

Quiet Neglect: Southeast Asian Refugees Amidst U.S. Denial

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Sociology in the Department of
Sociology in the Graduate School
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2021

ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the concept of “quiet neglect” or the institutionalized silence of Americans’ misdeeds during the Vietnam and Secret Wars that subsequently eschewed Southeast Asian Americans’ (SEAA) issues, is a key factor leading SEAs to reconsider panethnicity. Using 62 in-depth interviews with Southeast Asian refugees who were resettled in North Carolina and the service providers who work with them, I examine how the erasure of U.S. culpability and responsibility to SEAs has impacted SEAs’ racial experiences in their new homes. The chapters of the dissertation are as follows:

Chapter 1 examines the link between collective memories and quiet neglect, and how the former impact refugees’ present-day encounters with intergenerational trauma and racialized emotions. Following the Vietnam and Secret Wars, the U.S.’s rescue of Southeast Asian refugees was both lauded for its humanitarianism and criticized as a means for obscuring the military’s wartime atrocities. I examine how narratives of U.S. heroism have impacted the former’s encounters with trauma. I argue that our collective memories of the Vietnam War have (1) made refugees into a group whose histories are to be forgotten or “quietly neglected,” and thus (2) indicate that refugees’ trauma is not purely psychological but linked to racialized postwar emotions. First, I observe how collective memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars have denied refugees’ suffering while bolstering ideas of American benevolence. Second, I explore how these collective memories shaped the institutionalized denial of refugees’ ongoing trauma. Finally, I

examine how some respondents challenged the systemic neglect shaping their communities and attempted to construct “countermemories” of the war and resettlement.

Chapter 2 looks at how quiet neglect uniquely shaped SEAs’ experiences relative to those of voluntary immigrants and pushes for a reconsideration of how they are categorized and identified. Namely, Asian American panethnicity is popularly used as an umbrella term housing SEAs alongside other ethnic groups. Increasingly, scholars have questioned whether panethnicity accurately reflects the diversity of different ethnicities’ experiences and identities. In mainstream culture, “Asian American” has become synonymous with East Asian Americans and stereotypes—albeit biased ones—of their affluence, thus erasing the realities of working-class, South, and Southeast Asian Americans (SEAs). I focus on the last group and join other scholars in emphasizing how ethnic groups’ unique historical relationships with the U.S. differentially impact their racial identities and attachments to panethnicity. I explore how quiet neglect shapes refugees’ connections to Asian American panethnicity and their decision to align with alternative identities. At stake is our capacity to recognize individuals’ agency to challenge racial boundaries and assert identities that they find meaningful. Additionally, I examine how SEAs situate themselves within our broader racial structure and harness their identities to connect with other people of color.

Chapter 3 considers the connections between quiet neglect and SEAA deportations. Integral to quiet neglect is the casting of Southeast Asian refugees as “good refugees” whose resettlement represented American heroism and humanitarianism.

However, starting in the immediate post-9/11 era and ramping up under the Trump administration, these very refugees have been subjected to new deportation agreements that stigmatize them as “violent criminal aliens.” Despite these developments, the “racialization of illegality” has continued to frame deportations as a Latinx issue, eschewing its impacts on Asian Americans. Using 62 interviews with Southeast Asians and service providers in North Carolina, I explore how refugees and their support systems both reify and reject conventions of racialized illegality as they respond to changes in deportation policies. Southeast Asian Americans’ responses indicate the challenges of imagining a highly racialized phenomenon like deportations as an opportunity for interracial cooperation.

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Acknowledgements

Much of my success and ability to stay sane over the last five years is owed to the kindness and graciousness I have received from the people in my life. I want to first thank my undergraduate professors from Pacific University, particularly Daniel Eisen and Dane Joseph, for putting it in my mind that I could make it to graduate school. I would never have applied to Sociology PhD programs—or believed that I could get into these programs—without the two of you. You both provided me with invaluable guidance and were always honest about what the reality of academia was like for a person of color. This information was essential to my PhD experience, and I am so grateful to have benefitted from your mentorship.

I would also like to thank my current advisor, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva for his support over the last five years. From day one, you told me that you knew it was difficult for your students to come all the way out to North Carolina to work with you. You made sure to take care of your students and offered them a home while they braved Duke Sociology. I do not think I would have lasted in this department without your generosity or Mary's. The both of you provided me with a sense of comfort in what could otherwise have been an utterly hopeless graduate school experience.

I am immensely grateful to the different refugee communities who allowed me into their homes so I could do this project. When I first started working with you all, I had such a small understanding of the things you experienced or what life for you was like. Yet, you all were so generous and welcoming to this clueless grad student. Working

with you all brought a sense of purpose and meaning to my work and I hope to be able to return the kindness you all bestowed upon me.

I have made some wonderful friends during this PhD program. They were also instrumental for surviving the last five years. Brionca, Crystal, Diamond, and Madeleine—thank you so much for all the uplifting conversations, moments of commiseration, and humor that you brought into my life. We all need allies we can lean on in both the pleasant and rough times. I can only hope that I reciprocated the joy you gave me.

There are also old friends of mine, Erin, Sheri, and Benny, who I turned to so often to vent my frustrations, consult on important decisions, and renew my energy when the demands and injustices of academia wore me out. I needed to have people in my life who loved and cared about me unconditionally and didn't care if a publication was rejected from a journal or if I had been turned down for some fellowship or grant. To the three of you, I'm just Liann—the success or failure of my work didn't change what you thought of me or how you treated me. I needed that more than you know, and I am so thankful to have friends like you in my life.

Umma, saranghae.

INTRODUCTION

During my time working with Southeast Asian refugees in North Carolina, one of the groups I became closest with were the Montagnards in Guilford County. Montagnards are the Indigenous peoples of Vietnam's Central Highlands who are distinct from ethnic Vietnamese. Vietnamese people have long discriminated against Montagnards and increasingly encroach on their ancestral territory for natural resources and land. This antipathy was heightened following the Vietnam War when Montagnards made a bargain with U.S. forces against the Communist Viet Minh. American troops promised Montagnards independence from the Vietnamese government in return for their allyship. However, the U.S. military evacuated Vietnam in 1975. Instead of fulfilling their end of the deal, Americans told Montagnards that they would one day return to help them in their struggle against North Vietnam.

Montagnards took this promise very seriously and a segment of their population continued to fight against North Vietnam for 17 years following the war's end in 1975. Small waves of Montagnards made their way to the U.S. in the 1980s (Andresen 1988). Later in the 1990s, they were systematically resettled in North Carolina. Resettlement efforts were only initiated after a cadre of Montagnard men trekked through the jungles of Vietnam to the American embassy in Thailand in the mid-1980s. Exhausted, long deprived of supplies, and desperate to know where their American allies were, these men crossed the Thai border to contact the American embassy. Americans were shocked to learn that their former allies were still fighting in the jungles and ordered them to immediately lay down their arms.

As resettlement gained momentum, some Montagnards started a resettlement agency in Guilford County to help new arrivals. It was at this organization where I volunteered as a social work intern that I came to know the Montagnards. The agency was a centerpiece of Montagnard life, and its work with the community was vast and varied. The agency held community potlucks at local parks where picnic tables were filled with foods ranging from platters of spaghetti to containers overflowing with green papaya salad—tangy, salty, and spicy from fish sauce, lime, and smashed chilis.

In the early days of volunteering, I drove through neighborhoods with an intern from the agency. We looked for houses belonging to Montagnards so that we could slip flyers advertising a free book event into their mailboxes. I had asked the intern if we had a list of addresses so we would know which mailboxes to place the flyers in, and she responded saying that there was no such list. Baffled, I asked “How are we going to know where to put the flyers?!” She informed me that there were clear indicators of Montagnard houses. We would pull over in front of homes that had corn, chili pepper plants, okra, and “Montagnard vegetables” growing outside. Confidently, she pointed to these houses and announced, “That’s a Montagnard house. Montagnard people grow those.” With a bit of confusion, I would slip a flyer into the mailbox and we were on our way, keeping our eyes peeled for ears of corn and ripe okra.

Much of my volunteer time was spent at the agency, a small office in an old brick building that housed about 10 other businesses in a rougher part of town. The agency itself only has five full rooms, with every nook and cranny used to its utmost capacity (the social work intern sits at a desk crammed into a hallway corner). The agency

founder, Y'Mon Dieu¹ is in his 60s and was part of the cadre that crossed over to the Thai embassy. He still works part-time though many of the affairs are handled by two social workers who manage the organization. Y'Mon Dieu's desk sits at the front entrance, and some days he can be seen either asleep at his computer, playing a large red guitar that he bought at a secondhand shop, or assisting elderly clients.

Some of the work conducted at the agency may seem mundane. It was common for Montagnard families to walk in and ask for someone to explain a notice that had come in the mail or receive help paying their medical bills. Although they had lived in North Carolina for decades, Montagnards' low literacy rates made such tasks difficult for them to complete on their own. As a resettlement agency, the organization was not funded to assist Montagnards with these concerns. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) only provides funding to agencies to support refugees for up to five years following their arrival in the U.S. After this period, refugees are assumed to have reached "self-sufficiency" and become independent. However, the agency helped community members no matter how long they had resided in the U.S. as the social workers knew there was no other place for Montagnards to turn to.

The backroom of the agency, a long, narrow space with several tables pushed together to make one long meeting table, served multiple purposes. During the winter, it was a storage room for toy donations that were collected and shared with refugee families. It served as a meeting space to plan community events and eat lunch. A whiteboard had been placed on one end of the classroom, where I taught one of the

¹ All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

English Language Learning (ELL) courses for the agency. I had been asked to volunteer as a teacher just a few months into my time with the Montagnards. When I expressed concern that I had no prior training to teach ELL, the intern and the lead social worker, a Montagnard woman named H'Noel, reassured me that it was "easy." Except for a few younger students who came in to learn the requisite English needed to pass their citizenship exams, most of the students were older Montagnard women who had attended class for years. These women were never going to become proficient in English, but they came to pass the time with other Montagnard women.

Every now and then, an argument would erupt from the backroom between Y'Mon Dieu and a Montagnard woman about my age, Lan. Lan had grown up in Guilford County but worked for a Southeast Asian grassroots organization located in another part of North Carolina. She would make frequent trips to visit home and collaborate with the resettlement agency. Sometimes, her visits led to shouting matches with Y'Mon Dieu and the subject of their arguments was always the same: Lan and Y'Mon Dieu had very different political beliefs from one another and would clash over what they considered as the best path forward for their community.

Lan, akin to some of the younger Southeast Asians (SEAs) whom I interviewed, leaned towards the political left. She felt distressed about the Trump administration, its increasingly punitive refugee and immigration policies, and the rampant racism in our society. Lan was also deeply upset by what she perceived as Montagnard elders' unwillingness to recognize the racial harm wrought by the U.S. government unto SEAs. Conversely, Y'Mon Dieu and many other older Montagnards viewed the Trump administration (and the government generally) as benevolent. They expressed a deep

sense of gratitude towards the U.S. government for resettling their people and saving them from the tyranny of Communist North Vietnam. I interviewed Y'Mon Dieu during my fieldwork where he shared, “We could not stay with the Communist. That’s why we try to escape from our country to come here, just to survive. We thank very much to the U.S. government, have accept us to this country. Otherwise, if no country accept us to be here, we die in the jungle².”

Alongside their deep gratitude and patriotism towards the U.S. for granting them resettlement, some older Montagnards held a deep appreciation for former-President Trump due to his invocation of Christianity in his speeches. Prior to the Vietnam War, American Christian missionaries made trips to the Central Highlands and converted Montagnards. The Vietnamese government has persecuted Montagnards for their devotion to Western religion as Christianity was viewed as an invasive, external cultural force. To this day, segments of the Montagnard community in Guilford County are deeply pious and feel a strong attachment to the faith that they were once punished for embracing.

Reverend Eban, a well-respected pastor who had survived in the jungles of Vietnam during the 17-year period in which Montagnards waited for American troops to return, explained his affinity for Trump despite his administration’s creation of punitive policies that hurt his people—including those that justify SEAA deportation. According to Reverend Eban, the policies were justified especially since they were enacted by a president who was “born again...I see [Trump] become born again, then God start to use

² Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thus reflect participants’ speech styles.

him...he open pray in the White House, nation pray, and he start in the White House...I see what he stand for, the God religious...he stand for the law.” He added,

Many people tell me “Why you...take the side with Republican?” And I said I am the pastor...Who worship my God, who believe to God, who listen, who do practice the right...I respect all the leader who do what right, like the Constitution, protect the freedom in America, and I will follow...I not take a side...but I tell the truth...because Jesus is the way the true and the light. If I not do that, I cannot be a servant of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps because he viewed Trump as a man of devotion who shared his goals and values, or due to the undying gratitude he had for the U.S., Reverend Eban also believed that Trump would improve the living circumstances of Montagnards in Vietnam who continue to face persecution and harsh discrimination. Meanwhile, Lan (and other 1.5- and second-generation SEAs in the study) stridently felt that the older generations were blinded by White saviorism (Camarotta 2011) and their immovable reverence towards the U.S. government and military. For Lan, the notions conveyed by Y’Mon Dieu and Reverend Eban were detrimental to Montagnards’ wellbeing and created an overreliance on White institutions and White people for validation. These sharp divergences between Lan’s and Y’Mon Dieu’s views led to their heated arguments in the agency’s backroom.

However, though older respondents appeared unrelenting in their love for the government and belief that it could do no wrong, there were moments where their faith wavered. Li Siu, another Montagnard veteran, spoke of how Montagnards had tried to partner with the local and federal government to address human rights violations in Vietnam. Although he initially expressed gratitude towards the government for its assistance, Li Siu wearily stated: “We keep work with the U.S. government...Maybe someday, somehow God will see in their heart, can help us...we work with our representative in North Carolina like Lisa Barnes, Tom Tillis, and David Price we would

like to pass the Montagnard resolution...it don't go nowhere...I don't know, yeah. So um, yeah. I don't know." Y'Mon Dieu expressed a similar fatigue and disappointment when he considered the lack of support that his community received from the military and government: "Now it seem like they forget us already (laughs sadly)...In the past, they promise that they will come back to help us fight the Communist in Vietnam, but right now, it seem like everyone try to forget about the war."

Listening to Li Siu, Y'Mon Dieu, and Reverend Eban, and the arguments that broke out at the agency, there were times where it seemed like the Montagnards were still in the jungles of Vietnam, waging a ceaseless war with nothing to fuel them but the broken promises of the U.S. Montagnards, as well as other SEAA groups in this study including Hmong, Laotians, Vietnamese, and Cambodians attested to how the U.S. had abandoned their people during the Vietnam and Secret Wars, the latter of which had been waged in Laos at the same time as the former. As many participants would explain, the abandonment did not only occur in 1975 when the U.S. evacuated Southeast Asia and cut off its support to anti-Communist regimes throughout the region. Rather, as alluded to by Y'Mon Dieu, interviewees felt as if the U.S. was deliberately trying to forget about its wartime involvement which had wrought chaos, violence, and death throughout Southeast Asia.

I argue that White-led institutions such as the U.S. government and media have implemented an institutionalized silence of Americans' misdeed during the Vietnam and Secret Wars" that I refer to as "quiet neglect³." Quiet neglect is a discourse (Foucault

³ Though similar in phrasing, quiet neglect differs from Moynihan's (1969) idea of "benign neglect." The latter concept was suggested as a strategy for ameliorating racial tensions. Moynihan suggested that by simply leaving the issue of racism alone, it might resolve itself. While benign neglect and quiet neglect may

1981) that shapes what we know or believe to be true about SEAs, how we interact with (or ignore) them, and what we know *not to know* (Mills 1998) about the U.S.'s connections to refugees. This discourse has subsequently shaped the racial inequality that SEAs have incurred after being resettled in the U.S. and the obscuration of their histories from public knowledge. Quiet neglect was founded on the broken promises of the Special Forces to Montagnards whom they deserted in the jungles of Vietnam. Today, it produces an ignorance regarding SEAs' ongoing issues that enables the apathy of North Carolina officials towards refugees' pleas for foreign aid. The impacts of quiet neglect neither stop there nor only reach Montagnards. Rather, the Vietnam and Secret Wars affected many different ethnic groups, and the U.S. has endeavored to erase the damage done to all of them. The 62 SEAs and refugee service providers who participated in this study indicated that quiet neglect had pervasive, systemic impacts that shaped the entirety of refugees' lives, revealing the vast depth of silence.

These effects are explored in this three-paper dissertation, which are as follows. The first chapter examines how quiet neglect has shaped SEAs' experiences with trauma and mental health concerns. Additionally, I argue in this chapter that SEA trauma must be conceptualized as not only an individualized psychological problem but as an issue of *racialized emotions* stemming from the collective memories we have fostered around the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Refugee policies and programs were woefully unequipped to help newcomers recover from the trauma and mental illness common amongst first-generation refugees. Subsequently, second-generation SEAs

have some parallels regarding their usage of "racial ignorance" (Mueller 2020), my concept refers to a deliberately and carefully crafted system for rewriting narratives of U.S. involvement during the Vietnam and Secret Wars.

suffered from intergenerational trauma that had been handed down via their parents' unmetabolized distress.

Previous studies indicate that the process of healing from trauma can be facilitated through narratives that 1) acknowledge historical atrocities and 2) appropriately hold certain institutions accountable for contributing to these misdeeds (Kusow and Eno 2015; Kwan 2020). However, the U.S.'s desire to erase collective memories of the pain endured by Southeast Asian refugees left 1.5- and second-generation SEAs without clear narratives, frameworks, or roadmaps to navigate their emotions. At a national level, interviewees lacked media representations, historical texts, and political commemorations of their communities' contributions to the Vietnam and Secret Wars. They also did not have access to truthful retellings of the U.S.-refugee relationship that engendered their parents' suffering. Within local cities and counties, service providers repeated common tropes of U.S. heroism and generosity both during and following the Vietnam War, further obscuring Americans' culpability in producing SEAs' grief. Some even embodied the notion of the benevolent American savior while ignoring refugees' holistic needs and concerns.

As such, SEAA respondents were deprived of the requisite cultural knowledge to understand their intergenerational trauma. Participants were aware of the dysfunction within their families and had vague notions of why these issues emerged. However, they often felt disoriented as they tried to detangle the complex emotional turmoil within their communities, which only exacerbated their distress. Thus, this chapter explores the socially constructed nature of refugee trauma (typically depicted as a singularly

psychological issue), how it is informed by the collective memories we construct of different key events, and its links to racialized silences.

In the second chapter, I observe the impacts of quiet neglect on SEAA racial identity. The different ethnic groups represented in this study—Montagnards, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotians, and Hmong—are part of the panethnic “Asian American” group. However, SEAs often named “Asian American” as only a secondary or tertiary identity and preferred to use ethnic labels or an SEAA-panethnic identity instead. Interviewees explained this decision stating that the term “Asian American” often referred to *East* Asian Americans whom they perceived as adhering more closely to the model minority stereotype (Lee and Zhou 2015). Throughout their lives, respondents had been associated with stereotypes of affluence and prosperity—even service providers perpetuated these racialized notions—although their lived experiences as refugees harshly contrasted against such expectations. Thus, respondents pushed back against identifying/being identified as Asian American and adapted ethnoracial labels to better match their realities.

Yet, their resistance to the Asian American label was not only due to the socioeconomic incongruence they felt between perceptions of “Asian Americans” and their everyday realities as SEAs. Participants pointed out that their histories, traumas, and challenges were unlike those of the East Asian Americans who had become the face of Asian American panethnicity. SEAs felt that their communities were overlooked and forgotten after being housed under umbrella racial categories. Identifying as SEAA or by their ethnicities offered an avenue for interviewees to create safe spaces where they felt seen and validated. This chapter provides insights into how underrepresented Asian

American groups respond to panethnic categorizations and exercise their agency in an “ethnoracialization” (Brown and Lee 2015) process to rework racial boundaries and identities. In addition, interviewees sometimes expressed a greater sense of closeness towards Blacks and Latinxs rather than East Asian Americans. These feelings were often contributed to shared experiences with political, social, and economic marginalization. I explore how SEAs not only reconsidered their ties to Asian American panethnicity but also their allyship with other communities of color as they contested systemic racism.

The final chapter explores how quiet neglect has influenced interviewees’ experiences with deportation. At the time of data collection (2019-2020), SEAA deportations had ramped up due to punitive policy measures implemented by the Trump administration. Laos had been pressured by the U.S. government to accept deportees and Montagnards who were previously exempt from removal received deportation orders during Trump’s presidency (Dunst 2019). Though SEAA deportation increased in recent years, there was minimal media and political discussion of this problem—especially in relation to the hypersurveillance of and sensationalism surrounding Latinx deportations.

Throughout this chapter I suggest that quiet neglect and the obscuration of SEAs’ post-resettlement challenges has led to an eschewal of SEAA deportation in the mainstream. In turn, I examine how the concealment of this issue influenced respondents’ understandings of deportations in their own communities. Even as they occurred in their backyards, some SEAs—and this applies to service providers, too—viewed deportations as a non-issue and instead claimed that Latinxs were the only people affected by immigration policies. At other times, SEAs believed that deportations were a one-off event rather than part of a structure of racial inequity. These interviewees

engaged in “moralizing regulation” (Andrews 2018) to distance themselves from co-ethnics with removal orders and asserted that these individuals were criminals who deserved their punishments. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the potential for and constraints surrounding interracial collaborations between SEAs and Latinxs against punitive deportation policies.

CHAPTER 1: QUIET NEGLECT

Southeast Asian Refugees, Emotions, and U.S. Culpability

The presence of Southeast Asian refugees of the Vietnam and Secret Wars in the U.S. threatens the nation's moral identity as a pillar of democracy, serving as a constant reminder that American military interventions catalyzed their displacement (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009; McMahon 2002). Post-1975, the U.S. government grappled with its guilt by formulating discourses and policies that obscured its wartime involvement. By admitting refugees, honoring only American veterans (and forgetting Southeast Asian allies) in war commemorations, and portraying the U.S. as an anti-Communist haven, leaders showcased the U.S. as a humanitarian society at the expense of erasing refugees' experiences (Espiritu 2013).

