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Vietnamese Child Migrants in Australia and the Historical Use of Facebook in Digital Diaspora



(Screenshot of animation, "Reunion," courtesy of Jennifer Tran and Jackson Cook)

Anh Phuong Nguyen

ORCID ID Number: 0000-0002-0583-7972

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School of Historical and Philosophical Studies
The University of Melbourne

Abstract

Vietnamese have been a part of Australia's migrant community since 1975. After more than forty years since the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese child migrants, including refugees and adoptees, have grown up with the education and technology to represent themselves in the history of Australian migration. This thesis engages with the memory and experiences of Vietnamese child refugees and adoptees in Australia and of their agency and self-representation in the history of transnational childhood and migration. Accordingly, it examines how Vietnamese have been represented in Australia, how they represent themselves on Facebook, and how their self-representations inform national and transnational histories of migration and childhood.

I argue that Vietnamese child migrants embrace their status as *refugees* and enact their own agency in new ways of national and transnational belonging. These positivistic views of their former refugee status seem implausible in Australia's contemporary political climate towards asylum seekers and refugees, however, the value of examining their memories, experience, and choices allows us to acknowledge children's perspectives that enhance the history of lived experiences, childhood, and migration in Australia.

Within the body of scholarship about Vietnamese refugees and migrants in Australia, children were not afforded the opportunity of self-representation of their experience or memories of migration. They were too young to remember, or their parents may have spoken on their behalf. It is through this collection and analysis of Vietnamese child refugee, adoptees, and second generation Vietnamese oral histories about childhood, identity, belonging, and community on Facebook that broadens an understanding of their agency and contribution to the history of national and transnational childhood and migration. Within the broader category of history and experience as *refugees*, these oral histories support the vision of refugees as self-determined subjects of contemporary life and history that provide a critical paradigm for understanding the complexities of national and transnational identity, belonging, and community formation on-line. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to inspire future research about children's agency and self-representation in history, their contribution to digital citizenship and communities in diaspora, and the use of technology and self-representation about refugee and migrant life and identity.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- (i) the thesis comprises only my own original work towards the PhD,
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used,
- (iii) the thesis is no more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliographies, and appendices.

(Anh Nguyen)

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Notes on Terminology

Child migrant

In this thesis, child migrant is used as a collective term referring to children in all the categories listed below as they all became migrants to Australia upon resettlement.

Child refugee

Child refugee refers to Vietnamese children, under the age of eighteen, who left Vietnam and entered Australia with their family or relative/s.

Unaccompanied minor

Unaccompanied minors are child refugees that left Vietnam and entered Australia without parent/s or guardianship. In this thesis, to distinguish between the different child migration experiences, they are always referred to as unaccompanied minors.

Vietnamese Adoptee

Vietnamese child who was officially adopted and raised outside of Vietnam, and in this case, Australia. Some adoptees from Vietnam came to live in Australia through the Australian Intercountry adoption program, and not as a direct result of the aftermath of the Fall of Saigon. The Intercountry adoption program facilitates all overseas adoptions for Australians. This thesis focuses on the experience of adoptees from Vietnam.

Vietnamese War orphan

War orphans are a subgroup of adoptees. They are children such as those in Operation Babylift, who left Vietnam as a baby or child in the immediate aftermath of the Fall of Saigon and were adopted in Australia.

Introduction

From 1975 to the present, Vietnamese refugees have been a part of the evolving multicultural idealisation of Australia. Their arrival coincided with the transition from White Australia policy of immigration history as their experiences informed the history and development of refugee studies. Refugee studies is a large field of study in which Historian, Peter Gatrell, advocates for a greater focus on trajectory of refugees over time and space.¹ This contemporary study of self-representation in oral history of Vietnamese child refugees, adoptees, and Facebook communities of refugees considers their development in refugee identity, experience and practices of belonging to the present day. The study of Vietnamese child migrant memories and experiences coincides with the emergence of refugee studies in Australia.² Historian, Klaus Neumann, argues that it was in the late 1970s when scholars were writing about the resettlement of Vietnamese (Indochinese) as refugees as the beginning of *refugee studies* in Australia.³ Prior to their arrival about forty years ago, scholars referred to refugees as immigrants of distinct ethnic groups. Given the history of refugee studies in Australia, Vietnamese people have been relatively positive about being described as *refugees*.⁴ In contrast to the current political negativity surrounding the reference to *refugees* and *asylum seekers*, Vietnamese migrant identity as *refugees* remains a key signifier of cultural heritage from the founding generation to second generation that have grown up in Australia.⁵ Even in the global diaspora, as exhibited on Facebook communities, Vietnamese cultural pride and heritage as *refugees* is the basis of their identity and connection on-line. On Facebook, Vietnamese all over the world unite in communities based on the refugee camps or rescue boats that brought them to the camps to gain refugee status. The history of Vietnamese

¹ Peter Gatrell, "Refugees—What's Wrong with History?," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no.2 (June 2017): 170-181. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few013>; Peter Gatrell, "Refugees and Refugee Studies," *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 6 (November 2017): 1189–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1355359/>.

² Klaus Neumann, "The Resettlement of Refugees in Australia: A Bibliography (8th rev. ed)," accessed 18 May 2019, <http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/resettlement%20bibliography>.

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ Kim Huynh, "Refugeeness: what's good and not so good about being persecuted and displaced?," *Local-Global Journal*, 8 (2010) 52-74.

⁵ Samantha Cooper, Erin Olejniczak, Caroline Lenette and Charlotte Smedley, "Media coverage of asylum seekers in regional Australia: a critical discourse analysis," *Media International Australia* 162, no. 1 (2016): 78-89.

resettlement in Australia is a microcosm of the global dispersal of more than two million Vietnamese refugees, half of whom were children when they arrived in refugee camps.⁶

This thesis focuses on Vietnamese children who are *refugees*, including Vietnamese child refugees, war orphans, and the children of Vietnamese refugees in Australia.⁷ The collection of oral histories about their memories and experiences of childhood in the aftermath of the Vietnam war, during migration, in refugee camps and resettlement in Australia. The analysis explores the themes of childhood, identity, belonging, and community development. These themes of migrant memory and experiences of identity, belonging and community development have been analysed by other scholars, however, the dynamics of how Vietnamese child migrants engage them historically and in digital diaspora open new areas for critical observation and analysis.⁸ This study takes up the diversity of historical contexts, growing up in Australia, and engagement on Facebook as unique places of memory to understand how Vietnamese child migrants form belonging without “ideals of childhood based on notions of residential fixity.”⁹ Against the presumption of fixed residency for an ideal childhood, Vietnamese experience idealised childhoods in the refugee camps, growing up in Australia, and their engagement on Facebook. With Facebook, they become transnational agents of self-representation as Vietnamese child migrants in this critical refugee study. According to Yen Le Espiritu, critical refugee studies considers ‘the refugee’ not as an object of investigation but rather as a *paradigm* that “questions the established

⁶ James M. Freeman and Đinh Hữu Nguyễn, *Voices from the Camps: Vietnamese Children Seeking Asylum* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 13.

⁷ The inclusion of war orphans with this study of refugees is deliberate as they both were a result of post-war Vietnam and the history of childhood and migration in Australia. In the context of resettlement, it has also been established that refugee children were placed in adoption services shared the same fate. See Karen Agutter, “Fated to Be Orphans: The Consequences of Australia’s Post-War Resettlement Policy on Refugee Children.” *Children Australia* 41, no. 3 (2016): 224–31. doi:10.1017/cha.2016.15.

⁸ For examples, see Abbas El-Zein, “Being Elsewhere: On Longing and Belonging,” in *Arab Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, edited by Ghassan Hage (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 225–40; Zlatko Skrbis, Loretta Baldassar, and Scott Poynting. “Introduction – Negotiating Belonging: Migration and Generations.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (August 2007): 261–360; Sara Wills, ‘Flora’s Box: Empty Spaces, Memory and Migration’, paper presented at the History and the Meaning of Things Seminar Series, Museum Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34437>; Maggie O’Neill and R. Harindranath, “Theorising Narratives of Exile and Belonging: The Importance of Biography and Ethno-Mimesis in ‘Understanding’ Asylum,” *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2, no. 1 (2006): 39–53; Ien Ang, “On not speaking Chinese: Diasporic Identifications and Postmodern Ethnicity,” in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, (London: Routledge, 2001): 21–36.

⁹ Caitríona Ní Laoire et al., “Introduction: Childhood and Migration — Mobilities, Homes and Belongings,” ed. Caitríona Ní Laoire et al., *Childhood* 17, no. 2 (May 2010): 155–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210365463>, 159.

principles of the nation-state and idealised goal of inclusion and recognition within it.”¹⁰ In this case, the investigation of the oral histories and self-representation of Vietnamese child migrants memories and experiences in Australia is a critical paradigm that questions the principles of assimilation and politics of belonging in Australia and in diaspora. Sharing their contemporary life histories and engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora through social media creates other possibilities of belonging and exercise of agency.

Children in migration are perceived as passive recipients or non-actors in history. My contribution to childhood and migration history, is to focus on Vietnamese child migrants’ agency in self-representations of their experiences and memories of childhood, migration, identity as *refugees* in Australia and on Facebook which provides new understandings of national and transnational belonging. As transnational agents that leverage technology and national belonging, they create other possibilities of belonging as *refugees* in Australia and the digital diaspora. My argument is based on an examination of the historical context of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, the studies about Vietnamese refugees in Australia, and how their self-representation in the oral histories of childhood, migration, identity, and belonging are situated in Australian and transnational history of childhood and migration. The following presents a brief overview of these areas of studies and my point of departure to examine how Vietnamese child migrants represent themselves as *refugees* in oral histories, memoirs, and Facebook, and how their self-representation informs the history of national and transnational migration and childhood.

This thesis also falls within the scope of historical studies of war, memory and migrant groups in Australian history, in this case about the Vietnam War and Australia’s response to refugees post-war.¹¹ Jeffrey Grey argues that the greatest single legacy of the Vietnam War in for Australia is the Vietnamese refugees and migrants that settled in this country after the fall of Saigon.¹² Grey outlines how Vietnam became a part of history in Australia through what Douglas Pike defined as the three phases of writing about the war.

¹⁰ Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 10.

¹¹ Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia’s Greek Immigrants after World War II and the Greek Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Langfield, Michele, “Memories of Jewish Child Refugees in Australia,” in *Holocaust Studies*, 16, no. 3 (Winter, 2010): 79-94; Diane Barnes, “Resettled Refugee’ Attachment to their Original and Subsequent Homelands: Long-term Vietnamese Refugees in Australia,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 14, no. 4 (2001): 394-410.

¹² Jeff Doyle, “Getting into the Books: Vietnam as History in Australia” in *Australia’s Vietnam War* edited by Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey, and Peter Pierce, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 98-109.

The first phase includes works produced from participants and observers during wartime, the second contains analysis from scholars with subdued passion and presumed subjectivity, and the third predominant phase of establishing “historical truths.”¹³ This research is positioned within the third phase of establishing historical truths to include memories of Vietnamese war orphans and child refugees as a part of Australia’s history on the Vietnam war politics and memories. The Vietnam War features in the oral histories, memoirs, art and literature from Vietnamese child migrants. The Vietnam War may not have had direct impact on the participants of this study as young children born during or after the war. However, the Vietnam War is the cause for leaving Vietnam in the aftermath, and origins of their Vietnamese cultural heritage in resettlement. To comprehend the complexity of how war politics and memory works in these oral histories, it is important to understand the historical context of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

Australia in the Vietnam War

Much has been written about the Vietnam War in English and from the American perspective. There are voluminous bibliographies of literature and scholarship about the United States’ involvement in the war since the mid 1950s. There are bibliographies of scholarship in special collections held with public and private libraries including literature about America’s involvement in Vietnam War and the psychological and social impact on American soldiers post-war.¹⁴ The American perspective still dominates the literature about the war. The range of inquiries include Marilyn Young’s *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990* which discusses in great detail the explanations and justifications as to why America became involved in Vietnam. Young notes that there are continuous controversy as official justifications changed with political climate in America.¹⁵ Publications continue to address

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Louis A. Peake, *The United States in the Vietnam War, 1954-1975: A Selected Annotated Bibliography*, Wars of the United States, vol. 4 (New York: Garland Pub, 1986); John Newman and Ann Hilfinger, *Vietnam War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works about Americans Fighting in Vietnam*, 2nd ed (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1988); Norman M. Camp, Robert H. Stretch, and William C. Marshall, *Stress, Strain, and Vietnam: An Annotated Bibliography of Two Decades of Psychiatric and Social Sciences Literature Reflecting the Effect of the War on the American Soldier*, Bibliographies and Indexes in Military Studies, no. 1 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Chris Sugnet, John T. Hickey, and Robert Crispino, *Vietnam War Bibliography: Selected from Cornell University’s Echols Collection*, The LexingtonBooks Special Series in Libraries and Librarianship (Lexington, Mass: LexingtonBooks, 1983).

¹⁵ Marilyn Blatt Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

this underlying concern as evidenced by Max Hasting's *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975* which was published in 2018.¹⁶ The literature about the Vietnam War in Australian history was not exempted from this inquiry about why Australia was involved and its role in the aftermath.

Published works about Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, historical perspectives as an ally, are considered "new" and sparse grains of sands in the monoliths of American literature and memory about the Vietnam war.¹⁷ The work of Peter Edwards is especially pertinent to the discussion on Australia's involvement. Edwards was the Official Historian of Australian Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975. Edwards held the office as the Official Historian from 1982 to 1996.¹⁸ He wrote about the Australian government's commitment to the Vietnam War and argued that it was not until the late 1980s, when Australian public interest peaked as Veterans were welcomed home in 1987. The Australian scholarship published about the war started to appear between 1990 and 1992 when a national monument was dedicated to Vietnam veterans on Anzac Parade in Canberra on October 3, 1992.¹⁹ Perspectives from Asian Allies, European SEATO Allies, and Australian Allies was considered *new*.²⁰ The most recent perspectives about the war politics and memory are from South Vietnamese soldiers written by Natalie Nguyen.²¹

Within Vietnamese communities, the legacy and influence of the Vietnam war continues in scholarship and publication. One of the unique perspectives on the war in recent times comes from the diaries of Dang Thuy Tram, a twenty-five-year-old chief physician at a field hospital in the mountains of central Vietnam.²² Dang Tram worked in a civilian clinic treating sick and wounded soldiers of the North Vietnamese army or main force guerrilla

¹⁶ Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975*, First edition (New York, NY: Harper, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2018).

¹⁷ Peter King, ed., *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War* (Sydney ; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

¹⁸ Doyle, Grey, and Pierce, *Australia's Vietnam War*.

¹⁹ Doyle, Grey, and Pierce, Preface xi.

²⁰ Schoenl, *New Perspectives on the Vietnam War*.

²¹ Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, ed., *New Perceptions of the Vietnam War: Essays on the War, the South Vietnamese Experience, the Diaspora and the Continuing Impact* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014).

²² Thùy Trâm Đăng, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram*, 1st American ed (New York: Harmony Books, 2007).

during the Vietnam War. Her diaries were published in Hanoi on July 18, 2005 as Hanoi was preparing to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of liberation of the South.²³ The translation of her diaries by Andrew Pham, an American Vietnamese refugee writer, is a controversial publication. Vietnamese refugees are considered as expatriates, supporters of the former South Vietnamese government, and American Vietnamese refugees are particularly criticised in their own community if they are in any way supporting the current Communist government or perspective of North Vietnam. The publication of these diaries that show sympathetic views towards a woman who took care of North Vietnamese soldiers by a South Vietnamese expatriate creates controversy within the community. Mariam Lam explains that there are particular subject positions to war politics and war memory for diasporic writers, and Pham seems to embrace “the messiness and binary oppositions, others distance themselves from it entirely, and still others channel the painful complexity into the power of their pens.”²⁴ As a Vietnamese refugee scholar, I am aware of these tensions and would like to disclose my own positionality about the research.

I embrace the complexities of Vietnamese war politics and memory as an American Vietnamese refugee child and permanent resident of Australia.²⁵ My own positionality as researcher is informed by memories of childhood in Vietnam as recited to me while growing up as a Vietnamese refugee child in Texas during in the 1980s. I was born a year after the Fall of Saigon without any direct memories of the war. The memories of the war and its aftermath are part of the origin stories as to why our family left Vietnam. From my own experiences as child boat refugee who resettled in America, I have had a comparative basis of experience to inform my understanding of the role of national histories in the construction of oral histories and memoirs. I also have personal experience and knowledge of Vietnamese language and culture which enables me to comprehend and delve into greater detail about the

²³ Ibid, xvi.

²⁴ “Circulating War Memories: The Diary of Đặng Thùy Trâm,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 2 (June 2008): 172–79, <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2008.3.2.172> -179.

²⁵ This is part of my practice of research ethics. For research ethics and perspectives that have informed this study, see Block, Karen, Elisha Riggs and Nick Haslam, eds., *Values and Vulnerabilities: The Ethics of Research with Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (Bowen Hills, Queensland: Australian Academic Press, 2013); Mackenzie, Catriona and Christopher McDowell, Eileen Pittaway, “Beyond ‘Do No Harm’: The Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 12 (1 June 2007): 299–319. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem008>; Jacobsen, Karen and Loren B. Landau, “The Dural Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration” *Disasters*, 27, no.3 (2003): 185-206.

oral histories of war orphans and child refugees that settled in Australia. War politics, memory, and experiences differ significantly depending on the migrant group and the historical context of the country of resettlement, in this case, Vietnamese in Australia in the aftermath of the war.²⁶ My positionality as a Vietnamese American refugee informs my work, but it does not define my politics. I am less interested in nationalistic histories, and more interested in the interpretation of migrant's lived experiences and how that informs history. More importantly, this thesis considers the experiences and memories of Vietnamese child migrants from the aftermath of the war to the present to provide a sense of continuation in the history of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. To do so, it is important to understand the historical events in Vietnam that lead up to the war, and Australia's subsequent acceptance of Vietnamese refugees.

Vietnamese history of internal displacement as a result of colonisation, war, and migration provide the background for this study of Vietnamese child migrants in Australia. According to the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Citizenship in Australia, the historical background about the impact of the war and how refugees came to Australia can be summarised in the following major events leading up to the Fall of Saigon and the ensuing refugee exodus: French Indochina colonialism that ended with Japanese occupation in 1940; Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnam independence in September 1945; a decade of war with the French which ended in their defeat in 1954; and the establishment of the communist government after the failure of establishing a provisional government.²⁷ An estimated two million Vietnamese sought refuge in camps of neighbouring South-east Asian countries and mostly resettled in Australia, United States, France, and Canada. Prior to the Fall of Saigon to the north and established Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the following set of Vietnamese-born people were already in Australia.

There were about 700 Vietnam-born people in Australia, mostly tertiary students, orphans, and wives of Australian military personnel who had served in (South)

²⁶ Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, "Memory in the Aftermath of War: Australian Responses to the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis of 1975," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society / Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 30, no. 2 (August 2015): 183–201, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2015.21>.

²⁷ "Community Information Summary Vietnam-born, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship," accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2014/vietnam.pdf.

Vietnam. Refugee resettlement occurred during 1975-1985, followed by family reunion. By 1981, 49 616 Vietnamese had been resettled in Australia.²⁸

This summary about Vietnamese resettlement in Australia does not account for the distinctive experiences within the category of refugees including children and war orphans or the political climate of that decade in Australian history. In the context of Australian migration history, Klaus Neumann wrote a comprehensive twentieth century history of Australia's governmental response to refugees which begins with the resettlement of so-called DPs (displaced persons) from camps in Germany and ends with the arrival of Vietnamese boat people. He draws great attention and detail to the continuities and parallels of Australia's response to refugees since Federation until 1977 that shape the social and political climate for the current debate on refugees and asylum seekers today.²⁹ Neumann notes that by 1977, the Australian government had started to develop a comprehensive refugee policy and the public become actively informed in the policies and debates about refugees and asylum seekers today. His critical history provides a context about government policy for understanding of the state of the debate and nation in which this historical investigation begins.³⁰

This study begins in 1975, a significant time of crisis and transition for Vietnam and Australia. The Fall of Saigon had occurred in April and in November of that year, the Australian government was in crisis with the dismissal of the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) from office. The Governor-General Sir John Kerr commissioned the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Fraser of the Liberal Party, as caretaker Prime Minister. Whitlam had turned against any policy or response to refugees and asylum seekers at the end of the Vietnam War.³¹ Malcolm Fraser became prime minister on 11th November 1975. Seven months after the Fall of Saigon, the Fraser government was able to establish a Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs on 22nd December 1975 to handle the response to take in refugees from Indochina. The Whitlam government had tried to abolish that department in the previous year.³² During the transition in government and reformation of the Immigration department at the end of 1975, the intake of refugees from

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Klaus Neumann, *Across the Seas: Australia's Response to Refugees: A History*, 1st edition (Collingwood, Vic, Australia: Black Inc, 2015), 11.

³¹ Ibid, 13.

³² Ibid, 248.

Indochina to Australia slowed. Under Whitlam, Australia had admitted 1,086 refugees in 1975 and only 865 refugees were admitted under Fraser's government in 1976.³³ Whitlam's government in 1973 made the initial moves towards the formation of official national multicultural policies that were later implemented by Fraser's government in 1978.³⁴ The history of Australia's conception and reconceptualisations of multiculturalism influenced the experience of Vietnamese child migrants who grew up in it.³⁵ With the arrival and acceptance of Vietnamese boat refugees to Australia from 1975 until the late 1980s, a variety of scholarship about their adaption and resettlement experiences in Australia ensued.

Studies about Vietnamese Refugees in Australia

Beginning in 1975 up to the present day, this study of contemporary oral histories of Vietnamese child refugees, war orphans and children of refugees seeks to show continuance in the history of scholarship about Vietnamese refugees in Australia. In 1975, the first Vietnamese were welcomed on Australia's shore as "boat people."³⁶ From that historical moment of landing on the shores of Darwin, the plethora of studies about Vietnamese in Australia proliferated. The earliest studies were for government reports about the population for integration or political justification of Australian immigration policies.³⁷ Nancy Viviani wrote extensively about Vietnamese in Australia from 1975-1996, including the political and historical context of why they left Vietnam and how they progressed in Australia.³⁸ Frank

³³ Ibid, 249.

³⁴ Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics, 1945-1975* (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

³⁵ A more detailed explanation of the defining the historical context of multiculturalism in relationship to the Vietnamese migrant experiences in Australia will be in Chapter one.

³⁶ For an account of media coverage of Vietnamese boat people in Australia, see Bruce Grant, *The Boat People: An Age Investigation with Bruce Grant* (Harmondsworth, Eng. ; New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

³⁷ The most recent work in the policy space has been to re-examine the interdepartmental debates about the status determination of Indochinese boat arrivals in Australia's definition of "genuine refugees" see Claire Higgins, "Status Determination of Indochinese Boat Arrivals: A 'Balancing Act' in Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, August 17, 2016, fev036, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev036>.

³⁸ Nancy Viviani, *The Long Journey : Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia*. (Carlton, Victoria : Melbourne University Press, 1984); Nancy Viviani, "The Vietnamese in Australia: new problems in old forms." In *Immigration and Ethnicity in the 1980s*, edited by I. H. Burnley, S. Encel and G. McCall. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1985; Nancy Viviani, "Indochinese refugees and Australia" in *Indochinese Refugees: Asylum and Resettlement.*, eds S. Chantavanich and E. B. Reynolds. Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. 1988; Nancy Viviani, "The resettlement and integration of the Indochinese communities in Australia." in *Asian Migrant* 4, no 4 (1991):121-125; Nancy, Viviani, James E. Coughlan, and

Lewins and Judith Ly conducted the study of the first wave of immigrants that arrived after the Fall of Saigon.³⁹ Then a body of sociological and demographic research emerged about Vietnamese in Australia.⁴⁰ Mandy Thomas started to explore their narratives of experience of social, economic and cultural adaptation in Australia as part of the larger history of the Vietnamese diaspora.⁴¹

After the initial period of resettlement for Vietnamese in the late 1980s, studies focused on Vietnamese lives and cultural history. Lesleyanne Hawthorne presented twenty narratives of Vietnamese refugee's lives in Vietnam before and after the Vietnam War.⁴² Her collage of life stories within the framework of the major historical events after the Vietnam War sought to present who are these refugees, what they had come from and why they left Vietnam. She did not claim to analyse, explain or endorse a historical position. She left "the stories to comment on and modify each other."⁴³ Most of these stories depicted Vietnamese

Trevor Rowland, *Indochinese in Australia: The Issues of Unemployment and Residential Concentration*, Canberra : Australian Govt. Pub. Service, 1993; Nancy Viviani, *The Indochinese in Australia 1975-1995: From Burnt Boats to Barbecues*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press. 1996.

³⁹ Frank Lewins and Judith Ly, *The First Wave: The Settlement of Australia's First Vietnamese Refugees*, Studies in Society 28 (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

⁴⁰ Nguyen, Xuan Thu, and Desmond Cahill, eds. *Understanding Vietnamese Refugees in Australia*. (Coburg: Phillip Institute of Technology, School of Community Studies. 1984); Hassen, Riaz, J. Healy, R. B. McKenna, and S. Hearst. "Vietnamese families." In *Ethnic Family Values in Australia*, ed. D. Storer (Sydney: Prentice Hall, 1985); E. M., Hodson, and B. J. Springthorpe.. Medical problems in refugee children evacuated from South Vietnam. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2, no. 20(1976):747-749; Barbara R. Ferguson, "The shadow hanging over you: refugee trauma and Vietnamese women in Australia." In *Nobody Wants to Talk About It - Refugee Women's Mental Health*, eds. B. Ferguson and E. Pittaway (Parramatta: Transcultural Mental Health Centre. 1999); Damien McCoy. "From hostel to home: immigration, resettlement and community, the ethnic-Vietnamese in Australia, 1975-1995." (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales. 1996); MSJ Keys Young Planners, "Survey of Vietnamese refugees," prepared for Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. Surry Hills: MSJ Keys Young, 1983; My-Van Tran and Robert Holton, "Sadness is losing our country, happiness is knowing peace: Vietnamese social mobility in Australia, 1975-1990," Wollongong: Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, for the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1991; Uyen Nguyen-Carrington, "The impact of trauma on refugee women's integration in Australia: a case study of East-Timorese and Vietnamese women in Darwin, Northern Territory," (M.S.W. thesis, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University. 1997); Diane Zulfacar, "Policies, programs and outcomes for unaccompanied Vietnamese refugee minors in Australia," (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales. 1996).

⁴¹ Mandy Thomas, "Vietnamese in Australia," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* (Springer, 2005), 1141-1149, http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_116; Mandy Thomas, *Dreams in the Shadows: Vietnamese-Australian Lives in Transition* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1999); Thomas, Mandy, "Place, memory, and identity in the Vietnamese diaspora," (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1996).

⁴² Lesleyanne Hawthorne, *Refugee, the Vietnamese Experience*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴³ *Ibid*, xvi.

as victims of a history of the Vietnam War. Nathalie Nguyen's history of Vietnamese Australian women carried out in 2005 was the first of oral histories that came from within the community.⁴⁴ Published in English and Vietnamese, the women of the Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association (AVWWA) describe their life in Vietnam, in transit and in Australia.⁴⁵ Beyond the presentation of life stories in resettlement, Nathalie Nguyen's later work included the experiences of Vietnamese Australian women as central to the discourse on memory, narrative and trauma.⁴⁶ Vietnamese child refugee narratives were dispersed or alluded to within these histories, but the analyses did not focus on the children's memories, experiences or perspectives on childhood, migration, identity or belonging.

This thesis seeks to contribute further to the collection of oral histories about Vietnamese refugees in Australia and broadens the focus on child migrant experience and memories. Prior works that included children in oral histories include Nathalie Nguyen's chapter, *Refugee Children*, which focused the narratives of two women who are unaccompanied minors from Vietnam.⁴⁷ Carina Hoang's collection, *Boat People*, contains a selection of boat refugees who entered as children though the focus was on migration and resettlement, not their experiences of childhood.⁴⁸ Most of the scholarship about Vietnamese refugees in Australia focused on early resettlement, social, and economic adaptation to inform policy and integration of the Vietnamese refugees into Australian society. There are few that focus on children or their perspective of migration and resettlement. One notable work about children contained interviews with caretakers of Vietnamese Children for the Department of Educations on how to explain the cross-cultural understandings of issues such as pregnancy, toilet training, and the use of chopsticks.⁴⁹ Such studies show the challenges for Australian service providers and their concerns about Vietnamese refugee children which

⁴⁴ Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Voyage of Hope: Vietnamese Australian Women's Narratives* (Altona, Vic: Common Ground, 2005).

⁴⁵ Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen and Ngọc Yến, *Hành Trình Hy Vọng: Chuyện Kể Của Những Phụ Nữ Úc Gốc Việt* ([Richmond, Vic.]: AVWA (Australian Vietnamese Women's Association), 2009).

⁴⁶ Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Memory Is Another Country: Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2009).

⁴⁷ Nguyen, *Voyage of Hope*.

⁴⁸ Carina Hoang, ed., *Boat People: Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus 1975-1996* (Cloverdale, W.A: Carina Hoang Communications, 2010).

⁴⁹ Robin Mitchel, *Vietnamese Child – Rearing Practices*, (South Australia: Department of Further Education Language and Migrant Education Centre, June 1980).

did not include self-representation of Vietnamese refugee or children's perspective or experiences.

This study also seeks to contribute to a growing number of studies about different generations of Vietnamese in Australia and their experiences of identity and belonging. Caitlin Nunn wrote about Vietnamese Australians negotiating a sense of belonging or not belonging in an ethnocultural or multicultural Australia.⁵⁰ Based on multigenerational interviews, Nunn describes how Vietnamese in Australia engage in a dynamic and dialogical process of “ethnocultural belonging,” an accumulation of valued characteristics and dispositions set forth in concepts of a White Australia: language, accent, bodily praxis and modes of sociality.⁵¹ She also referred to “multicultural belonging” as a more inclusive, flexible and porous sense of belonging that anyone who shares in the policy, demographics or ethos can have as a form of national belonging.⁵² Building upon Nunn's discourse on multicultural belonging, this thesis explores further the complexities and differences within groups as is the case for Vietnamese adoptees amongst other Vietnamese immigrants to Australia. Given the shared ethos of their arrival post war, their experiences and memories of childhood could arguably be conflated within Nunn's conception of “multicultural belonging.” However, Vietnamese adoptee's cultural identity and experiences of belonging amongst Vietnamese refugee children differ. While Vietnamese refugee children and adoptees share national origins, and orphan's transnational childhood does not include the journey via boat or escapes from Vietnam, life in refugee camp, or transitional housing. As distinguished in this thesis, and distinct from Nunn's notion of multicultural belonging, the complexity of belonging for Vietnamese refugee children and war orphans presents nuanced differences in childhood memories and experiences even with their shared history of displacement. Thus, this thesis distinctly focuses on these differences in experiences within the group of Vietnamese child migrants which contribute to the history of national and transnational childhood and migration.

⁵⁰ Caitlin Nunn, “Negotiating National (Non)belongings: Vietnamese Australians in Ethno/multicultural Australia,” *Identities* 24, no. 2 (March 4, 2017): 216–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2015.1096273>.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid*, 11.

National and Transnational History of Childhood and Migration

This thesis about Vietnamese refugee and adoptee memories, experience, and self representations makes an important contribution to national and transnational histories of childhood and migration. Carla Pascoe's historiography of the history of childhood in Australia provides a comprehensive look at the national field and provides interdisciplinary approaches for this thesis about Vietnamese child refugees.⁵³ Pascoe raises the challenge of distinguishing between our contribution to "the histories of *children*, which concern actual experiences, practices, and *histories of childhood*, which focus upon ideological concepts of children."⁵⁴ This thesis is a history of Vietnamese child migrant's adult memories of their own childhood. The analysis focused on their experiences of displacement, identity and belonging contribute to propositions about refugee childhood. In response to the "paucity of sources that forces most historians to research ideas of childhood, which may or may not reflect behavior of or towards children," this collection of oral histories about Vietnamese child migrants contributes to the resources available for the study of histories of childhood.⁵⁵ The oral histories collected are the primary sources about refugee or migrant childhood as there are few available sources to "reconstruct childhoods within living memory."⁵⁶ The Vietnamese child migrants interviewed as adults are the children of the founding generation of Vietnamese refugees, otherwise known as the 1.5 generation. The 1.5 generation refers to the children of the founding or first generation of adult refugees. Their experiences as children were subsumed in the historical narratives of their parents. However, they occupy a unique position in the history as they have their own experience of escape and resettlement as a child, inherited memories of their parents as a child of refugees, and contemporary lived experience and memories as children of refugee heritage. Most of the participants in the study were born after 1975 are now in their forties. It has become timely to capture their recollections of childhood as enough time has passed for them to reflect upon their past with some emotional distance. Some are willing to speak as they reflect on raising their own

⁵³ Carla Pascoe, "The History of Children in Australia: An Interdisciplinary Historiography: The History of Children in Australia," *History Compass* 8, no. 10 (October 4, 2010): 1142–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00710.x>.

⁵⁴ Pascoe, 1143.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1154.

children with Vietnamese cultural heritage or have found that their parents are more open about the past, and they are more curious or receptive of learning about their refugee heritage. Given the context of contemporary inquiry towards a history of Vietnamese child migrants about their conception of childhood, it is worth considering what is an Australian childhood during the time of their arrival and coming of age in Australia.

Vietnamese child migrants arrived and grew up in a time when the conceptions of childhood in Australia favored a recognition of the child as vulnerable and needing special consideration. Historians asserted that with modernization of the family in the 1970s, there was sense of ‘sacralisation’ of childhood, “middle-class, western children began to be viewed as increasingly vulnerable and innocent”.⁵⁷ Pascoe asserts that these conceptions of childhood impacted Australian historians work on Australian history in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁸ Then in the twentieth century as Australians published histories of childhood, the status of the child rose to national considerations.⁵⁹ This history about childhood in the twentieth century aligns itself with the growing focus on the status of children in Australian childhood studies. Australian childhood and migrant studies reached global considerations in human rights arena, notably in the context of refugee history, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention in 2014.⁶⁰ In turn, these oral histories of Vietnamese child migrant memories and experiences contribute to that growing discourse on history of global childhood.⁶¹ Furthermore, it contributes to a developing practice of historians involved with transnational and migration childhood studies.⁶²

Peter Stearns argues that the children of war in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries face dislocations that shape what is the modern conditions of childhood.⁶³

⁵⁷ Pascoe, 1145.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gwyneth M. Dow and June Factor. *Australian Childhood: An Anthology*. South Yarra, Victoria : McPhee Gribble, 1991.

⁶⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014*, 2014, accessed 26 May 2019, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/forgotten_children_2014.pdf.

⁶¹ Kate Cregan, *Global Childhoods: Issues and Debates*, 1st edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014).

⁶² Paula S. Fass, “The World Is at Our Door: Why Historians of Children and Childhood Should Open Up,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2008.0016>.

⁶³ Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, 2nd ed, Themes in World History (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 111.

Vietnamese child migration after the Vietnam War is no exception. The historical impact of war on children has been well established,⁶⁴ however, the nature of childhood in the context of migration post war the Vietnam War has not been explored. Kathy Gardner advocates for the study of child migrants to inform transnational migration studies.⁶⁵ She writes,

children are generally overlooked, or lumped into wider questions concerning family or intergenerational relationships, with scant consideration given to how the children themselves may have specific roles and perspectives.⁶⁶

In acknowledging that children's experiences are subsumed in their family histories without specifics about their perspective on migration, Gardner furthers the challenge to question, "How is transnational migration experienced by children?"⁶⁷ This research embraces that challenge with historical inquiry to specifically focus on post war childhood experience and memory as its contribution to transnational migration studies. Gardner also notes that "there has been remarkably little research on transnational diasporic children."⁶⁸ How do child migrants remember their childhood, where does childhood take place when they are displaced? This thesis posits that Vietnamese conceptions of childhood are *en route* to settlement, in Australia, and on Facebook as distinctive sites of memory for the transnational diasporic child. The thesis locates the transient experience and memories of Vietnamese child migrants within the transnational diaspora of Vietnamese, and more specifically their contributions to the digital diaspora on Facebook. Gardner also invites emerging research on independent child migrants which mostly focused on development and poverty issues. She notes the lack of studies that involve second or third generation youth in diaspora. The oral histories in this study of Vietnamese child migrant memories and experiences of childhood,

⁶⁴James Garbarino, Kathleen Kostelny, and Nancy Dubrow, *No Place to Be a Child: Growing up in a War Zone* (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 2005); James Alan Marten, ed., *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Graça Machel, *The Impact of War on Children: A Review of Progress since the 1996 United Nations Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (London: Hurst, 2001).

⁶⁵ Katy Gardner, "Transnational Migration and the Study of Children: An Introduction," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 6 (July 2012): 889–912, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.677170>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gardner, 890.

⁶⁸ Gardner, 891.

self-representation, including social and political activism specifically focuses on their roles and perspectives. Vietnamese migrant children are an active cultural agent in their contribution to their family, community and the global diaspora as featured in chapters five and six. Gardner also encourages a focus on the child-centered research for a more nuanced understanding of the transnational child in terms of “the nature of cultural identity, human mobility and the complex and ever-changing interconnections, exchanges and hierarchies that constitute the global order,” what Stearns termed as global childhood history.⁶⁹ The later part of this thesis has this global perspective in presenting how Vietnamese child migrants reunite with each other on Facebook and in real time reunions. These on-line and real time reunions are a practice of contemporary cultural identity and exercise their agency and cultural mobility with social media. In echoing Gardner’s challenges, Carla Pascoe also notes the constant and vexing difficulties of sourcing material for historical childhood studies, and Australian childhood studies in particular.⁷⁰ The Facebook collection of pictures, stories, and memorabilia including Australian Vietnamese contributes another knowledge source to limited histories of national and transnational childhood studies. Pascoe notes that because childhood is regarded as an “almost sacred period,” it is often seen as a difficult concept to interrogate.”⁷¹ However childhood memories are held, even if it is public and on the internet, historians can work with them as an archive and public history of childhood, another primary source for understanding of childhood. While childhood and internet resources are difficult to interrogate, this study is situated in that difficult space of possibilities for using them to understand child migrants in diaspora. Echoing Pascoe’s concerns about sources of knowledge about childhood, psychoanalyst, Ernest Schnachtel, expresses the uncertainties of using adult memory and translating them to understand childhood experiences. Schnachtel, writes,

The adult is usually not capable of experiencing what the child experiences; more often than not he is not even capable of imaging what the child experiences. It would not be surprising, then, that he should be incapable of recalling his own childhood experiences since his whole mode of experience has changed.⁷²

⁶⁹ Gardner, “Transnational Migration and the Study of Children,” 892.

⁷⁰ Pascoe, “The History of Children in Australia,” 1153.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ernest Schnachtel quoted in Pascoe, “The History of Children in Australia,” 1153.

Obviously adult observations of childhood require imaginative recall and are distinct from direct accounts of children's experiences at the time. This study recognizes that adult recollection of memories of childhood as refugees does not capture the direct experiences of refugee children. The focus on memories of Vietnamese child migrants and their conception of childhood is significant and nuanced as it explores childhood during displacement, a category of memory making that is not often explored in transnational childhood studies. The child becomes a migratory cultural agent with complex and ever-changing interconnections to the refugee camp as a site of significant memories of childhood. The focus on movement and transitional sites of memory for refugee children expands the conception provides nuanced conception of where childhood takes place.⁷³ Furthermore, these oral histories of Vietnamese adults remembering childhood and migration to Australia and their engagement on Facebook aligns with emerging developments in Australian history.

Ann Curthoys advocates for historians to move more towards comparative, diasporic, world, international and thematic transnational histories as the future for Australian historical scholarship, and this study does just that.⁷⁴ Diasporic histories which once focused on 'expatriate minority communities' has evolved to

investigate the experiences of people with a common origin who have migrated to different parts of the globe, forming diasporic communities that relate both to their place of origin, their place of re-settlement, and to one another.⁷⁵

This study in Australian history creates connection with diasporic studies about Vietnamese in other countries and historical contexts.⁷⁶ Yen Le Espiritu and Thom Tran have studied the

⁷³ Ibid, 892.

⁷⁴ Ann Curthoys and others, "Australian History beyond Australia Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and the Problem of Race," *History Australia* 12, no. 1 (April 2015): 69-74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2015.11668553>.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 149.

⁷⁶ Michel Mignot. *Kampuchean, Laotian and Vietnamese Refugees in Australia/New Zealand, Canada, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom: A Bibliography*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1988; Alexander Cannon, "Introduction: Epic Directions for the Study of the Vietnamese Diaspora" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7, no.3(Fall, 2012):1-6;Yuk Wah Chan, ed., *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the Boat People*, Routledge Contemporary Asia Series 33 (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011); Chan Kwok Bun, "Hong Kong's Response to the Vietnamese Refugees: A Study in Humanitarianism, Ambivalence and Hostility," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 18, no. 1 (1990): 94-110;

Vietnamese second generation, but only in the American context.⁷⁷ This study of the Australian context extends the inquiry beyond the American context. The engagement with the different generations and global diaspora of Vietnamese refugees on Facebook aligns with studies about migrant transnationalism.⁷⁸ Michael Jones-Correa, an advocate for more work on transnationalism, also noted the need to focus on children of immigrants.⁷⁹ This study about child refugees and the children of refugees addresses that need. Furthermore, this research about Vietnamese refugee Facebook communities and their practice and identity as refugees contributes to a growing body of research about diaspora and the use of social media.⁸⁰ This study of self-representation of identity and belonging in the Vietnamese refugees on Facebook falls in line with emergent studies about ethnic on-line communities.⁸¹ It also contributes to the discourse on forced migrant's use of Information Community

Kathleen Valtonen, "The Adaptation of Vietnamese Refugees in Finland," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1 (1994): 63–78; Mary Yuen, "Vietnamese Refugees and Singapore's Policy," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 18, no. 1 (1990): 81–93; Morton Beiser, *Strangers at the Gate: The 'Boat People's' First Ten Years in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Min Zhou and Bankston, Carl, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese children adapt to life in the United States*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988); "Vietnamese American Oral History Project: Life Stories of Vietnamese Americans in Southern California," accessed 31 May 2019. <https://sites.uci.edu/vaohp/>.

⁷⁷ Yen Le Espiritu and Thom Tran, "Viet Nam, Nuoc Toi" (Vietnam My Country: Vietnamese Americans and Transnationalism" in *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, eds. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 367–398.

⁷⁸ Levitt, Peggy and Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational migration studies: past developments and future trends," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33 (2007): 129–56, doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816; Levitt, Peggy "Roots and routes: understanding the lives of the second generation transnationally," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 7 (2009): 1225–42, doi: 10.1080/1369183090300630; Haller, William and Landolt, Patricia, "The transnational dimensions of identity formation: adult children of immigrants in Miami," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 6(2005): 1182– 214, doi: 10.1080/01419870500224554.

⁷⁹ Michael Jones-Correa, "The Study of Transnationalism Among the Children of Immigrants: Where We Are and Where We Should be Headed," in *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, eds. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 233–234.

⁸⁰ Mary Tomsic, "Sharing a Personal Past: #iwasarefugee#iamarefugee on Instagram" in *Visualising Human Rights*, ed. Jane Lydon (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2018), 63–84; Dierdre McKay, "On the Face of Facebook: Historical Images and Personhood in Filipino Social Networking," *History of Anthropology* 21, no.4 (December 2010): 479–498; Martin Paulsen, "#Holodomor: Twitter and public discourse in Ukraine," in *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States*, eds. Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor, and V. V Zvereva, (New York: Routledge, 2013): 228–238; Alonso Andoni, and Pedro Oiarzabal, eds, *Diasporas in the New Media Age : Identity, Politics, and Community*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010); Dana Diminescu, "The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto," *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 565–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018408096447>.

⁸¹ Hariz Halilovich, "Bosnian Austrians: Accidental Migrants in Trans-local and Cyber Spaces," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26, no. 4 (December 2013): 524–540, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fet002>.

Technologies (ICTs)⁸² for sociability, self-representation, and collective ways of knowing and relating on-line.⁸³ The intergenerational dialogue amongst founding, first, second and third generations of migrants use of ICTs for new practices of belonging and politics of “becoming at home in a new country *and* as a citizen of a more global, deterritorialized world.”⁸⁴ Their Facebook posts and self-representation of national and transnational identity are a form of oral history, the primary focus of this study.

Oral History and Self-Representation

Oral history collection and analysis of self-representations in memoir and on Facebook are the primary focus of this study. The marriage of history and memory in the twentieth century has been well established in the discipline of oral history in Australia.⁸⁵ The use of oral history interviews as a method in this study falls in line with its use in informing Australian histories since 1966.⁸⁶ Alistair Thomson has substantiated the work on oral history and migration studies in Australia.⁸⁷ The use of oral histories in Australia is part of the transnational practice as pioneered in the work of Alessandro Portelli.⁸⁸ Using interviews as the primary practice, others expanded on the practice for migrant and refugee histories about children in Australia.⁸⁹ Oral history is a viable means for gathering stories and perspectives

⁸² Raelene Wilding and Sandra M. Gifford, “Introduction,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26, no. 4, (December 2013): 495–504, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fet025>.

⁸³ Saskia Witteborn; Becoming (Im)Perceptible: Forced Migrants and Virtual Practice, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 28, Issue 3, 1 September 2015, Pages 350–367, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feu036>.

⁸⁴ Sandra M. Gifford and Raelene Wilding, “Digital Escapes? ICTs, Settlement and Belonging among Karen Youth in Melbourne, Australia,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 26, no. 4 (December 2013): 558–575, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fet020>.

⁸⁵ Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, “Memory and history in the twenty-first century Australia: A survey of the field,” *Memory Studies* 6, no.3 (2013): 370-83.

⁸⁶ Donald A. Ritchie, “Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History” in Donald A. Ritchie, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, Oxford Handbooks Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

⁸⁷ Alistair Thomson, “Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies,” *Oral History* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 24-37.

⁸⁸ Alessandro Portelli, “The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event,” in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-28.

⁸⁹ Joy Damousi, “The Campaign for Japanese-Australian Children to Enter Australia, 1957–1968: A History of Post-War Humanitarianism,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 64, no. 2 (2018): 211–226; Joy Damousi and others, “Humanitarianism in the Interwar Years: How Australians Responded to the Child Refugees of the Armenian Genocide and the Greek-Turkish,” *History Australia*, 12, no.1 (2015): 95-115.

about childhood. These life stories illuminate a different set of memories about childhood since perspectives of migration experiences in children and adults differ.⁹⁰ A growing body of work supports the use of children's memories and autobiographies to contest dominant histories highlighting their agency, self-representation, and participation in history.⁹¹ This collection contributes to that growing body of work. Of the expansive use of oral history methods for migration and memory studies, the cross-cultural interview method provides the best framework for talking with Vietnamese child migrants and shared authority in oral history in the a "user-generated world," in this case, Facebook.⁹² Along with the cross-cultural interview method used in this study, William Schnieder suggests that the key question that governs the [oral history] interview is "What do we need to know by way of background to understand?,"⁹³ including the background of the researcher's position.⁹⁴ My experience as a Vietnamese child refugee and interviewer contributes a particular perspective, depth and insight into the cross-culture interview process. In acknowledging the role as a cultural

⁹⁰ Gillian Morantz, Cecile Rousseau, and Jody Heymann, "The Divergent Experiences of Children and Adults in the Relocation Process: Perspectives of Child and Parent Refugee Claimants in Montreal," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 71–92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer025>; Paradee Thoresen et al., "Identifying the Needs of Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children in Thailand: A Focus on the Perspectives of Children," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no.1 (2016):1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few028>.

⁹¹ Kate Douglas and Myra Bluebond-Langner, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti, *Life Narratives and Youth Cultures: Representation, Agency and Participation, Studies in Childhood and Youth*. (London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Kate Douglas and Gillan Whitlock, eds., *Trauma Texts*. (London: Routledge, 2009); Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas, *Telling Tales: Autobiographies of Childhood and Youth*. (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁹² The use of oral history and different framers will be further discussed in Chapter One. For a selection of oral history perspectives that have informed this study, see Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia, PA: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011); Steven High, "Telling Stories: A Reflection on Oral History and New Media," *Oral History* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 101-112; Simon Bradley, "History to Go: oral history, audiowalks, and mobile media," *Oral History* 40, no.1 (Spring 2012): 99-110; Marita Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 248–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem007>; Rebecca Jones, "Blended Voices: Crafting a Narrative from Oral History Interviews," *Oral History Review* 31, no. 1 (2004): 23–42; Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, eds., *Writing the History of Memory* (London: Bloombury, 2014); Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁹³ William Schneider, "Interviewing in Cross-Cultural Settings" in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, Oxford Handbooks Series, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51-64.

⁹⁴ This is in response to the complexity of relationships that may arise in this research as described in Maurice Eisenbruch, "Action Research with Vietnamese Refugees: Refugee, Befriender and Researcher Relationships ¹," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (January 1986): 30–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.1986.9963297>.

insider as a refugee and cultural outsider as a Vietnamese American child refugee, I can ask more informed questions given the high context knowledge of the American Vietnamese experience within the global diaspora.

This study of Vietnamese child refugee, adoptees, and second- generation oral histories of self-representations of their national and translational identity and belonging broadens our understanding of children's agency and contribution to the history childhood and migration. The collection includes narratives of idyllic childhood filled with discovery, exploration and freedom in the escape from Vietnam and life in the refugee camps. For war orphans and adoptees, memories of childhood are based in Australia as they were young babies and orphans upon departure. For Vietnamese child refugees and adoptees, the process of migration and escape from Vietnam fractures the conception of childhood based on traditional and stable sites of memory and experience. The sites of memory of childhood are transitory: the journey of escape from Vietnam, boat passage en route to refugee camps, in refugee camps, in birth records or return visits to orphanages. Memory itself is fractured as children of a certain age with significant time growing up in Vietnam have experience and memories of childhood prior to leaving Vietnam. Vietnamese adoptees or minors who left at a younger age have less memory of a childhood in Vietnam. Depending on their age upon departure from Vietnam, their memories of childhood include the escapes from Vietnam or childhood in the refugee camps. Against the presumption of suffering in these circumstances, the experience of childhood during migration or escape from Vietnam is one of adventure and freedom from demands of becoming more adult in resettlement.⁹⁵ Furthermore, their self-representation of experiences in resettlement reveal new insights about children's agency in cultural adaptation which aligns with the shift in scholarship that acknowledges the agency children demonstrate in migrations and challenges the traditional views of children as passive.⁹⁶ In these oral histories of Vietnamese child migrant's self-representation of their own identities is an enactment of their agency.⁹⁷ With greater access and ease to language

⁹⁵ Studies about unaccompanied minors' experiences because they are such a highly vulnerable group of child migrants, see Mariana Nardone and Ignacio Correa-Velez, "Unpredictability, Invisibility and Vulnerability: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors' Journeys to Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 3 (September 2016): 295–314, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev020>; Goodwin-Gill, Guy S. "Unaccompanied Refugee Minors." *International Journal of Children's Rights* 3, no. 3&4 (1995): 405-416.

