Chapter IV

(Re)silience and Agency

There is no greater force than people who have nothing left but each other.

- Arundhati Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy*

In a world marked by widespread conflict and displacement, the global refugee crisis brings attention to a key aspect of refugee lives—their resilience, both as individuals and as members of a collective. This chapter, titled (Re)silience and Agency, uses Hannah Arendt's concept of Plurality to explore how refugees move beyond mere survival and continuously reclaim their agency through shared action and mutual support. The prefix (re) in (re)silience signals an ongoing process—a repeated effort to recover, adapt, and act in the face of recurring challenges. Resilience, in this sense, is not only a personal strength but also a political stance. It involves commitment to values such as freedom, dignity, and equality, made possible through collective human efforts. Arendt's idea of Plurality suggests that true human strength arises when diverse individuals come together, speak, and act in pursuit of common goals. Like metals that become stronger under repeated pressure, refugees build strength through collective action, resisting exclusion and asserting their presence in the public space. This chapter argues that such ongoing, shared resilience reshapes the refugee experience and affirms agency as a force for social justice.

Becoming stateless migrants or refugees often entails enduring profound social, psychological, and economic challenges. While examining these hardships, it is crucial to also recognise the resilience and resistance of the oppressed. Resistance emerges as a survival mechanism in unsafe environments, while resilience involves not only facing challenges but also healing and strengthening oneself for a better future. Although power structures often dominate marginalised groups, individuals can become resilient by

identifying with their communities and collectively resisting complete oppression. Papadopoulos in the research article titled "Collective resistance as a means to healing. A narrative participatory study with sexual minority refugee & asylum-seeking people" observes, "collective storytelling is also registered here as a context which provides a corrective experience of togetherness, which in itself transforms fearful subjectivities into agentic actors, able to challenge such dehumanising discourses and practices through collective action" (323). This chapter explores how unity among refugees serves as a powerful tool in reclaiming their agency and challenging oppressive systems.

War, oppression, economic instability, and ethnic conflicts have contributed to the hazardous conditions faced by refugees. Analysing the refugee crisis necessitates a critical examination of power dynamics and their role in spreading inequality. Joy Ann James, in the article "Hannah Arendt's Theory of Power as Communication," highlights Arendt's perspective on political power, stating that "political power is shared power, collective action by members of a political community with an understanding of power as communication not as coercion. Arendt argues that traditional political philosophy misrepresents power as ruling and confuses power with domination" (2). Drawing on Arendt's framework, this chapter contends that refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced individuals embody a form of resilience and agency that challenges intimidating structures of power. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the misuse of power as a pivotal factor intensifying the refugee crisis, underscoring the need for just and communicative approaches to governance and societal transformation.

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy elaborates on Arendt's views on political power, stating that "Arendt maintains that the legitimacy of power is derived from the initial getting together of people, that is, from the original pact of association that establishes a political community, and is reaffirmed whenever individuals act in concert

through the medium of speech and persuasion" (d'Entrèves, sec. 4.6). This perspective highlights the constructive potential of power when rooted in collective action and mutual understanding. 'Plurality' is a political term used by Arendt in her works to convey the idea that all humans are equal, despite the social differences attached to them. The concept not only emphasises the importance of advocating for equality but also argues that equality can only be achieved in plurality. Arendt asserts that any action without an audience is meaningless, and justice can only be realised in solidarity. She highlights the necessity of critics and non-supporters as essential agents in this process. Craig Calhoun, from the University of North Carolina, in the article titled "Plurality, Promises, and Public Spaces," notes, "Plurality is not a condition of private life or a product of quotidian personal tastes, in Arendt's view, but rather a potential that flowers in creative public achievements" (253). Drawing on Arendt's ideas and contemporary perspectives on plurality and agency, this chapter argues that resilient refugees, as a community, serve as metaphors of plurality, and that greater social good can be achieved through their solidarity.

The refugees, migrants, IDPs and asylum seekers understand that expressing anger could undermine their access to basic rights. However, they also recognise the limitations of their silence and that prolonged silence might cut them off their available necessities also. Their quiet endurance becomes a strategy, motivated by the need to preserve their remaining rights and ensure their survival. Sentle, in the research article titled "Human Rights and the Refugee Crisis" specifies the finding, "refugees frequently faced inadequate living conditions, limited access to essential services, and insufficient integration opportunities." (63). Protests or acts of resistance typically emerge only when the burden of oppression reaches an extreme point, threatening their lives. Until that moment, refugees persist in navigating their daily struggles. This ability to endure and remain resilient, as Arendt's pluralism suggests, demonstrates that refugees, when united

as a community, embody not a position of weakness but one of equal agency and potential within society.

Oppressed communities often demonstrate remarkable endurance, navigating barriers that limit access to resources and opportunities. In contexts marked by ethnic conflict, such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka, individuals face discrimination from birth, with their existence often questioned in societal and institutional structures. Alongside these challenges, they encounter significant obstacles to achieving basic needs such as education, economic stability, and security. Natasha Harding, in her article "Refugee Oppression in Media and Politics: Vicarious Trauma, Burnout, and Opportunities to Thrive in Refugee Advocates," highlights the prevalence of oppression within kyriarchal power structures like mainstream media, politics, and organised religion. Harding emphasises the importance of understanding the lived experiences of refugees to inform policy, amplify marginalised voices, and create a "more inclusive and compassionate society" (11). For these communities, solidarity and collective action are crucial in asserting their existence and driving change for the betterment of their social and economic conditions.

Refugees endure disproportionate hardships due to societal constructs that marginalise them, often working harder than others to maintain their existence while ensuring they are not blamed or accused unjustly. Their resilience manifests in their ability to tolerate punishment, even for mistakes they did not commit, while striving to protect future generations from similar suffering. However, this endurance should not be mistaken for passivity; refugees, despite facing constant oppression, lack the power or space to challenge their circumstances without risking further punishment. As Katrin Kremmel and Brunilda Pali note in "Refugee Protests and Political Agency," "While on the one hand Hannah Arendt has offered both her focus on the refugee as a central figure in political

theory and her focus on action as constituting political agency, we failed to find within an Arendtian framework of thinking answers to the question of how political agency is constituted by refugees' protests and actions" (270). Despite the focus on refugee suffering, existing research often overlooks how their resilience, exercised through solidarity and collective action, can be a potent political act.

The resilience of the oppressed is often misinterpreted as a lack of reaction or a fearful submission to injustice. David Owen in the article titled "Refugees and Responsibilities of Justice" specifies, "acknowledgment of refugee agency raises questions not only concerning the responsibilities of global political society to refugees, centrally but not exclusively as an international community of states, but also of the role of refugee choices and refugee voice in the global governance of refuge and asylum" (25). It is often overlooked that those who face oppression encounter continuous obstacles in their pursuit of justice. Struggling with social and economic instability, they fight daily for survival within a society that marginalises them. When their very existence is at stake, they may lack the means, resources, or legal empowerment to demand equality and justice within an environment that dehumanises them. The dominant society often ensures that even their most basic needs are withheld, preventing them from finding the time or energy to advocate for the rights they deserve as human beings.

Subsequently, those in positions of power often neglect the suffering of the oppressed, even as large numbers of them die due to the discrimination embedded in society. In the face of such life-and-death conditions, the resilience of asylum seekers and refugees is not born from fear but from courage. In an interview with *The Guardian* on October 29, 2024, actor Sangaré, a Cannes Film Festival Best Actor winner, highlights the constant fear refugees endure, "When you're without papers you're always scared, always stressed. It's impossible to walk freely in the streets or chase your dreams" (Kassam 2). It

is this resilience that sustains them, allowing them to endure immense suppression. Resilience becomes the driving force that helps refugees remain hopeful, enabling them to pursue their dreams despite the societal fears that surround them.

It is crucial for writers and researchers to address the refugee crisis as a broader political issue rather than reducing it to individual struggles. Mikkel Flohr, in his article "Beyond the Nation State," highlights Arendt's broader perspective on the refugee crisis, "Hannah Arendt's essay shows that the situation of the Jewish refugees was not just a collection of individual accidents or personal tragedies, but a systematic political phenomenon produced by the international system of nation states" (Flohr 12). When displaced, migrants, and refugees become an oppressed community, they often lack agency, as they are not represented within any political framework. They do not possess the power or authority to advocate for their rights or highlight the injustices they face both in their host societies and in their countries of origin. However, refugees do find ways to organise themselves as an agency, resisting their difficult circumstances to protect their dignity and rights. Rather than engaging in direct confrontation, they often adapt strategically, focusing on survival within their conditions. It is this resilience that later empowers them to reclaim their denied rights. Aware that their situation may not improve quickly, migrants adopt long-term strategies, understanding that their perseverance is essential for eventual success.