In what follows, I argue that Southeast Asian Americans' (SEAs) experiences are framed through "quiet neglect." Quiet neglect is a discourse constructed upon the systematic silencing of Americans' misdeeds during the Vietnam and Secret Wars that subsequently shaped the U.S.'s eschewal of SEAA issues. Previous studies have noted that the denial of U.S. culpability first occurred at an institutional level through resettlement policies and media discourse before ultimately informing individuals' apathy towards refugees (McMahon 2002; Ong 2003). Silence can act as a form of oppressive discourse that minimizes one group's reality for the benefit of those in power (Foucault 1976). In the case of racial ignorance, White norms and narratives have been legitimated to the detriment of people of color who have yet to receive justice or proper acknowledgment for the racism they withstood (Foreman and Lewis 2006; Ioanide 2015; Mueller 2020).

I examine how quiet neglect shapes SEAs' experiences with another key issue: trauma. I argue that certain kinds of emotional and mental health concerns—such as those resulting from SEAs' connections with U.S. militarism and policies—that historically were the focus of psychological studies also have sociological roots and thus require broader-level conceptualizations to ameliorate. To make this claim, I first discuss how “collective memories” (Hawlbachs 1992; Olick 1999) of the Vietnam and Secret Wars are connected to quiet neglect, framing Southeast Asian refugees as a group to be forgotten. I link research on collective memories, racial ignorance, and emotions to examine the social nature of SEAA trauma and how overarching racial narratives shape the affective experiences of marginalized groups.

Using interviews with Southeast Asian refugees and service providers, I then explore how quiet neglect and collective memories shaped SEAs' “racialized emotions” (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Specifically, I examine how the institutionalized silences surrounding U.S. accountability affects 1.5- and second-generation refugees' emotional experiences with intergenerational trauma. I do this by first exploring respondents' perspectives of how key institutions, grounded in the U.S.'s desire to project exceptionalism and heroism, deny the concerns of SEAs. Second, I examine how institutionalized neglect shaped the collective memories that interviewees could access to comprehend their pain. Finally, I observe how refugees developed “countermemories” (Whitlinger 2015), confronting their communities' forgotten histories by forming their own narratives of the war, resettlement, and their lived experiences in the U.S. Interviewees reported experiencing healing after developing countermemories, which indicates the importance that narrative creation has for trauma recovery.

BROKEN PROMISES: U.S. INTERVENTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

I briefly discuss the oft-observed history of U.S. military interference in Southeast Asia. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are unique countries, and I cannot provide a full history of each. Instead, I highlight some common themes of U.S. militarization, their devastating impacts, and the atrocities motivating the U.S. to hide its involvement in Southeast Asia.

Present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were once colonized as French Indochina (1887-1954) (Chan 2006). Following World War II, the Communist Viet Minh demanded autonomy from France, leading to the First Indochina War (1946-1954) (Chan 2006; Schlund-Vials 2013). The conflict ultimately led to the establishment of independent Laos and Cambodia, and split North and South Vietnam in the Geneva Accords (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). In 1955, the U.S. offered military training and supplies to anti-Communist regimes in Southeast Asia to stave off the growing Communist powers (Schlund-Vials 2013). The American government also staged coups to insert Western-friendly governments in Laos, which had been deemed neutral territory by the UN (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). The Communist factions in Vietnam (Viet Minh), Cambodia (Khmer Rouge), and Laos (Pathet Lao), already wary of Western influence, were embittered by the Americans' presence (Chan 2004).

As the Vietnam War (1955-1975) intensified, the U.S. heavily bombed Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Attacks on Laos are part of the Secret War that was kept (and largely continues to) remain hidden from the American public (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). Cambodia and Laos were shelled; raids were not confined to combat zones but frequently targeted farms and villages, leading to massive civilian casualties (Chan 2004)

and making Laos the most bombed country per capita (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). Meanwhile, the U.S. recruited vulnerable ethnic minorities such as the Hmong, a nomadic people who had settled in Laos (Hein 2006), and Montagnards, the indigenous people of Vietnam's Central Highlands who faced discrimination from ethnic Vietnamese (Kinefuchi 2010). American forces promised these groups freedom (Andresen 1988; Yang 2001) but offered their allies no immediate route to safety after evacuating in 1975 (Chan 2006; Schlund-Vials 2013).

Postwar conditions were especially extreme for the Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, Cambodians, and Montagnards who fought for the U.S.; they faced certain torture, persecution, and death under the victorious Communist factions (Schlund-Vials 2013; Yang 2001). Fleeing these unlivable conditions, refugees undertook dangerous journeys through minefields, past military guards, and treacherous wildlife to reach camps at Thailand's border (Chan 2004). Some travelled by difficult boat journeys to countries such as Singapore and Malaysia (Chan 2006; Espiritu 2013). After being promised by American forces that their troops would return, a segment of Montagnards continued to fight against the Communists in the jungles of Vietnam for 17 years (Andresen 1988). The broken promises of the American government and its devastating role in Southeast Asia, just briefly highlighted in this section, were a source of guilt and shame for the U.S. in the immediate postwar era (Hing 2003). The U.S.'s desire to cast off the disgrace of the Vietnam and Secret Wars has influenced its resettlement policies and mistreatment of refugees.

U.S. GUILT AND GOOD REFUGEES: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE FRAMING OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS

Quiet neglect operates as the discourse influencing our views of Southeast Asian refugees. It encompasses policies, media depictions, and narratives that shape our perceptions of refugees and how we treat them. Meanwhile, collective memories are one of the cultural elements reinforcing this discourse. Refugee resettlement facilitated a rewriting of the U.S.'s collective memories surrounding the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Collective memories deal with how present-day conditions inform our remembrance of the past (Olick 1999; Schwartz 1991). Frequently, the most powerful institutions dictate a community's collective memories (Brehm and Fox 2017; Zerubavel 1996).

In our racial system, White people and institutions rewrite and relay collective memories regarding their domination of people of color. The ways in which we remember the Vietnam and Secret Wars and the role of White-led institutions (the military and government) in producing SEAA suffering are tied to "racial ignorance" (Mueller 2020) or an "epistemology of ignorance" (Mills 1998). According to Mueller, our racial system is predicated upon the willful, deliberate denial of White supremacy and the harm unleashed upon people of color to maintain Whites' power. Racial ignorance manifests itself as and is maintained by institutionalized programs, discourses, and everyday practices that obscure inequality. In this paper, I argue that quiet neglect and its associated collective memories serve to uphold Americans' racial ignorance of the atrocities committed against Southeast Asian refugees.

At a national level, the U.S. government converted the U.S.'s shameful collective memories of the Vietnam War to those of a noble struggle via policies such as the Refugee Act of 1980 (Espiritu 2013; McMahon 2002). This policy opened the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) which sets intake quotas each year and distributes funding

across states to support resettlement (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2019). Though partly motivated by humanitarianism—a concept that has been deployed to reinforce Western paternalism and White racial and colonial dominance (Espiritu 2013; Ngo and Hansen 2013)—the Refugee Act was also created to display the benefits bestowed upon refugees through American interventions (Espiritu 2013). ORR programming facilitated the government’s goals to reframe the Vietnam and Secret Wars by pushing refugees to quickly leave welfare as a way of showcasing their newfound prosperity in the U.S. (Hein 2006; Zhou and Bankston 2000). Over the last several decades, social and economic support for refugees has declined. Within the first 30-90 days of resettlement, refugees are expected to meet a dizzying set of “self-sufficiency” requirements: finding a job, signing up for ESL classes, paying bills, undergoing a cultural orientation, enrolling children in school, learning how to take public transit, and applying for health insurance (International Rescue Committee 2019). The efficacy of resettlement programs has been questioned as refugees enjoy a better quality of life when given more time to adjust (Chan 2004; Henry et al. 2019).

The clash between resettlement demands and newcomers’ wellbeing were products of the U.S.’s postwar agenda. Without acknowledging the stark differences between voluntary, post-1965 Asian immigrants, and Southeast Asian refugees, policymakers urged the latter to economically assimilate like the former. In fact, the Refugee Act was partially predicated on the model minority myth and intended to manufacture “good refugees” (Espiritu 2013) or Southeast Asians who were liberated from Communism and on their way to becoming new “honorary Whites.” Good refugees were meant to symbolize the kindness brought by resettlement and facilitate a

misremembrance of the U.S.'s role in making the 1980 Refugee Act necessary (Espiritu 2013).

The Refugee Act simultaneously reframed collective memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars in a more beneficial light for the military and government (McMahon 2002) while diminishing U.S. accountability to SEAs (Chow 2005). Negligent resettlement practices have resulted in SEAs' dismal outcomes and disadvantages, including higher rates of incarceration and poverty, and lower educational attainment levels (Tang 2013; Zhou and Bankston 2020). As mentioned earlier, the Refugee Act can be considered as a larger-scale mechanism in the cultivation of quiet neglect. Since this chapter focuses on the micro-level consequences of this discourse such as SEAs' experiences with trauma, I now turn to a discussion of how collective memories shaped by racial ignorance are linked to individuals' emotional wellbeing.

PERSISTING TRAUMA: REFUGEES' RACIALIZED EMOTIONS

Mental health concerns have been heavily documented amongst first-generation Southeast Asian refugees (Das, Dubus, and Silka 2013; Gordon 2011). Previous work has found that refugees are reticent to address these issues (Jazzar and Hamm 2007; Tang 2013) citing cultural norms stigmatizing those who seek psychological help (Chan 2004; Kinzie 1989) and a need for more culturally competent mental health services (Ong 2003). When older survivors are silent about their past, younger generations are left with their parents' "unmetabolized trauma" (Prager 2003) which leads to familial dysfunction, abuse, and other unhealthy behaviors (Atkinson, Nelson, and Atkinson 2010).

These studies conceptualize trauma as an individualized problem, though scholars of collective memory have also coined the term "cultural trauma" to denote the

experiences endured by members of a group who have suffered from a tremendously horrific event that fundamentally changes their identities (Alexander 2004). Research on cultural trauma often focuses on understanding how it is constructed, iterated, and legitimated (Eyerman 2004; Giesen 2004), but far less work examines the consequences of trauma on directly affected parties. Instead, an emphasis is often placed on analyzing how a group remembers a specific event and the trauma that results from these commemorations (Alexander 2004).

Rather than having obvious ways of memorializing their communities' pasts, SEAs may lack clear collective memories of and explanations for their parents' distress (Kwan 2020). Thus, SEA trauma is rooted in our attempts to forget refugees' pain just as much as it is embedded within the collective memories we have about resettlement or the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Compared to the number of studies on commemoration, there is less scholarship on how misremembrances affect people's experiences with trauma. Available research notes that the descendants of refugees and war survivors experience emotional strain as they try to navigate conflicts and their identities while lacking roadmaps, memories, or social scripts to comprehend their trials (Sangalang and Vang 2017; Stein 2009). Others have observed that in cases of colonialism where a colonized group's history has been erased, trauma arises from the sense of illegitimacy and disconnection that they feel to their contemporary realities (Lazali 2021). These emotional experiences have been paralleled to that of amputees who suffer from "phantom limbs" (Lazali 2021:82); both parties sense the absence of something important but are unsure of how to regain this vital appendage. This feeling of loss creates a lingering pain that lacks a clear remedy.

While research on collective memories and racial ignorance hold the potential to help us better conceptualize the trauma of refugees, these bodies of scholarship are rarely united. Our understanding of SEAAAs' emotional and mental health struggles would benefit from linking these theories together to (1) acknowledge that their trauma is not only psychological but rooted in systemic forces and (2) explicitly address the relationship between racism and refugee trauma. I assert that refugees' affective experiences with postwar collective memories may be understood as "racialized emotions" (Bonilla-Silva 2019) which emerge from the relational nature of racism (i.e., how White domination impacts the emotions of people of color, and vice versa). Racialized emotions dictate "feeling rules" (Hochschild 2012) that inform different groups about the appropriate emotions to hold towards different groups and scenarios, often leading those in subordinate positions to manage their emotions in a way that benefits the group in power. For example, refugees have previously been documented as feeling indebted and grateful to the U.S. for its generosity. These emotions are adaptive responses that are meant to help refugees adjust to the U.S. and earn favor with sponsors and resettlement aids who hold great influence over their lives (Hing 2003; Nguyen 2017).

However, research also indicates that survivors of violence do not simply live with their unresolved pain. Marginalized groups create "countermemories" (Beneduce 2016; Whitlinger 2015) and challenge dominant ideologies by excavating narratives and knowledge that were deliberately buried by those in power. Studies show that the second-generation may feel that there are broader stories behind their trauma and try to fill in these lapses, cultivating collective memories of their communities' diaspora by patching

together family stories, personal research, and sparse media representations (Kidron 2009; Kwan 2020). Refugees weave together the gaps and scraps of the past to construct memories and form present identities. Taken together, these studies suggest that the attenuation of refugee trauma requires both mental health services (Gordon 2011; Ong 2003) as well as cultural acknowledgments of suffering. The latter provides survivors with a framework for metabolizing their pain and distributing accountability that can initiate social justice, healing, and growth (Eno and Kusow 2015).

In what follows, I use 62 interviews with Southeast Asians and service providers to explore the impacts of quiet neglect on respondents' emotional wellbeing, how the absence of collective memories affects SEAA trauma, and the ways in which SEAs contest racialized ignorance. Having outlined the national-level manifestations of quiet neglect through the Refugee Act and popular culture, I turn to an exploration of how it influences local institutions and service agencies by assessing the views of service providers. The most accessible collective memories and narratives of the Vietnam and Secret Wars paint the White-SEAA relationship as one of goodwill and beneficence with the former cast as the latter's saviors (McMahon 2002; Ong 2003). I explore how these narratives permitted service providers to feel positively for helping refugees attain self-sufficiency and meet ORR requirements, even as they were unattuned to SEAs' holistic issues including mental health challenges. These responses indicate the relationally constructed positive emotions that service providers felt while remaining unaware of the scope of SEAs' adversities.

Second, I examine how national- and local-level quiet neglect impacted SEAs' individualized trauma and emotions. I frame these discursive manifestations in national,

local, and individual terms to highlight how refugees' emotions are produced by our racial structure rather than being purely individualized experiences. Interviewees lacked support from local services to address the issues in their communities. They also noted the pervasive absence of broad cultural narratives to help them understand their communities' trauma, which made their feelings even more difficult to process.

Finally, I observe how participants crafted counter-memories. Interviewees challenged SEAs' roles as sacrifices in the preservation of Americans' reputations by breaking the silences shrouding their trauma. At first glance, respondents seemed to just be starting conversations about SEAA histories and experiences. However, in a society where an acknowledgment of SEAA anguish has been discouraged, the first step of initiating dialogues and building an awareness of their buried stories was deeply impactful for interviewees. These stories reveal how SEAs sought to remedy their pain and contest the erasure of their communities' realities. Quiet neglect has cast SEAs as background characters whose suffering is used as a prop to emphasize American heroism. Thus, it is important to note how participants exercised agency to foster counter-memories.

METHODS

Conducting Refugee Research in a New Immigrant Destination

I conducted this research with Southeast Asian refugees in North Carolina, a "new immigrant destination" (NID) (Marrow 2009). Compared to longstanding immigration hubs, NIDs have fewer resources and established institutions for newcomers (Winders 2012). By the time of my study, resettlement had reshaped a few cities in North Carolina to include more service agencies and a few ethnic or Southeast Asian organizations

(Kolano and Davila 2019; Lau 2000). However, North Carolina generally lacks the large centers of ethnic life present in California, Minnesota, or other key resettlement states (Hein 2006; Schlund-Vials 2013). One exception is with the Montagnards, whose largest population (estimated at upwards of 10,000 people, though there are no official counts) outside of Vietnam is in Guilford County, NC (News & Record 2019). Though Guilford County hosts Montagnard community associations, Cambodian Buddhist temples, and Vietnamese businesses, discernible ethnic hubs are sparse.

Conducting research in an NID impacted my work in multiple ways. In states such as Minnesota and California, SEAs have fought to have their histories recognized by local schools and media (Gandhi 2019). This is made possible by SEAs' larger size and influence in these areas. However, SEAs lack the same visibility in North Carolina and thus had fewer resources to support refugee mental health or garner awareness of their issues. As such, the findings of this study may deviate from comparable examinations of SEAA trauma and racialized emotions in traditional immigration or resettlement hubs.

Furthermore, given the limited visibility of SEAs, recruitment was done in a piecemeal manner since markers of community life only became apparent as I spent time in the field. Like other researchers who have worked with Southeast Asian refugees in North Carolina (Clune 2015; Lau 2000), I reached out to community leaders from cultural and civic associations, churches and temples, and grassroots organizations. I discussed my project with these individuals, shared my goals, and asked how I could give back to SEAA communities. I also shared my interview guides and consent forms with

leaders who reviewed my materials before agreeing to introduce me to potential interviewees.

Sample, Interviews, and Analysis

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Vietnamese, Montagnard⁴, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees from the first, 1.5, and second generations (n=47).⁵ During these interviews, I asked respondents questions about the circumstances leading to their or their families' resettlement, what it was like growing up in or adapting to North Carolina, how connected they felt to their ethnic cultures, the impact of this connection on their wellbeing, and the many issues including discrimination, trauma, and deportation that impacted their lives. All respondents except for two who either had a community or family member translate for them were at least proficient in English as I did not have the resources to hire translation services (See Table 1 for respondent information)

⁴ Some Montagnard respondents also identify with their ancestral tribes. In these cases, respondents are described as being Montagnard-[tribe] (i.e., Montagnard-Jarai, Montagnard-Bunong).

⁵ The sum of refugee respondents (n=47) and service providers (n=23) is greater than my total sample size (n=62) because some refugees worked as service providers and thus are counted in both categories.

Southeast Asian Respondent Information				
Race/Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Generation	Education
Montagnard-Bunong, Southeast Asian, Asian American	22	F	1.5	Some college
Montagnard-Bunong, Southeast Asian, Asian American	20	F	1.5	Some college
Southeast Asian/Montagnard-Jarai	24	F	1.5	Associates
Montagnard-Jarai, American	35	M	1	Masters
Southeast Asian/Montagnard-Bunong, Asian American	22	F	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Bunong, Asian	63	M	1	Doctorate
Vietnamese/Chinese, Asian American	22	F	2	Bachelors
Montagnard American, Southeast Asian	27	F	2	Bachelors
Khmer Krom	44	M	1	Trained in art in Cambodia
Vietnamese, Asian American	20	F	1.5	Some college
Montagnard-Jarai, Asian	23	M	1.5	Some college
Lao American, Southeast Asian, Asian American	18	NB	2	High school
Montagnard-Jarai, Asian	64	M	1	Middle school or lower
Cambodian (Khmer), Asian	40	F	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Bunong, Asian	26	M	1.5	Associates
Asian American/Vietnamese	65	M	1	Bachelors
Montagnard-Bunong, Southeast Asian, Asian	22	F	1.5	Some Associates
Montagnard-Rhade, Asian	18	F	1.5	Some college
Montagnard, Asian	25	M	1.5	Some college
Montagnard-Jarai	74	M	1	Trained in Saigon as government employee
Montagnard-Rhade	72	M	1	Doctorate
Montagnard Asian American-Bahnar, Asian	27	F	2	Bachelors
Vietnamese, Asian	44	M	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Jarai	79	M	1	High school
Montagnard Asian American-Jarai, Asian	27	F	1.5	Associates
Lao, Asian	23	M	2	Some college
Montagnard-Jarai	32	F	1.5	Bachelors
Asian American, Southeast Asian, Montagnard/Cambodian,	25	M	1.5	Bachelors
Hmong/Thai, Asian American	20	M	1.5	Some college
Asian American, Hmong, Southeast Asian	46	M	1.5	Masters
Hmong, Asian	23	F	2	Some college

Hmong, Asian	20	F	2	Some college
Vietnamese American, Asian American, Southeast Asian	19	F	2	Some college
American Asian, Hmong	23	F	2	Some college
Lao, Asian	23	M	2	Some college
Southeast Asian, Lao, Asian	27	F	2	Some graduate
Vietnamese American, Asian American	19	F	2	Some college
Lao, Asian American	47	F	1.5	Associates
Lao	53	M	1.5	Some high school
Lao, Asian American	50	M	1.5	Some high school
Lao	50	M	1	Some high school
Southeast Asian/Lao, Vietnamese	21	NB	2	Some college
Montagnard, Asian	25	F	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Rhade, Asian	36	F	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Bunong, Southeast Asian, Asian American	25	F	1.5	Bachelors
Montagnard-Jarai	29	F	1	Bachelors
Hmong, Asian American, Southeast Asian	25	F	2	Some college

Six months after starting these interviews, I contacted service providers, community advocates, and others who helped refugees acclimate to North Carolina (n=24). They included social workers at resettlement agencies, community advocates, healthcare liaisons, and lawyers (for the sake of brevity, I refer to these participants as “service providers”). I asked service providers about how they viewed refugees’ needs and the integration process. I also talked to service providers about the bureaucratic and political challenges of their work: the pressures of federal resettlement standards, and the limited funding their agencies receive because of recent changes in refugee quotas (down from 110,000 in 2016 to 18,000 as of 2019).

Service providers worked in Guilford County (n=17), Mecklenburg County (a large resettlement site for refugees generally) (n=3), and Orange County (a growing site for resettlement) (n=4). They came from a range of racial backgrounds including White

(n=8), Black (n=2), Latinx (n=1), mixed-race (Asian/White; n=1), and single-race Asian (n=12). Aside from one Chinese American service provider, the other 11 Asian service providers were from Montagnard, Lao, and Karen refugee communities. The last group represents a growing group of Southeast Asian refugees who were recently resettled in North Carolina (See Table 2 for respondent information).