⁹⁶ Carly McLaughlin, "Childhood, Migration, and Identity in Chris Cleaves *The Other Hand*" in *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*, Cross Cultures 167, eds. Irene Gilsena Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena, (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2013), 47-67.

⁹⁷ Jacqueline Knörr, "When German Children Come 'Home,'" in *Childhood and Migration: From Experience to Agency*, ed. Jacqueline Knörr (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 51-76.

acquisition and cultural proficiency acquired schooling during resettlement, they describe the higher level of responsibilities put upon them in childhood for their family's livelihood, what Gardner refers to as 'Frontiering.'⁹⁸ How Vietnamese child migrants 'frontier,' i.e. creating new links and spaces, will be further explored in Chapter Four.⁹⁹ Along with more agency, the children in this study also take up the call to change our perspective about children and migration. As Paula Fass argues, "We imagine that children are weak, dependent, and innocent. And we approach the study of children with these values and commitments."¹⁰⁰ This oral history collection of self-representation and children's agency reveals that children do not represent themselves as victims of war or cultural inheritance of defeat or trauma. There is often heroic memorialising of their parent's refugee history, heritage and sacrifices that become part of their own identity. The intergenerational impact of their family refugee heritage inspires political activism and leadership aspirations in the second generation who zealously take pride in their identity as refugees, which is also reflected in the Vietnamese diaspora on Facebook. Furthermore, self-representation accounts for *refugee* identity "as a process that is continually reshaped at the crossing of past and present experiences" in national and transnational contexts.¹⁰¹ Explorations of these historical and contemporary contexts will be further examined throughout this thesis.

Finally, my task is not to conclude that these self-representations are indicative of the majority of Vietnamese child refugee or adoptee experiences in Australia or the global diaspora. The opportunity for self-representation through oral history interviews about their childhood and cultural identity elevates their own pride and status as refugees. These self-representation in oral history, memoirs, and Facebook communities are uniquely individual and part of the self-historisation of Vietnamese refugees in digital diaspora. My interest is in how they enact agency about their refugee heritage and identity and their role as transnational agents in building new politics of belonging in digital diaspora. It remains open for debate and further research as to the impact on how these on line and real-time histories informs our

⁹⁸ Gardner, "Transnational Migration and the Study of Children: An Introduction," 903.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Fass, Paula S. "The World Is at Our Door: Why Historians of Children and Childhood Should Open Up," 27.

¹⁰¹ Halleh Ghorashi, "Giving Silence a Chance: The Importance of Life Stories for Research on Refugees," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (March 2008): 117–132, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem033>, 120.

contemporary public policies and ideologies about child migrants and asylum seekers today. It does not engage the larger discourse of Australian identity politics or the impact on national public policy. This thesis primarily focuses on the memory and experiences of Vietnamese child refugees and adoptees in Australia and their contribution to a contemporary understanding of their agency and self-representation in the history of transnational childhood and migration. In doing so, it offers a distinctive contribution to the body of work on Vietnamese migration and refugees as outlined in the following seven chapters.

Chapter one will examine the historiography of Vietnamese migration in Australia, the historical impact of the White Australia Policy and Multiculturalism, the history of childhood in Australia and how these oral histories are situated in the national and transnational history of childhood and migration. In addition, it will outline the method of using oral history and theories of memory that inform this history of Vietnamese child migrants.

Chapter two explores how art, literature and museums has presented the lived experiences of Vietnamese refugees, and how contemporary Vietnamese child refugee and Second Generation artists approach self-representation. It opens our exploration of refugee childhood memory and experiences and representations of Vietnamese identity and belonging as represented in children's literature, community art practices, and museums. The discussion also includes how representation of Vietnamese in Australia has evolved from narratives about them as objects of history to self-representation of their own memories of childhood and migration as presented in this research.

Chapter three examines Vietnamese refugee and adoptee experiences of agency and adventure in transnational childhood and migration *en route* to Australia. The sites of childhood memories include transitional spaces and experiences: childhood in Vietnam, departure as an orphan, escapes from Vietnam, boat journeys to refugee camps, and life in the refugee camps. In contrast to the dominant trauma narratives of adults who report about children's lives during displacement and in the refugee camps, these self-representations entail idyllic experiences of adventure, discovery, and exploration. The oral histories in this chapter focus on three types of Vietnamese child migrants: unaccompanied minor, war orphan, and child migrant within a family. Their self-representation about their self-determination in these transitional and transnational spaces is indicative of their developing agency in resettlement.

Chapter four focuses on childhood memories and experiences in Australia. Growing up in the late 1970s, they experienced firsthand the tension of Australia's formative

difficulties as a predominantly white European settler nation transitioning into a multicultural society. An analysis of published Vietnamese memoirs about childhood and migration shows a progression in the trope of narratives of resilience and success in a multicultural Australia. These oral histories question the stability and conception of an idealised Australian childhood. The oral histories highlight their agency at school, home, and working at home during resettlement. Their memories and experiences of childhood contribute to a more complex history of childhood in multicultural Australia.

Chapter five explores the complexities of belonging through childhood memories and experiences of Vietnamese war orphans and adoptees. Through an analysis of how their identity is presented, these children of the Vietnam War engage in the complicated task of negotiating cultural and national belonging. Vietnamese adoptees' unique history and experiences destabilises the assimilation model of belonging and easy conflation of their experiences with Vietnamese refugees in Australia. Their childhood experiences in Australia and returns to search for identity in Vietnam empowers them as transnational cultural agents in the history of transnational childhood and migration.

Chapter six explores the inheritance of historical memories and childhood for the children of refugees, second generation Vietnamese. The analysis of their memories of childhood includes how they acquired Vietnamese cultural heritage, political activism, and community development. Second generation Vietnamese also extend their transnational identity and political engagement with issues of concern in Vietnam. The inheritance of memory as children of refugees encourages their agency, understanding of national and transnational identity, and global belonging.

Chapter seven examines the historical memory and the practices of Vietnamese refugees with the global diaspora on Facebook. Based on their identity as former refugees, memories and experiences life in refugee camps, they enact their agency with the use of social media. Facebook becomes a site of memory for their self-representations about childhood and memories of life in the refugee camps, contemporary life as refugees in resettlement, real time reunions with other Vietnamese refugees from the camps or rescue boats, and return visits to sites of memory. Through individual and group self-historicisation, Vietnamese refugees on Facebook engage in a new politics of transnational belonging and formation of a digital diaspora.

My research about Vietnamese refugee children and adoptees arrived at a historical moment when lived experiences have become vital to Australian history of migration in the twentieth century. Children and refugees have been featured in Australian policy and media

since the inquiry and post Tampa years as Australia gains leadership in the development of off-shore detention as a policy of deterrence.¹⁰² The lived experience of refugee children has also become a priority in the service and policy sectors.¹⁰³ This research presents the lived experience of Vietnamese child refugees at a time when the use of social media also inspires political action and community engagement. The first Vietnamese boat people who landed without notice or concern on Darwin's shores in 1975. Their boat landing can now be interpreted as a watershed moment of the change in political perspectives towards refugees and asylum seekers, just as Tampa was a watershed moment for the policies towards off-shore detention. There was no social media to broadcast their arrival then or television to politicise their situation or boats waiting in the harbours to deter them. The oral histories in this study respond to the larger discourse about asylum seekers and refugees by focusing on the individuals and self-representation of their role in history. Oral histories refugees and immigrants are not new to the history of Australian migration. However, the case of Vietnamese growing up in Australia presents a historical period in which refugee children's lived experiences and engagement with social media converge. The analysis in this thesis holds the possibility of informing more culturally competent and child focused public policy and service design of resettlement services for incoming groups of refugees. In looking at the past to design the future, Vietnamese orphans and child refugees from the 1970s and second generation Vietnamese Australians are an ideal case studies for investigation. They are a highly established group of immigrants in Australia. More importantly, it is about the lived experiences of those with an awareness of their histories in which the past becomes present and shapes their future.

¹⁰² Klaus Neumann, *Refuge Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004).

¹⁰³ J. Olaf Kleist, "Remembering for Refugees in Australia: Political Memories and Concepts of Democracy in Refugee Advocacy Post-Tampa," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (December 2013): 665–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2012.746172>.

Chapter One

Historical Context and Methodology

This chapter explains the historical context and methodology of this thesis. The first part of the chapter provides the historical context of the Vietnam war and the forced migration of people that it produced. It examines how Australian government became involved in the Vietnam War, Vietnamese history of migration, Australia's response to the global dispersal of Vietnamese refugees, and the influence of Australia's White Australia policy and multiculturalism on Vietnamese child migrant's memories and experiences of childhood and migration. The second part of the chapter explains the methodological approach for this study. It outlines the use of oral history and memory constructs that inform this thesis on how Vietnamese refugees have been represented in Australia, how they represent themselves as refugees on Facebook, and how these self-representations contribute to the national and transnational history of migration and childhood. To begin, the following discussion is about the Vietnam war and migration in the twentieth century, the historical context for understanding the experience and memory of Vietnamese child migrants in this study of Australian and transnational childhood and migration.

Vietnam War

This history of Vietnamese child migrants in Australia begins with the question about why did Australia become involved in the Vietnam war, and how did it lead to the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Australia? One of the dominant theories of why America and its Allies, including Australia, became involved in the war was the fear of Communism taking over the region. During the late 1950s America established itself as an anti-communist protectorate of the world, and involvement in Vietnam was to halt the domino effect of other nations in the region succumbing to communism. There were three theories about Communist government takeover that fueled this call to arms in the region.¹ The first was that Moscow was going to gain territory if Vietnam was not defended. The second was that China would be the beneficiary. Thirdly, Hanoi would extend its powers of conquest of neighbors. The threat of China loomed large in Australian foreign policy on Southeast Asia as encapsulated

¹ King, *Australia's Vietnam*, 11.

in the statement from Paul Hasluck, Australian Minister for External Affairs, in a Foreign Policy statement to the house of Representatives. Hasluck stated,

There is no doubt that...part of this (the insurgency in South Vietnam) is the determination of Communist China to establish hegemony throughout Southeast Asia, working in the first place through the agency of her North Vietnamese puppets.²

Hasluck's statement in parliament revealed the prevailing Australian perspective that Chinese communism was a threat to take over other South Asian regimes, including the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. There was the presumption that Australia could mitigate the threat of Chinese communism through intervention in Vietnam. Australia also already had a history of defense against the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. Since 1953, Australia had significant concerns about the influence of Communism in South East Asia especially during the height of the cold war. In an alliance with Britain and New Zealand, Australia had resolved to defend Malaya from Communist takeover in what was known as the Malayan Emergency (1948 – 1960).³ Malaysian Chinese sought to overthrow British colonial administration in Malaya. In committing Australian forces allied with Britain in Malaya, Australia already had laid the groundwork with the Far East Strategic Reserve to deter communist aggression in Vietnam.⁴ The rationale was that if Malaya was taken over by Communism, it would infiltrate Indonesia which would lead to conflict against Australia via Papua New Guinea.⁵ The strategic plan was to deter Malaysian Chinese guerillas in Malaya so as to not start a domino effect of communism taking over the region. After the defeat of the French Union forces in Vietnam and the subsequent Geneva agreements in 1954, Australia joined the United States and six other member nations to create the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) for security of the region.⁶ By the middle of 1963,

² Hasluck quoted in Clark, Gregory, "Vietnam, China, and the foreign affairs debate in Australia *A personal account*" Peter King, ed., *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War* (Sydney ; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 18.

³ "Australian involvement in South-East Asian conflicts: The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) Causes and General Description," Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/australian-involvement-south-east-asian-conflicts/malayan-emergency-1948-1960>, accessed on 18 May 2019.

⁴ Ian McNeill, "The Australian Army and the Vietnam War," in Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey, and Peter Pierce, eds., *Australia's Vietnam War*, 1st ed, Texas A & M University Military History Series 77 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 16.

⁵ Ibid, 17.

⁶ Ibid, 18.

confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia intensified as conflicts erupted in Bornea between Papau New Guinea and the new state of West Irian and the Australia cabinet foresaw that it would need to commit troops to Southeast Asian mainland, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.⁷ Australia developed a standing Australian army that could respond to the escalation of communist threat over the region. In November of 1964, it revived the national service scheme for twenty-year old males to serve two years of military service including overseas assignment to prepare for the conflict.⁸ It was new to add overseas service assignment and conscription, compulsory military service, started a year after the end of Vietnam war on 28th April 1965. The Australian Army sent thirty officers to start the Army Training Team into Vietnam in July of 1962, this group otherwise known as The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATV) which grew to one hundred officers by 1965.⁹ The token AATV were present with American military combat in Vietnam for four years prior to the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 that spurred the war effort in Vietnam. The doctrine known as Nixon's 'Vietnamisation,' rallied allied forces to send their own security forces into Vietnam to defend their interests in the region. In response to 'Vietnamisation,' the Australian Prime Minister John Gorton limited the commitment of combat troops to three battalions, and these troops were withdrawn in 1971 during McMahon government.¹⁰ The total contribution of Australian troops as of 2 March 1966 (including units already in the country) was approximately 4,500 Australian men, which was the upper limit of Australia's contributions to Vietnam short of a declaration of an Australian defense emergency.¹¹ Australia's primary involvement was in the Phuoc Tuy Province where the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was committed to secure the coast of North Vietnam from 1967-1968.¹² Australian forces in Vietnam felt they had limited their military effectiveness as the roles for Allied forces were imprecisely defined.¹³ Decisions to commit the Australian forces from the Army, Navy, or Airforce were all independently made without reference or coordination of strategy for Allied

⁷ Ibid, 19.

⁸ Ibid, 20.

⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁰ King, *Australia's Vietnam*, 12.

¹¹ McNeill, "The Australian Army and the Vietnam War," 33.

¹² Ibid, 48.

¹³ Ibid, 36.

forces.¹⁴ America lead the war efforts, and the Australian Army's primary responsibility was to secure the Phuoc Tuy Province and Highway 15 from the port of Vung Tau.¹⁵ In 1973, the new Labor government in Australia broke with this plan for intervention, cancelling conscription and withdrawing the combat troops in the Training Teams. The the cease fire was signed on the 23 January of 1973 when American withdrew from the Phuoc Tuy region and the Training Teams remained in Vietnam for twelve months after the departure of Australian combat forces after.¹⁶ When Nixon announced the call to arms with "Vietnamisation," there were already doubts that the outcome of the war would be favorable to America and its allies. Mass media and protests on campus were informing the debate in America and Australia. Protests and media coverage against the war in America negatively impacted returning soldiers, however the Australian press did not follow suit.¹⁷ For Australians, there was a sense that this was America's war. The prevailing thought was that communism could be contained, but that western intervention was doomed to failure given the example of the French colonisation in Indochina (French colonial name for Vietnam).¹⁸ Non-interventionists in Australia argued that this was an American war about their reputation as protector of the world against the takeover of communism in the region.¹⁹ Thus, Australia's limited commitment to the Vietnam War in terms of troops was a result of its alliance with SEATO and its own regional concern about the influence of Communism in the South East Asia. This is one version how and why Australia became involved in the Vietnam war.

Another perspective comes from Peter Edwards, Official Historian in Southeast Asian Conflicts from 1948-1975. Edwards de-emphasised the threat to Australian security in Southeast Asia and argued that Vietnam was a lost opportunity for internationalism. Edwards posits that there was an assumption that Asian Communism was spreading. He argued that Australia needed to show its support of American policy in Vietnam to ensure that the US

¹⁴ Ibid, 49.

¹⁵ Ibid, 47.

¹⁶ Ibid, 21.

¹⁷ Rachel Stevens, "'Captured by Kindness': Australian Press Representations of the Vietnam War, 1965–1970," *History Australia* 3, no. 2 (2011): 45.1 - 45.17. DOI: 10.2014/ha0600465.

¹⁸ King, *Australia's Vietnam*, 10.

¹⁹ Ibid.

would support Australia if there was ever a threat of an attack from its neighbors. Edwards asserts that these assumptions were not based on the regional intelligence about the political landscape at the time. He described the tensions in Southeast Asia as “greatly eased” and the threat about the spread of Communism rather subdued during the late 1950s. He agreed that anti-Communist governments were much more active than they had been in the region, and that Malaysia and Singapore were in disarray, but that despite communal riots in Malaysia and unrest in Laos, there was prospects of a secure and prosperous future in the region. Edwards acknowledged that the fate of Laos and Cambodia were linked to the outcome of the conflict in Vietnam, however, he considered Vietnam as an isolated theatre of conflict that did not have consequences for all of Southeast Asia.²⁰

Regardless of the various historical rationales about why and how Australia became involved in the Vietnam War, the war remains the cause of the mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees worldwide. In the history of Southeast Asian theatre of conflicts, the Vietnam War, was only one of the many conflicts that are part of Vietnam’s colonial history.²¹ Vietnamese were not foreigners to the impact of war and migration as a result of civil and colonial conflicts. The history of colonisation and internal displacement was an inherent part of Vietnamese history of war and migration in the twentieth century. How that history of civil and colonial conflicts lead to the exodus of refugees and the subsequent arrival of Vietnamese in Australia will be discussed in the next section.

Vietnamese History of Migration

In the context of twentieth century history, Vietnamese has had a significant history of migration and internal displacement since the 1950s and prior to their arrival in Australia in the 1970s. Vietnamese refugees are the consequences of a long history of wars against

²⁰ Peter Edwards, “SEATO Allies ‘Down Under’: Australian Gradual Withdraw,” in *New Perspectives on the Vietnam War: Our Allies Views*, ed. William J. Schoenl, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 71-72.

²¹ For more detailed histories of Vietnam and its conflicts prior to the Vietnam war, see Vu Hong Lien and Peter Sharrock, *Descending Dragon, Rising Tiger: A History of Vietnam*, (London, England : Reaktion Books, 2014); Keith Weller Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Justin J. Corfield, *The History of Vietnam*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2008); Oscar Chapuis, *A History of Vietnam: From Hong Bang to Tu Duc*, Contributions in Asian Studies, no. 5 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1995); Christopher Goscha, “Vietnam before the War,” *History Today*, 67, no. 2 (Feb 2017): 20-27; Raymond Millen, The political context behind successful revolutionary movements, three case studies: Vietnam (1955-63), Algeria (1945-62), and Nicaragua (1967-79) (Carlisle Barracks, PA : Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College) 2008, <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS92385>.

colonial domination, internal displacement, and migration after war. The internal displacement of the 1950s that marked the beginning of their civil war impacted the parents of Vietnamese child refugees in Australia during the late 1970s. Vietnamese refugee parents that arrived during the 1970s were the internally displaced children of civil conflict in 1950s Vietnam. To understand the legacy of displacement for Vietnamese child migrants that resettled in Australia during the late 1970s, it is worth examining the history of Vietnamese as a migrant nation.

Nancy Viviani's history of Vietnam prior to 1975 encapsulates how the Vietnamese were a migrant people from China, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos that established a nation fighting against the forces of Chinese imperialism, French colonialism, and Western imperialism.²² After ten centuries of Chinese domination (111 B.C.E. to 939 C.E.), eighty years of French colonialization (1867 to 1954), the Vietnamese persisted with the dream of building their own nation.²³ Vietnamese nationalists defeated the French and according to Geneva Accord in May of 1954, the major powers and rivals within Indochina agreed on the division of North and South Vietnam and the re-establishment of Cambodia and Laos as nation states.²⁴ The need to keep Vietnam divided and growing anti-communist sentiments opened the gates for the United States to seize power of Vietnam as the next colonial power.²⁵ In essence, the Vietnam war was another form of colonization of Vietnam. In 1965, America committed combat troops and convinced allies including Australia to fight against the tide of communism that posed a political and ideological threat to Western civilization. Vietnam's civil war became America's war against communism. After a decade of guerilla war and foreign intervention, 20 million Vietnamese had already been internally displaced.²⁶ The Paris Peace Agreement of 27 January 1973 to end the war and restore peace to Vietnam called for a ceasefire and withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. However, the civil unrest remained and climaxed with the Communist takeover of Vietnam on the 30th of April 1975, otherwise known as the Fall of Saigon. Continued civil hostilities lead to the global

²² Viviani, *The Long Journey*, 5.

²³ Nguyen, *Voyage of Hope*, 1.

²⁴ Viviani, *The Long Journey*, 24.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

dispersal of refugees, internal displacement and migration of Vietnamese and Ethnic Chinese throughout Southeast Asia and subsequently, Australia.

From the Fall of Saigon to communist forces in April of 1975 for almost two decades, a regional humanitarian crisis of refugees emerged from Vietnam after the war. There is a saying in Vietnamese that captures the desperation and will of the Vietnamese to flee after the Fall of Saigon: “If the lamppost could walk it too would leave.” The urgency of exodus was marked with the American troops pulling out and evacuating with 140,000 Vietnamese who were closely associated with the former South Vietnamese government who resettled in the United States.²⁷ Many of those associated with the South Vietnamese government had left before the Fall of Saigon, and those left behind started to plan migration to closer countries of refuge. At the end of 1975, there were some 5,000 Vietnamese refugee in Thailand, 4,000 in Hong Kong, 1,800 in Singapore, and 1,250 in the Philippines.²⁸ While the war may have ended for America, Vietnamese civilians struggled with their discontent under the new communist regime. By July of 1976, Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. More than one million people including Ethnic Chinese dissidents of communism were placed in re-education camps and suffered from the effects of this even after the camps were closed in the 1980s.²⁹ The history of internal displacement and civil unrest resulted in the exodus of Vietnamese and Ethnic Chinese refugees that become the new migrants to the Allied nations that that took part in the Vietnam War.

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Australia is part of the tidal wave of Vietnamese refugees that started to swell after the Socialist Republic of Vietnam came into power. People left on boats heading for China, Hong Kong, Thailand. According to the figures from UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), by 1977 about 15,000 Vietnamese sought asylum in Southeast Asian countries. Towards the end of 1978, the numbers fleeing by boat had quadrupled and 70 percent were Vietnamese of Chinese origin.³⁰ Vietnamese of Chinese origin were highly prominent in the private economic sector and this deeply conflicted with communist ideology. As a result, China decidedly took back

²⁷ Mark Cutts and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, eds., *The State of the World's Refugees, 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Geneva : New York: UNHCR ; Oxford University Press, 2000), 81.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 82.

³⁰ Ibid.

some of their own by granting asylum, but also creating settlement communities in the South of China for approximately 250,000 Vietnamese.³¹ There was also a wave of refugees that left Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program whereby the Vietnamese government gave permits to individuals to resettle in countries to avoid clandestine and dangerous departures by sea. The Orderly Departure Program was the first occasion in which UNHCR became involved to pre-empt a refugee mass exodus. These programs were a part of international efforts including UNHCR conventions and conferences to deal with the global dispersal of refugees. These concerted efforts ended in 1989 with the Comprehensive Plan of Action to control the departures from Vietnam and to encourage and facilitate the repatriation of Vietnamese asylum seekers from the region.³² While Australia had little direct involvement in Vietnam's history of colonization, civil unrest and internal displacement prior to the war, Australia did take an international interest in providing asylum to Vietnamese refugees after the war as discussed in the following section.

Australia's Response to Vietnamese Refugees

Australia's acceptance of Vietnamese refugees was a humanitarian response to the UNHCR Convention to deal global exodus of Vietnamese refugees and pressure from community groups in Australia sympathetic towards war orphans and the family of Vietnamese international students already in Australia before the end of the war.³³ It was also a political response from politicians dealing with the controversy of conscripting Australian troops to the war in Vietnam and managing diplomatic relations with the communist government in Hanoi. Prime Minister Robert Menzies conscripted Australian troops into Vietnam on 28 April 1965. After a decade of involvement, the Australian public and government felt disillusioned. Gough Whitlam, leader of the ALP, was prime minister during the final days leading up to the end of the war in Vietnam. Whitlam stated frankly in an address on the 8th of April 1975 to parliament about the impact of the Vietnam War on Australia, "All of us are still paying the prices for those mistakes – in economics, in loss of confidence, in western civilization itself."³⁴ Whitlam expressed his great disappointment

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 86.

³³ Viviani, *Australian Government Policy on the Entry of Vietnamese Refugees in 1975*.

³⁴ Ibid, 5.

with the 1973 Paris agreements where the South Vietnamese and United States failed to set up a provisional government. The leader of the opposition, Malcolm Fraser, replied in critique of Whitlam's perceived partisanship to North Vietnam.³⁵ Whitlam was then forced to defend the party against accusations of partisanship to avoid offending the new government in Hanoi. As a result, he created policy in response to public concerns about policies on foreign aid, Vietnamese students already in Australia, and their request for family to join them.³⁶ At the same time, community pressure on the Australian government to open the intake of family members of Vietnamese students already in Australia and war orphans from Vietnam.

Increase in pressure from community groups in Australia and the chaos in Vietnam at the Australian embassy after the Fall of Saigon pushed policies and humanitarian action which brought forth the arrival of war orphans, the first group of Vietnamese child migrants to Australia. Two public responses influenced policy at the time.³⁷ There were Australians outraged with the plight of children in Vietnam and urging the rescue of war orphans and those concerned the welfare of Vietnamese students and their family in Vietnam. The emotional support of Australians concerned about war orphans in Vietnam convinced the government on the 4th of April 1975 to airlift the first baby flight carrying 208 children.³⁸ A second orphan flight was scheduled for 7th of April 1975, but by this time questions were raised about the morality of kidnapping children who were not really orphans. Thus, only seventy-five orphans were airlifted out on the 16th of April 1975.³⁹ These first humanitarian entrants from Vietnam, war orphans, would be later known as *refugees* in Australian migration history. Despite political and humanitarian ambivalence, sympathies for children in Australian policies prevailed. The Australian government and public were dealing with internal issues that influenced their response to the global diaspora of Vietnamese refugees. In some quarters, the government and public were ambivalent about constructing immigration policies for an intake of refugees in response to a war they did not support. However, the emergence of multicultural policy in the late 1970s created a new agenda for an end to the White Australia Policy that would open the gates for the arrival of Vietnamese refugees.

³⁵ Ibid, 15.

³⁶ Ibid, 16

³⁷ Ibid, 24.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

White Australia Policy

The historical context of racism and widespread support of the White Australia Policy against Asians and Non-Europeans would influence the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in Australia even as policies shifted towards multiculturalism in the 1970s. The White Australia Policy that favoured British and white Europeans for immigration remained in effect from the 1900s until the 1960s. Parliamentary members of the Federation hailed the immigration policies as legitimate means to preserve “Australia’s white racial purity,” and protect its workers from the “vagaries of cheap Asiatic labour,” and to protect national sovereignty against a potential “‘Asiatic’ invasion.”⁴⁰ These ideologies expressed a deep desire to prevent the contamination of the races. Alfred Deakin declared the White Australia policy as the *raison d’être* for the formation of the Australia federation. He stated,

No motive power operated more universally on this continent...than the desire that we should be one people and remain one people without the admixture of other races. It is necessary to say that they do not and cannot blend with us, that we do not, cannot and ought not to blend with them. ⁴¹

However predominant the White Australia Policy desire to not encourage mix traces, it also failed to eliminate all traces of non-European origins and culture. Since the implementation of White Australia was based on physical appearance rather than geographical origins, immigrants from Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Indian or the Pacific of mixed descent were allowed entry.⁴² The fiction of a monoculture was not possible. Population and market pressures forced Australia to reconsider its immigration policies. It was through the leadership in the Immigration department that Asian immigration gained force and transformed Australia from the ideology of a monocultural society. Australia’s need for labour to sustain its population, the notion of “populate or perish,” emerged during the post war period.⁴³ Labour was needed for the modernization of roads and infrastructure and creation of hydro-electric and irrigation schemes. British immigrants who came through the assisted programs did not want lifestyles

⁴⁰ Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jupp, *Immigration*, 1991, 51.

⁴³ Ibid, 70.

outside of the major cities or work in agriculture or mining.⁴⁴ The needs for industrialisation and labour during the post war period urged changes to immigration policy and the context for accepting a non- European refugee population into Australia. With the need for industrialised labour and the Gold Rush in the 1950s, Chinese immigrants paved the way for the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s.

The White Australia policy and immigration policies against Chinese immigrants in the formative years of the federation of Australia shaped the experiences of Vietnamese refugees in Australia in 1970s. The policy made Australia famously exclude non-Europeans to create a ‘White Australia’ with widespread popular support and reinforced with administrative policy for almost ninety years.⁴⁵ Gwenda Tavan argues that Australia was internationally recognised for its ‘White Australia’ policy until Al Grasby, Australia immigration minister in 1973, traveled throughout Asia announcing the Whitlam government’s reforms to end it.⁴⁶ For almost a century, the White Australia Policy originated in racism and labour market protection against Chinese and non-European settlers. Fear of Chinese expansion in the 1890s coupled with labour competition and unionization of Australian workers created the foundation of support for White Australia.⁴⁷ Otherwise known as The *Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act*, the Commonwealth Parliament in 1901 introduced it as their first piece of legislation. It was intended to restrict immigration and provide for the removal of certain immigrants already in the Commonwealth based on race.⁴⁸ It excluded Chinese from immigration, barred them from specified occupations and made it virtually impossible for them to become citizens.⁴⁹ The fear of an Asian invasion fueled continual support for the White Australia policy throughout the formative years of the federation and the reception of Vietnamese refugees into Australia based on their similar racial profiles.

⁴⁴ Jupp, 102.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 82.

⁴⁶ Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 8.

⁴⁷ James Jupp, *Immigration*, 2nd ed (Melbourne ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139.

⁴⁸ Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 7.

⁴⁹ Jupp, *Immigration*, 1991, 47.

Vietnamese refugees entered the history of Australia at a precipitous time when the White Australia policy was ending and government policy was transitioning towards multiculturalism. James Jupp claimed that when the first Vietnamese refugee arrived in Darwin in 1976, that was the end of the White Australia Policy.⁵⁰ Before the arrival of Vietnamese refugees, the Chinese were the first Asians to have immigrated to Australia in the 1850s in response to a labour shortage outside of the city centres.⁵¹ Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong with British citizenship were not inspired to immigrate to Australia until the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851. The first Chinese seeking gold arrived in Melbourne in January of 1853.⁵² This first arrival of Chinese were seen as numerous and threatening to the half-million British population in Australia, even though British immigrants doubled in numbers during the 1850s.⁵³ The fear about Chinese invasion ensued without clarity as to the number of Chinese with British citizenship from Hong Kong. Public anxiety about the changing face of Australian immigration was subsumed in the impetus to find gold. Immigration for Chinese and Europeans increased in territories of Australia that had not been developed. For instance, in the 1880s, Queensland was developing as a center of tropical agriculture and mining. More British migrants were assisted to immigrate to allocated land there. Chinese were migrating towards these new goldfields.⁵⁴ Along with the tension of resistance against Chinese and Non-Europeans in these traditionally British settled territories, racial tension was further heightened by continuing warfare against Aborigines.⁵⁵ These labour and racial tensions shaped the formation of The White Australia policy that coincided with the formation of the federation of Australia in the 1900s. Without economic drivers such as gold or a labour shortage to govern immigration policies, the White Australia policy spawned prejudice against Asian immigration in the 1970s.

⁵⁰ James Jupp, *Immigration*, Australian Retrospectives (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1991), 87.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 43.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 48.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Changes in the immigration policies and public opinions about Asian immigration were already in effect prior to acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. Arthur Calwell, Australia's first Minister for Immigration from 1945 to 1949, changed the ethnic face of Australia introducing non-British refugees to the population. He invested in recruiting immigrants from Displaced Persons (DP) camps in central Europe.⁵⁶ The DP program conservatively changed the ethnic composition of Australia bringing in a large population of non-British from 1947 to 1953.⁵⁷ From 1956-58, Alexander Downer as Minister for Immigration made some minor changes that effected The White Australia policy, but it was Hubert Opperman who made major changes in March of 1966.⁵⁸ The Opperman reforms in 1966 dramatically increased non-white European immigration. The figures of less than 500 per annum in the early 1960s increased to over 9,000 (including part-Europeans) by 1971 just four years prior to the arrival of the first Vietnamese refugee.⁵⁹ However, it would not be until the 1971 that all references to racial discrimination in immigration legislation marked the official end of the White Australia Policy under the Whitlam government.⁶⁰ James Jupp argues that the White Australia Policy did not effectively end until the government changed policies on admission to not be based on race, ethnicity, religion or cultural background.⁶¹ It was in 1976, when Vietnamese refugees were accepted for intake without reference to the White Australia Policy. Vietnamese, however, were not passive recipients of the national agenda for a multicultural Australia. As illustrated in their self-representation in this thesis, they became active agents, cultural liaisons for Australia's international relations with the global agenda for the resettlement of Indochinese refugees. Their agency will be further explored in the memoirs, oral histories and use of Facebook about their memories of childhood, migration, identity, and belonging of the following chapters. Before progressing, I would like to define the historical context of multiculturalism in Australia from the late

⁵⁶ Jupp, 103.

⁵⁷ Jupp, 104.

⁵⁸ Jamie Mackie, "The Politics of Asian Immigration," in *Asians in Australia*, edited by James E. Coughland and Deborah J. McNamara, (South Melbourne: Macmillian Education Australia Pty Ltd, 1997), 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Jupp, *Immigration*, 86.

1970s to the present, and how that shaped the experiences of Vietnamese child migrants and their agency in it.

Multiculturalism

The meaning of multiculturalism has changed since its conception in the late 1970s, and it has influenced the experiences of Vietnamese child migrants growing up in Australia today. Multiculturalism was transformed from a national policy that was in response to the White Australia policy that Australia would remain “white and British” and immigrants would become “New Australians” (1901-1960) to policies promoting assimilation (1960 - 1972). Just as Vietnamese were about to arrive in Australia, multiculturalism changed its focus towards tolerance of other cultures (1972—1982). At the height of Vietnamese immigration in the 1980s, multiculturalism focused on including welfare programs for cultural and structural pluralism. As the first and second generation of Vietnamese children were gaining education and voice, multiculturalism shifted to focus on the rights of migrants within mainstream Australia to express cultural identity (1990 - 2000).⁶² Some key events marked these developments in the policy as the meaning of multiculturalism continues to be shaped through political debate and activism of ethnic communities today.

The conception of multiculturalism as a policy has been attributed to a series of changes in ideology governing our social services starting with the 1973 Grassby Report, titled *A Multicultural Society for the Future*. The report marked the end of assimilation and dictated an obligation of the government to provide services that ensured “equality of access and provision.”⁶³ Grassby argued for an already “existing multicultural reality,” and he preferred the term “polyethnic” to describe contemporary Australia.⁶⁴ It is from Grassby that the phrases, “Family of the nation” and “Strength in diversity” and “social and cultural rights” became a part of the conversations about multiculturalism.⁶⁵ However, the

⁶² John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton, *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration Since 1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1–10; Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2005), 110; Lack and Templeton, *Bold Experiment*, 89; Andrew Jakubowicz, “Ethnic-Affairs Policy in Australia: the Failure of Multiculturalism,” in *Australia in Transition: Culture and Life Possibilities*, (eds) Milicent Poole, Philip De Lacey and Bikkar Randahawa (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 271-278; Lois E. Foster and David Stockley, *Multiculturalism: The Changing Australian Paradigm*, Multilingual Matters 16 (Clevedon, Avon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1984).

⁶³ For a complete analysis of the theoretical framework and documents Grassby submitted, see Foster and Stockley, 61-67.

⁶⁴ Foster and Stockley, *Multiculturalism: The Changing Australian Paradigm*, 61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 62-63.

conceptualisation of multiculturalism did not take the form of programs and services for migrants and refugees until the 1978 Galbally Review. This review created government advisory bodies such as the Ethnic Affairs Council and the Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Councils to govern social service aid to the ethnic communities.⁶⁶ While there was a focus on migrants and refugees services, Andrew Jakubowicz considered the 1978 Galbally Report and the recommendations implemented in the 1980s as a “second-rate system of welfare” because Ethnic community groups had to fight for government funding.⁶⁷ This “second rate welfare system” for refugees and migrants raised significant controversies that started to target Asians including the Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s.⁶⁸ Most notable were critics such as Geoffrey Blainey who created the rhetoric of “privileges” granted to ethnic minorities and the perils of more Asian immigration, including Vietnamese refugees.⁶⁹ According to Jakubowicz,

Blainey, a well-regarded historian who had coined the term "tyranny of distance" to describe Australia's relations with its British political founders, argued in a speech to a Rotary club in the Victorian town of Warnambool in 1984 that the pace of Asian migration was too high, that it threatened the "social cohesion" of Australia, that migrants generally took "Australian" jobs and unless major changes were made to immigration policy, racial conflict and violence would ensue.⁷⁰

Blainey's rhetoric that instilled prejudice against Asians as a threat to erode social cohesion in Australian shaped the controversies around multiculturalism. In a debate when he was the oppositional leader, John Howard stated reference Blainey's rhetoric with statements such as “multiculturalism...ha[d] gone off the rails.”⁷¹ Howard purposefully made multiculturalism a

⁶⁶ Jakubowicz, “Ethnic-Affairs Policy in Australia: the Failure of Multiculturalism,” 273-275.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 274.

⁶⁸ Andrew Jakubowicz wrote particularly about Vietnamese refugees in the midst of these debates, see Andrew Jakubowicz, “Once upon a Time in ... ethnocratic Australia: migration, refugees, diversity and contested discourses of inclusion and exclusion.” *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 3 (2016):144; “A Quintessential Collision: Vietnamese in Australia after a generation of settlement and adaptation,” University of Technology Sydney, May 2004, <https://andrewjakubowicz.com/publications/vietnamese-in-australia-a-quintessential-collision/>.

⁶⁹ Geoffrey Blainey, *All for Australia* (Sydney: Methuen Haynes, 1984).

⁷⁰ Andrew Jacobowski, Commentary on: The Blainey debate on immigration, Multicultural Australia, accessed on 28 May 2019. <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Timeline-Commentary/id/115.The-Blainey-debate-on-immigration->.

⁷¹ David Carter, “Modern Nationalism, Mundane Diversity and Positive Unoriginality. Modes of Cultural Originality and Transfer in Australia”, in *Australian Nationalism Reconsidered: Maintaining a Monocultural Tradition in a Multicultural Society*, (ed) Adi Wimmer (Tübingen Stauffenburg, 1999), 72.

bi-partisan issue. He focused on its purpose for social integration so that ethnic minorities needed to defer identity and focus on an “Australian core culture” and “multicultural nationhood.”⁷² The meaning and purpose of multiculturalism for social cohesion continued throughout his eleven years in office (1996-2007). However, the spotlight and debates against Asians continued through the 1990s and gave rise to Pauline Hanson’s opposition to multiculturalism and Asian immigration. During Howard’s administration, Hanson’s politics against multiculturalism and opposition to Asian immigration began during the Howard administration. More recently, Hanson’s One Nation Party downplayed its openly anti-Asian positions which essentially remained unchanged for a decade (1996-1998).⁷³ Hanson’s One Nation party was revived in the current elections as her policies focused on the current rhetoric against asylum seekers and refugees. She called for the removal of Australia as a signatory of the 1954 Refugee Convention.⁷⁴ Anti-Asian and anti-immigration political campaigns continue to shape immigration policies and multiculturalism today.

Multiculturalism in the current political climate revives the rhetoric against immigration, but now openly against asylum seekers and refugees. For example, the same prejudices and presumptions are placed upon refugees on welfare from the 1980s. Now, however, the ethnic community programs, such as SBS News, that were established in the late 1970s policies for multiculturalism, can respond. For instance, in a report about who is actually receiving Centrelink New Start benefits (welfare), the research indicates that “[w]hen it comes to the dole, those born in Australia are the biggest recipients of Newstart, followed by those born in the UK, Vietnam, and then New Zealand.”⁷⁵ Some scholars argue that multiculturalism as a bipartisan policy is “embedded...in the everyday lives of the people of Australia,” even as some of the tensions remain unresolved.⁷⁶ The Australian government continues to uphold it as

⁷² David Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2, 126, 128.

⁷³ Philip Dorling, “Still Anti-Asian? Anti-Chinese? One Nation policies on Asian immigration and multiculturalism 仍然反亚裔？反华裔？一国党针对亚裔移民和多元文化的政策,” The Australia Institute, May 2017. <http://www.tai.org.au/sites/default/files/P349%20Is%20PHON%20still%20anti-Asian%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁷⁴ “Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Policies: Asylum Seekers and Refugees,” accessed on 28th May 2019, <https://www.onenation.org.au/policies/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/>.

⁷⁵ Rashida Yosifzai, “Refugees on welfare: the real numbers,” SBS News, updated 9 September 2017. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/refugees-on-welfare-the-real-numbers>

⁷⁶ Maree Pardy and Julian Lee, “Using Buzzwords of Belonging: Everyday Multiculturalism and Social Capital in Australia”, *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2011): 298; Nicole Oke, Christopher C. Sonn, and Christopher McConville, “Making a Place in Footscray: Everyday Multiculturalism, Ethnic Hubs and

a national agenda.⁷⁷ As multiculturalism changed from the late 1970s, it changes informed the experiences of Vietnamese child migrants growing up in Australia. For instance, Thomas Nguyen, who is featured in Chapter Six as a second generation child of refugees, can relate to the impact of the welfare system in the 1980s that gave his father veteran pension as a soldier of South Vietnamese army. The historical influence of multiculturalism and its impact on Vietnamese will be explored further throughout this thesis. However, before we proceed in these explorations, I would like to provide an explication of the methodology, use of oral history and theories of memory that inform this study.

Oral History

The use of oral histories or life stories is one of the ways that Vietnamese child migrants can represent themselves in the national and international histories of childhood and migration. During the 1970s and 1980s when Vietnamese child migrants arrived at the refugee camps, their histories were not actively recorded. There a numerous reason and presuppositions about why there is a lack of Vietnamese child migrant experiences in the history. A lack of English language proficiency on the part of the parents, and the view that the experience of the child was as separate from the events that are a part of the family history may have contributed to this lack of records at the camp and in the years of resettlement. Many refugee children as adults in this study have expressed that they had never been asked about their childhood memories.⁷⁸ As discussed in the introduction, there is a lack of literature about direct children's experiences due to research ethics and perspectives about children. Research ethics recognizes the special treatment of vulnerable populations such as children and refugees when conducting life interviews.⁷⁹ The onerous process of attaining

Segmented Geography," *Identities* 25, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 320–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2016.1233880>.

⁷⁷ The multicultural statement is translated into 32 languages. See "Australian Government's multicultural Statement: Multicultural Australia – united, strong, successful" Multicultural affairs, Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, accessed on 29 May 2019. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs/about-multicultural-affairs/our-statement>.

⁷⁸ Khai Phan interviewed 27 May 2016; Hang Do interviewed 13 November 2017; Claudia Nhu Nguyen interviewed 11 March 2017; Alex Nguyen interviewed 21 March 2017; Thomas Nguyen interviewed 19 March 2017.

⁷⁹ For the purposes of this study in historical memory, the concerns about children are not existent as the oral history interviews are conducted with adults about their memories and experiences of childhood. This does not preclude the precautions for the researcher that such memories will stir up difficult feelings or trauma in childhood. See Catriona Mackenzie, Christopher McDowell, Eileen Pittaway; Beyond 'Do No Harm': The

research ethics approval may have discouraged researchers to pursue studies of direct children's experiences. Also, research about refugees has incited greater concerns about the nature and ethics of conversation and engagement with a population that may still be vulnerable especially when remembering or sharing life stories may further traumatise or exacerbate difficulties in resettlement. This may have also contributed the difficulties for researchers in accessing refugees for studies. Given the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness of the recommendations in best practices with refugee studies,⁸⁰ the use of oral history in this study about the experiences and memories of refugee children from thirty to forty years ago mitigates these possibilities of invoking trauma or negatively impact their status as resettled citizens. Oral history interviews of Vietnamese adults about their childhood is the primary method for this study. It is the most efficient means to address the lack of primary sources about direct childhood experiences during migration. The following details the design of these oral histories and their contribution to the history about childhood and migration.

The design of this study is based on the oral history interviews, a selection of memoirs and children's books, artifacts in museum collections, and Facebook postings on public Vietnamese refugee communities. The interviews were from self-selecting adults who responded to advertisement and word of mouth about sharing their stories and experiences as Vietnamese child adoptees or refugees. There was a total of fifteen interviews. Each contributed an average of one to two hour of interviews with some more extended one to two hours of interviews in follow-up sessions. The participants included adults who were under the age of eighteen when they migrated with their family or entered Australia as unaccompanied minors or adoptees. Each were asked questions about their memories and experience of childhood and life in Vietnam, during migration, and resettlement in Australia. Interviewees who entered as children under the age of ten with less memory of life in Vietnam, were asked about their inherited memories and the stories they were told about their childhood and migration. The interview excerpts and Facebook posts quoted in in this thesis are direct quotes and correct as is.⁸¹ These oral histories are examined alongside a small

Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 20, Issue 2, 1 June 2007, Pages 299–319, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem008>.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 300.

⁸¹ When necessary, I have edited their responses and preserved the unique manners of speech and diction by adding *[sic]* to indicate that it was thus quoted. In the same informal manner, I will be using their first name

selection of children's books and memoirs by Vietnamese Australian writers about their childhood and memories of life as migrants and refugees.⁸² The purpose of looking at children's book and the selected memoirs was to have an idea of the dominant narratives that are published and widely read in English about Vietnamese refugee experience and childhood. Memoir excerpts that were selected for analysis in this thesis were based on their correlation with the predominant themes that emerged from the oral histories.

The inclusion of self-representation in postings on Facebook pages of Vietnamese refugee communities emerged out of the oral history collection process. Phuong Ngo, a second-generation Vietnamese artist, had informed me that there were stories of Vietnamese on Facebook. In one of my first interviews, I was connected to the interviewee's cousin who had migrated as an unaccompanied minor, Nam Huynh. Nam happened to be the administrator of three of the Vietnamese Facebook refugee community pages, "Pulau Bidong Alumni," "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore," and "Âu Cơ Family, Pulau Bidong." Nam allowed permission for me to join the groups and create a researcher profile to disclose my purposes and access the content for this study. An analysis of "Âu Cơ Family, Pulau Bidong," the Facebook community for unaccompanied minors of the Pulau Bidong refugee camp and Vietnamese Adoptee Facebook community were not included in this study because they are closed groups, not open to the Facebook public. Access to the other Facebook Vietnamese refugee communities mentioned are open to the public and require Nam or the other administrators in the United State to approve requests to join the group. As a Vietnamese refugee, I was able to join as a contributor to the conversations and posted updates about my research on-line.⁸³ Nam Huynh

after the first formal introduction of their given and family names. There are many common Vietnamese surnames and it would confuse the reader otherwise.

⁸² Anh Do, *The Happiest Refugee: the Extraordinary True Story of a Boy's Journey from Starvation at Sea to Becoming One of Australia's Best-Loved Comedians*, (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2010); Anh Do, Suzanne Do, and Bruce Whatley, *The Little Refugee* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.; Brighton: Allen & Unwin ; Roundhouse, 2012); Bic Walker, *A Safe Place to Live* (Asburton, Vic.: Bic Walker, 2011); Cat Thao Nguyen, *We Are Here*, (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2015); Tracy Vo, *Small Bamboo* (Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2014); Alice Pung, *Her Father's Daughter* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2011); Benjamin Law, *The Family Law* (Melbourne, Vic: Black Inc, 2010); Kim Huynh, *Where the Sea Takes Us: A Vietnamese-Australian Story* (Pymble, N.S.W.: Harper Perennial, 2008).

⁸³ For examples of some of my postings, see Anh Nguyen, May 25, 2016 at 4:58pm, Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, accessed 29 May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>; Anh Nguyen, December 19, 2018 at 11:20am, Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, accessed 29 May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>;

also invited and presented me as a researcher to the Pulau Bidong alum group that had connected on line at their reunion in Melbourne.⁸⁴ Access to second generation Vietnamese was through an unsolicited invitation to design a workshop to teach leadership skills in the Dual Identity Leadership program.⁸⁵ The program was an initiative of the Victorian government that promotes cultural diversity and civic action. Self-select alumni of the program who learned about my research offered themselves for interviews. Access to Vietnamese adoptees grew from word of mouth and introduction through my interview with Dominic Golding and Lynelle Long who are activists within the intercountry adoptees community. Like the direct quotes of interviews, the Facebook posts quoted in this thesis are direct quotes at the time posted. Some participants on Facebook may have edited or deleted their previous posts, and I cannot account for these changes. The use of oral history interviews, children's books, memoir, and Facebook self-representations as primary sources for this research has connected me with the Vietnamese community in Australia and in digital diaspora. In gathering and seeking to understand their stories and experiences, my research contributes to a larger understanding of refugee memory in the history of childhood and migration. Subsequently, an explanation of memory constructs that inform this thesis follows.

Memory Constructs

Within the scope of this thesis, *postmemory* and *refugee diasporic exile memory* are the foundational constructs of memory in the narratives of Vietnamese child migrants to Australia, Second Generation Vietnamese,⁸⁶ and Vietnamese refugees on Facebook.

Anh Nguyen, October 28, 2017 at 8:40pm, "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore," Facebook public group, accessed 29 May 2019.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>;

Anh Nguyen, February 4, 2019 at 6:30pm "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group accessed 29 May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

⁸⁴ Bidong reunion was held on the 10-11 March 2018 in Melbourne, Australia. See posts about the announcement and my post to the group after the reunion, Nam Huynh, December 3, 2017 at 12:07pm, Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, accessed 29 May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

Anh Nguyen, June 5, 2018 at 2:10pm, Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, accessed 29 May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

⁸⁵ Dual Identity Leadership Program, <https://www.facebook.com/dualidentityleadership/>, accessed 29 May 2019.