Arendt frames the refugee crisis not merely as a humanitarian issue but as a conflict rooted in political power struggles, particularly those related to identity crises. As Tömmel explains, "By distinguishing action (praxis) from fabrication (poiesis), by linking it to freedom and plurality, and by showing its connection to speech and remembrance, Arendt is able to articulate a conception of politics in which questions of meaning and identity can be addressed in a fresh and original manner" (Tömmel). Arendt underscores

that refugees can demonstrate resilience and work toward a better future by functioning as a collective community united by the goal of freedom. A crucial aspect of this resilience is the strength found in collective action, where the solidarity of the refugee group proves more powerful than individual struggles.

The representation and recognition of refugees in public discourse can significantly affect their lives. Negative portrayals by dominant groups contribute to their stigmatisation and marginalisation. Every so often, the refugees' experiences are obscured by political agendas that serve the interests of those in power. However, refugees demonstrate resilience in challenging these narratives, slowly reshaping societal discourse through patience, tolerance, and solidarity. Arendt highlights the role of plurality in promoting freedom, asserting that equality is not inherent but created through collective action. She argues, "We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights. Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organisation, because man can build, act in and change a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals" (301). Arendt's emphasis on plurality reassures refugees that they are equal members of society and that they have a right to demand justice.

Refugees endure immense challenges, resisting entrenched oppression and striving to reclaim agency. This resistance often leads to risks, including persecution, yet underscores their courage and inspires others globally. Amidst alienation, refugees persist in creating a sense of belonging, preserving their cultural identity while adapting to new environments. As Stephanie Eleanor Berry and Isilay Taban argue, refugees often resist assimilation, aligning with Arendt's concept of equality through cultural acknowledgment. "As minority-refugees … they are more likely to comply with integration policies than assimilation policies" (217). By maintaining their identity and navigating complexities

with resilience, refugees balance cultural preservation and coexistence, demonstrating their determination to regain agency and dignity.

Further, refugees, despite facing discrimination, demonstrate resilience by preserving their cultural identity while adapting to new environments. Kari Burnett, in "Feeling Like an Outsider," aligns with Arendt's view, emphasising that refugees can take pride in their marginalised identity while shaping a new one for future generations. Burnett observes, "As identity is constructed of a plurality of elements, individuals have to choose which aspect of their identity to emphasise in different situations" (5). By maintaining their cultural practices and respecting the host culture, refugees navigate the complexities of displacement with thoughtfulness and determination, turning their differences into a means of survival and self-expression.

In *How Dare the Sun Rise,* Sandra Uwiringiyimana highlights the resilience of refugees through their pursuit of education as a means of equality and community upliftment. "Arendt specifies that education plays a decisive role in the sense of conserving the world, as it is a question of introducing to the youth the set of rational, scientific, political, historical, linguistic, social and economic structures that comprise the world they live in" (César 4). The memoir demonstrates how refugees recognise the importance of education for gaining social capital and securing a place in society. "Princesse got a scholarship for college in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. She also got a job at a government minister's office, which was rare for an undocumented immigrant, but she had impressed her employers at the interview" (Uwiringiyimana 77). For refugees, education is not merely a personal achievement but a task of resilience, requiring immense strength to overcome barriers, and when approached with pluralism, it can politically empower entire communities.

Refugees often face additional layers of discrimination upon resettling in other countries, particularly related to race and origin. In the United States, racial discrimination compounds the challenges faced by immigrants, with some groups perceiving them as unwelcome. As detailed in a *Los Angeles Times* article on September 21, 2023, Tyrone Beason writes, "Those from Africa or the Caribbean experience a double burden of discrimination in the U.S., both as immigrants and as Black residents in a country with a long history of racism, according to the first-of-its-kind survey" (Beason 4). Sandra Uwiringiyimana reflects on this dual oppression in her memoir, noting her initial difficulty in grasping the intensity of racial dynamics in America, "I didn't understand the difference between black and white. Growing up in Congo, being black was not an issue for me. My skin color was something I never thought about" (Uwiringiyimana 110). Adapting to such new forms of oppression requires resilience, as refugees navigate these challenges collectively to promote inclusivity and secure equal rights.

Uwiringiyimana embraces her cultural identity while critically addressing its flaws. She openly condemns harmful practices, stating, "It was part of an unfortunate culture, mainly in the villages, in which young men would kidnap a girl, rape her, and then marry her" (33). Her approach reflects a clear awareness of what to uphold and what to challenge within her traditions. As a migrant who later became a refugee and eventually a U.S. citizen, Uwiringiyimana navigated multiple cultures, learning to preserve her heritage while adapting to new environments. Timofei Gerber, in the article "Hannah Arendt: Culture as Care and Resistance" (*Philosophy Monthly*, March 2023), notes that culture, according to Arendt, encompasses not just artifacts but also "words and deeds" worth preserving as part of our shared experience. Following this perspective, Uwiringiyimana consciously safeguards the positive aspects of her culture while striving to eliminate its harmful elements and by doing this, she is able to strengthen the solidarity among refugees

by identifying them as one single community and also include non- refugee citizens in the collecting experience of seeking justice

The refugees adapt socially and psychologically to endure their lives of trauma and hardship. Although they are unfamiliar with formal concepts of coping with trauma, they intuitively find ways to support each other as a family. Uwiringiyimana describes the aftermath of the genocide, "Mom cried all the time. Everyone did. We would be sitting around, in our usual zoned-out state, and someone would suddenly cry. No one would question the reason for the tears. It was just part of our new life" (Uwiringiyimana 68). Having survived the genocide together, the family acts as an emotional support system, offering understanding and quiet acceptance. As Papero notes, "Within the family system, the balance reflects the expectations family members have for the behavior of one another" (12). In their case, there are no expectations or demands; they allow each other to grieve freely. Through this mutual understanding and silence, the family navigates their trauma together, demonstrating resilience in the face of immense suffering.

Refugees show resilience in facing challenges while maintaining their self-respect. There are often biased perceptions about refugees, with others assuming they are entirely dependent and willing to accept anything offered. Uwiringiyimana demonstrates resilience balanced with self-respect in how she approaches help from others. She writes, "Yes, we were refugees, but it didn't mean we had no fashion sense. Back home in Congo, our clothes were tailored, and they fit beautifully. People in America seemed to assume that we were coming from an undeveloped land where we had no decent clothes. But we knew style" (Uwiringiyimana 91). By choosing clothes that reflect their taste, Uwiringiyimana and her sister assert their dignity, countering stereotypes about refugees. Her memoir highlights her homeland's rich culture and challenges prejudiced views, inspiring other refugees to assert respect through resilience and encouraging readers to unlearn biases.

Writing the memoir itself becomes an act of resilience, nurturing empathy and solidarity with refugees.

Uwiringiyimana and her family display remarkable resilience, maintaining hope and faith despite the immense losses they have suffered. She writes, "We wanted to find a church we loved. And then we found the New Hope Church, and our prayers were answered" (Uwiringiyimana 98). In their new environment, the family seeks something to anchor them, relying on their faith as a source of strength. Their search for a church similar to the one back home reflects their deep connection to their roots, no matter where they settle. By uniting as a family and community, they embrace Arendt's concept of collective resilience, finding solidarity in a church that offers equality and support amidst diversity.

Another hurdle Uwiringiyimana and her family face in America is the language barrier. As Alrawashdeh notes, "Refugees pass through hard circumstances after and before refuge since they were taught by different educational systems and curricula in their homelands; some have different native languages, and some learned different foreign languages in schools" (1). This barrier limits their ability to communicate and form relationships. However, they manage to build connections with an open heart, even without fluent conversation. Friendly church groups help them feel welcome and at home. Uwiringiyimana works hard to learn English, which allows her not only to communicate but also to share the story of her tribe's oppression with a wider audience.

Uwiringiyimana demonstrates resilience in her pursuit of education, valuing learning despite the challenges of adapting to an unfamiliar system in America. Reflecting on her experience, she writes, "I was supposed to be in eighth grade … But in America, I got placed in sixth grade. I had worked so hard on my education, and this felt like a

setback. I knew I was being demoted because I didn't speak English, but this made me angry" (Uwiringiyimana 94). Her frustration arises not from fear of coping with the curriculum but from the injustice of being underestimated. Confident in her ability to succeed, Uwiringiyimana channels her anger into determination, ready to work harder than her peers to excel. She views education as a pathway to improve not only her own life but also the lives of her refugee community, showcasing resilience as both a personal and collective commitment.