Service providers have varying levels of involvement with the Southeast Asian refugees in this study, and many worked with a broad range of newcomers. Some

Table 2: Service Provider Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Occupation	Location
Asian/Lao	27	F	Youth Program Coordinator	Mecklenburg County
Lao	47	F	Non-profit Coordinator	Guilford County
Lao	53	M	Non-profit Coordinator	Guilford County
Lao	50	M	Non-profit Coordinator	Guilford County
Lao	50	M	Non-profit Coordinator	Guilford County
Asian/Montagnard	25	F	Refugee Health Coordinator	Guilford County
White	37	F	Social Worker	Guilford County
White	49	M	Literacy and Employment Coordinator	Guilford County
Asian	43	F	Non-profit Director	Guilford County
Black	44	F	Employment Specialist	Guilford County
White	69	F	Congregational nurse	Guilford County
White	43	F	Job Developer	Guilford County
White	35	F	Immigration Lawyer	Guilford County
Latinx	25	M	Immigrant Center Director	Guilford County
White	39	F	Community Engagement Coordinator	Mecklenburg County
Asian/Montagnard	36	F	Non-profit Administrative Coordinator	Guilford County
Montagnard-Bunong	25	F	Statewide Base-Building Coordinator	Mecklenburg County
Montagnard-Jarai	29	F	Social Worker	Guilford County
Black/African	45	F	Case Manager	Guilford County
White	29	F	Social Worker	Orange County
Asian/Chinese	63	M	Community Advocate	Guilford County
Karen	22	F	Language Program Coordinator	Orange County
Karen	22	F	Intern	Orange County
White	24	F	Program Manager	Orange County

respondents had not served many Vietnamese, Montagnards, Cambodians, Hmong, or

Laotians but their perspectives are still relevant to this project because current refugee institutions such as resettlement agencies are shaped by the 1980 Refugee Act which was established in response to the post-Vietnam War refugee crisis. Thus, many of the contemporary models and programs for working with refugees are grounded in the quiet neglect that initially shaped the U.S.'s responses to Southeast Asian refugees. Whether respondents had Southeast Asian clients, their practices and beliefs contribute to the general climate of refugee support systems in North Carolina which affected SEAs.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in NVivo. I coded interviews in multiple stages and analysis was ongoing throughout data collection. First, I developed open codes to discern general themes and ideas from the interviews (Marshall and Rossman 2016) Second, I conducted axial coding (Charmaz 2006) to merge these themes into concepts around Southeast Asian refugees' narratives of trauma, coping strategies, and sources of distress. I compared these with the codes developed from interviews with service providers about how they viewed refugee trauma and the types of support they offered clients. Taken together, key themes emerged concerning refugees' trauma and their interactions with institutions. In the next section, I focus on the institutionalized silences and resources that surrounded refugee needs and issues.

FINDINGS

Institutional Silence: Saviorism and denial in refugee services and social systems

Forty years after the Vietnam and Secret Wars, quiet neglect still shapes how institutions handled refugee issues. White saviorism and self-sufficiency, key themes that enabled the U.S. government to eschew refugees' issues and reinvent collective memories of the Vietnam War, continued to inform how local service agencies conducted

their work. Namely, the erasure of refugees' histories and struggles led service agencies to use an assimilationist model when working with refugees. By investing in this framework, service providers felt good about focusing on their clients' self-sufficiency while remaining unaware of the full scope of their needs.

Carrie (43 years-old, Asian/White), the director of a refugee education center who had worked with Southeast Asians for over 15 years, proudly proclaimed her dedication to "assisting refugees and immigrants with self-sufficiency." Emphasizing refugees' abilities to assimilate and live independently, Carrie defined self-sufficiency as, "am I able to do different things I need to do on my own without help? ...A big thing we talk about a lot is empowerment. We're not gonna do things for you." Carrie stressed a notion of economic self-sufficiency which was essential to the good refugee narrative: "the clients that have the drive and get to the point where they're able to financially support their family...you can see that they have much more self-confidence." Additionally, Carrie asserted that Southeast Asian refugees were more invested in obtaining an education than some other students. Whether this is true, Carrie's perceptions paralleled narratives and collective memories of Southeast Asians as "good refugees" who were meant to become upwardly mobile and self-reliant.

This programming ethos has been criticized for being hyper-individualistic and negating the structural forces that engender refugee resettlement (Espiritu 2013). In the case of SEAs, refugee programming reinforces collective memories of U.S.'s kindness towards refugees while denying the U.S.'s culpability for newcomers' issues. Avery (29 years-old, White), a refugee mental health program coordinator, offered a critique of how resettlement practices bypassed a more progressive approach to wellbeing:

People have to be taking English classes in order to receive cash assistance and several other things...So if people are not doing those things, they don't accept the first job they're offered and they're sanctioned...usually around month two or three that's when people's distress goes way up, if they didn't already come in with high distress anyway...it's just such a complicated process, and really focuses on employability. And people would be so much more employable if their physical and mental health needs are taken care of first.

While researchers have noted that the 1980 Refugee Act was a first step in erasing U.S. accountability for refugees' suffering, comments by Avery and Carrie reveal that policies have subsequently perpetuated the silence-around newcomers' trauma and holistic challenges including with their mental and physical health, sense of belonging, and capacity to live comfortably in the U.S. While unintentional, Avery noted how the structure of resettlement programs inevitably reproduces quiet neglect: "I know many of the resettlement agencies and people who are interfacing with resettled refugees are trying the best they can...But the policies that are behind all those rules...make it so that people really don't have the assistance they need to get stable on their feet."

The mistreatment of refugees is not only evident in resettlement programming but filters down to how other institutions viewed and treated Southeast Asians. For over 12 years, Ivan (Chinese American 63 years-old) was a community advocate for Montagnards in Guilford County. He recounted some afterschool activities at a refugee housing site from 20 years prior that symbolized service providers' savior mentalities and the positive emotions they derived from performing them:

The Center for New North Carolinians (CNNC) was doing a lot of [afterschool] stuff...one of the persons had this brilliant idea that, oh we've got these little Asian kids? [Cooing in a patronizing tone, mimicking the CNNC worker] ...Soo cute, let's have them learn songs, right? English songs, right? Let's have them sing songs from...*The King and I! The King and I!*...[Ivan scoffs] A Rogers and Hammerstein musical from the 1950s and it shows the White savior woman and...Neil Brenner ain't Asian, but [plays] the part of the Asian guy, you got the

English savior, and you got all these little kids lined up and they're gonna march around and sing.

Ivan's critique continued with a recent example. A few days before our interview, Ivan sat with Montagnard teens, young adults, and a Guilford County Board of Education member to discuss the public-school system's abandonment of SEAA students. The meeting was partly motivated by the suicide of a Montagnard youth just a few weeks beforehand:

You see the really heart-wrenching stuff about this kid shooting himself...if there's a silver lining... [Montagnard kids were] sitting at this table, talking to the Board of Ed member...Some of the youth were sayin', "Yeah, I suffer from depression. Nobody's helping." Schools are supposed to be there to help, and you know these young people sayin' like I was never helped...Nobody followed up and nobody seemed to care...[They] were sitting here and corroborating each other's stories, this is what's been going on for the past 10ish years or so at this high school, so it doesn't seem like a one-off thing...There have been past incidents, we're just not willing to look at the overall system...[it's] denial, constant denial, no, no, no, no, this is not a big deal.

Although these mental health concerns were obvious to the SEAs who experienced them, they were easily overlooked by teachers, administrators, and school officials.

Without a discourse to help them make sense of SEAA mental illness, educators instead followed the typical social script for dealing with refugees' issues and could not acknowledge the severity of these issues.

Some respondents connected the deep silence in schools around refugee issues to the dearth of curriculum covering the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Nhung (18 years-old, Montagnard-Rhade/Asian) pointed out that her high school history classes dodged the Vietnam War: "Whenever I bring up the Vietnam War, a lot of people wouldn't talk about it. But you know, stuff like World War II...they wouldn't mind." Sombath (53 years-old, Lao) had a clear explanation for why the Secret War was kept out of schools

and other public spaces. Referring to the intense bombing of Laos, he asserted, “Lao...they cover what they doing there...the bomb that dropped is in Laos, the most right now...The CIA trying to shut down, cover up Lao... like when you guys study in high school and college, they don’t see Laos. You ask Americans, hey, what’s Laos? ...Laos is like they hide us.”

Drawing parallels to the rewriting of Native American history, Kyra (25 years-old, Hmong/Southeast Asian/Asian American) also commented on the political nature of (the lack of) Vietnam War representations:

It’s not just Hmong people, it’s Montagnard, or other small ethnic groups and diasporas...a lot of us played such a big role in the Vietnam War, and that’s why we’re [in the U.S.] in the first place...We still aren’t even acknowledged...a lot of history books are erasing that part that they don’t want to keep...like Native Americans...their history is being erased, and it talks about how the Native Americans are giving their land to like the White man...I don’t know if any of us will get any recognition, not just the Hmong people, but other people who aren’t White.

Kyra’s critique relates to the structural nature of racial ignorance. The same colonial and racial logics of erasure that negated Native Americans’ history were used to reject Whites’ culpability in engendering SEAA’s misfortune. Respondents indicated how practices across a range of institutions created a racial binary that lauded White heroism—such as by replicating musicals whose plots focused on White saviors in “the Orient” and focusing on goals of self-sufficiency—while shunning collective memories of refugees’ suffering. In the next section, I explore how SEAA respondents’ emotions are shaped by these systemic silences and collective postwar memories.

Personal Trauma: Racialized emotions and the impact of quiet neglect

Mainstream institutions were impacted by collective memories that depicted SEAA’s as good refugees who were rescued by Americans’ benevolence. Refugee

programs have subsequently focused on SEAA's economic assimilation to reify these narratives. Meanwhile, 1.5- and second-generation refugees' trauma, fear, anxiety were often overlooked. Younger generations, due to their Americanized upbringings, were more comfortable than their elders talking about their emotions. Thus, their experiences are more prominently featured in this section. These respondents endured intergenerational trauma, and some associated their struggles to resettlement practices that negated collective memories of U.S. culpability and refugees' suffering. The pervasive ignorance throughout society regarding SEAA issues left respondents with few means through which they could comprehend their pain or work through mental health issues.

H'Bo (22-years old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian/Asian American) criticized how refugee programming ignored issues that arose in resettlement, including newcomers' physical and mental health: "[There is a] lack of education that our mental health impacts our overall health...I think our medical community or overall society, it's not in a place where they recognize the stress and the trauma that refugees go through." H'Bo was personally affected by this problem and talked about how trauma and the challenges of resettlement "played such a role...in my father's health right now." H'Bo's father has kidney failure and she believed that unresolved trauma and stress contributed to his ailing health. She explained that her father endured, "such an emotional strain but [he] doesn't know how to recognize it. I felt like because of that illness, I lost a father, you know? That's really hard."

As mentioned by H'Bo and Avery (in the earlier section), there are limited services to help SEAA's deal with trauma and mental health challenges. Other

respondents spoke more abstractly of the collective silence noted by Ivan, Sombath, Nhung, and Kyra, and how it contributed to a dearth of resources for navigating their trauma. Lan (25 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian/Asian American) noticed this with many first-generation Montagnards who had been heavily influenced by collective memories of the good refugee: “The elders love to talk about the war, how we sided with the U.S. I don’t think they necessarily talk about some of the aftermath and some of the traumatic stuff...that the U.S. wasn’t able to support them.” Reflecting on her conversations with Y’Mon Dieu, a Montagnard elder who was well-respected for his military service and local leadership, Lan said, “I had to pry it out of Y’Mon...cause after the war, he was in the jungle. He kept on fighting...he was like ‘Yeah, I stayed there for 14 years because the U.S...said they were gonna come back for us and then they didn’t!’ So, I think talking fairly about these things or openly is really difficult for folks.” Just as a discourse of silence and the good refugee trope permitted Americans to disavow their remorse, Lan believed that Montagnards’ internalization of this myth, though protective in some ways, created harmful emotions and views of their relationship with the U.S.

Younger respondents who had not lived through the war had trouble accessing *any* framework through which they could interpret their experiences. We are often taught what we should know about race (e.g., the hierarchical structure of our system, which group is in which position) as well as what we should not know (e.g., how this structure came to be made and the questionability of its legitimacy) (Mills 1998; Ioanide 2015). Thus, marginalized groups lack the language and tools they need to name their oppression which is a critical step in overcoming racist transgressions (hooks 1991; Lawrence 2011). Interviewees often sensed that something was amiss in their

communities but lacked cultural representations of SEAs or resources to learn about their groups' histories and concerns. They felt a heavy absence in place of discourses and frameworks through which they could interpret their trauma, and the weight of this loss exacerbated their emotional turmoil. Adding to that, service providers—people who worked closely with refugees—seemed to know little about the trauma endured by their clients. This ignorance was pervasive throughout refugees' lives, filtering from national and local-level manifestations to shape their individual confusion, distress, and turmoil as they wrestled with their realities.

Minh (20 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian/Asian American) remembered leaving Vietnam as a young girl. Her father had fled to the U.S. years before the rest of her family after being persecuted by the Vietnamese government. Minh recalled, "I knew something was wrong and I cried all day the day before he left...[when] he left...I cried all day that day." Due to her past, Minh "had really bad anxiety as a kid, I wasn't even sure why. I wasn't even sure what anxiety was, but it...makes sense, you know?" After being relocated to North Carolina, Minh faced new emotional conflicts as a member of a deliberately forgotten community. Throughout her childhood, Minh felt unsettled about her identity and disliked being Montagnard. She linked these negative feelings to the absence of public discussion about her community. "How come my people aren't in the history books? Did we not fight in the war? And then you grow up to learn that you did fight in the war and a lot of people died...the U.S. doesn't want to put it in their history books, of course...Growing up with that mindset...made me not want to be who I was cause I felt like I didn't have a group to go to."

The lack of SEAA representation in schools and mainstream culture compounded silences within respondents' immediate networks that made it difficult for them to deal with trauma. Individuals like H'Bo and Minh recognized that service agencies and key institutions were unwilling or uninterested in reckoning with refugee trauma and history. Meanwhile, the institutionalized lack of acknowledgment regarding refugees' issues were mirrored in the resounding silences within participants' own homes when it came to the wars and family members' memories of them. As a child, Sydney (22 years-old, Vietnamese, Chinese/Asian American) knew that her family was different from other American households because of "most definitely the trauma, the trauma that's never spoken about or the trauma that's like never brought up." However, her family used humor to avoid their painful memories, leaving Sydney to feel the "phantom limb" of her family's unspoken trauma: "I get that [my family] just wants to put it in the back of their mind to keep their day going...they'll always bring up memories of how hard it was, but they always end up turning it into a joke."

Taylor (20 years-old, Southeast Asian/Lao, Vietnamese), a non-binary second-generation refugee, emphasized the importance of having diverse portrayals of SEAs that enabled people to both acknowledge and heal from their trauma. Taylor was aware that their family had resettled in the U.S. because of the Vietnam and Secret Wars but was not exposed to collective memories of SEAs beyond their wartime victimization. During their childhood, Taylor's main way of identifying with their community involved being, "Constantly reminded that if the war never happened, [I] wouldn't exist...I came to college not being able to separate my identity from that. Like I'm a war!" It was only after Taylor entered college, met other SEAs with whom they had positive interactions,

and joined their peers in collectively organizing around SEAA issues that they saw their identity and community's history in a more positive light. They emphasized how important it was to be able to identify with something outside of their trauma to find healing: "I got burnt out before I got to college...hearing about these issues all the time. I became so depressed...at this point, I want to be separated from my struggles."

A final example of the impacts of quiet neglect comes from Duc (65 years-old, Vietnamese/Asian American) who fled Vietnam with his dad when Saigon fell in 1975. Although Duc did not explicitly talk about trauma, the terror he felt during this time was evident in his recollections: "It's between life and death...we made it down to the ocean and you know, there's more chance of dying because we have no way to go. We have no idea where we'll end up, it's just to leave the country...We just have to get out." Duc trekked by boat to Singapore, was sent to refugee camps in the Philippines, Guam, travelled through Hawaii and Florida, and finally settled in Minneapolis before later moving to North Carolina.

At first, Duc struggled to adjust to the U.S., but later enjoyed a long career with IBM. Though Duc was happy to have afforded his American-born children a better life, he was troubled that,

It's very vivid memory of how I left my country, the last few months of Saigon...I can write a book, but I have not...My son think that I made up all the story...the young Vietnamese generation, it's not just my son, it's the younger generation right now think about the miracle story of the boat people...and we dramatizing that...So that's the reason...I don't even want to...write down those stories, I have to live vividly those moments of suffering, of the horrible things I faced...if they don't believe what we are about to tell them...why I have to go through that painful things in my mind?

Duc stated that second-generation Vietnamese Americans did not believe the first-generation's stories because they "didn't see the tragedy, the struggling that the

Vietnamese American people when they first came this country.” Considering other statements relayed by interviewees, it stands to reason that our collective memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars influenced the empathy gaps between the first and second generations.

In this section, I discussed how the depiction of Southeast Asian refugees in mainstream institutions affects individuals’ emotional struggles with trauma. I emphasized that while interviewees’ feelings may seem to be highly individualized psychological experiences, the confusion and distress they felt around their intergenerational trauma resulted from systemic issues. I now turn to examples of how interviewees challenged the oppressive silences surrounding their communities’ turmoil by unearthing countermemories.

Breaking the Silence: Healing amongst refugees

Given the absence of resources and collective memories that spoke to SEAA histories, interviewees grew up feeling unequipped to navigate their trauma. For years, they lived with a constant sense of uncertainty and anxiety about how to broach the tensions within their communities. Some interviewees were able to explore their feelings with empathetic audiences in their adulthood, and these experiences were revelatory and cathartic after having lived in silence for so long. For example, Sydney had never fully reckoned with intergenerational trauma until she began working for a Southeast Asian non-profit where she met other second-generation SEAs. Prior to this job, Sydney said, “I haven’t met others that I related to so much,” and she recalled:

I cried the second day at work...cause I opened up to [a Hmong co-worker] and like I don’t know, the tears just kept fallin’...Talking about like how we grew up in families, and she like explained to me that the past traumas from parents are passed down, and how real it is, and that like really clicked for me...She gave me

a book to read...it was [by] a Vietnamese author who pretty much wrote about her parents' trauma...that generation's trauma and how it affects [their] kids...and [my co-worker] is Hmong, [another is] Montagnard, and me being Vietnamese, we all related to it.

Through books and conversations with other SEAs, Sydney was starting to form counter-memories of the older generations' trauma so that she could better understand her own experiences and emotions.

Chan (25 years-old, Asian American/Cambodian-Montagnard-Jarai/Southeast Asian) endured intergenerational trauma in the form of familial abuse and dysfunction. He recalled being taught to distrust people: "My parents, they never wanted me to go outside, they didn't want me to play with other kids, they didn't want to trust other families cause they're just afraid...my dad doesn't even want me to hang out with other Montagnard kids sometimes because he doesn't know if they're a spy and stuff." When I asked Chan about how his parents raised him and his sisters, he responded, "Um...(sighs) really bad...cause our parents used to hit us...they treated us badly." Akin to Sydney, Chan lacked the resources to comprehend this trauma until he became an adult. When he was 18 years-old, Chan met Ivan, the Montagnard community advocate, who offered him the knowledge and context to make sense of his familial trauma:

He talked to me about a lot of things that were going on in the community, and he...was kind of there when my family was going through a lot. He wanted me to understand why the things were happening in my life and stuff. And that's where I kind of understood, cause at 18, I didn't know what was going on or why things were happening to me. And it was like you know, this is where I come from, this is where my parents are coming from, they're coming from a place of war and poverty...and I learned to be open-minded talking to Ivan.

Chan shared that learning about his community's history offered insight into his family dynamics. The counter-memories and knowledge that Chan developed with Andrew about the wars and resettlement made him realize that, "I never really looked at

[my parents'] perspective...I didn't know my dad was gonna have a lot of health problems, I didn't know my mom was gonna be working...at some dead-end job...they carry those burdens on them since like my dad fought in the war...they were raised...in a warzone...So that's why now as an adult, I have to put myself in their shoes."

Lan worked at the same Southeast Asian organization as Sydney and had experienced intergenerational trauma: "'75 was when Saigon fell, and I think my mom was born in '72 and my dad in '65. They were fairly super young when all this shit was happening, and so I think that's traumatic for them, and I think that...they didn't have a space to understand that was trauma." Lan believed that her parents' emotional turmoil manifested in "multiple ways, the way they hit us, I think the way that they talk to us." She recalled a particularly hurtful incident from high school, where she was the only Montagnard in her AP and IB classes. Compared to her affluent White peers, Lan felt, "I was the least smartest of all those students, with not enough resources." Trying to keep up with her classmates, Lan invested a lot of time studying and was wounded when her parents told her, "You'll never be as good as the White kids." This statement was "really hurtful because...of like what was going on for me and my own self-worth. I, I, I think it was, my support systems weren't strong enough, or I didn't find a space where I could be me and people saw me and supported me."

Lan was starting to find this space at her workplace and had found a mentor in her boss, a Vietnamese refugee: "I wish I had somebody like [my boss] when I was growing up, for the youth, because I think that different perspective is helpful." She tried to pass forward this mentorship to refugee youth. Lan's community work also made her more interested in learning about Montagnards' history with the Vietnam War and

colonization. Having this knowledge helped Lan grapple with her trauma and she considered her parents' statement that she would "never be as good as the White kids":

I think some things I learned right now might be their experience...my parents grew up during the war... historically, the Bunong folks in the village, if the French people weren't looking down, and taking over, and telling them what to do, it was the Vietnamese...also I think it's like their experience with the U.S...it was so much more easier for me to learn English and I think it was really hard to be in the States...so I think there's a history of colonization, I think it's their experience in America...And I think at the end of the day, they're just trying to protect me, as messed up as it is.

By learning about Montagnards' obscured history, Lan was able to situate her family's trauma and conflicts within larger contexts of colonization and racism. She recognized that "as messed up as it is," her parents' assertions that she would "never be as good as the White kids" came from their own trauma with being colonized and oppressed by Vietnamese, French, and Americans. Lan's parents internalized a "colonial mentality" (David and Okazaki 2006) wherein they believed that they were inferior to Whites. Over time, Lan recognized that her parents were trying to spare her from the pain and humiliation of attempting to attain a higher status which they felt was unreachable for Montagnards. Through her new roles in the Southeast Asian community, Lan was able to understand her parents' perspective. She used her knowledge to heal not only others' pain, but her own. This process was initiated after she gained the information and support necessary to construct counter-memories that countered mainstream retellings of the Vietnam War and refugee experiences.

There was a significant absence of resources to help respondents understand their communities' histories and navigate trauma. Yet, interviewees like Sydney, Chan, and Lan were thwarting quiet neglect by piecing together their own narratives of refugees' wartime involvement and experiences in the U.S. By cultivating support systems and

dialogues with fellow SEAs about their communities' trauma, respondents were rewriting their memories to understand the silences that had long been a source of familial pain. Through these efforts, they opened potential avenues to reinterpret their communities' past-and pave the way toward a different future. Their accounts highlight the necessity of having not just therapy or other mental health resources available to refugees, but narratives and collective memories that hold parties accountable for the suffering they dealt unto their victims. These discourses also open up pathways to healing for marginalized groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I have argued that collective memories are part of quiet neglect, or the institutionalized silence of the U.S.'s role in the Vietnam and Secret Wars that precluded the country's acknowledgment of refugees' struggles. Although the U.S. lost the military battle, the government depicted its interventions abroad as a moral victory by celebrating its "liberation" of Southeast Asians from Communism (Espiritu 2013; McMahon 2002). This valorization relies on erasing SEAA history and oversimplifying refugees' experiences, converting them into collective memories that rescue the reputations of White-led institutions. Several theoretical and practical implications are connected to this study.