⁸⁶ For further discussions on how memory lives on in second generation communities, Marek Tamm, *Afterlife of Events: Perspectives on Mnemohistory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Nina Fischer, *Memory Work: The Second Generation*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as “not a movement, method, or idea;...rather, a structure of inter and transgeneration transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” which accounts for how children inherit and re-create the past based on their parent’s experience and memories of the past.⁸⁷ Hirsch’s concept of postmemory as applied to second generation writers and visual artists of the Holocaust expressing their connection to the past, is “mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.”⁸⁸ In this study, *postmemory* does apply to the second generation, but other constructs of memory and variations of *postmemory* as a dynamic movement are needed to understand the narratives of adoptees, unaccompanied minors, and the 1.5 generation. For Vietnamese child refugees that entered under the age of 18, the child experiences directly the trauma with the parents, as well as their own trauma. The stories told by parents about their childhood capture incompletely the child’s lived experience and their own narrative seems lesser in light of their parents’ struggles or journey. Through a process of recreation of memory, Vietnamese refugee adults remembering childhood often acknowledge that their own memories live in the shadows of the parent’s trauma or experience. Kim Huynh, a 1.5 generation refugee child, articulates the impetus to write and the nature of transmitting the family history as a variation of *postmemory* in his historical memoir,

There was impetus to write about my family history....I focus on their (his parent’s) great leaps of courage and ingenuity. I never matched....I gauge myself against what they have done on the big things – what courage, what creativity...”⁸⁹

Many of the participants in this research expressed that even though they are part of the 1.5 generation, there is a sublimation of their own memories and experiences within the awesomeness of their parent’s experiences. The desire to transmit or write about the inherited memories is a variation of recreated *postmemory*. As evidenced in the most familiar initial response to the request for interview, participants are surprised as no one had ever asked them about my childhood memories, and previous to this inquiry the oral history interviews they

⁸⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* in Karen Redrobe Beckman and Liliane Weissberg, eds, *On Writing with Photography*, 2013, 202-249. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unimelb/detail.action?docID=1161008>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 204-205.

⁸⁹ Kim Huynh, phone interviewed, 19 May 2016; See Huynh, Kim. *Where the Sea Takes Us: A Vietnamese-Australian Story*. Pymble, N.S.W.: Harper Perennial, 2008.

have shared have been about their parent's history or refugee experience. This acknowledgement of child's memory constructed in the shadow of their parent's experiences prevents the very loss that Hirsh describes about *postmemory*:

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth, or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation.⁹⁰

Vietnamese child refugees of the 1.5 generation are no exception in how they are overwhelmed with the inheritance of their parent's memories as refugees. As children, some have no memories, only flash memories of escape, or embodied memories may have been displaced. The attempt to express or place those memories in the history of global childhood provides insight on how historical *postmemory* works for refugee children. Yen Le Espiritu further expanded the understanding of *postmemory* as applied to Vietnamese refugees as *refugee postmemory*.⁹¹ Her work focused on war trauma for the 'Generation After,' and not necessarily childhood. Child refugees that were children when they left Vietnam have their own experience of migration and personal trauma that resulted from the displacement in the aftermath of war. Child or sexual abuse in the refugee camp may have occurred during the course of migration from war, but the memories are not about the war. These seemingly secondary traumas may have had a greater impact on the child's memory construct. This historical study about child refugee memory necessitates the recognition of public, private and political negotiations about what are acceptable memory to be told about child's experiences as refugees in their respective mainstream cultures. It is also important to acknowledge how parental memory informs childhood memory. Elaine Reese addresses this within her work on the cognitive psychology and development of adolescent autobiographical memory and the parental influence on memory.⁹² Tina Waserma has written about

⁹⁰ Hirsh, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 204-205.

⁹¹ Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*.

⁹² Elaine Reese, Fiona Jack, and Naomi White, "Origins of Adolescents' Autobiographical Memories," *Cognitive Development* 25, no. 4 (October 2010): 352-67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2010.08.006>; Karen Salmon and Elaine Reese, "Talking (or Not Talking) about the Past: The Influence of Parent-Child Conversation about Negative Experiences on Children's Memories: Influence of Parent-Child Conversation," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 29, no. 6 (November 2015): 791-801, <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3186>.

construction of images of postmemory which will be further explored in the works of Vietnamese refugee artists and adoptees that return to Vietnam to look for their origins.⁹³ The research on how memory is constructed allow for understanding of the dynamic nature of *postmemory* for Vietnamese child migrants. Furthermore, *postmemory* in combination with the conception of *refugee diasporic exile memory* provides a more focused lens to understanding memory constructs in this study.

Refugee Exilic and Diasporic Memory

Thomas Lacroix and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's *Refugee diasporic exile memory* provide a useful framework complementary to Hirsh's *postmemory* in this analysis of memory constructs that inform this thesis. Certain constructs of memory are more useful than others in understanding the unique ways of migration. For example, combining the dynamics of exilic and diasporic memory proves useful for understanding childhood memory of refugees and war orphans of the Vietnamese diaspora. As Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh stated,

Exilic memory is the main term of reference for the classical conception of diaspora and can be seen as a collectively shared representation of the traumatic conditions that led to the dispersion of the group from the homeland.⁹⁴

Exilic memory as a collective representation, in this case, the Vietnamese diasporic narrative, accounts for the shared loss of homeland for all the Vietnamese child migrants regardless of their status upon entry to Australia. For example, Babylift orphans were also in flight from persecution after the Fall of Saigon, but they did not enter Australia with refugee status. All the child migrants in this study have a shared pre-migration identity as Vietnamese living in exile as they have shared lost their homeland and identity as Vietnamese citizens.⁹⁵ Exilic memory, as distinct from diasporic memory, does not refer to shared experiences in the

⁹³ Tina Waserman, "Constructing the Image of Postmemory," in *The image and the witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, eds. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 159- 172.

⁹⁴ Thomas Lacroix and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Refugee and Diaspora Memories: The Politics of Remembering and Forgetting," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (December 2013): 684-96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2013.846893>, 687.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 688.

country of origin. As Lacroix and Finddian-Qasmiyeh explained,

In turn, diasporic memory is not structured by a narration of the point of origin per se but, rather, is the outcome of a collective migratory trajectory, with the diaspora's sense of distinctiveness, and of forming a minority, having thus throughout the course of their emigration.⁹⁶

In this case, Vietnamese child migrants' memories are diasporic because of their shared migratory trajectory, resettlement and adjustment to Australian mainstream culture as a collective minority due to emigration. "Exilic diasporic memory" is an apt term because it accounts for variations of memories that arise from a shared loss of country, national identity, and flight from persecution and harm. Combining both categories of memory allows room for differences in memories and experiences which will be discussed further in Chapter Five about Vietnamese orphans and adoptees, and Chapters Three and Four about Vietnamese child refugees and unaccompanied minors. However, the three distinct groups of Vietnamese child migrants are diasporic exiles and have shared constructs of memory based on their shared departure because of the "The Fall of Saigon."

The Fall of Saigon on the 30th of April 1975 was the capture of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, by the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The event marked the end of the Vietnam War and the start of a transition period to the formal reunification of Vietnam under the Socialist Republic. The Fall of Saigon caused one of the largest waves of refugees in the twentieth century. The dispersion takes many forms via land and sea. The historical memory that comes from that flight informs the diasporic experience of a collective Vietnamese refugee memory. In combining the dynamics of exilic and diasporic memory, Thomas Lacroix and Fidian-Qasmiyeh create what is termed, "refugee diasporic exile memory," which aptly describes the type of memories in the oral histories and Facebook posts in this thesis. Refugee diasporic exile memory encapsulates the historical departure point, cause, and nature of memory *en route*, in flight for fear of harm and persecution that shapes the childhood of Vietnamese child migrants in this study. Further analysis of the distinct differences in experiences for Vietnamese unaccompanied minors, orphans of Operation Babylift, and children who escape with their families will enhance an

⁹⁶ Ibid.

understanding of these memory constructs in the following chapters.

In conclusion, the historical context of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese internal displacement and Australia's transition from the White Australia Policy to multiculturalism will inform an understanding of oral histories of self-representation throughout this thesis. Vietnamese child migrants were the grandchildren of internally displaced Vietnamese since the 1950s, when their parent's parents had fled communism that was taking over the North of Vietnam. Prior to that was a long history of perseverance through domination under several colonial powers. The Vietnam War was the crucible of those struggles in power and control over a nation and its people. It resulted in the global dispersal of over two million refugees. Australia's reticent involvement as an ally in the Vietnam War, perceived to be an "American War," resulted in its humanitarian intake of the refugees that ensued. Vietnamese war orphans that initially arrived in Australia before the Fall of Saigon were only a preview of the mass of refugees that disperse globally. It is through this collection oral histories and examination of *postmemory* and *refugee exilic and diasporic memory* of Vietnamese child migrants' experiences that contribute to a larger understanding of the national and transnational history of childhood and migration. The following chapter will explore representations of Vietnamese refugee experiences in Australian children's literature, community art practices, and museums of Australia as a lens for understanding this day and how it informs national and transnational history of childhood and migration.

Chapter Two

Representations of Vietnamese Refugees in Australia

This chapter explores the representations of Vietnamese refugee experiences in Australia and how contemporary Vietnamese child refugee and Vietnamese refugee artists approach self-representation. It examines refugee memory and experiences represented in children's literature, art and museums about Australian migration history. How Vietnamese children and refugee experiences are represented in the Australian public imagination and institutions of culture provides a baseline of understanding the critical shift in perspective from representation to self-representations in this research. Each of the chosen forms of representation present a different lens for understanding Vietnamese migrants in Australia. Children's literature provides the perspective of a child's memory and imagination about migration.¹ Museum collection artifacts and images reflect and shape public perception of migrant experiences. Vietnamese refugee artists respond in conversation with these institutional representations. The analysis of Vietnamese-Australian artists and their works provides a critical paradigm for examining contemporary life in multicultural Australia.² In analysing these forms of representations of public imagination about Vietnamese refugee, the research highlights the role of child migrants and refugees in dynamic movement between representation by others and self-representation of their own memories and experiences of childhood and migration.

Children's Literature

Children's literature is one of the lens that facilitates an understanding of the representation of memory and experiences of children. Picture books, the dominant form of children's literature, have only recently approached difficult memories and experiences such as war, trauma, refugees or migration.³ In Australia, there are two published picture books

¹ Mary Tomsic, "The politics of picture books: stories of displaced children in twenty-first-century Australia," *History Australia* 15, no. 2 (2018): 339-356. DOI: 10.1080/14490854.2018.1452156.

² Boitran Huynh-Beattie, "Less Seen Art, Made by Vietnamese-Australian Artists," *Kunapipi* 32, no. 1 (2010): 147-164. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol32/iss1/14>

³ Monica Edinger, "Picture Books Tell Children the Harsh Stories of Migrants and Refugees," *New York Times*, August 30, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/30/books/review/refugee-children-picture-day-war-came-nicola-davies.html>.

about Vietnamese refugee migration from a child's perspective. The following analysis of these two picture books, *A Safe Place to Live* and *The Littlest Refugee*, demonstrates how two Vietnamese child refugees create visual and narrative self-representation of their own history and experiences.⁴ Bic Walker was born in 1974 and escaped Vietnam at the age of four. *A Safe Place to Live* recounts her experience of fleeing Vietnam with her family in 1979 and resettlement in Australia.⁵ Anh Do was born in 1977 and escaped Vietnam with his family in 1980.⁶ Although Anh was only a toddler at the time, he grew up hearing stories of the escape.⁷ A close reading of the art and narrative provides a foundation for engaging the common themes that arise in Vietnamese children's perspective of migration.

Bic Walker's *A Safe Place to Live* exemplifies how a Vietnamese refugee child represents her own historical memories and bi-cultural awareness as an Australian. Bic opens with a keen awareness of the nature of children's imagination. She invokes the opening of fairy tales and focuses on a theme of great interest and concern for children and parents: safety.

Once upon a time, my family
lived in a place that was unsafe.
People were always fighting and
there was war everywhere.
So we decided we must go on a
journey to find a safer home to live...⁸

With the classic fairy tale opener about a leaving a war torn place and seeking a safer home, Bic explains the reason for forced migration from a child's perspective. In these opening illustrations, she does not draw images of the war nor specify the historical context of Vietnam. In the following page, Bic transforms the journey into an escape and softens the trauma of loss by listing things she and her siblings could take with them.

⁴ Do, *The Little Refugee*; Walker, *A Safe Place to Live*.

⁵ "Bic Walker, Illustrator, Inspirational Speaker," Booked Out, accessed on 18 May 2019. <http://bookedout.com.au/find-a-speaker/author/bic-walker/>.

⁶ Schmidt, Lucinda, "Profile: Anh Do Buying his mum a house was a high point for this refugee-turned-comedian," *The Age*, February 2, 2011, 3.00am. <https://www.theage.com.au/money/investing/profile-anh-do-20110201-1abk3.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Walker, *A Safe Place to Live*.

We were not allowed to leave so we had
to escape. We could only take one of
our favourite things with us. My brother
took his kite, my sister took her teddy
and I only took with me my memories.⁹

Bic's siblings take comfort items such as a kite and teddy, and she takes her memories. For Bic, memories are a personal possession, an object for self-representation as evidenced in this picture book about the journey. Bic draws the siblings and herself a child with abstract elongated eyes holding the items that they took with them. Her memory takes the form a ghostly looking boat on a towering black sea. The ubiquitous boat takes form as she further details the journey, "One night we tip toed very quietly to a dock where a small boat was waiting." The next pages show more familiar looking forms of people, the eyes are less elongated and there are tears as they sit inside a boat.

The boat was crowded with sad people.
The people were sad because they were
all leaving their homes and families to find
a new place to live.¹⁰

Seeking a home in resettlement would have been a construction of rationale that a child understands in retrospect, however, Bic returns to this as the primary focus for description of the boat journey.

Out at sea, it rained and rained,
we could not see where we were going
and got very lost. We ran out of food and
water and had nothing to eat except salty
rice cooked by sea water.¹¹

The descriptions of running out of food and water on the boat journey is not depicted in the illustrations. The threat of death and starvation for a child stranded on a boat at sea is a terrifying. The more terrifying the experience, the less imagery Bic presents. For instance, when she describes the pirate ship approaching, the ominous darkness and the ghostly pirate ship appear in her drawings two children as pirates as if they were playing pretend when it was perhaps all too real. The words however are terrifying. Bic wrote,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

In the distance we saw a bright light of
another boat. We thought it was a
rescue boat, but when it got closer
we realised it was a pirate ship.

We tried to run but it was too late.
The pirates took over our little boat
and stole all our food and petrol.
We were left to drift for many days
and nights thinking we are all going to drown.¹²

According to the words, the passengers on the boat think that the ship approaching will rescue them from the sea, but instead it is pirates that pillage their boat. The loss of food and petrol and drifting at sea cannot be easily comprehended by other children, so Bic returns to the visual of herself and her siblings in the rescue narrative. Bic wrote,

Then a large oil tanker came and
rescued us. We had to climb up
the large tyres on the side of the
oil tanker to get up. It was very high.
The sailors on the oil tanker were
very kind. They gave us food and
water and blankets to keep us warm.¹³

Another ship appears after the pirates had left, and this oil tanker rescues them. The sense of safety is restored to the child and readers' imagination with food and warm blankets distributed. The transition to safety also takes the form of time in the refugee camps. Such a place is not easy for children to comprehend so Bic focuses on the theme of it as a place of waiting for safety. Bic wrote,

After a few days we came to an
island where there were many other
people camping for refuge.
The island was a waiting place.
Everybody there was waiting to be
taken to safer places to live.¹⁴

The pictures of the camp with many bodies is followed by pictures of children at play in the refugee camp. Bic draws what looks like underground holes of people in blocks of orange,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

red and yellow isolated cells like prisons. Their bodies are contorted to the space and expressions of frustration and worry dominate the faces. However, she describes the waiting for children as a playful matter. This echoes the oral histories of children's memories of life in the refugee camp in the following chapter. Here Bic makes similar statements:

We waited while we swam in the river.
We waited on the swings.
We waited in the trees.
We just waited and waited.
Finally we were picked up and flew
across the world to a safe place
called Australia.¹⁵

Each of the phrases above about waiting in the refugee camp for asylum has a colourful picture of the children at play on a bright and happy toned background. The book ends when they gain access and status as refugees in Australia. The description of their life in Australia includes imagery of flight from war in Vietnam in contrast to the freedom of flight of birds and kites in Australia. Bic wrote,

There was no fighting or war and we
were allowed to do what we wanted
and go where we wanted.
My brother flew his kite high up in
the sky. We were as free as the birds.

Bic's picture book illustrates how a child could understand the narrative of a refugee. The use of historical memory and representation of herself as a child with agency and initiative for play, adventure, and discovery shines through her writing and illustrations. Bic also placed a brief biography and a photograph of herself as a child in the refugee camp, holding up a wooden placard with her refugee number and birth name, Phan Bich Ngan. The biography states, "Bic Walker escaped with her family from Vietnam as a refugee in 1979 when she was 3 years old. This is a true story based on her journey to Australia."¹⁶ Her picture book closes with acknowledgement and gratitude to her brother, sister, husband, children, and friends that supported her work. Bic's children's book provides a common narrative arch for how Vietnamese refugee stories are tailored to an Australian readership. Bic's relatable themes and experiences in childhood with less specified historical memory allows for more

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid

Australian audiences to relate to the story, whereas Anh Do wrote a more detailed historical version of his memoir for children called *The Littlest Refugee*.¹⁷

The following analysis of Anh Do's *The Littlest Refugee* illustrates how children's perspective of war and migration are mediated through set of choices about an adult self-representation of his migration experiences as a refugee child. *The Little refugee* is the children's version of Anh Do's memoir, *The Happiest Refugee*, a popular and widely read book in secondary schools.¹⁸ The narrative and illustrations are tailored to children in primary school capturing the essential episodes and experiences of early childhood in Australia. The opening presents the historical context of Vietnam to children as a place of strange wonders and possibilities. Anh wrote,

I was born in a faraway country called Vietnam.
It's a crazy place – strange food, snakes in bottles,
Five people squashed onto the back of one little motorbike!¹⁹

Anh represents Vietnam not as a destination defined by war, but a place like any other where children experience childhood even amidst the poverty that his family experienced. He wrote,

My mum and dad were very poor, so we lived with
Mum's family...lots of them! There were fourteen people
Living in a tiny three-room house.

Even though we were poor and the house was crowded,
I was happy because there were always lots
of people to play with me.²⁰

In Anh's description of childhood poverty as a time of happy togetherness, he is careful not to universalise it for all children in Vietnam. Even in his explanation of the war, he manages to negotiate the boundaries of the personal and the political with a child's perspective as the lens from which to view these historical events. He wrote,

I didn't know there was a war going on. Outside our house,
In the jungles and in the villages of Vietnam, many people
were dying. Lot of them were soldiers, but some were

¹⁷ Do, *The Littlest Refugee*.

¹⁸ Do, *The Littlest Refugee*; Do, *The Happiest Refugee*.

¹⁹ Do, *The Littlest Refugee*.

²⁰ Ibid.

mothers and fathers, and some were even children.²¹

It is very difficult to describe war to children. The inclusion of children in the description of war and its impacts proves effective as Anh proceeds to explain how that war drives his family to escape. The use of the personal and political conveys the technical reasons why they became refugees. Anh wrote,

My father and many of my uncles were in the war fighting
alongside the Australian and American soldiers. After the war
ended their lives were in great danger because they were on the
losing side. My family decided to escape to another country.
From now on we would be refugees.²²

In representing themselves as refugees as a consequence of war and involvement with the Allies, Anh has simplified the legal definition and qualifications for that status. He further describes his family's escape with sensory and strong concrete detail. Anh wrote,

Our family, together with some
neighbours and friends, bought
an old wooden fishing boat
that stank of fish.

Very early one morning
When it was still dark
We crept out to our boat.
Forty people crammed
on board.²³

The illustrations mirror the detail of the boat smelling of fish with forty people sardined people in sea storm. Anh then describes the sun and storm are beating down on them. Then he addresses the child and readers' need for assurance amidst the chaos of things beyond their control. He wrote,

At first the sun beat down on us.
Then luckily clouds came and gave us shade.
But when the sky turned black and an angry storm arrived.
Giant waves crashed down on our little boat.²⁴

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

I was terrified but my mum hugged me tight and told me,
'Everything will be okay. Don't worry, it will be okay.'

The drawing of a mother holding her two children tight and wrapped in blankets conveys familiar comforts just as a parent may be comforting her own children while reading such a book in bed. However, the sense of safety and assurance of the storm passing only alludes to challenges to come. Anh wrote,

Finally, the storm passed and the sun came out again.
Mum and Dad stood together looking at all the food
And water that had been ruined by the sea.
'At least we are all still alive,' said Mum.
Be we were hungry and thirsty.²⁵

The illustration of bowed heads and distraught faces of the adults with hunger and thirst is balanced with the view of children trying to smile and accept the situation. The lull in thought passes as the following pages describe the pirate attack and absolute fear they inspire. An illustration of an oversized man holding a machine gun and pointing a finger at the reader proves confronting. Anh wrote,

The next morning, we awoke to the sound of
my uncle shouting, 'A boat! I see a boat!'

A fishing vessel was approaching. It pulled
up alongside us and the fishermen jumped
on board our boat.

'Sit down, all of you!' the leader shouted,
waving a gun.²⁶

The following illustrations include a child screaming in fear as the of the most frightening experience unfolds when a pirate threatens the life of a child. Anh wrote,

A pirate grabbed hold of a baby. He lifted up the baby
And ripped open his nappy. A tiny slice of gold fell out.
The pirate dangled the baby over the side of the boat,
Threatening to throw him in. My father screamed,
'We must save the child!'

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

All the scared, hungry people on our boat stood up
Ready to fight these pirates to save the baby's life.

The pirate changed his mind and tossed the child
At his mother's feet. His life was spared. That baby
Was my brother, Khoa.²⁷

The intensity of these events and the surprise that the baby is the writer's brother has made this one of the most poignant and memorable events in the story. Yet however terrifying the situation, Anh has the exceptional ability to illuminate children's resilience to render the threats as challenges to surpass. He writes,

As the pirates were leaving, one of them felt
sorry for us, and threw us a bottle of water.
it wasn't much, but it saved our lives.²⁸

The pirate's threat turns into surprise on the child's face upon accepting a bottle of water. They are rescued by a German cargo ship on their fifth day at sea. The assurance of his mother that 'everything will be okay now' becomes a chorus throughout the child's life and challenges in Australia. Anh's picture book has no mention of memories of life in the refugee camp as the settlement adventures unfold. Anh judiciously chooses to not tax the attention of children about refugee camps, a place of experience and memory beyond the scope of experiences for most Australian children.

Anh chooses to focus more on resettlement, growing up in Australia, as there are more relatable experiences Australian children. With childlike excitement and energy, Anh exclaims, 'What a great country!' upon arriving in Australia. With childlike clarity, he recounts the challenges of resettlement from a child's perspective. He wrote,

I tried hard at school because I knew that would make my
parents happy, but I was really miserable.

I couldn't speak English very well so I didn't understand
my teacher. I had different food to the other kids and
some of them laughed at me. I even looked different
because I didn't have the right school uniform. Uniforms
were expensive and my parents couldn't afford to buy the
right one.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Anh notes the cultural differences and difficulties with English, food, and affording school uniforms. School becomes a place of significant memories of childhood. He is also aware of a different life at home and the challenges that his parents face in resettlement.

Mum and Dad started their own sewing business so they could make more money and buy us all the things we needed for school. They bought three brand-new sewing machines.

But then one morning Mum raced into the house yelling, 'Where are the machines? Who moved the sewing machines?

The sewing machines were kept in a shed in our back yard. During the night someone had stolen them.³⁰

In their struggle with poverty and trying to start their own home based sewing business, Anh highlights the resilience of his family in the face of challenges. Like the time when the pirates had raided their ship, Anh depicts the sadness that his mother overcomes to comfort and assure him about the theft. With the picture of a child sleeping beside his mother, he wrote.

Mum was really quiet for a few days after that. One afternoon I heard her sobbing quietly to herself in the bathroom.

It made me very sad.

So I went and hid under my bed. Mum found me and she climbed under there with me...

'You know, Anh, I'm just a little bit sad now, but I'll be okay. You must always have hope that things will be okay.

Remember when we were on the boat and that pirate threw us a bottle of water? Even when things seem really terrible, something good can come of it.'³¹

His mother's reminder of how to hope in the face of adversity is then translated to his experience in school where slowly he progresses in learning English and building friendships.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

In Year 3, Anh befriends a lonely boy named Angus. By Year 4, Anh describes how his succeeds with acculturation when his parents arrive at the school assembly. He wrote,

Throughout the awards I was praying that I would win one
so that Mum and Dad would be proud of me.

The school principal reached the end of her list of awards.
I didn't get one. I was so disappointed that I couldn't even
look at my parents. They had taken a precious afternoon
off work for nothing.

Then the principal said she was going to announce all the
Class captains for next year....

'And the class captain for the 5 Blue class is ... Anh Do!'

I couldn't believe it! The kid who used to have no friends
And smelly lunch had become class captain!

Anh recalls this key experience of acceptance at his school and the pride of his parents as one of many moments which would later mark his success as a comedian and artist in Australia. The book ends with his proud parents' assurance which fuels his continued resilience, "to have hope, and to believe that everything would turn out okay in the end." It is through the hardship and dangers that he experienced as a child and witnessing the struggles of his parents that he had earned this vision of life. Anh's memoir and children's book illustrates the underlying self-determination and agency he developed as a child to write his memoir of self-representation for the Australian public. Both Bic and Anh's children's book are the personal and political self-representation of their lived child's perspective and experiences of migration. Their work contributes to public history about Vietnamese refugee experiences that are further institutionalised in museums.

Museums

Museums are public institutions of cultural heritage that contribute to an understanding of representations about groups of people and national identity. The most well-known museum for representation of groups and national identity in Australia is the Immigration Museum which is a part of Museums Victoria network.³² It has a history of

³² For a historical understanding of the Immigration Museum collection see Eureka Henrich, "Museums, Migration and History in Australia," *History Compass* 11, no. 10 (2013): 1–18;

showcasing the cultural heritage of the immigrants that are part of Australian history.³³ Museums also use oral histories and objects that represent historical groups and experiences that are a part of its national identity. For example, The Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney collects objects that convey stories about Australian Maritime history. It also has one of the largest floating historical vessel collections in the world including a reconstruction of a fishing boat that the first Vietnamese boat refugees arrived in.³⁴ The following examination of the objects about Vietnamese migration in the Melbourne Museum and Maritime Museum will showcase how these museums have represented Vietnamese refugee experience and how Vietnamese artists contribute to a critical shift in perspective from representation to self-representation of childhood and migration.

The Museums Victoria collection contains most of the institutional artefacts about the migration history of Vietnamese refugees in Australia. One of the main features includes objects and pictures from the Pulau Bidong Refugee camp. Lachlan Kennedy contributed these works. Kennedy worked for the Australian Department of Immigration on the Indochinese Refugee Taskforce in Malaysia.³⁵ Pulau Bidong was one of the principal camps where Vietnamese refugees were selected for resettlement in Australia. Kennedy took pictures of the daily life of refugees in the camps and described the conditions for staff and refugees. He stated,

The refugees on Pulau Bidong at this time lived in wooden-framed shanty houses covered in plastic. They were breezy, which was lucky, because there was no power for cooling fans. Their houses were not rat proof. But Pulau Bidong had a library, hospital, market stalls, and two wonderful open-air cafes on the beach.

Kennedy provided detailed perspectives about the conditions and programs for refugees to spend their time while waiting for resettlement interviews and examination. Kennedy further describes the history and conditions of the camp,

Bidong was opened as a refugee camp in August 1978 and by June 1979 there were about 40,000 Indo-Chinese refugees on an island said to have capacity for about 4,500 people. From this time on the numbers declined with fewer arrivals and people processed and re-settled in countries such as Australia....The refugee camp closed in

³³ Erek Henrich, "Suitcases and Stories: Objects of Migration in Museum Exhibitions". *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 3, no. 4 (2011): 71–82.

³⁴ "Australian National Maritime Museum -What we do," Australian National Maritime Museum, accessed on 18 May 2019. <https://www.sea.museum/about/about-the-museum/what-we-do>.

³⁵ "Lachlan Kennedy, Dept of Immigration, Indochinese Refugee Taskforce, Malaysia, 1981," accessed 30 May 2019. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/13492>.

1991 with some 250,000 refugees having passed through and either re-settled or, eventually, forcibly repatriated.³⁶

Along with the description of the camp in terms of official numbers and capacities, Kennedy also described interactions with refugees outside of his official role as an interviewer. He was particularly taken with the art workshops in the camps that allowed refugees to produce handcrafts such as the Vietnamese fishing boat model that was gifted to him and later donated to Museums Victoria. This boat model was made by Tran Van Huong who had the unfortunate diagnosis of having had tuberculosis. Tran Van Huong was originally accepted to resettle in Canada, however, public opinion in Canada had turned against anyone with a history of tuberculosis. Kennedy was introduced to Tran Van Huong when he was asking around to buy one of these wooden boats as a souvenir. Tran Van Huong gifted the boat to Kennedy, but it was refused for fear of corrupting the process of interviews for resettlement. Kennedy later learned that the UNHCR decided that Tran Van Huong was to be treated for tuberculosis at the camp and then resettled to Australia. Kennedy then accepted the boat and gifted it to the museum for collection. The boat model is one of the key representations of life for Vietnamese refugees in the camp. It's significance in the collection aligns with the purposes of critical refugee studies. As Espirtu describes refugee studies had a "hyperfocus on suffering" that renders less visible refugee's everyday struggles and management of the impact of war in their lives.³⁷ Yes, there was suffering in the camps, however, people were also experiencing life and creating exquisite crafts to pass the time. The pictures of life activities in Paula Bidong including relaxing views of the island, refugees in the kitchen fascinated with a squirrel on the window ledge, and the makeshift cafes on 'D' Beach run by refugees with the cemetery visible on the cliff behind it.³⁸ The significance of the wooden boat model and representations of refugee life from Kennedy also extends the connection of

³⁶ Kennedy, Lachlan, "'D' Beach, Refugee Camp, Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, Apr 1981," Museum Victoria Collection, Item MM 140181, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/2103260>.

³⁷ Yen Le Espiritu and Lan Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art," *SIGNS*, 43, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 587- 615.

³⁸ Kennedy, Lachlan, "Pulau Bidong Island, Western Face, Malaysia, Apr 1981," Museum Victoria Collection, Item MM 140177, accessed 30 October 2019, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/2103248>; Kennedy, Lachlan, "Kitchen Hands Outside Dining Room. Refugee Camp, Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, Apr 1981" Museum Victoria Collection, Item MM 140178, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/2103256>; Kennedy, Lachlan, "'D' Beach, Refugee Camp, Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, Apr 1981" Museum Victoria Collection, Item MM 140181, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/2103260>.

the history of Vietnamese refugees with identity of Australia as a nation of settlers from overseas. Just as the first settlers came upon boats to Australia, the figure of the boat plays becomes a major representation of Vietnamese refugee identity in Australia. Furthermore, the boat as an object of memory occupies the imagination and association with Vietnamese refugees as “boat people” is a shared features in the Maritime Museum collection.³⁹ The story of Tu Do boat below illustrates how the boat has become an established object of representing Vietnamese in Australian immigration history.

The Tu Do boat in the Australian National Maritime Museum as one of the objects of major historical significance in Australian maritime and migration history. It signifies the first arrival of refugees and asylum seekers by sea in Australian maritime and migration history. The boat carried 31 refugees and the owner, Tan Than Lu. Considering the two million people that were estimated to be part of the post-Vietnam War exodus, only 2,059 people ever arrived directly in Australia by boat between 1976 and 1981.⁴⁰ The arrival of Tu Do, which means ‘Freedom’ in Vietnamese, shows the ingenuity of refugees who were not just passive objects to be rescued. Tan built the boat and staged an engine breakdown to divert surveillance of it before his departure in September of 1977. He had installed a replacement engine and took 38 passengers, eight of which decided to disembark as refugees seeking asylum when they landed in Mersing Malaysia.⁴¹ Tan also rescued another refugee boat on his way to Australia, *PK3402*, and towed it across the Timor Sea to arrive in Darwin after two months at sea.⁴² Tan and his crew had navigated 6,000 kilometres using a compass and map that was on the lid of a school desk.⁴³ The level of skill and perseverance to have planned and executed such a journey. As an object of history, it also showed that Vietnamese refugees were rescuers for one another. Tan’s boat carried children including his own daughters aged six and four, son who was two years old, and his pregnant wife who delivered their child in Brisbane when they arrived at the Migrant Hostel. Tan’s agency and self-determination to build the boat and make the journey is an act of significance in the history of

³⁹ Kim Tao, “A Fishing Boat Called Freedom: The Story of Tu Do,” Australian National Maritime Museum, 30 Apr 2015, <https://www.sea.museum/2015/04/30/a-fishing-boat-called-freedom-the-story-of-tu-do>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

migration in Australia. In a similar fashion, Cuc Lam decided to arrive in Australia on the 16th of July 1978, not as an empty-handed refugee.⁴⁴ Upon departure from the refugee camp, she sold her wedding ring to buy a suitcase and packed inside it their precious belongings to showcase that refugees came with a sense of personal dignity, life and narrative before resettlement. She later donated the little red suitcase and her belongings to Museums Victoria as an act of self-representation as a Vietnamese refugee. It has since become one of the distinguished treasures in the collection.⁴⁵ Cuc became an active community member in Melbourne and assisted other refugees and migrants during resettlement. She became Mayor of Maribyrnong and has held office since 2017. These two relics of refugee lives, the boat and the suitcase, represent significant experiences in the history of migration for Vietnamese refugees. However, it was not until 1992 that Vietnamese children's perspective of migration became a part of the museum collection.

In 1992, the Immigration Museum started to showcase the connection with art and immigration history, "Immigration & Artistic Practice," which included perspectives about Vietnamese children during migration.⁴⁶ The "Immigration & Artistic Practice" collection contains one hundred and forty artworks and twenty-seven oral histories involving thirty first and second generations immigrant artists from various countries of origins. Thomas Le, a child refugee, was featured as the artist for Vietnamese. Thomas Le had escaped Vietnam at the age of sixteen. As an adult, he produced drawings for Austcare Greeting Cards on which he reflected about his childhood,

As a child growing up during the war, I never had a childhood.
I missed out on many simple things such as the pleasures of reading books
and being able to look at illustrations other than war propaganda.
I often used a stick to draw on the dirt, and then imagined the colours.⁴⁷

In Thomas' reflection on childhood and the loss of it in the aftermath of war, he alludes to the propaganda art and style he was exposed to in Vietnam. After working for Auscare,

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Museum Victoria, ed., *Treasures of the Museum, Victoria, Australia* (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2004).

⁴⁶ Michelle Stevenson, "Immigration & Artistic Practice Collection in Museums Victoria Collections," accessed 31 October 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/4352>,

⁴⁷ Le, Thomas. "Greeting Card – Eucalytus Caesia & Black-Chinned Honeyeater, for Austcare, 1996," Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/822769>.

Melbourne Museum commissioned him to produce artwork based on the immigration and resettlement experiences of Mai Ho. Below is a summary of her migration experience as a child into adulthood that informed Thomas' work.⁴⁸

Mai Ho was a child during the war and recalls interruptions of school in Vietnam because of a bomb and writing to soldiers as a class assignment. Mai organised for a boat to leave Vietnam with 161 people. The passengers spent five nights at sea until an English oil rig agreed to transport them to the Malaysia refugee camp Pulau Bidong. While at the camp, Mai worked as a translator for the Australian delegation because she knew some English. Mai and her family arrive in Australia on the 15th of December 1981 and she picked fruit to support her family and two and a half months later became the first female quality control inspector at the Fisherman's Bend Plant. She started many business and established a Vietnamese community support service in Footscray and ran for local election in 1992 and was elected as Deputy Mayor of the City of Footscray in 1994, became Mayor in 1997. She became a part of the Australian Consultative Delegation to Vietnam, the first delegation to investigate human rights in Vietnam.⁴⁹

Mai's story is one of the most complete narratives about a child refugee through the stages of migration and resettlement in Museum Victoria's collection. Thomas Le's paintings conveyed the major themes of Vietnamese refugee migration through her narrative about life in Vietnam, the war, the escape, boat passage, rescue, life in the camp, and resettlement in Australia. The scenes of life in Vietnam include ink wash and pencil drawings of the war tanks and children, foiled escape plans, grief and loss of family prior to departure, and planned escapes.⁵⁰ Life in Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon is depicted as a series of contradictions in the form of propaganda art posters of empty promise of prosperity under communism. There is a drawing of soldiers bringing news instead of the postman, and Vietnamese huddled furtive groups planning escapes as fear and anxiety take over their daily life. The depiction of the journey *en route* to Australia includes boat people packed like

⁴⁸ "Interview with Mai Ho, Maribyrnong, Victoria, 14 Dec 1997," Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1173027>.

⁴⁹ Stevenson, Michelle (2010) Mai Ho, Vietnamese Migrant, 1981 in Museums Victoria Collections, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/3512>, accessed 31 October 2018.

⁵⁰ Thomas Le, "War in Vietnam, Thomas Le, Ink Wash Drawing, 1998." Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270633>; Thomas Le, "Escape Foiled, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998," Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270634>; Thomas Le, "Run for your Life, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998," Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270632>; Thomas Le, "The Escape, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998," Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270635>.

sardines, refugees rescued in fishing nets, and a sea of faces awaiting resettlement offers in the camps.⁵¹ The final set of drawings are about life in Australia entitled, “Settling in Australia”, “Building a New Life”, and “Success & Home.”⁵² Resettlement includes the much anticipated flight to Australia and the kindness of nuns who look after them in the migrant hostels, and the gift of a new home. Mai’s story is one of success with gaining work in manufacturing, going to night school, creating business, and being able to help her own community as the Mayor. Furthermore, Mai’s daughter, Tan Le, who arrived at the age of four followed in the footsteps of her mother’s successes to become Young Australian of the Year for her community service to Footscray.⁵³ Tan Le attributed her success to the bravery of her own mother and heritage as an immigrant in her TED talk. She later excelled as the founder and CEO of EMOTIVE, a neuroinformatic company that develops mobile electroencephalography (EEG) to advance the understanding of the human brain.⁵⁴ Tan Le’s story and portrait is part of the collection in the National Portrait Gallery.⁵⁵ Just as Mai Ho pioneered the way for herself and her children, her child has contributed to the collection a historical and visual narrative of the life of Vietnamese refugee successes in Australia. These narrative of successful and resilient refugee in museum collections established public representations about Vietnamese refugees in Australia, which subsequent Vietnamese refugee artists have expounded upon.

⁵¹ Thomas, Le, “On the Ocean, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998,” Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270636>; Thomas Le, “Rescue, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998, Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270637>; Thomas Le, “Life in the Camp, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998,” Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018. <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270638>.

⁵² Thomas Le, “Settling in Australia, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998” Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270639>; Thomas Le, “Building a New Life, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998,” Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270640>; Thomas Le “Success & Home, Thomas Le, Pencil Drawing, circa 1998,” Museums Victoria Collections, accessed 02 November 2018, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/270641>.

⁵³ “1998 Young Australian of the Year: Tan Le,” Australian of the Year, accessed on 2 November 2018, <https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/honour-roll/?view=fullView&recipientID=141>.

⁵⁴ “Tan Le - Founder & CEO at EMOTIV,” Visual CV, accessed on 2 November 2018. <https://www.visualcv.com/tanttle>.

⁵⁵ John Tsiavis, “Tan Le, 2018,” National Portrait Gallery, accessed on 2 November 2018. <https://www.portrait.gov.au/portraits/2018.63/tan-le>.

Vietnamese Refugee Artists

Artists are agents of self-expression and representations that sometimes draw on themes from their own experience and background. Vietnamese refugee artists are no exception. The following two oral histories from Vietnamese artists reveal how being a child of refugees informed their personal and political self-representation. For Huong Tran, reflections on childhood in Vietnam, growing up in Australia, having his own children and returning for visits to Vietnam has informed his work. He describes his conception of childhood in Vietnam as built on inherited memories juxtaposed with his experience of childhood in Australia. For Huong, memories of Vietnam and childhood are reinforced through family retellings of the stories. He stated, “I remember very little of life in Vietnam, [mostly] through retelling [of] stories.” He recalled one memory of childhood which he claims to be his own.

One of the few real memories I can remember is that sensation, the scent of candy[sic]. There was a lady that walked around with mobile food cart. I think she sold candy – *khe* (Vietnamese word for candy). It was honey and something syrupy[sic]. I remember the actual candy, but I don’t have a memory of eating it. That is one of my earliest childhood memories.

For Huong and other refugee children that migrated with family, childhood memories are reinforced through the stories told from the parents or relatives. Huong recalled how his parents would review what they did in Vietnam compared to what he was doing in Melbourne daily life.

I know that I helped out on the farm a lot, but I don’t remember doing those things. It was my parents [sic] waking me up and reminding me that if I was in Vietnam, I would be doing this or that.

The overlap of memories of stories told about childhood in Vietnam and the childhood he experiences in Australia is also layered with his observations of children and childhood in Vietnam as an adult. Huong explains,

Children have a different relationship to physical spaces than here[sic] and that was for me was striking. In the mornings, kids would be playing soccer or badminton in the middle of a city. You would see how they play in groups, and how it is different than living in urban Melbourne.

Huong made video works of children playing in Vietnam are a record of his memory of real and imagined difference of what he reflected upon as memories of childhood in Vietnam in contrast to childhood for his children in Melbourne.

When I was young, we played more on the streets, that does not happen now. But going back to Vietnam and being in Vietnam, it brought back memories of playing in Vietnam....People keep their doors open and the distinction between public and private spaces homes and shops is not as clear. Your home is your shop front and you see children move through those spaces fluidly.

When asked about the video works about children's movements through public and private space, Huong explained his own memories and thinking behind the video works. He stated,

One (of the works) is of morning of exercise, play and waiting for traffic to slowly enter. It shows the way the children responded to the traffic. Another one is a fixed camera of traffic over a bridge. You would see an adult dinking his whole family on a moped. Life is more exposed, and that is just what I was overwhelmed by it.

In discussing his observations of movements for children and the interplay with traffic, there is an awareness of his own curiosities as an adult reimagining Vietnam. It was his return trips to Vietnam that spurred his reflections upon the palimpsest of myth, stories, and memories he acquired as a child. Huong recounted the formative returns to Vietnam as evolving artist and the creating works about self-representation. Huong felt like a cultural insider who was an outsider on his first trip to Vietnam,

I was frightened of having poor language skills and nervous about speaking properly and *[sic]* being sprung because you cannot speak the language properly and *[sic]* that you're not really Vietnamese. I had travelled many other places before that trip. Growing up here [in Australia], I was the thinking that it would be the first place that you visit: Vietnam. When it came to it *[sic]*, I actually avoided it because of that fear and anxiety about not being able to fit in.

Huong stated that anxiety about speaking Vietnamese properly was as an adult phenomenon. His first visit to Vietnam was with his family, "I was sixteen or something and my father and mother were mediating the experiences." This is often the case for Vietnamese child migrants to return with parents who mediate the experience for them. When asked if he continued to visit Vietnam and how it informed his work, he described how different it was to go as an adult.

I finish Uni *[sic]* in 1999. I had spent a few years backpacking and did some work. In 2003, I went with my partner. I had cameras with me, and I made*[sic]* lots of

photographs, but that was just my way of going somewhere. The trip in 2003 was more planned and directed to make work and meet other artists.

Huong's first trip to Vietnam in 2003 when he began surveying Vietnam as a refugee returnee through the lens of a camera. He described the experience as culturally overwhelming at first.

It was overwhelming being in the cities. The first day [sic], it was hard to get out of the hotel room because it was so intense outside [sic] just that barrage of sensations and sounds, the intensity of urban life there, and industrial fumes.

He later described the sense of being at home in it and more at ease as a refugee with some familiarity of Vietnamese language and culture. When asked if it was an emotional experience to return, Huong stated,

I actually felt at home. I felt really easy being there once I got over the oh my god what is this place....I revisited my hometown, Vung Tau, where I was born. That was the most personal thing I did. I made photographs of the town, but maybe because I did not have enough memories of where things were, it was not so much[sic] an emotional impact. It was just important to revisit and important to do it.

Huong's visit to his home town and memories childhood in Vietnam is a construct of *postmemories*, stories from parents about life in country of origin and *exilic memory*. He does not have direct experience or memories of the place he had to leave as a child. In similar ways, the stories told about his life in the refugee camp are inherited *postmemories* that become his origin story, *exilic diasporic memory*, about how he and his family become refugees in Australia. Huong explains how that origin story of arrival at the refugee camp is a memory that has been recited and evolved as he has grown up and privileged to more sophisticated details. He states,

The story was that we arrived at Malaysia. The people there did not want us to dock. This part of the story I only heard and remembered in my adult life, and not when I was younger[sic]. They did not want us to dock so my dad said[sic], 'Okay, can we just stay here overnight and then we will leave.' But overnight, my dad sabotaged the boat so that it started taking water in[sic] and that is what forced them to accept us.

This story of sabotaging the boat is disclosed when Huong is an adult. It touches upon a legal technicality that refugees must be in distress and in flight of persecution to claim asylum.

When asked as about how his father knew about the nature of distress needed to claim asylum, Huong replied,

Yeah, I can only guess. Whether it was desperation or through other stories or experiences and[sic] that is what happened. We were accepted and got on land. I remember a really long transit in the dark, but I do not remember getting on land.

Huong and his family were transited to the refugee camp at Pulau Bidong. When asked if he remember much about life in the refugee camps, he replied,

I remember very little of the camp, again[sic] it is only certain things. I don't know if this is true, but I remember there was an outdoor cinema and they showed *Planets of the Apes*. I remember being really frighten of that. That really freaked me out. If I think about it now, how would they have done that[sic], just having the equipment and resources to do that [sic]. That is one of my memoires of the camp: being freaked out watching *Planet of the Apes*. The little things I remember is[six] fences, wire fences, and other than that [sic] I think we were there for four months.

Nam Huynh from the Pulau Bidong Alumni Facebook group had also mentioned an area where there were movies shown outside at Pulau Bidong.⁵⁶ Huong's memory of the *Planet of the Apes* movie is indicative of the nature of childhood memory. He noted the fences at the camp, but only as a secondary fact to the movie that would capture a child's imagination. He also mentioned the time they spent at the camp, a fact of adult reinforced *postmemory*. Within four months, his family was accepted as refugees to be resettled in Australia.

Huong's childhood in Australia included engagement with the pro-democracy movement in Melbourne that shaped his memories. He explains how Vietnamese myths learned through the pro-democracy movement also informed his life and art.

I had a long engagement with these stories about [sic] whether they were historical or if they were legends [sic] myths of Vietnam. I was already preoccupied with those stories about what my own sense of what Vietnam is [sic]. If you are going to a long overseas protest, then you are also preforming these sorts of identity reconstructions.

When asked about what sort of identity reconstructions he was referring to, Huong expounded that myth making for the community is also a contemporaneous practice for the diaspora.

The most common is April 30th. The community goes to Canberra in front of the consulate of Vietnam with concerns about human rights issues. The pro-democracy main actors are the remains of the South Vietnam regime. For as long as I have known, living in Australia, the [former South Vietnamese] generals and lieutenants left without status and power in the migration process, still felt that they would re-take Vietnam [sic].

⁵⁶ Huynh, interview.

At these protests, practices of *exilic diasporic memory*, the Vietnamese community in Melbourne participate as former South Vietnamese citizens of Vietnam prior to the Fall of Saigon. Huong explained that these rituals of reconstructed identity in diaspora shaped the pro-democracy movement for Australian Vietnamese.

Anytime a Vietnamese dignitary visits Australia from Vietnam, there would be a protest or something controversial [sic], mostly with human rights because that is the language that the West engages with in terms of mobilising something politically.

Huong explained how these protests of Vietnam's human rights violations are tied to the struggles of the past for the South Vietnamese ex-patriates in the refugee diaspora.

It is about abuse of human right issue, at the same time, there are multiple strands. The human rights protest also expose how bad that government is, and how we should overthrow the government, and it is all about reclaiming Vietnam and all leftover from the South Vietnam regime[sic].

When asked about his connection to this pro-democracy movement and how it informs his art, Huong responded,

My uncle was heavily involved in that. He still fears going back to Vietnam and he fears he will be endangered or black listed. I was in and amongst that [sic]. I remember going to a protest in the city. There would be a conference, protest and coming back and watching us on the news and police would come and marchers would be chased [sic]. I guess for me, it was adventurous, exciting, being in a group[sic].

Through family connection to his uncle and growing up in the protest culture, Huong absorbed these cultural practices of *exilic refugee diasporic memory*, expressions of his collective identity and memory from the past and present. He explained how the music and gatherings informed his sensibilities.

The chanting and songs were a big thing for me growing up. The whole community would gather in the park, bring their instant noodles, pork rolls (banh mi) that would be your lunch [sic]. You form a circle, there be one or two guitars. You sing French inspired folk songs in Vietnamese from famous composers [sic]. There is one from the Bob Dylan of Vietnamese.

Huong explained how this is just one scene of protest in isolation, but that the practice of community reconstruction of identity included storytelling about the cultural memory in diaspora.

It is not just one protest in isolation [sic]. It is all cultural tradition and practice sitting around in circles retelling stories, legendary stories through their own struggles from the war or the refugee stories or resettlement stories [sic]. It was quite immersive and complete. In that sense, they were quite vivid for me.

Throughout his childhood in Melbourne, Huong participated in these practices of *exilic refugee diasporic memory*, and they informed his art. His connection to the practices changed his art evolved.

I went to them by fact that my parents went and the whole family from day one [sic]. Later on in high school I was still connected to those people, doing things like opening up a gallery in Footscray. Through that [sic], I had relationships with the Vietnamese community organisation on that level. Those relationship changed, but they were there for most of right up to ten years ago when I moved on from that [sic].

When asked about his engagement now with the community and those pro-democracy movement and whether he would engage his own children in them, he replied,

No, because I don't think it exists in the same way one. I have lost contact with them and those people who were have also moved on [sic]. That group at the time fifteen years ago could declare that they could retake Vietnam [sic]. I don't think that same belief is there now. I have moved on geopolitically. I know that April 30 still happens in Canberra every year, but my parenting would not engage that [sic].

When asked to clarify what it means to move on, Huong explained his loss of engagement with that protest culture. He stated,

I guess for me I saw that those movements were not just about reclaiming Vietnam [sic]. It was a result and expression of losing your homeland....At some point, I realise it was not just about reclaiming the land, but the loss, how to navigate your sense of really stuck, displaced identity [sic].

Huong explained how the Vietnamese community arts movement paralleled the pro-democracy movement.

What kept that movement going on? There was a younger generation that I was part of that was trying to navigate that idea of your teens and your early twenties [sic]. You are forming your sense of identity. A lot of people latched onto that movement as a process, and a lot of people do art because of that too, community arts especially. For me, that movement and the young people of my generation that was attaching themselves to that movement was going through that process as well [sic]. As I progressed, I saw what that was about, and I've grown [sic].