During her teenage years, Uwiringiyimana faces the painful challenge of discrimination based on her appearance. She endures bullying that makes her feel insecure about her hair and overall looks. "The kids made me cry, and I could not make my hair grow fast enough to stop the insults. I hated to step outside the front door. To shield myself from the jeers, I decided I needed a wig" (Uwiringiyimana 102). Coming from a place where everyone looked alike, this experience is especially difficult. Her family, however, provides constant reassurance, with her father reminding her, "Beauty is in your head, not on your body" (Uwiringiyimana 103). Their support, along with encouragement from friends, helps her regain confidence. Over time, Uwiringiyimana embraces her natural hair and takes pride in her identity. She transforms into a confident and inspiring individual, delivering speeches that resonate with her resilience, while finding comfort in the kindness of those who genuinely support her:

> I found a few kindred spirits in the church youth group. The kids there didn't want to kill me—how novel! They actually wanted to get to know me. I became friends with a girl named Mabel, a white girl who was intelligent and tried valiantly to speak with me, even though I still knew little English. She worked with me, helping to teach me some words. I began to think maybe America wasn't so bad. Maybe there was hope. (103).

The care and support from a few individuals help the refugees manage the insecurities they encounter in their new environment. Friendships formed in their new community ease the emotional difficulty of leaving their homeland and offer strength to navigate challenges. For the family, being treated with basic respect is vital to rebuilding their confidence and addressing obstacles. When setbacks occur, the solidarity of supportive individuals enables them to recover and persevere. Another significant act of resilience Uwiringiyimana undertakes is attending therapy sessions in college. Although sharing personal trauma with a therapist is not part of her cultural norms, she sees it as a necessary step to address her past and move forward. With encouragement from her American friends, she begins therapy and gradually opens up, despite initial difficulties. This decision shows her willingness to confront her trauma and take steps toward healing. She also uses social media to connect with other refugees who experienced the genocide, creating a network of individuals who share similar struggles. Her decision to revisit refugee camps and observe the ongoing challenges faced by others marks a shift from focusing solely on her personal resilience to supporting her community, highlighting her efforts to address both individual and collective challenges.

Uwiringiyimana undergoes a significant transformation when she becomes a speaker, sharing the struggles of countless voiceless migrants, refugees, and displaced individuals. Her resilience is further evident when she chooses to write about her people's experiences despite the personal risks involved. While writing holds its power, she finds speaking even more impactful, as it allows her to witness the immediate reactions of her audience, who often respond with empathy and outrage. Adam Saltsman, in his article "Storytelling in Research with Refugees," notes that "storytelling is central to refugees' struggle for self-representation and their claims for belonging and social justice" (2527). Uwiringiyimana recognises this power and uses her storytelling as an act of resilience to

amplify the voices of her community. She reflects, “I could see that my words stunned people. They looked angry, too, as they learned what we had endured. It made me feel angry as well. I wish I could have told the congregation that my experience was unique, an isolated event. But it wasn’t. Millions of people have been uprooted and displaced by war” (Uwiringiyimana 135).

The audience’s response to her speech strengthens her resolve to advocate for her community’s rights. Initially uncertain whether others would believe the refugees’ stories, she discovers that many are willing to stand for justice, giving her a renewed purpose to face further challenges. Her public speaking not only supports her community but also broadens the circle of solidarity, drawing in individuals who stand for humanity and justice. Uwiringiyimana commits to sharing her story openly, undeterred by the efforts of oppressors to silence her. Her speeches also give hope for other refugees, encouraging them to seek the help they need, “I said, That is my story. I will tell it to anyone who will listen. Not because it is easy. Every time I tell it, I am back in Gatumba, a ten-year-old burning in a tent. But as long as the criminal who admitted to leading that massacre continues to walk freely in the streets of Burundi, I have no choice” (Uwiringiyimana 172).

Uwiringiyimana acknowledges that revisiting the painful memory of losing her little sister in the genocide and sharing this story with the world was not an easy act. However, she chooses to do so as a resilient advocate, determined to stand up for justice for her people. Through her speech, she becomes a powerful figure, not only recounting her personal loss but also empowering others. She unites a diverse community of resilience, encouraging refugees to recognise their worth and claim their rights. Applying Hannah Arendt’s concept of identity and resilience, Uwiringiyimana’s narrative exemplifies how personal and collective identities intersect with the political realm.

Arendt posits that identity becomes political when it grants visibility within the "world of appearance," creating a space where marginalised voices can challenge injustices and assert their presence. Uwiringiyimana's memoir operates within this framework, as her recounting of her tribe's struggles and her critical examination of cultural practices elevate the Banyamulenge's plight to a global stage. By documenting both resilience and resistance, she not only preserves her heritage but also reclaims her community's narrative, fulfilling Arendt's vision of identity as an active, visible engagement with the world that demands justice and recognition.

Zoya Phan's *Little Daughter* is a memoir that reflects the resilience of refugees fleeing from home, often facing the constant threat of violence. Zoya inherits resilience from her community, which has endured years of discrimination in Myanmar. The memoir is not solely focused on the refugee experience; Phan also highlights the life her family once had, offering insights into the Karen community's cultural practices and lifestyle. This helps readers understand what they lost amidst the ethnic conflict. In her narrative, Phan demonstrates resilience by advocating for her people's freedom and their right to a homeland. Despite facing death and rape threats, she remains steadfast in sharing her story, illustrating her commitment to her community's struggles.

In contrast to Uwiringiyimana, resilience is not something Phan learns through struggle; it is a trait she inherits from her mother. From a young age, Phan is shaped by her mother's strength, which empowers her to speak up for herself and endure the oppression faced by their community in Myanmar:

> From my earliest memories my mother worked in the information department of the Karen resistance. She had to use an old manual typewriter as there were no computers. With my father away so much, she had no one to help look after the

> children. I'd go with my brothers and sister to her bamboo-walled office, and we'd play quietly whilst she banged away on that ancient typewriter. (20)

Phan's mother, who has served as a soldier while caring for her children in her husband's absence, combines both roles of soldier and mother. She raises her children to be ready for any challenge, knowing they could become refugees at any moment. By passing on her resilience, she ensures they are equipped to handle future hardships. She also emphasises the importance of staying united as a family and maintaining good relationships with others, encouraging them to work together in a spirit of cooperation. Through her example at home, Phan's mother teaches her children to apply these values in the broader community.

Phan demonstrates resilience in her writing by recounting the history of her ancestors' lives in Burma. She highlights the unjust hatred directed at them over many years, often based on unfounded reasons. She also reveals how many have labelled them as 'traitors' without understanding the historical context behind their actions:

> Over the centuries the different ethnic groups in Burma expanded, and more people settled in the country. As they did, they came into conflict with each other. The Karen people were subjugated and persecuted by the ethnic Burman and Mon groups. When the British colonized Burma the Karen were treated more equally, and many Karen considered that life was better under British rule. (28)

Phan openly recounts the history of the Karen community, expressing their belief that life was better under British rule. She does not soften her words but speaks the harsh truth, pointing out how her fellow countrymen inflicted more suffering on them than the British colonisers did. This reflection on the community's past is central to understanding their resilience and the formation of their resistance. The term 'Resistance' is reflected in

the name of the association of Karen soldiers who fought for the minority group in Myanmar. The Karen people did not join the force out of obligation but out of necessity, fully aware that their survival depended on their ability to fight for their rights:

> Freedom's struggle was led by the Karen resistance movement, the Karen National Union (KNU). The Karen resistance gave their traditional lands the name of Kaw Thoo Lei – Land of No Evil. It was to this Land of No Evil, and the wider resistance struggle, that so many were drawn – my parents among them. I was born in Manerplaw, the headquarters of the resistance – and in our language Manerplaw means 'Victory Field'" (29).

Phan connects herself to her land and the readers by incorporating Karen words into her writing, allowing a deeper connection to her community's identity. The resistance fighters also give their land a name, working with the hope that one day it will become a place of peace and freedom from discrimination. As noted by Hein, "So far, resistance forces have had no trouble recruiting to replace losses and expand their strength, while the Sit-Tat is experiencing defections and recruitment difficulties" (Hein and Myers). This sense of hope is evident in the resistance fighters, who persist in their struggle while functioning in plurality, demonstrating remarkable resilience.

The military in Myanmar employs calculated measures to suppress minority groups, undermining their ability to resist and survive. Their actions target communities like the Karen with deliberate tactics, dismantling societal structures and eroding access to basic necessities. The Karen National Union (KNU), a central resistance group, struggles against these efforts, with their morale often tested by the overwhelming force of the regime. Phan's father, a key figure in the resistance, underscores the critical role of unity, observing, "The resistance – Christian, Buddhist and animist – has to be united, for only in

unity can there be victory" (Phan 141). Yet, the ruling regime intensifies divisions and marginalisation, strategically weakening the Karen by obstructing education, access to resources, and safety. These calculated pressures leave many with no option but to leave their homeland.

Throughout her memoir, Phan emphasises the deep connection the Karen people have with nature, animals, and birds. By sharing her personal attachment to nature, she illustrates how the land itself does not discriminate; rather, it is humans who disrupt the inherent equality in the country. She recalls, "Growing up with an elephant in the village was completely normal for us. As children we didn't even call her 'the elephant' – everyone called her Mo Ghay Bay" (Phan 44). Through these reflections on her childhood, Phan highlights how their peaceful, harmless way of life was forever altered. She also underscores that it was not only humans who functioned in plurality, but nature in Myanmar itself, resiliently embodying peace and equality.