First, I have offered insight into how micro-level SEAA trauma and mental health issues are connected to national- and local-level racial processes. Specifically, I argued that our collective memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars are tied to racial ignorance and thus can be considered racialized emotions. At a national level, the U.S. government and military crafted cultural narratives and policies that deliberately obscured Southeast

Asians' suffering in favor of casting Americans as benevolent heroes. Glorifying the U.S. promotes a minimization of Americans' misdeeds, a strategy that has long been used to erase colonial and racial atrocities (Kurtiş, Adams, and Yellow Bird 2010). Kyra's remarks were particularly astute as she drew parallels between the ignorance that shaped retellings of the genocide against Native Americans, and the U.S.'s reticence to acknowledge its role in the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Her comments point to how SEAs' racial positions were carefully constructed to redeem the U.S. from its militaristic missteps, disregarding the memories, struggles, and emotions of refugees.

At a local level, service agencies and other institutions were influenced by collective memories regarding Southeast Asian resettlement. Humanitarian agencies and public institutions are shaped by the narratives and agendas of society's dominant groups (Ngo and Hansen 2013; Ong 2003), leading them to replicate systems of oppression even as they intend to enact compassion. Narratives of the Vietnam and Secret Wars placed refugees' needs in the background while moving ideas of American heroism to the foreground. Ivan pointed out how school officials and refugee housing providers denied SEAs' challenges to create feel-good scenarios about their work. Carrie's proud discussion of how she helped refugees meet self-sufficiency requirements offered a firsthand example of how service providers emotionally benefitted from their purported "rescue" of refugees.

This relationship between Whites and Southeast Asian refugees promotes the conversion of the latter's trauma into a sense of pleasure for the former, a trend documented amongst other oppressed groups (Ioanide 2015). For example, the formation of a positive White national identity and collective memories of the postwar—one that

enables service providers to teach Montagnards songs from *The King and I*, champion the self-sufficiency cause, and ignore refugees' issues—came at the loss of critical Southeast Asian narratives. Instead, the most obvious discourses for refugees to access are the ones that diminish their wartime contributions and ongoing pain.

Lan indicated that these discourses impacted refugees' micro-level experiences such as with Montagnard elders who espoused the good refugee narrative, skewing how first-generation refugees viewed their relationship to U.S. domination, and complicating how they addressed trauma. Using a racialized emotions framework, refugees' sense of allegiance and gratitude towards the U.S. can be considered a racial "feeling rule" (Hochschild 2012) whereby marginalized groups are taught to manage their emotions to maintain the dominant group's power and comfort (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Wingfield 2012). Other emotional responses, such as how Duc's children refused to believe his stories of the Vietnam War are also informed by quiet neglect and reinforce the collective amnesia around Southeast Asian refugee politics. Minh, Sydney, and Taylor withstood confusion, anxiety, and an initial uncertainty about how to connect the dots between their personal emotions and Southeast Asians' legacies of trauma. These feelings are produced by the racial silences that constrain how the Vietnam War, Secret War, and their aftermaths are conceptualized.

Second, understanding refugee trauma as a social issue is important for developing strategies that ameliorate distress. Many individualized, psychological solutions have been prescribed, especially for first-generation refugees suffering from PTSD. These include talk therapy, peer support groups, and culturally cognizant forms of treatment (Gordon 2011; Ong 2003). Some second- and third-generation individuals who

experience intergenerational trauma have found empowerment in constructing narratives about their communities' histories and problems to clear the shame underpinning mainstream discourses (Kwan 2020; Stein 2009). The creation of these narratives facilitates the "theorizing" of one's pain wherein people make sense of their lives to imagine futures beyond their oppressive realities (hooks 1991).

As indicated in previous studies, countermemories can unearth willfully forgotten knowledge (Silver 2016; Whitlinger 2015). Interviewees started their healing processes by tapping into these silenced histories and connecting with others about their communities' shared trauma. By confronting the ignorance surrounding Southeast Asian issues, respondents found liberation in crafting countermemories that recognized how their pain manifested from systemic issues including colonization and White saviorism. This information allowed participants to situate their personal experiences within larger racial contexts and become more empathetic to their parents' struggles.

There are limitations to my understanding of how interviewees navigated the process of forming countermemories. Lan, Chan, and Sydney were amongst a minority of respondents who experienced healing through the development of countermemories. Some participants were in the early stages of these processes but, lacking adequate knowledge and support to fully understand their communities' hardships, felt confusion and uncertainty around how to make sense of their emotions. Respondents' restricted capacities to approach their trauma is reflective of the minimal resources and cultural narratives available to help them interpret their pain. They conveyed their feelings in abstract ways that are difficult to explicitly convey or theorize in a paper.

Sociologists must focus on expanding how we understand emotion to allow for discussions that can adequately address the more intangible and indirect ways in which people communicate complicated and difficult feelings. Additionally, future studies regarding refugees' experiences should deepen our understandings of how resettled communities dismantle institutional silences to foster healing. While collective memories negatively impacted interviewees' encounters with trauma, they can also be crafted by marginalized groups in a way that empowers them to construct their own narratives.

However, I also urge that the onus should not only be placed on marginalized communities to break collective silences. To fully attend to refugees' trauma and racialized emotions, the U.S. must begin with a *structural* acknowledgment of its role in the Vietnam and Secret Wars, and subsequent racialization of Southeast Asian refugees as a quietly neglected group. This is just the first step in what must become a larger process of addressing how the U.S.'s collective memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars shaped its maltreatment of Southeast Asian refugees.

CHAPTER 2: “I’M A WAR”

Southeast Asian American Identity and the Interrogation of Panethnicity

I interviewed Taylor (21 years-old, Southeast Asian/Lao-Vietnamese), a second-generation, non-binary SEAA and college junior, at their university in North Carolina. Taylor arrived with lunch in hand and asked if they could eat as we chatted—their schedule was busy with coordinating a SEAA university event. As we spoke, Taylor recounted how their family’s connections to the Vietnam and Secret Wars—waged in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the 1960s and 70s—impacted their identity: “When you’re a child of refugees, you can’t separate yourself from the war and conflict...we’re constantly reminded like if the war never happened, you wouldn’t exist. I just could not...separate my identity from that. It was just like, I’m a war!”

For much of their childhood, Taylor’s identity had been wrapped up in the awareness that their parents were refugees who survived immense violence and chaos. They knew that their community had a history of trauma owing to Vietnam and Secret Wars, as well as to their encounters with racism and social inequity in the U.S. Taylor’s hardships made them feel distant from the “Asian American” students on campus. For Taylor, these were East Asians who enjoyed a level of privilege that they and their co-ethnics never had. Other 1.5- and second-generation interviewees echoed Taylor’s sentiments, describing how wartime trauma and their families’ experiences with resettlement set them apart from the model minority stereotype that they knew was ascribed to all Asian Americans. In general, few respondents considered themselves first and foremost as “Asian American.” Instead, they used ethnic labels or panethnic-SEAA identities to explain their social positions.

Using 62 interviews with Southeast Asian refugees and service providers, my study ventures into the murky waters of Asian American panethnicity, expanding on the growing literature (Ocampo 2016; Schacter 2014; Thangaraj 2012) about how underrepresented Asian groups (South and Southeast Asians) navigate their identities. Scholars have found mixed results around whether diverse ethnic groups truly cohere under a unifying “Asian American” label. Some argue that South Asians and SEAs feel unrepresented in mainstream cultural depictions of Asian Americans and thus forge their own identity categories (Kibria 1996; Nguyen and Ferguson 2019; Schacter 2014). I join these scholars in exploring the agency that SEAs exercise as they adapt racial labels to better suit their circumstances. As identities are created through an iterative process, I also examine how service providers—influential figures in refugees’ experiences—frame SEAs’ racial positions and simultaneously challenge/motivate refugees’ attempts at reconfiguring their identities.

This study also focuses on examining how SEAs’ historical ties to U.S. militarization abroad continue to influence their ethnoracial identities. Previous studies have explored why groups are more or less likely to identify panethnically and analyzed how discrimination, proximity to co-ethnics, and English language fluency affect identity formation (Schacter 2014). While it is important to observe how these conditions shape refugees’ views on race, I add that we must understand how their ties to the Vietnam and Secret Wars—the precipitating factors of resettlement—and the U.S.’s treatment of refugees have shaped SEAs’ contemporary identities.

Specifically, the U.S.’s militaristic involvement in Southeast Asia was deeply shameful, leading the government to launch resettlement programs and rectify the

country's reputation (Espiritu 2013). Rather than being purely benevolent, our resettlement system has assuaged Americans' guilt at the expense of erasing refugees' suffering (McMahon 2002). SEAs have been portrayed as "good refugees" (Espiritu 2013) who were granted access to middle-class, model minority status through U.S. interventions. They are "silent" minorities whose trauma and ongoing needs are overshadowed by the U.S.'s narratives of its postwar heroism. I argue that this "quiet neglect," or the institutionalized silence of Americans' misdeeds during the Vietnam and Secret Wars that subsequently eschewed SEAA issues, is a key factor leading SEAs to reconsider panethnicity.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF ASIAN AMERICAN PANETHNICITY

Drawing inspiration from Civil Rights organizers, Asian American panethnicity emerged in the 1960s and 70s in response to pervasive anti-Asian racism (e.g., Vincent Chin murder case) (Okamoto 2014; Wu 2002). Activists urged fragmented ethnic groups to rally around a shared "Asian American" identity that would grant them greater political power and visibility (Espiritu 1992). For Asian Americans, panethnicity was intended to remind the U.S. that they shared a history of oppression due to White supremacy just as other minoritized groups (Mora and Okamoto 2020). At its conception, Asian American panethnicity was meant to include diverse ethnic groups who were linked by racialized experiences of being dubbed "forever foreigners" and "model minorities" (Wu 2002).

However, many have interrogated the meaning of "Asian American," noting that it has become synonymous with "East Asian" (Lee 2019; Lee and Ramakrishnan 2019). This is owed to our associations of Asian Americans with the fair-skinned features

attributed to Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans (Lee 2019), the significant presence of East Asian American leaders in panethnic coalitions (Nakano 2013), and the panethnic movement's roots with middle-class, college-educated East Asians (Mora and Okamoto 2020). Mainstream U.S. culture also tends to stereotype Asian Americans as hyper-successful model minorities (Lee and Zhou 2015) due to the general affluence associated with East Asian Americans (and, when they are cited in discussions of Asian Americans, South Asians such as Indian and Pakistani Americans). While this stereotype conceals socioeconomic diversity amongst Asians (Lee and Kye 2016), its pervasiveness in mainstream culture shapes our ideas of what it means to be Asian American.

Some scholars state that Asian Americans' ethnic identities do not conflict with the formation of a panethnic consciousness (Okamoto 2014). However, research with Filipino Americans suggests that phenotype, connections to ethnic culture, and ties to U.S. colonialism impact individuals' willingness to identify panethnically (Ocampo 2015; Schacter 2014). Although this finding reveals the importance of researching diverse Asian ethnicities, we still do not have enough work about South Asians and SEAs compared to their East Asian counterparts (Schacter 2014; Tuason 2007). This is an egregious gap, especially given (1) the prevalence of work that analyzes "Asian American" outcomes with little regard to divergences amongst ethnic groups (Le, Aurora, and Stout 2020; Min 2015), and (2) critiques concerning the monolithic grouping of Asian Americans (Irizarry 2015; Teranishi 2010).

Scholars have called for greater representation of Asian ethnic groups as we interpret the "multidimensionality of panethnicity" and move beyond "simplistic" racial imaginaries that perpetuate inequality (Lee 2019: 10). My research fills in these gaps by

exploring how Southeast Asian refugees negotiate their racial identities. This study contributes to our understandings of how different sociohistorical contexts influence SEAs' affiliations with panethnicity, as well as their capacity to redefine categories of identity. Before discussing SEAs' unique contexts, I first review frameworks that explain how underrepresented ethnic groups (particularly Filipino Americans due to the availability of research on this group) challenge panethnicity and discuss their usefulness for understanding Southeast Asian refugees.

ETHNORACIALIZATION AND PANETHNICITY

The formation of Filipino Americans' identities can be understood using the theory of "ethnoracialization" (Brown and Lee 2015). Brown and Lee note that the formation of panethnic identities has been framed as a reaction to racialization; "ethnic" or "personal" forms of identification are believed to follow the "racial" or "socially ascribed" labeling (i.e., separated Asian ethnic groups adopted a panethnic identity in response to anti-Asian racism). However, Brown and Lee challenge this perspective of panethnicity, arguing that the dichotomy between ethnicity (self-identification) and race (socially ascribed categories) is false. Instead, they suggest that communities always exercise some level of agency to contest, reimagine, and rearticulate the racial categories imposed upon them.

This definition of ethnoracialization parallels Filipinos' interpretations of their identities. Filipino Americans have conveyed ambivalence about being Asian American because of their ties to Spanish and American colonization which divide them from East Asian Americans. Spanish colonization shaped the culture of the Philippines, exposing Filipinos to Catholicism and producing similarities between Tagalog and Spanish

(Ocampo 2016). Subsequent colonization by the U.S. led to the development of American-style schools in the Philippines, as well as the proliferation of English (David and Okazaki 2006). Filipino immigrants arrive in the U.S. with very different cultural orientations than other Asian groups.

In addition, centuries of colonization led Filipinos to occupy a liminal status within the U.S. Filipino Americans have been dubbed “invisible minorities” and “forgotten Asian Americans” (David and Okazaki 2006). Their marginality is owed to how the U.S. deliberately erased its colonization of the Philippines from national memory and portrayed Filipinos as racial minorities rather than former colonial subjects (Buenavista, Jayakumar, and Misa-Escalante 2009). Filipinos face distinctive challenges due to colonization, including the underdevelopment of the Philippines’ economy and the cultivation of a “colonial mentality” (David and Okazaki 2006) which engenders a belief that they are inferior to Whites—and in some cases, East Asians (Eisen 2019). These issues have been overlooked as Filipinos were placed under the panethnic “Asian” Census category.

Filipinos have responded to their unique racial and colonial circumstances by reimagining the boundaries of race. For example, Ocampo (2016) found that Filipino Americans from multiracial California neighborhoods identify as the “Latinos of Asia,” blurring the lines between panethnic groups. Ocampo’s participants had grown up around and were sometimes confused for Latinxs due to their racially ambiguous features and Spanish surnames. These individuals sometimes identified as Asian American but felt “less Asian” after meeting East Asian Americans in college who seemed to meet the high standards of academic success and socioeconomic prosperity commonly associated with

Asian Americans. Filipinos who grew up in lower-income homes that sent remittances to the Philippines lacked the same levels of affluence. They questioned their Asian-ness and situated themselves within a hybridized racial identity.

Although Filipino Americans cannot select “Latinos of Asia” on official forms, local communities have adopted their own styles of ethnoracial identification. People have both “public” and “private” racial identities, the latter representing labels that are intimate and the former constituting mainstream society’s views (Khanna 2010). Previous research has noted that the boundaries between these two identities are blurry rather than opaque; instead of being solidly divided, private and public racial identities inform one another (Brown and Lee 2015; Khanna 2010). As Filipino Americans adopt cross-racial identities, they open the possibility of rewriting public racial categories. To develop a deeper understanding of panethnicity’s nuances, we must understand how ethnic groups conceptualize their own ethnoracial labels and why they formulate these perspectives. Having explored ethnoracialization amongst Filipinos, I now turn to SEAs and the contexts influencing their racial identities.

“QUIET NEGLECT” AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN RACIALIZATION

Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, Montagnard) refugees are connected to the U.S. in ways that diverge from East Asian immigrants. I highlight some commonalities amongst these groups to understand how quiet neglect presently shapes their identities. This is just an overview as each group’s history is too complex to detail in this chapter.

Following World War II, Communist influence spread throughout Southeast Asia leading the U.S. to intervene during the First Indochina War, Second Indochina War

(Vietnam War), and the Secret War. The American government sent troops, supplies, and officials to aid Western-friendly regimes (Chan 2004). Americans heavily bombed Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—attacks on Laos were part of an unauthorized Secret War (Vang 2013)—leading to massive casualties (Chan 2004; Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). The U.S. recruited disenfranchised groups such as the Hmong who are ethnic minorities from Laos (Vang 2013). Montagnards, the Indigenous people of Vietnam’s Central Highlands who faced discrimination from ethnic Vietnamese, were recruited by U.S. Special Forces (Andresen 1988). These groups were offered their autonomy for aiding the U.S. but when American forces fled Southeast Asia in 1975, they abandoned their allies until they initiated refugee resettlement (Chan 2006; Schlund-Vials 2013).

Americans were aware of some of the government’s shameful transgressions (McMahon 2002). To restore its reputation as a moral democracy, the U.S. launched the 1980 Refugee Act which established the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and created a formal resettlement system. Though the Refugee Act was partly motivated by humanitarianism, it eased the nation’s guilt by depicting the U.S. as benevolent heroes and erased Americans’ culpability in exacerbating the refugee crisis (Espiritu 2013). Resettlement can be considered a mechanism of “racial ignorance” (Mueller 2020) wherein institutions dominated by White Americans willfully deny the atrocities they committed unto people of color as a way of preserving White innocence.

Racial ignorance informs quiet neglect in multiple ways, including the ORR’s operations. Although refugees can access food stamps and cash assistance for a period after arriving in the U.S., they are encouraged by ORR programs to quickly cease using welfare (Hein 2006; Zhou and Bankston 2000). While refugees enjoy better qualities of

life when given more time to adjust (Chan 2004), they are pushed to meet “self-sufficiency” requirements (i.e., enrolling children in school, finding employment, learning how to take public transit, paying bills) within the first 30-90 days of resettlement (International Rescue Committee 2019). These fast-tracked timelines were constructed to prove that American benevolence facilitated refugees’ upward mobility (Espiritu 2013). Over time, the U.S. decreased social services for refugees, signifying their expectations of Southeast Asian assimilation (Chan 2004; Fujiwara 2005).

Espiritu (2013) has noted that the assumption of Southeast Asians’ speedy integration is connected to their portrayal in the media and commemorations of the Vietnam War as “good refugees.” The 1980 Refugee Act was a catalyst for the dismissal of refugees’ trauma that shaped cultural narratives of the good refugee. Southeast Asians were subsequently objectified as victims “rescued” by American saviors and the reality of their needs was diminished. Inherent to the good refugee trope is also the expectation that Southeast Asian refugees would become model minorities with Americans’ aid (Espiritu 2013). Thus, SEAs’ unique struggles were overlooked via the eradication of their narratives from mainstream discourse. Instead, they were depicted through Asian American stereotypes. Some refugees even adopted the image of the good refugee or model minority to smoothen their transition to the U.S. and gain acceptance amongst Whites (Nguyen 2017).

Despite SEAs’ inclusion in panethnicity and depiction as model minorities/good refugees, their structural positions clash with common Asian American stereotypes. SEAs are likelier to live in low-income neighborhoods of color where they are more impacted by poverty and policing than East Asian Americans (Ong 2003; Tang 2013).

Cambodians, Lao, Hmong, and Montagnards have lower levels of educational attainment compared to Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans (Zhou and Bankston 2020). Recognizing their unique social situations, SEAs have attempted to create identities apart from Asian American panethnicity (Chhuon and Hudley 2011; Nguyen and Ferguson 2019; Trieu 2018). Their identities are simultaneously shaped by external racialization from teachers who either stereotype them as “model minorities” or denigrate them alongside Black and Latinx students (Chhuon and Hudley 2011; Lei 2003); police officers who criminalize their communities (Ong 2003; Tang 2013); and social narratives of good refugees (Espiritu 2013). These competing forces complicate SEAs’ efforts to engage in ethnoracialization.

In what follows, I use 62 interviews with refugees and service providers to provide further insight into how Southeast Asian refugees conceptualize their racial identities and rework our understandings of panethnicity. First, I examine how SEAs’ experiences with quiet neglect led them to feel dissimilar from Asian Americans (whom they equated with East Asians). Aware of their socioeconomic disadvantage, traumatic resettlement experiences, and the erasure of their communities from the public eye, SEAs shied away from the Asian American identity and instead connected with their ethnic backgrounds or a panethnic-SEAA collective. Our identities are affected by the messages we receive from others (Khanna 2010) and service providers’ perspectives are influential for refugees’ opinions (Chan 2004). Thus, I also discuss how their views of refugees perpetuated quiet neglect and may have motivated SEAs to distance themselves from panethnicity.

Second, I note that SEAA's identities were both private and public. Respondents formed ethnic and panethnic-SEAA organizations to address their communities' otherwise neglected needs. Participants' ability to project their internal identities through public institutions indicates the potential for greater recognition of their reimagined identities. Finally, I explore how respondents' development of a panethnic-SEAA identity enabled them to recognize some of their shared similarities with Blacks and Latinxs. These findings expand previous research examining how Asian ethnicities stretch our racial imaginings to embrace multiracial networks.

METHODS

Refugee Research in a "New Immigrant Destination"

I conducted this research in North Carolina, a "new immigrant destination" (NID) (Marrow 2009). Compared to longstanding immigration hubs, NIDs have fewer resources for newcomers (Winders 2012). By the time of my study, resettlement had reshaped a few cities in North Carolina to include more service agencies and a handful of ethnic or Southeast Asian organizations (Kolano and Davila 2019; Lau 2000). However, North Carolina generally lacks the large gathering places and centers of ethnic life present in California, Minnesota, Texas, or other key resettlement states (Hein 2006; Schlund-Vials 2013). One exception is with the Montagnards, whose largest population (estimated at upwards of 10,000 people, though there are no official counts) outside of Vietnam is in Guilford County, NC (News & Record 2019).

As an NID, many North Carolina counties are still largely White and Black, reflecting the South's historic racial demographics. According to Census data (2019) respondents tended to reside in counties reflecting this split. Guilford County, a key

resettlement site, is 49.4% White, 35.4% Black, 5.3% Asian, and 8.4% Latinx.

Mecklenburg County is 46.1% White, 33.0% Black, 6.3% Asian, and 13.8% Latinx.

Rural Catawba County, home to a small but notable population of Hmong (n=4,785; total population=159,551), is much Whiter than the two above counties (74.9%).