Huong further explained that art was a way of dealing with that loss of participation in the protest culture, and subsequent questions about identity and community belonging. He stated,

Making art fifteen years ago was not about making an object. If you are in the process of forming your identity in that process, for me, trying to engage people with your work and my work was so much about my, not just my identity, and the diaspora identity *[sic]*. I was naturally engaged with community and forming community. During those years, I was forming my own community in a sense, but having said that, I think I have a sense of community now that had a relationship to that time*[sic]*.

Huong's sense of community changed. When asked how he characterises his sense of community now, he responded,

I have lost contact with the Vietnamese community on the umbrella organisation level. My sense of community is related to my art or family. I guess at the same time, there are still links to that early period of practice because there are artists who I met and formed close relationships that are still with me now *[sic]*. We're still in some ways working together, but we are not making the same work. We're not interested in the same things. Things have shifted.

When asked about the shift and how it informs his understanding of community art, Huong explained,

I found myself exploring these things and inadvertently being interested in ideas of community and then my practice having crossover with community arts practice. That is a new field of practice and Footscray being well known for that historically.

Through this interview in his art studio in Footscray, he has presented a self-representation that integrates the complexity of his refugee identity and artistic practice. His perspective as a refugee child give also inform his identity politics,

With politics of identity, that was always really fraught, being so, you always question whether and how you should engage with that, not just through your work, but just through life and that translates to ideas about community politics and they are sort of linked *[sic]*.

I have always had an uneasy relationship about making work about identity because um um it's really easy to be labelled *[sic]*. You know how it is liked to be labelled, if you allow your practice to fall into those traps *[sic]*. Those structures that you think are limiting anyways, then you are always at a step back in relationship to it*[sic]*.

The easy and predominate understanding of art as a vehicle for refugee identity politics is uncomfortable for Huong. He alluded to stepping away from to produce work that is critical and reflective. For Huong, the close encounter with lived experience and the distance from the identity politics of multiculturalism inspires him. He stated,

Multiculturalism came out of a really positive time in Australia. The Whitlam years and that period is celebrated, but for someone who is already has an uneasy and unclear relationship to home and to nation, then you naturally question what multiculturalism is for you *[sic]*.

You know, at the same time, you are questioning the bigger ideas of Australian identity, indigenous history, colonial history. You are interested, but you have to keep your distance with those politics. That is the only way that it can be useful.

The usefulness of engaging multiculturalism and refugee identity politics in art and self-representation also goes beyond the 1.5 generation. Another artist, Phuong Ngo, a second-generation Vietnamese, has developed most of his work based on the history of Vietnam and his own identity as a child of refugees in his work.

Phuong was born in Adelaide. His parents arrived as refugees from Vietnam in 1980s. The inheritance of his parent's stories as refugees, and his experience as a child of Vietnamese refugees is the bedrock of his art practice. Phuong's oral history, explication of the Vietnamese Archive Project and current works in progress provide a lens to understanding how history and memories as a child of refugees informs his self-representation in art. Phuong's art studio contains an archive and memory artefacts that are used in his exhibitions. He has even gone back to Vietnam, and had items shipped back to Australia for his works. He has a table from his grandparents in Vietnam that may be a part of an upcoming exhibition, Primavera 2018. The exhibition includes eight Young Australian Artists exploring the politics of identity, visibility and representation at the Modern Contemporary Art Museum in Sydney (MCA).⁵⁷ Phuong explained,

This [table] came from my mum's ancestral home. I have this reputation now in the family that I collect weird shit *[sic]*. There's a bullet, cluster bomb from the war, these are mortar shells, bit of trench art *[sic]*. They have been turned in vases. In Vietnam, they have taken the bombs and turned them into boats. French fire irons, these will appear at the MCA *[sic]*.

As Phuong lists for me the raw materials used in his upcoming show, he morphed in my presence into a type of cultural bower bird. The discarded objects, memories of ancestors past, and scraps of war artillery are put together to criticise the history of the French and

⁵⁷ "Primavera 2018: Young Australian Artists - Eight artists explore the politics of identity, visibility and representation," Museum of Contemporary Art Australia Exhibition, accessed on 19 May 2018. <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/primavera-2018/>.

American occupation in Vietnamese history. Phuong is fascinated with discarded items, and this inspired his collecting of items known as The Vietnamese Archive Project.⁵⁸

THE VIETNAM ARCHIVE PROJECT is an ongoing artwork initially starting as a material research project in 2010 in Melbourne *[sic]*. Currently consisting in excess of 5000 items, including slides, photos, film reels and objects. This ever-growing collection has emerged as an act of acquiring and curating found histories and memories that have come to define PHUONG NGO's personal identity of and that of the wider Vietnamese Diaspora that has emerged since the fall of Saigon in 1975.⁵⁹

The archive as described contains raw historical artefacts and memory for Phuong's works of self-representation. The act of collecting itself is engagement with the Vietnam War history and memory. Phuong emphasised how the objects acquired a type of inherited memory. In previous interviews, he described the archive project as an on-going collection that is the foundation of his art work on engaging history, personal and political memory.

The materiality of THE VIETNAM ARCHIVE PROJECT has been utilised to further extend NGO's practice developing artworks, investigating ways in which history is understood, altered and how personal experiences and inherited memory and experience dictate this *[sic]*.⁶⁰

As a child of refugees, born in Australia, Phuong works with his inherited memory and experiences. He continuously creates work from this collection. He stated,

The archive itself is [a collection] of photo albums. This is where I started, and this is where it has gone. There are slides, and my favourite one is with the rear view, the guy behind him is taking the photo in a vehicle *[sic]*. There are pictures when soldiers some take R&R (rest and recovery) in Australia and places like Thailand, and one from Japan. They all inform some kind of work in the end *[sic]*. There are also lightbox of strippers and some film reels and different objects.

Phuong started buying these photo albums and items from Ebay and other on-line marketplaces. When asked about his motivation and process of collecting, he stated,

It's about hoarding. It's not necessarily about memory. These are not my memories. It's about acquisition of history, experience, of memories, but of documents that somewhere along the line impacted Vietnam and subsequently me – hoarding that history that defines your existence and the existence of your community *[sic]*.

⁵⁸ Ngo, Phuong, "Unpacking the Vietnamese Archive Project," The Substation, Past Events, 2016, accessed 17 November 2018. <https://thesubstation.org.au/archive/vietnam-archive-project/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The photographs and objects collected are not his memories. They are soldiers' discarded memories of their war experiences. The acquisition of history and memory for self-definition and re-representation of cultural heritage gives rise to his art. When asked whether it is then about capturing loss, he replied,

I guess it is a way to try and address the loss. I try in a way to stake an ownership – take initiative even those these are not mine *[sic]*. These are photographs from the colonial period, like a scrapbook. This is a turn of the century wedding photos of a Vietnamese wedding*[sic]*.

In acquiring these objects of memories and events that are no his own, Phuong is trying to address the loss of the war, innocence, life occasions that were otherwise disregarded. If there is not a keeper of lost memories, the loss is not noted in history. Phuong's work mostly tries to document the history of losses in the Vietnam War. The war is the origins of his work as Phuong stated,

The war was really the reason why we are all here. Communism is a reason why we are all here. Colonialism is a reason as to why we are all here. It's looking at that lineage of history, experiences, and events that resulted in why we are here and why I do what I do *[sic]*.

Phuong accepts the war, communism and colonialism as forces that forged his existence as a second-generation Vietnamese in Australia. To further understand his identity and use of the Vietnam Archive as a form of historical research, art production, and self-representation, we examine the planning behind his upcoming show at the MCA.

Phuong actively creates exhibitions that integrate political history with personal history. He builds upon works prior and formulates new variations of self-representation of the memories he has inherited as a second-generation Vietnamese in Australia. He explained to me his processes for the upcoming MCA show. The work is about his lineage prior to life in the refugee camp, Pulau Bidong. The objects from his ancestral home including the cabinet that houses the Vietnamese Archive Project will be featured. Above the table will be his installation work, *The Colony*.⁶¹ Phuong described what will be on the walls for the exhibition at the MCA:

One wall is for my mum's family and then my dad's family is very sparse because they were quite poor and did not have photos *[sic]*. I only have three and that fit into the refugee narrative. There is a shrine, their visa documents, my mum's medical

⁶¹ *The Colony* is a work of art previously featured at Substation for exhibition. It contained hundreds of old postcards from Vietnam hung in a pattern a large red threaded lantern.

records, pictures of them in refugee camp, pictures in Adelaide, and their wedding photos. There's a narrative stream that comes into play – this wall starts with my great grandfather and then it goes down to all the kids and my granddad's stepmom *[sic]*.

The layout of lineage is like that of a family tree. The pictures from Adelaide are of their life upon arrival in Australia. The narrative that runs throughout is the inheritance of memory and history as embodied in his existence as a child of refugees and artist. Phuong noted some items that open up new history and themes of exploration about his lineage. Phuong explained,

We found my mom's birth certificate a number of years ago in Phenom Penh so it is in French and Khmer and not in Vietnamese, that speaks to a whole lot of stuff *[sic]*. We found three of mum's student ID and her wedding – [this] talks about the ethnic cleansing*[sic]*. My grandmother had a policy that the girls had to get married to go back into Vietnam, so any boy who was decent that asked for her daughter's hand in marriage was wedded off.

Phuong's mother was a Vietnamese raised in Cambodia and married off to a Vietnamese who lived in Vietnam. It is a bit of mystery as to why his grandmother raised her children in Cambodia, however, this discovery of family origins in Cambodia is part of the history of Vietnamese displaced in Cambodia after the war. Phuong expounded upon this through the personal and political connection with the wedding photograph.

If you see these pictures, she is really upset. In these photos you see she doesn't like him. He's happy. He wanted to marry her. Grandmother has agreed that she is getting married whether she likes him or not.

She doesn't like him because he is short. She is not even allowed to wear shoes at her wedding because she would tower over him. Back in those days, they had to get married to leave the house and my grandmother was very strict *[sic]*.

The wedding photographs are evidence of his mother's personal history with an underlying narrative about the purpose of marriage to reconnect to their Vietnamese cultural heritage as Vietnamese displaced in Cambodia. Since resettlement in Australia, her narrative has evolved and become a part of Phuong's personal history. He stated, "They are still married now, and they look after each other. They are in a lovely relationship, but at that point in time, it was not a happy story."⁶² The marriage in Cambodia gives rise to Phuong's birth in Australia, his arts is the layering of memories and histories. His works show a lineage and connection to in

⁶² Phuong Ngo interviewed 11 September 2018.

personal and political history that gives rise to his self-representation as an artist. Phuong stated,

The end point is to try and understand identity and the narrative that brought about my existence. I talk about it as a beautiful failure, but one that I will pursue nonetheless, because it helps me to correlate my understanding of identity *[sic]*.

When asked to clarify what is the failed experiment, Phuong clarified that that failure is not in self-representation, but representation of his parents' experience and history as refugees. He explained,

Failure in the sense of trying to understand another human being's experience *[sic]*, never is going to be a success. I went to the refugee camp thinking that I will learn something. Then I left feeling further away. It is one thing of having romanticised experiences of your parents as boat people, it's another thing going *[sic]* to the place of their narrative and thinking you are going to get something out of it. I am in a private resort, and I can come and go as I please. This is not anywhere near understanding their experience (as refugees).

Even though it is a failed experiment, Phuong continues to attempt to connect to his past as an artist. Phuong's narrative integrates his memories and experiences as a child of refugees that are now included in institutional museums in Australia and internationally. As an institutional artists, Huong Tran and Phuong Ngo's works are collected by museums and integrated into the history of representation of personal and political memory for other Vietnamese refugees.

In conclusion, self-representation of refugee child migrants' memories and experiences in children's literature, art, and museums has expanded our understanding of histories of childhood and migration in Australia. Museum collection of representations about Vietnamese established refugee experience as filled with suffering. It was not until the late 1990s that Vietnamese artists such as Thomas Le were able to include perspectives of childhood into the collection. Today, contemporary Vietnamese Australian artists such as Phuong Ngo and Huong Tran have integrated their inheritance of memories as refugee children and children of refugees to produce works that represent them. Understanding the critical shift from representation by others to self-representation in children's literature, public and institutional art enhances an understanding of the oral histories about childhood, identity, and belonging that will be the focus of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three

Childhood During Migration and in Refugee Camps

In this chapter, I will explore the memories and experience of Vietnamese child migrants in the refugee camps before their migration to Australia. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the UNHCR estimated that between two hundred thousand and four hundred thousand Vietnamese boat people died at sea.¹ Boat refugees who were lucky enough to make it to the refugee camps lived out their lives there, waiting for asylum. Yen Espiritu argues that while refugee camps are spaces of deferred time, they are also dwellings where refugees have their own economy and base for community development.² Refugee camps, thus, become a significant site of memories of continuous day to day life. In these transitory sites of memory, childhood is lived out while children also await asylum.

Migration and childhood for children of war, in this case, Vietnamese orphans and refugee movement is inherently transnational. These children are born and experience a childhood in a country of origin, dislocate and transition to a resettlement country. Researchers of children and childhood struggled with the follow-up and access to these migratory children. It is only through oral history interviews that we have been able to reconstruct childhoods about migratory children.³ Furthermore, it is only through oral history interviews that this research can capture histories of places like refugee camps which no longer exist. Peter Stearns in defining *global childhood studies*, noted that as many as four percent of all people on earth have fled their homes at least once in the past century. This includes twenty million children who lived in refugee camps.⁴ Despite the realities of war and dislocation, the historical literature has not noted the journey during displacement or refugee camps as sites of memory where children experience childhood. For Vietnamese child refugees, these sites of memory are dynamic as places of significant memories that are formative in the discourse of transnational history of childhood and migration.

¹ Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 590.

² Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 605.

³ Pascoe, 1153-1154.

⁴ Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, 113.

Children's migration experiences differ from the dominant narrative that adults reported about them, especially when they are given the opportunity to represent themselves in the history of migration. The predominant narratives in the historical literature about displaced children involves trauma and suffering prior to resettlement. Children are portrayed as victims without agency or choice in migration, and that childhood is damaged, lost or somewhat compromised in the experience.⁵ There was also a silence about their experiences of childhood *en route* to resettlement. The voice and perspective of parents, caretakers, or humanitarian workers dominated the secondary information we have about children's experiences as refugees in the camps.⁶ Parents spoke on the behalf of children. Their parents lacked English language proficiency, and children were not considered as separate individuals in families. Records of Vietnamese refugee children direct experiences in the refugee camps are from Vietnamese unaccompanied minors. Their narratives focused on the transmission of their family refugee histories and not the child's experience.⁷ Peter Stearns described these generalised vision of life in the refugee camps as traumatic and full of stress and suffering for children.

Throughout the century, but again particularly from World War II onward, children war often forced to flee the scenes of war. Millions of children, in various places, have lived in refugee camps during the past 60 years, amid varying conditions but always facing considerable stress.⁸

Stearns lists the conditions of most child as suffering malnutrition with medical problems as a result of a shortage of food and medical supplies. He notes the loss of their parents who died in transit, the stress of "living in a region where they did not know the language," and cases where their parents pushed their children into prostitution or thievery as a means of supporting the family.⁹ Studies about life in refugee camps for Vietnamese were focused on

⁵ Linda Hitchcox, *Vietnamese Refugees in Southeast Asian Camps* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990); Chan Kwok Bun, "Refugee Camps as Human Artefacts: An Essay on Vietnamese Refugees in Southeast Asian Camps," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 3 (1991): 284-290.

⁶ Freeman and Nguyễn, *Voices from the Camps*; Adrian Lyons and Jesuit Refugee Service, eds., *Voices, Stories, Hopes: Cambodia and Vietnam: Refugees and Volunteers* (North Blackburn, Vic: CollinsDove, 1993).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, 2nd ed, Themes in World History (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 113.

⁹ Ibid, 114.

suffering and institutionalization, likened to living in a prison.¹⁰ As Stearns noted, the happier times are when one leaves the camps.

Occasionally also, children (often with some family members) made their way out of camps to a better life. After months, even years, many Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees were admitted to the United States, and some built positive lives despite the hardships they had endured.¹¹

Whilst Stearns characterizes the suffering for refugee children in the camps, a different perspective emerges from the following self-representations of memories of childhood.

The following narratives include surprisingly positive associations of childhood with *en route* to settlement. During the escape from Vietnam and life in the refugee camps, childhood is expressed as a narrative of adventure and increasing agency against the predominant narratives of adversity, trauma, and victimhood.¹² There is no claim that these are dominant experiences or memories for most Vietnamese displaced children post war. For the Vietnamese child migrants featured in this chapter, transnational sites of childhood memory include movement from Vietnam, the country of origin, escapes on boats through international waters or on foot through Cambodia, and the refugee camps. Their memories and experiences of childhood in transition depended on their age and cognitive abilities to remember and the nature of their displacement as a war orphans, an unaccompanied minor, or minor with their family. Memories of childhood in Vietnam, during the escape, and in refugee camp differ for a Vietnamese unaccompanied minor, an orphan that was a part of Operation Babylift, and a child who escapes with her family. Despite the variation in age and displacement, there are shared themes revealed in their self-representation about their childhood *en route* to resettlement: the loss of connection to family in the country of origin, the development of agency and independence, the adventures of escape, and discovery in the refugee camps. The following analysis explores these positive and varied experiences, memories and *postmemories* starting with childhood in displacement from the country of origin.

¹⁰ Linda Hitchcox, *Vietnamese Refugees in Southeast Asian Camps*.

¹¹ Stearns, *Childhood in World History*.

¹² Freeman and Nguyễn, *Voices from the Camps*.

Childhood During Displacement

Memories of childhood during displacement vary according to the age the child leaves the country of origin, the nature of displacement, and the availability of people who have stories and memories of the child's experience in the country of origins. The presence of family and their contributions to memory differs for the different types of Vietnamese child migrants that are a part of this study.¹³ For war orphans, especially infants upon departure, there is limited experience with Vietnamese family or memory of childhood in Vietnam except through documents, information from orphanages, and return trips to Vietnam. For Vietnamese child migrants that leave with their family and/or siblings, there are others on which they can rely for stories about their memory and experiences of childhood in Vietnam. For an unaccompanied minor, there is separation from their family and no one to rely on for stories about childhood. Adult memories of childhood form and change with time. On return trips to Vietnam, adult memories of childhood may emerge for the first time as stories are discovered or told about life there as a child. For Vietnamese war orphans, return trips to Vietnam bring insight about the context of where they are from, and new relationships inform them of their cultural heritage. Hirsch claimed, "Children of refugees inherit their parents' knowledge of the fragility of place, their suspicion of the notion of home."¹⁴ The term "home" in Hirsch's observation can be broadened to include experiences of childhood in a place of origins. Displaced children in post war Vietnam inherit their parents' understanding of the instability of childhood. The following narratives explore how and why we remember experiences and work with *postmemories* of childhood home or place of origin in Vietnam.

Remembering with Family

Children who migrated with their families have the benefit of relatives who can assist in the construction of *postmemory* of childhood in Vietnam. For Hien Bui Webb, who migrated with her family to Australia, her memories of Vietnam arose in a conversation about her first return visit to Vietnam. She stated,

¹³ For a further discussion on cultural memory and engagement with family memories, see Astri Erll, "Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 42, no. 3 (2011): 303-18. <http://www.jstor.org.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/stable/41604447>.

¹⁴ Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today*, 1996, 659-686.

The first thing I remember, fifteen years later is how come nothing changed except for the erosion of the river, it was just wider, and fond memories of two tamarind trees *[sic]*. There used to be four. That is not my house, and the trees had fallen into the river. I recognised my neighbor. They were fifteen years older and they still remembered me.¹⁵

Hien was eleven years old when she left Vietnam, and she has very specific memories of her family home and neighbors. She remembers the food her grandmother used to make as well as the games she played in childhood. She describes the nature and materials to play with in Vietnam.

You thread together elastic band, and it becomes a long rope. One person holds the other end and jumps in and out, you do that here (in Australia), but this was with elastic bands *[sic]*.

We draw squares on the dirt. We try to flick something into the square, and it cannot cross the board. Whatever is inside is yours. If you touch the border, then you loose.¹⁶

Children's games and play remains regardless of the post-war context. The games created include found objects such as elastic bands and sticks in the dirt. The use of found objects accounts for the poverty and inaccessible market of toys available. However, American military presence in Vietnam provided some access to American toys. Hien mentioned a doll she had access to because of her father's work with Americans in Vietnam.

My father was in the Navy so he went overseas. He got me a gorgeous American doll and wearing a dress *[sic]*. I remember her long lashes and blue eyes. When I lie her down, her eyes closed *[sic]*. I was not into dolls and I was so scared of it. He saved all his money to buy that doll for me.¹⁷

The memory of this doll from America speaks to the influence of the Americans in Vietnam during Hien's childhood. While it gave them access to toys from America, it also separated her father from her.

When I was five years old, I lived with an auntie that was 100 Km away, my mother and my dad's half-sister *[sic]*. She was seventeen years old and lonely. Her mother died when she was eleven years old. My mum had my two younger sisters to look after, and my father was on Navy postings. My auntie and uncle suggested that I go to keep her company. My mother agreed. I thought it was a one-day excursion. Then I found out that I stayed there for the year or two *[sic]*.

¹⁵ Hien Bui Webb interviewed 24 May 2016.

¹⁶ Webb, interview.

¹⁷ Webb, interview.

I brought the doll. I hid the doll in the cupboard because I was scared of it. The next door neighbour said, “I have a bunch of bananas. They were cut down from the tree with about 12 layers, and you can have them if I can have your doll.” *[sic]* I was so excited. I said yes, and my auntie was upset with me for giving it away.¹⁸

Hien was not comfortable with the separation from her family. Hien’s reaction to the doll as foreign and scary aligns with her resistance to the strain that the war put on families. The value of a bunch of native bananas over a foreign doll illustrates her desire for the familiar and familial. She stated,

It was not normal to grow up with aunties. My mom thought it was normal, and I did not. I took out their picture, and I said I miss you guys, come and get me *[sic]*. It was upsetting. She thought that I liked it. At the time, I was four, and so bored *[sic]*. My aunt and uncle were besotted with me. After a week, I wanted to go home. My grandfather had a curfew for my aunt and uncle, and healthy eating very basic food *[sic]*. It was torturous for a four-year old. I just wanted snacks and other energy food. I was five or six when I got to move back.¹⁹

As indicated in her first recall of the separation, Hien did not fully comprehend that she would be away for so long. In her mind, it was only a day excursion which turned out to be a couple of years. When asked about how these memories of Vietnam were constructed given her limited awareness as a child, and then learning the details later, Hien stated that it was her mother’s memory that helped her to know about her childhood.

Mum has a good memory and minute details about who said what, in what circumstances, and she put the jigsaw puzzle together *[sic]*. It is all very emotional, and all had impact *[sic]*.²⁰

It is emotionally complicated how Hien is dependent on her mother for the details in memory. In circumstances of war, there are limited resources within a family, it would have been difficult for her mother to manage three children on her own. Hien thinks about the emotional impact on her as a child, and also reflected about her own mother having leave her family back in Vietnam.

She did not want to leave. It was my dad that wanted to leave. He was sent to re-education camp. He did not have any future. We did not have any future, and only a

¹⁸ Webb, interview.

¹⁹ Webb, interview.

²⁰ Webb, interview.

limited one if we can afford it. There is no opportunity because of the black history that my dad has, fighting for South Vietnamese Navy *[sic]*.²¹

Hien's father had limited opportunities as he was black listed, and placed into the re-education camps. As a result of the black listing, he has never returned to Vietnam for a visit. However, Hien's mother returns often to visit her family. Hien's father's involvement in the South Vietnamese army limited their opportunities for a life in Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon. It did produce a vision of escape and possibilities of livelihood for himself and his children in allied countries. It was Hien's mother who made the decision to leave Vietnam. Hien explained,

For her (Hien's mother), to choose between leaving her parents, it took a long time *[sic]*. She made the decision for us, the three kids and her husband. She was very sad, but we were together as a family and that helped us to go through the painful fear, period of lost, grief and separation *[sic]*.²²

Hien's sensitivity to the loss that her parents suffered during and after the war is quite common in the narrative of children who migrated with their families. Naomi Ngo also speaks to the loss of extended family.

I remember just before we left Vietnam, my mother took me to the market, my brother and me, so we could say goodbye to paternal grandmother *[sic]*. She did not know that we were leaving because we technically and traditionally belong to paternal grandparents *[sic]*. My father was the favourite child. They really valued us as grandchildren. What had happened was that my parents tried to escape before, but my paternal grandparents refused. They cancelled that trip and planned another one without telling them that it was happening.... I very close with grandmother at the time. We went on boat that afternoon.²³

Naomi grieves this loss of her grandmother and a loving childhood with extended family in Vietnam. Naomi left Vietnam when she was six with limited capacity to remember, but she recalls two major events in the family that shaped her childhood. The first was in relationship to her grandmother in reaction to the death of her uncle.

The main one that stuck to my mind is the drowning of my youngest uncle on my dad's side *[sic]*. It stuck because it was so traumatic....

²¹ Webb, interview.

²² Webb, interview.

²³ Naomi Ngo interviewed 16 February 2016.

I remember the funeral because I had to hide behind a curtain because every time I saw my grandmother cry, I would cry *[sic]*. I could not stop myself. I had to hide behind the curtain to stop looking at her *[sic]* to take a break from crying.

I know I am a very emotional person. I was so close her at the time, and I could not help but sympathise. I vaguely remember the curtain and holding it in front of me.²⁴

Naomi remembers death in the family and the emotional reaction of her beloved grandmother. She later notes how this traumatic incident induced in her a fear of swimming for fear of drowning. When asked about any happy memories of childhood in Vietnam, she recounted her life with her aunties.

Yes, there were: living with paternal grandparents and because of my aunts *[sic]*. I spent a lot of time with them. I remember going on honeymoon with my favourite aunt. They told me that I wouldn't let her go without me, so she took me along. They went to some village, and I met up with a little boy. We were roaming the village running around, and I also remember dad taking us to the beach teaching us to swim, but the waves were too strong *[sic]*.²⁵

Naomi accounts of happy childhood in Vietnam included her father. When Naomi mentions, "they told me" she alludes to family memories that augment her memory of childhood. Naomi also had her own memories of childhood.

Another memory I have is of when they would tell me scary stories about ghosts that oversee children when we were asleep *[sic]*....

I used to fall out of bed all the time. I remember one night that I rolled, someone stopped me *[sic]*. I was on the edge of the bed and I was too scared to reopen my eyes and I remember I said to myself, it's that ghost, geez he is not a bad ghost, he stopped me from falling off the bed because I was too scared to roll to the edge of the bed in case I bump into him *[sic]*.

I was very conscious at night, so I stopped falling off the bed and then after a while I got a feeling that he was no longer there because I had learned to not fall off the bed *[sic]*.²⁶

The stories her parents told her about her own childhood reinforced Naomi memories of using her imagination to stay in bed at night. On a return visit to Vietnam, she remembers her father's recall of her childhood in Vietnam. Naomi stated,

²⁴ Naomi Ngo, interview.

²⁵ Naomi Ngo, interview.

²⁶ Naomi Ngo, interview.

When he [Naomi's father] passed away, my mum decided to go to Vietnam. That was when I was finishing year eleven. I thought that is great because I get to go to Vietnam.

I had heard so much about it, especially from my dad. I was so excited to see my grandparents my paternal grandparents. My mum and I went while my brothers stayed back with a friend. It was such an eye opener for me in 1990 as well.

Vietnam was so undeveloped, simple to me. It was so beautiful, the lifestyle and everything was the opposite from our lives in Australia – so insular, lonely, isolated, not having lots of people around like extended family to support you *[sic]*.²⁷

As it was for Hien, the return to Vietnam with her mother completes the reconstruction of childhood memories there. For some child refugees that migrated with family, it is in adulthood that an inquiry into childhood and life in Vietnam occurs. This was the case for Van Le who migrated with her family and four other siblings.²⁸ Van learned about her past as an adult. Van stated,

All five children are born in Vietnam. Culturally, women who had husbands that were South Vietnamese were allowed children to take on the maternal name so that there was no connection to my father *[sic]*.

We took on my mother's maiden name. It is not clear why, but one reason I have mother's maiden name is because my dad was a POW (Prisoner of War). He went to re-education camp.²⁹

I asked Van if she knew this as a child, to which she replied, "No, I know a lot of it now. I guess I am starting to ask questions because my mom is getting old *[sic]*."³⁰ Van's mother raised the children on her own while her husband was in the re-education camp post war and re-education. When asked about when Van was born, she stated,

He and my mum were separated because after the war when he came home, he went to the monastery. It was just my mum who had raised the kids.³¹

²⁷ Naomi Ngo, interview.

²⁸ Van Le interviewed 14 January 2017.

²⁹ Le, interview.

³⁰ Le, interview.

³¹ Le, interview.

With the absence of her father after the war, Van's mother is integral to her remembering facts about her life in Vietnam. Van, however, has flash memories of childhood there as described with some augmentation from her mother's stories. When asked, "Where do your childhood memories begin? How do you know them?," Van replied,

I will have bits and pieces of my childhood memories. Things I know like monsoon rain. We would just run around and play. It was fun, running around naked (Van laughs).

Then Van more seriously reflected on her childhood in Vietnam, and stated,

When the government seized the family business, she (Van's mother) was chemist. We had to sell a lot of things to put food on table and that was in Saigon.³²

In the above recollection, there is blend of Van's own memories of playing in Vietnam and concerns about how her mother managed on her own with four children. The nature of augmented memories with children and parents is imperfect. It is refined over time with more detail and clarification of stories in adulthood. For instance, Van remembered going to preschool and later learns more details on a return trip to Vietnam. She stated,

I remember going to preschool, and found out recently which one. I always thought I went to the Marie Currie kindergarten where my brother and sister went, but I spoke with my mom recently and she said, 'You went to Con Ven D'essou or something – Convent of Little Birds in Saigon [*sic*]. It is a convent, literal translation convent of young birds, was it near our home. She keeps telling me where we lived, but I don't remember. I think it may be district 5 or 7.³³

With the help of her mother, Van can get more details about her memories of childhood.

When asked if there were pictures that help her to remember her childhood, Van stated, "It was only when we got to Australia when the family bought them over."³⁴ Van still heavily relies on her mother's memory and willingness to speak about the past in her old age. She explained,

Mum is getting old and blurts out things. When she does, I will ask her a few things and one of them was about kindergarten [*sic*]. I remember this girl next to me that pinched me. and it hurt me so bad that I gave her my pocket money.³⁵

³² Le, interview.

³³ Le, interview.

³⁴ Le, interview.

³⁵ Le, interview.

Van actively remembers snippets such as this memory about a girl in school that pinched her for pocket money. This is a type of memory that is not related to her family experience, but for the memories that are family memories, she has the assistance of her mother's memory. Thus, those who migrated with family have the benefit of kin stories to help them fill in the gaps of remembering childhood.

Remembering without Family

For child migrants who left Vietnam without family, there are no adults to augment the memories of childhood. Their own capacity to remember based on their relative age at the time of departure and return visits assists in how they remember. Children who are adopted or displaced without guardianship do not have the benefit of family to assist in augmenting their memories of childhood in Vietnam. For unaccompanied minors and adoptees, remembering childhood or life in Vietnam is dependent on their age at the time of departure, opportunity to revisit Vietnam or to seek out the people that were part of their birth or processing to get into Australia. As an unaccompanied minor who started trying to escape at the age of thirteen, Nam Huynh had significant memories of childhood in Vietnam.

After 1975, I was born. My dad was working for the South Vietnamese government. He was sent to prison for three years, and we were moved to the new area. In Vietnam, everything is connected to places. You remember how your house is laid out as a child. When my parents moved out to new area, my mom stayed behind. They sent me first to make it through the school term. I was only six or seven years old. I missed my family, mum the most. Then my complete family moved there to that small village in 1981.³⁶

Nam refers to re-education work camps as “the new area,” that the Communist government created for those who were dissidents. When asked if his father spoke about it, Nam said he was too young to remember. Nam not only remembers his friends and neighbours, he remains in touch with them. He describes village life.

There was one person who had a black and white TV (television). He charged people to see it, so I just peer up on the window.

With friends, we went swimming and there, most people work in the rubber plantation. We collected the milk (rubber tree sap) to make balls after they all left.

³⁶ Nam Huynh interviewed 16 February 2016.

The challenge was transport. One day, there is only one bus to go to the big market, and people just pushing one another. When I was a child, it was really bad and it was really cramped.³⁷

Nam has clear memories of his rural upbringing in Vietnam. He notes the nature of infrastructure and the impact of living in a work camp post war. Nevertheless, Nam is nostalgic about his childhood home and has even kept a picture he drew of his home village, from his memory, during his time in the refugee camp. He described the drawing he made as in the refugee camp, 'My house' – 'My village' – 'My valley' (Nam verbal translation of the words written in Vietnamese).

This is house from my childhood and it is significant to me. I grew up in this house, and all the details and the tree cut down to stumps [*sic*]. My house is looking down on the rubber plantation. There is a timber bridge and something deeper to get the rain water (trench or quarry). We can go into it and swim. It is a government owned rubber plantation. I drew this because I was missing home.³⁸

Nam not only missed his home while he was a boy in the refugee camp, he missed his family. As an adult, he described the literal meaning and loss in translation.

In Vietnamese, when they say 'moving house,' it means moving the house. Everything is unearthed on wheels or buffalos. You move the whole house, all these pieces of timber[*sic*]. When I was six years old, it was the first time I had been away from home. My dad arrived with all the components of the house.³⁹

Nam's initial move at the age of six would become the first of many away from his family. He was later asked to move to the city of Saigon by himself.

In that little village, education is really poor. In grade six, at the age of ten or eleven, my uncle moved me to Saigon to study[*sic*]. The kids there were well-trained, and I struggle to keep up with studies.⁴⁰

Nam's family was too poor to afford to leave together. Nam's uncle paid for his schooling and funded his attempts to escape from Vietnam. He explained,

³⁷ Huynh, interview.

³⁸ Huynh, interview.

³⁹ Huynh, interview.

⁴⁰ Huynh, interview.

I come from really poor family and we are taught whatever we grow, we eat and the government collects. I always felt lucky to be where I am, and I have responsibility to do the right thing by my parents and my brother and sister.⁴¹

Nam was indebted to his uncle and family. The plan was that he would escape and establish a life abroad then sponsor his family to join him. Nam was old enough to remember life in Vietnam as a teenager. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, adoptees like unaccompanied minors do not have family to assist them in remembering childhood during displacement. For Vietnamese children who were airlifted out of Vietnam and adopted by Australians, memories or knowledge about their childhood varies. Some have the resources to return to Vietnam for personal research or access to aid workers that informed them about their past. Whether one has the benefit of remembering childhood with or without family, extended relative or aid workers, childhood during migration is an important part of understanding translational childhood and the history of migration.

Childhood During Migration

Childhood during migration is a dynamic space where children develop their sense of agency and self-determination as explorers and adventurers in the history of migration to Australia. The following selection of oral histories features the memories and experience of Vietnamese refugee's childhood during the journey or displacement to the refugee camps. Each narrative showcases their increasing sense of agency and self-determination during displacement. Their level of agency depends on the nature of displacement and age or maturity of the child upon leaving Vietnam. Due to her maturity upon departure with family, Hien has significant memories and *postmemories* from her parents of their escape from Vietnam.

I was eleven [years old] when I left Vietnam. I remember it was the 30th of April in 1979. My father planned the trip for two years and on the night of the 30th of April the Vietnamese communist would be partying [*sic*]. It was the anniversary of their unification, and he thought that would be good time to depart.⁴²

Hien reveals her knowledge of the historical context and significance about the date that her family decided to leave Vietnam. As an adult remembering, she recognises her father's sophistication in planning for the political opportunity at that time. Throughout her narrative

⁴¹ Huynh, interview.

⁴² Webb, interview.

there are switch backs in memory from this perspective of the adult remembering and the child experiencing. For instance, she detailed their preparations with the curiosity of a child noticing something out of the ordinary about the day.

Two days before, my parents packed our bags, had cooked rice and dried it on the front yard. I asked why we were drying rice, and was told that an elder aunty was sick and we have to prepare it for her *[sic]*.⁴³

As an adult, Hien remembered this explanation of preparing food for a sick aunty seemed plausible to her child self at the time. What follows this memory builds on that nascent knowledge of events that were unusual in retrospect as an adult remembering childhood.

On about the 28th (of April), we left with our suitcases and closed the door. Usually, we do not close the door or put locks on, so the whole village knew that we would be going to the island to visit our great auntie who we never met *[sic]*.⁴⁴

This memory of leaving the house, putting on locks, and visiting an aunty they had never met heightens the suspicion in the child that something is amiss. These alibis that families told their children were quite common. The escape narratives often included hiring people to hide or smuggle them onto boats or alibis of going to visit distant relatives near a coastal town. Hien explained further,

We stayed with someone else for a day near the river and we walked in bush on a boat and then rowed the boat onto a bigger boat and then got down into the lower cabin and a few people already there *[sic]*.⁴⁵

Hien's memory and articulation of being people smuggled is a common trope in escape stories for Vietnamese boat people. In speaking to me as Vietnamese child refugee and interviewer, it was easily comprehensible the similar sequence of events of my own family's escape from Vietnam. Hien's family lived for a day with strangers that were hired to keep them and smuggle them and other escapees through the bush, and onto a boat. To a child it seemed quite an unusual set of circumstances. Hien recalls it from her childlike perspective.

Then we fell asleep and woke up. The engine was next to my ear and so loud. I ask mom where are we, she told us we about go to My (which meant America in

⁴³ Webb, interview.

⁴⁴ Webb, interview.

⁴⁵ Webb, interview.

Vietnamese) and others said we going to My Tho which is not too far from Mekong Delta [*sic*].⁴⁶

Given the explanation from her mother that they are on a journey or vacation of sorts peaks Hien's curiosity and wonder. She expresses this playful curiosity in the conflation of the meaning of the Vietnamese word for America, My, and its similarity of the name of a Vietnamese town, My Tho, which shares the same initial word. The discrepancy between these two places geography is quite significant. Hien goes on to recall her need to figure out what was really going on.

I got up to the top of the boat and all I could see was water and I said good, this is so fun, I never been on a boat before [*sic*].⁴⁷

In her childlike wonder, she remembers accepts the possibility that she was on a vacation boat. She expressed that it was exciting since she had never been on a boat before. Her sense of fun and adventure turns into to fear when her father explained to her what is really happening.

It was quite scary surrounded by water and then eventually my dad said we not going to My Tho [*sic*]. We are going to My (America).⁴⁸

The sea which moments before was vast and adventuresome became ominous in her childlike memory. Hien explained how the "vacation at sea" became a nightmare.

It was like that for four nights. On the fourth day, we encounter a Thai boat and we started waving. We were so excited to have another boat escaping with us. We thought they were companions as they approached closer.⁴⁹

After recalling this memory of another boat approaching them in the present tense as if were happening in her mind, Hien then goes into an explanation of her father's role on the boat. Hien's use of the present tense in her memory is like that of a child remembering it as it is happening. However, her adult mind takes over the story as she explains her father's position and perspective at the time.

⁴⁶ Webb, interview.

⁴⁷ Webb, interview.

⁴⁸ Webb, interview.

⁴⁹ Webb, interview.

He was the everything on the boat including navigator *[sic]*. His background was in the Navy before 1975. During those Navy years, he learned a lot about navigation and how to go around the coral wreaths.⁵⁰

Hien and the people on the boat relied on the most skilled person which was her father. It was quite ambitious the idea of sailing all the way to America from Vietnam. Hien is proud of navigational skill, and the ability to dodge coral reefs. She trusted her father's memory and judgement.

He said it was weird, they have guns on them, and it was too late, they had started to jump over*[sic]*. They asked for water or oil. We only had enough to keep us going, and they asked for gold and money*[sic]*. By then, he knew they were Thai pirates.⁵¹

Attacks by Thai pirates were quite common during these years of boat people escaping Vietnam, however, what is interesting is how Hien remembers the scene from her father's point of view. These types of narratives illustrate the gestalt nature of children's memories of childhood. There is a sense that she remembered how he described the events as they unfolded. Whilst attacks from pirates were common, there are interesting variations to the outcomes of these desperate situations for people fleeing. Hien went on to describe what happened during their encounter with the Thai pirates.

Before they jumped over, he (Hien's father) noticed their Buddhist altar and bowing before they jumped over*[sic]*. He thought they are probably not too bad because they have faith and prayed that none of us got hurt or have calamities*[sic]*.

They took the gold from the women. I remembered my gold earrings, so I put my hand over my ears as I heard they would pull and it would hurt *[sic]*. They did not see me and left me alone. It was quite chaotic. Then they jumped back and gave us oil and water to continue. No one was hurt, no violence, just took the gold and left*[sic]*.⁵²

With an awareness of the precarious nature of the situation, Hien attributed the Buddhist practice of kindness in only pillaging for gold instead of raping women or killing people. Hien recalled herself as having some agency and awareness to protect herself and her gold earrings. This level of agency amidst chaos is notable as children in narratives of migration are often seen as passive victims on which traumas are enacted. Hien notes that it was a "terrifying experience," and how her father persisted.

⁵⁰ Webb, interview.

⁵¹ Webb, interview.

⁵² Webb, interview.

So right we will go inland, and not go outward. He had planned to go out to the China sea and avoid the Thai peninsula. We only ran into one Thai pirate boat, and the aim was to curve down to Singapore.⁵³

The new trajectory for the boat proved successful in avoiding Thai pirates. However, other dangers loomed.

On the fifth day, the boat nearly capsized. On the fifth night. I woke up with the bright light of oil container shinning in the middle of the sea. In the morning, my dad talked to the people on the container ship. They saw that we had food, and everyone was looking healthy and self-sufficient, so we cannot pick you up[sic]. They gave us more oil and then my dad started inland towards Malaysia.⁵⁴

The encounter with this ship that did not rescue or tow them to the refugee camp reveal the geopolitics of the times. There were so many boat people at sea and the rationale was that you had to be in distress to justify the action of rescue. It is also known as the duty to rescue at sea as spelled out in Article 98 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).⁵⁵ With the additional oil, Hien's father proceeds to navigate them toward the refugee camp in Malaysia.

We reach the shore and it was the most happiest site I had ever seen. The palm trees - after five days on the sea [sic]. The Malaysian police and coastal guard. They took us in and we transferred to refugee camp. It was 1979, and we are not the first wave of boat people. The camp was already established there for the few boats that arrived.⁵⁶

When asked about how she can recall such details of the living conditions and whether she remembers it from stories told about the journey, Hien confidently stated, "No, it is from my own recollection." When asked about the emotions she experienced throughout the journey, she replied,

Scared, definitely, during the time that the Thai pirates jump over [sic]. It was quite stressful, and that fear is overwhelming. Are we going to survive? If anything happens to us? How come there is no land? What happens if I cannot swim? What will happen?

⁵³ Webb, interview.

⁵⁴ Webb, interview.

⁵⁵ Papanicolopulu, Irini, "The Duty to Rescue at sea, in peacetime and in war: A General Overview," *International Review of the Red Cross* 98, no. 2 (2016): 491–514. doi:10.1017/S1816383117000406.

⁵⁶ Webb, interview.

I was yearning to stretch and play in the playground and seeing trees – wanting land – that feeling of safety [*sic*]. Seeing those big boats and that tiny boat in the middle of the sea makes you feel small and vulnerable.⁵⁷

Hien acknowledges the uncertainty and vulnerability as a child on the journey. She expresses her need as a child for play and safety which could not be had on the boat. When asked further about the need for play, she described memories of what play could be had with her siblings.

One is nine and the youngest is seven. The seven-year old is always cuddling with mum. I had a hammock on the boat. The other sister was blue dehydrated, seasick the whole time[*sic*].

At times, I went to the tower and asked if I can help with anything. He (her father) said, “You can walk around and stay around, but cannot touch anything.” He showed me the map and how to avoid the corals and the routes. I am not allowed to steer, and not to go near the edge of the boat and I was told off when I went to the tip.⁵⁸

As the daughter of the ship’s navigator, Hien had a privileged position to roam the boat and inquire in detail about the journey. She is limited in her capacity to help her father, navigate but she learns about how the boat works. Hien is otherwise pre-occupied with the memory of things that are interesting to children.

I saw dolphins racing with us the whole way through and calm sea for three days, that was our only fun time racing with the dolphins[*sic*]. Most days are in the cabin, and sometimes on the deck and at night, we sleep under the deck and can move around[*sic*].⁵⁹

Hien recalled the dolphins as the highlight of the journey on the boat and the listlessness of captivity on the sea. When asked about what food they had to eat, she stated,

We had rice, fruit, noodles and fair bit of food. We were well prepared. The fruit was mainly crunchy, full of water sweet fruit[*sic*]. It is the one you take to the field because it has high water and sugar content. They last longer and do not go off. It is something used for a long journey.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Webb, interview.

⁵⁸ Webb, interview.

⁵⁹ Webb, interview.

⁶⁰ Webb, interview.

Though Hien cannot name the fruit from her memory in English, the description resembles a fruit otherwise known as a “watery rose apple.” Some of the themes that Hein touched upon in her memories of childhood *en route* to the refugee camp illuminate the historical events as they were experienced and understood as a child. The shifts in perspective of Hien as a child integrating her father’s perspectives produce a dynamic narrative of inherited memory in self-representation. In the following narrative of Nam’s numerous escape attempts, a greater sense of adventure and agency emerges his childhood during displacement.

Agency and Adventure

For some migrant children, personal agency and adventure emerge as primary to their experiences of migration and displacement. When Nam speaks about his memory and experiences as an unaccompanied minor, his eyes light up as he narrates and represents himself as the hero of an epic journey. Even at the age of thirteen, he was open to the adventure. He stated,

They [Nam’s parents] just asked me, “Do you want to go?” To pay a fee for a spot was a lot of money for them. I am the oldest child and we could only afford to send one. I have three more siblings. At that time, I do not know much. I am only thirteen. I just said, “Yes,” take a risk, and jumped.⁶¹

It was quite common for families in Vietnam to invest in their children, especially the eldest son with the hopes that he would later be able to sponsor the family.⁶² Young men were considered more able to survive. It however a surprise when Nam stated that he had tried several times to escape. He described each attempt as an adventure in which he was the protagonist in an action movie.

I nearly died. It is kind of funny, but when I was young, we would watch movie or stories of adventure[sic]. After [each attempt to escape], you kind of link yourself to the character, you kind of learn to survival, and you kind of like it.

I liked it, me and my cousin, even if it may kill us[sic]. We had experience and when they ask if you want to go again, you say yes, it is very easy[sic].⁶³

⁶¹ Huynh, interview.

⁶² Huynh, interview.

⁶³ Huynh, interview.

Nam and his cousin, who were about the same age, escape together as unaccompanied minors, i.e. without relatives or guardians. After each attempt, Nam felt more confident and willing to take on the risks involved. He describes his first attempt,

We left from Da Lat. We got to a small boat to get to the big boat, a metal ship, which is usually very rare[sic]. It is usually a wooden boat. That is why they manage to put 252 people on board. We are like fish jammed down, no more room[sic]. To put on top and people push them down[sic]. In a matter of few minutes, you sweat. It was really horrible.⁶⁴

When asked about the outcome and how his cousin fared on this first attempt, Nam stated,

I was next to him. Then they got engine problems, and they did not go very far out. Engines failed. What happened is they try to fix, and could not fix it. We met two other Vietnamese fishing ships and gave them gold to pull us out to international water. They returned the money. They turned us over to the police. The year is 1988.⁶⁵

Nam noted that the year was 1988, the time of the height of refugee escapes from Vietnam. During that time, there were already international efforts to repatriate Vietnamese that did not receive asylum. It was likely that the fisherman on these boats were paid a greater sum of money to turn in refugees than the amount that the people on Nam's boat could afford to pay them to be towed into international waters. The people on Nam's boat wanted to get into international waters to qualify for asylum seeking status according to the special considerations for asylum seekers at sea as outlined by the Executive committees of the UNHCR.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, they failed in this attempt. Nam revealed what happened when they were returned to the Vietnamese officials.

It was bad, after they capture us. They treated us really bad, like criminals. I did not anticipate this as a child. You try to hide. At night, they take us to small police station. They inspect everyone to get anything they can get.

They interview, and then in the morning when they have seen everyone, they linked our hands[sic]. Everyone is tied by wrist, like a chain, and they parade us out to the beach side of this island to look like criminals[sic].⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Huynh, interview.

⁶⁵ Huynh, interview.

⁶⁶ "Protection of Asylum-Seekers at Sea Protection of Asylum-Seekers at Sea No. 20 (XXXI) – 1980," Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 16 October 1980. <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/exconc/3ae68c435c/protection-asylum-seekers-sea.html>.

⁶⁷ Huynh, interview.

Taken as prisoners, the guards take the money from the people and shame them for their attempts to leave Vietnam. Nam explained the prison conditions and outcome for himself as a minor.

They fed us rice and salt, and then sent us back to the prison. That was brief and not long. Because we were minors and under 18, they let us go. The adults got three years in prison and their heads shaved.⁶⁸

As unaccompanied minors, Nam and his cousin are luckily released whereas the adults are further shamed and detained. He reflected on what he learned from that first attempt.

That is the first time we ever got captured. We were so scared, so we told them everything. We told them the true address and everything - what we know, not much and real address, so they had it on the books[sic].⁶⁹

After release from the prison, the next part of their adventure was to find a way home. As stated earlier in his description of post war Vietnam, there was limited access to transport available in his village, Nam stated,

Transport during that time was bad. There is only one bus from there to Saigon. Only one morning bus, and we had been sleeping in the open air[sic].

Kids with family stayed with their parents. Kids without parents they released us in the afternoon at 5pm, and absolutely no transport[sic].

So we went to terminal and the cops knew that we had to stay there overnight. The next morning, we begged the driver for a free ride back to Saigon and they let us on. That was the first attempt, 1988.⁷⁰

For unaccompanied minors, there was more leniency. When asked about what inspired him to try to escape again, Nam mentioned the confidence and knowledge he had gained with each attempt. A year later, Nam and his cousin attempted to escape on foot through Cambodia.

Three people die on this trip. After that one is where we got confident [sic]. The first one, no one died, and we got out of prison. We did not feel anything, just a bit hungry.

⁶⁸ Huynh, interview.

⁶⁹ Huynh, interview.

⁷⁰ Huynh, interview.

That was okay. People were kind to us. The guy on the bus put me on his lap. Maybe because I had a babyface. There was no seat, but I was cared for.⁷¹

Nam attributes his youth as an asset for lighter treatment and more generous assistance from strangers along the way. In this second attempt, Nam and his cousin were smuggled through Cambodia, though he described it as if it were a school field trip abroad.