Phan creates a space of Heterotopia by detailing the unique ceremonies that form an integral part of Karen culture. These rituals, which are central to the community's identity, are contrasted against the prejudices and negative discourses created by the oppressors. Through her careful narration of these ceremonies and the ordinary life of her people in Myanmar, Phan challenges these stereotypes. By showcasing the richness of their traditions, she works to dismantle the biased narratives that have been constructed about the Karen community. In doing so, she highlights the deep cultural value and strength of her people, presenting an alternative view to the oppressive and reductive portrayals they have faced:

> Such communal activities were the social glue that held the village together. Each year in August, the whole village would come together for the most important

> event in the Karen calendar, Lah Ku Gee Su – 'the month of wrist tying'. The wrist-tying ceremony takes place alongside Pwaw Htawt Ker Pa – 'the ceremony of touching the pig'. This was a bittersweet time for our family. On the one hand, we enjoyed the way in which these ceremonies reaffirmed our Karen culture and identity. But on the other, they reminded my parents of how totally cut off we were from their home village and their extended family. (51)

Phan's narration highlights that the Karen people engage in ceremonies and practices that bring them joy without harming others. Their strong connection to their cultural traditions reflects their resilience as a group. This shared bond helps unite them in both celebratory and difficult times, contributing to their ability to withstand challenges as a community.

> Phan shares how the Karen community adapted their traditional ceremonies to changing circumstances, highlighting the significance of these practices in preserving cultural identity. Despite their statelessness, Phan proudly identifies as a Karen woman, reflecting on the meaningful ceremonies of her childhood. As Elmé Vivier notes in the article "Construction of Identity in the Philosophy of Hannah Arendt," Arendt argues that human identity emerges through public action and speech (83). Phan's act of narrating her culture is an expression of resilience and contributes to the pursuit of social justice, "…we couldn't afford a pig, so we performed our Aw Gheh ceremony with a turkey instead" (54).

The family faces challenges in performing a ceremony that connects them to their ancestors, particularly due to their financial constraints, which force them to substitute the pig with a turkey. Despite these difficulties, they continue with the ceremony, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness. This resilience, evident from Phan's childhood, shapes her into a determined advocate for her people, unafraid of the risks she may face.

Phan also provides detailed descriptions of the Karen food habits, expressing pride in her culture as she shares it with the world in a global language. She recalls, "At dusk he would take us locust-hunting … In the morning we'd eat them as a deep-fried snack – crunchy and sweet and bursting with fat. At night … we'd go looking for frogs. …" (58). Through such vivid memories, Phan underscores the significance of these traditions in her cultural identity. Phan shares the unique food habits of the Karen people without hesitation, presenting them as part of their identity. In doing so, she challenges negative stereotypes and shifts the focus from the oppression they face to the cultural richness of their practices. As Freeman defines it, "Food oppression is facially neutral food-related law, policy, or government practice that creates health disparities along race, gender, and class lines" (3054). Through her resilient portrayal of her people's food culture, Phan confronts the stigma of food oppression, emphasising pride in her heritage while critiquing the unjust treatment they endure.

The resilience of the Karen people does not come from ease or comfort. They remain resilient despite near-death experiences and living without a place to call home. Even after witnessing the destruction of everything they once had, they continue to hold onto hope. Phan recalls seeing their homeland burn, "Once it was dark, we could see the sky on the far side of Teak Mountain lit up an unearthly, fiery orange, and we knew that Manerplaw was burning… Clouds of smoke coloured an angry red by the flames billowed skywards. It was heartbreaking" (Phan 151). They see their homes and communities destroyed, but they still choose to face life with hope.

The Karen people know the forest well and use it to survive. Phan recalls, "We thread our way through the trees, searching for a spot where we can rest" (153). The Bamboo people hide and protect themselves in the forest. During their escape, the Karen are killed if caught by the oppressors. "For two weeks we stayed in this place-with-no-

name, living like ghosts in the forest. Each day we ate the rice, salt and fish paste that we had carried with us. It was never enough, as my mother was rationing our food, and we were always hungry. But at least we were alive and there was something in our bellies." (Phan 154). Phan's mother, drawing on her experience as a soldier, rationed food to sustain her children in the forest. Her focus is on survival, with her thoughts cantered on keeping her children alive. She also applies her resourcefulness to help others, particularly young mothers. Recognising that infants are at greater risk of being caught and killed, she advises the mothers to keep their babies quiet by breastfeeding them constantly, as "a baby's cries might attract the enemy" (Phan 155). Phan's mother uses her soldier skills to guide the mothers in protecting their children. The Karen people, characterised by resilience, function as a collective, understanding that individualism would have led to their community's destruction.

The Karen people come to terms with the devastating loss of their homeland and the dreams tied to it. Phan reflects, "As I lay there staring up at the starlit heavens, I wondered how such a beautiful land could be full of so much evil … All of our hopes and our dreams and our visions of the future seemed lost … Manerplaw lay in ruins, and we were running for our lives" (Phan 161). The destruction of Manerplaw not only dismantles their sense of security but also forces them to confront an uncertain future. This acknowledgment of loss prompts a shift in priorities, as survival becomes paramount. The need to adapt—to leave behind their former lives and move forward—demonstrates a silent resilience. Phan's account highlights how the Karen navigate this precarious existence, enduring the immediate hardships while wrestling with the impossibility of returning to what once was. Their actions reflect the strength to persist in the face of profound upheaval.

Phan and her companions, upon finding refuge in a camp, navigate the harsh realities of displacement and misfortune. Despite the absence of strength to consistently uplift one another, they persist in enduring their circumstances. Phan reflects, “Lily Flower, Bwa Bwa and I did our best not to discuss the darkness that had engulfed our lives during the past few weeks … And if we ever did have to mention such sadness and tragedy and loss, we would often do so by trying to make light of it, making jokes to cheer each other up” (Phan 167). Their resilience is manifest in their shared silence, a collective choice to avoid dwelling on their profound losses. This deliberate evasion of despair reveals a subtle yet profound form of emotional support, where quiet solidarity becomes a mechanism for healing and fortitude.

Survival in the camp demands not only resilience but a willingness to adapt and seek aid when necessary. Phan notes, “After four weeks living in the forest we were pretty much out of rice, so we fitted that category. In order to get the rations we would have to register with the Karen Refugee Committee. Once we had done so we could collect a rice ration, and a little salt and fish paste” (Phan 170). Stripped of their previous stability, the refugees exemplify resilience by balancing self-respect with dependence on external support. Their ability to humble themselves and seek assistance reflects a nuanced understanding of survival, where dignity coexists with vulnerability.

The sense of confinement within the camp underscores the refugees’ predicament, where their freedom is curtailed and their identities as transitory individuals are forcibly altered. Phan recounts, “But the biggest drawback of the camp was that we were trapped. As non-official refugees we were told that we had no status in Thailand. Whilst the Thais would tolerate our presence inside the camp, there was to be no leaving it. This sense of being imprisoned just added to the feeling that here we had no future, and that our lives had come to a dead end” (Phan 171). Their enforced immobility, coupled with the absence

of recognised status, renders the camp a site of both physical and existential entrapment. Yet, their endurance within these confines exemplifies a courageous resilience:

> The refugees understand that the soldiers stationed in the camps are not there to protect them but to monitor their movements and prevent escapes into Thailand. Their safety depends on their own vigilance and courage to confront the dangers surrounding them. Phan observes, "The Thai soldiers had a guard post by the refugee camp's main gate, but when the enemy attacked they were nowhere to be found … In that time the enemy had burned down part of the camp and kidnapped people. My mother is convinced that the Thai soldiers had allowed the enemy in to attack us" (177).

This perceived betrayal intensifies the refugees' vulnerability, forcing them to rely on their own resourcefulness. The lack of protection underscores their precarious existence, where resilience means remaining constantly prepared for threats, even from those tasked with ensuring their safety. Phan and her family remain acutely aware of how they are perceived as a threat by those across the border. They remain vigilant, fully conscious of the prejudices that label refugees as sources of danger within Thailand. Despite enduring profound marginalisation, they exemplify resilience, choosing to embody love and humanity in a society steeped in hostility towards them.

Central to their perseverance is their recognition of education as a vital tool for resistance and empowerment. Phan and her family strategically navigate their circumstances, knowing when to exercise restraint and when to assert their rights. Much like Uwiringiyimana, Phan understands that education not only provides personal advancement but also equips her with the social and intellectual capital necessary to advocate for her community's struggles and aspirations:

> By June of that year a new secondary school had been built. It was situated in Section Five, which meant I would have to cross the river to reach it. Even so, I was determined to attend lessons. But the journey across the river was too difficult and dangerous, especially when using a bamboo raft in the rainy season. So, my mother proposed that a high school be built for our section of the camp. (183)

While the family endures a quiet process of resilience, they refuse to remain silent when it concerns the education of their children. Fully aware that education for the present generation is essential to liberate future generations from oppression, Phan's mother actively advocates for the establishment of a school and successfully secures it. The Phan family exemplifies a steadfast commitment to survival, demonstrating resilience that transcends individual experiences and evolves into what can be described as transgenerational resilience.