Taking a closer look, Guilford County's Vietnamese makes up 22.7% of the Asian community and since there is no official Census category for Montagnards (Indigenous peoples of Vietnam), some are likely included in this count. Asian Indians (20.2%), Chinese (10.9%), Koreans (7.6%), Lao (5%), and Filipinos (4.5%) represent other Asian ethnicities in Guilford County. Mecklenburg County's largest Asian ethnicities are Asian Indians (42.1%), Vietnamese (15.6%), Chinese (11.5%), Koreans (4.3%), Lao (3.2%), Filipinos (3.1%), and Hmong (3.0%). Hmong people comprise approximately 70% of Catawba County's Asians. While SEAs make up sizeable portions of these Asian populations, they are much smaller than North Carolina's White and Black groups and thus are less visible. These statistics have implications for my respondents' racial identities, which I discuss in the findings.

The racial demographics of North Carolina and the relative marginality of SEAA communities shaped my recruitment strategy. Given the absence of discernible ethnic hubs, I built contacts in a piecemeal manner. Akin to other researchers who have worked with SEAs in North Carolina (Clune 2015; Lau 2000), I reached out to community leaders from cultural associations, churches and temples, and grassroots organizations. I discussed my project's goals and asked how I could reciprocate my participants' engagement. After spending time with SEAA communities, I met potential respondents

and was invited to spaces that I would not have known of without a guide or insider information.

Sample, Interviews, and Analysis

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Vietnamese, Montagnard, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees from the first, 1.5, and second generations (n=47; See Table 1 on p.26 for respondent info). I asked respondents about their racial identities in many ways. The sample consisted of 27 women, 18 men, and 2 respondents who identified as non-binary. The only apparent gender difference in racial identification was that more women than men identified as “Southeast Asian” (only two men used this label)⁶. At the start of each interview, I asked participants to name the racial category with which they identified most strongly. As the interview progressed, I asked whether interviewees identified in other ways, the situations in which these identities were salient, and which labels they felt were most accurate. At these points, respondents spoke of feeling invisible within the Asian American category, mistakenly perceived as “model minorities,” and lacking adequate support to address their unique needs as SEAA refugees.

Interviews were conducted in English except with two interviewees who used a community leader or family member to translate. My interviewees were mostly fluent in English, somewhat comfortable with speaking to a researcher from outside their community, and often had at least some college education. Respondents noted that their

⁶ This could be explained by the fact that more women in my sample attended college and had a chance to join SEAA organizations or meet other peers who identified as SEAA. Throughout my work in SEAA communities, people also commented that women more so than men went to college and that the latter group struggled with attaining an education.

levels of educational attainment made them unlike many of their peers. As I will state in the findings, having access to universities allowed some interviewees to meet fellow SEAs and form panethnic-SEA identities. Thus, the educational levels of my participants likely influenced their identities.

Since interviewees brought up the lack of resources and attention they received, I decided to contact service providers who helped refugees acclimate to North Carolina (n=24). This broad group of “service providers” includes social workers at resettlement agencies, grassroots organizers, healthcare liaisons, and lawyers. Many worked in Guilford County (n=17), with smaller numbers in Mecklenburg (a large resettlement site) (n=3), and Orange County (a growing site for resettlement) (n=4). Service providers were White (n=8), Black (n=2), Latinx (n=1), mixed-race (Asian/White; n=1), and single-race Asian (n=12). Aside from one Chinese American respondent, the other 11 Asian service providers were from Montagnard, Lao, and Karen refugee communities. The last group represents Southeast Asian refugees who have been recently resettled in North Carolina (See Table 2 on p.25 for respondent information).

Service providers are important figures in refugees’ lives and I explored how they racialized SEAs. I linked these perceptions to respondents’ experiences with marginalization and resulting desire to distance themselves from Asian American panethnicity. I asked service providers about their views of refugees’ needs, how SEAs fared in North Carolina, and whether they saw similarities between their SEA clients and those of other racial backgrounds.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in NVivo. I coded interviews in multiple stages and analysis was ongoing throughout data collection. First, I developed

open codes to discern general themes from the interviews (Marshall and Rossman 2016). Second, I conducted axial coding (Charmaz 2006) to merge these themes into concepts around Southeast Asian refugees' identities, marginalization, and how they responded to being neglected within key institutions (i.e., schools, social services) and Asian American narratives. I compared these codes with service providers' comments on refugee issues and their perceptions of SEAs. Mismatches emerged between how SEAA interviewees identified themselves versus the views held by service providers and external community members. Given these discrepancies, some SEAs believed it was best to separate themselves from "Asian Americans" (whom they associated with East Asian Americans) and develop ethnic or panethnic-SEAA identities.

FINDINGS

Not Your "Model Minority": Participants' perceptions of panethnic identity

Before delving into how respondents constructed adaptive ethnoracial identities, I offer a snapshot of the different labels they used. As with findings in previous studies (Tuan 1999), first-generation refugees were more likely to use single-ethnic classifications (6 of 10 respondents) whereas the 37 1.5- and second-generation interviewees had a much broader range of identifications (only 1 of 37 identified with a single-ethnic label). First-generation participants who named multiple identity categories felt more intimately tied to their ethnicities and only used labels such as "Asian" when filling out forms.

Duc (65 years-old, Asian American/Vietnamese) was an exception. Though Duc spoke proudly of his Vietnamese heritage, he stated his identity as "Asian American." However, he did not enjoy using this term:

...I, I don't actually prefer being called Asian American...an American is an American, right? ... the term we use is 'Asian American' is to differentiate you know, in a way your origin background...I don't feel like being called Asian American, it's just like when I go back to Vietnam, I want to feel like I'm a Vietnamese, not a Vietnamese foreigner. Ok?

Duc begrudgingly accepted that he was "Asian American" in the eyes of people who believed that his Asian heritage qualified his American citizenship. He also shared that he initially struggled when he first arrived in the 1970s, but eventually found a good job with IBM. To obtain his job, Duc explained that he, "How do I say, integrated (chuckles)... We have to give up lot, you know, the only thing left for me at the time is the name, right. And even though it's hard to pronounce my name...I chose to keep my name." Duc's reluctant decision to identify as "Asian American" perhaps symbolizes the sacrifices he and many other Vietnamese refugees made to assimilate.

By comparison, 1.5- and second-generation respondents had multiple ways of identifying. Nina (22 years-old) identified as "Montagnard-Bunong", "Southeast Asian", and "Asian American." Vinh (44 years-old) was most closely connected to his "Vietnamese" identity but selected "Asian" for forms. Altogether, 14 interviewees used "Southeast Asian" as at least one way of describing themselves. Though many included "Asian" and "Asian American" in their list of identities, just 3 designated them as their main racial identity ("Asian" and "Asian American" were used interchangeably, with the former acting as shorthand for the latter). Since 1.5- and second-generation individuals developed more creative iterations of their identities, this chapter focuses mostly on their perspectives.

Participants explained their secondary or tertiary use of "Asian American" by stating that it was too ill-defined to meaningfully capture their identities. Interviewees

knew of racial stereotypes such as the model minority myth but had little exposure to East Asians who they considered synonymous with “Asian American.” Some refugees had only grown up around co-ethnics and had little idea of what being Asian American meant outside of their ethnic group. Kyra (25 years-old, Hmong/Southeast Asian/Asian American) spent her childhood in Catawba County’s small but significant Hmong community. Outside of this community, Kyra recalled that environments such as her school were “predominantly White and Black and then a few Asians...I don’t remember any other Asians besides Hmong people.” While Kyra did not know non-Hmong Asian Americans in her youth, she was constantly confronted by broad Asian American stereotypes. She described herself as someone who “never fit the model minority, I never made straight-A’s...Growing up, everyone definitely told me that I wasn’t a real Asian because I sucked at math. I excelled more at the arts...that was my niche.”

Those from Guilford and Mecklenburg Counties were isolated from East and South Asians who lived in more affluent neighborhoods. Chan (25 years-old, Asian American/Montagnard-Cambodian/Southeast Asian) was from a low-income segment of Guilford County where “the Asian population here, it’s all Montagnards...the area I lived in, it was predominantly Black...actually, it was a mixture: it was Black, Asian, Hispanic, and White.” Chan attended a majority-Black elementary school where, due to the combination of his dark skin and the absence of other Asian students, he remembered thinking of himself as Black. Chan had met few East Asians and spoke of them abstractly: “When I think about Japanese, Korea, and some Chinese people, they have really light skin...all our cars come from Japan, all our technology comes from Korea or Japan, and all our stuff is made in China. But when you think about Southeast Asian

countries, you don't really hear much, and I think that's a really big gap between us.” Chan's comments—as well as a later remark that East Asians were “cleaner” than SEAs—convey a sense of inferiority relative to Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. These remarks point to a belief that East Asians met “model minority” standards frequently associated with Asian Americans (e.g., being successful, of a higher status). SEAs fell short of meeting these expectations, indicating that they did not completely fit in as Asian Americans.

Andi (18 years-old, Lao/Southeast Asian/Asian American), a non-binary respondent, grew up in Mecklenburg County and was from a “not really a good part of the city.” They had attended a Title I elementary school in their neighborhood which was populated by Black, Latinx, and Southeast Asian students. Andi's parents encouraged them to attend higher-ranked middle and high schools in the affluent part of the city which was composed of Whites and East Asians. They struggled to keep up after transferring and felt isolated from their peers:

I wasn't in the “smart” classes in middle school, so all the kids were just like, “Oh can you help us with our homework?” ...But I literally had no idea what was going on...They were like, “Oh, so you're a dumb Asian? ... Basically, I had to just be ok with people making fun of me like that. That's kind of what I thought as a survival tactic, and then high school started and I tried to...get rid of my identity in a sense? And like get rid of my Southeast Asian identity when I got into high school.

Andi's experiences are telling of the pervasiveness of Asian American stereotypes. It did not matter that they had transferred from a Title I school or were placed in lower track courses—their peers still read Andi as a model minority. They later qualified Andi's Asian identity by calling them a “dumb Asian” when they “failed” to meet their academic expectations. The anxiety Andi endured as they wrestled with their

SEAA identity and others' racial assumptions became so severe that they begged their parents to allow them to transfer to their neighborhood high school. While Andi was exposed to East Asian Americans, they still felt dissimilar from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans.

Interviewees like Andi, Kyra, and Chan grew up in NIDs with limited or scattered Asian populations. Respondents thus felt closer to SEAs and co-ethnics rather than "Asian Americans" whom they equated as East Asian model minorities. As participants did not personally know East Asians, their overarching notions of Asian Americans were informed by stereotypes. Respondents felt disconnected from Asian American panethnicity because they did not conform to these generalities.

In the next section, I assert that interviewees had another reason for identifying more closely with their ethnicities and SEAA-panethnicity: they encountered emotional turmoil from racialized assumptions that they were model minorities and good refugees. Portrayals of SEAs as model minorities in the making enabled U.S. institutions to bypass their past atrocities against refugees. This eschewal produces negative outcomes for SEAs whose post-resettlement issues have gone unattended. Thus, when interviewees chose to identify as "Lao" or "SEAA," they did so not only because they viewed "Asian American" as an inaccurate label. Rather, they were adapting ethnoracial categories to find safe spaces and places of healing. Interviewees carved out these identities to validate their unique racial experiences and find kindred individuals who similarly yearned for inclusion and a sense of community.

The "Jungle Asians": The impact of quiet neglect on SEAA identity

Before delving into SEAs' reimagined ethnoracial identities, I first turn to quotes from service providers to understand why interviewees felt compelled to reconfigure their identities. As the first points of contact for newly resettled refugees, service providers hold influence over SEAs' outcomes and self-perceptions. I spoke with Guilford County service providers such as Carrie (43 years-old, Asian/White) and Todd (49 years-old, White) who had worked with Southeast Asian refugees for years. Carrie was a refugee education center director, and she invoked the model minority myth as she compared how Southeast Asians adjusted to North Carolina against other racial groups: "What I have, I don't want to be racist, what I've noticed is certain populations tend to have a heavier interest in education...a lot of Asian cultures are that way...I've found that Southeast Asians tend to focus a lot on the educational piece." Referring to some Montagnard students, Carrie said:

There's two young men that we have right now, their educational background is almost nil...But they also are here every day and super thrilled to be able to learn English ...They, a little bit surprisingly, actually speak some Vietnamese. That does help...cause we don't have dictionaries that are in Jarai, they just don't exist, but we do have dictionaries in Vietnamese.

Todd, a workforce development manager who taught women the English they needed to work in low-paying textile jobs, espoused similar beliefs. Compared to other refugee groups, Todd claimed that "Most of the Montagnards that I've worked with are from those early waves of resettlement...they oftentimes seem to be stable. Stable family units, stable home lives, stable with work." Todd noted that H'Noel, a Montagnard social worker, had opposing opinions:

I do hear reporting from H'Noel that there's a lot under the surface. There's problems with alcoholism, there are problems with domestic violence, there are problems with gambling. But you know, how is that different from the problems that exist in the White communities? ...I can't tease that out for you, but...I know

they arrived here by virtue of the fact that they received an awful lot of support from...these ex-military groups that helped resettle them, and I don't know how that would've affected how rapidly they adjusted to life here.

Espiritu (2013) argued that the obliteration of refugee legacies, U.S. culpability, and the failures of resettlement would bolster national discourse suggesting that refugees were "rescued" by benevolent Americans and thus salvaged from harm. Todd's and Carrie's statements are practical examples of how quiet neglect shrouds SEAs' unique challenges. Todd's assertion of alcoholism and abuse as ubiquitous problems ignores the specific reasons for refugees' issues (trauma, poverty due to a lack of social support). Carrie adopted mainstream views of Asian assimilation, praising Southeast Asians' enthusiasm for learning while bypassing how their needs, such as access to basic learning materials, were unmet. Thus, quiet neglect is not just concerned with the literal policies that shape refugees' lives but reflect the cultural messages that service providers internalize about Southeast Asians because of the 1980 Refugee Act. In turn, they unwittingly embody notions of their clients as self-reliant and acculturated.

Social workers such as Gwen (37 years-old, White) and Angela (43 years-old, White) knew very little about Southeast Asian refugees in Guilford County. This was striking given that (1) SEAs had lived in the county for 40 years, and (2) both women worked for agencies that partnered with H'Noel's organization which was founded by (and continues to serve) Southeast Asians. However, Gwen and Angela primarily work with newly resettled refugees as the ORR only funds resettlement agencies to assist refugees for their first five years in the U.S. After this period, it is assumed that newcomers have acclimated and no longer need support. Southeast Asian resettlement slowed in the early 2000s and by ORR standards, this population should be well-adjusted.

Thus, ORR guidelines for self-sufficiency informed service providers' lack of contact with SEAs and inability to recognize their needs. SEAs were viewed as a group that no longer warranted ORR assistance and their issues flew under service providers' radars. After asking Gwen what she knew about Guilford County's Southeast Asians she plainly stated, "I really don't know how integrated they are. I'd be curious to what H'Noel would say."

H'Noel (36 years-old, Montagnard-Rhade/Asian) was from the SEAA community and recognized how refugees' struggles were obscured by government policies and ORR criteria. H'Noel helped older refugees who despite living in North Carolina for decades were far from self-sufficient: "Now they're like 70-something, 60-something, and their health is deteriorating, they don't speak English, they cannot read and write, some of them have no family member, so those are the one that we see that needs help the most...If they don't have children, then they come...[and ask us] to read their mail or appointment notice." Since these elderly refugees had been in the U.S. for over five years, H'Noel's agency did not receive ORR funding to assist them. Working with these clients was financially "bad" for the agency—a small, under-resourced organization in the same rough part of town that Chan was from—even though H'Noel personally valued working with them. Expectations of SEAA acculturation, integral to the good refugee trope which facilitates an eschewal of refugees' challenges, disabled segments of the community from accessing resources that are integral for integration.

These guidelines not only affected first-generation arrivals but 1.5- and second-generation refugees whose identities in turn were shaped by quiet neglect. One way of thinking about this is viewing media and political depictions of refugees, the negation of

SEAA struggles, and our resettlement system as national- and local-level forces that shaped cultural generalizations of SEAs as model minorities and good refugees. Growing up under these cultural assumptions and institutional conditions, 1.5- and second-generation respondents dealt with being overlooked and underserved at all levels of society. Given these experiences, participants exercised their agency to reject an “Asian American” identity and instead associated with categories that more accurately reflected their everyday lives.

Karina (27 years-old) identified as “Laotian” or “Southeast Asian” because “Southeast Asians, most of them came as refugees as the result of the Vietnam War...I know that experience of...East and South Asians is very varied, but I see them coming over...for a job or you’re here for school, some level of privilege.” Karina grew up in a low-income, heavily policed neighborhood of color in Mecklenburg County. She recognized similarities between her family and her Black neighbors: “I feel like our lives are not different, or like our socioeconomic class and stuff are similar...the way we grew up probably created similar experiences.” Yet, Karina’s teachers saw her as the model minority and they “had their expectations, because I was Asian and kind of quiet: she’s quiet, she does her work, she’s not gonna cause any trouble.”

During her senior year at a predominantly Black magnet high school, Karina’s classmates applied for college financial aid. The applications “had [a] line for Black and Latino students, and nothing about Asians...I feel like the model minority myth had something to do with that.” Although Asian Americans are perceived to be overrepresented in higher education, once in college Karina observed that there were no

SEAA leaders to advocate for SEAA students. Karina's experiences with being neglected confirmed the necessity of separating herself from more privileged "Asian Americans."

When respondents talked about confronting the model minority stereotype, they noted another impact of being grouped under the broad umbrella of panethnicity: the minimization of their families' unique histories, trials, and trauma. Nina, a college senior from Guilford County, offered an example of feeling invisible within East Asian-centered notions of Asian Americans:

I didn't grow up with my family expecting me to be a doctor...it wasn't the pressure that I think a lot of East Asian families stereotypically have. My family was just like finish school, but you need to come home and sweep the floor and make dinner, you need to take care of your siblings....My family wanted me to focus on school...but it was also important for me to come home and be a good Bunong daughter...We were a new family in America, we struggled financially a lot of times and I just couldn't relate to that Asian American narrative.

Nina felt that Asian American issues "don't necessarily relate to me...(sighs) I can't think of a specific example, but [my college's Asian American organizations] are very, very East Asian dominant." She wished that there "there could be more diversity to include more Asian American narratives because the problems that we're trying to combat is that we're all different." Nina primarily identified as "Southeast Asian" and "Montagnard-Bunong" rather than Asian American.

Similarly, Der (23 years-old, Hmong) was more attached to her ethnic identity. She was from a small Hmong community and knew of the challenges that came with being a Southeast Asian refugee. Der frustratedly conveyed how SEAs' resettlement pathways were conflated with those of voluntary Asians immigrants:

I think in general...we don't, like, the model minority...Hmong people, we're not rich. We didn't come here having our own business, we didn't come here because we want to start a business...We came here for safety...for my parents, I don't think they ever like came [to the U.S.]...[to go] to school and like want to be a

lawyer... They came to America to be safe, but they didn't come to America to improve their career.

Ha (25 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Asian), a martial artist from Guilford County who had dropped out of college, expressed a distinction between his identity as a Southeast "Jungle Asian" compared to East "Dynasty Asians." Initially, he named these differences by stating that Dynasty Asians are "more book smart, intelligent." Ha's delineation between Dynasty and Jungle Asians echoes Chan's descriptions of East and Southeast Asians wherein he associated the former with tropes attributed to Asian Americans (e.g., success, achievement. For both Ha and Chan, SEAs were disconnected from stereotypes commonly attributed to Asian Americans. Ha then referenced Montagnards' culture and history to further distinguish his community from Dynasty Asians:

I think we relate a lot to like the Native American...in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, we were there before the Chinese and the French discovered, came over, and just like how the European came to the Native Americans and they kind of took over. We kind of felt the same...oppression and kind of like the same struggle...Our people don't have much...there's no business owners, so it's like we're always viewed below the other people.

Ha preferred to identify as Montagnard rather than Asian American, and it was his link to Montagnards' forgotten history, legacies of colonization, and encounters with oppression that hardened the boundaries between Dynasty and Jungle Asians.

Respondents felt that common depictions of Asian Americans not only misrepresented their experiences but were predicated upon a negation of SEAs' issues that allowed refugees and East Asians to be racialized as one and the same. Nina, Der, Ha, and Karina subsequently reworked boundaries of identification to better suit their needs. I emphasize that interviewees' decisions to identify with their ethnicity or as

SEAAAs were not entirely private matters. Some participants expressed their identities publicly, such as by creating or leading ethnic or SEAA organizations to address their communities' neglected needs. I now turn to an exploration of public identity performances, the potential they have for rearranging racial boundaries, and the constraints attached to the development of adaptive identities. As racial identity is not only comprised of an individual's personal views of themselves but how they display and represent their identity to others (Khanna 2010; Nguyen and Ferguson 2019), these findings illustrate how respondents sought external validation as SEAAAs.

"A Bit of Unawareness on Both Sides": Public SEAA identities and racial boundaries

Some respondents participated in the ethnoracialization process by forming their own organizations. Taylor started an SEAA organization at their college after noticing the inequities between Southeast and East Asian American students:

I went to [an Asian American association's] first meeting my freshman year and I just knew right away that was I not comfortable... There was... career exploration, having events for Asian American students and bringing Asian American alumni from CISCO. It was just (chuckles softly), like, you know I was talking about it with some Southeast Asian friends at the time, it was like we're first-gen, we don't even know what we don't know (laughs) about career exploration, but we're just getting thrown all these like Asian people in these like super high positions, and we don't even know like how to do the most basic of like job applications.

Taylor felt erased within narratives of Asian American affluence and exasperated with what they perceived as East Asian students' privileged ignorance: "When I first got here, I was like very angry all the time about like, oh you're East Asian? You'll never know, like stop talking—you know?" These experiences led Taylor and other students to form the Southeast Asian Student Organization (SASO):

We just didn't feel completely comfortable [at the Asian American association] ... we knew they weren't intending to be exclusive, but their efforts in trying to be inclusive were not working... [one of my friends] is Thai, we had another co-

founder who's Indonesian, and there wasn't enough students to create like Indonesian Student Association, Thai Student Association, Lao Student Association. So, we just came up with the idea to combine all of it, make it Southeast Asian because Southeast Asian as a whole is not represented in higher education...that's why we decided to create [SASO].

Sua (20 years-old, Hmong) was the president of her college's Hmong Club and felt that her co-ethnics needed specific resources. One of Sua's largest responsibilities was to coordinate a campus visit for Hmong high schoolers. The goal of these visits was to expose Hmong youth to "higher education, how to get in, the admission process...Most of our parents didn't go to college and so [the students will] be the ones to decide how they want post-graduate to be." Sua alluded to how her status as a college student was anomalous: "a lot of Hmong people don't go to college...if you look at the Chinese population here, it's like way, way bigger. Hmong people, there's only like 20 of us here out of the thousands of students."