We had to go through Cambodia to get to boat. During those months there were storms, so we had to wait for the right time to cross the border. We were divided into groups of ten. In Phnom Penh, the families are hosts that hide us and they go out and shop and cook for us[sic]. We only go out at night. I was pretty fortunate. My cousin stayed in the house with me.⁷²

Many Vietnamese had escaped Vietnamese communism to live and work in Cambodia. Nam remembers the lady of the house who indulged him as if he were her own child.

She took me out to go shopping. She was a lady like yourself with one child. I got to see the world outside. I got to *an* (eat) *che* (pudding). There were good bits in a bad situation. I get to go to market, and I was able to make *nuoc mam* (Vietnamese fish dipping sauce). They liked it. They are Chinese and can speak Vietnamese. They were in Vietnam before, and when communist take over, they were kicked out.⁷³

Nam stayed with that family for a month and twelve days. He learned new things about life in Cambodia. He shared some of his experience and culture with the host family while waiting for other people smugglers to give them further instructions for escape.

One night, they came and told us it is time to move. It was scary. We got into the back of a truck, a Russian truck to get us across the border. It belonged to Vietnamese high up internal affairs government guy. We come to a check point and his status was not strong enough.

We were exposed and sent back to the council office. When we were captured, they put us onto another truck, an open truck and they drive mad[sic]. I was scared I would fall out. That was scariest part.⁷⁴

Nam and his cousin are put into council prison again and he describes the hunger and bartering that takes place.

⁷¹ Huynh, interview.

⁷² Huynh, interview.

⁷³ Huynh, interview.

⁷⁴ Huynh, interview.

In the council building, we were so hungry. Whoever had money to give them money to buy *banh mi* (sandwiches) – gave them money, but they did not bring back food[sic].⁷⁵

The Cambodian guards had taken their money and sent people back to Vietnam. Nam and his cousin decided to return to the house where they hid with the nice lady. Nam remembered where it was.

They shipped us by slow van of about 100 people each. We were small kids, so we were the first to go back to the river port that is connected to the river crossing to Vietnam[sic].

As soon as they left us there, and there was one guy guarding, we were cheeky and we signaled to each other and decided that we were going to escape[sic]. We pretended we were going to the toilet. Then zip, we were gone[sic].⁷⁶

Nam and his cousin traced their steps back to the house where they were hidden. They dodged council patrol trucks along the way.

We walk back to that place from that council. If we see the van coming back, then we know we were on the right path. We saw the truck! We saw the van. We hid behind the bloody post, like in the movies, we hid there and we did this a few times. In the end, we got a *cyclo*. We got back and asked the lady to pay for the *cyclo* because walking took us a long time [sic].⁷⁷

Nam and his cousin returned to the hideout house, the other escapees were also there. Nam learned that the adults obviously knew to return to the hide out homes and try again.

And those adults, they already escaped, they were already there[sic]. I think they had other deals. They knew the address. They had money somehow and most of the people they had captured had gone back to the hide out homes[sic].⁷⁸

A few weeks later, the people smugglers returned to the hideout house, and the group tried again to escape.

⁷⁵ Huynh, interview.

⁷⁶ Huynh, interview.

⁷⁷ Huynh, interview.

⁷⁸ Huynh, interview.

This time the truck - the men on those trucks are men that no longer part of Vietnamese army[sic]. They get to the truck check point, but they go through this time.

This is the most scary part. They said we had to stop and go on foot. The guy says – you are going to step where I step or you going to get blown up[sic].⁷⁹

Nam and his cousin and the group went through a field of Cambodian landmines to get to the boat. He describes it as a fear induced numbing experience.

My cousin and me are lucky to be just a few people after him[sic]. He runs, we run after him, and no fear, only fear that we may get blown up, just bare feet and punctured and no pain, but compared to the fear of being blown up there is no pain[sic]. You just run and after a few hours we reach the shoreline of the sea. I look at the feet. I am bleeding and there is no pain.⁸⁰

After running through field of landmines to get to the boat, they wait for a transport boat to take them to the larger boat that will go out to sea.

We wait until night. They transport us from taxi boat to the big boat. I went with the first group – with the guy who steers that boat and his family[sic]. They go about six people at a time. We were exhausted. We were half asleep when last boat carried thirteen people. That little boat sank.⁸¹

Nam explained that the last group with thirteen people were on the taxi boat meant for six. Three people drowned, and Nam recalled who they were from their journey.

The last group, the last thirteen were so impatient that they were going to be left behind, but when it sunk as they got to the big boat, three people died[sic].

One was a lady that traveled by herself and two twins that we had sat next to in the truck. I see and remember that lady too[sic].⁸²

After their first encounter with death, Nam recalled the realization that it was not an action movie. There were real consequences. He stated,

Wow! We had our adventure, but we never saw anyone die. Now they were gone. Dead. It was so scary.⁸³

⁷⁹ Huynh, interview.

⁸⁰ Huynh, interview.

⁸¹ Huynh, interview.

⁸² Huynh, interview.

⁸³ Huynh, interview.

When the bigger boat went out to sea, they encountered engine troubles again. The supposed captain of the boat turned out to be an imposter who knew nothing about boats or navigation.

The boat engine had problems. It could not be fixed again. This time it was bad because the “captain” that pretended to be a South Vietnamese army whatever, it turned out that he was a fake[sic]. He knew nothing about the sea and just wanted a free ride. He put everyone at sea in danger.⁸⁴

There was a type of mutiny and suggestion to throw him and his family overboard, but the people agreed that the people smugglers would deal with him. Stranded at sea, they were idle for a day until the coastal police from Vietnam captured them. Nam explained how they were released and fortunately avoided a major weather storm.

We were are stuck there for a day, waiting to be captured. This is 1989 and the government has already changed. It is more lenient. We burned the tire and the coastal police of Vietnam came out and capture us to take us back to Vietnam[sic]. There was a massive storm that was going to hit. It was lucky they took us back in.⁸⁵

Nam considered this capture a rescue. He described how the storm would have destroyed the boat. He also described how better they were treated by the Vietnamese police during these lenient years. These were the years when Vietnamese officials were paid to repatriate refugees.

We got captured back and this time they treat us very differently. They feed us with rice and fish. I thought, wow, what a difference. Then in the prison, they asked us if anyone had taken our watches, they would get it back for us.

This time we were more experienced. We gave them a false address and different surname. I still kept my first name as Nam just in case they yell it out. Again, they release us in the late afternoon. We got home after one month and 12 days.⁸⁶

When Nam reflected on the escape through Cambodia, he is fixated on the deaths. However, it does not deter him from trying to escape again. Within a month or two, they try again. Nam rationalized that they can make it because they know how to swim, and the people that had drowned did not know how to swim. Nam had learned to swim during his time in Saigon.

⁸⁴ Huynh, interview.

⁸⁵ Huynh, interview.

⁸⁶ Huynh, interview.

Swimming proved to be the key to their survival in their last failed attempt to get to the boat. This time, they ran through sea grass that was about two meters tall.

There are roots and water. People are rushing to follow the leader. My cousin and I are always at the front. There are sections that are deep. We can swim, but there were older ladies running. They cannot even make it. Other people are just stepping over their bodies. It's kind of horrible.

They cannot swim, so they had to go a longer route to get to the small boat that collect us. They missed it. We did not miss it. They decided to take 30 only on the boat that just came in.⁸⁷

Nam then backtracked in the story to explain that they had to get through a Russian protected area where there were search lights looking for escapees.

Before we get to that point, we had to get pass this land. I am going to backtrack the story a bit. This land was Russian controlled. They have patrols, and there was this massive search light that goes around in intervals.

We were told that when the light goes in the other direction, you run then, and when the light is back, you duck right[sic]. That is what we had to do for a good bloody twenty minutes.⁸⁸

When Nam told this part of his escape journey, he compared it to being in the movies. He said, while laughing, "It is just like in the movie, Bruce Lee movies, 007." The group expressed fear that they would be caught or shot at. They decided to abandon the escape plan. They waited until the morning and were transported back to Saigon. Nam says he "lost a few kilos – hungry, rain, mosquito[sic]," but there was no harm because he was able to swim. Finally, in his last attempt to escape, Nam made it to the refugee camp with a boat of "139 people, one pregnant lady – 139.5." He described this final boat journey.

This boat - painted HQ – with Vietnamese navy marking and fake guns made of bamboo painted black to deter the pirates and real AK47 on boat[sic]. We did not know that until the end. It had a timber water tank that gave you water just the size of one coffee. It had river water – dark and horrid smell[sic]. People suggest we go back, but so much effort despite water supply[sic].⁸⁹

The lack of a clean water supply and conditions on the sea worsen after three days at sea.

⁸⁷ Huynh, interview.

⁸⁸ Huynh, interview.

⁸⁹ Huynh, interview.

That water is gone as well – then sea water – could not drink – lips are all dry and on the second and third day, cannot eat nothing[sic]. There is rice and noodles, but you just want a drop of water. Baby is crying. The human body can cope for three days. One more day and we would be wiped. From 11am to 2pm, it is very hot.⁹⁰

On the third day, the boat is still headed for Australia. They ran into a Malaysian fishing boat that tells them to try and steer towards Malaysia instead.

They did not pull us in. Our engine had eight cylinders that reduced to six, then four, and only two left, and was running all the time[sic]. At 11pm – we saw horizon and traffic – that was Malaysia[sic].⁹¹

Nam explained that the people navigating the boat had gotten lost and did not know about refugee camps. In the conversation with the fishing boat, they had learned how to access the camp.

At the time we had no idea that it leads to the camp. We later learned that you do not go into the shoreline because the boat can hit and turn over and people drown[sic]. We decide to hit the shore as hard as we could, and then we were ready to jump. You never know if there would be rocks.⁹²

Nam and his cousin and their boat with 137 other people and one pregnant woman arrived at Pulau Bidong refugee camp.

We got off safely onto the sand. Police arrive, circle the area, set up tables for names and bring over water and food. Later they send us to camp with Red Cross. It is January 1989. People were still coming up to 1996 even if it is officially closed.⁹³

Arrival at the refugee camp did not necessarily mean the end of his adventures and growing agency for Nam. His oral history of self-representation focused on a sense of adventure and agency during migration and upon arrival at the refugee camp. Nam was not alone in his memory of the refugee camps as also a place of adventure and developing self-determination.

Naomi like Nam also experienced her migration from Vietnam as escape adventure, but with family. She describes how her memories differ from the adult experience of the boat

⁹⁰ Huynh, interview.

⁹¹ Huynh, interview.

⁹² Huynh, interview.

⁹³ Huynh, interview.

journey that she learned about from her mother. Naomi stated that her mother described the journey as a bit of a battle.

Bit of a battle that went on, lots of crying worries and anxieties, women and children down in the hull[sic]. We heard argument and heard gun shots. My mum huddled us together, and then it was all cleared away and everything was fine. As an adult, my mother told me the story. There was some conflict between passengers. It became a bit violent and then all resolved.⁹⁴

Amidst the chaos of arguments among the men on the boat, fears and anxieties in response to the conflict arose between passengers. Naomi remembered the boat journey differently.

As a refugee child, she had her own memory and experience of it. She stated,

My brother and I got to roam around the boat, we had such a great time. It was like an adventure park. I remember before going on the boat, when we were about to board the boat, I saw this kid that was running around on the edge of the boat[sic]. I was like geez that was scary, but then eventually, my brother and I were running around it. I even remember going, oh my gosh I am running around, I am not walking, I was not scared at all.⁹⁵

Naomi did not experience the boat as particularly confining. She noticed the freedom and opportunity it offered for an adventure. She could explore and run around it as a child.

Naomi was not scared of the journey despite seasickness. She stated, “I remember getting really sea sick and felt terrible, mom giving me an orange, fortunately vomited and then felt so good after, felt so good[sic].” Naomi was not the only child in the family that experienced the boat journey with good humour. She remembered her younger brother enjoying the adventure, even though he almost drowned. Naomi stated,

I remember my brother running around with a bowl of noodles one morning. He fell off [the boat] while we were at sea.

What happen was one of the women freaked out and jumped in and could not swim. [She] yelled, “help me, help me!” (in Vietnamese), and a couple of guys jumped in to save them and pulled my brother out [sic].

I was told about it because I cannot remember this. [My little brother] said, “Where is my bowl of noodle?” They asked if he was scared, [and he replied], “Oh no, I fell in

⁹⁴ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁹⁵ Naomi Ngo, interview.

the water and started swallowing water so I decided to not swallow anymore, so I just held my breath and I floated up[sic].”⁹⁶

Naomi’s memory of her brother mucking around with their own agenda and priorities for food or play differed than the concerns of the adults or woman who almost drowned trying to rescue him. Naomi even noticed this spirit of adventure amongst the other children. She observed this when they are denied refuge on an island and accepted onto a Navy boat for asylum. Naomi stated,

I remember we landed somewhere. I think now I know it is a Malaysian island. They did not accept us, we had to go away.

Then we came across US naval ship, and because my dad could speak English, he talked on behalf of whole boat and they took us on board.

There were other refugees [on board] and I remember there were kids. They had settled already, and they were running around. I was like, give me some time and I’ll know how to run around this ship.

As a kid, all I cared about was exploring and becoming the most experienced explorer.⁹⁷

Naomi was not unusual or alone in her sense of exploration and spirit of adventure in describing her memories of childhood during the journey and displacement. Like Nam and her brother, her sense of adventure and joys of childhood even extends to her arrival at the refugee camp.

Childhood in Refugee Camps

The following self-representation of childhood in the refugee camp further illuminates the sense of adventure and growing agency of children in the history transnational migration and childhood. Refugee camps are often depicted as sites of suffering, trauma, uncertainty, transition and loss. However, these narratives from Vietnamese child refugees indicate they were also sites of memory of a magical and adventuresome childhood.⁹⁸ For children that escaped with family, there was an awareness of their parents suffering and anxiety, but their own memories and experiences were of a freedom from that as well. Unaccompanied minors

⁹⁶ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁹⁷ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁹⁸ Linda Hitchcox. *Vietnamese Refugees in Southeast Asian Camps*.

found friendship with other minors and enjoyed a level of independence from their parents. With lighthearted acceptance of events that unfolded on her boat journey, Naomi's memory of life in the refugee camp negates the presumption that refugee camps are sites of suffering for children. In fact, Naomi described it as the best site of her childhood.

I remember praying to God every night to keep me six years old because on this island I was having the best time of my life[sic]. We had the jungle. We had the beach. Even though I was scared of swimming and stuff, we were playing games all day. It was the best childhood on that island.⁹⁹

In a similar vein, Hien recalled the view of the camp with the same romanticism as Naomi. She detailed the sight of the palm trees and remembers how helpful officials were. With an awareness of the history as an adult, she noted the year of their arrival and explained how these refugee camps had been set up for the oncoming exodus from Vietnam. She described the scene on the beach upon arrival.

I saw a lot of people on the beach looking for their relatives. When my dad laid down on the sand, he collapsed, 65 people, one woman was pregnant and had the child on the island[sic]. Our boat DN (Dang Nai) 66 had arrived. That was the registration on my first visa tag. When we got there, I even heard someone calling for my mum.¹⁰⁰

The boats that arrived at the refugee camp were registered with the number of people that survived and the port of their departure city in Vietnam. Hien recalled the fact that one of the survivors was pregnant which added to the number. She did not remember who was calling out for her mother, but the sense of recognition from someone that knew you from Vietnam must have been such a relief against the possible anonymity of death at sea. Hien goes on to detail the experience of processing in the refugee camps.

We were lucky and got into the temporary camp. Some were there for 2-3 years and waiting to transfer to the two islands, Pulau Bidong and Pulau Tengah.

We were transferred there overnight. They were living on thatch squares with very basic shelter and crowded conditions. They had cooking pots all set up, and we did not have anything. We did not have money to even buy these cooking utensils.

⁹⁹ Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹⁰⁰ Webb, interview.

We were told that tomorrow there will be people leaving the island, and they will give you things. However, we were the ones that got transferred. It was just our luck, transferred overnight.¹⁰¹

Like Hien, Naomi and Nam were among the fortunate children that made it to the refugee camps. Their direct memory narratives of life there inform the conception of transnational migratory childhood. Hien summarized her time there in the camps with fondness.

We were there for almost a year, Palawan in the Philippines. It was newish camp. We had to build huts and stuff. I remember going to toilet. That was big hole that was dug out. I remember that I loved it so much.¹⁰²

Nam also experienced the refugee camp as an adventure island. As an unaccompanied minor, he lived with other unaccompanied minors in the Au Co house (Children's House).

Many kids in the children's house, each room has responsibility – cooking, washing, then go to school to learn English, go beach, swim play, or church. At the height there were 24,000 people on the island, and in the children's house only a few hundred.¹⁰³

The level of attention and care including the companionship of other unaccompanied minors allowed Nam to develop his own independence and vision of a future.

In refugee camp, you are care free and you hang out with friend and at the beach each day and you are thinking the future is so bright because we have so many choices[sic].¹⁰⁴

Nam particularly remembers his teachers, one of which teaches them skills for outdoor exploration and survival.

One of the teachers was a homicide detective. He put us on physical program and I am thankful for that – 6am at the beach –exercise[sic]. The boys and girls do the same training which prepared us for exploring the island. Everyone of us made it through two trips.

We learned a lot of survival tips from him [such as] when you see clear water do not drink it. If you see something survive in it, then it is safe to drink. If you are lost, you follow stream to the highest point.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Webb, interview.

¹⁰² Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹⁰³ Huynh, interview.

¹⁰⁴ Huynh, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Huynh, interview.

Nam explained that learning survival and exploration skills from this teacher was a “highlight” of his childhood in the refugee camp. Bonding with the other refugees and unaccompanied minors sustained him through the loneliness and homesickness. Nam recalled,

When we landed it, two weeks later, we got aerogram to write home[sic]. This time, there is no going back. Missing Vietnam and home especially when listening to music[sic]. Everyone is afraid to say that they miss home. It is a massive thing and at that time there was no way you ever know if we could ever go home again[sic]. Vietnam was under embargo. There were no flights.¹⁰⁶

This homesickness was intense for unaccompanied minors. The minors only had each other as family and Nam treasured this kinship.

There was a lot of bonding with other refugee children. When you landed, for the first few days you learn everyone else’s story. There was one kid. I still remember his name. He went with his dad and when boat overturned, it killed his dad. That is why he was with us. He was 16. He got to France very quickly, within a month or so.¹⁰⁷

Nam recalled this person and shook his head in sadness reflecting upon the story during the course of the interview. He stated,

Some of stories were just horrible. You naturally share. If I never did this trip, I would not have met these people from different part of Vietnam, and you learn about them and their story[sic]. I got reconnected with a lot of people [from the camp] on Facebook.¹⁰⁸

In adulthood, Nam reconnects with refugees from the camp through the Facebook groups online. He never thought that this would have been possible then.

When we gone to third country, unless you know friend of a friend you could not find or connect with others. When we get here to Australia, there were letters. Then when we upgraded to emails. I wrote letters home to Vietnam, and I have letters in the camp.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Huynh, interview.

¹⁰⁷ Huynh, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Huynh, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Huynh, interview.

Through this sense of connection, Nam volunteered to become the administrator for two of the Facebook refugee sites. One group is for the alums of Pulau Bidong and the other group is for the unaccompanied minors in the Children's House.¹¹⁰ The refugee camp becomes a centralizing site of memory. Nam and thousands of refugees that Nam stay connected with these community group on Facebook. As discussed further in Chapter Seven, former refugees find and connect with each other as alums from specific refugee camps. The unaccompanied minors from the Children's House of Pulau Bidong have set up their own Facebook community site because life in the refugee camp remains central to their experience of childhood. Nam stated,

When I stayed in Bidong, I consider it part of childhood memories. It was big part of my life. In Australia, I was already a teenager."¹¹¹

Along with his memories of childhood in the refugee, Nam had drawings from when he is a child on the island and other historical artifacts of his life there. Nam shared with me his drawing entitled "The view from Pulau Bidong looking out – Feb 22 1989" (written in Vietnamese). He described it:

We are on Pulau Bidong looking at the other island. The island is circular shape and one flat area for the refugee housing[sic].

We named that island, "shark island," it looked like shark. That is zone F. People that arrived dead or died at the camp are buried there. We play there. There are ghost stories.

You have boat coming in, people or rocks and coconut trees that kill people when they drop 30/40 meters overhead[sic]. New boats arriving, one or two per day. They just land everywhere.¹¹²

The drawing captured the spirit of the life and perspective of a playful child in the refugee amongst the dead, dying, and arriving. The actual island is run down and in constant threat of deterioration. There is political suppression of the history from the Vietnamese government about why Vietnamese needed to leave after the Fall of Saigon. This contributes to pressure on the Malaysian government to not preserve the refugee camp. However, it is a major site of memory for many refugees and especially the children who so fondly remember their

¹¹⁰ "Âu Cơ Family, Pulau Bidong." Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/124884117597393/>; "Pulau Bidong Alumni." Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665>.

¹¹¹ Huynh, interview.

¹¹² Huynh, interview.

childhood there. Many Vietnamese refugees have returned to visit the site of the camp as discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In conclusion, these narratives of memories of his childhood in Vietnam, during displacement, migration and in the refugee camps are nuanced sites of memory. The oral histories featured in this chapter are children's self-representation of their experiences of childhood during migration. Escapes become a dynamic space where children develop their agency and sense of adventure. Childhood in the refugee camps becomes an extension of this growing agency and spirit of adventures in their accounts of memories of childhood. These self-representations of childhood during migration and in the refugee camps do not claim to represent the majority of children's experiences. However, they are evidence of experiences that diverge from the predominant narratives of suffering and traumas of migration as reported by adults. Furthermore, the nature of childhood as Vietnamese child migrants are displaced, migrating, or living in refugee camps is transnational. Their movements at sea, in international waters, or life in the camps are not a part of stable or nationalised sites of memory. In this regard, these narratives of memory and the following chapter about self-representation of childhood in resettlement expands our understanding of national and transnational histories of childhood and migration.

Chapter Four

Childhood in Australia

During the late 20th century, American, Canadian, and Australian Vietnamese child refugees (1.5 generation) started to publish English memoirs about their experience and history of migration.¹ There were already narratives from the first-generation Vietnamese adults written in Vietnamese, but not widely published for the English language audiences. After forty years of Vietnamese resettlement in Australia, memoirs of childhood and growing up in Australia emerged as Vietnamese child refugees gained greater access to education. The majority of Vietnamese child refugees were born after 1975 and came of age in the 1980's. In Australia, the published memoirs were nationalistic and positivistic portrayals of resilient children who wanted to honor their parents' lives, journey and sacrifices. There are few moments in them that critically cast their parents as anything less than heroic. Often the child's experience is subsumed in the history and memory of their parents. Given the opportunity to self-represent and voice their own memories and experiences as child refugees, memoirs and oral histories in this collection fill in the gap of knowledge about the Vietnamese refugee childhood in Australia. The following discussion integrates an analysis of two significant Vietnamese memoirs and the selections of oral histories collected to explore the major themes of childhood in Australia. These narratives of self-representation, agency, and self-determination in childhood include transitions, challenges at home and school, and growing up in a time when Australia formally adopted policies of multiculturalism.

Transitions

While Australia was transitioning towards becoming a multicultural society in the 1970s, Vietnamese child migrants were transitioning from the refugee camp to resettlement. For instance, Van Le and her family were experiencing life in transition through the migrant

¹ The majority of these works are published in America and Canada because there were more Vietnamese that resettled there than in Australia. There is listing of 49 Vietnamese American memoirs and the majority of the authors are of the 1.5 generation. The bibliography in this study has listed the few from Australia up to date. See "Listopia: Vietnamese- American Novels," Goodreads, accessed on 30 May 2019. https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/43494.Vietnamese_American_Novels_Memoirs.

hostels of Australia where multiculturalism entailed exposure to a very different culture and food. She stated,

I remember being in Mitcham at the hospital, near Springvale. I remember having a difficult time with food. I hated breakfast. I was not used to cereal and the milk.

I remember occasionally, we would walk down to Springvale and get some instant noodles, the green and white packet – the onion flavour[sic]. If we did not want to have breakfast, we would sneak home and have instant noodles for breakfast.

I remember just hating breakfast, cornflakes and milk. I remember getting sick.²

The foreignness of the food in the hostels and their homesickness for instant noodles were indicative of an Australian culture that was not anticipating differences in cultural tastes and preferences. Van also remembered the different cultures living in the hostel in Mitcham and transitioning to primary schools in Blackburn and then Richmond.

There weren't a lot of Asians then [in Blackburn]. There was another two token Asians in the class. Then us (long pause). When I went to Richmond Primary, there was a guy from the Phillipines, but his dad was Australian. There were other Asians, but 85 or 90 percent were Caucasian with a mixture of Greek.³

For Van, those early years in transitional housing solidified their identity as transient refugees. Life in the hostel and their humble beginnings created a new origin narrative about where they were coming from as Vietnamese refugees. Van stated,

Years later, we [went] back to that hostel, and by then it the next immigrants that have come, Southeast Asian people[sic]. I just wanted to check out where we came from. There were no Vietnamese there. It was just the next wave, and [I thought] we kind of made it. We have made it. We have jobs and we have a place. We were not refugee as such, we were citizens.⁴

Implicit in this statement about the transition from refugee to citizens are markers of establishing life as Australian: securing a home, work and departure from transitional housing. Van explicitly identifies as a refugee during her childhood in Australia, whereas, Hien, another child refugee that migrated with her family, did not identify as a refugee during those early years in Australia. Hien stated,

² Le, interview.

³ Le, interview.

⁴ Le, interview.

We did not talk about it (being refugees or multiculturalism) at all. We were so busy with survival issues, learning English and never get to talk about it at all because I was the minority even though I was not the only refugee in my high school[sic]. Most were second generation Italians and Greeks and there were some Polish. They did not talk about it and I did not talk about it.⁵

Like Van, Hien attended a school that included other refugee children from Eastern Europe. Their experience was not openly discussed because multiculturalism meant assimilation and not recognizing their difference. Hien, however, was aware of the differences in class, and felt inferior even amongst other newly arrived immigrants.

I felt a little bit inferior. They had nice clothes, car and nice house. We were living in a government flat. We were very happy, but other kids had afterschool dancing and singing lessons. I felt inferior.⁶

Naomi, another refugee child that transitioned through the commission flats, struggled with the early years of adjustment to life in Australia. Movement in response to parent's jobs prospects and living in transitional housing created a sense of instability and loss of childhood. Naomi stated,

When we landed, we were taken to the midway hostel which is in Maribonong...I think we were there for almost 6 months then we moved out to a cousin's place. She married an Australian. She had a place in North Carlton, so we moved in with her. Then my parents moved into a private rental, and then moved to Brunswick.⁷

When asked about these moves, and what Naomi noticed as a child about her parent's situation or troubles, Naomi replied,

I was aware of their struggles then. It was not like the refugee camps at all. There was more anxiety, but it was because we experienced poverty. That is what made me more aware, because we did not have clothes[sic]. My parents were working in the factories, we got visited several times by charitable organisations. They mainly gave us Christmas presents. We were children. It was a lot of my parents working, and us being alone on our own[sic].⁸

⁵ Webb, interview.

⁶ Webb, interview.

⁷ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁸ Naomi Ngo, interview.

Naomi differentiates the experience of her early childhood in transitional housing from her more idyllic experience and memories of childhood in the refugee camps. As Naomi's parents struggled to create a livelihood, Naomi experienced a greater compromise of her agency and self-determination as a child because she had to take care of her siblings, work the Milk Bar, and becoming a contributor to the economic wellbeing of her family. While her parents worked in the factories, Naomi acquired new responsibility of taking care of her brothers.

My dad was working for a sticky tape company. My mother was working for a stocking making factory. We got stability with housing when we got housing commission flats, which I hated, but we were there for a decent period of time[sic].⁹

While it can be argued that children providing childcare for their siblings is a type of agency in support of the family economically, Naomi did not feel particularly safe nor enjoyed childhood in the commission flats. She talks about how she had to mind her brothers and her growing concerns for the family's safety.

It was a stable 3-4 years. That area was really rough at the time. I hated it and it was unsafe. My parents would go to work, and we were alone taking care of ourselves. I would take my brothers downstairs to play. We would get wierdos following us, flashing at us, staring at us, but I still took my brothers downstairs to play[sic].¹⁰

Naomi started to develop very adult concerns as the eldest child taking care of her siblings. She was then even concerned for her mother's safety coming home at night to the commission flats.

Mum did afternoon shift work and that worried me to death because I heard about how women got raped around the housing commission complex[sic]. I remember praying every night that she would get home safely, and eventually my mother noticed this milk bar near where she worked and it was for sale, so she and my dad bought it and so we moved[sic].¹¹

Naomi was preoccupied with safety for her mother and themselves in the commission flats. The transition to the milk bar was one move towards stability, though there were so many moves that had impact on her childhood. She stated,

⁹ Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹⁰ Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹¹ Naomi Ngo, interview.

That was the one traumatic thing about my childhood, that I had to move schools all the time. I remember counting that I had to move schools seven time, yeah, because my parents had to move places because of work[sic].

It was disruptive because you know it is hard work making friends, and then having good friends[sic]. Then having to move, you know, I just wanted to have that stability. I was really desperate for it as a kid because I found that I was constantly uprooted and having to reinvent myself in an environment that I wanted to do well which was school[sic].¹²

While moving disrupted school life, Naomi found that school was a place that she could do well. She considered it an escape from the difficulties of childhood in transition. She stated,

School was where I would escape poverty and a hard life in Australia - so them making us move all the time, for me I remember crying so much[sic]. I did cry to my parents one time, but because I understood at the time, I just cried to myself most of the time[sic]. I just hated moving schools.¹³

Memories of crying as a child in response to early adjustment periods was a common response about early childhood in transition. Alisha Fernando, who arrived in Australia with at the age of two, has been told stories about her crying during those early years in transition.

We arrived in Tassy [Tasmania] in early 1983 and lived in a hostel. I remember that mum was an accountant by trade and dad worked in computer science. I was suffering from PTSD and did not know it then. Mum tried to go back to school for accounting. I would cry and hit my head against the door and could not be left at childcare[sic].¹⁴

When Alisha says she remembered that she suffered from PTSD or separation anxiety, it is an augmentation of facts that appear in her self-representation as a refugee adult. As a young child, she developed a very close relationship with Neville, a volunteer that assisted the family when they were starting out in the hostels of Tasmania. Alisha stated,

We were very lucky there was a gentleman that took our family under his wing, taught us things such as going to supermarket. He taught us what we could or could not eat, and how to go to Vinny and put our names in for furniture[sic]. He taught mum to drive. He spent time speaking to me because I was not in childcare. I learned English. I attribute my English skills being surrounded with his family – surrounded in English[sic].¹⁵

¹² Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹³ Naomi Ngo, interview.

¹⁴ Alisha Fernando interviewed 30 October 2017.

¹⁵ Fernando, interview.

For Alisha, early childhood was at home absorbing culture and English language with a volunteer that assisted them in resettlement. Home became a learning space. For Naomi, home was a place where she had to provide childcare, and school was where she could enact her agency and self-determination. Poverty was the underlying force that caused the transition and instability in both of their childhood. However, home and school become significant sites of memory and experiences in childhood for Vietnamese child refugees to enact their own agency and self-determination.

Home

In the history of childhood and migration, home features as the primary focus for attaining stability in resettlement and enacting agency and self-determination as immigrants. For Vietnamese child refugees, establishing a home in Australia becomes an iconic aspiration. Cat describes the charged feelings about establishing a home in her narrative of acquisition and loss of their first home in Australia.

After several years of sewing garments, day and night factory shifts, my Vietnamese parents had saved enough for a deposit on a house. I loved our five years there. The house represented our piece of the Australian dream. There is a photo of us all standing out the front: my mother and father, Hai and my uncle, the poet, Van and I.¹⁶

For Cat, establishing a home was fused with the national agenda of becoming Australian. It also meant a secure place for childhood.

In 1990, we lost our beloved house. The FOR SALE sign came and went... There were to be no more Monkey Magic games. No more handful of the first fruits of the season... Our slice of the Australian dream was shattered... My family and I would become nomadic squatters destined to borrow a piece of someone else's dream in someone else's play.¹⁷

The loss of the home signifies an end to childhood games, a return to nomadic life, and departure from the Australian dream. Anh Do described a similar loss and conflation of nationalism in establishing a home in Australia. They lost a livestock of the ducks raised on farm feed from dodgy seller, "the property bubble burst. It was 1989, interest rates hit

¹⁶ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 64.

¹⁷ Ibid, 88.

eighteen per cent, and the farm was sold for a loss.”¹⁸ With the loss of farm and home, their center for family culture and stability of childhood was threatened. Cat described how the home was a shelter for their Vietnamese culture.

As we settled into our own glimpse of Australian dream, my parents still carried their old home with them in their mouths – from conversation to cuisine. Inside the house, we spoke, ate and lived Vietnamese.¹⁹

For some Vietnamese child refugees, the home is not just a base for Vietnamese food and culture. It is also the center of their work life. Their childhood included working in the house, a place to enact their agency and self-determination.

Refugee Children Working at Home

For Vietnamese child refugees, working at home to help their parents was an enactment of agency and self-determination that shaped their childhood memories and experience in Australia. Cat Thao described the challenges of her mother finding work and establishing work in their home life.

I remember her leaving to go to work for the first time. I was left in the care of our neighbor, the young aunt. I don’t know how I knew she was leaving, but I sense that raw moment of initial separation from my mother....

As it turned out, though, my mother would not work outside the home for very long. Common with most Vietnamese refugee mothers, she would spend the next twenty years as an outworker operating a sweatshop in one of our rooms.²⁰

Sewing at home for sweatshops was common amongst Vietnamese refugees. The ability to work from home and to be with their children proved sustainable. In self-representations of childhood as refugees, the children noted their agency and contribution to this home work environment. Cat described how the sewing machinery became a part of the family.

Two years later when I turned six, Van and I resumed our positions, this time in front of the Singer sewing machine.

¹⁸ Do, *The Happiest Refugee*, 61.

¹⁹ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 88.

²⁰ Ibid, 50-51.

Often I would come home from school, whether it was second grade or seventh, and help my mother unstitch hundreds of incorrectly sewn garments....She would work late into the night.²¹

The sewing work with her mother becomes a part of Cat's home life. It is a matter of fact consequence of the shared struggle for a livelihood that Vietnamese child refugees take on voluntarily. The fusion home and work life proved seamless. Cat described how the sound of the machinery becomes a part of her childhood.

I would always fall asleep to the regular sound of my mother sewing...The tune of the sewing machines, like the regularity of rust and rain, became the lullaby of my childhood. Delivery-day deadlines became the milestones upon which each week was measured.²²

Like Cat, Anh Do also worked as a child at the age of seven to help his parents with their home sewing business, "To this day I am still an absolute gun at hemming, overlooking and buttonholing."²³ Anh Do describes how his parents integrated work with home. He explained the freedom and command they had over their immigrant status outside of the mainstream work culture.

Mum and dad discovered that working from home meant they didn't have to knock off at 6 p.m. They could keep going, and the harder they worked, the more money they made. All of a sudden their destiny was in their own hands. Dad left the job at the factory and starting making clothes with Mum.²⁴

Anh Do's positivism about work at home does not account for all the hours they worked. He writes in retrospect, "My parents and their siblings worked and worked. I look back now and the hours they did were absolutely ludicrous."²⁵ There was, however, a level of freedom and self-determination that Anh admired about his parents working at home and running their own sewing business.

He knew they were being paid peanuts by their employer, so they went to the source and got the work direct from the big wholesaler. Soon we had three uncles, four aunts and several distant cousins helping out, and we were running our own business.²⁶

²¹ Ibid, 52-53.

²² Ibid, 54.

²³ Do, *The Happiest Refugee*, 36.

²⁴ Do, 37.

²⁵ Do, 38.

Vietnamese refugee children's contribution to their parents work and struggle for livelihood was a natural consequence of immigrant poverty. There was also additional economic pressure on the parents to send money to support family in Vietnam. Cat wrote,

It was 1984. We had been in Australia for four years but we still didn't have enough money for a telephone because the monthly landline fees were very high. Every single surplus dollar was sent back to nourish our relatives in Vietnam.²⁷

In addition to working for an Australian livelihood, families ventured into business that involved the transfer of money back to Vietnam, money lending syndicates. Cat explained,

My parents started a money-lending syndicate...Funds are pooled together and loans are given out each month. A \$500 syndicate of twenty people would yield a potential monthly loan pool of \$10,000 with differing interest rates each month.

It was simple: everybody would secretly write down the interest they were willing to pay on the loan if they were granted it at that month's meeting...The person willing to pay the highest interest...would be granted it that month. As organisers of the syndicate, my parents could use the pool of loan funds interest-free.²⁸

To secure their livelihood in Australia and send back money to Vietnam, Vietnamese parents also took on additional business opportunities. Cat's parents bought a business and expanded their sewing operations at home.

My parents continued to work hard and their thrifty lifestyle enabled them to accumulate some money. They found a small business for sale: a shop selling newspapers and magazines. My parents decided to build another house in the backyard in order to set up a larger garment making operation with more machines employing more Vietnamese mothers.²⁹

Like Cat's family, Naomi's family ran an additional side business to support the family in Vietnam. Naomi explained what she remembered about how it worked as a type of import and export business.

My mum would buy these goods, send it to my auntie. Then my auntie would sell it then use the money to give to relatives of people over there who used my mum to

²⁶ Do, 39.

²⁷ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 61.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 62.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 62-63.

transfer money. At the time, Vietnam was not open to the world, so that is how my mum did it – use the money that people gave [transferred through her to their relatives] to buy goods. She would have a conversion rate. That is how she was able to make money out of that, and so did my auntie. My aunties would make a profit to support my extended family in Vietnam.³⁰

As the demands of additional business and work took over the life of the family, Vietnamese refugee children took over the role as parents for their younger siblings. Cat recalled the day her younger brother Vinh was born and how she took over his upbringing.

As my parents busied themselves on factory floors, sitting at sewing machines, making care packages and struggle to keep us in Catholic schools. I would attend to Vinh.³¹

From the age of nine until her brother graduated from high school, Cat, like other elder refugee children, exercised her agency to care for her younger brother. Proficient with the English language and the Australian school system, Cat took on the parental roles outside the home as well. She described her relationship with the school and teachers for Vinh.

I met all his teachers from primary to high school; in all his years of schooling, I missed only one parent-teacher meeting. I discussed his academic progress with his teachers and areas in which he could do better, translating for my parents when they were able to come to the meetings too.³²

As adults looking back on their Vietnamese childhood in the Australian context, there appeared to be a loss or end to childhood with the weight of responsibilities in the home. Cat expressed this in terms of solemnity that sets in as a young person trying to take on the caretaker role for her brother.

Vinh was attached to my mother as I was at his age. When Vinh realized that my mother had left he began to cry. There was nothing I could do to stop him. It was an excruciating feeling. Helplessness engulfed me like a toxic gas....Feelings of infinite desperation unraveled and wrapped themselves around my eleven-year-old body while Vinh's screeching cries continued to deafen my small ears. When my parents eventually returned, the solemnity of adulthood had already seized me. It took away my freedom to play, to wonder. It would be years before the solemnity would let go.³³

³⁰ Naomi Ngo, interview.

³¹ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 77.

³² *Ibid*, 78.

³³ *Ibid*.

As Cat expressed this loss of childhood wonder and play in her memoir, Naomi shared similar feelings about the end of childhood in resettlement. Naomi was in Grade six when she started to help her parents run the milk bar. She worked for them at that Milk Bar for the next six years.

They kept it until my dad passed away from cancer. They bought it when I was in Grade six until the end of year eleven. That was the worse, I thought that was the worse time of my life. We couldn't do anything as a family. I had to work for them. Afterschool I had to work in the milk bar so that my mom could make dinner and my dad was not much of a seller, but they were doing some other stuff as well[sic].³⁴

Naomi considered those high school years as the worst years as a family. The stability of owning a home and a business deprived them of time to do anything other than work. Her parents also got involved in a variety of other business ventures to make money for the family back in Vietnam.

They got involved in purchasing a couple properties. Interest rates were really high at the time. They had to sew as well. I was looking after the milk bar, and I did not like that I did not have any freedom.³⁵

Living and working the milk bar signaled the end of childhood. Naomi stated,

I couldn't play, I couldn't go out. We could never sit down to a meal as a family because one of us had to look after the bar. It would be my mother after she was finished cooking. We would go eat, then she would go look after the milk bar. We would never go out as a family because it was seven days a week, 7am to 9pm, everyday. When we had a public holiday, we had to close it. Then we could go out as a family.³⁶

Rituals of family life were compromised for work, and Naomi took on more responsibility as the eldest child. She recalled how unfair the distribution of labour was with her younger brothers along strict gender lines.

I would come home, take out my homework and did my homework while I was selling, but my brother had a good time[sic]. He was able to go out, because there was already me selling[sic]. Then on weekends or school holidays, they would let me take

³⁴ Naomi Ngo, interview.

³⁵ Naomi Ngo, interview.

³⁶ Naomi Ngo, interview.

care of the milk bar *and* my two brothers while they (her parents) went out to buy fabrics to send to Vietnam.³⁷

Naomi felt an unfair burden in childhood in having to take care of the milk bar and her brothers. These demands reshaped her thinking about childhood in Australia. Naomi noted this as a significant change from her childhood in the refugee camp. Naomi stated,

I see childhood as a time of innocence, play and fun, and that was played out sort of speak at the refugee camp[sic]. I began to lose my childhood when we started living at the housing commission flats. I was able to play quite a bit, but I was no longer naïve at that point. I was a lot more cluey, and almost had to be like a parent supervising my brothers.³⁸

For Naomi, the end of childhood was in resettlement. The conflation of home and work life proved common amongst Vietnamese refugee families as noted in these memoirs and oral histories. Their exercise of agency in becoming caretakers and assistants in the family businesses shaped their childhood in Australia. School also becomes a site of memory where Vietnamese child refugees could exercise greater agency and self-determination.

School

School for Vietnamese refugee children became a shelter from the responsibilities of work and home life. It was a place where they could exercise their growing independence and agency in cultural adaptation. Memories and experiences of school included different interactions with the challenges. Naomi particularly liked high school. It was a place where she could have her own life and independence from working in the milk bar and taking care of her brothers. Doing well in school became the motivating force of her coming of age and development in Australia. Naomi stated,

I was really keen to acquire the language as quickly as possible so that I could do everything that the other kids did.

I remember when we were at school and they had the alphabet on the walls, words, because my English wasn't as good[sic]. I remember I was self-taught.

I would teach myself to memorise all the alphabet and the words and everything like that so my English would improve[sic]. I remember watching a lot of TV so then I

³⁷ Naomi Ngo, interview.

³⁸ Naomi Ngo, interview.

could understand more because I was very competitive. I wanted to be as good or even better.³⁹

Naomi's internal drive to succeed at school was an expression of desire to assimilate. Hien also spoke about the pressure of becoming a success to evidence her ability to assimilate.

We all had to do well, as in becoming Pharmacists and doctors, and now again they changed after we educated them about success *[sic]*. It is not all about how much money you earn. It's about you doing the best that you do, following your passion and interest and that means success, instead of following other people's notions of success *[sic]*.⁴⁰

When asked about this pressure to succeed and how she coped with it, Hien stated, "I was in my dark place in my twenties, early twenties." She felt the pressure from her peers and her parents. Science did not appear to be a good enough choice in terms of career. Hien explained,

It was good enough for me, but it was not in my mum's eyes and my dad. They were at some stage with their friends whose kids were doing so well, but the good thing was that they let go of that expectation. Because they let go of that expectation, my sister she did really, really well without that pressure. She ended up in pharmacy, and that allowed my other sisters to follow her passion.⁴¹

Hien explained further that her parents had these notions of success because of their peers. These notions changed over the years. She mentions how her parents recently advised her sister about raising her children.

My dad said, "Just let them follow their passion because when they follow their passion, they will be successful." I could not believe that came out of my dad's mouth. It shows how much he has changed and how he has shifted a lot.⁴²

The pressure to succeed academically and economically is reinforced amongst Vietnamese parents and children even for the second generation. These expectations take many forms. As Khai expressed, his parents had no expectations for him, however, he knew that he had to do well even without their guidance.

They did not push me to study. Not my mum and dad. They sent me to a good school, but whatever I do was up to me. They did not know what I did most of the time.

³⁹ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁴⁰ Webb, interview.

⁴¹ Webb, interview.

⁴² Webb, interview

When I got into Uni (university), They were like, ‘Great. You got into Uni. We’ll get you a car.’

Khai’s parents did not have expectations about his studies, however, he recalled wanting to go into architecture. This was not a traditional or known choice of professions in his family. He felt that they did not provide support of these choices or interests, though he does not blame them for their ignorance. He stated,

If I was pushed a little more or had mental support, I cannot blame them[sic]. They gave me time to study and if I needed a tutor, I did not know what I need[sic]. I was working as well. They have done enough to help me.

Khai appreciated his parents support of his livelihood, and stated how he would raise his own child differently. In contrast, he supports her interests even if they are non-traditional career pathways.

If my daughter likes drama, if she likes certain things, we push her to try it[sic]. She liked piano, and then we let her try, and now she does not like it[sic]. For instance, music, I did not get to do music, it would open more brain.

Khai was self-determined to succeed, however, he also had significant responsibility to his family and the family sewing business while pursuing his education.

In 1984, they had my youngest brother on arrival and because I was older, I took care of my younger brother[sic]. I was really close to him. My brother is now working for my mum. I was working with her after Uni, and she was not happy that I would not continue the family business[sic] – when she went out to have her own [clothing] label. I helped her to set up and then went out [of the family business] again.

Khai was self-determined to be successful in Australian life and work culture, but there was pressure on him to continue the family business. He considered himself to be more independent than his siblings who are still working and living with his parents. This would not have been possible without his education. Like Khai and Naomi, Cat further explained the pressure and the value placed on education for Vietnamese refugee children,

With our baptisms came my parents’ relentless determination to school their children at expensive Catholic schools. Like their parents before them, our parents had firm believes in the value of education. They were determined that we would go to good schools, no matter what the cost. Jesus would help us.⁴³

⁴³ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 63.

With the help of scholarships and frugality of their parents' lifestyles, Cat like other refugee children were the beneficiaries of a private school education. However, the disparities of social economics became quite transparent.

Like most girls from St Jerome's, I went onto MacKillop Girls High School in Lakemba, right next door to St John's Boys high school... Sometimes I would get a lift with Karissa in her mother's Mercedes.... The contrast of our families socioeconomic status embarrassed me.

When I joined Bethany College, I was the only student of Vietnamese origin in my grade. It was another all girls Catholic school but most of the families were far more affluent than those back at MacKillop.⁴⁴

Given these economic disparities, Cat describes motivation and drive to succeed in school through extra efforts, "At MacKillop, I was a diligent student. I stayed up all night to memorise textbooks."⁴⁵ Compounding their efforts with family expectations about the importance of education fueled her ambition to succeed at school. Cat wrote,

When I received ninety-nine per cent in a maths exam, my father asked me why I didn't get a hundred. When I came second in Vietnamese, he asked why I didn't come first, despite coming first in all the other subjects.

It was kind of tough love that confused children growing up in a western society, where television parents regularly give unconditional hugs and tell their children, 'I love you'. Or where parents say 'as long as you do your best'. Ludicrous. How can mediocrity ever be okay?

I was raised with the typical academic expectations of Asian children as reported on tabloid current affairs shows and caricatured by my fellow Australians on the ABC. But I didn't play the violin or piano; we couldn't afford the lessons.⁴⁶

For Vietnamese, what is stereotypically seen as an Asian drive for success in school has an underlying shame rooted in the social economic disparity and poverty as refugees. Cat describes this in a memory of entering a public speaking competition when she is sixteen. When her first-year coordinator inquired as to why she is staying late at the library and whether she is okay, Cat

⁴⁴ Ibid, 112, 128.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 120.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 120, 123.

mumbled something about the refugee life, about wanting to make my parents happy, about being helpless, about the absolute imperative to win. To win would be visible victory, it would in some park make the endless sewing and factory shift worth it....To win the competition, to redeem all the pain and suffer of my family, to heal us.

The loss that day would haunt me for some time to come. There was nothing anyone could do to sooth me. The idea that I could be so close, but not good enough embedded itself in me. I never participated in public-speaking or debating completion again.⁴⁷

Anh Do has a similar memory of humiliation and pressure to succeed at public speaking when he decided to run for school captain in year five. In learning English as a second language, he confessed to struggle with a thick Vietnamese accent throughout primary school. Despite his challenges with the English language, he sets forth to give a public speech to become class captain. The speech does not go as well as planned.

Everyone started laughing. The worst thing was when I looked down, I even saw teachers laughing. I looked across at my own teacher and she wasn't laughing, but I could see her trying not to laugh!⁴⁸

The irony is that Cat later becomes a lawyer mastering the language of persuasion and Anh becomes a comedian. For both Cat and Anh, their fathers played significant roles in developing their resilience in the face of defeat. Anh's father responded to his defeat with a celebration. Anh wrote about his father witnessing his failed speech.

There was no change in his demeanor, he was just as exuberant. Maybe he knew it was always going to be a long shot. I'll never know, but he called up everyone to celebrate anyways. We went out for yum cha and it was one of the biggest celebrations I can remember in my childhood."⁴⁹

Cat's father instilled in her resilience from his own difficulties with speaking up for himself in the face of cultural prejudice and humiliation. One day, her father came home from work and told Cat about the racism he experienced at work. A fellow worker had tried to sabotage the machine that her father worked on. Her father exploded "like a crazed rabid animal" and had taken up a rod and tried to attack the culprit. She explained the source of the rage and silence with her father's sense of humiliation and refugee past in the re-education camps.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 134-135, 138.

⁴⁸ Do, *The Happiest Refugee*, 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

My father never told me what happened to him in the re-education camps,...And now he was just another mute migrant. Anger, fear, resentment, pity, terror and sadness rolled over him like waves.

He dropped the rod along with the last remnants of his pride. My teenage heart was breaking into tiny bits of pulp as he recounted the story. Then he looked at me and said, 'In this country I have a mouth to eat with but I don't have a mouth to speak with. You are my voice.'⁵⁰

This moment became significant in her decision to become a lawyer. Cat wrote,

That day marked a turning point for me. I saw my future. There would be many others just like my father who needed a voice to speak for them. They needed access to justice and representation.