Phan's father demonstrates extraordinary foresight and courage as a resistance leader, risking his life to advocate for equality and justice for his people. His bold actions, such as traveling to Rangoon to confront the Generals directly and refusing to be intimidated, underscore his unwavering commitment. As Phan recounts, "He had gone to Rangoon to risk meeting the Generals face to face, and he had refused to be bullied or to back down. This was the first time we had heard things of this kind" (Phan 225). These stories of her father's defiance profoundly shape Phan, nurturing in her a resilience and bravery that empower her to endure immense suffering in her pursuit of justice for her people.

The Karen resistance groups, composed of young individuals acting as an army in times of war, bear the weight of responsibilities far beyond their years. These youth, alongside men, women, and children, face dire circumstances, often battling hunger and

witnessing profound loss. Vulnerable populations, particularly the elderly and the young, suffer the most, succumbing to the harsh realities of their environment. As Say Say reflects on his experiences, he acknowledges the pain but asserts, "I was glad to have seen such things, for only that way could I know the truth of what was happening" (Phan 226). This shows the profound resilience forged in the face of unimaginable adversity.

Even after enduring tormenting brutality and witnessing deaths, the young soldiers of the Karen resistance demonstrated unyielding resilience, continuing their fight with unwavering determination. They refused to yield to fear or intimidation from the opposing forces, embodying the spirit of true fighters driven by a shared vision of peace, liberty, and equality.

The resilience of the refugees extends far beyond moments of crisis; it is a sustained effort that spans years of hardship. Displacement, instability, and continuous migration became a way of life as they adapted to survive. Their endurance reflects not only the resilience of raising their voices for justice but also the quiet resilience of enduring and resisting through silence. Phan recalls, "My mother was taking it the hardest. The terror and trauma … had really taken its toll. During the day she worked feverishly … trying desperately to rebuild our lives. But during the night … she was sleepless and racked with fever" (236). This silent perseverance underscores the immense strength required to endure and rebuild amid relentless adversity.

Phan's life in Bangkok is fraught with danger, as her presence in the country is unauthorised. Despite these challenges, she endures significant hardships to pursue her education. Zsombor Peter, in a *Voice of America* article published on September 20, 2023, observes, "Thailand has never signed the United Nations' refugee convention and, until now, makes no legal distinction between asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, leaving

most in constant fear of being arrested and deported" (Peter). This underscores the precarious conditions Phan faces as an undocumented immigrant, "I have no legal papers or ID card to show to the police. So I have to hide, even as I go about my daily studies. Whenever I see the police I try to melt into the background … Bwa Bwa and I go from living in a camp with ghost refugees to being ghost citizens ourselves" (260). Phan's experiences exemplify the resilience required to navigate the risks of living and studying in such an uncertain environment.

Phan lives as a 'ghost' to pursue a good education, enduring constant fear of being caught and imprisoned as an unwanted refugee. Despite this, she navigates her fears and insecurities with remarkable bravery. Throughout her life, Phan longs for an opportunity to speak openly about the injustices her people endure. She is determined to challenge the oppressors by revealing the truths they seek to conceal. It is during her time in London that Phan finds the platform to voice the realities of life in Myanmar. She seizes the opportunity to speak with conviction, presenting evidence and refusing to be silenced by fear. As she reflects on this experience, she says:

> Things are completely different here, as opposed to how they had been at college in Bangkok. I can talk openly about the story of my life: fleeing my village; the refugee camps; the ongoing crisis and the life of those affected by it. I have even brought with me newspaper articles and reports about the crisis in Burma, and I am determined to talk to as many of the students as I can about it. (304)

Phan engages in the same act of rebellion as Uwiringiyimana in America, both seizing opportunities to speak out for voiceless refugees when given the freedom to do so. They recognise that their audience can empathise with their struggles. Phan recalls, "As I stopped speaking, the audience started to rise to their feet, and all of a sudden 3,500

delegates were giving me – the Karen girl from the jungle – a standing ovation. I had done it. I had spoken for five minutes freely from the heart" (328). This act of speaking for their community is a powerful form of resilience, where the speakers learn the significance of voicing the concerns of the oppressed. They also realise the support they can gain in their pursuit of justice. Through this experience, Phan overcomes her insecurities and begins to embrace her true identity.

Once refugees begin voicing their struggles, they find the courage to continue speaking out, regardless of the risks, including the potential loss of life. This act of speaking up also brings a sense of fulfilment from reaching out to others, which is meaningful in its own right. Phan shares, "I told my father that I had started working on this book. And I told him that with the proceeds I wanted to set up a charity in memory of my mother, to fulfil our dream of providing proper education for the Karen. My father was so pleased" (342). Phan reaches a point where she no longer fears the death of herself or her loved ones. Each life lost in the fight represents a step closer to freedom and justice, including the death of her father. She reflects, "Our father's death does not leave us weaker. It shows that we are strong. They killed our father because they are afraid of him and what he stood for. Our father did not live to see freedom for our people, but his dream lives on. The Karen, and all the people of Burma, will be free" (351).

Hannah Arendt's concept of plurality emphasises the unique individuality of human beings while also highlighting the interconnectedness of their collective experiences. In Little Daughter, Zoya Phan embodies plurality by sharing her personal narrative, deeply intertwined with the collective identity and struggles of the Karen community. Through her detailed recounting of cultural practices, communal resilience, and historical oppression, Phan illustrates how the Karen people function in plurality, maintaining their shared identity amidst external adversities. Her memoir becomes an act

of public speech and action, as described by Arendt, allowing her to assert her individuality while simultaneously advocating for her community's collective rights. Phan's reflections on ceremonies, traditions, and the Karen's resistance movement demonstrate how individual and communal actions amalgamate to preserve cultural identity, nurturing resilience and unity in the face of systemic injustice. This interplay between individual agency and communal solidarity aligns with Arendt's notion of plurality as central to human existence and political life.

The fiction *The Milk of Birds* explores the challenges faced by internally displaced women in the Darfur refugee camp. The novel highlights how tasks that might seem ordinary for most people become arduous for refugees, who, with limited options, must exert considerable effort to secure even their basic needs. The trauma these individuals have endured, both in their home regions and during their journey to the camps, contributes to the stoic nature of some refugees. Furthermore, there is an added burden placed on the youth, who often assume the role of caregivers within their families. For example, Nawra, a teenager in the novel, is tasked with caring for both her sick mother and herself while also carrying the burden of being pregnant as a result of sexual assault. "I carry my mother as I used to carry wounded animals from pasture, arms on one side, legs on the other, her body draped behind my neck and across my shoulders. She is not much heavier than a goat" (Whitman 8).

Nawra is responsible for carrying her mother when necessary, as her mother has lost the ability to walk due to a gunshot wound. In the midst of this, Nawra must demonstrate resilience to protect herself, her mother, and her unborn child, ensuring their survival. She embodies strength, performing the tasks required to keep them alive. Nawra represents one of the many oppressed women whose very existence is an act of resilience. In the novel, internally displaced women navigate their struggles through solidarity and

friendship. Through mutual care, enduring hardships, and uniting against the sexual assaults occurring in the camp, these women assert their agency and demonstrate power amid chaotic circumstances.

Nawra, as a resilient woman, channels not only her anger but also great kindness. She does not complain about her lack of material resources; instead, she focuses on giving what little she has to those she cares about. Her compassion for others surpasses her own needs, even during such dire times. “We talk of food for a moment. The ration is less now than in the winter months. Many grumble that hunger is the fault of the newcomers, but I do not say this. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fatted ox where there is hatred” (Whitman 66). Nawra ensures that the limited food rations are shared among all the displaced people in the camp, showing little concern for her own reduced portion due to the arrival of new refugees. She doesn’t complain about the scarcity of food but instead adapts to the difficult circumstances with quiet resilience. Her commitment to fairness and equality, coupled with her ability to spread kindness, empowers her as a woman and nurtures solidarity within the community. Nawra demonstrates that resilience, in its truest form, is not rooted in violence but in nonviolence and collective strength.

The narrative provides a detailed depiction of the hardships faced by internally displaced individuals, particularly the physical challenges arising from disease and inadequate sanitation in the camp. It highlights the spread of illnesses such as measles and the limited availability of medical interventions. Hassan, Zainab’s brother, describes the situation, “The khawaja said any child who does not have a card must go to the clinic. A van came from many miles with a special medicine to keep away the disease of the dots.” “Measles,” Adeeba clarifies. Hassan continues, “The khawaja said if we did not take the medicine, we would burn with fever and our eyes would scream in the light” (Whitman 72).