Some interviewees participated in programs led by Taylor and Sua. Kong (20 years-old, Hmong/Hmong-Thai/Asian American) felt that the Asian American label minimized SEAs: "People just kind of see Chinese or Korean or Japanese, whatnot. We're outnumbered, kind of makes...[others'] awareness of us small? Or unnoticed." The Hmong Club offered Kong a space where he could feel validated: "I kind of get...that feeling or that situation where other people understand my background, who I am, where I'm coming from. We share the same stories or understanding of things." Nina had joined SASO and said, "I'm happy that [SASO] exists because I feel like it is a safe space where we can have more honest conversations and can relate to each other more...we didn't come from privilege, and a lot of the struggles that come with being Southeast Asian because a lot of us did come from a very similar immigration story."

As respondents publicly displayed ethnic or panethnic-SEAA identities, they started to consider their ties to other racial groups. For some (n=6), the cultivation of an SEAA-specific identity enabled them to consider how their communities' struggles were embedded within systemic racism. Exemplifying the agency exercised in processes of ethnoracialization, some respondents came to value multiracial collaboration through their identification as SEAAAs. Aside from service providers, I did not interview people of other racial groups and do not have a comprehensive understanding of how my respondents' interest in interracial cooperation was received. However, there were cases where participants' quotes revealed how people of color responded to their multiracial political interests. These perspectives highlight both shifts and limits in interracial organizing—timely topics in today's political climate.

Lan (25 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian) was a community organizer for a Southeast Asian grassroots organization. The organization collaborated with Latinxs and Blacks to dismantle shared issues such as policing and deportation. I interviewed Lan in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and she reflected on the common anxieties plaguing Southeast Asians, Blacks, and Latinxs during COVID:

I was talking to a Black organizer here...we got to talking about emergency rooms and how health insurance is such a hard thing to navigate...The way that my parents have like, from what the Black organizer shared with me, the way that Black folks in [this city] access healthcare is through going to the emergency room, you know?...So do Latinx folks, but like (sighs) especially for undocumented folks, how do they access any of these resources when people ask for qualifications or ask for these documents and you don't have those things... We're making people jump through so many hoops to get the basic resources that they need!

Having built relationships with diverse organizers and activists, Lan yearned to address the racism affecting multiple marginalized groups.

Though Taylor had started SASO to offer SEAs a safe space, they were from a minority neighborhood and knew that the racism impacting SEAs was shared by Blacks and Latinxs. SASO wanted to acknowledge these similarities but was confronted by obstacles that hindered multiracial collaboration:

We try to collaborate, but it just kind of dissolved, with the deportations of the Southeast Asian community, Latinx community...Something [else] we talk a lot about was how...the Vietnam War was happening at the same time as the Civil Rights Movement... I feel like being Southeast Asian, our time here would have been even more difficult than it already is had the Black community not made way for us first...In my interactions with communities of color here, I noticed there's a bit of unawareness of both sides, but...I don't expect like all Black students to be aware of my identity or where I come from.

Thao, a 1.5-generation refugee (46 years-old, Hmong/Asian American/Southeast Asian) relayed a complicated story about our racial boundaries. Thao was from rural Montgomery County where a small population of Lao and Hmong people resided. All throughout his life, Thao noticed how his community was under-resourced. During his employment as a university librarian in North Carolina, Thao worked with Asian students to start a campus association. This seemed to be a SEAA-panethnic collective: "I got the student together and I believe in power in number. We have Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, all different ethnic...[We] can't be like [big universities], have Hmong student group, Viet student."

Having faced the challenges that accompany invisibility and marginalization, Thao was invested in finding multiracial supporters. These feelings were evident as he discussed his brother Tuam's recent run for county office. As Hmong made up a tiny voting bloc, Thao stressed the necessity of attracting diverse voters: "We have less than 500 Hmong people...the community here about 40,000 Black and White." Thao had anticipated that Black people would vote for Tuam since his competitor was a White

woman (both were Republicans) who ran a xenophobic campaign: “I’m running against [Tuam] cause he’s a foreigner.”

Much to Thao’s surprise, Black folks “voted for this White lady! ... We did have some Black people who support us... but this community came out and say no, we’re not supporting your brother—but they support this White lady!” Both Thao’s and Taylor’s accounts underscore the constraints of racial categories and how racial narratives impact coalition-building. Previous research suggests that Blacks and Latinxs may not believe that Asian Americans suffer from discrimination as they do (Kim and Lee 2001), which creates obstacles preempting multiracial cooperation. It is possible that the eschewal of SEAA struggles and proliferation of stereotypes of Asian Americans as foreigners and model minorities precluded others’ capacity to view them as racial allies.

However, some SEAs did form interracial bonds such as Lan’s multiracial collaborations. H’Bo (22 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian) spoke of her closeness with Blacks and Latinxs, and a distance from Whites and East Asians. H’Bo used her own variation of Ha’s “Dynasty” and “Jungle Asian” labels, referencing Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans as “White Asians” compared to her status as a “Black Asian” due to differences in wealth, affluence, and SEAs’ darker skin tones. H’Bo had “really good relationships with the Black and Latinx community” in Guilford County because of perceived cultural similarities: “I have a friend...she’s Mexican, and when I go to her parents’ house, you just know what respect is in that space.” Alongside these personal relationships, H’Bo worked for a healthcare referral system and recalled a Black co-worker telling her, ““Oh, you’re Southeast Asian, the health disparities that you guys experience are similar to African Americans, like to just general people of color’...and

that kind of like exclude[ed] East Asians from ever having health disparities...She also mentioned skin color; you look more like us.”

For some, efforts to project a SEAA-panethnic identity were recognized by other people of color leading to multiracial partnerships. At other times, they faced resistance to interracial allyships. Participants’ narratives indicate the complexities of 1) adapting ethnic and SEAA-panethnic identities, 2) publicly projecting the SEAA identity, and 3) creating fluid racial bonds between different groups. I discuss these nuances in the concluding section.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study used an ethnoracialization framework to understand SEAs’ connections to Asian American panethnicity and their racial/ethnic identities. Previous research has urged us to ask whether the forces moving underrepresented Asian ethnic groups towards panethnic identification are the same as for East Asians (Schacter 2014). However, this study also begs the question: under what conditions do we see modifications to or re-imaginings of Asian American panethnicity? I examined the conditions that motivated interviewees to actively participate in the ethnoracialization process, question their Asian American-ness, and adopt ethnic or SEAA-panethnic identities. Additionally, I considered how these identities (especially an SEAA identity) led some respondents to empathize with other people of color, revealing the fluidity of our racial boundaries.

Key amongst these motivating factors is the negation of SEAA histories and experiences from mainstream culture which resulted in the marginalization of SEAs and their invisibility within the Asian American category. Interviewees who had grown

up in lower-income neighborhoods and wrestled with the obscuration of their communities' struggles endeavored to distance themselves from the Asian American label. This decision was partly due to participants' belief that Asian American stereotypes and mainstream representations did not accurately depict their struggles. They were also responding to the obscuration of their communities' histories and ongoing issues that had been veiled by the model minority myth and good refugee narrative. This perhaps explains the anger and fatigue expressed by individuals like Nina and Taylor as they talked about Asian American (East Asian) spaces: their middle/upper-middle class culture reminded them of the racialized expectations embedded within quiet neglect.

Interestingly, though respondents distinguished themselves from Asian Americans, they did so under comparable conditions that catalyzed Asian American panethnicity. Much like leaders who drove the development of Asian American panethnicity in the 1960s and 70s, the participants who identified specifically as SEAA were college-educated. Decades ago, universities provided a space for Asian Americans to learn about their history, meet co-ethnics, and rally around shared encounters with discrimination. Today, they allow SEAs to form and join safe spaces where they can discuss issues relevant to their communities and foster a collective consciousness.

Just as panethnic organizers of the past called for solidarity with people of color, respondents differentiated themselves from East Asians by noting their similarities with Blacks and Latinxs. However, interviewees were met with mixed responses from people of color when they tried to publicly assert these similarities. Lan and H'Bo had cultivated relationships with Blacks and Latinxs who viewed SEAs as allies, but their accounts suggest that these connections took time, commitment, and trust to build. Conversely,

Thao and Taylor had not developed comparable networks and their attempts to foster interracial allyships were met with resistance.

The findings of this study indicate future directions for research about Asian ethnic groups, panethnicity, and racial identification. First, scholars should explore how divisions and nuances within Asian American panethnicity affect multiracial coalitions. My findings and those of other studies have documented a lack of political and social cohesion between Asian Americans and Blacks/Latinxs (Kim and Lee 2001; Liu 2018; Rim 2006). My participants' experiences suggest that obscuring SEAA struggles may hinder Blacks and Latinxs from recognizing the diversity of Asian experiences. However, more work must be done on whether underrepresented Asian populations are differentially perceived from East Asian Americans and thus likelier to collaborate with diverse BIPOC groups.

Second, more research is needed to understand the circumstances under which SEAs are more likely to identify with Asian American panethnicity. Many of my respondents named "Asian" or "Asian American" as secondary or tertiary identities. Their unique experiences as refugees led them to feel that this panethnic grouping was too broad and, in some ways, detrimental to their sense of identity. However, there may be contexts in which SEAs are eager to identify with East Asian Americans—especially during periods of rising anti-Asian racism, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Future studies should consider how sociopolitical crises affect panethnic solidarity.

Lastly, researchers should consider what leads 1.5- and second-generation individuals to identify with ethnic versus panethnic identities. Sua, Ha, and Der identified more strongly with their ethnicities whereas Karina, Taylor, and H'Bo espoused both

SEAA and ethnic identities. My sample is too small and varied to draw clear conclusions about what produces these differences. I can only cautiously speculate that individuals who adopted SEAA identities had more progressive, left-leaning political agendas than those who primarily identified with their ethnicities. Taylor, Karina, and H'Bo connected being SEAA to experiences of structural racism and a sort of linked fate with Blacks and Latinxs. An SEAA-panethnic identity may have facilitated empathy with other "panethnic" racial groups. Meanwhile, Sua, Ha, and Der drew attention to the needs of their specific ethnic groups and were less interested in relating to other minorities. Furthermore, more women than men identified with an SEAA-panethnic identity, suggesting that there may be gendered patterns regarding racial identification. Future studies could build on this project and take more steps towards clarifying trends in 1.5- and second-generation refugees' identities.

CHAPTER 3: GOOD REFUGEES AND BAD DEPORTEES *Southeast Asian Racialization and Deportation*

In 2017, the Trump administration reinterpreted a 2008 bilateral agreement with Vietnam which previously protected pre-1995 arrivals against deportation, even if they had committed a felony. The interpretation was justified by the Department of Homeland Security to keep “violent criminal aliens” (Dunst 2019) out of the U.S. The policy shift was especially shocking for Montagnards, the Indigenous people of Vietnam who were allies with the U.S. (Andresen 1988). Promised by American forces that they would return to defeat North Vietnam, some Montagnards continued to fight in the jungles until 1992. Due to their allyship, Montagnards had been unofficially exempt from deportation, but the 2017 policy made them subject to removal (Dunst 2019). The morality of these policy shifts was questioned in media reports of two Montagnards’ struggles with deportation and their citizenship statuses: Chuh A and Elizabeth Rahlan.

In 1998, Chuh A, the son of a Montagnard veteran who fought alongside U.S. forces (Rogers 2017), was resettled in North Carolina. It was here that Chuh met Rex, another Montagnard refugee, whom he fell in love with and had a family. Struggling to make ends meet, Chuh “did a one-time drop” by trafficking ecstasy, was sent to prison, and deported (Dunst 2019). Chuh believed that he would be exempt from removal but found himself sent on a plane to Vietnam with no warning (Nguyen 2019).

Elizabeth’s experience diverges from Chuh’s. As a baby, Elizabeth’s adoptive parents found her at a Cambodian refugee camp. They filled out the requisite paperwork for her adoption, but later learned that the documents were not properly filed. At 16, Elizabeth found out that she did not have a valid green card and her dreams of obtaining a driver’s license, getting a job to help pay for her father’s medical bills, and attending

college were dashed (Rowe 2020). Although Elizabeth never faced deportation, the threat of removal loomed due to her tenuous legal status. As Elizabeth's story gained media traction, she was able to raise the money for an immigration attorney. At 18 years-old, Elizabeth finally has her green card (Rowe 2020).

I include the stories of Chuh and Elizabeth to highlight the oft-overlooked issue of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) deportation, which I argue is eschewed partly due to a concept I term "quiet neglect." Quiet neglect is a discourse that perpetuates the systematic denial by U.S. institutions (government, media) of Americans' culpability in exacerbating the Vietnam and Secret Wars—which engendered Chuh's and Elizabeth's resettlement. Following the wars, the U.S. sought to disguise the chaos and massive casualties wrought by the military. To do this, the government initiated a refugee resettlement program whereby Americans became "saviors" of displaced Southeast Asians who were then cast as "good refugees" (Espiritu 2013). Good refugees were meant to prove that the U.S.'s involvement in the Vietnam and Secret Wars was more altruistic than harmful; resettlement was framed as bringing security and happiness to the rescued Southeast Asians. Rather than recognizing the many challenges afflicting Southeast Asian refugees, the reality of their struggles was obscured (Tang 2013). This is true for the case of deportations—while some groups like Latinxs have been overtly racialized as illegal and stringently surveilled (Chavez 2013; Ngai 2004), the obfuscation of SEAA deportation hides how refugees are now being expelled by their once-gracious benefactors.

Using 62 interviews with refugees and service providers from North Carolina, I argue that the respective racial framings of SEAA and Latinx deportations maintains

White “racial ignorance” (Mueller 2020) regarding U.S. imperialism and domination abroad. Applying the concept of quiet neglect, I also explore how interviewees reified the racialized illegality of Latinxs and overlooked the significance of deportations within SEAA communities. Service providers indicated that at the county and city-levels, deportation-related resources were geared towards Latinxs but not SEAs. The racialized illegality of Latinxs and absence of information for SEAs dealing with removal orders were related to respondents’ general beliefs that they were unaffected by deportation. Many interviewees drew stark distinctions between how deportations impacted SEAs and Latinxs. They invoked mainstream narratives that normalize Latinx deportations and undermine the seriousness of SEAA removals.

The purpose of this study is multifold. First, I expand extant sociological literature on deportation, which focuses on Latinxs while largely leaving Asian Americans unattended (Enriquez 2019; Golash-Boza 2015; Sudhinaraset et al. 2017). Given the lack of research on Asian American deportation, sociology is limited in understanding how these policies impact various groups of color to reinforce systemic racism. Thus, the second purpose of this paper is to illuminate parallels between Latinx and SEAA deportation that underscore how these events perpetuate White racial ignorance and preempt multiracial movements against punitive deportation policies. Previous studies (Kim and Lee 2001; Rim 2006) have documented a lack of interracial political collaboration over immigration policies that are detrimental to both Asian Americans and Latinxs. I explore why these connections may be difficult to build by shedding light on how SEAA deportations have been overlooked and ignored, thus disguising the fact that deportations affect multiple racial groups alongside Latinxs. Lastly, as a small body of

respondents fight against the erasure of their communities' issues to recognize how racism shaped SEAs and Latinx deportations, I explore potential counter-narratives for fostering multiracial coalitions.

RACIALIZED ILLEGALITY AND RESPONSES TO DEPORTATIONS

First, to set a theoretical foundation to compare against the case of SEAs, I explore how White racial ignorance has shaped Latinx deportation. I also identify common frameworks used to justify Latinx deportation and excuse the racism embedded within our immigration policies. In her work *Impossible Subjects*, Ngai (2004) noted that the U.S.'s colonization of Mexico initiated a process whereby Americans racialized Mexican immigrants as "illegal" regardless of their citizenship statuses. Ngai (2004) delineates the socially constructed nature of legality and how Mexicans' statuses fluctuated depending on the social context. At various points in the twentieth century, they were considered White, then subjected to punitive deportation and immigration policies, and later with the Bracero Program (1948-1964) unauthorized immigration was encouraged to provide cheap agricultural labor to White farmers (Ngai 2004). Shifting immigration policies and the framing of Mexicans—and today this framework applies broadly to Latinxs (Chavez 2008)—as illegal has always served the U.S.'s sociopolitical and economic interests (Ngai 2004).

Key amongst these interests is the U.S.'s desire to enforce a White national identity by othering Latinxs as undeserving of American citizenship. These beliefs facilitated the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (Kanstroom 2012). Together, these laws created stringent measures that deported immigrants for past crimes,

dismantled judicial review of removal orders, and expanded the grounds for deportation (Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez 2010). Following 9/11, concerns about national security led to increased support for the 287(g) program which enabled cooperation between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local and state law enforcement agencies to detain and deport immigrants who committed felonies or lacked legal residency (Kanstroom 2012). While these changes were enacted in the name of national security, the U.S.'s history of selectively awarding citizenship, monitoring certain immigrant populations (people of color) while overlooking others (Whites), and deporting Latinxs who have no criminal records or committed minor offenses suggest that deportation is an issue of race and perceived deservingness rather than security (Carrasco and Seif 2014; Golash-Boza 2015; Wu 2002).

The hypersurveillance of Latinxs has been rationalized through frames of racialized illegality that view undocumented immigrants as illicit, ignoring the structural forces that prompted their migration: the colonization of Mexico, recruitment of undocumented labor, and restrictive policies hindering their legal entrance (García 2017; Nakano Glenn 2002). Thus, Latinx criminalization relies on racial ignorance, or the denial of how Whites have caused lasting, institutionalized harm to people of color to advance their interests (Mueller 2020). By denying its colonial exploits, the U.S. government depicted undocumented Latinxs as threats to their national sovereignty (DeGenova 2013) and these perceptions have leant to stereotypes of Latinxs as gangsters, drug smugglers, and welfare abusers (Chavez 2013; Gilbert 2009). These stereotypes reversed the U.S.-Mexico relationship, permitting the idea that White Americans were endangered by Latinx invasion when it was the U.S. that had engaged in colonialism

(Chavez 2013; Nakano Glenn 2002). The image of the undeserving, dangerous Latinx migrant were bolstered with President Trump's calls to build border walls, imprison immigrants, and end DACA (Shear and Dickerson 2020).

While Latinxs fear for their safety, they have also organized resources and engaged in activism to support undocumented community members (Abrego 2008; DeGuzman 2020; Dreby 2012). Yet, resistance to racist immigration policies is constrained by the boundaries of our racial structure. Frameworks that allow Whites to consider themselves as moral citizens simultaneously encourage Latinxs to internalize stereotypes of their illicitness and some participate in “moralizing regulation” (Andrews 2018) where they reference White notions of legitimacy to separate themselves from “bad” immigrants. In order to survive, marginalized groups frequently adopt the ideologies and discourses of those in power—even as they may cause harm to affected communities (Mueller 2020). As such, Latinxs believe that they must prove their worthiness of citizenship by assimilating to American culture and undocumented individuals feel compelled to make their situations palatable to mainstream audiences (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2014; Nagel and Ehrkamp 2016).

By engaging in moralizing regulation, Latinxs garner sympathy for deportation cases by arguing that students, gainfully employed individuals, or people who were involuntarily brought to the U.S. as children merit citizenship (Andrews 2018; Carrasco and Seif 2014; Yukich 2013). However, this establishes a binary of “more” versus “less” deserving immigrants that reinforces the racialization of illegality and deems certain people's presences as “illegal” and thus warranting of removal (Andrews 2018; Yukich 2013). Unable to fully address the historical and racial conditions motivating their

migration, some Latinxs have harnessed moral dichotomies to legitimize their presences. I now turn to the less-discussed subject of SEAA deportations to understand how quiet neglect, which is founded upon racial ignorance of U.S. culpability during the Vietnam and Secret Wars, shaped SEAA's connections to deportation.

QUIET NEGLECT, THE GOOD REFUGEES, AND INVISIBLE DEPORTEES

I will first define quiet neglect and then explain its connections to SEAA deportation. Quiet neglect is a discourse deployed by U.S. institutions (e.g., schools, government, media) to manage its reputation with the Vietnam and Secret Wars, mistreatment of refugees, and uphold a national ideal of White exceptionalism. During the wars, Americans were responsible for massive civilian casualties in Southeast Asia and deliberately violated foreign policies by staging battles in countries such as Laos that had been declared neutral territory by the U.N. (Khamvongsa and Russell 2009). U.S. militarism and its deadly consequences cast a massive blow to Americans' beliefs in their moral superiority, leading them to feel outraged and ashamed (Espiritu 2013; Nguyen 2017).

Seeking to restabilize the country's reputation, the government implemented the 1980 Refugee Act which can be viewed as a catalyst for quiet neglect. Though partly motivated by humanitarianism, it also allowed the U.S. to become the "ethical" postwar victor by demonstrating its benevolence towards refugees whose very displacement they had engendered (Espiritu 2013; Ong 2003). Implicit within the Refugee Act were government leaders' view of Southeast Asians as "good refugees" (Espiritu 2013), the necessary victims to illustrate American heroism. Derived from the model minority stereotype, the good refugee trope portrayed Southeast Asians as victims who were

rescued by the U.S. and offered a chance at the American Dream. Media depictions and cultural commemorations of the Vietnam War reinforced this image, framing refugees as tragic props in stories of gallant American veterans (McMahon 2002; Espiritu 2006). Meanwhile, service providers and government agencies expected refugees to quickly assimilate to the U.S., attain “model minority” socioeconomic statuses, and becoming living proof of the U.S.’s superiority over Communist countries (Hing 2005; McMahon 2002).

The impacts of quiet neglect and poorly planned resettlement programs have been lasting for refugees. Lacking adequate support for a smooth transition to the U.S., SEAAs have lower socioeconomic statuses than the average citizen (Zhou and Bankston 2020), struggle with attaining higher levels of education (Lee 2001), and experience significant emotional distress (Cengel 2017). Some have turned to illicit activities to keep afloat and in certain localities, are associated with criminality (Chan 2004; Hein 2006). However, at a national level, SEAAs’ struggles have been minimized (Tang 2013). U.S. institutions, pursuant to the good refugee narrative and perpetuation of quiet neglect, broadly depicted refugees as model minorities while suggesting that criminal activity was rare and individuated (Nguyen 2017). Further reinforcing this idea, some refugees—recognizing the moral obligation that Americans felt towards them in the 1970s and 80s—strategically adopted the good refugee persona, displaying gratitude and patriotism to preserve their access to social services and hospitality (Nguyen 2017).