That day I vowed I would do whatever I could to be worthy of being my parent's daughter, a daughter to this family – a family that was surviving.⁵¹

Success for Cat was not just about survival but an accounting for the efforts and suffering of her parents in the past. The conception of success at school and career is not for the individual as it is for the family. Given her history as refugee children, Cat described the notion of success from refugee childhood perspective.

I was driven by a fierce need to succeed; success in the Higher School Certificate was a way for me to garner pride and respect for my family among both other Vietnamese families and Australian society at large.⁵²

Success at school and cultural assimilation remains at the center of these memories and experiences of refugee childhood. In the final chapter of her memoir, entitled "Arrival," Cat is graduating from law school. Entering the profession marks the culmination of resilience in the face of a difficult journey for herself and her family.

I saw myself an overgrown child in the middle of this prestigious court – an emblem of achievement, arbitrator of truth. The sea of faces, young and old, was awash with respect inside this honourable chamber. *I am here.*⁵³

⁵⁰ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 145.

⁵¹ Ibid, 146.

⁵² Ibid, 161.

⁵³ Ibid, 263.

Cat attributed the success to her parents and in response to a past as a refugee child from Vietnam.

I look over at my parents with their constant terrible memories hovering just beneath their skin; I thought of landmines, of wet footprints in Cambodian jungles, of sewing machines, steel-capped boots, boxes of vegetables from wholesale markets and unpaid bills.⁵⁴

The sense of arrival is the mark of successful assimilation into an established Australian profession. Cat and her family's resilience became a part of their narrative of success in resettlement.

It had been a long and turbulent journey. The three of us held each other awkwardly. It was a rare moment of physical affection that I relished....As my mother finally pulled away, she squeezed my hand. She softly smiled through her tears as the staff ushered us towards the lifts. *We are here.*⁵⁵

While Cat and other Vietnamese refugee children flourished in school and assimilation, other refugee children found it challenging and difficult in less diverse communities. Alisha explained,

When I came to Melbourne, I did not see myself any different than anyone else. Until grade 5. I grew up in Footscray and Yarraville. Teachers were supportive. I was in ESL (English as a Second language class) when I started school. They were very accommodating and supportive and helped me to assimilate.⁵⁶

Alisha's early primary school years were in Footscray and Yarraville where there were other Vietnamese and newly arrived immigrants. Both towns were more multicultural than where her family settled in Werribee. She recalled,

When we moved to Werribee, I was one in less than handful of Asian kids. It was my first real situation of being different in grade 4 or 5. A kid said, "You should go back to where you came from." I was Australian. I was taken aback, and then confronted with the fact that I was different. I did not address it and never talked about school with my parents.

School proved challenging and formative for Alisha and her developing agency. She learned to negotiate her identity and adapt to expectations at home and at school.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 264.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 263.

⁵⁶ Fernando, interview.

At school, I was an Aussie kid. At home, I was a Vietnamese child. At home, I always respected elders and never talk and never challenged them – this was drummed into me. At school, I was taught to speak up, challenge. It was black and white upbringing outside and inside the home and at home[sic]. At time it was jarring and confusing. I got in trouble with mum when I talked back.⁵⁷

Alisha's transcultural childhood included this movement from home to school and negotiating who and what to be in those spaces. There were nationalised expectations of her behaviour and identity in each sphere. In terms of cultural and social expectation, home was a territory of Vietnam and school was Australian. This produced some conflicts for Alisha as she became truant.

I was confused and up until the first year of Uni (university). In high school, I was rebellious wagging school. One my teachers told me that she could not write the report about me because, 'I do not know who you are.'⁵⁸

When asked why and what she did when wagging school, Alisha stated,

Because I was one of three students who happened to be Vietnamese in my year level, and I did not feel I fit in with them[sic]. They were quite Asian. I wanted to hang out with Non-Asians and Caucasians, the wogs and Europeans. They wanted to just hang out with themselves. I was very lost and did not feel I belonged. I looked like one group but did not identify with them. Those whom I did identify with, they did not want have a bar of it.⁵⁹

While primary school in more multicultural towns worked for Alisha, she did not do as well in Werribee. She wagged school to hang out with others in the city. She would hang out with other students from "other schools that were more multicultural." They would "hang out – catch train into the city and spend time Flinders and Russel Street." Alisha explained her sense of displacement and truancy.

The high school was not a good one and being smart you would be bullied and called a geek[sic]. I was really bored and grasped things easily and year 10 did not go to school at all and that did not work out for me[sic]. I did not do good at school and really had to knuckle down for VCE. I did alright with VCE, good enough to get into Monash University which was surprising.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Fernando, interview.

⁵⁸ Fernando, interview.

⁵⁹ Fernando, interview.

⁶⁰ Fernando, interview.

Growing up in Australia and having a certain ease of adaptive and social intelligence, Alisha managed to get to university. It was central to her success that she be with others in more multicultural university.

The summer before Uni, I decided I was an adult then. My parents said you finish year 12 and we'll be off your back, and up until then they were strict [*sic*]. Tutors afterschool every night – 7days – maths and English on a Sunday and studying like a crazy woman [*sic*].⁶¹

Alisha did later excel at school to enter university where she found a greater sense of independence and belonging. She stated,

In Uni (university), there was a sense of being my own person and a grown up. I found people just like me. There was a big Asian study body there. Asians that played footy and finally these are my people and I could completely assimilate.⁶²

When asked what she meant by assimilate, Alisha clarified, “I use it in a sense – fit in and become likes others – as in whatever group you in.”⁶³ Her cultural adaptivity becomes a major asset as she went on to work in diversity and social inclusion in ANZ Bank and then the University of Melbourne. She reflects on her identity as a refugee with pride.

I am proud and get to speak to students at high school as a proud Vietnamese Refugee Australian. I am very conscious about the order. Vietnamese person, I am refugee and come to Australia and that is the order that I talk about myself to acknowledge my heritage[*sic*].⁶⁴

Alisha's pride as a refugee shows a progression in level of agency and self-determination she acquired through childhood. She expressed this pride and acknowledged the resilience involved in forging this identity when she did not initially identify as a refugee.⁶⁵ Embedded in these narratives of self-representation in memoir and oral histories of childhood is an underlying idealisation of an Australian childhood.

⁶¹ Fernando, interview.

⁶² Fernando, interview.

⁶³ Fernando, interview.

⁶⁴ Fernando, interview.

⁶⁵ Fernando, interview.

Idealisation of Australian Childhood

Vietnamese refugee children idealised what is imagined as an Australian childhood from depictions on television. Naomi explained how Australian television really shaped the sense of a normative life and her idealisation of childhood.

When we sold the milk bar, and moved to a house in Brunswick, it was near the park[sic]. I was so happy. I was so happy even though my dad was dying. I was so happy. It was an escape from the milk bar. I no longer had to work in a milk bar, that we could have a normal life[sic].

I even got myself a part time job to earn money. I found I was living a normal life, almost normal. We were doing things as a family. Although we did not go out as a family because my father was dying, at least we had a meal as a family[sic]. All those things mattered to me, having a home, doing family things.

I guess that was all shaped through watching Australian television. I was so happy that I was normal.⁶⁶

The Australian television was the most accessible form of cultural cues for immigrant children. The ideal Australian childhood included the sacredness of having a home, freedom from having to work as a child, freedom from adult concerns about livelihood, the right to play and commune as a family, and parents who were also caretakers of their children instead of children assuming the responsibilities of caretaking for their siblings. Television provided access to popular Australian culture and icons that informed this idealised childhood. As evidenced in Cat's enthusiasm to meet her new baby brother in the hospital, she decorated his incubator with her drawings of him as a superhero from Australian television. She wrote,

As I entered the hospital with my mother to visit Vinh a few weeks after her was born, I held onto the huge drawing I had made which was to be hung from Vinh's incubator. It was of Vinh as a superhero with a V stamped on a crest emblazoned across his chest.⁶⁷

The idealisation of an Australian childhood is also highlighted in the myths and traditions of childhood such as the tooth fairy. Cat wrote,

⁶⁶ Naomi Ngo, interview.

⁶⁷ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 76.

When my first tooth began to wobble, I became excited at the prospect of being visited by the tooth fairy. I wondered whether her fluttering would sound like a mosquito near my ear.

In the morning, I looked underneath the pillow. The tooth was still there. Maybe the tooth fairy had forgotten. Or maybe she hadn't come because I wasn't white. On television, the kids that were visited by the tooth fairy were white with white parents.⁶⁸

Cat is aware of the traditions of childhood in Australia and expressed a desire for those experiences in the Vietnamese home. However, the rituals of an idealised childhood are expressed in great variation for refugee children. Like any child, Cat has pets. In fact, she has seven cats during her childhood. Cat wrote, "We had seven cats. They kept breeding. We had no idea about desexing." Furthermore, even the iconic memories of cartoons or shows that Australian children obsess over are tinged with that sense of difference. Cat noted the plot of her favorite cartoon during the times,

Monkey Magic was a TV series on the ABC based on the sixteenth-century Chinese novel Journey to the West and featured a monk, a pig monster obsessed with lust and gluttony, a water monster who was a reforming cannibal and a magic money. Together they went on a pilgrimage to fetch the Holy Scriptures, battling demons and monsters along the way.⁶⁹

The Asian cultural appeal of this Japanese cartoon dubbed with Australian English illustrated the influence of Australian television on refugee children's memories and idealization of Australian childhood. However, the projected normal childhood on Australian television did not account for the complexities of growing up in a Multicultural Australia.

Complexities of Growing up in Multicultural Australia

The memoirs and oral histories of Vietnamese refugee childhoods in Australia highlights the tension of growing up in a period when multicultural policy was constantly changing. As refugees in a settler nation, there is a tension about refugee belonging in an indigenous and migrant nation. Anh Do described a confrontation in history class which illustrates these complexities, and the level of agency he and his peers enact in response.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 67.

I'm pleased to say I never once suffered any racism at school from mates or fellow students. My only experience of something odd in relation to my nationality came from one of my teachers – a history teacher.

The history teacher creates a lesson that transposed the racism against Aboriginal people and Chinese immigrant labours, and to the influx of Vietnamese refugees in Australia.

The first lesson we had with him he held up a dark folder and described its colour as 'boong black', and the kids laughed. At the time I knew boong was a derogatory term for Aborigines but I didn't think much of it....

Then in the second lesson were introduced to the 1850s gold rush in rural Australia, and he gave the class an unusual assignment. We had to make posters from the gold rush period...create modern-day versions of the anti-Asian posters that the settlers made during the time following the arrival of Chinese prospectors in the goldfields....

He showed us pictures of the posters made back in the 1850's with the exaggerated Asian man's face with buck teeth, slanty eyes and racist slogans: 'The Yellow Peril will steal your livelihood and rape your women', etc.⁷⁰

Anh Do is perplexed about this lesson, and felt quite vulnerable to the prejudices that the history teacher is trying to perpetuate in the classroom.

So everyone started working on their posters, and the teacher encouraged us with examples of negative behaviour by Asians throughout history....I was the only Asian student in the class and I felt terrible.

This incident captures the inherent historical complexities of Australia's racism towards Aboriginals as well as the derived resistance against Asian migrants, as a result of the White Australia Policy. Anh Do confronts this history in the classroom as a child and lends a unique perspective on the generational shift in thinking since the 1970s. Anh Do's memoir was published in 2010. He stated that the children in his class were not necessarily in agreement with this teacher, "I was especially angry at him for the insidious way he was getting my mates, whom I know weren't racist at all, to say things they would never say to me."⁷¹ In his iconic positivism about childhood and life in Australia, Anh Do projects a confidence in the belief that his peers did not share these prejudices. He is in fact enacting the role as an active cultural agent of the national agenda towards multiculturalism. Children as active cultural agent would rather than adopting adult culture, create their own culture with a focus on their

⁷⁰ Do, *The Happiest Refugee*.

⁷¹ Ibid, 104.

unique perspective as children.⁷² As the subject and object of history, Vietnamese child refugees growing up in Australia are the obvious target of prejudices. They are also the subjects who advocate for the national agenda of becoming a more multicultural Australia. Catwrote about Asian anxieties with the history of White Australia and multiculturalism.

As my senior years rolled on and studies became exhausting, Pauline Hanson began to rise to prominence. A year earlier, on 10 September 1996, while I was still at Bethany (high school), Pauline Hanson had delivered her maiden speak in parliament after winning the seat of Oxley in Queensland...I thought about my place in this Australia.

The concept of what it meant to be Australian was still so rooted in the legacy of White Australia Policy...The growing negative perception of Asian Australians, particularly Vietnamese, was further compounded by the trouble sin Western Sydney. I was fourteen when Cabramatta MP John Newman was murdered.⁷³

Cat acknowledges her position and agency in this historical junction. As subject and object of history, she took on the role as a community advocate against uninformed prejudices about Vietnamese in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s. She summarised the impact of the gap between the idealization of multiculturalism and the practices of prejudices and identity politics that Vietnamese child refugees faced. She wrote about how the Vietnamese kids dealt with these difficulties.

In the nineties, it was said that we Vietnamese Kids from my part of Sydney became overachievers, gangster or drug pushers. Kids from my part of Sydney lied about their address on job applications in the hope of avoiding the stifling stereotypes types.⁷⁴

In another parts of her memoir she contends with the role of the press in continuing to perpetuate the prejudices. As a community advocate she is asked to be a part of forum televised in Cabramatta, depicted as the epicenter of the drug issues on current affairs show such as *60 Minutes*. She wrote,

It soon became clear that the forum was carefully scripted, with predetermined questions asked of certain people. The footage was then edited so as to present Cabramatta as a divided community.⁷⁵

⁷² Gardner, "Transnational Migration and the Study of Children."

⁷³ Nguyen, *We Are Here*, 155, 158.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 158.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 192.

As Cat attempts to raise the conversation about the complexity of the problems within the community that contributes to the crime, i.e. “health, education, unemployment, settlement and youth issues,” but she is disregarded.⁷⁶ The forum that is broadcasted containing the following footage.

Before I could continue, the host, Ray Martin interrupted to show the forum video footage of a violent assault captured by closed-circuit television cameras. At the time, nobody realized that the footage had been shot many years earlier.⁷⁷

The scene here illustrates the role of public receptivity and projection of narrow visions about multicultural Australia. Cat was invited to the forum, but her voice and presence there is scripted against her own agenda. As a critical subject and advocate of her community, Cat represents the growing movement of Vietnamese migrants seeking involvement in the political processes of Australia that will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

In conclusion, Vietnamese child migrants and refugees were growing up and trying to assimilate into mainstream Australia during the 1970’s. Since then, they were responding to it with their own voice and self-presentation in memoir that established narratives about childhood, resilience and success in the vision of a multicultural Australia. In examining the oral histories of Vietnamese child migrants in this chapter, variations in memory and experience emerge. Some Vietnamese child refugees struggled with the difficulties of belonging to multicultural Australia. Transitions and instability in resettlement, the conflation of work and home life, and challenges in school added complexity to the expected narratives of resilience and the idealisation of an Australian childhood. Their self-representations of everyday life in resettlement indicates their self-determination, continued agency and limitations such as work and caring for family as a child. In the following chapter about the complexities of belonging, Vietnamese war orphans and adoptees lend their memories and experience to add to the complexity of these lived experiences in history of national and transnational childhood and migration.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 193.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Chapter Five

Vietnamese War Orphans and Adoptees

Vietnamese war orphans and adoptees are a part of the history of transnational childhood and migration because they provide a unique category of experience to examine the complexities of belonging. This chapter examines Vietnamese orphans that became adoptees, their self-representation in oral histories and the complexity of their identity and sense of belonging in relationship to the Vietnamese refugee experience. To comprehend their shared and distinct experiences in the history of childhood and migration, we need to clarify the foundation of their shared point of departure because of war and identity as children of war. With the Fall of Saigon to Communist rule on the 30th of April, 1975, Vietnamese war orphans that became adoptees and Vietnamese child refugees shared similar fates as refugees, displaced children of the Vietnam war in the global diaspora. However, the memories and experiences of Vietnamese adoptees and refugees as displaced children of war are different. For instance, Vietnamese children that came to Australia as orphans received humanitarian status and entered Australian households as adoptees. Distinct in their migratory experience, legal status, and government recognition, adoptees have slightly different identity and sense of belonging from Vietnamese child refugees as discussed in the previous chapters. In this chapter, a more detailed picture will unfold about the complexity of belonging in these oral histories about their lives as Vietnamese war orphans, their childhood as Vietnamese adoptees, their agency and self-determination, and their returns to Vietnam as transnational cultural agents in the history of national and transnational childhood and migration.

Complexity of Belonging

It is difficult to describe belonging. It is generally described as a sociological phenomenon that is not static, but rather a set of processes in which groups and individuals relate to one another in a dialectic of seeking and granting it, especially in the context of migration.¹ One of the most comprehensive way of understanding the dynamics of social and

¹ Zlatko Skrbis, Loretta Baldassar, and Scott Poynting, "Introduction – Negotiating Belonging: Migration and Generations," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (August 2007): 261.

cultural identity and historical interplay of belonging comes from Martha Kuwee Kumsa 's sociological study of a different group of children, young Oromos refugees in Toronto. In her study, Kumsa offers *dispersal-affinity* as a conceptual framework to capture the complexities of negotiating belonging.² The framework works for Vietnamese adoptees as they contest the “dualism created between essentialist and constructionist perspectives” of identity.³

Vietnamese war orphans that became adoptees are neither Vietnamese nor Australian nor Vietnamese refugees. Vietnamese adoptees face different constraints than Vietnamese refugee children in processing identity and attaining a sense of belonging. Vietnamese refugee children are free to construct their own identity given their particular ethnic or historical heritage, their political status and cultural identities are grounded in birthplace or nation. Even in diaspora, Vietnamese refugees share the same origin stories as boat people or political exiles. They also share constructs such as *refugee diasporic memory* based on their basis to flee from Vietnam. Vietnamese war orphans do not necessarily feel a shared sense of belonging with the history of Vietnamese refugees. Consequently, belonging for Vietnamese war orphans and adoptees is a “project of selfhood that is both fixed and constantly shifting.”⁴

Kumsa's *dispersal-affinity* framework uniquely “provides a contextual and relational understanding of refugee experiences.”⁵ It can be applied to an understanding of Vietnamese war orphans that become adoptees experience and memories. History becomes a significant character in the geographical landscape on which the questions of identity and social cohesion take form. The following definitions of Kumsa's terms of reference provides the basis for an examination of its applicability to the conversation of the role of history, identity, and national belonging for Vietnamese adoptees in relationship to Vietnamese refugees.

Firstly, Kumsa defines dispersal.

In dispersal–affinity, dispersal signifies the violence of disrupting social ties and hurling refugee bodies into a global space; it signifies dislocation and displacement.⁶

² M. K. Kumsa, “‘No! I’m Not a Refugee!’ The Poetics of Be-Longing among Young Oromos in Toronto,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 230–55, doi:10.1093/jrs/fel001.

³ Ibid, 230.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 236.

⁶ Ibid.

Dispersal, dislocation and displacement are shared experiences for Vietnamese adoptees and refugees. The shared disruption of social ties because of the war and the hurling of bodies into the diaspora has been discussed in Yen Espirtu's work.⁷ What is significant is the shared descriptors that adoptees and refugee children use in characterising that displacement. There has been a kind of shared and historicised attribution of the chaos caused by the Fall of Saigon that marks that disruption. As stated in Dominic Golding's rendition of the fall,

I think the whole thing was a mess, the country as a mess. The government here was in a mess. When everything happened was a mess, even when the plane went down it was a mess (laughing).⁸

The dispersal of Vietnamese orphans in Operation Babylift and evacuation of Vietnamese refugees was chaotic, including those days leading up to The Fall of Saigon. The underlying loss of social ties for Vietnamese war orphans is of a different magnitude than the loss of land and social ties for Vietnamese refugee children. Vietnamese Refugees had social ties in the form of relatives or parents during the evacuation. Even in the case of unaccompanied minors, there were some that had at least a cousin or distant relative with them. Dominic alludes to the total absence of any social ties upon the arrival in Australia without linkage papers about his birth or identity. He literally arrives in cardboard box as a baby to be adopted as one amongst a collection of Vietnamese baby orphans supposedly airlifted for humanitarian reasons instead of the sole purpose of adoption. The on-going controversies about this generation of children adopted or taken from Vietnam without checking if they had any remaining extended family to take care of them continues to inform the contemporary debates about intercountry adoptions to date.

Patricia Fronek wrote about Operation Babylift and how it advanced the policies of intercountry adoption in Australia.⁹ Fronek confronted the history of dispersal and loss of social ties for these orphans,

The humanitarian discourse that surrounded the airlift of children from Saigon, Operation Babylift, precipitated private- and government-sponsored mass evacuation

⁷ Yen Le Espirtu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*.

⁸ Golding, interview.

⁹ Patricia Fronek, "Operation Babylift: Advancing Intercountry Adoption into Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 2012): 445–58, doi:10.1080/14443058.2012.727845.

of “orphans” who were adopted despite the lack of substantive evidence of their orphan status with no attempts at supported reunification.¹⁰

Dominic also reflected upon this dispersive moment with contention about whether it was for humanitarian purposes. When asked, “Were you evacuated as result of war or adoption?” he replied, “I was evacuated purely for adoption.”¹¹ Fronek argued that the humanitarian operations of Operation Babylift were filled with purposeful collection of children just for fulfilling Australian families need for children to adopt.¹²

The fact that Operation Babylift occurred for the purposes of adoptions often takes second place to more romantic, drama-filled depictions of child rescue and tragedy depicted in film and literary representations.¹³

Fronek mentioned this perspective in film and literature to support her argument that historically the humanitarian purposes masked the ‘needs’ of parents in Australia. She stated how this has impacted the on-going debate about intercountry adoption in Australia.

A localised discourse that does not differentiate between the needs of children elsewhere from those of perspective parents cannot objectively assess the needs of these children, marginalises the right and needs of birth families and communities, privileges Western society and labels alternate discourse as anti-adoption.¹⁴

Dominic noted that his parents had applied to adopt from Indochina before the Fall of Saigon. It was their intention to adopt a child from another country, not necessarily as a humanitarian gesture in response to the Vietnam War. What is then the impact of this on the Vietnamese child that is adopted?

Dominic’s experience offers insight and understanding into the complicated sense of belonging, what Kumsa described as dispersal affinity,

Dispersal–affinity captures the simultaneous flight and search that permeates the lives of many refugees. The framework interweaves four paradoxical spaces: the relational space, the reflexive space, the temporal space, and the glocal space. By paradox, I

¹⁰ Ibid, 445.

¹¹ Golding, interview.

¹² Fronek, “Operation Babylift.”

¹³ Ibid, 447.

¹⁴ Ibid, 450.

mean the conflicting inconsistencies that riddle everyday refugee experiences. By space, I mean both geographical space and symbolic aspects of refugee experiences.¹⁵

For Vietnamese adoptees, the flight from war torn Vietnam and search for their history of birth or origins permeates their lives and as it does for refugees. Dominic's resistance to the dominant narrative of humanitarian purposes of Operation Babylift alluded to the second aspect of Kumsa's terms of reference to affinity within the framework for describing belonging for Vietnamese orphans that became adoptees. Kumsa stated,

Affinity signifies refugee resistance to disruption, dislocation, and displacement. It signifies their yearning to relocate disrupted social ties, and their intense longings to be-long.¹⁶

Vietnamese Adoptees share an affinity with Vietnamese refugees. Both share in an intense longing to belong as displaced people of the same national origin dispersed into the same historical context, in this case, Australia. For example, Vietnamese adoptees such as Indigo Williams have published research and become advocates to create affinity and belonging for other Vietnamese adoptees and refugees.¹⁷ Dominic has participated in creating affinity with others with disabilities, adoptees, and refugees.¹⁸

In numerous roles Dominic has worked with Australian Vietnamese Youth Media on Aussie Bia Om, Viet Boys Downunder, Banana Strip (2001-2004) and directed Walking Without Feet (2004) with the Vietnamese Community in Australia (VIC chapter) an art showcase by Vietnamese young adults with special needs Dominic has returned to Vietnam three times, each time a new show was developed, Shrimp (2005, 2007) which won the Drama Victoria Award, Mr. Saigon, Ms. Hanoi (2007) and now working on Umbilical which examines Operation Babylift and the role of women during the Vietnam war, this play was short listed for the RE Ross playwright development award (2010). Today he works at RISE a refugee drop in centre.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kumsa, "'No! I'm Not a Refugee!' The Poetics of Be-Longing among Young Oromos in Toronto. 236-237"

¹⁶ Ibid, 236.

¹⁷ Indigo Williams Willing, "The Adopted Vietnamese Community: From Fairy Tales to the Diaspora," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43, no. 4(Fall 2004): 648-664; Indigo Williams, "Not Quite/ Just the Same/ Different: The Construction of Identity in Vietnamese War Orphans Adopted by White Parents" (MA thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2003); Indigo Williams Willing, "Beyond the Vietnam War Adoptions: Representing our Transracial Lives" in *Outsiders Within: Racial Crossings and Adoption Politics*, ed. Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Golding, interview; Golding, Dominic Hong Duc, "Ex-detainees, asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities: our needs and perceptions of disability," Public advocacy paper 2018, RISE: Refugees Survivors & Ex-detainees

¹⁹ "Articles by Dominic Golding," Peril: Asian Australian Arts and Culture, accessed on 05 May 2019, <https://peril.com.au/author/dom/>.

Dominic creates community for himself and others to openly resist the disruption of social ties to his own birth country through his advocacy work, artwork and consistent return visits to the Vietnamese orphanages as a volunteer. He spent a year living in Vietnam to experience what it would be like to be a local.²⁰ Dominic is unique in that he was one of the war orphans that was a part of the Operation Babylift to Australia. His experience in detail provides a paradigm for understanding dispersal-affinity and how Vietnamese adoptees' experience and memories are different than those of Vietnamese child refugee.

Vietnamese War Orphan

Vietnamese war orphans that became adoptees after the Fall of Saigon are a unique set of immigrant children to Australia. Some of the Vietnamese orphans of Operation Babylift left before the end of the Vietnam War. Dominic Golding was one of these babies sent out in a box with this operation. He described the chaos and his connection to this historical moment of departure from Vietnam.

Within the act of war, we effectively left the country on the month that the communists surrounded Saigon. Communists take over on April 30, 1975 and most of us left in the first few weeks of April.²¹

Dominic noted the date of the Fall of Saigon as a significant historical moment throughout his interview. Through pictures and oral history narrative, he related how the evacuation for adoption took place.

I was on the last flight out of Saigon, there were two, one to Sydney and one to Melbourne, the one to Sydney had 200 plus children and one to Melbourne – only 74-72 children.²²

Dominic was too young to remember details of Operation Babylift, but his memory has been augmented with the help of Rosemary Calder who was a social worker at the time. His parents received pictures of him for adoption. He described the pictures about his early childhood.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Golding, interview.

²² Golding, interview.

This is photo of me from the hospital. I was 4 months old when I got to Australia....I was really young, malnutrition and I was premature. The second orphanage was this one (points to the picture). That is where we had been evacuated. I was the size of bread basket. I would of fitted into this album.²³

In other publications, Dominic described his arrival of a baby in a shoebox.²⁴ He was a part of the second Operation Babylift to Australia that departed on the 17th of April 1975, weeks before the Fall of Saigon on the 30th of April 1975. Dominic was four months old suffering from serious malnutrition and respiratory failure. From the age of 2 to 4, developmental delays indicated he had cerebral palsy that affected his hearing and speech. He grew up on a farm in country Victoria, and recalls his childhood there as one in which he felt very different from those around him, however, he had a loving white Australian family. Even upon the point of departure from Vietnam for adoption during the war, Dominic distinguished his experience from those of refugees.

Refugee or migrants make a choice to leave their country of origin for whatever reason that is, where as I was adopted. I was adopted into a family and was renamed and ended up with that family.

As an orphan of the war, the shared need to belong and identity as a child of the Vietnam War is experienced differently at different stages of his life. In reflection on this initial placement into a white family as a result of adoption post war, he explained how that differed from the choices some refugees made during that time. For Dominic, an awareness of one's identity and origins arose in reference to the Vietnam War. He explained this about himself and the other adoptees that he has known. He stated,

...basically teenagers and older locate their identity to a place of conflict because they have to leave and most of us see it in the same way - the flight, or being the lucky ones, as many boat people did not survive [*sic*].²⁵

Though Dominic referenced the Vietnam War as a shared cause of displacement, he locates the concept of identity to the place of conflict and the resulting flight or departure from those origins. Herein lies the crucible of where a shared cultural identity is forged for both groups in the complexity of belonging.

²³ Golding, interview.

²⁴ "From Saigon in a Shoebox: Australian 'Operation Babylift' Orphans Reflect 40 Years on," News, accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/03/25/operation-babylift-40-years>.

²⁵ Golding, interview.

Vietnamese children who entered as refugees and those who were born in Australia share in their challenges and questions about cultural heritage and barriers to belonging that are similar to what adoptees experienced. Like adoptees, some second-generation Vietnamese do not even speak Vietnamese nor know or understand their cultural heritage and its significance. Like adoptees, they were raised in mainstream Australia. Like second generation Vietnamese, adoptees often find it difficult to relate to a history they had no experience of and only inherited through birth and education. When Dominic is asked whether he felt he fit in with the Victorian Vietnamese community during the time he worked in the Footscray community and he stated plainly, “No, they see me as too white. I am a banana.”²⁶ A “banana” is a racial phrase for an Asian who is “yellow” on the outside and “white” on the inside. When asked for further details such as if Vietnamese language or his own disabilities were barriers to belonging, Dominic replied,

No, I do not speak Vietnamese, and I do not have an understanding of their struggle. I am not a boat person or refugee. I did the leadership program this year (2016) and reconfirmed my belief about the Vietnamese community here. I don’t have their battle. I do not feel I have their support.

I am seen as living and working as a social worker in Vietnam, and I do not want to jeopardise that just to be involved in the community here. They are politically against being involved with communist Vietnam.²⁷

In understanding Dominic’s sense of not belonging with the Vietnamese community here in Melbourne, there are significant indications that Vietnamese history and politics are major contributing factors of difference. The anti-communist position of refugees in Victoria that fled from persecution have an on-going commitment to not support the current regime.²⁸ Dominic refers to his return visits and volunteer work at orphanages in Vietnam as his social work in Vietnam which would not be acceptable to this group of refugees in Victoria. Dominic expounds about the difference between Vietnamese refugees and adoptees,

²⁶ Golding, interview.

²⁷ Golding, interview.

²⁸ For example, see the news about the Vietnamese Australian communities in Melbourne and Adelaide campaign for the former South Vietnamese flag to represent Vietnamese in Australia, see “Maribyrnong to allow flying of former South Vietnam flag,” SBS News, Updated 23/10/2015, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/maribyrnong-to-allow-flying-of-former-south-vietnam-flag>; Ashleigh Pisani, “Council to fly South Vietnamese flag despite warning it will cause ‘deep offence’ to Vietnam government,” October 19, 2017 11:48am, Portside Weekly Messenger. <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/messenger/west-beaches/council-to-fly-south-vietnamese-flag-despite-warning-it-will-cause-deep-offence-to-vietnam-government/news-story/bc101d85143f663e369d6bad9dfcb0ad>

If you take literal language of refugee or migrant, there are cohorts attached to each label. An adopted person does not make a choice and someone does that for them, that agency is not where I find myself. Given the circumstances of where I come from, I would have to say that I am a refugee because the circumstances of that time was the Community surrounded Saigon. There was a lot of bombing. They were concerned about orphans and they needed to be evacuated out of the country.²⁹

In this instance, Dominic has referred to himself as a refugee from an outsider's perspective, i.e. an Australian government official or someone not in the immediate Vietnamese cultural context. The issue of agency and definition of refugee is simplified to label anyone that was Vietnamese and leaving the state of chaos in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. This viewpoint makes sense for the general public, such as an Australian who has no idea of the inter-community differences or history of how Vietnamese migrants came to Australia. When further asked about why he would then refer himself as refugee, is it for easier comprehension by the mainstream community, he responded,

This is a situation where the language starts collapsing on itself refugee, adopted person, an orphan. Within the circumstance with the knowledge of the situation, I would consider myself a being refugee, one of being a forced refugee or a silent refugee. We don't have a voice or given a voice, we were just picked up by the relevant authorities and adopted out.³⁰

Dominic highlighted how agency and definition of refugees implies a lack of it and in this case, adoptees in the context of the aftermath of the Vietnam War shared in this lack of agency and therefore share in the plight and flight from the country. However, does historical departure point and arrival in the country of resettlement shape the difficulties of belonging? Not necessarily, what Dominic alluded to is about how history defines cultural and social identity and belonging as children of war growing up in Australia.

Vietnamese Adoptees in Australia

Vietnamese orphans that become adoptees are a part of the complex history of transnational childhood and migration because they provide a unique category of experience to interrogate the conflation of these experiences. Dominic Golding, a Babylift orphan and

²⁹ Golding, interview.

³⁰ Golding, interview.

adoptee explained the complexity and difference of experience of Vietnamese adoptees versus child refugees in history,

I would clarify the point again when it comes to history of Vietnamese refugees. There is really very little acknowledgement of those that came prior to 1979. I want to make that point quite clear that they were [Vietnamese] people in Australia under the Colombo Plan and here under the defense force.³¹

Dominic argues for an acknowledgement of Vietnamese that arrived in Australian history before the post-war migration of Vietnamese refugees. The Colombo Plan had Vietnamese students living and studying in Australia prior to 1975.³² Some of the adoptees also arrived prior to April of 1975.

There is a pattern of acknowledging everything only after 1975 and nothing prior and that is why I have kept myself quite separate from the Vietnamese refugee community. They do not acknowledge adoptees coming out in Operation Babylift. They do not see them as a part of their experience, but the Brisbane community has taken on board the children that left the country at that time.³³

Like Dominic, Sue Bylund was one of the adoptees that arrived prior to 1975.³⁴ Her experience and memories makes the connection between the early arrival of Vietnamese adoptees before the end of the war that assisted in the acceptance of the proceeding Operation Babylifts orphans. When asked if she was technically part of Operation Babylift, she stated,

No, I came a year before. There were quite a few of us that snuck in before 1975. and it was really all those one that came through that started to gather momentum in the public media. They were talking about families and raising awareness.

The big push in 1975 probably would not have happened without them, so that the first Babylift Operation that came through came without government approval. The first group that came in 1973, said too bad, well they are here.³⁵

³¹ Golding, interview.

³² Sanger, Clyde, "The Colombo Plan and Vietnam, 1948–54," in *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire*, 342–52. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995.

³³ Golding, interview.

³⁴ Sue-Yen Bylund interviewed 22 February 2016.

³⁵ Bylund, interview.

There was so much confusion during the time that children were taken out of Vietnam along with the refugee exodus, that there was a conflation of events where some adoptees were really refugee children separated from their family. Dominic noted,

There were over 3,000 that were adopted taken out for adoption and 10% were found that their families were also refugees mainly in the United States and they already been given back to their birth family.³⁶

The chaos also left a set of orphans and refugee children that were stranded in Vietnam and were considered unacceptable in Vietnamese society. They were the children of war known as Amerasians, children of American soldiers and Vietnamese women, that were abandoned. Dominic stated,

There are so many children that did not get to leave the country out of Operation Babylift. There are all sorts of stories that they became homeless. The people running the orphanages were ex pats and they left with evacuation and when communist came in and cleared them out and most of the children left were Amerasians.³⁷

Dominic has done his own research about adoptees and other researchers in America have revealed in greater detail about these Amerasian experiences.³⁸ There was no such category of children that came to Australia. Dominic suspects that it was not discussed in the adoption process. Dominic stated that because Vietnamese communities in Australia did not recognize arrivals prior to 1975, that has left him feeling a lesser sense to the history of migration of Vietnamese in Australia. Dominic noted that the Brisbane community of Vietnamese refugees has acknowledged the history and presence of Vietnamese orphans and refugees. However, Dominic alluded to his sense of not belonging in Victoria, even though he is a Vietnamese artist, performer and activist recognised for his Vietnamese ethnic heritage in the Victorian community. This highlights another aspect of the complexity of historical and cultural identity and belonging that is played out in the differences in refugee and adoptee childhood in Australia.

³⁶ Golding, interview.

³⁷ Golding, interview.

³⁸ Kien Nguyen, *The Unwanted: A Memoir* (Boston: Little Brown, 2001); Kori A. Graves, Amerasian Children, Hybrid Superiority, and Pearl S. Buck's Transracial and Transnational Adoption Activism *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. 143(2):177-209.

Vietnamese Adoptee Childhood in Australia

The following oral history narratives about Vietnamese adoptee's childhood in Australia offers some insight of the complexity of identity formation and belonging. Rohan Samara was adopted from Vietnam and refers to "childhood" as the time in "primary school," he was teased about his differences. Rohan stated,

In primary school, I felt there was a difference and that is more in looks and was not an adoptive stigma. You know how kids are in primary school. It was the early 1980's. It did not make me a recluse, but I learned quickly that people tease you, you accept and tease them back and you have got to figure out how to take it as not overly personal [*sic*].³⁹

Rohan's adaptive behavior is not particular to cultural identity as much as it is common with all children growing up different than most of their peers, however it is a fairly common descriptor of what adopted children experience early on. Dominic, who grew up in rural Australia, also found school and the outside world particularly confronting about his difference. He described his early childhood,

I grew up as a single child. All my siblings were older, eight and twelve. They were pretty much out of home when I was young teenager. I grew up on a farm and did farm stuff.

It was a typical white able-bodied community. If you did not play sports, you lose that social community. Because I could not nor want to play sports, I became a geek minority.⁴⁰

Even though Dominic was a self-declared "geek," he did not like school. School was a place of social persecution because he had difficulties with his speech and hearing.

Schooling - I don't like – because of torment, bullying, racism, structural shit from school and having disability. I was put in special needs class.

It was country town. I didn't even have an opportunity to learn sign language. They had to fly an Orthologist to Mt. Gambia to give deaf people hearing aids. Else, I had to go to Adelaide – 6 hours away – it suffers country deficiencies.⁴¹

³⁹ Rohan Samara interviewed 18 March 2016.

⁴⁰ Golding, interview.

⁴¹ Golding, interview.

When asked what sustained him in growing up as a disabled Vietnamese in a country town, Dominic replied,

I had no idea, I had a loving family and a nice home. Outside the home, I felt the world was against me, but inside the home was okay. Outside the home was shit, inside was – I had a very loving and nurturing family. Outside society was competitiveness, egos, white supremacy without saying white supremacy and class as well. It was a very good adoptive family.⁴²

Dominic was grateful for his family and relationship with his siblings, but there was not a strong network of friends or much interest for him growing up in rural Australia. He stated,

My siblings were awesome. I did not have a strong or big friendship network because of that, also because I lived on farm and not in town, the other friend grew up in town –10 to 15 Km outside of town.⁴³

It was not until Dominic left for schools in Adelaide and then Melbourne where he found a network of belonging and interest in acting, political theory, and life of his own.

I went to TAFE to study acting. I liked acting in year 12. I did not want to do math, science, at that time. I did drama for six years in Adelaide University, political theory and politics and then moved to Melbourne (after my first visit to Vietnam) to live and work in Footscray community. That was interesting.⁴⁴

Dominic's time in Footscray proved interesting as that was the first time he was around other Vietnamese immigrants as described earlier. Though he felt he could not relate with Vietnamese boat refugees in Footscray, his work with asylum seekers created a community that supported his sense of belonging. For Dominic and Rohan as adoptees, the early awareness of a different identity signifies the expectation for adoptees to build a self-concept around cultural identity as a child. When asked if Rohan looked for felt distinctly Vietnamese, he replied,

Everyone thinks that I am Filipino and look up FB. I had a weird experience on the Gold coast, a taxi asked where you from. I said, "Vietnam." He said, 'You are not. You are Cambodian brother.' He jumped out of taxi to give me a hug. He was so certain.⁴⁵

⁴² Golding, interview.

⁴³ Golding, interview.

⁴⁴ Golding, interview.

⁴⁵ Samara, interview.

However, genetic or cultural appearances of Vietnamese identity or descent prove uninformative. These differences are real as highlighted in many of other adoptees' stories are in a collection called, *The Colour of Difference: Journeys in Transracial Adoption*.⁴⁶ These self-representation of their experiences as Australian intercountry adoptees showcase the complexity of personal and cultural identity formation and how it informs their sense of belonging. Lynelle Long, Founder of InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV), who initiated the project back in the 1980s sought to share the experiences of intercountry adoptees in Australia.⁴⁷ As stated in the books promotional excerpt,

The aim of the project was to draw together the experiences of both Australian-born transracial adoptees and intercountry adoptees ... Of the nine Australian-born adoptees, there were those of Aboriginal, Chinese, Maori, African, Spanish descent. The countries of origin for the 18 intercountry adoptees were Vietnam, Bangladesh, Fiji, New Zealand (Maori), Burundi, Korea, Colombia, Sri Lanka, India and Canada (North American Indian).⁴⁸

As evident with the life stories of intercountry adoptees from all over the world, the personal is political, their concept of self, cultural and communal identity formations inform history of transnational childhood. It is not the purpose of this research to repeat any of the narratives in that book, but to contribute these additional oral histories from adoptees as evidence of transnational childhood in the history of Vietnamese childhood and migration.

One of the key memories and experiences that emerged about adoptees transnational childhood is the nature of how their adoptive parents and siblings approach the situation of explaining difference. When asked how did his parents explain where Rohan came from, he recalled reading a picture book about it. Rohan remembered,

⁴⁶ Sarah Armstrong and Petrina Slaytor, eds., *The Colour of Difference: Journeys in Transracial Adoption* (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ For information about intercountry adoption, see Judith Gibbons and Karen Rotabi, eds., *Intercountry Adoption, Policies, Practices, and Outcomes* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); "Intercountry Adoption," Australian Government Attorney-Generals' Department, accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/IntercountryAdoption/Pages/default.aspx>; "Intercountry Adoption Australia – your guide to overseas adoption," accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.intercountryadoption.gov.au/>; "Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)," accessed May 25, 2019, <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/>.

⁴⁸ Armstrong, "The Colour of Difference: Journeys in Transracial Adoption."

The “Where Do You Come From” books when I was five or six years old. It was a picture book. Mom explained that you were special because you were chosen and never made to feel not part of family.⁴⁹

Rohan further mentioned that the family was so accepting and such a protective factor in his growing up as a Vietnamese adoptee that his own sister in adulthood decided to adopt children from Vietnam as well.

My sister was eleven years older and my brother is nine years older than me. My sister loved having an adopted Vietnamese. She lives in Switzerland. She has adopted two kids from Vietnam. Australia is the hardest country to adopt. It took them five years, but in Switzerland, it was easy.⁵⁰

Rohan states that his siblings and parents were always supportive of him even in his adulthood search for his birth family.

My parents were not secret and always supportive if I wanted to go search. My father establish in the 1980s an adoptive parents association for kids from Sri Lanka. My adoption was the norm and being around adoptive parent association, I had family days and grew up with kids that were adopted.⁵¹

Similar to Rohan, Sue had the support of her family and growing up in a multicultural community.

My experience is overall positive, keeping in mind knowing how others fared. I was adopted to and stayed in the city in Perth. The school I went to was multicultural and unusual back then. There were a lot of new immigrants, a spattering of racism, I just stood up for myself and there was enough diversity in our community to not be concerned about that.⁵²

The resilience Sue expressed also stems from the protective factor of a family already familiar with the complexities of belonging.

My family, they were really good, and unusual. My mum worked with adult migrants teaching ESL English. Her community was the new refugees coming over and that

⁴⁹ Samara, interview.

⁵⁰ Samara, interview.

⁵¹ Samara, interview.

⁵² Bylund, interview.

continued for over two decades until I was about in my twenties. There was a huge wave of refugees. She was not just teaching English, but resettling them.⁵³

Sue had a chance to grow up around other Vietnamese refugees through her mother's work in resettling new migrants. She described how her mother expanded the family experience to other refugees.

She had an open house policy and at Christmas and at times, the Australian community was so family based and our house be filled with Vietnamese refugees and I did not speak Vietnamese, but just ran around and blended in.⁵⁴

Growing up with an open family allowed Sue to have her experience as an adoptee separate from refugees, but more importantly, the family did not create a narrative to exclude or make exceptional anyone's heritage. Sue explained,

My adopted family is definitely white. My father is first generation Dutch. He had a very strong Dutch accent. My two brothers were born in Melbourne. They were white Aussie kids and my mum was born in Melbourne. We already had a huge cultural diversity in the family, so it did not seem strange each in turn to talk about where we came from and what that story meant. There was never a really strong family story that I felt I did not connect. My father's story is related to the war, and his parents had traveled all over the world. My story was one of adoption.⁵⁵

Given the openness of the family narrative about where they came from, Sue felt a lot of agency as a child in dealing with the inevitable situations that arise due to difference. She stated,

As a child, you are different. You were told often in a black and white situation: this is where you fit.... As a child, you never feel you are inviting any these comments, they are given and you learn as a child. Certainly, I developed resilience to that.... I decided as a child – am I those things?, and I wasn't. I wasn't not those things, but by my physical appearance I was those things. I developed a humour around it.⁵⁶

Sue's sense of agency and self-determination about her transcultural identity. She explained how her humour about prejudicial expectations of her became a way of playing with identity given the diversity of her adopted family.

⁵³ Bylund, interview.

⁵⁴ Bylund, interview.

⁵⁵ Bylund, interview.

⁵⁶ Bylund, interview.

People also did not know where I sit: was I Vietnamese, was I Chinese? There was a little bit of play in that because I did not have a family that immediately identified with my cultural origins.⁵⁷

Like Sue, Rohan also experienced a somewhat exceptional level of cultural hybridity and acceptance growing up around adopted children. Nevertheless, both Sue and Rohan delayed returning to Vietnam and exploring their cultural identity until late adulthood. Rohan stated,

It was not until the age of eighteen or twenty-one that I started thinking I would like to learn more about it and visit it. Then twenty years later, I thought I must do it. It was not until end of 1989, that it felt like going home arriving in Saigon.⁵⁸

Sue had traveled significantly around the world until she made the first trip back to Vietnam. For Vietnamese adoptees, it is one of the major experiences towards the end of childhood, for some it is a search of history about their family and origins. The following exploration of those return trips and augmentation of memories from aid workers illuminates the level of agency and self-determination that Vietnamese adoptees exhibit in the formation of a transcultural identity.

Adoptee Returns to Vietnam

For Vietnamese children that were airlifted out of Vietnam or adopted into Australia the return trips for personal research are significant acts of agency and self-determination that develop their transcultural identity. For Dominic, for instance, there are no memories of childhood in Vietnam except those imagined from his return trips to search for the orphanage and voluntary work with orphans in Vietnam. Dominic has returned to Vietnam and taken pictures as well of his orphanage which he includes in the album about his origins, “This is a picture of the second orphanage where we had been evacuated” for Operation Babylift. Many of the things Dominic learned about himself as a child came from a woman who worked at the orphanage and returned to Australia. Dominic relayed some of the facts that he and other orphans of the Babylift operation learned about themselves.

According to Rosemary Calder, she was one of women who got the children out of the aircraft, my name was not listed in the file or reports or in her records either, the authorities informed before the plane landed, there were a couple of children just

⁵⁷ Bylund, interview.

⁵⁸ Samara, interview.

hanging around and nothing to do – there were 70 that arrived without linkage papers and I was placed into a family after.⁵⁹

History, personal or political, is something that adoptees inherit and have no direct memory about. With the help of other aid workers, adoptees from Vietnam have been able to learn things about themselves and their life in Vietnam. Dominic went to do this type of personal research and it proved inconclusive. When asked about the research he has done about his early life and what he found out about himself, Dominic replied,

Nothing. Mainly that I found the address of World Vision. They do not have any record of me. The documents of family service were from South Australia. There were no translations of the adoption papers and nothing in records from Vietnamese government at the time. I have found the location of World Vision office which has been torn down. [He shows me a picture of street in Vietnam]. I found out from another adoptee that was with World Vision and crossed reference and when I went to anniversary 40th of Operation Babylift.⁶⁰

The lack of information, memory, and history of early life or birth for adoptees is quite common. Birth papers become artefacts of memory. While Dominic does not have birth record, Rohan did have document of his date of birth and name of his parents.

It was February of 1975. To get a baby out with Operation Babylift, they had to have paperwork. Babies go to Saigon to get paperwork and not issue in Sa Trang. The birth certificate says mum and dad's name and birthday in February. I never made that trip to Saigon, when babies were to be taken out the baby next to me, Robbie Burns, was sick and I was put in to not waste a spot.⁶¹

When asked how Rohan came upon this information about his departure from Vietnam, he stated that his parents stayed in contact with an assistant from the orphanage, and it was with through his connection to her that he had a sense of extended family in Vietnam.

Rosemary Kennedy worked with Friends for All Children. She was assisting with the catholic orphanage run by Vietnamese nuns. I have visited twice and both times met a sister there when I was there. It was very exceptional the first time and the second time. The first time as leaving I was crying. She said that when I was born I hold you in my heart and no matter where you are you are family here and always have a home food and bed. She was eighty and passed away 12 months after I met her.⁶²

⁵⁹ Golding, interview.

⁶⁰ Golding, interview.

⁶¹ Samara, interview.

⁶² Samara, interview.

There are also occasions for adoptees to re-connect with blood relatives. After forty-two years in Australia, Rohan was able to find three distant relatives through DNA testing and he got in touch via Facebook. He described what he learned from the blood relatives about his early life. He stated,

It's incredible to be in touch with blood relation you never have known. It is quite exciting. She was born in Saigon in 1974 and there is only a year separating us. I was born Sa Trang down in the Mekong. We have been there twice.⁶³

Rohan talked about his visits to these blood relatives and plans to return for future visits. With the rare opportunity of finding blood relatives, Rohan had pictures of when he was a child. His adopted mother gave them to him when he was about twenty-five years old. Rohan described the experience of viewing these pictures,

In one of them, I am lying in a cot with a sign that says Rob. The other is a shot from stomach up with mouth....It was significant and quite sad to see myself as a small helpless being. When you see documentaries about long lost family, I find it very sad. I would love to find my birth mother and say thank you and give her peace of mind. It is the hardest decision and has made incredible difference.⁶⁴

Rohan made peace with the loss of his birth family. Dominic who has not located his blood relatives came to terms with the loss by volunteering with orphanages in Vietnam. Dominic described these volunteering visits to orphanages,

I just do it out of my own sense of self. I do not know how to explain it. I have conflicted relationship with it now. I am adopted person from Vietnam, does that make me better? I did art workshop for the children and took them to theme park and at the end of the day, I still get to go home to Australia.⁶⁵

Along with complicated thoughts about his role as an Australian volunteer privileged with a stable life that allows him to volunteer, Dominic expressed what others consider a type of survivor guilt about the outcomes of his life. He explained further that it does arise from his sense of connection to his personal history in Vietnam.