The narrative emphasises the harsh living conditions, including the use of poorly maintained latrines and the scarcity of basic necessities. Internally displaced individuals adapt to these challenges, making do with the limited resources available to them as they navigate the struggles of daily survival. The arduous task of collecting firewood highlights the persistent challenges faced by women in the camp, as they traverse long distances carrying heavy loads. Despite being acutely aware of the risks involved, they undertake this laborious journey to meet basic survival needs. The narrative observes, "There are no fine tombs here, just mounds of earth, and women picking their way between because it is the shortest path for those leaving the camp to search for firewood. 'A pregnant girl has one foot in the grave,' says a voice I recognize. Adeeba and I turn. Halima is parading with her usual companions, who nod" (Whitman 96).

Nawra's pregnancy intensifies these struggles, as she contends with physical frailty caused by inadequate nourishment and demanding labour. Her resilience, however, remains unwavering. The ever-present threat of sexual violence during these treks further underscores the severity of the women's plight and the harsh realities they endure within the camp. Nawra reflects on her mother's inability to support her during her pregnancy, perceiving her silence and grief as an additional burden rather than a source of guidance. Her mother remains consumed by mourning her losses and the trauma of her past, leaving Nawra to navigate her struggles alone:

> Nawra's thoughts reveal her disillusionment, "He who has a mother has no worries, my grandmother used to say. I no longer believe that. … Their wisdom belonged to the village… But the devils poisoned the wells. In this camp, we need another wisdom, about bugs and birth in the dark" (112).

The narrative juxtaposes the traditional wisdom of the village with the harsh realities of the camp, where such knowledge proves inadequate. It underscores the loss of generational support and the need for new forms of resilience to adapt to the camp's challenging conditions.

Nawra adjusts to the reality of being the sole caregiver for her sick mother, managing to survive through her resilience. Despite her mother's inability to help, Nawra finds strength in her silent presence, drawing hope from her family's proximity. Her mother's silence becomes a source of emotional support, enabling Nawra to persist through her struggles. After enduring a violent attack and countless hardships, Nawra develops a steadfast strength to face life without fear. She expresses this newfound resilience when she says, "I have a baby in my belly, K. C., but I do not want a picture. I am not afraid of birth, for I have seen it many times. Adeeba will be my midwife. She tells me she cannot do this, but I remind her that an honorable person's promise is a debt. She will not be alone, for all power and strength belong to God" (Whitman 120).

Nawra not only maintains her own strength but also continually reassures her friend Adeeba, placing complete trust in her. She believes in their bond more deeply than Adeeba could ever trust her. Reflecting on her past experiences, Nawra recalls, "I remember that terrible place of tents and fires and piles of stolen carpets and pots. None is born a slave, but any can be made one" (Whitman 127). The assaults, harassment, and tortures she has endured have shaped Nawra into a resilient woman, prepared to confront any future hardships with resolve.

Nawra faces immense resistance when she carries the child conceived through sexual violence. Accepting and loving the child, despite the circumstances of conception, is an excruciating challenge. The child, destined to grow up without a father, becomes a

symbol of her endurance. She reflects, "What does my son dream? Does he see what I have seen? Once I felt him within, I tried to turn my thoughts away from ugliness. . . . Muhammad raises his hand, his fingers waving like grass in the wind. You are right, my son, to push those memories away. You cannot carry eggs and iron in the same bag" (194).

Although aborting the child or even ending her own life might have seemed easier, Nawra chooses a path of extreme resilience. She decides to give birth to the child and love him unconditionally, as she did her brother Mohammed. In her teenage years, Nawra's decision reflects her strength as a refugee in a camp, and she embraces the child as a member of the collective resilience that binds her. Women in the camp, especially refugees, are treated as though they owe their existence to others, enduring a life of constant dependency. Stateless and without advocates, they suffer injustices that often go unnoticed, even when deaths occur in large numbers. In such an environment, standing up for themselves becomes an almost insurmountable challenge. A poignant moment captures this reality:

> My friend tells of the men who abused her while she was gathering wood. The old doctor asks about the camp clinic. Then she points at Zeinab, sitting beside me on the ground. 'Is that the child violated with you?' … Slowly, like the first wisp of smoke from a fire, Zeinab's hand rises above her head. A khawaja speaks. 'Let the record show the witness raised her hand, indicating yes,' the translator says. (Whitman 262)

Adeeba becomes the first to report sexual abuse to the authorities and seeks medical attention to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Despite cultural barriers and scepticism about justice for refugees, Adeeba's courage inspires other women to report their experiences. Together, they form a united front, resisting collectively before

the media to demand justice and prevent future violations. These women transform into a powerful force of resilience, challenging the very structures that once silenced them.

Adeeba chooses to break the everlasting silence. She bravely speaks out, both for herself and in support of Nawra, urging her to tell the story behind her pregnancy. As she says, "The committee will make a document. Then people who care about what is happening in Darfur will read your words" (Whitman 257). This act of defiance is not just an individual protest, but a collective one that challenges the silencing of women's voices. Adeeba's decision to speak out disrupts the prevailing narrative of victimhood, asserting that the truth of women's suffering deserves acknowledgment. This moment of courage embodies the power of sisterhood, as Nawra reflects, "Why does she call me 'sister'? It's like 'comrade.' Sisterhood Is Powerful" (Whitman 19). It is through solidarity that women in the camp can begin to dismantle the layers of fear and shame imposed upon them. In *The Milk of Birds*, Hannah Arendt's concept of plurality comes through in the shared resilience and mutual care among the women in the Darfur refugee camp. Despite their individual struggles, they find strength in solidarity, supporting one another through acts of kindness and shared responsibility. Nawra's quiet determination and fairness reflect how, even in the harshest conditions, the collective spirit can help individuals endure and assert their humanity.

Habiburahman's *First, They Erased Our Name* is a memoir recounting his journey of struggle as a Rohingya seeking a place to call home. Being born into the Rohingya tribe entails daily battles for survival, as they are targeted and marginalised. The United Nations describes the Rohingya as "the most persecuted minority in the world" (USA for UNHCR, August 22, 2024). This reality reflects Habiburahman's transgenerational resilience. Despite facing countless struggles for basic rights, he emerges as a resistance writer, fearlessly chronicling the oppression endured by his people under a dictatorial regime.

Through his memoir, he wields his pen as a weapon, exposing the brutal truth of systemic 'othering' and advocating for justice.

Pride in their identity places Habiburahman and his family in a perilous position, forcing them to conceal their heritage for survival. "The word 'Rohingya' is forbidden. We only use it among ourselves in the hut. It is our secret identity. Dad insists that we use the term 'Muslim' … If we say that we are Rohingya, we would be signing the family's death warrant" (20). Habiburahman's narrative highlights resilience, not only as a survivor but as a voice for his community, challenging the erasure of identity and history while calling for collective resistance against injustice. Habiburahman's peers subject him to relentless attacks and mockery during his childhood, leaving him with no recourse but to endure. Guided by his family's teachings, he learns patience as a survival strategy, anchoring their existence in a hostile environment. The family remains steadfast in their home until their safety becomes shaky due to escalating threats. Their perseverance in the face of discrimination reflects what Arendt conceptualises as resilience in plurality—a collective strength to endure and resist systemic oppression.

Habib's father imparts the importance of resilience and moral integrity, understanding that these are vital for a Rohingya to survive in Myanmar's hostile environment. Years of hardship shape Habib into a person who approaches difficult situations with tolerance and calm. He remains unconcerned with rigid methods, focusing instead on finding any means to achieve his goals. Even so, he deliberately chooses paths where resistance takes precedence over anger, reflecting a quiet defiance grounded in purpose rather than rage. Habiburahman recounts:

> Before I fled the village in Arakan where I was born, I was a leader who was respected by the Rohingya, but also by members of other ethnic groups. The secret

> is tolerance and accepting differences. You have to be open to the people around you without imposing your beliefs or your choices on them, and you need to know how to listen and find grounds for understanding, which is how people are able to live together. (39)

Habiburahman's father teaches him a form of resistance that ensures not only his survival but also nurtures the peaceful coexistence of others. He emphasises that resisting injustice requires tolerance and acceptance of diverse beliefs and cultures as integral to one's own. This approach, he shows, has the potential to cultivate love and harmony, addressing the deep-rooted injustices pervading society.

Habiburahman's escape to Rangoon in search of education is an act of defiance in a situation where silence often means survival. Despite the constant risk of being apprehended, he joins a student group to protest the injustice faced by his people. Distributing pamphlets with anti-regime messages results in his arrest, and he is tortured for days. "On the fourth day, death still does not come even though I am constantly begging it to take me. Life clings on stubbornly because my heart still finds the strength to beat. I have never suffered like this, and every passing hour inflicts new and unsuspected pain, more agonising than ever. The guards never weary of taking turns to beat me" (Habiburahman 162). This passage speaks to the excruciating physical and psychological toll of his imprisonment, which reflects the broader suffering of the Rohingyas under the regime. Nevertheless, even in the face of such brutality, he survives, continuing his journey of escape that takes him from Rangoon to Bangkok, and eventually to Malaysia.