As Americans learned to reject the injuries wrought upon Southeast Asians, their moral obligation to aid refugees waned over time. “Bad refugees” (Nguyen 2017) who did not fit the model minority stereotype were covertly punished as the government

reduced refugee aid (Fujiwara 1996) and later instituted punitive deportation policies for those with criminal records. Amidst the post-9/11 xenophobia and concerns regarding national security, the U.S. issued a 2002 Memorandum of Understanding with Cambodia to accept deportees (Chow 2005). In addition to the recent reinterpretation of the 2008 agreement with Vietnam, in 2020 the U.S. persuaded Laos to take in deportees (Mentzer 2020). Smaller numbers of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Hmong had been issued deportation orders earlier in decades prior⁷, but were more tightly regulated under the Trump administration. Orders for SEAA deportations are placed regardless of the harm repatriation may bring.

As of 2018, 16,000 of the 2.7 million Southeast Asians in the U.S. have deportation orders. Approximately 13,000 of these orders were issued for people who had committed crimes in the past (SEARAC 2018). The U.S.'s history of ignoring Southeast Asians' struggles and general lack of discourse surrounding Asian American deportation (Enriquez 2019) has allowed these trends to go largely unexamined. Far less is known about how Asian Americans, who constitute 13 percent of the 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants (Zhou and Bankston 2020), are affected by deportation orders. Available scholarship indicates that unauthorized Asian Americans feel stigmatized by co-ethnics and are less likely to seek support than undocumented Latinxs (Enriquez 2019; Patler 2014). As I previously mentioned, people of color often feel that they must abide by dominant racial discourses and may internalize the messages conveyed by those in power (Bonilla-Silva 2018). The good refugee and model minority stereotypes assume Asian

⁷ There were Southeast Asians with deportation orders but whose birth countries would not accept deportees. In these circumstances, they could not actually be repatriated. Instead, they continued to live in the U.S. until recent policy changes made them susceptible to deportation.

American complicity with White social norms (Kuo 2018), leading co-ethnics to denounce “deviant” Asians who engage in criminal activity. Asian Americans who have deportation orders feel ashamed and avoid calling attention to their struggles.

Inattention towards SEAA deportation boosts the U.S.’s narrative of post-Vietnam War heroism that allowed refugees to seamlessly adopt the American Dream. Although SEAA deportation may have sparked outrage from Whites who felt obligated to treat refugees charitably in the immediate postwar aftermath, I argue that today it reinforces Americans’ morality by suggesting that the U.S. is only punishing the “violent criminal aliens” who failed to integrate. Covertly, deportations perpetuate racial ignorance, the U.S.’s false sense of morality, and boundaries around national belonging. Thus, SEAA and Latinx deportation, though distinctively framed, both serve the purpose of upholding Whites’ deliberate ignorance regarding their racist history. Each racialized depiction of deportations—Latinxs as highly surveilled indigents, Southeast Asians as quietly neglected refugees—also reifies the U.S.’s national identity as one of White moral superiority contrasted against undeserving minorities. By ousting people of color on the grounds of their criminality and the alleged threat they pose to “Americans” (who are often equated with Whites) our immigration policies take for granted the citizenship of certain groups while perpetually questioning the belonging of others (Chavez 2013).

In what follows, I examine how quiet neglect and racial ignorance have shaped respondents’ understandings of and responses to deportation. First, I document how the portrayal of deportation as a Latinx issue prevented the creation of support systems for SEAs. This was observed by service providers who were cognizant of SEAA deportation and expressed frustration towards the lack of widespread aid for diverse

communities who were harmed by removals. As a result of the inattention to their issues, SEAA interviewees were often unaware of how deportation affected their ethnic groups. Instead, when asked to speak about deportation, they reproduced racialized tropes of Latinx illegality.

Second, I explore how service providers and SEAs employed moralizing regulation to reify the belief that deportations were a non-issue in their communities. Some service providers depicted SEAs as good refugees and upright citizens, suggesting that deportation due to criminal convictions was anomalous for this population. SEAs invoked their own notions of the good refugee trope and their indebtedness to the U.S. (Nguyen 2017), suggesting that individuals who committed crimes squandered the generosity bestowed by Americans. These interviewees were grateful for resettlement, felt obliged to follow the law, and condemned co-ethnics who behaved otherwise. With these cases, I show how quiet neglect limits SEAs' recognition of discrimination from the state, their empathy for other people of color, and capacities to challenge deportations. However, I also feature a small body of respondents who recognized how their challenges intersected with Latinxs'. I examine their perspectives to highlight both the potential for and barriers to interracial anti-deportation movements.

METHODS

Conducting Refugee Research in the U.S. South

I conducted this research in North Carolina, a “new immigrant destination” (NID) (Marrow 2009) that has widely implemented 287(g) (Arriaga 2017). Punitive immigration measures in NIDs are contrasted against the absence of resources for

newcomers, especially compared to longstanding immigration hubs (Winders 2012). By the time of my study, resettlement had reshaped a few cities in North Carolina to include more service agencies and a few ethnic or pan-Southeast Asian organizations (Kolano and Davila 2019). However, North Carolina generally lacks the clear centers of ethnic life present in key resettlement states (Hein 2006). This is the case even with Montagnards whose largest population (estimated at upwards of 10,000, though there are no official counts) outside of Vietnam is in Guilford County, NC (News & Record 2019). As such, participants' discussions of deportation and the dearth of support for this issue may differ from SEAs who live in states such as California or Minnesota which have larger, more visible SEAA organizing.

To build contacts, I followed other researchers who have worked with Southeast Asian refugees in North Carolina (Clune 2015; Lau 2000). I reached out to community leaders from cultural and civic associations, churches and temples, and grassroots organizations. I discussed my project and asked how I could give back to communities. I also shared my interview guides and consent forms with leaders who reviewed my materials before agreeing to introduce me to potential interviewees. To familiarize myself with the Guilford County communities, I volunteered with a service agency that was started by Southeast Asian refugees and networked with different refugee groups throughout my fieldwork.

Sample, Interviews, and Analysis

I conducted interviews from June 2019 to June 2020. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with Vietnamese, Montagnard, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees from the first-, 1.5-, and second-generations (n=47). I asked respondents about

the circumstances leading to their own or their families' resettlement, encounters with discrimination, their knowledge of immigration and deportation policies, and how U.S. politics impacted their everyday lives. All respondents except for two who either had a community or family member translate were at least proficient in English (See Table 1 for respondent information).

Six months into interviewing refugees, I decided to speak with service providers (n=24), including community advocates, resettlement social workers, grassroots organizers, healthcare liaisons, and lawyers. Service providers play important roles in refugees' lives (Chan 2004), thus I aimed to understand their views of deportation and how they might impact refugees' experiences. I asked service providers about how changing resettlement and immigration policies (1) affected their capacities to serve refugees and (2) impacted their clients. Much of this sample works in Guilford County (n=17), while the remaining are in Mecklenburg (a larger resettlement site in North Carolina) (n=3), and Orange County (a growing site for resettlement) (n=4). (See Table 2 for respondent information).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in NVivo. I coded interviews in multiple stages and analysis was ongoing throughout data collection. First, I developed open codes to discern general themes and ideas from the interviews (Marshall and Rossman 2016) Second, I conducted axial coding (Charmaz 2006) to merge these themes into concepts concerning Southeast Asian refugees' racialized notions of who is impacted by immigration policies, and how they justified or rejected frameworks of deportation. I also compared these themes with service providers' interviews to understand how

opinions conveyed at meso-level support networks may have shaped individuals' interpretations of deportation.

FINDINGS

“We didn’t just hop over”: Reiterating Racialized Illegality and Tropes of Deservingness

Ignorance towards refugees' struggles has shaped the invisibility of SEAA deportations and a subsequent lack of resources to address this issue. Before detailing SEAA respondents' internalization of quiet neglect, I highlight service providers' observations about the racialization of deportation as a Latinx issue. Their comments provide greater context into the factors shaping SEAs' perspectives. Service providers talked about how institutionalized silence limited the resources and advocacy efforts for SEAA deportees as compared to Latinxs. Valerie (39 years-old, White) worked with both Latinx and SEAA grassroots collectives, and she expressed concerns that SEAs were underinformed about ICE raids, deportations, and lacked support systems. She attributed these problems to how the government and media framed deportation as a Latinx issue, ignoring SEAs:

When people think about people at risk for deportation, they think about Latinx people...That's what the media does, right? They don't tell those stories at all! So we have to tell the stories and create these events that the media doesn't even show up to, like literally, we've been beating a dead horse for years in [this city] talking about Southeast Asian deportation and trying to get local funding for our programs...but...the fact that this isn't on the national radar media-wise and consciousness-wise, we get nothing!

Víctor (25 years-old, Latinx), an assistant director at a non-profit that served refugees and immigrants, similarly observed the misrepresentation of deportation as a Latinx-only problem: “We’re seeing a rise [during the Trump administration] in detention-deportations, and this doesn’t only affect Latinos or the Latinx community. It

affects any immigrant in general, and that's something we have to keep reiterating over and over because sometimes people associate immigration with just the Latino community, and that's not the case." Although Víctor's organization worked with immigrants and refugees, he observed that "About 80% of the population that we serve here are Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America." The other 20% consisted of refugees and immigrants from all throughout the world.

Far more Latinxs than Asians sought help from Víctor's non-profit. Previous studies have suggested that compared to Asian Americans, Latinxs are much more aware of and willing to access networks and resources that support people who are vulnerable to deportation (Sudhinaraset et al. 2014). Asian Americans' invisibility within discourses of deportation hinders their ability to cultivate support systems. In turn, the dearth of clear resources and collective action reinforces the silence around deportation both within and beyond SEAA communities. It is difficult to know if Southeast Asian refugees did not turn towards Víctor's non-profit because they did not need assistance, or if society's general lack of interest towards SEAA deportations had created barriers preempting their access. What was clear was that the mainstream depictions of Latinx illegality and apathy regarding refugees' struggles shaped SEAs' perceptions of deportation.

Many respondents repeated narratives of racialized illegality that indicated that deportation only harmed Latinxs. Jason (23 years-old, Lao/Asian) stated he had a limited understanding of deportation but "heard a...couple rumors about that wall...I understand like, I think people coming in with drugs, you can cause crime, but I think it's even worse to block out people [of] Mexican descent...I just have mixed feelings about it." Jason's opinions of restrictive immigration policies were confined to the media and political

rhetoric of border walls and stereotypes of Mexican drug trafficking. Sokheap (40 years-old, Cambodian/Asian), a school social worker, was aware of how deportation policies affected immigrant students. She noticed that many of the students she worked with had dropped in school attendance out of fear that they might be detained by patrolling ICE or police officers. According to Sokheap, this problem affected “More so the Hispanic population,” than Asian Americans. Indeed, Sokheap’s discussion of family separations pertain to media stories of Latinx parents and children being torn apart and sentenced to holding facilities.

Similarly, Madison (19-years old, Vietnamese American) was familiar with narratives of Latinx deportation. Madison articulated the key arguments embedded in media portrayals of undocumented Latinxs: “With ICE just knocking down doors, how they’re going about it is not great...I do not appreciate them...I guess I get the idea that they’re illegal, and that like our economy would be better without them, because they’re taking money, right? ...But at the same time, there’s the simple courtesy of treating other humans as humans.” Contrastingly, quiet neglect’s diminishment of SEAA deportation contributed to Madison’s minimal knowledge about this topic: “I think it is impacting the Asian community...I just don’t see it in the media as much, and so yeah I’d definitely, I always default to the Latinos.”

These answers are unsurprising given the sparse representation of Asian American deportations. This was pointed out by Nhung (18 years-old, Montagnard-Rhade/Asian) who was cognizant that “It’s not just Hispanics that get deported.” Nhung owed her knowledge of deportations to her involvement with a Southeast Asian

organization, but otherwise, “I don’t really hear about it. Whenever I go to [the organization], I’d always hear about it, but if I weren’t there, I’d never know.”

Some other interviewees did know about SEAA deportations. Most often, perhaps due to the renegotiation of the 2008 agreement with Vietnam, the proliferation of Chuh’s story in media outlets, and their connections to co-ethnics who had not yet attained citizenship, Montagnard participants generally had the deepest knowledge of deportation. Interviewees’ views were shaped by discourse that obscured the direness of SEAA deportations and they usually engaged in moralizing regulation that trivialized deportations as one-off punishments for criminals. Respondents evoked themes of individual deservingness that reiterated tropes of racialized illegality and alienated Southeast Asian deportees as part of an immoral “other” whom they associated with Latinxs.

These themes emerged during my interview with H’Linh (27 years-old, Montagnard Asian American-Jarai/Asian) who was resettled in North Carolina as an infant and thus identified as an American citizen even though she was not naturalized. This perception had changed recently: “It just hit me...[the U.S.] could deport me...So that was more of the driving thing...to get my citizenship.” H’Linh further explained where she had learned about Montagnard deportations and why she was concerned about this issue:

Just all the news. I think my mom told me, “Hey, did you know this person got deported?” I was like, “Was it a Spanish person?” No, Asian, like Montagnard just got deported! And I’m like well mom, did he have a criminal background...[My mom] was like, “But you could [get deported], anything could happen with the president...Just go get your citizenship...it’s not gonna be hard for you. People struggle cause they can’t speak the language.”...So I just had to do it! (Laughs) [My mom] worked really hard, you know? English isn’t her first

language...and she taught herself the whole 100 questions and passed on her own...If she can do it, I can do it (laughs).

H'Linh conveyed racialized assumptions of who is susceptible to deportation: "Was it a Spanish person?"; "Did he have a criminal background?" Though H'Linh and her mom may not have agreed with Trump's policies, they considered it their individual obligation to prove that they deserved to live in the U.S.

Kanh (26 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Asian) compared the legality of Montagnard refugees to undocumented Latinx immigrants, legitimizing the former by denigrating the latter: "We didn't just hop over and just try to sneak in, like we had to go through all that process." Kanh strongly believed that Montagnards were accountable for their own safety and should make the effort to assimilate:

If you have your citizenship, don't do nothing stupid like criminal record, you not gonna get deported! Why you got all panic and scared? ...I tell my Montagnard, you guys all come here with green card and legal way. If you so scared, don't renew your green card—just get your citizenship! Take the test. And then you just live by the rule, you have nothing to worry! ...A lot of people have excuse, I can't pass the test, it's too hard or whatever. You know, my mom, she can't really speak English or nothing, three or four time, she tried. I was like if my mom can do it, anybody can get it. That's all I gotta say.

As mentioned earlier, racial ignorance shaped immigrants' views of deportations as not a matter of a flawed, racist system, but a question of individual responsibility and morality. The silence surrounding SEAA deportations led respondents to believe that this was a Latinx issue rather than one in their backyards. Participants like H'Linh and Kanh who were aware of Montagnard removals invoked themes documented in studies of Latinxs to regulate co-ethnics' morality. They both mentioned how their families had worked hard to assimilate, suggesting that there was no excuse for remaining unnaturalized and vulnerable to deportation. Respondents made these claims while

distancing themselves from Latinxs whose presences they deemed less legitimate than those of Montagnards. These participants not only reinforced racial ignorance around SEAA deportation but othered Latinxs and rejected the possibility of similarities between their groups' experiences with deportation.

In the next section, I explore how respondents policed and stigmatized co-ethnics who had deportation orders. These individuals harnessed forms of moralizing regulation that not only referenced stereotypes of Latinx criminality, but called on their identities as good refugees who should be forever grateful to the U.S. Rather than suggesting that this is a wholly unique form of moralizing regulation or a complete break from stereotypes used to justify the racialization of deportations, I argue that SEAs' invocation of the good refugee trope represents a continuation of the U.S.'s efforts to perpetuate racial ignorance and its moral national identity. Respondents' invocation of the good refugee myths contains similar functions as stigmatizing Latinxs for "hopping over" into the U.S. They also reflect how people of color internalize the ideologies and discourses that maintain White supremacy, thus inadvertently reifying punitive immigration policies and the nation's identity as one based in Whiteness.

Remaining the Good Refugee: SEAA Rejection of Deportations

SEAs' responses to deportations were shaped by widespread ignorance of their issues and the good refugee narrative so that they only viewed deportations as one-off punishments for bad behavior. Interviewees castigated co-ethnics who had removal orders, attributing deportations to a few criminals who squandered Americans' benevolence. These individuals engaged in moralizing regulation wherein they stigmatized their co-ethnics as ungrateful and thus undeserving of residence in the U.S.

Many of these perspectives, as with the last section, come from Montagnards. However, I include the perspectives of respondents from other ethnic backgrounds where applicable.

Before conveying their thoughts, I first turn to an examination of how service providers repeated the good refugee myth, obfuscating the seriousness of SEAA deportation at the county and city-levels of refugee agencies and resources. Barbara (69 years-old, White) had served for 13 years as a congregational nurse at a Montagnard church. She had witnessed a few “quirky” deportation cases, such as a young woman who:

Came over legally. Of course, all the Montagnards have come in ...documented...When the girl was...16, she had this gentleman that used to help the Montagnards with their citizenship helpin’ her...and then he died...Anyway, she registered to vote and voted illegally, but didn’t know any better...she never would’ve done anything illegal...She had been livin’ with her grandmother...and somebody from ICE came knockin’ on her grandmother’s door lookin’ for her because she voted illegally. And she lived here since she was a baby.

Barbara said that such cases were unusual given that Montagnards were “mostly law-abiding citizens and they’re all documented.” She proclaimed that “they’re probably better Americans than most Americans, I’m not kiddin’ about that. As far as bein’ patriotic and appreciating what this country offers them.”

Carrie (43 years-old, Asian/White), a director of a refugee education center who had worked with Southeast Asian refugees for over 15 years, viewed them as model residents. However, Carrie knew some deported Southeast Asian refugees, like a young woman who “Came to the United States as a two-year-old, grew up as an American kid. Parents never got citizenship, which is something I talk to parents about a lot...and when she was just out of high school...wrote five thousand dollars in bad checks. That’s a felony. Put into deportation, to a country that she had never been.” Just as with Barbara,

Carrie indicated that these deportation cases were rare in an otherwise exemplary group: “Most often, it is someone who came here as a young child, looks at themselves as an American, and screws up. And it is heartbreaking.” Carrie and Barbara perpetuated the notion of Southeast Asian “good refugees” whose legal missteps were atypical.

SEAA interviewees projected images of themselves that paralleled Carrie’s and Barbara’s depictions. They displayed patriotism and appreciation for the U.S., and for some, these sentiments were integral to their identities and sense of belonging. For instance, Reverend Eban (72 years-old, Montagnard-Rhade) was one of the Montagnards who remained in the jungles of Vietnam after 1975. After resettling in North Carolina, he led a Montagnard church and was well-respected for his religious leadership and wartime contributions. Montagnards value their religious freedom as they have been (and continue to be) persecuted by the Vietnamese government for their indigenous heritage, ties to the U.S. military, and Christianity. The words of someone like Reverend Eban hold great sway, especially amongst devout older Montagnards.

Reverend Eban proudly recounted Montagnards’ historical connection to Americans whom he believed would help his people who were still in Vietnam: “President Trump will stand...will use the law for promote peace or freedom.” Reverend Eban’s indebtedness to the U.S. government and President Trump (whom he described as a “born-again Christian”) led him to believe that Montagnard deportations were warranted by the state:

Liann: I remember there was that community meeting...a couple weeks ago. And I think at the end, people mentioned issues of deportation and how that affected some Montagnards.

Reverend: Yes.

Liann: And the deportations had happened with President Trump being our leader.

Reverend: Yeah.

Liann: How does that make you feel in terms of President Trump being our current president and having the deportation of Montagnards under his administration?

Reverend: If I was in prison, I would stand by the law. I stand by Constitution. And we Montagnard, before I come to United States, I already swear, I come to the United States, I respect the law, freedom, land of the law, and I will be obey...I don't think that the President return somebody...but if you do criminal [crime]...the rule of law, we have to obey. I don't think I take personally President Trump do that...I have to obey the citizen, protect the freedom and Constitution in America.

I asked another Montagnard veteran, Luan (79 years-old, Montagnard-Jarai), about his opinions regarding the Trump administration's deportation policies and how some refugees criticized these laws. Akin to Reverend Eban, Luan earnestly felt that President Trump would provide support to the Montagnards in Vietnam. He summed up critiques about Southeast Asian deportation as anti-Trump propaganda, "Yeah, that's the way (chuckles), that's the way some of the people, they against [Trump], too. They want to be with the Democrat." Luan firmly agreed that Montagnards who committed crimes deserved whatever punishment they received: "American, they put us in jail because you break the law, but in reality, we don't do nothing then American really love us...I talk with my people... 'Hey! Be careful, don't against the law!'...If you against the United States, you go out."

Thao (44 years-old, Hmong/Asian American) was staunchly anti-Trump but many of the older Hmong and Lao residents in his town shared ideas like those of Luan and Reverend Eban. Thao explained why these elders supported the Republican party despite

the implementation of harsh immigration policies, cutbacks on refugee quotas, and reductions for public resources that were crucial for older refugees.

Back in the '80s, it was Republican who wanted the refugee. Not the Democrat. You know that, right? ...The Big Bush [George H.W. Bush] and Reagan, they were talking about you know, welcoming immigrants, welcoming refugee...but now it is changed...with Trump because the Republican was the one that support us...and now they made the refugee as the enemy...That's why you see a lot of older Hmong people are registered Republicans...[They] feel obligated to what U.S. done in the past.

Y'Ben (25 years-old, Montagnard/Asian) conveyed a moderate version of the good refugee framework. He had mixed feelings around the recent deportation of a community member:

Everybody makes mistakes. You know me, I live here, and I'm blessed to be here. I love here, and I think this country has given me opportunities. That's why I try to avoid any problems, not to brag or anything, but I have never gotten in trouble with the law...I don't want to take those chances...but...everybody makes mistakes. I think everybody does deserve a second chance if they do commit a crime and if they do commit a second, then it's up to them. Then you know...there's always consequences to the action. I think it's a luxury to live here, so you can't take those things for granted.

Y'Ben held fast to his sense of gratitude towards the U.S. Not taking into consideration why refugees were forced to resettle—wartime devastation, persecution for working with U.S. troops—or why people might commit crimes (e.g., financial hardship due to a lack of social support) Y'Ben felt that breaking the law symbolized a rejection of the gift of resettlement.