Does being Vietnamese and having some former relationship, does that make me better than a White person doing the same thing? I think it does not make me any

⁶³ Samara, interview.

⁶⁴ Samara, interview.

⁶⁵ Golding, interview.

better. I have relationship with this orphanage. This is where the first child that my parents adopted from had passed away, and they were waiting for government response for another child.⁶⁶

Dominic's adoptive parents had few ties to Vietnam, meeting with other adoptees has formed the kinship that others described in early life. Amongst adoptees there's a shared sense of loss. As Sue Bylund articulated, many adoptees are at various points with the search for birth parents and reconciling the lack of memories or personal history. With each return, Sue gained greater acceptance of the unknown past in Vietnam and establishes new relationships with the people there in the present.

Every time I go back, without fail, I've been back ten or eleven times, is that I allow myself to experience a different facet of what it is to be Vietnamese and as much as I like to feel that is a controlled immersion experience, I am sure it is not. (Laugh) Well in my mind, I am saying, I could always opt out, but it took me five trips back before I could go to an orphanage. A lot of adoptees go straight in. They go back. They want to see an orphanage, whereas I know that this is my life here.⁶⁷

The choices and experiences of returns for Vietnamese adoptees and child refugees to recover memory or history has varied outcomes and purposes. However, they share in ways that remembering without family, as discussed in Chapter two, and still create a connection to the Vietnam, as a place of origins and early childhood memory. The lack of memory does not negate the process of finding and constructing memories. The unique nature of adoptee networks as extended family also strengthens their sense of transcultural identity and belonging with other adoptees. Dominic has found this in his returns to Vietnam on adoptee reunions.

Well, there have been two reunions, I have been to both. They have a Facebook network of adoptees and scramble together for a year for the 35th anniversary, five years prior there was 30th anniversary for Santa Maria orphanage can technically go and only those with that orphanage.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Golding, interview.

⁶⁷ Bylund, interview.

⁶⁸ Golding, interview.

Dominic is referring to closed Facebook communities of adoptees from particular orphanages, for instance, Adoptees from Providence Orphanage Can Tho, Vietnam.⁶⁹ When asked about these orphanage reunions, Dominic described the pictures about these reunions,

This one is at the crash site (of the airplane to transport orphans out of Vietnam). There would be a memorial. This was the first flight and it went down and it was halted for a bit, emerging government said let's get more plans, and Australian said they would follow Americans [sic]. The flight to U.S. and the second official flight sponsored by the South Vietnamese and American government crashed[sic].

This was an American thing, but I went along out with compatriots. It had not much to do with me, but it is a memorial a couple of kilometers outside of Saigon. These are the babies and survivors.⁷⁰

Dominic has been to several of these reunion of adoptee sites even if he does not find out much about his own personal history. In these trips, he has connected with other Vietnamese adoptees and orphanages that builds a sense of community for him there. He shared me more pictures of these events that are also organized by Vietnamese adoptees.

This is the orphanage I visited recently. This is the one I visited in 1999. This one is in Vung Tau, run by a Vietnamese adoptee. These are compilation of the four trips to Vietnam.⁷¹

Dominic has also been around the media around these reunions. He showed me a picture of an Oprah Winfrey Show in Hanoi and described the experience,

This is specific on family reunion of missing persons show. It was a show in Saigon about adoptees and people looking for children. People flew in and it was a part of the reunion work. I decided to be in the back and not in front. I did not have anything to invest in that emotional hope. That was for last year for the 40th anniversary. There was just a select group of Australians.⁷²

Along with reunions and anniversary events at orphanages where adoptees are searching for family connections, Dominic has also witnessed adoptees bringing their own children on return trips to Vietnam. He stated,

⁶⁹ "Adoptees from Providence Orphanage Can Tho, Vietnam," Facebook closed group, accessed on 15 December 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/80577890955/>.

⁷⁰ Golding, interview.

⁷¹ Golding, interview.

⁷² Golding, interview.

I can only refer to a number of adoptees that have brought their children back to Vietnam. It has been a great experience for the whole family. The family generally has had no knowledge or understanding of the adopted person, their lived experience as an orphan. The children get a lot of benefits from witnessing their parent's relationship with the orphanage or the country. It gels for them for their own essential national identity. I am a Vietnamese person. I may be an American or Australian, and I can now see why my mum or dad is the way they are.⁷³

Dominic mentioned some articles on SBS that have covered these reunions. In one article, a Vietnamese child returns to find his father.⁷⁴ There are several variations to these return trips and searches. More importantly they highlight the public's interest in these stories because identity and belonging for adoptees is a unique blend of Australian nationalism and transnational migration history. For Dominic, he equates the sense of belonging with other adoptees with the way refugees feel with one another.

Being around adoptees is cathartic– bit like refugees get together and everyone knows they face similar situation without having to say or explain anything. I felt affirmed about adoptees experience.⁷⁵

Dominic described a type of understanding amongst adoptees about the complexity of identity formation and belonging that is felt and implicit in being with other adoptees.

Adoptees as Transnational Cultural Agents

Transnational cultural agents have the unique mobility to go back and forth to inform the culture of their origins and settlement country. As a Vietnamese Babylift orphan and intercountry adoptee advocate, Sue Bylund has been a transnational cultural agent, going back and forth between Vietnam and Australia over ten to eleven times as an adult. She travelled everywhere in the world and lived in Japan and Sweden, but never lived in Vietnam. It was only on the fifth trip back that she decided to visit an orphanage.⁷⁶ She explained that it feels too confronting to live there as she would constantly questioning whether the person she

⁷³ Golding, interview.

⁷⁴ Catherine Scott and Calliste Weitenberg, "Chasing the Dragon: Return to Vietnam," SBS Dateline, Tuesday, April 28, 2015 -21:30, accessed on 15 December 2018. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/story/chasing-dragon-return-vietnam>.

⁷⁵ Golding, interview.

⁷⁶ Bylund, interview.

was interacting with could also be a blood relative. This thought “sits at the back of your mind and that is really taxing. You can turn it down, but you cannot turn it off. It is something to be managed.” Sue instead took on the role of a transnational cultural agent, which is distinct from what other adoptees return to Vietnam seeking to do in search of their birth histories and biological family. She described the difference,

A lot of adoptees go straight in. They want to see an orphanage, whereas I know that this is my life (here in Australia) and that’s a different thing to going to other countries to live.⁷⁷

Defining her life as based in Australia and acknowledging her Vietnamese heritage, Sue continued to guide trips of Australian adoptees, parents, church friend, and other volunteers that want to support the efforts of an orphanage that she feels confident about.

When I go back to those children’s homes and see those kids, I know that that was me, I look at them and think so this is good thing (to have returned). It has made me instantly empathetic and sympathetic to the workers that are there doing their job for very little...I look at other people that have a real passion for funding and supporting orphanages and things and I think my way is much quieter. It’s my mum saying that there is this girl that needs sponsorship, and doing it that way.⁷⁸

Sue further described her voluntary work with adoptees that have chosen to stay and now live in Vietnam. She worked with My Huong who works for the social protection of children there. Sue expresses the ultimate admiration for My Huong’s work and life journey.

My Huong has done an amazing job. She has done something there I think is like the ultimate. You go back (to Vietnam). You remember the last place you saw your mum. You go there. You find her, then you stay on. You learn the language and work there. She sits at the hybrid of both cultures and she gets things done and I have an appreciation of what she has done because we have the same value systems and yet she is completely Vietnamese but she’s abandoned the thought of continuing to live here life here whereas I am tilted the opposite way.⁷⁹

In contrast to the return journey of an adoptee and total cultural immersion, Sue described how she moves in and out of Vietnam as a cultural agent that facilitates some connections for herself and other adoptees.

⁷⁷ Bylund, interview.

⁷⁸ Bylund, interview.

⁷⁹ Bylund, interview.

I step into Vietnam and I indulge my need to reconnect with that and find connection, not even reconnection, find connection as an adult[sic]. It is developing new connections and new understandings every time I go back. It is layered.

The first time I went back, it was with my husband because I was unsure about how I would react, whether it would be positive or negative and if there would be a next time[sic]. I met up with a group of adoptees and stayed out in a village with grandparents of a refugee that I had met.⁸⁰

Given Sue's unique position and set of life perspective and choices about how to interact with her Vietnamese heritage and national origins, she transmits Australian culture to Vietnam and brings her cultural sympathies and understanding about Vietnam back to inform nation building here in Australia. In the following reflection on the adoption market, we can see how fluid the transmission of this unique position. She described how intercountry adoptees going back to Vietnam are engaging in the economic market that surrounds adoption which is distinct from the experience of a Vietnamese refugee returning for a visit to Vietnam.

We do not have services that built around us in that way. We are the same, but we have fight for the rights as Australian citizens, not as Vietnamese, to have services, because government says well you're Vietnamese so have your government to sort it out[sic]. For us (adoptees), it is not our government. We're Australian so you just feel like you are shouting at a 3-year-old (child) at times trying to get them (government) to understand it.⁸¹

Sue described this struggle for understanding of intercountry adoption as a complicated economic interaction in Vietnam to which Australian adoptive parents are implicated.

The economy around it is about coercion and corruption. They (Australian and Vietnamese government) often focus on the monetary issues of coercion around procuring children, and equally around adult adoptees, reunions and trying to make money around finding your parents[sic].. It is a real minefield and it can be an emotional experience, which we talked about, but it can also empty your bank account pretty fast and leave you destitute in your life in Australia, which is a really scary thing politically[sic]. That is really some of the things we are trying to address, which is to say, well adoption sits very uncomfortably across two government borders and two everything, the duplicity makes it very complicated[sic].⁸²

In iterating the monetary risk underlying the emotional risks that Australians engage in with intercountry adoption in Vietnam, Sue highlighted the vulnerability of intercountry adult

⁸⁰ Bylund, interview.

⁸¹ Bylund, interview.

⁸² Bylund, interview.

adoptees within this system of corruption to which they may or may not have control of the outcomes as transnational agents. She further explains the difference in cultural agency for intercountry adoptees as oppose to refugees who return to Vietnam for similar search and discovery of their own heritage.

I do not know if refugees, because they already have that conduit with family, whether they suffer the same duplicity, or whether the bias which always works in their favor *[sic]*? When you have no connection, it is really hard. Who do I get in country to help me? Who is going to translate my documents correctly? Who is going to do the right thing for the right price, and you only have certain amount of money *[sic]*.

My cultural misinterpretations, when I get to Vietnam, can have repercussions. I have to be really mindful and careful who advocates for me in Vietnam. That is where My Huong comes in. Her heart and her mind and her skills are where they need to be. There is no uncle, no distant cousin, and you want that connection. You want that security. It is hard to find. It is also what adoptees try and share as well.⁸³

Given the level of insecurity about who to trust for Australian intercountry adoptees returning to Vietnam in search of information about their family or birth histories, Sue explained how the community of intercountry adoptees abroad has formed to address those needs. She reiterated her trust in My Huong and formation of community of intercountry adoptees in Vietnam have supported those who come as transnational cultural agents. The community of cultural agents within the intercountry adoptees is thus inherently transnational. It is the understanding of the level of cultural information and trust that must be established for intercountry adoptees to exercise their agency in seeking their birth histories. Refugees experience this level of distrust in the Vietnamese government as returnees, but often had the prior life experience there in Vietnam as an adult or extended family for guidance. Because Vietnamese adoptees are often taken out of the country as children, their historical and cultural knowledge and networks are limited. The notion of intercountry adoptees as transnational agents is also applicable to understanding Vietnamese refugee children who have returned to live and work in Vietnam. While it is not within the scope of this work to explore the dynamics of their experiences due to limited time and resources, it is worth noting for later investigations. Within the realms of this research, the transnational investigations extend to the digital diaspora that Vietnamese child refugees and adoptees are actively engaging in. Even from the early history of the formation the intercountry adoptees network that Lynelle created, Facebook has been the preferred platform for their diasporic formation.

⁸³ Bylund, interview.

The transnational communities of adoptees on Facebook is one of the ways that Vietnamese adoptees have for self-representation of their memories and experiences in Australia. In building connections on Facebook, their return visits to Vietnam, and with one another in the different country contexts they exercise their agency and express their nationalism as transnational cultural agents.

In conclusion, Vietnamese war orphans and adoptees are in a unique position as transnationals given their distinct migratory experience and recognition as a special category of refugee children. Their self-representations in these oral histories shows the complexities of their personal and national belonging, identity, and relationship to the Vietnamese refugee experience in Australia. Their childhood in predominantly White Australian households presents different experiences and memories that nevertheless share in the struggles of cultural belonging that Vietnamese refugee experience in their own school and communities. Their search for identity and belonging in returning to Vietnam at times provides some information about their past, connection to cultural heritage, and augmentation of memories through social workers or adoption agencies that can assist with missing information. Some have found greater connection and sense of belonging with the intercountry adoptee communities and activism that included volunteering experiences with adoption agencies based in Vietnam and on Facebook. Their self-representation in these oral histories broaden the scope of national and transnational childhood and migration and adds to the complexity of cultural belonging and heritage that Second Generation Vietnamese, the children of refugees, experience as explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Children of Vietnamese Refugees

A history of childhood and migration of Vietnamese children would not be complete without considering the children of refugees, the second generation's self-representation of their inheritance of memory, childhood, and contributions to the community. Children of refugees, the second-generation born in Australia are distinct from the 1.5 generation, refugee and adoptee children that entered Australia before the age of 18. The second generation lives with historical knowledge, repercussions of trauma and memories of their parent's experience as refugees. Growing up in Australia presents challenges of cultural integration that differ and vary in terms of the agency and choices they make about their historical inheritance. This chapter explores their experiences, memories and narrative self-representation from a selection of Vietnamese children of refugees. The following discussion examines their memories and experiences of their refugee parent, their childhood, their agency and choices integrating their cultural memory, and how it has contributed to their identity and sense of belonging in the history of national and transnational childhood and migration.

Second Generation Vietnamese

It is not uncommon for the second generation to take on fervently their parent's refugee memory and channel it towards politicised activism.¹ In Kristen Schultz analysis of life course and the effects of childhood or war experience on the later life political activism among Okinawan women, Schultz noted that temporal proximity to the war, links to family with war trauma or experience, including networks and resources were the key determinants of later life political activism.² The second generations artistic and literary representations become notable ways in which deep memory of these experiences are expressed. Esther Faye refers to it as a "kind of uncanny doubling as survivor and historian," as someone who lives

¹ Kristen Schultz, "Family War Experience and Later-Life Political Activism among Okinawan Women." *Journal of Family History* 27, no. 3 (2002):273–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/036990027003004>; Monica Hess and Benedikt Korf, "Tamil diaspora and the political spaces of second-generation activism in Switzerland. *Global Networks*," 14 (2014): 419-437. doi:10.1111/glob.12052; Teresa M. Cappiali "Whoever decides for you without you, s/he is against you!": immigrant activism and the role of the Left in political racialization, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40, no. 6 (2017): 969-987. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2016.1229487; Davide Però and John Solomos, "Introduction: Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 1 (2010): 1-18. DOI: 10.1080/01419870903418944.

² Schultz, 287;

out the history and tells it.”³ The Dual Identity Leadership Program was created with this mission to inspire second generation Vietnamese Australian in Victoria towards civic and political action through their social impact program.⁴ The program is an initiative of the Vietnamese Community of Australia, Victorian Chapter. Its purpose and mission is to transmit the Vietnamese cultural heritage of the foundational generation of refugees that settled here in Australia. The foundational generation were predominantly from the South Vietnamese government officials and civilians who faced persecution and loss in dissent of the Communist government of the North that took over the republic of Vietnam. The community proudly adopts that yellow flag with three red stripes of the Republic of Vietnam as oppose to the red flag with yellow star of the current Socialist Republic of Vietnam. As noted in Chapter four, the Vietnamese community has organized political action to have the Socialist Republic of Vietnam flag represent the Vietnamese community in Australia instead of the current Vietnamese Flag. The Dual Identity Leadership program second generation members were an active part of this endeavor.⁵ The curriculum of the Dual Identity Leadership Program adopted principles based on founding generation to ensure that Vietnamese that grow up in Australia never forget the sacrifices that their refugee parents made for their lives here in Australia. In the following narratives about the history of what the Second Generation Vietnamese know, understand, and have been told about their parent’s refugee past will illuminate how the inheritance of history and memory informs the lives of Vietnamese children of refugees.

Inheritance of History and Memory

Second Generation Vietnamese vary in their exposure and understanding of the history and memory of their Vietnamese refugee parents and how it effects the course of their identity, sense of belonging, and community development. The inheritance of history and memory and sometimes trauma of their parent’s past is present in their experiences and memories of childhood. However, the impact or integration of this history often occurs in late

³ Esther Faye, “Missing The ‘Real’ Trace of Trauma: How The Second Generation Remember The Holocaust,” *American Imago* 58, no. 2 (2001): 525–54.

⁴ “Social Impact Projects,” Dual Identity Leadership Program, accessed 30 May 2019. <https://www.dualidentityleadership.org.au/sips>.

⁵ See video of their testimonies in support of the campaign in Yara city council for this use of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam flag, Brimbank City Council OCM 19/3/2019 Co Vang Flag, accessed on 03 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDa30UY8oMw>.

adulthood. Experiences vary depending on the circumstances including whether they grew up with exposure to Vietnamese community, activism, or in predominant White Australian communities. The select narratives of self-presentation about their inheritance of history and memory are from participants of the Dual Identity Leadership Program. They are a self-select group of Second Generation Vietnamese who chose to explore these questions of refugee history and memory and the impact on their identity, sense of belonging, and community development. Each person's experiences vary though they share in grappling with similar challenges in the process of acculturation. Their challenges differ depending on the language proficiency, education, and the social and economic position of their refugee parents in Australian resettlement. The following exploration about what they know and understand about their refugee parents' history and experience of migration will further inform an understanding of the inheritance of memory for Second Generation Vietnamese.

Alex Nguyen and Claudia Nguyen are both active leaders in the Dual Identity Leadership program.⁶ They were participants in the program who later committed to actively work on improving the program for other Second Generation Vietnamese to understand and integrate of their refugee parent's history and experiences. Alex was told stories about his parent's refugee past, but he did not really take an interest in them until later adulthood. Alex stated,

I have heard stories from them about why they left Vietnam. My mum used to come from quite a wealthy family, so the new government moved in, they were sent to re-education camps. They had a lot of family and friends that died as a part of the war and those who went overseas already. They were just looking for an escape because they couldn't imagine any life during those times. They could see their whole family was struggling under the new regime. They wanted to move into a wealthier country to start a new story, and eventually send funds home and bring them over to that new country.⁷

Alex understood why his parents left Vietnam, but he stated that they were less detailed about the journey. He had seen documentaries about boat people passages that were like his parents' description of their experiences, even though they did not talk about it in dramatic detail while he was growing up. He expounded,

They did not elaborate about the details frequently, but when they do it is more just pirates took over the ship, they took our gold and money, we did not have anything

⁶ Alex Nguyen interviewed 21 March 2017; Claudia Nhu Nguyen interviewed 11 March 2017

⁷ Alex Nguyen, interview.

left. It's very short and to the point, very frank. After they arrived in Malaysia, they spent a few months to a year in a refugee camp in Malaysia, and were offered a place in Australia, Melbourne. They took the plane over and started their life here.⁸

When asked about when he started to hear these stories, Alex admitted that he was rather dismissive about his parents' past. He took an interest after reading a book published in English about the refugee experience of another person that was his parents' age. He was about sixteen to eighteen years old at the time. He stated,

Being a very obnoxious kid, I didn't want to hear about those stories. As I got older, my parent gave me a book about the refugee experience by Quynh Dao. She's an author in Melbourne and her experience is quite similar to my parents. She was from the same city as my dad and she went on the boat to Malaysia. My dad read the book and said to have a read of it and tell me what you think.⁹

After having read about "half of the book," he started to ask his parents about their journey. With a publication in English of Quynh Dao's book, Alex had access to the experience and memories of the founding generation of Vietnamese refugees that was like his parents. He stated,

Before then I heard little snippets, but not the full story. I knew that my parents were attacked by pirates and I knew that from an early age, who they went with, that all came when I read that book and had that conversation.¹⁰

When asked about what he learned from the book and how it matched up with what he knew and understands about his parent's journey or experience as refugees, Alex replied,

When I was reading the book, I had heard snippets from my parent's story – the author spent a little time of journey on the boat and I knew that about my parents, Malaysia and the camps, so I could say I have heard that.¹¹

Alex noted the divergence in his parents' experience and the book's narrative about life in Vietnam. It gave him an understanding of the historical context in which his parents made the decision to leave as young adults. He stated,

⁸ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁹ Quynh Dao, *Tales of a Mountain City: A Vietnam War Memoir* (Fyshwick, A.C.T: Odyssey Books, 2010); Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹⁰ Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹¹ Alex Nguyen, interview.

The difference was that the book describes for a few chapters of life in Vietnam after the war and growing up during the war. The author was young when the war was ongoing. She described how her brother and sisters were generals in the army, and lifestyle growing up in that environment during the war. I don't think my parents ever discussed that with me.¹²

Alex spoke with his father about the past, though when asked about whether he felt the impact of his parent's experiences on his childhood he stated,

I know that from the past that it was traumatic, and I cannot see it in them. They don't act like they have been through anything traumatic. They just live life as normal.¹³

Alex's parents made a set of choices about their lifestyle in Australia and did not talk about the past or show any behavioral indications that they were different from the Australian culture that they had successfully assimilated. Alex explained further,

My parents don't speak of it, and they seem quite happy to settle in their lives here. They already have a solid foundation and with a good network of friends and work and stuff like that, so I don't really see it in them, but I know that it is there. It never really occurred or was obvious to me about their experiences.¹⁴

Alex grew up in a very Westernised household and notices the difference for Vietnamese children of refugees in his cohort that grew up in more traditional manner. He attributed these differences to choices his parents made and their own experience as refugees. He stated,

I know other kids that are different because maybe their parents are not as western, where they have grown up with Vietnamese very traditional way of doing things. I guess they have a stronger memory of their parents' journey and what it is like to be Vietnamese.¹⁵

In retrospect, Alex equated a type of loss in his inheritance of Vietnamese culture and migration history from his parents in terms of how Vietnamese he describes himself. He noted the differences in language used at home and even the food they chose to cook.

My parents sheltered us perhaps a little too much, maybe because they wanted us to take full advantage of everything Australia. I guess we did, and that came at a loss of not speaking Vietnamese. Even my mum doesn't cook much Vietnamese food. She

¹² Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹³ Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹⁴ Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹⁵ Alex Nguyen, interview.

mostly cooks Western food or Vietnamese food that is in western style because it was easier for us to eat.¹⁶

In contrast to Alex, Thomas Nguyen, another Second Generation Vietnamese, grew up in suburbs around other Vietnamese refugee families.¹⁷ He recalled more clearly the impact of his father's migration experience and history. Thomas stated,

My dad was a refugee and was in the South Vietnamese army. After year 12, he was conscripted to join a war and because he got a year 12, he was a lieutenant. They made you do hard labor and watch propaganda. It was a labor camp. He oversees the troops, small teams on the front lines. He was a Second Lieutenant in charge.¹⁸

When asked about when Thomas started to hear stories about his father's past, he said, "primary school."¹⁹ These stories arose often and seem to permeate their everyday life.

Thomas stated, "He casually brings it up unannounced when he feels like it."²⁰ Thomas and his family speak Vietnamese at home and neither of his parents are fluent in English.

Thomas's father arrived as an older adult, "He came from Hong Kong refugee camp in 1989 and he was 45 years old" and met his mother in 1993 after he had settled in Melbourne.²¹

Thomas recalled his father "driving home in the car or at dinner or casually bring them up," memories of past, such as the fact that "He taught Vietnamese to the refugee kids and they paid him in cigarettes."²² It is only in fragments that Thomas pieced together stories about his father. When asked about why his father left Vietnam, he stated, "Because he was in the South Vietnamese army, he could not get jobs or anything. He was doing freelance cyclo (peddle bike taxi). He just wanted to get a better life."²³ Thomas recalled some details about his father's journey, and when asked about how his father felt about this past, he stated,

¹⁶ Alex Nguyen, interview.

¹⁷ Tin Nguyen, interview.

¹⁸ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

¹⁹ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²⁰ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²¹ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²² Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²³ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

It was not trauma, it was more on a positive side...Resilience or just taking risks. He came by himself...His younger brother was in the navy and came here before my father. He settled in Melbourne.²⁴

From these snippets of stories and memories about his father's past as a refugee, Thomas expressed a humble "pride" about his heritage. Thomas stated,

I did not feel embarrassed that he was a refugee because he gets Veteran's pension. They were allied forces with Australia. He had to go through Centrelink and the welfare system when he was 55 and got the pension earlier because he was a veteran.²⁵

With this connection to Australian history in the war, Thomas was proud of his father's career as a soldier fighting with allied forces. It allowed him to retire from laboring in sweatshops for ten years upon arrival. His cultural heritage includes his immigrant Vietnamese mother who was not a refugee, but had entered through her family's sponsorship. Each second generation has a story about their parent's migration history as a living time capsule. For Claudia, both parents were refugees, but did not stay together in resettlement.²⁶ They divorced when Claudia was ten years old, however, she also grew up amongst Vietnamese extended family. Vietnamese history and heritage remained a significant inheritance from her parents and aunties. Claudia recalled stories about their life and Vietnam that are later augmented by the aunties on her father and mother's side. Claudia stated,

Both of my parents were refugees. They went from Thailand and from there went to Adelaide. They stayed there. Dad originally was from Canberra and then moved to Melbourne. They were in their teens. When they came here they had to do high school again as mature aged student, then eventually went to university.²⁷

Claudia's parents met in university as refugees and each had their own migration experience to Australia. Claudia did not take an interest or had much knowledge of the details while growing up. She stated,

Up until I was around twenty years old, I didn't really pay attention to their story. Even if they were told to me, I wouldn't connect to it that much. They would talk about how they went on boat from Vietnam to Australia, how they lived in refugee

²⁴ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²⁵ Thomas Nguyen, interview.

²⁶ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

²⁷ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

camps and how they went to university and struggled with English. It was not a significant story that was powerful, but it was.²⁸

Claudia's connection to refugee migration history and heritage did not only come from her parents. She stated that it came from her own interest in the Vietnamese community history.

After I joined the program (DILP), I became more interested in those stories. I would actively ask people in community how they experienced it. Through that, I would get a bigger understanding of that experience and the struggles the community went through, and why there was still a lot of anger and hurt - when they see parents die in front of them or acts of violence [sic].²⁹

Claudia's connection to the past is expansive and communal. She describes two incident that significantly shaped this connection to refugee history. The first was a documentary she saw about why the *Cua Vang* [Yellow flag of the former South Vietnamese government] was important, and why the people had left the country. The second was her involvement in community practices of cultural heritage and preservation of that history on the anniversary of the Fall of Saigon. She explained,

30th of April is when we lost the war and each chapter of Australia makes it an event to go to Canberra to protest against the Vietnamese government in front of the embassy....It was a wave of people, hundreds and thousands, everyone had that flag. To see that support and to see the love and so many people were there that I should be so proud of who I am because we have this connection here that other communities might not have [sic].³⁰

With connection and political and personal to the stories of refugee experience and migration shared at these events, Claudia grew up enriched with inherited memory. She described how stories were shared with her about Vietnamese heritage on the trips to Canberra.

There are songs about the war and about pro democratic South Vietnam songs, the south Vietnam national anthem. On the (10 hours) bus (ride), they tell stories about their experiences of war and sometimes positive and funny stories. For me seeing that comradeship and connection that everyone has because they came from a similar situation as refugees, it's that similar connection of people and experiences that I thought was quite powerful for me[sic].³¹

²⁸ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

²⁹ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

³⁰ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

³¹ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

The pro democratic South Vietnamese songs and stories told kept Claudia connected to the history and memories of her community as Vietnamese refugees. Like Huong Tran, the 1.5 Generation refugee artist who grew up in the pro-democratic moment, Claudia participated annually in this trip and maintains engagement with her elders in the Vietnamese community in these rituals of cultural heritage. As a Second Generation Vietnamese, Claudia's upbringing is highly enriched with Vietnamese refugee cultural heritage.

Hang Do, another Second Generation Vietnamese, also expressed this deep communal connection to Vietnamese refugee history that extends from her family's cultural heritage.³² Hang's historical inheritance of memoirs is from the moral stories she is told about her heritage. When asked about what kind of stories her father told her about being Vietnamese, she stated,

A version of being a good moral person in Vietnamese is different from that being a good moral person in Australian society. Mum and Dad would give their interpretation of why Australian was lazy. It was very collectivist and anti-communist.³³

Hang's exposure to their migration history and stories was disrupted as the family broke up in her early childhood. She did put together some knowledge of her parents' story and her own birth.

Mum and Dad both came from central Vietnam but met in a Hong Kong refugee camp. They had fled separately. They dated for twelve months and he was able to learn Mandarin. My understanding was that Mum fell pregnant with me there.³⁴

Hang recalled her parents telling her about their history in the camp, and the options that they had to resettle in United States or Australia.

It was international organisation that asked them if they wanted to go to the US or go to Australia. He felt that U.S. (United States) had abandoned them. He was very anti-communist, so he chose Australia. I was born in Queen Victoria hospital which is no longer here. While mum was pregnant, they were in Midway Migrant Hostel in Maribyrnong, which is now a detention centre[sic]. After they had me, they moved out to rentals.³⁵

³² Hang Do interviewed 13 November 2017.

³³ Hang Do, interview.

³⁴ Hang Do, interview.

³⁵ Hang Do, interview.

Like Claudia, it was participation in the Dual Identity Leadership Program that shaped Hang's understanding of cultural heritage. Hang stated,

I became Vietnamese when I did this DILP program. I was handing out for Greens at TET festival, and heavily pregnant with second child. I saw a pamphlet at empty stall and it was about DILP, only that would excite a person like me[sic].

It changed my life. I was interacting with other 1.5 and second generation and my experience with my identity was very common....It was like being with family...What I said earlier about being really uncomfortable about Vietnam and my culture[sic]. I didn't feel so threaten by it anymore. I feel really empowered to speak on the behalf the community, and it's okay to not know everything about being Vietnamese[sic].³⁶

Hang learned about her heritage through her community. She also had the advantage of being able to speak Vietnamese which gave her access to her elders and their stories about refugee experience and migration. She stated,

I have language (Vietnamese language) and others without language do not engage in same way. The oldies do not engage those young one the same if their language is not strong, interpersonally, but also the lived experience of that generation[sic].³⁷

Hang went on after the program to run for a seat in parliament. In a speech as the first Vietnamese woman in Victorian parliament, she noted how her heritage and community shapes her. She stated,

We each come to this place with our own story, each of us a reflection of the people and experiences that have shaped us. I am humbled to be standing here as the first Vietnamese-Australian woman to take a seat in this place....

Both my grandads served in the South Vietnamese army, fighting the Việt Cộng. At the Fall of Sài Gòn in 1975 each of my parents were chosen by their families to flee on crowded fishing boats. As 'boat people' they would face starvation, pirates and the prospect of never seeing their families again. But life in Vietnam under communism was unbearable. Thousands had already died in labour camps. Millions of Vietnamese people made this same perilous journey and perished. My parents survived.³⁸

³⁶ Hang Do, interview.

³⁷ Hang Do, interview.

³⁸ Hang Do, email. These excerpts are from a "Corrections to Members proof" of the speech that Hang provided to me as an attachment to an email on March 16, 2018 as a follow-up on the interview to be used in this thesis. I will not cite the official transcript as it would disclose her real name.

Hang's opening to the speech shows how she has been able to share her historical inheritance as a child of Vietnamese refugees. She connected herself to the larger experience of the community of boat people through her grandparents. She related to her inheritance of being an Australian through her parents who were refugees that undertook the perilous journey and survived. Furthermore, she noted that each person has their own experience and story. As a child of refugees, she also had her own experience of childhood and growing up in Australia. The following self-representation of narratives of the childhoods of Second Generation Vietnamese furthers the understanding of how the inheritance of memory and experience from their refugee parent's implicates their memory and experience of childhood in Australia.

Second Generation Childhoods

Second Generation Vietnamese inherit their parents' refugee history and memories that inform their experience of childhood in Multicultural Australia. One of the key factors that shaped their childhood experience at home is the access and exposure to Vietnamese culture in everyday life. Alex explained the impact of this on his childhood,

My parents are a little bit odd in the sense that they didn't want to live too close to the Vietnamese Asian population. Back then there was Footscray and Glen Waverly, and those were areas that were predominately where Asian immigrants would go to live. They wanted us to grow up in a very Western environment.³⁹

Alex had Vietnamese family, but he did not remember stories about the past from them. He stated,

My parents have a few Vietnamese family friends and uncles, but at a young age, even now, I do not hear any stories about their journey[sic]. Whenever we visit them, or they come over, we never discuss the past.⁴⁰

Alex did not have Vietnamese elders that shared stories about Vietnamese culture or heritage. He did not have any friendship networks with Vietnamese his age either. He stated,

When I was growing up until high school, I did not have many Vietnamese friends at all. Most were Australian white and the only time I started to make Vietnamese friend was through DILP.⁴¹

³⁹ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁴⁰ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁴¹ Alex Nguyen, interview.

Like Hang, Alex did not create those connections with other Vietnamese until he joined the leadership program. However, in stark contrast to a less explicit Vietnamese upbringing, Claudia had deep connection with Vietnamese culture and experiences through extended family relationships. She stated,

I grew up around Richmond, which is a very popular Vietnamese area. A lot of my aunties still live there. I grew up there and went to preschool there. Eventually mum and dad divorced, I started going to school around the northern suburbs. Every Saturday I would come back to visit dad and aunties there.⁴²

Claudia grew up in a Vietnamese speaking household even though she was born and raised in Australia. She went to Saturday school to study Vietnamese and was also a part of a Vietnamese Scouts group during primary school. She explained,

Dad and aunties couldn't speak English. Mum spoke English, but we spoke Vietnamese predominantly at home. Vietnamese school started when I was maybe grade 2, grade 3, and I started with Gia Dinh Phuc Thu – which was a scout Buddhist group down in Collingwood[sic]. I did that for a few years and I really enjoyed that. The sense of community and they brought in religion into it and they made it quite fun and engaging with a lot of activities[sic].⁴³

As her childhood was filled with Vietnamese relatives, language and rituals, Claudia found starting school rather difficult. She remembered stories told about how she struggled in Kindergarten with the separation like Alisha Fernando, a 1.5 generation refugee, described in Chapter Four.⁴⁴

Kindergarten was a bit hard for me. It took me a while to really blend into the crowd and make friends. I remember that I was very attached with my family. I remember crying every time they had to leave me. I still hear stories about how I couldn't really blend in well with the crowd and that the teachers did not know what to do, so I remember them locking me into a room and I would just cry in there[sic].⁴⁵

⁴² Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁴³ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁴⁴ Fernando, interview.

⁴⁵ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

Family for Claudia was the source of Vietnamese culture and socialization for her during childhood. Even though her parents were divorced, her cultural ties with her father and aunties were strong.

I think that when my parents broke up, my dad he had a lot of sisters that felt quite sorry for me. They would come around and always give me presents and spoiled me a bit, which is not always good. I always had family around me. They took great pride in the festivals throughout the year such as whenever you would remember an ancestor[sic]. It would always be this massive banquet. Family was quite important growing up, being around the aunties.⁴⁶

Even though she was surrounded with Vietnamese culture and extended family in relationship to celebrate, Claudia did not identify with her cultural heritage outside of the home Van Le, a 1.5 generation refugee child, described in Chapter Four.⁴⁷ She explained,

Growing up I was always aware of the culture and why it was important this notion of family as always being there for you[sic]...

I went to Vietnamese language school, but I was never really into it. I never enjoyed it that much. Every Saturday you would have to go. You wake up early. Then you sort of ask the question, why am I at school when everyone else is doing other things?⁴⁸

In Claudia's awareness of difference in the experience as a Vietnamese child from other children who did not go to school on Saturdays, she started to associate Vietnamese culture within the realm of home and with family. She did not integrate an interest in Vietnamese culture with school life. She stated,

It wasn't until my late teens or early twenties where I really started to become interested in the Vietnamese culture and learn the history of refugees, how my parents came here and what all that means to me as a person in terms of my identity: who I am and the struggles that the community went through [sic].⁴⁹

Claudia took an interest in learning more about Vietnamese culture and history in her late teens. In a similar way, Hang grew up immersed in Vietnamese family and culture and kept

⁴⁶ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁴⁷ Le, interview.

⁴⁸ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁴⁹ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

that separate from her school life even though she schooled in a multicultural environment. Hang explained,

I remember being at a school that was really multicultural. It was a dormitory. I grew up around White Australians, lots of Chinese and Vietnamese, Italian and Greek kids, all sorts. It never occurred to me that Australia was white, except that my teachers were white.⁵⁰

Even though her school experience included other immigrants and focused on multiculturalism, Hang did not identify as culturally Vietnamese. When asked about her experience with Vietnamese culture, she stated, “I had this huge cringe about Vietnamese people.” She explained,

Home was very different than what was on TV. When I went to Anglo Australian houses, they were more like TV. I understand now the extent in which I wanted to be White Australian. I reckon it was when I had kids that it was worthwhile to explore and that I had a Vietnamese identity.⁵¹

Similar to Cat, a refugee child featured in Chapter Three, Hang acquired notions about what it meant to be Australian through watching television. When asked about her sense of cultural cringe about Vietnamese people, Hang explained that her relationship with her father who was symbolic of Vietnamese culture contributed to the tension.⁵² She noted that in multicultural Australia, there was always the option to deny your cultural heritage and choose assimilation.

I turned away from it, and I could. I realise that now that we are so privileged here. If you choose to not be Vietnamese, there is a whole culture of assimilation ready to ignore that part of you as well.⁵³

Hang chose to identify herself as Australian. Her Vietnamese family and friends around her would presume she was inherently Vietnamese. She gave some examples of her behaviour back then.

I identified as Australian, and if anything, really White Australian [*sic*]. I did not speak Vietnamese very well. I felt really offended [if someone] presumed I know what it was to be Vietnamese or asked me how to say their name in Vietnamese. As if

⁵⁰ Hang Do, interview.

⁵¹ Hang Do, interview.

⁵² Hang Do, interview.

⁵³ Hang Do, interview.

there was always an equivalent to an English word. Asking if I had been back [to Vietnam], that used to grate me.⁵⁴

The option to identify as a culturally White Australian, was highly reinforced in school multicultural rhetoric. Hang conveyed a story of what she understood as multicultural Australia from a memory of school that were racially diverse. She stated,

I enjoyed drawing.... There was a poster competition, I ended up drawing a White person, Black person, Asian person. I noticed that I kept those motifs. It was constantly fed to us, including Australian animals, but it was not descriptive Vietnamese[sic].⁵⁵

She clarified further this notion of multicultural motifs and what she meant as descriptive Vietnamese.

Nothing in it was encouraging me to explore what it meant, what it meant geopolitically or in society to be Vietnamese[sic]. I ate rice and used chopsticks at home. When I am at school, most people have ham sandwiches. I did not think anything of it really except that multicultural Australia were people with different skin colour.⁵⁶

For Hang, the option to be White Australian was very real. She slowly identified that she could be of a different skin colour, but White inside. She stated, “Sometimes I forgot that I was Asian until someone reminded me, a lot more in high school and college, especially when I was meeting other people’s parents[sic].”⁵⁷ Hang kept separate her home and school identity. When asked, “How did you understand as a child what it meant to be Vietnamese?”⁵⁸ She stated,

Maybe it did not matter much because it was part of home. I was part of family. I just knew it would be different when I got to school. I did have to explain a lot of things about the way we did things at home. Culturally, my Anglo friends didn’t really understand.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Hang Do, interview.

⁵⁵ Hang Do, interview.

⁵⁶ Hang Do, interview.

⁵⁷ Hang Do, interview.

⁵⁸ Hang Do, interview.

⁵⁹ Hang Do, interview.

Hang gave an example of a Vietnamese cultural expectation and understanding that she lived with at home. She explained to her White Australian, Anglo friends,

I have a younger brother and sister. The oldest always is the last to get things. It is an ethic of sacrifice. It was not that my brother and sisters were being selfish. Those are things that I had to explain to friends. It was not that I was being a martyr. That was the way things were.⁶⁰

Vietnamese language and culture were a part of the home life that Hang could disown at school and amongst her Australian friends. In many ways, her growing up resembled some of the 1.5 generation narratives. For instance, she stated,

I hated to translate for my mum and how necessary it was[sic]. It was as soon as I could speak. I still do it. I can read. With practice, I can speak Vietnamese. They did not speak English at home.⁶¹

The social and cultural mobility of using English and Vietnamese language proficiency for the service of one's parents is a common experience amongst the 1.5 generation. It was also a shared burden for those in the second generation that had less English language or culture proficient parents. In her speech to Parliament, Hang summarised how this translated to her support of the public social system that assisted her and her family's development.

My brothers and sisters and I were born and raised in the western suburbs of Melbourne, in public housing, at public schools[sic]. We played in public parks and read books in public libraries. And when we were sick, there was Medicare.

Us kids spoke fluent 'Australian' ... With all that, we grew up with a huge sense of responsibility, growing up with the weight of our families' expectations to make good on their sacrifices [sic]. And navigating a world that our parents could not explain to us.⁶²

Hang accepted her responsibilities at home as a child to assist her parents, and as an adult take up her civic responsibilities to campaign for the preservation of those systems. This is one of the ways that Hang and other Second Generation Vietnamese have been able to express their integration of lived experiences as children of refugees. The following additional narratives are from other Second Generation Vietnamese that have integrated their cultural identity to create a sense of belonging in Multicultural Australia.

⁶⁰ Hang Do, interview.

⁶¹ Hang Do, interview.

⁶² Hang Do, interview and email.

Belonging

Second Generation Vietnamese exercise about their identity and create belonging in multicultural Australia through the integration of lived experiences as children of refugees. They also make politicised choices based on their understanding of Vietnamese cultural heritage and their childhood experience with refugee parents. Hang surmised that during the historical period that she grew up as a Vietnamese child refugee there were more options are for Australian asylum seekers than there are today. She stated in Parliment,

It is not lost on any of us kids with migrant parents how different our stories would be if we were seeking refuge today. The difference then was that, as the fallout of the Vietnam War played out, we had politicians here, significantly Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, who had the courage and compassion to take us in and make room for us. This is the difference between me standing here as your newest MP, rather than being on Manus as a detainee.⁶³

These statements show the level of sophistication in Hang's development from a person that had experienced cultural cringe about her own Vietnamese identity and the evolution of her acceptance and civic responsibilities based on her cultural heritage. In colloquial terms, some people express it as "finding your tribe." When I asked Hang about "finding her tribe," she explained,

I have multiple tribes. Greens are home for my progressive values, and sometimes unfamiliar white space. I am working hard in that space to make it more multicultural. Vietnamese is home for me and is powerful as well. I feel safe and strong. As a mum, I talk with others nurturing a parent style of breastfeeding until they are old. Similar to parenting, I hone my sense of what feels true and finding ways to being Vietnamese. These are tribes that can help me build that and where it makes sense.⁶⁴

When Hang talks about making sense or integrating her multiple dimensions of self, she refers to experiences in diverse community of support "where I do not have to explain myself because of the assume knowledge is different in those groups."⁶⁵ The social and cultural access and mobility for Second Generation Vietnamese growing up in Australia extends their choices and options to develop their own community for belonging. Alex explained how his lived experiences as a child of refugees allows him insight into further developing the program for other Second Generation Vietnamese to experience a greater sense of belonging.

⁶³ Hang Do, interview and email.

⁶⁴ Hang Do, interview.

⁶⁵ Hang Do, interview.

When asked about how he became active in the community and where this idea come from, he replied,

It all came from my dad, a lot of the big decisions in my life are based on my dad's advice. My career is one of them and joining DILP is one of them.

I am very thankful for my dad to push me there. A lot of stuff around culture and heritage I had pushed that away from a very early age.⁶⁶

Alex also explained that it was not usual that Second Generation Vietnamese like himself were not interested in their refugee parents' history or perspective to begin with. Their parent's refugee identity and cultural belonging was something the he and other children in the program had resisted. Alex explained,

Going into the program and meeting people with similar experiences and like-minded as me and hearing their story triggered something. I became more interested about learning about my heritage and became more comfortable with my dual identity, and that it was something I did not need to push away *[sic]*.⁶⁷

Alex started to embrace his dual identity as a Vietnamese Australian and volunteered for Vietnamese community events. He eventually became more involved in the leadership for the program and fostering that sense of belonging for the community.

I started doing small events and towards the end of the program. Following that, Viv pushed me to be the chair of the next program. I have a great admiration of the program and how it much changed my outlook on Multiculturalism and personal identity.⁶⁸

Alex expressed how he wanted to reach out to other Second Generation Vietnamese that share his new found appreciation for culture and belonging through the program.

I wanted, a lot of people like me -- who brushed away that Vietnamese side and really identified themselves as Australian. Underneath all that, there is genuine curiosity and interest in learning where they came from and their history. Somehow it is this program. Maybe it's the connection that you make with the community. The content somehow unhatched that curiosity, and that is how I stuck around to be the chair.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁶⁷ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁶⁸ Alex Nguyen, interview.

⁶⁹ Alex Nguyen, interview.

After a year as the chair, Alex became Vice President of the Vietnamese Community in Australia, Victorian Chapter. Like Alex, Claudia was also a part of the program and went on to work in the committees to promote a greater sense of acceptance of cultural heritage and belonging for other Second Generation Vietnamese. She reflected on how being a child of refugees affects life choices for the Second Generation Vietnamese. She stated,

Given our experiences as refugees, there have been limitations as to how we were brought up. Our parents who worked very hard so that their children could have a better life. They have expectations that you be a doctor, be a lawyer, etc. Although I understand that parents want the best for their children, it does limit the second generation as to how far they can succeed in their growth potential.⁷⁰

Claudia strongly believes that the expectation of refugee parents for their children stifles the range of possibilities for the children in the Second Generation.

The second generation have not reached their peak. They have hit this mark and said that is good enough for me: I make money, I am doing my parents couldn't do by working, but there is a lot more to do, in terms of representing the community in high leadership roles in politics, community, the environment[sic]....I do not think the community has a voice out there, and that plays a part to how we were brought up and as refugees [sic]. You are limited as your parents want you to do this this and this.⁷¹

What Claudia alluded to is the political voice and representation in the larger Australian community. She noted a difference in childhood and upbringing with refugee parents that creates a sense of cultural separateness. When asked when she started to notice this difference, Claudia stated,

During the early years of high school, [Australian] people were so independent and doing their own thing and not being pressured by their family to always stick to science or engineering or whatever.

The difference was that their parents would actively tell them to go and join sport clubs, go and volunteer here, or go run out in the park. It was more so then staying at home, studying, being with family.⁷²

Claudia's recognition of the separation of family and Vietnamese culture from mainstream Australia is an effect that goes beyond the first generation of children raised in Australia. She

⁷⁰ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁷¹ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁷² Claudia Nguyen, interview.

noted another significant difference about the Second Generation that effects their sense of belonging with each other and the Vietnamese community at large: Vietnamese language. Claudia described her interaction with her grandmother and the difference for her cousins of the same generation because of their Vietnamese language proficiency. She explained,

She's (Claudia's grandmother) eighty-nine years old. I remember a few years ago when we were visiting her at the nursing home that I could joke with her. We could talk about random things. I could see that she was happy. Then I realized that when I look over to my cousin, they could not speak Vietnamese at all. They had no connection and no relationship with grandma. I found that really sad.⁷³

Vietnamese language proficiency allowed Claudia to communicate with her grandmother. It allowed her to understand the stories about Vietnamese refugee heritage and learn to sing the song at the protest for Vietnamese democracy in Canberra. Differences in Vietnamese language proficiency amongst the Second Generation effects their sense of belonging in the community of elders and connection to Vietnamese refugee heritage. Claudia admitted,

There is a struggle to get second generation to be involved, to understand what this all means. I understand what this means to my aunties. They escaped war when they went through a lot. I think as a community, we fail to tell stories and to pass on stories. You can ask my cousin what happened to your parents during the war and they might not know it at all. Yeah, it's a struggle that we have.⁷⁴

Despite the challenges for Second Generation Vietnamese to maintain connection with founding and first generation of Vietnamese refugees, Claudia expressed how she believe in the efforts of the DILP program to build connection for cultural preservation. She stated,

I wanted to continue that for the next cohort for the rest of the younger generation coming through, and that concept of dual identity, that your culture as a person is important, before you can go out there and make an impact[sic]. That is one reason I am still with the program until now.⁷⁵

⁷³ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁷⁴ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

⁷⁵ Claudia Nguyen, interview.

The DILP program just celebrated its fifth year of participants and the group has grown in its members and level of activism. The Facebook community activities and posts indicate a significant sense of belonging.⁷⁶ For instance, Elisa Nguyen posted,

Participating in DILP 2017 has changed my perspective as a Vietnamese-Australian. Being born in Australia after my parents migrated here after the late 1970's was somewhat conflicting to my dual identity. My parents worked hard for the family and cultivated us in the Australian way of living. I was used to the Australian values and system which distanced me from my Vietnamese culture. They rarely would share their stories of coming to Australia on a boat across the seas and I only knew general history of the Vietnam War through history classes at school[sic]. Such that my dual identity had been westernised and washed away.⁷⁷

Elisa's and other testimonies from DILP participants on Facebook share narratives of self-representation that affirm the purpose of supporting children of refugee identity development and belonging. Along with testimonies of their own experiences on the DILP Facebook page, there are pictures of community ceremonies such as the Lunar New Year, and flag raising of the South Vietnamese flag. A key aspect of the program involves the social impact programs that the students create about the social concerns for the Vietnamese Australian community. For example, one of the student groups posted on Facebook a description of a project to address the concerns of coming out in the Vietnamese community.

The project was based on interviews that were conducted with Vietnamese-Australians who identified as LGBTIQ+. We explored concepts of stigma, the unconventional and the innate fear of change, whilst promoting LGBTIQ+ awareness, particularly in the Vietnamese community where it is often criticized.. This is just one of the many Social Impact Project (SIP) topics where participants are confronted with the task of delivering or initiating social change by celebrating humanitarian success or challenging stigmatised concepts.