Despite this, a spirit of resistance persists within them, waiting for the right moment to surface. Habiburahman recalls his father's words, "He pulls me towards him and looks me straight in the eyes as he says, 'You see, Habib, even if everything is

conspiring against us, we must never stop claiming what is rightfully ours. It's the only way — learn to say no to injustice and rise up against it'" (Habiburahman 54). These words embody a quiet defiance, a firm commitment to justice that sustains them in the face of oppression. Habib and his family endure the injustices imposed upon them, yet at times, they find the courage to assert their rights. While Habib's father teaches him the essential rules of survival, he also emphasises the importance of standing up for oneself when the time is right. Over time, Habib learns to seek help from others, using the strength of collective support to resist and survive in hiding as an unauthorised refugee in Thailand. Through this experience, he comes to understand the role of plurality in sustaining their struggle.

The Rohingyas experience sudden and profound disruptions in their lives, pushed into circumstances where, despite their innocence, they are treated as criminals. Habiburahman recalls, "I soon find out that the house where Mum used to live in Thatkaybyin is now part of Military Training Camp 313, where Rohingya and other prisoners are interrogated and tortured" (Habiburahman 85). Spaces once filled with meaning and memory are turned into sites of control and suffering. Habiburahman vividly recounts the immense struggle and resistance he faced in order to attain the status of a refugee. Living as a stateless individual, devoid of any documentation to confirm his existence, he fights persistently to gain recognition. As he reflects, "Despite all this, something changes inside me. I have a status. I have been declared a refugee. The persecutions I have suffered are now recognised. I stare at the letter for hours. I am under the protection of the United Nations. I will exist. Finally" (Habiburahman 199).

However, even after achieving this status, he soon realises that the challenges of being a refugee are far from over, as his needs remain unmet and the path ahead continues to be fraught with hardship. "The Myanmar dictatorship is still casting its long shadow

over us and continuing to destroy our lives. We are human debris washed up on the Australian coast, a long way from regaining our dignity. In this cage where we are being assessed, we lose faith in justice. For us, democracy is a mirage" (207). Even after reaching Australia and gaining a voice through his education, Habib continues to struggle with the trauma of his past and the suffering of his people. Despite losing hope in the prospect of a democratic government for his community, he demonstrates resilience by continuing to fight through his words.

In his memoir, Habib channels his enduring strength and resistance, using his narrative as a means to bear witness to the ongoing injustice and to give voice to those still silenced by oppression. Habiburahman's *First, They Erased Our Name* reflects Arendt's concept of plurality, highlighting the collective strength of the Rohingyas in preserving their identity and community despite systemic oppression. By adapting to unjust restrictions while sustaining their connections and culture, they resist erasure and assert their existence, embodying resilience through shared endurance and action.

In *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, Atia Abawi portrays how Tareq, a teenager from a broken family, demonstrates resilience in the face of overwhelming loss after a bomb blast kills most of his family. "The man in the helmet waited until he could see that the boy's whole body was safely away from the wall before dropping it back down, sending a dust cloud up into his own mouth. Coughing, he bent to pick the boy up" (Abawi 23). Despite surviving the blast, Tareq finds that he has lost everyone except his father and little sister, Susan. He has little time to mourn, as he must resist the urge to despair and focus on protecting his sister. His father, too, exhibits resilience, searching for his surviving children.

Tareq's trauma is intensified by the sight of his lifeless mother, a moment that forces him to confront the harsh reality of his circumstances. "Holding their lifeless hands, Tareq tried breathing in his mother's scent one last time, but all he could smell was smoke and dust" (Abawi 24). The smoke and dust serve as a stark reminder of his loss and the uncertain future ahead. The survivors are compelled to resist their grief, quickly regrouping in order to flee the devastation and ensure the safety of their remaining family members.

The survivors of a brutal blast face not only the profound loss of their loved ones but also the persistent trauma of violence, bloodshed, and lifeless bodies. The memories, marked by screams and the aftermath of devastation, linger as an unshakable presence. For Tareq, the resilience needed to face these memories and move forward becomes a continuous struggle. As he recalls, "Tareq finally found the courage to move closer … He noticed a spot of blood inside Ameer's nostril … That one tiny stain … His brothers were dead. That blood made it feel instantly real" (Abawi 29). This moment forces Tareq to confront the painful reality of his loss, a challenge that demands significant resilience to endure.

The survivors are left wandering, disoriented and unable to fully comprehend the sudden changes in their lives. The shock of their loss begins to transform into a painful reality when Tareq discovers blood in his little brother's nostrils, a stark reminder of the violent event they've endured. He must resist the urge to let this image define his future. As Abawi writes, "They didn't find Salim's body … Families are forced to suffer not only loss, but also the bleak existence of living with dark hope" (31). More haunting than the bloodstained bodies are the missing ones, whose absence becomes a lingering torment, overshadowing the survivors' every thought.

The father, fully aware of the dangers in Raqqa, is compelled to travel there despite the risks. In order to escape, he decides to borrow money from his brother and endure the hardships of the journey. He resists the weight of uncertainty and pushes through the struggles, using all his resources to secure a future for his family. As Tareq observes, "Tareq scanned the small crowd … All the men were bearded; most of the beards were longer than the one his father was trying to grow out and much manlier than his own kitten whiskers" (Abawi 37). This moment captures the father's resilience as he endures the difficulties and compromises necessary to protect his children.

In one chilling instance, a young man is shot, his body convulsing as bullets rips through him. His mother collapses in shock, while his father is too stunned to help her. When the gunfire stops, the horror continues. The man who had been chanting approaches the lifeless body, grabs the head, and slashes the neck with a blade, "slashing the flesh" (Abawi 63). This moment illustrates the terror the family faces, reflecting the oppressive environment that compels them into silence. The father could have avoided the traumatic trip, but he endures it with courage, determined to gather the money necessary to leave and start a new life. He resists the challenges of his present situation in order to build a better future for his family.

The father, despite his efforts, loses the financial capacity to flee the country by sea, having spent most of his money bribing oppressors during the journey to Raqqa. Determined to protect his family, he decides to send his children ahead while he remains behind to save enough money to join them. As he tells his son, "Omri … I know you don't want to leave me. But you won't be leaving me for good. I will save up some money and join you. But what is important right now is that you and Susan get to Europe" (Abawi 124). His decision reflects both love and courage, as he endures the brutality of his surroundings and the pain of separating from his children, the only surviving members of

his family. Meanwhile, Tareq, despite his young age, takes responsibility for his sister, showing remarkable resilience in navigating life as a refugee.

During the perilous boat ride to cross borders, the refugees face life-threatening situations and resist these challenges together. At one critical moment, they are forced to lighten the boat's load to prevent it from sinking. "'Our lives are far more precious than what we have in these bags.' They all started opening their sacks, quickly pulling out their small valuables and money" (Abawi 152). The overcrowded boat is filled beyond its capacity, and passengers throw away their belongings in an attempt to survive. Despite their efforts, many do not make it to the shore alive, underscoring the profound hardships and sacrifices endured in their pursuit of safety.

With their sense of self and purpose shattered, the refugees struggle to find meaning in staying alive. Their existence becomes a constant battle, overshadowed by dependency on others and the stigma of being unwanted. Yet, despite these challenges, they wake up each day and choose to persevere. Their resistance is an effort to ensure that future generations inherit resilience and hope instead of despair. Atia Abawi's *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* reflects Arendt's concept of plurality by portraying the collective resilience of Tareq and his family as they endure loss, trauma, and displacement. Their shared struggles and acts of courage demonstrate the strength of human connections and the enduring hope that sustains them in the face of oppression and violence.

Sharon Bala, in her novel *The Boat People*, vividly portrays the resilience of Sri Lankan refugees who endured unimaginable violence, war, and hatred before reaching the shores of Canada. Describing their arrival, she writes, "Men, women, children … bedraggled and malnourished, shivering under blankets even though it was summer … these were the survivors. Arrival of the fittest" (25). Despite their physical and emotional

scars, these individuals exemplify resilience, having resisted and persevered through immense suffering to find safety in a new land. Without basic resources, many find themselves reliant on legal processes to establish their eligibility for asylum and to counter suspicions of criminal intent. Their arrival does not mark the end of their struggles but instead introduces new challenges in securing recognition and safety. Even in these circumstances, they continue to endure and adapt, reflecting a quiet resilience in their pursuit of stability and acknowledgment.