Throughout this section, I have shown how interviewees espoused the good refugee narrative to separate themselves from co-ethnics with deportation orders. Just as Latinxs engage in moralizing regulation to prove their worthiness of belonging, interviewees distinguished themselves from SEAs who they believed had taken their lives in the U.S. for granted. Having internalized discourses about racialized illegality

and deservingness, they were unable to consider the various social factors (e.g., poor resettlement practices, systemic racism, discrimination) that may have contributed to refugees' criminal involvement. Instead, they diminished the significance of deportations in their communities and the reality of discrimination that SEAs have incurred from the state.

Although it may be initially puzzling as to why refugees adopted narratives that stigmatized their own communities, the rationale becomes clearer once we consider how the good refugee myth regulates understandings of who can belong in the U.S. Refugees internalize notions of deservingness (Nguyen 2017) and the discourses of those in power as they find belonging in their new home. Frameworks of quiet neglect and racial ignorance taught interviewees to be good refugees who, as Luan purported, were loved by Americans. Thus, the good refugee archetype and racialized illegality go hand in hand to create definitions about who deserves to live in the U.S. Additionally, it establishes moral boundaries for SEAs to police their own communities, reduces SEAs' awareness of the injustice behind deportations and their interest in challenging discriminatory policies. However, as I explore in the final section, there were some participants who challenged the legitimacy of deportation policies and rejected normative ideas of belonging and deservingness.

"It's Not Just One Fight": Resisting Racialized Illegality and Deportation Discourses

I have highlighted how respondents embraced the good refugee trope, notions of racialized illegality, and internalized quiet neglect. These individuals believed deportations were a serious problem for only Latinxs and they stigmatized co-ethnics who had removal orders. As such, respondents expressed neither a sense of shared

oppression with Latinxs nor regard for the importance of combatting deportation policies. However, a small group of interviewees were cognizant of SEAA deportation, its roots in systemic racism, and sought to protect their communities. In this section, I underscore both the potential for anti-deportation activism and multiracial collaborations within the Southeast Asian refugee community, as well as their accompanying challenges.

Jeremy (23 years-old, American Asian/Lao) personally knew some deported Cambodians and he felt concerned about SEAA deportation. However, the lack of discourse regarding SEAA removals left him feeling confused about how to approach this issue:

I think deportations that have recently been happening was very eye-opening, cause our community at least had known people that's been deported...What if someone else closer to us is being deported? That would dramatically impact us. So that's one of the issues where we can't just help ourselves. We need outside help...we really don't have the power cause our community is so small, so we definitely do need outside help.

For some respondents, the widespread silence around SEAA deportation made it difficult for them to find ways of contesting immigration policies.

Andi (18 years-old, Lao American/Southeast Asian/Asian American) echoed the feeling that SEAA deportation was unbeknownst to people outside their community and overshadowed by discussions of Latinx immigration: "What I see in my community...they think it's just happening to like Latinx folks, but no...Southeast Asian deportation is overlooked." Having joined a Southeast Asian community organization (the same one that Nhung was in) that addressed topics like incarceration and removal, Andi was able to connect SEAA deportation to larger issues of racism: "People don't see Asian Americans as a minority group, they think we're like next-level White...people don't know that police...it's not just Black people they kill...Southeast Asian is included,

and there's been instances in [my city] where police brutality is a thing...It made me realize that it's not just one fight...There's multiple people we're fighting for...it's a matter of unity and solidarity.”

Lan (25 years-old, Montagnard-Bunong/Southeast Asian/Asian American), who worked for the organization Andi participated in, tried to combat quiet neglect by educating SEAs about deportation. Lan's organization developed multiracial collaborations with other non-profits to raise people's awareness about ICE and immigration policies. She and her co-workers had made some headway in advocating for deportees, but Lan also expressed a deep frustration with Southeast Asian refugees who chose to avoid rocking boats over deportation. Lan recounted being a panelist at a Cambodian event where she was asked to “not talk about Southeast Asian deportation...It was just a hard thing for me to hear from one community member...saying, ‘Oh, it's not affecting the Cambodian community here.’ Well, that doesn't mean that we still can't talk about it! That doesn't mean it shouldn't be something we share with our community!”

Lan also encountered resistance from her fellow Montagnards:

When I think about Chuh, who is the first Montagnard person that's deported, I think about how hurtful it was, how hard it must've been for his partner, his kids...and then the whole Montagnard community...didn't say anything about it...I brought it up to [Reverend Eban], and him just being like, “Oh it's not happening,” that doesn't validate anybody's experience...It's hard to be the one that's trying to support community members going through it...For Southeast Asians, it's just not wanting to rock the boat on anything...always wanting to be the good refugee, the good immigrant.

Taylor (20 years-old, Southeast Asian/Lao-Vietnamese/Asian American) knew that deportations were hurting SEAs and pointed out that people in their network had removal orders. They tried to increase awareness of SEAA deportation and wanted to promote interracial solidarity. Taylor did this through the Southeast Asian Student

Organization (SASO) they had started at their university. Taylor recalled, “When we were creating SASO, we had to explain to the school why this was necessary...and definitely one of the issues we brought up [was] a misconception of deportation and who can get deported.” While this cause was close to Taylor’s heart, they found that both co-ethnics and other people of color were disinterested in taking collective action to thwart deportations. For instance, Taylor recalled trying to work with a Latinx student organization to rally together against 287(g) and ICE operations but these efforts “just kind of dissolved.” They remarked that in general, other BIPOC student groups seemed uninterested in partnering with SASO and that there was “a little bit of unawareness on both sides” regarding how these organizations understood others’ issues and needs.

Reflected in this section were some participants’ desires to halt quiet neglect. Despite the lack of interest in mainstream media and politics to address SEAA deportations, interviewees endeavored to raise awareness for these issues and facilitate multiracial coalitions to combat stringent immigration policies. However, respondents’ stories also convey how normative deportation narratives constrain their efforts to resist punitive immigration policies. I discuss this further in the concluding section.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The U.S. government has increasingly targeted SEAs through deportation policies. Rather than signaling a departure from how the U.S. characterized SEAs as good refugees, deportations are a continuation of the quiet neglect that obscured the U.S.’s culpability in refugees’ suffering. Efforts by the U.S. government and military to conceal the atrocities they committed unto Southeast Asians diminished refugees’ relationship to Americans’ broken promises and wartime exploitations (Chan 2004;

McMahon 2002) and eclipsed the nation’s dismal resettlement practices that exacerbated refugee poverty, trauma, and other adverse conditions (Chow 2005; Tang 2013). Today, the erasure of U.S. culpability has enabled the government to justify deporting “violent criminal aliens” whose misfortunes it played a role in creating.

Compared to Latinx removals, SEAA deportations have occurred quietly with little media fanfare or political debate covering changes in policies. The differences in how deportations of each group are discussed are reflective of the ways in which Latinxs and SEAs are racialized. Previous scholars have documented how Latinxs are explicitly labeled as illegal and tightly surveilled by law enforcement (Kanstroom 2012; Ngai 2004). The hypervisibility of Latinx immigration is an example of how Americans have historically sensationalized this group as unlawful border-crossers who threaten their sovereignty. These narratives allowed Americans to avoid reckoning with their colonization of Mexican land and role in stimulating undocumented immigration. Meanwhile, the deportation of SEAs is quieter and construed as atypical in accordance with the good refugee narrative which assumes that SEAs aspire to become model citizens. These narratives contribute to the quiet neglect of my study population⁸.

Comments from service providers like Valerie and Víctor show how these frameworks and forms of racialization impact local-level service and resources for deportees. Both participants expressed frustration and concern that Latinxs had become

⁸ The proportion of SEAA to Latinx deportees also likely affects the visibility of SEAA deportation. In 2018 (SEARAC) noted that over 16,000 SEAs had received final orders of deportation. In 2018, 256,000 people were deported (Bever and Paul 2018). The top three countries receiving deportees were Mexico (accepted 139,330 deportees), Guatemala (52,755), and Honduras (32,180) (McCarthy 2019). The scope of SEAA deportations is much smaller than that of Latinxs. Yet, scale alone cannot explain why SEAs who witnessed deportations occurring in their own backyards did not view immigration policies as impactful for their communities. Some of this explanation rests on the power of racial discourses to make even disenfranchised groups accept the terms of their oppression.

the poster children for deportation while other affected groups were ignored. Others like Carrie and Barbara inadvertently repeated harmful narratives portraying Southeast Asian refugees as model minorities and good refugees who were largely untouched by our criminal justice system.

Immersed in national and local-level institutions and narratives that denied the reality of SEAA deportation, many SEAA respondents did not recognize their shared oppression with Latinxs. Instead, they invoked notions of deservingness to distance themselves from Latinxs who they viewed as the main target of immigration and deportation policies. Interviewees also drew boundaries between themselves and detained co-ethnics. Reverend Eban, Luan, and Y'Ben doubled down on their identities as good refugees and engaged in moralizing regulation as they legitimated deportations in their communities. Many of the interviewees who exhibited such behavior were men. This is commensurate with previous studies finding that refugee men, attempting to recover status lost status upon resettlement, adopt conservative beliefs to gain favor with American benefactors (Nguyen 2017). These respondents sanctioned the refugees who “chose” to waste the opportunity of resettlement.

However, there were some who noted that deportation was not purely an issue of individual criminality and drew links to systemic racism. Lan, Andi, and Taylor stated that refugees' issues were part of a racist system that, if it were to be dismantled, required the cooperation of all people of color. Andi noticed that whereas deportations and the imprisonment of Blacks and Latinxs are overt, SEAA deportations were facilitated through silence. Participants who protested SEAA deportation considered raising awareness of this issue as instrumental to the liberation of people of color broadly. Their

attempts at challenging the neglect of SEAA deportations were often dismissed by both co-ethnics and other people of color, however. Service providers, the Black and Latinx organizations on Taylor's campus, media reporter perceived Southeast Asians as unlike other marginalized populations.

Thus, Latinxs' and SEAs' respective encounters with deportation are constructed to uphold our hegemonic racial system, its accompanying stereotypes, and the ignorance surrounding U.S. colonialism and militarization abroad. This assertion requires much more than just my single study to flesh out and ascertain. Future studies should more deeply interrogate how the deportations of multiple groups serve White racial ignorance and examine possible ways of forming interracial coalitions to combat unjust immigration policies.

Interviewees such as Lan, Taylor, and Andi offered some insight into how these collaborations might be formed. I highlight the potential for intergroup support and empathy with a final quote from Duc, a 65 year-old Vietnamese refugee. Duc and his father, a South Vietnamese military officer, witnessed the fall of Saigon in 1975. Fearing for their lives, they fled to the ocean and became boat people who undertook the perilous journey to countries like Singapore in search of safe harbor. Danger was imminent, and the specter of death loomed in Duc's memories. It is for this reasons that I take his criticism of deportation—focused more on the present conditions of Latinxs—with special care. Posed within perspectives such as Duc's is the potential to both reject and reinforce collective struggles against deportation:

In my opinion...currently policy...enforced right now protecting the White man, the "minority" in the United States (laughs)...How I feel...The border security things, right now we try to treat people not like human being, right? Doesn't matter if [they] come from South America...I'm saying that you know, you have

to really create the environment that people, they are welcome here...To be treated like less than animal, that's not right. If I were being treated the way it is right now, I would rather die in the ocean. I wouldn't come here this country, I'd rather be drowned! You know the boat here, that took me this country, I wouldn't live a life here...I know that a lot of people who come here, they willing to sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

At the Corner of “Xiong” and “Whitey”

After my interview with Thao Xiong, the Hmong refugee whose brother had successfully run for political office (Chapter 3), I was offered a chance to tour his town and see its Hmong and Lao population. I did not expect to encounter very many Southeast Asian refugees in a place that was so small and rural, and the population of SEAs was not large at all. As we drove through the town, Thao commented that many younger SEAs chose to move out to cities like Charlotte and Raleigh in search of better opportunities. However, there were unmistakable markers of Southeast Asian life that Thao pointed out during our trek.

We passed by a small Lao temple before making our way over to a little neighborhood tucked into a side street that was filled with older-looking houses. I saw a few older Southeast Asian men burning trash outside of their homes. Thao explained that he and some of his cousins had grown up in these houses decades ago, and that the neighborhood had originally been erected for Hmong families. At one point, we passed by a patch of land covered in dirt and mulch and Thao fondly recalled, “We used to play volleyball there, me and my cousins.” Thao remarked that the area was now home to more Lao families than Hmong. As the waves of refugee resettlement shifted and fewer Hmong arrived in his town, Lao folks replaced them. Jeremy, a Lao interviewee (Chapter 3), noted that he was raised in this very neighborhood. Once we came to the end of the street, we turned around and exited back onto to the town’s main road, proceeding with our tour.

One of the last stops we made was at another secluded, tucked-away area where some of Thao's relatives lived on a large plot of grassy land. About a half-dozen houses were scattered and the plot was spacious enough that each household could keep chicken coups, big gardens, and fruit trees on their property. The Xiong family's homes could not be spotted easily; Thao and I had to slowly venture down a narrow gravel path from the main road before making it to the houses. "Years ago, the fire department wanted to name this road," Thao said, referencing the gravel-strewn side street. "They needed to know where to go in case an emergency, you know? My family used their last name."

As Thao unfolded these memories, his truck slowly came upon the Xiong properties as well as another piece of land that was adjacent to the Xiong family's field. Thao started to tell me about the neighbor and gestured towards their house. He said, "This guy, White guy, didn't like my family. He had problem with them, so you know what he named his street?"

Thao halted his truck as we approached a street sign bearing the names of both the Xiong's street and the neighbor's. I leaned my head out of the truck to peer at the sign names and just as they came into view, Thao barked out in a tone that was half-amused and half-bitter, "Whitey!"

We paused at the street sign; a single metal pole bearing the names of two families who were seemingly worlds apart. For a while, we just looked at the acres of land before us and then Thao said, "We had problems with the chickens." Eyeing the houses, I could see chickens pecking and bobbing behind fences and in coups. A few—perhaps ones that had escaped from the fences—roamed freely on the property. Thao explained that the neighbor would let his dogs loose on the Xiongs' property, killing the

chickens and destroying gardens. Eventually, the Xiongs came up with a solution to the problem. One day when the neighbor had let his dogs run onto their land, members of the Xiong family took out their guns and shot them. After that, the issue ceased.

I relay Thao's story of the chicken fight at the corner of Xiong and Whitey because in a way, it represents the quiet neglect that has shaped the lives of many SEAs in North Carolina. The SEAs whom I interviewed had small community networks to draw on. Montagnards had a refugee agency in Guilford County; young leaders like Taylor, Lan, and Sua were developing associations for co-ethnics to coalesce; Mecklenburg County houses a Southeast Asian grassroots organization that became a home for people like Sydney, Nhung, and Andi. However, outside of these spaces, SEAs found themselves with little to no support or acknowledgment of the many complex issues they endured. Mainstream society—politicians, media, educators—seemed uninterested in recognizing SEAs' distinct experiences, and respondents often spoke of wrestling with their problems without outside assistance. The Xiong family's dispute with their neighbor parallels these trends: living on a secluded plot of land that was hidden from plain sight, they relied on their own initiative to settle conflicts.

Participants often attempted to resolve their own struggles and ordeals because they sensed that no one was interested in helping them. In Chapter 1, I explored the ways in which SEAs grapple with intergenerational trauma resulting from resettlement and their communities' ties to the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Much of the scholarship on SEAA trauma is psychological and documents how refugees' encounters with violence affect later experiences with anxiety, PTSD, and other mental illnesses (Das, Dubus, and Silka 2013; Gordon 2011; Kinzie 1989). Studies of trauma that are sociological, such as

those rooted in collective memory, often focus on unraveling how our remembrances and retellings of troubling events shape the trauma that groups subsequently endure (Alexander 2004; Eyerman 2004).

However, SEAs are a quietly neglected group whose suffering has been eschewed in favor of stories hailing Americans' heroism during and post-wartime. As such, SEAA trauma is not just grounded in our memories of the Vietnam and Secret Wars. Rather, it is rooted in how the U.S. government, military, and media deliberately exercised racial ignorance (Mueller 2020) to forget the catastrophic consequences of these periods, Americans' responsibility in engendering refugees' pain, and the continued impacts these issues have had on younger generations. Given the relationship of trauma to racial ignorance, I conceptualized interviewees' trauma as a "racialized emotion" (Bonilla-Silva 2019) and discussed how SEAs collectively experienced distress due to (1) the abuse, maltreatment, and dysfunction that arose in their communities because of untreated postwar mental illness, and (2) the absence of narratives that might help them process these issues.

I also noted that a small group of SEAs such as Lan, Chan, and Sydney were attempting to heal their communities' trauma by sharing knowledge about their ethnic groups' histories and the oppression they faced by the American government and military. By disseminating these stories, SEAs were starting to find ways of naming the pain they had endured, orienting themselves to their communities' trauma, and finding ways to move beyond it. These efforts were largely contained within refugee spaces with few external resources or individuals (aside from people like Ivan) offering to shed light on SEAs' challenges.

Trauma was not the only issue that resulted from the institutionalized erasure of SEAs' histories. In Chapter 2, I drew connections between the U.S.'s desire to rewrite its reputation following the Vietnam and Secret Wars and the conflation of SEAs with voluntarily-immigrated East Asian ethnic groups. For instance, the "good refugee" trope (Espiritu 2013), a characterization of Southeast Asian refugees as victims of Communism who were saved by the U.S. and afforded the American Dream, is based on the model minority stereotype (Lee and Zhou 2015; Wu 2002). This stereotype is linked to the perceived socioeconomic success of affluent East Asian American groups (although there is vast variation within each ethnic group) who have become the face of Asian American identity in mainstream culture (Lee 2019).

Partly owing to their invisibility as Asian Americans, SEAs felt disconnected from this racial group. Respondents also distanced themselves from the idea of being Asian American because they faced certain struggles that were dissimilar from East Asian Americans (e.g., coping with the stress and trials of resettlement, experiencing poverty or lower levels of economic prosperity due to their statuses as refugees). As few people outside of their ethnic circles were able to differentiate SEAs from East Asian Americans, participants grew increasingly frustrated with being stereotyped as academically successful and well-to-do. They engaged in a process of "ethnoracialization" (Brown and Lee 2015) to exercise their agency and contest the idea that they were Asian American. Interviewees asserted SEAA-panethnic identities or made claims to their ethnic heritage before identifying as Asian American. Additionally, some respondents created SEAA-specific organizations in response to feeling excluded

from panethnic Asian American spaces which typically represented East Asian Americans.

Some interviewees publicly presented themselves as SEAs and tried to carve out spaces for their identities within larger social settings. They struggled to have these identities acknowledged by other racial groups, an experience that parallels the quiet neglect of SEAs and refusal to recognize their unique experiences. Since mainstream society does not have ways of acknowledging how or why SEAs are different from East Asian Americans, non-SEA individuals overlooked participants' usage of SEA-panethnic identities and their associated racial meanings.

Lastly, in Chapter 3 I discussed how the ignorance towards SEAs' post-resettlement issues broadly facilitated apathy towards their concerns about deportation. Compared to Latinx removals which receive frequent media airtime and are hypervisible (Chavez 2013), SEA deportation tends to be glossed over in mainstream culture. The discourse of silence framing SEA issues influenced respondents' views of deportations in their communities, facilitating a belief that the removals were a non-issue for refugees. Instead, both SEAs and service providers felt that deportations only impacted Latinxs. In the case that an SEA did receive removal orders, interviewees engaged in "moralizing regulation" (Andrews 2018) to disassociate themselves from deportees. They justified these removals as one-off punishments for indigents who—by virtue of their criminality and disloyalty to the U.S. legal system—deserved to be repatriated.

Such beliefs made it difficult for progressive SEAs and their allies to engage in activism that combatted deportations and spread awareness about punitive immigration policies. Lan recalled butting heads with Reverend Eban, a Montagnard pastor and elder

who staunchly agreed with the Trump administration's deportation of Southeast Asians as a fair and righteous measure. For people like Lan, anti-deportation work was already extremely difficult to do. Valerie, an ally to SEAA and Latinx organizations that fought back against detention and deportation, had pointed out that politicians and the media paid little attention to the plights of SEAs. Their activism became lonelier and even more challenging as fellow SEAs doubted and dismissed the legitimacy of their endeavors. As Lan put it, "It's hard to be the one that's trying to support community members going through [deportation]...For Southeast Asians, it's just not wanting to rock the boat on anything...always wanting to be the good refugee, the good immigrant."

The stories conveyed by my participants sit at the corner of Xiong and Whitey: they reveal a world in which SEAs—despite being our neighbors, co-workers, students, clients, and perhaps even our friends and loved ones—are little understood or appreciated. SEAs' historical struggles and contemporary realities have been erased. While refugees continue to face an uphill battle against racial ignorance, discrimination, deportations, and the death of their chickens, the U.S. government and military have erected memorials honoring Vietnam War veterans; the media spins stories of American courage in the fight against Communism (McMahon 2002); service providers fondly remember the work they did to save the "good refugees" (Espiritu 2013). Although they have been resettled in North Carolina, SEAs continue to metaphorically wade through the jungles, fighting a ceaseless war even as their American allies have long retreated to safe harbor.

While this reality seems bleak for SEAs, I would be remiss if I passed over the ways in which respondents confronted quiet neglect and gave voice to their experiences.

A few of these progressive practices have already been outlined in this conclusion. By coalescing with fellow SEAs, some interviewees found the once-inaccessible language they needed to share the traumas that had been ingrained within their communities.

Others were carefully carving out spaces for SEAs to make their identities, issues, and concerns known to broader audiences. With little funding or resources, individuals like H'Noel (the Montagnard social worker who works for a Guilford County resettlement agency) tried to provide refugees with assistance that they could not receive from any other local organization.

This work is challenging. SEAs commented on the lack of support they received from both within and outside of their own ethnic groups as they tried to make their experiences visible. As important as their efforts are, a missing piece of the struggle is an acknowledgment from the U.S. of its responsibility in catalyzing the challenges that SEAs continue to face. If institutions such as the government or military were able to hold themselves accountable, then perhaps policymakers would have to reconsider the ethics of deporting refugees whose resettlement was necessitated by American militarism, we could start to cultivate narratives and knowledge that would help SEAs navigate their trauma, or develop in-depth understandings of how Southeast Asian refugees are distinctive from voluntary Asian immigrants. With no guarantee of if or when the U.S. will ever accept its culpability, SEAs are quietly neglected and left to remedy their own problems. They fire their guns into a vast grassy expanse and a shot rings out—does anyone hear it?

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