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Check out the Rainbow Family's podcast series 'DILP Uncloseted' here: <https://soundcloud.com/user-927852471>.⁷⁸

These programs show the Second Generation's deep knowledge about the intergenerational and cultural concerns within the community. For instance, Vietnamese language is a huge barrier for Second Generation. It is difficult to even describe their sexual preferences to their

⁷⁶ Elisa Nguyen, Dual Identity Leadership Program, <https://www.facebook.com/dualidentityleadership/>, accessed on 4 April 2019.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

parents as they often struggle with knowing the Vietnamese language phrase to use, let alone translating their thoughts and feelings through a mix of English and Vietnamese. The podcast discusses these issues and other concerns about cultural heritage. It seeks to build great support and belonging for young Vietnamese LGBTIQ+ that feel otherwise highly stigmatised and left out of the Vietnamese community. From the feedback and motivation of students who have been in the program, the sense of community and belonging for the Second Generation has really expanded through the DILP program. Their cultural heritage of growing up as children of Vietnamese refugees has become an asset for the participants. Like the Facebook communities built around refugee identity, the participants of DILP can build belonging based on their dual identity as Vietnamese Australians.

In conclusion, the memories and experiences of Second Generation Vietnamese, children of refugees are shaped by their life and choices about identity and belonging to the mainstream Australian and/or the Vietnamese Australian community. The choices vary depending on their experiences of childhood in Australia, Vietnamese language and cultural knowledge, and expectations from their refugee parents. Their narratives of self-representation as children of refugees broadens a historical understanding of parental refugee history informs childhood, identity, belonging and civic responsibilities in succeeding generations of Vietnamese. Their inheritance of refugee history and memories informs their community practices, such as the Dual Identity Leadership Program which supports the national agenda for the development of a more multicultural Australia. Their exercise of building community and belonging includes their connections on Facebook, which will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Vietnamese Refugees on Facebook

Previous chapters have mentioned the significance of social media for Vietnamese adoptees and second generation to form communities and express their identity and belonging. Some of the interviewees featured in the previous chapters are active administrators and participants of these Vietnamese on line communities.¹ This chapter looks at Facebook posts as self-representation of Vietnamese refugee and child migrants' memories and experiences in the history of national and transnational history of childhood and migration. It explores in greater detail how identity and belonging are expressed. Child refugees and children of refugees are the major participants of these internet-based communities. Based on their identity as refugees, Vietnamese refugee and child migrants in Australia have leveraged technology to form Facebook communities that engage the global Vietnamese diaspora. Facebook becomes a historical site of memory that facilitates self-representation of their historical memories of childhood in the refugee camps, migration, and returns to sites of memories. The following also includes an analysis of how Vietnamese refugees engage in Facebook Hermeneutics to express their historical memories, identity and belonging in digital diaspora.

Facebook and Diaspora

What is Facebook and how are Vietnamese refugees contributing to historical knowledge about the formation of transnational communities? Facebook is a website, a place in cyberspace, where individuals from all over the world set up personal pages with pictures and postings of their thoughts and ideas to share with the public, family and friends. Since 2006, Facebook has become one of the most commonly used Information and Communications Technology (ICT) available. The average Australian spends 1.7 hours per day on Facebook.² Since 2009, the emergence of Facebook group and community pages started to engage people who wanted to form communities based on a set identity or shared

¹ Lynelle Beveridge and Dominic Golding are active members of the adoptees Facebook groups. Nam Huynh is an administrator of Pulau Bidong and Au Co Vietnamese refugee public Facebook groups. Claudia Nguyen, Dominic Golding, and Thomas Nguyen active member of the Dual Identity Leadership public Facebook group.

² Alex Herbert, "These incredible stats show exactly how huge Facebook is in Australia," *Business Insider Australia - Tech*, 8 April 2015.

experiences. The Social Sciences lead studies about these Facebook communities focusing on five areas of research: “descriptive analysis of users, motivations for using Facebook, identity presentation, the role of Facebook in social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure.”³ Emerging studies in History consider the use of ICTs and the politics of transnational identity for migrant populations.⁴ Facebook resembles a digital archive of personal and public photographs, videos, memory writing, correspondence, news articles, and music clippings. Historical analysis of this digital archive informs us about the history and the use of ICTs for the formation of refugee communities in diaspora.

The phenomenon of creating Facebook transnational communities in diaspora is not new. Migrants have been the main social actors of such movements and more so since the emergence of ICTs that transcend time and distance. Pedro J. Oiarzabal and Ulf-Dietrich Reips posit that the age of ICTs naturally brought forth construction of transnational and diasporic communities.⁵ To illustrate the exponential growth of online diaspora groups, Oiarzabal and Reips used the Basque diaspora as their example.

As of November 1997, there were 61 Basque diaspora institutions registered with the Basque government, but only one diaspora association online which was created in 1996...as of March 2009, the diaspora had formed 211 associations throughout 24 countries, of which 135 (or nearly 64 per cent) had a presence in cyberspace in 20 countries –or over 83 per cent of the total.⁶

ICTs such as Facebook have contributed to this phenomenal growth and ability to mobilize groups of people without the constraints of geographic boundaries. Using self-administered

³ For a literature review of social science studies of Facebook, see Robert E. Wilson, Samuel D. Gosling, and Lindsay T. Graham, “A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7(3), 203, DOI: 10.1177/1745691612442904.

⁴ Ellen Rutten and Vera Zvereva, “Introduction: old conflicts, new media: post-socialist digital memories,” in *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States*, edited by Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor, and V. V Zvereva (New York: Routledge, 2013): 1-18; Dieter De Bruyn, “From ‘The Second Katyn’ to ‘A Day Without Smolesk’: Facebook response to the Smolesk tragedy and its aftermath,” in *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States*, edited by Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor, and V. V Zvereva (New York: Routledge, 2013): 228-238; Iyla Kukulin, “Memory and self-legitimization in the Russian blogosphere: argumentative practices in historical and political discussions in Russian-language blogs of the 2000s,” in *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States*, edited by Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor, and V. V Zvereva (New York: Routledge, 2013): 112-129.

⁵ Pedro J. Oiarzabal and Ulf-Dietrich Reips, “Migration and Diaspora in the Age of Information and Communication Technologies,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (November 2012): 1333–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.698202>.

⁶ Pedro J. Oiarzabal, “Diaspora Basques and Online Social Networks: An Analysis of Users of Basque Institutional Diaspora Groups on Facebook,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (July 3, 2012): 1472–73, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2012.698216.

surveys for Basque migrants and their descendants from 75 Basque diaspora institutions' groups on Facebook, Oiarzabal and Reips explored their reasons for using Social Network Sites (SNSs) and to ascertain their socio-demographic profile and the potential effect or influence on users' 'offline' identity and community formation.⁷ They concluded that Facebook, in particular, promotes the expression of individuality in connection to a collective identity and that "Basque migrants tend to reproduce their offline networks and friendships on Facebook, while timidly engage in finding new friends and recruiting new members for their diaspora groups."⁸ Like Basque migrants, Vietnamese refugees in diaspora have formed Internet communities and connected to their collective identity.

Facebook facilitated the development of the Vietnamese communities on-line based on their identity as refugees. After the Vietnam War, Vietnamese represented one of the twentieth century's largest movements of refugees. From 1976 to 1990, over 500,000 Vietnamese were resettled all over the world. Facebook, a transnational ICT, brings together Vietnamese who have a shared identity as former refugees and are now citizens of the world. As examples, there are currently over 2,680 members of the "Pulau Bidong Alumni" and over 700 members of the "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore."⁹ These are Facebook public groups of former refugees, humanitarian aid workers, their family and friends. Lam Khánh Nguyễn, started the Hawkins Road group to document the history of refugees at that particular camp. He recently created another group based on the rescue boat, "Cap Anamur/Boat People/Vietnam."¹⁰ The use of Facebook to reconnect with past identity as a refugee has lead to other on-line initiatives including Anna Bui's "Vietnamese Refugee information"¹¹ group and her "Remembering the Vietnamese Exodus"¹² website, an index of all Vietnamese refugee camps active in the 1970s

⁷ Ibid, 1473.

⁸ Ibid, 1480.

⁹ "Pulau Bidong Alumni," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>, accessed 26 October 2015; "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

¹⁰ "Cap Anamur/Boat People/Vietnam," Facebook public group, accessed 19 June 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/110447342329657/>.

¹¹ "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group, accessed 19 June 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

¹² "Remembering the Vietnamese exodus," [Refugeecamps.net](http://refugeecamps.net/), accessed 19 June 2015, <http://refugeecamps.net/About.html>.

and 1980s. These community pages connect former refugees and humanitarian aid workers from all over the world. Facebook provides a permanent place for these on-line communities, but does the Vietnamese refugee on-line community constitute a diaspora?

Martin Sokefeld lends a vital framework to this inquiry with his application of social movement approach towards a definition of diaspora.¹³ The application of Sokefeld's social movement theory for the formation of diaspora qualifies Vietnamese refugee on-line communities as a diaspora. The meaning of diaspora implies dispersion. It becomes very difficult to reconnect people and events based on former refugee camps and rescue boats. Refugee camps and rescue boats are transient as is the nature of diaspora. Sokefeld defines diaspora as "a type of consciousness" that has to do with dislocation, but not necessarily a "natural outcome of migration" or attached to a place or "a primordial bonding and belonging" to a particular race, ethnicity, or nation.¹⁴ Building upon the image from Benedict Anderson that nations are imagined communities, Sokefeld defines diaspora as a "special case of ethnicity" in which identity is the mobilizing force of creating an "imagined transnational community."¹⁵ This definition of diaspora arising from social movement theory requires three components: *political opportunities*, *mobilizing structure and practices* and *framing*.¹⁶ These characteristics can be applied to define the Vietnamese refugee on Facebook as a diaspora. The *political opportunity* that fuels the creation of Vietnamese refugee Facebook community is not based on a grievance that typically drives social movements. Vietnamese refugees have taken the *political opportunity* to establish historical legitimacy based on their identity and experience on rescue boats and at refugee camps. The *mobilizing structure*, Facebook, is the 'collective vehicle' for connecting the networks of people for "collective action." The collective action is to organize historical objects and memory as well as respond to concerns about the current state of refugees and asylum seekers. The *framing* refers to "shared understanding" of survival and traumatic experience as refugees. The following is an example of Facebook as the *mobilizing structure* for Vietnamese refugees on-line to have the *political opportunity* to comment on the Syrian refugee crisis based on their shared experience as refugees. Sonny Le wrote,

¹³ Martin Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora," *Global Networks* 6, no. 3 (2006): 265–84, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111>.

¹⁴ Ibid, 265 -266, 271.

¹⁵ Ibid, 266 – 267.

¹⁶ Ibid, 269.

I was on NPR's Here & Now (US public radio network) this morning. Didn't realize how close to the surface it was/is [*sic*]. I verklempt[*sic*], but stayed composed enough to get through it. As refugees & immigrants, it's our moral responsibility to hold the plank that we've crossed on for others behind us.¹⁷

Sonny Le expressed his shared understanding and sympathy with the plight of other refugees is based on their identification as refugees regardless of nationality. Refugee identity as a mobilizing force creates this imagined transnational community of refugees. Imagined, in this case, is based on their conceptual sense of connection based on their identity as refugees and not based on their actual experiences as refugees. As articulated in the framework of Sokefeld's definition of diaspora, the Vietnamese Refugee community on Facebook is its own diaspora. What and how does this migrant community on line contribute to history?

Facebook Hermeneutics

The Vietnamese diaspora on Facebook contributes to historical knowledge through their engagement in the hermeneutic process of self and community historicization, otherwise known as "Facebook hermeneutics."¹⁸ According to Robert Craig, Facebook hermeneutics is the integration of German philosophers, Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer's work regarding self-representation and use of the language in the process of self-historicization in the digital-dialogical space. Craig stated,

Hermeneutics can be understood here as a science of man's objectifications, of which Facebook, with its constant stream of self-expressions and excretions, has now perhaps become the location par excellence.¹⁹

Facebook users will recognize the expressions of self occur in the "status update box" as the digital-dialogical space. The dialogue involves a circular interchange of postings, comments and replies about the individual as *subject* and experience as *object* and vice versa in the process of self-historicization. Friends and family in the individual's networks engage in this

¹⁷ Sonny Le, September 10, 2015 at 5:22am, accessed 21 September 2015. "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>; For the coverage on NPR, see "Vietnamese 'Boat Person' Speaks Out About Refugee Crisis, Here and Now with Robin Young and Jeremy Hobson, Wednesday, September 9, 2015, accessed on 21 September 2015, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2015/09/09/vietnamese-boat-people-refugees>..

¹⁸ Robert Craig, "Dilthey, Gadamer, and Facebook: Towards a New Hermeneutics of the Social Network," *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 110, No. 1 (January 2015, 184-203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.110.1.0184>.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 189.

dialogue to produce a type of group historicization. In the hermeneutic circle (in this case, squares) of Facebook status update boxes, our expressions of self and our sharing of experiences as “subjects-in-history,”²⁰ are “fleshed out and expanded through our listening to and reading about people’s experiences,”²¹ in the comments and replies posted. The dialogue creates history on Facebook as “every one of today’s self-objectifications and projections will become tomorrow’s history”²² The individual and those in the group gain greater understanding, “the achievement of language itself,” and best facilitates in our “meaningful being-with-ourselves and our being-with-others in dialogue.”²³ In the Facebook context, the researcher can also gain greater understanding. As an interlocutor or interpreter of these community pages, the historian can facilitate the progression from “the self-reflectively autobiographical to an understanding of communal and historical realities.”²⁴ A closer look at the dynamics of Facebook hermeneutics and Vietnamese refugees self and group historicization will inform us about what they are contributing to history.

Self Historicization

Vietnamese refugee’s self- historicization focuses on the search, identification, and connection with former refugees and aid workers on Facebook. The search for an identity and recognition in a sea of anonymity is not foreign to refugees. Most were labeled with numbers and their names were distorted in phonetic translation. Against the inherent misidentification, self-declaration as a *boat person* or *refugee* on Facebook assumes a sense of positivism, agency, and pride instead of the political stigmatization these labels have in present day politics. Tin Nguyen embraces his refugee identity and describes his search and idyllic experience of the camp. He posted,

Stumbled across this group when searching for the location of Hawkins Rd Camp on the internet. Seeing my childhood memories wiped out by the jungle is a very emotional experience for me. I was a little boy when my family and more than 130 other people were rescued by the Norwegian LPG tanker MV Berge Sisu after 10 days at sea in May 1979. At that time, Hawkins Road was a beautiful neighbourhood.

²⁰ Ibid, 186.

²¹ Ibid, 188.

²² Ibid, 193.

²³ Ibid, 198.

²⁴ Ibid, 199.

It was an open refugee camp where we were allowed to go wherever we wanted. Now everything is gone... Thank you for creating this group. Hopefully other people from Berge Sisu are here as well.²⁵

Tin Nguyen self-historicized in the above narrative and searches for other refugees that were a part of this boat rescue. Former refugee humanitarian aid workers and volunteers also engage in this search and contribution to the history of Vietnamese refugees. Hugh Gemmel posted, “Looking for this girl from the film footage, Please pass on, I would like to give her this collection of Pics & film footage. It's part her history as well as mine.”²⁶ Former humanitarian aid workers’ contribution to history of refugees also takes the form of friendships and reunions off-line. These narratives of reunions become a part of refugees’ self-historicization in the present. The reunions connect the present self with the past refugee identity. For example, To Chau, a refugee in the children’s camp, was reunited with a volunteer in 2015 post. He wrote,

27 years later, without contact since leaving Singapore camp, we & Mr Tan met again in Saigon. Who would have thought? Saigon was the last place we expected to see Mr Tan. It was nice to see you again in person Mr Tan. The same humbled person as before. Conversations were flowing. We trade stories and filled in the gap.²⁷

Refugee reunions and moments of recognition on Facebook validate the experience of Vietnamese refugees and affirm their survival in history. For instance, when a group picture of Paula Bidong former refugee reunion in Perth (2011) is posted, comments from refugees that were not at the reunion emerge in response and recognition of their fellow refugees from the camp. In the above post, San Di Nguyen asked about a person in the picture, “The standing guy...I think I know him, what’s his name?” and Thinh (the person in the picture that she is referring to) replied, “San Di Nguyen...I think his name Thinh.” These moments of recognition in the search and connection with other refugees and volunteers contribute to individual and group historicization. As another example, Max Young, an American soldier,

²⁵ Tin Nguyen, Tuesday, May 26, 2015 at 1:18am, accessed 19 June 2015, “Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore,” Facebook public group. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

²⁶ Hugh Gemmel, October 8, 2014 at 2:54pm, accessed 22 June 2015. “Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore,” Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

²⁷ To Chau, June 17, 2015 at 3:51am, accessed 22 June 2015. “Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore,” Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

posted a picture of a Vietnamese woman on a hospital stretcher. He was looking for the identity of the woman. Through a series of connections with, Bich Tran, another refugee who was part of that rescue operation, Max received information about the woman's survival. However, the woman is not a use of Facebook. Bich Tran wrote,

in that time Lam Le was 20 years old....She lost her younger sister same age with me (18) her name is Ha passed away on the 5th August 1988 before U.S.S. Badge rescued us.”²⁸

Max Young later posted about the relief he experiences having discovered this Facebook Vietnamese Refugee community. It provides confirmation that those they had rescued were alive and well in the present. In his posting entitled, “Adrift No More,” he wrote,

For many years, I've carried that darkly-grateful day with me, and certainly I believe my shipmates felt the very same way. I always wondered if the day would come to put some closure on the wellbeing and outcome of those we rescued. That day has arrived, and I'm finding that the survivors shared similar thoughts as well.²⁹

Max Young's relief to have found Vietnamese refugee survivors on Facebook through Bich Tran's recognition of her refugee friend. Bich's own memories of rescue attests to the fact that Facebook is a powerful source of historical knowledge about the past and the present. These individual searches, identifications, reunion and recognition moment on Facebook contribute to the group historicization of Vietnamese refugee diaspora.

Group historicization

Group historization of the Vietnamese refugee Facebook community takes the form of a dialogue in which the refugee becomes the facilitator, subject, object, witness and interpreter of historical memory. Unlike the traditional form of oral history interviews, the researcher has a completely passive role. The authority is in the hands of the individual subjects who traditional do not lead the conversation in an oral history inquiry. Witness how this process of group historicization unfolds in the conversation on the Paula Bidong Facebook group site below. The researcher learns from the group lead historization about

²⁸ Max Young and Bich Tran, conversation thread, May 2, 2014 at 1:12am – May 10, 2014 at 7:32am, accessed 2 November 2015. “Vietnamese refugee Information,” Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

²⁹ Max Young, May 9, 2014 at 3:56am, accessed 2 November 2015. “Vietnamese refugee Information,” Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

their memories of the camp, naming conventions of refugee boats and the importance of mail in refugee's lives.

Anuar Ngah initiates the question about refugee's memories of Pulau Bidong and acts as the facilitator and witness of their memories of the camp.

Dear All Bidongers, please share here what is your most sweet and worst unforgettable moments at Pulau Bidong[sic]? Something that you won't forget for the rest of your life... Do you wanna visit back Pulau Bidong[sic]? If yes, what keep you holding you back[sic]?³⁰

Anuar Ngah's question elicits 44 comments and engages 5 different respondents that contribute their personal narratives and historical facts about their experiences. Thien Tran, the first respondent, noted the boat on which he arrived at the camp, "MC037," in the opening of his response. Thien contributed some key historical facts about life in the camp for children. There was a "Minor School where we learned ABC was fun.... We also played hide and seek...."³¹ Huy Cao responded to Thien Tran's post picking up on the notation of the boat as a reference to their group identity. He opened his own posting with the notation of the boat on which he arrived, "Boat # KG279 The 18 months I spent on Pulau Bidong are unforgettable for the rest of my life[sic]!"³² Anuar Ngah, as the informal facilitator, asked Huy Cao for more details about the meaning of the boat numbers. Anuar Ngah asked, "Secondly your boat number started with KG and not PB or MC?"³³ As the question is posted to the individual and the group, Truong Nguyen responded as an interpreter of historical facts. He wrote to clarify the nature of boat name and how they are coded with the time of arrival at the camp.

Before a name convention was created for a series of boat arriving at Pulau Bidong between a period of time, an actual boat name from Vietnam was used for that boat[sic]. For example, a boat names KG 029 left Vietnam and arrived at Pulau Bidong, is named KG 029. Later, a name convention was created for all boat arrived

³⁰ Anuar Ngah, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:08am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³¹ Thien D. Tran, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:40am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³² Huy Cao, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 4:09am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³³ Anuar Ngah, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 4:37am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

after that. My boat arrived Bidong at the time the first conventional name was given and it was BI followed by PB, MB then MC etc[sic].³⁴

From this information, the researcher and group interlocutors learn that Huy Cao was an earlier arrival at this camp and that Thien Tran was a later arrival as his boat started with an MC. This fact is verified in an early post in which Thien Tran stated that he was at the camp in 1988 and Trung Nguyen “left Bidong in 1980.”³⁵ From these postings, the researcher learns that the naming convention came into effect prior to 1980 when Truong Nguyen left the camp. Huy Cao, one of these earlier arrivals, described the rapid growth of the refugee population from the time of his arrival in March of 1979.

“At the age of 18, I came to join population of 4500 in March 1979 and experienced the hardness with population of 50,000 two weeks later...til the day I left in September 1980. Hungry – yes; Thirsty – yes; Cold & Hot – yes; Scared to death – yes; Unknown Future – yes! [sic]...³⁶

In the above, Huy Cao is the subject and object of history, one amongst the 4,500 refugees that left Vietnam. He was a witness from March of 1979 to September of 1980 of the exponential grow in refugee population at the camp. The informal nature of Facebook allows him to divulge a narrative of experience that is different than the published account. He wrote,

My Most Sweet Moment at Pulau Bidong was when you received a gift box from US just right before Christmas 1979. Consider it as “Lucky” as it was not even my gift by my big cousin’s from his mother in US (he left and let me have the right of it though...Most of them in the gift box were foods...oh boys! The Best Christmas Celebration I ever had with a small group of friends (single alone young guys).³⁷

Huy Cao’s narrative illustrates the unique awareness of oneself as a subject of a published history about boat passage traumas and refugee statistics, but that is not what engages refugee lead memory. Huy Cao’s memory about the significance of receiving mail at the camp inspired Duke Minh to enter the conversation.

³⁴ Truong Nguyen, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 4:42am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³⁵ Thien Tran and Truong Nguyen, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:42 -3:54am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³⁶ Huy Cao, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 4:09am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>,

³⁷ Ibid.

Received first letter from my parents, I was kinda [sic] shaking when I held it in my hand. My best friend grabbed it and ran. I chased him to sick bay hospital. We read it together as tears were pouring down like crazy[sic]. He was teasing me hehehehe[sic]..We both cried hehehehe it was a good cry lol (laugh out loud). There were so so many memories I've never forgot[sic].³⁸

Facebook, as an informal space, facilitates these group historizations where refugees are the facilitator, subject, object, witness and interpreters of refugee lead memory. As the authority of their own experience as refugees, each contributes to a history that bypasses the traditional form of oral history interviews. Through individual and group historization on Facebook, Vietnamese refugees build a unique site for memory for historical research.

Facebook as a Site of Memory

Facebook as a site of memory provides a space for memory, myths, memorials and community activism. It broadens the definition of a physical place based site of memory. The definition of sites of memory, “places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express ‘a collective shared knowledge...of the past, on which a group’s sense of unity and individuality is based’,” can be extended to communities in cyberspace.³⁹ Lynn Abrams lends insight to the conception of cyberspace as a site of memory for Vietnamese refugees. Applying her notion of memory as a source and subject of study in oral history, Facebook becomes a site for the history of Vietnamese refugees’ experience of refugee camps, boat passages, rescue and transition into settlement countries. Vietnamese refugees memories are “entry points to a past that no longer exists as a coherent time or place.”⁴⁰ Histories of refugees based on an impermanent identity (asylum seeker), transient place (refugee camp or processing center), and transitory objects (rescue boat) have a permanent place in cyberspace. Below is a memory about Zone F of Paula Bidong camp that would not otherwise exist without Facebook.

³⁸ Duke Minh, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:54am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

³⁹For a discussion and application of Pierre Nora’s *milieux de memoire*, see Jay Winters, “Sites of Memory,” in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds., *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, 1. ed (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2010) 312 -324.

⁴⁰ Lynn Abrams, “Memory as both source and subject of study: the transformations of oral history” in Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, eds., *Writing the History of Memory* (London: Bloombury, 2014) 89- 109.

My worst unforgettable moment at Bidong was that one day at around 12:00pm. I climbed to the top of the hill in zone F. On the way down, I missed a rock and darted down the hill like an arrow. At the base of the hill, I started to fall down and slide [sic] for 100 meters. My whole body was torned[sic]. I admitted to Sickbay hospital to fix my wound. I hurted for a month[sic].⁴¹

Thien D. Tran also contributed his memory of the stories about Zone F.

No no. Near the bottom of zone F mountain there was a tomb. We were told the tomb was for some guy who was beaten to death because people though he was VC (Viet Cong) soldier. Later people made that tomb for him covered with rocks.⁴²

Vietnamese refugee memories such as the above are the subjects, objects and sources of historical re-creation of Zone F and the myths surrounding it. As a site of memory, Facebook also provides a memorial space and platform for community activism in the present.

Vietnamese refugees' Facebook memorials includes tribute to volunteers that have died, gravesites for those who did not survive the boat passage, reflections on significant anniversary dates, and return visits to the site of former refugee camps. The following are some examples of the above. Ty Nan Songkhla posted the obituary of a volunteer:

I just found out Cinthia Albrecht (english teacher in Songkhla Refugee Camp 1980-81) passed away in year of 2000,
<http://www.ywam-memorial.org/cynthia-jean-albrecht>
YWAM (Young with a Mission)⁴³

Anna Bui posted a memorial for refugees who did not survive the boat passages on the Sea of Dungan, "The Mass Graveyard of 40+ VBP (Vietnamese Boat People) drowned in the open sea of Dungun."⁴⁴ Hugh Gemmell commemorated the Fall of Saigon in April of 2015 with pictures of refugees that he trying to locate from the boat, USS Denver LPD-9, of American troops and refugees evacuating Vietnam:⁴⁵ Many former refugees such as Tin Nguyen have

⁴¹ Truong Nguyen, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:54am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>.

⁴² Thien D. Tran, conversation thread, September 17, 2015 at 3:43am, accessed on 1 November 2015. Pulau Bidong Alumni, Facebook Public Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4218065665/>,

⁴³ Ty Nan Songkhla, September 15, 2014 at 6:50pm, accessed 2 November 2015. "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

⁴⁴ Anna Bui, April 6, 2012 at 8:15pm, accessed 3 November 2015. "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

⁴⁵ Hugh Gemmell, April 15, 2015 at 5:40am, accessed 3 November 2015. "Vietnamese refugee Information," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237414599670326/>.

returned to the site of their former refugee camp and shared video footage of what remains, including facts about the current locality.

Finally the circle is closed. A couple of days ago, I visited the previous Hawkins Road refugee camp with my daughter, who was born in Norway, to show her some of her Dad's history[sic]. We took the metro to Woodlands station, and thereafter bus 856 to View Road. It was a great experience for us, eventhought[sic] we did not find any major traces of the camp, which probably is removed by the authorities also due to political reason. We walked the whole area along Woodlands Avenue 4 back to the metro. I highly recommend anybody who has the opportunity to visit this place before everything is gone, and it will be soon[sic]...⁴⁶

As Tin Nguyen stated, the refugee camp as a physical site of memory will no longer exist as current construction builds over it. However, these videos and pictures of the area will persist as memorials.

In addition to creating memorials in cyberspace, Vietnamese refugees use Facebook to express their concern for present day refugees and asylum seekers. Vinh Phan posted a letter concerning the state of Africa's refugees:

Dear former Singapore Refugee or boat people, Can we allow ignore this letters – Please Read Below [sic]---[he attached a link to article from UNHCR.org]⁴⁷

Vietnamese refugees extended their concern for the lack of policies to embrace other boat people. Ken Fam posted about the 6,000 Rohingya Muslim and Bangladeshi boat asylum seekers turned away from Malaysia and Thailand. Facebook provides a site of memory for the Vietnamese refugee community to express these concerns about refugee and asylum seeker policies.

Transnational Nation Building

The formation of the digital diaspora mirrors the effects of assimilation and community building for refugees in their resettlement nation. For refugees, the resettlement nation is a real place they must cling to for citizenship. Without a resettlement nation, there is

⁴⁶ Tin Nguyen, July 12, 2015 at 6:31am, accessed 3 November 2015. "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

⁴⁷ Vinh Phan, May 29, 2015 at 6:07pm, accessed 22 June 2015. "Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore," Facebook public group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/98995200578/>.

no recognized land, life or identity. The transnational digital diaspora is not as concrete as land or nation, though Facebook has become a type of digital nation. Facebook has its own language and borders that are more open to migrants than the physical ones in the real world. Vietnamese in the digital diaspora share cyberspace commons. Their identity is expressed in as refugees at large who survived. On Facebook, nation building appears in the form of pride and expression of gratitude for the humanitarian aid and opportunities that civilian rescuers and nations. In the following excerpts from Facebook refugee communities, we can see how national identity features as the foundation of the pride and optimism that upholds their refugee identity and the formation of a Vietnamese digital diaspora.

In an October 28, 2017 Facebook post onto “Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore” community page, Em Rong posted the following with a video clip of the reunion at Vietnamese restaurants in Paris when they arrive from the airport, at home sharing stories in Vietnamese, and more Vietnamese meals shared together before their departure back to the airport.⁴⁸

~ The Memories of Friendship, The Power of Hope ~

The year: 1983.

The location: Sembawang, Singapore.

The people: were the first group of friends they had after Vietnam.

Growing up, I've always been intrigued about how my family had to flee Vietnam. How they had to sacrifice and leave everything they knew and had behind for the chance of a future and for freedom.

After being at sea for 3 days without food and water; they were finally rescued and brought into Singapore. There they met people who had forever remained in their hearts and prayers.

People were coming and leaving so quick; and the chances of ever seeing some of them were so slim. They had no permanent address and none of the advantages of modern communications technology like we have today. All they had were photographs and their memories. These were what they treasured.

There was one family in particular my mother would continually mention about - and how she hoped to one day see them again; but had no idea how to find them. This family had made my family feel welcomed and loved. Their comfort gave my parents hope that the future will be alright, that there is a place like 'home' away from 'home'.

⁴⁸ Rong, Em, “The Memories of Friendship, The Power of Hope,” accessed November 10, 2017. “Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore.” https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10212593522145535&id=1608797753&comment_id=10212599050403738¬if_t=feed_comment¬if_id=1509182148710680&ref=m_notif&pnrref=story.

I knew my goal was to search for these people; how could I not. If they have been a part of my parents' lives, then they surely are apart of mine too? After a while, even though knowing a search based on only the first name and date was going to be challenging; especially when it's such a popular common name, I then decided to search locations and photos. Any photographs I'd come across would be closely examined.

~ Challenge Accepted!!! ~
The year: 20th Sept 2017
The location: UK, England
The people: was my determination.

I came across a Facebook page; 'Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore'; this was probably my best chance. I knew there was nothing for me to lose, but I could gain so much with just a little bit of hope.

And guess what? I found them!!
I reached out to confirm it was them. The feeling of relief and 'finally!!' made me so happy and proud.

This was my chance to reunite and surprise my parents with friends they thought they would never see again. This was my chance to say thank you to the people who loved and cared for my parents.

The following month; on the 24th October 2017. I arranged for dad to come with me to Paris, France. I told him on the day what the surprise was and that no one knew he was coming, so I could surprise them too. He was so excited, he couldn't sleep, smiles all the way from London to Paris.

This is what happened on the day; 34 years after they last met. Everyone was emotional and overwhelmed by how long it had been and overjoyed with meeting old friends with new friends. I was overcome by how amazing life could be. That paths could cross again, that true friendship is for life, that nothing in this world can break a bond so deep, that all we need was a little bit of hope.

Not once have I met these people, yet they felt like family, like I've always loved them, like they are apart of my life. This was when I knew how special these people were to my parents, that the love and respect my parents have for them had been passed down to me which flows through my heart too.

I am so grateful to you chi Teresa Huong Thuy Tran and your family; especially your mother, for being the people you all are and for caring for my family. Thank you for arranging for us to also meet chu Long as well. Dad was surprised chu Long would be there.

I hope your lives are filled with people who love and support you all too. Love you all so much.

P.S: It was an honour being able to recreate your old picture.⁴⁹

Em Rong, is the daughter who has found for her father their friends from the refugee camp days, using technology to connect the different generations of Vietnamese refugees. It is uncertain if Em is a 1.5 or second generation child, but it appears that her parent's experience as refugees made a significant impact in her own life. The opening and closing pictures contain Em's father as a young man standing next to this young woman in the refugee camp and a picture taken at the reunion standing next to each other thirty-four years later.

In another story from a member of the same Hawkins Road Refugee Camp Facebook community, Yen Siow, described how she found her rescuers from Norway after thirty-seven years.⁵⁰ Yen posted a front page of the article entitled, "Life Boat" by Roderick Craig with a picture of her and her rescuers that was published in Trade Winds.⁵¹ She wrote in response to the article,

The interviewer chose to title the piece "Rescued for a purpose..."

I strongly believe we all were rescued for a purpose and the way we live, the spirit of gratefulness and being able to pay it forward so others may receive love and mercy - comes from the overflow of our heart that God has saved us for such a time as this.

One of the most fascinating interviews I had about being rescued was done together with my 4 rescuers in Norway this June by Trade Winds magazine! It was so special as it was my first time meeting them after 36 years! They had awesome tales of the rescue and inside knowledge of how we were treated as refugees and of course how extremely serious our circumstances were...

The whole journey has been wonderful and I am still so grateful for the work of these crew people who are now my friends 😊:)

I have always said that Facebook is so much more than just a social network platform!

Bernhard Øyangen Venke Fagerland Kjell Fagerland⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Siow, Yen, "Life Boat - Trade Winds Facebook Comment," accessed November 10, 2017. Vietnamese Boat People Refugee Camp, 25 Hawkins Road, Sembawang, Singapore, , <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154686176746403&set=gm.10156149338700579&type=3&theater>.

⁵¹ "Vietnamese Refugee Reunited with Bergesen Rescuers," TradeWinds | Latest shipping and maritime news, September 7, 2017, <http://www.tradewindsnews.com/TWplus/1308776/vietnamese-refugee-reunited-with-bergesen-rescuers>.

⁵² Ibid.

What stands out in the comment is not only the gratitude, but also the role of Facebook has played in the ability to facilitate these transnational connections. Through the Facebook public page, I was able to connect with Yen Siow who shared her personal Facebook page with me. A quick Google search produced more interesting facts about her story. Yen Siow is a Vietnamese Australian that is now living and working in Singapore. In an article published in *Strait Times*, there is a video of Yen as an adult and pictures of her as a child refugee at the age of four. I learned more about Mr. Bernhard Oyangen, her rescuer, who was then an 18-year old ship crew member.⁵³ Yen found him through Facebook when she is 39 year old in 2016. Yuen Sin, the author of the article wrote,

In August, she decided to track down her Norwegian rescuers and contacted Mr Oyangen through Facebook. They arranged to meet this month when he was due to pass through Singapore on a business trip to New Zealand.

Over breakfast at the airport, she found out other details of their 10-day journey at sea - why and how the crew had willingly taken in a group of refugees with an "indescribable" stench and given them the clothes off their back.

"It was wonderful to hear simple replies like, 'You're humans. We're people. We would save you no matter what'," said Ms Siow. "The profound kindness of his actions really hit me when I met him and heard those words from him."

She has found four other crew members since August, and hopes to travel with her family to Norway to meet them in December.⁵⁴

Yen Siow is very articulate about the humanity that she values in the encounter with her past as a refugee child. Yuen Sin, the author of the article wrote,

Mr Oyangen, who owns a business in the shipping industry, was surprised when Ms Siow contacted him out of the blue. The last time that he had met former refugees from the camp was about 15 years ago in Norway. "Helping people at sea is a part of seamanship," he said. "I was happy to meet her and hear her story. The Vietnamese people didn't talk much (about their history), but I know a lot more today after meeting her."

Mr Oyangen will be in Singapore until Tuesday, and has been spending time with Ms Siow and her family, visiting landmarks and having meals together. Yesterday, they

⁵³ Yuen Sin, "36 Years On, Ex-Refugee Meets One of Her Rescuers," Text, The Straits Times, October 23, 2016, <http://www.straitstimes.com/world/36-years-on-ex-refugee-meets-one-of-her-rescuers>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

also met Norway's Ambassador to Singapore, Mr Tormod C. Endresen, at his residence.⁵⁵

In the above excerpt, the confluence of the national pride and the transnational formation of Vietnamese diaspora is evidenced in their meeting with Norway's Ambassador in Singapore where the refugee camp was based. These two articles and comments on Facebook illustrate how the reunion encounter is a nation building exercise for Singapore, Norway, and Australia. Each share in Yen's success as an entrepreneurial refugee.

Stories of reunion of refugees have been previously published prior to the existence of Facebook, however, the level of access and prevalence of these encounters have increased with the emergence of the Vietnamese digital diaspora. Gratitude to the nation of resettlement and pride as a refugee became a noticeable theme in the comments on these refugee Facebook pages. Furthermore, Loretta Baldassar and her research team have worked closely to define the Vietnamese community in Australia and its contribution to the formation of a transnational Vietnamese diaspora.⁵⁶ "Drawing on the empirical findings of research conducted in three Australian cities, [they] examine[d] the character of the Vietnamese diaspora" which they defined as a victim or refugee diaspora.⁵⁷ A victim diaspora according to Cohen's typography of diaspora is characterised as "dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations."⁵⁸ Their research discovered that there are very weak ties to Vietnam, the homeland, in the formation of the Vietnamese diaspora identity and a strong community identification based on 'symbolic transnational' ties which "deviates from the standard" of homeland based transnationalism.⁵⁹ The question then arises as to what has been the role of Vietnamese children in community development and diasporic identity formation. Le Espiritu and Tran suggested that the second generation and newly arriving international students from Vietnam are constructing "symbolic transnational' ties."⁶⁰ The formation of Vietnamese Refugee Communities on Facebook goes beyond just creating

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Loretta Baldassar, Joanne Pyke, and Danny Ben-Moshe, "The Vietnamese in Australia: Diaspora Identity, Intra-Group Tensions, Transnational Ties and 'victim' Status," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 6 (April 26, 2017): 937–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1274565>.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 937.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 938.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

symbolic transnational ties in the history of childhood and migration. The Vietnamese child migrants and children of refugees, and adoptees engage in Facebook to connect with one another in real life. This type of everyday ritual of posting updates on Facebook, self-representation of their memory and experiences as Vietnamese child migrants and refugees, contributes to the future of national and transnational migration history.

In conclusion, the transnational Vietnamese diaspora grew out of the dispersal of refugees after 1975, but it was not until the year 2000 that the Vietnamese digital diaspora emerged on Facebook. Vietnamese child refugees, adoptees, and children of refugees that had resettled all over the world started to form Facebook communities of in search of one another, based on the shared placement in are refugee camp or rescue boat. The Facebook community of Vietnamese refugees presents a strong case of how migrants contribute to historical knowledge with the use of technology. With Facebook, they have expanded the repertoire of artifacts and practices of self-representation and memory making. Paula Hamilton defined historical consciousness as “a sense of living in time or being a subject of history, which expresses itself through artefacts of memory.”⁶¹ Artefacts of memory traditionally include tangible objects such as pictures and memorabilia, but what is unique about the use of Facebook for refugees’ memorial expression is the individual’s life itself. Their presence on Facebook is an artefact of memory. Their thoughts and feelings related to the camps and rescue boats express their awareness of themselves as subjects and survivors of a history of war.

⁶¹ Paula Hamilton, “Sale of the Century? Memory and historical consciousness in Australia,” in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts the Politics of Memory* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 137.

Conclusion

More of the world's children experience voluntary or involuntary migration due to war or climate change. This will necessarily impact our conceptions and understandings of both childhood and migration. This study of Vietnamese child migrants post-war has examined how a particular group of migrants have been represented in a specific historical context. It explored how the Vietnamese child migrants represent themselves in national and transnational spaces. It also has explored the different forms of representation and self-representation in children's literature, museums, and cyberspace. These select oral histories, memoir, and self-representations on Facebook illustrate the agency and level of self-determination children exhibit throughout their migration journey and resettlement. The oral histories and analysis presented focused on self-representation of individual's stories and themes that have not been predominately explored in history and social science literature about Vietnamese children and migration. While adults have written histories or reported about the lives of child migrants, children have been mostly silenced about their own memories and experiences of migration. With time and maturity, they become quite capable of representing themselves in history as evidenced in this study of Vietnamese child migrants in Australia and the digital diaspora.

Self-representation as refugees and perspectives of migration has become increasingly important not just in history, but also for the purposes of advocacy and policy for refugees.¹ Lived experiences of refugees, including children, provide insights that are otherwise not part of the history. This thesis offers their personal voice and perspective on how they actually experience childhood and migration as oppose to theoretical constructions of what childhood and migration may be like for children. Each of the chapters highlight aspects of childhood and migration that have not otherwise been expressed in adult narratives about Vietnamese children and migration. The scope of the study has been limited to Australian migration history and history of childhood, though the findings contribute to national and transnational understanding about children and migration. The limitation of a focus on refugees in a specific national historical context is a necessary parameter, just as refugees need national identity to be recognised in history at large. These parameters are not as strict as the political borders in which they must cross to become refugees. The use of life stories and Facebook

¹ Kleist, J. Olaf. "Remembering for Refugees in Australia: Political Memories and Concepts of Democracy in Refugee Advocacy Post-Tampa."

postings allows for multiple histories and voices to represent their experiences and memories. The focus on children's self-representation of childhood and migration can be applied to further investigations of Vietnamese children growing up in Canada, Finland, United States, Turkey, or on Twitter and Instagram. Each of these historical contexts or modes of self-representation could contribute to enlarge the scope of understanding about Vietnamese refugees nationally and transnationally. The unique contribution of this study is to initiate these investigations. Their voice and self-representation have revealed original findings about experiences and memories that have not otherwise acknowledged in the history of childhood and migration in Australia and the Vietnamese digital diaspora. The following is a summary of these findings per chapter and suggestions for further analysis and investigations.

Chapter one presented the pertinent historical context, methods and frameworks for this study. The literature review found limited studies about Vietnamese children's experiences of migration in Australia. It also indicated that the history of the childhood in Australia is part of the emergent discourse about the growing number of displaced children due to war. Given the lack of focus on children and difficulties of studying refugees during migration, oral history provides one of the ways to capture children's memories and experiences in retrospect. A review of theories of historical memory indicated that refugee, diasporic, and postmemory memory best describe the dynamic nature of memory for Vietnamese child migrants in this study. *Refugee memory* is applied to those who were child refugees with direct experience and memories at a certain cognitive age. *Postmemory* describes the dynamic nature of the memories children derive from their parents or relatives. Memories are augmented for adoptees. Some relied on social workers or records of adoption/ Some child migrants who were too young and reliant on the stories told about their migration history and childhood. Second Generation Vietnamese have inherited stories and memories of their parent's refugee history. Further research could increase the number of interviews from children that were unaccompanied minors and adoptees. However, the interviews selected and analysis on self-representation through oral histories, memoirs and Facebook provides contemporaneous and original findings about Vietnamese child migrants in national and transnational histories.

Chapter two explored representation of Vietnamese in Australian children's literature, museum, and art as a starting point for historical analysis of representation versus self-representation. A close analysis of *Safe Place to Live* and *The Littlest Refugee*, revealed the nuances of visual and narrative self-representation of Vietnamese children's perspective on migration. Familiar themes such as journey, seeking safety, holding onto comforting objects,

boats and pirate adventure, and adjustments to school are used to narrate about war, migration, and resettlement. While Children's literature perspective and experiences of Vietnamese migration are limited, museums offer more public and institutionalised representations of Vietnamese refugees in Australia. The works of Thomas Le and narratives about Mai Ho in the Melbourne Museum illustrated the shift from representations through Australian government officials in the refugee camp to self-representation by Vietnamese refugee artists. Through the oral history interviews with Vietnamese Australian artists, Phuong Ngo and Huong Tran, this study contributes contemporary perspectives on self-representation about Vietnamese refugee childhood, art, history and cultural heritage.

Chapter three presented the oral histories of Vietnamese refugee children's memories and experiences of childhood during migration and in the refugee camp as an adventure. The narratives of self-representation of childhood and migration in these transitory sites of memory involved the exercise of children's agency, self-determination, and transnational movement between country of origins to adventures at sea, on boats, and refugee camps sites. Refugee camps become a significant site of memory for adventure and agency in childhood. The findings confirm that children are active participants in the history of migration with their own memories and experiences during migration. Furthermore, memory constructs vary according to the age the child leaves the country of origin, their capacity to remember, the nature of displacement, and the availability of people who have stories and memories of the child's experience in the country of origins. These narratives contribute to a more dynamic form of reconstructive *postmemory*. For child refugees that leave with family and/or siblings, there are others on which they can rely for stories to augment their *postmemory*. For a war orphans, *postmemory* consists of information from aid workers, government documents, visit to find their orphanages, and return trips to Vietnam. Future studies of migration journey and refugee camps can pursue the view from children's perspective.

Chapter four explored the memoirs and oral histories of Vietnamese child migrants and adoptees that grew up in Australia whilst the nation faced its own growing pains transitioning from a White Australia Policy to becoming a multicultural society. The published memoirs of Anh Dao and Cat Thao illustrated the widely accepted representations of Vietnamese refugee childhood and adaptation in Australia. Upon closer analysis of their memoirs alongside the oral histories in this study, these narratives of self-representation question the idealisation of Australian childhood and multiculturalism. Furthermore, their memories and experiences of childhood and migration in Australia contribute to a complex history of childhood about their agency and self-determination in school, home, and working

at home. School is found to shelter Vietnamese refugee children from the responsibilities of work and home life. As Vietnamese child migrants become more English and Australian culturally proficient, they take on more responsibilities for themselves, their siblings, and parents. Distinct from the idealisation of Australian childhood as sacred and central to the home, Vietnamese refugee children and adoptees in this study experience greater responsibility and less freedom to be children in those spaces.

Chapter five presented the self-representation of Vietnamese child adoptees and an analysis of complexity of belonging given their cultural heritage and unique position in this history of childhood and migration. Given their violent dislocation and disruption in social ties with other Vietnamese in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Martha Kuwee Kumsa's framework of dispersal-affinity aptly describes the complexity of their experience of belonging. Dominic's narrative as a Babylift Orphan, artist, activist and participant in the Vietnamese community in Australia showed the differences between Vietnamese adoptees and Vietnamese child refugees, even though they share similar historical context and challenges in acculturation. Adoptee's narratives of childhood in Australian households and returns to Vietnam in search of memory, family, and cultural identity is an exercise of their transcultural agency. As transcultural agents and Australian nationals, their narratives enrich the history of global childhood and migration.

Chapter six shows how examining the inheritance of memory for children of refugees adds to the complexity of identity and belonging. Second Generation Vietnamese narratives of self-representation show similar themes of struggles in belonging and identity formation as those of refugee children. Inheritance of refugee history and cultural heritage from their parents are just powerful motivators of their interest in political activism. As evidenced in the narratives of those in the Dual Identity Leadership Program, they are deeply involved in community practices of preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity. The majority express experiences of Australian mainstream childhood with varying degrees of awareness of their Vietnamese heritage. Acceptance of cultural identity and the integration of history and memory of their refugee parents are the primary ways of discovering a sense of belonging and contributing to development of a multicultural Australia. Those with Vietnamese language capacity fare better in communicating with Vietnamese elders and providing cultural continuity. Further research about Second Generation Vietnamese could focus on the dynamics of the inheritance of historical knowledge from family, formal education, and experiences of returns to Vietnam.

Chapter seven concludes this study of self-representation of Vietnamese children's memory and experiences of migration in digital diaspora. The children featured in this study have grown up with social media to communicate their national and transnational identity with the global Vietnamese diaspora. Refugee identity becomes a category of belonging in Facebook communities of former refugees from refugee camps and rescue boats reconnect. According to Facebook Hermeneutics, Facebook facilitates self-representation of memories of migration and the continuity of group and self-historicisation. The posts including memories of childhood in the camps provide details about this site of memory that no longer exists except in digital memory. Their self-representation of experiences including reunion in real life, and connection to other refugees and aid workers from the refugee camps contributes to the formation of a digital diaspora and historical archive of Vietnamese refugee history. Further research including interviews of those that participate in reunion of refugees would broaden the scope of understanding about childhood, memory and its influences on the continuity of refugee lives. It may also open areas of exploration about historical discrepancies and representations on-line and lived experienced.

Self-representation of Vietnamese migrant children memories and experiences throughout this thesis has expanded the scope of national and transnational histories of childhood and migration. It hopes to inspire new areas for further research and exploration in the digital diaspora. As evidenced in this thesis and expressed in critical refugee studies, the refugee is a paradigm for analysis of national and transnational politics of identity and belonging.² Further research focusing on self-representation in histories of migration including other immigrant groups of children in Australia may contribute to more informed policies and practices for refugee resettlement. Research about refugees, children, and their use of social media including the impact on cultural identity and belonging will be important areas of exploration for effective social policy and program design. Refugees are primarily described as victims. This study about child refugees and migrants show the progress and development of their agency and self-determination. Self-represented histories, such as this one, broadens understanding of the complexity of refugee journey, choices, and narrative construction of memory. Whether it is presented in social media, memoir, art, or museums, oral histories, refugee lived experiences need to inform history. While it was not within the scope of this thesis, further studies about Vietnamese refugee children and children of

² Espiritu, Body Counts. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*.

refugees that have returned to live and work in Vietnam would contribute to a more complete understanding of transnational, historical, and cultural identity formation. Facebook has its own language and borders that are more open to migrants than the physical ones in the real world. Further explorations of communities in digital diaspora could focus on other disenfranchised groups, including those who are stateless or in detainment. Critical study of refugees including communities in digital diaspora may further enhance our understanding of transnational relations and histories.

Finally, the continuity of refugee lives and memories is a part of living history. Since the start of this study, I have made significant efforts to build collaborative projects that engage the Vietnamese and Australian communities. I have organised an art exhibition about the contemporary art produced by the refugee artists featured in this thesis. The oral histories about children's adventures and choices in migration including Nam's various escape plans have been used for designing video game prototypes. The process of game design based on oral histories has produced pedagogical methods for empathetic education about complexity of choices and journeys for refugees. These projects were my efforts to engage others in critical refugee studies. Histories about self-representation of those who are otherwise the subjects of history deserve public presentation and engagement. This thesis has been my way of honouring those who shared their lived experiences including complexity of their lives and memories for historical and cultural preservation.

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