Migrants in a new country often carry the emotional burden of mourning the loss of their home and familial bonds, while navigating the demands of an unfamiliar land. Their circumstances leave little room for grief or mutual solace. Bala captures this poignantly through a child's drawing, "Hidden between the pages of the exercise book was a drawing Sellian had made in blue crayon – a cement block house with a palmyra tree in front and two stick figures … labelled in Tamil Appa and Sellian. He had labelled the picture Home" (96). The drawing reflects the child's silent endurance, as he channels his unspoken pain and longing into art. In these moments, the resilience of young migrants is evident—they learn to cope with profound loss at an age when such understanding should not be required, quietly adapting to challenges far beyond their years.

The psychological resilience required to endure the brutalities of war and ethnic conflict defines the lived experience of many migrants. Bala's evocative description captures this trauma vividly, "Sri Lanka came back to him [Mahindan]: shell-shocked cows on the side of the road, their ribs prominent under emaciated flanks; clouds of dust that puffed up underfoot; the bodies they passed without looking" (Bala 118). For those who lived through the Sri Lankan civil war, survival often meant confronting the inescapable horrors of conflict. Fighters within the Tamil resistance faced limited choices, with entry into the force binding them to a struggle that allowed no exit except through

death or the uncertain promise of liberation. Those who managed to escape the conflict were frequently denied refugee status, stigmatised as criminals or terrorists, further complicating their attempts to rebuild lives beyond their homeland.

Migrants fleeing the ravages of war often face the harsh reality of being treated with suspicion in foreign lands, despite their efforts to escape death and destruction. In Canada, Mahindan, like many others, is imprisoned and separated from his child, forced to prove his innocence. Despite arriving with his papers in order and having learned English, he still finds himself facing these barriers. “He had stitched the pieces of his life together and re-formed them into a whole. He would tell the judge a good and compelling story and pass this hearing” (Bala 355). Mahindan’s resilience shines through as he presses forward, determined to reunite with his son and clear his name. His determination, despite years of separation and the emotional toll of being doubted, underscores the psychological endurance needed to navigate the obstacles that arise from being displaced.

Mahindan’s resilience is most powerfully expressed in his ability to endure the forced separation from his son, Sellian. The pain of being distanced from the only family he has left is acute, yet Mahindan gradually comes to accept this loss with the hope that Sellian might have a brighter future. What begins as desperation evolves into a quiet strength—a willingness to give his son the freedom to move forward, even if it means facing that path alone. His resilience lies not in resistance, but in the profound act of letting go for the sake of his child’s safety and possibilities.

This emotional transformation is captured in the novel’s depiction of his internal struggle, “Chithra had died in childbirth. For Sellian’s whole life, Mahindan had been both his father and his mother. Not a day had passed when he hadn’t seen his son, and the thought of letting him walk away, board a bus to an unknown place without him, made his

insides twist" (Bala 23). In Arendtian terms, Mahindan's journey illustrates a solitary form of resilience, shaped not through collective plurality but through private sacrifice. The emotional toll of displacement becomes evident not only in what is lost, but in what one must choose to give away. Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* illustrate Arendt's concept of plurality by depicting the collective resilience of Sri Lankan refugees who, despite their trauma and loss, continue to navigate the challenges of rebuilding their lives in Canada. Their shared experiences of violence, displacement, and legal uncertainty highlight the strength of human persistence and adaptation in the face of adversity.

City of Thorns is a non-fiction work by Ben Rawlence that demonstrates how the mere existence of refugees in camps is an act of profound resilience. The book exposes the grim realities of life in the camps, including starvation, inadequate healthcare, and the scarcity of meaningful employment. The fact that refugees are paid only a meagre amount for gruelling physical labour highlights their powerless position. Yet, they continue to work tirelessly, embodying an attitude of perseverance. As Rawlence notes, "Nisho smiled, happy, enjoying the burn of his muscles and the pleasure of the work. The sack upended and landed with a thump on the wooden wheelbarrow" (47). While it may not seem an act of resilience to enjoy one's labour, Nisho's ability to find satisfaction in his work—despite knowing that he would be paid very little and working under conditions of starvation—illustrates the strength of his spirit and the resilience required to survive in the camp.

City of Thorns also tells the story of Isha, a woman of great pride, who initially refuses to leave her home and farm. A proud farmer, she holds onto the hope that she can survive on her land. As Rawlence writes, "She couldn't bear the humiliation of having to beg for food like a refugee. In her mind, she was rich, she was strong, she was proud. Three things that were all about to change" (54). However, upon arriving at the camp, Isha

chooses to remain unnoticed, focusing on surviving while holding onto her dream of returning home and rebuilding her life as a successful farmer. Throughout the book, Rawlence emphasises the power of hope, capturing the resilience of the refugees. As he notes, “Crisis in Somalia was a normal thing: all we can do is hope for the best” (58). The book creates an oxymoron by presenting the harsh, desperate conditions of the refugees in the camps while simultaneously offering the possibility of a better future through resilience and hope.

In *City of Thorns,* Rawlence portrays the act of reaching the camp alive as a significant achievement after a long journey defined by resilience. He writes, “Forced to start walking again, the children were complaining and dragging. The sand had taken all the skin from their feet” (67). The refugees depicted in this book, despite their diverse backgrounds and living conditions, share a common resilience in surviving the perilous journey to the camp and forming a community within it. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept of power as a relational force rather than a stable possession, “Power is a relationship, not a property, of those that belong to a group. Power is dependent on an unreliable and temporary agreement of many wills and intentions” (Presbey 27), one can see that the refugees, often voiceless and surviving in silence, exhibit a form of resilience that is powerful in its plurality. The collective strength of their survival and unity challenges traditional notions of power, demonstrating that resilience within a community, even when marginalised, is a potent force.

This chapter underscores the resilience of refugees in overcoming hardships, challenging stereotypes, and asserting their agency. As Kassam notes, “Research demonstrates that refugees can positively influence the economic growth and cultural enrichment of the receiving country” (2). Drawing on Arendt’s concept of plurality, the chapter highlights how refugees, through their collective resilience, contribute to the

diversity and vitality of the community. Their shared experiences, while unique to each individual, promote a sense of collective agency, enriching the pluralistic fabric of society and emphasising the importance of diverse voices in shaping a more inclusive environment.

Refugees often experience marginalisation due to societal power structures, leading to profound psychological, social, and economic challenges. A recent article from the *Middle East Monitor* (November 28, 2024), titled "Israel swaps food aid entering Gaza with bags of sand," illustrates the extent to which power dynamics can exploit and instil fear in refugee populations. However, the oppressed do not easily surrender to these forces. They exhibit remarkable resilience, enduring harsh conditions in environments where they are often marginalised. Despite experiencing anger, sorrow, and frustration, refugees focus their energy on surviving the adversities they face.

Refugees are acutely aware that their social behaviour and resilience can either improve or worsen their situation within society. A recent article by Tora Agarwal and Sudipto Ganguly, published on September 12 in *Reuters*, discusses the Rohingya refugee hunger strike in India, protesting their prolonged detention and the stark extremes they face between freedom and death. "Many of them have finished their terms, but are still stuck in detention. They are not criminals, they fled persecution" (2). The negative portrayal of the oppressed in the media not only drives them to flee their homes but also hinders their ability to access the help they are offered in refugee camps. Upon becoming refugees, these individuals often face deplorable conditions, yet there are various ways they could fight to regain their rights. Despite this, many choose resilience over confrontation, preserving their dignity and reputation rather than further degrading themselves in society. It is this resilience that gradually dismantles the prejudices imposed on them by the outside world. As Goodale notes, "Structures of injustice do not just fade

away; they must be confronted, witnessed, attacked, and if necessary, burnt to the ground" (1). Arendt's philosophy outlines what refugees must do to secure justice, emphasising their actions toward this end rather than simply narrating their suffering and dire circumstances.

In the concluding stages of refugee resilience, the journey moves beyond survival and adaptation to a profound transformation that reshapes both individual and collective experiences. Survival resilience reflects the initial struggle to endure displacement, where shared cultural practices and communal support systems become critical tools for facing immediate dangers and preserving identity. Adaptive resilience follows as refugees begin rebuilding their lives, negotiating barriers of language, labour, and societal acceptance, while forging new paths in unfamiliar environments. This stage reveals the strength of collective effort, where unity becomes an anchor for navigating exclusion and asserting agency.

Transformative resilience represents the culmination of this process, where refugees not only adapt but actively participate in reshaping their communities and asserting their place in the public sphere. Through collective action, they challenge systemic injustices, redefine narratives of displacement, and advocate for social justice. This chapter underscores how resilience, rooted in solidarity and driven by shared human ideals, transforms refugees from victims of circumstance to agents of change, creating spaces of equality and freedom within fractured systems. It observes that resilience is an ongoing process of solidarity, silence and identity reclamation which would help the refugees in achieving a recognition that they desire and deserve, in the near future if handled in the right way towards justice.