Vulnerability, Response-Ability, and the Promise of Making Refuge

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Abstract: This paper proposes "making refuge" as a conceptual placeholder and an analytical rubric, a guiding ethos and praxis, for the engaged Buddhist aspiration of responding to the social, political, economic, and planetary crises facing the world. Making refuge is conceived as the work of building the conditions of trust and safety necessary for living and dying well together as co-inhabitants of diverse communities and habitats. The paper will explain the rationale for making refuge by connecting the dharmic understanding of dukkha with feminist conceptualizations of the body and vulnerability. This will chart some theoretical and methodological pathways for engaged Buddhism to further its liberatory aspirations in reciprocity with emergent movements in radical critical theory, contemplative studies, and social and ecological activism. The paper will also examine the effects of white supremacy in U.S. Buddhism through the framework of making refuge. This will demonstrate how political healing and restorative justice might be cultivated through a dispositional ethics that pays appropriate attention to the vulnerabilities facing oppressed people.

Keywords: engaged Buddhism; mindfulness; making refuge; vulnerability; response-ability; white supremacy; social justice; commons; feminist theory; posthumanism

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"The idea of a refuge is that, when you're in that refuge, you feel like you have that safe space and support and nurturing. That's what I'd really push for if I had more than six months left [to live]." Aaron Lee, the "Angry Asian Buddhist" blogger[1]

This paper proposes "making refuge" as a conceptual placeholder and an analytical rubric, a guiding ethos and praxis, for the engaged Buddhist aspiration of responding to the social, political, economic, and planetary crises facing the world. Making refuge is conceived as the work of building the conditions of trust and safety necessary for living and dying well together as co-inhabitants of diverse communities and habitats.

This was the subject of a three-day retreat-workshop held in Berkeley, California, in July 2017 for the Mind & Life Institute's Think Tank program with co-funding support from the Lenz Foundation. The workshop invited academic and nonacademic participants with backgrounds in dharma training, contemplative practice and pedagogy, and social and ecological activism.[2] A subtheme of the workshop

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1   Quoted in (Littlefair 2017a).
2   The participants were: Beth Berila, Ph.D., Professor of Ethnic and Women's Studies at St. Cloud State University and yoga-based social justice educator; Peter Doran, Ph.D., Lecturer in Law and Sustainable Development at Queens University Belfast and Zen practitioner of the Soto and Thich Nhat Hanh lineages; Dawn Haney, Co-Director of Buddhist Peace Fellowship, activist and graduate of Spirit Rock Meditation's Center's Community Dharma Leaders program; Funie Hsu, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of American Studies at San Jose State University, former board member of Buddhist Peace Fellowship and public intellectual on Asian American struggles in the history of U.S. Buddhism; Mushim Ikeda, founding

examined the challenges of racial injustice, particularly the influence of white supremacy on the history of U.S. Buddhism and on the commercialization of mindfulness meditation.

This paper will first explain the rationale for making refuge by connecting the dharmic understanding of dukkha with feminist conceptualizations of the body and vulnerability. This will chart some theoretical and methodological pathways for engaged Buddhism to further its liberatory aspirations in reciprocity with emergent movements in radical critical theory, contemplative studies, and social and ecological activism. The paper will then examine the effects of white supremacy in U.S. Buddhism through the framework of making refuge. This will demonstrate how political healing and restorative justice might be cultivated through a dispositional ethics that pays appropriate attention to the vulnerabilities facing oppressed people.

1. Starting with a Promise

The idea of making refuge was conceived out of dissatisfaction with the critical impasses that have stalled debates on contemporary mindfulness. We share the concerns of various academic discourses and media commentaries that have critiqued the ideological-political entanglements of secular mindfulness with the dominant logics of neoliberalism (Forbes and Burke 2016; Ng and Purser 2015; Purser and Loy 2013). But we have been frustrated with the repeated misunderstanding that such critiques are dismissing the potential benefits of secular mindfulness to individual well-being, or that such critiques are asserting a kind of Buddhist chauvinism that claims ownership over mindfulness practice. Making refuge was developed to pave theoretical and methodological pathways beyond these impasses.

How can we resituate mindfulness within a larger ecology of sociopolitical relations, while holding space for personal stress reduction and well-being, so that mindfulness does not become complicit with the individualizing, depoliticizing logics of neoliberalism? How can we explore secular applications of mindfulness in diverse domains of life, while honouring the historical Buddhist legacies that have transmitted the practice, so that effects of cultural erasure are not perpetuated against Asian Buddhist heritages in white-dominant societies like the U.S.?

The contemplation of these questions led us to reconsider the notion of refuge. In speaking of refuge, we are partly alluding to the vows of the Triple Gem, which may be formally (re)taken in various ceremonial contexts. But as an orienting praxis-ideal for Buddhist living in general, "taking refuge" or "going for refuge" in the Triple Gem is also informally (re)taken-in-action. By engaging in daily acts that accord with the vows of refuge—in such formal contexts as alms-giving, meditation, or scriptural study; or in such informal contexts as showing kindness to strangers or doing community service—a person is *performatively* making and remaking, fulfilling or failing, the promise of refuge they are given over to, regardless of whether they recite the vows of the Triple Gem or not.

"Refuge" in this generalized sense functions as a shorthand to encapsulate the aspirations and activities of compassionate living to which a Buddhist is committed. The varying schools of Buddhism delineate the notion of refuge differently. We do not pretend to hold expertise on the plurality of these perspectives. We simply recognise that there is room for play in how we might speak of the aspirations and activities encapsulated by this shorthand of refuge within Buddhist contexts and beyond. The phrase "taking refuge" or "going for refuge" is one of several possible expressions; it could also be

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dharma teacher of East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, California, community activist and diversity consultant; David Loy, Ph.D. author and dharma teacher of the Sanbo Kyodan lineage; Rhonda Magee, Ph.D., Professor of Law at the University of San Francisco, a teacher of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Fellow of the Mind & Life Institute; Edwin Ng, Ph.D. cultural theorist, independent scholar and public intellectual on the cultural translation of Buddhism and mindfulness; Jack Petranker, Director of the Mangalam Research Center for Buddhist Languages and dharma teacher of the Nyingma school; Ron Purser, Ph.D., Professor of Management at San Francisco State University and critic of mainstream mindfulness; Nathan Doshin Woods, Ph.D., anthropologist, writer, and novice Zen priest at Sweetwater Zen Center in National City, California; Zack Walsh, Ph.D. candidate in Process Studies at Claremont School of Theology and research associate at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies in Potsdam, Germany.

rendered as "to put oneself in the shelter of", "to rely on", or "to give oneself over", to the Buddha (as exemplary figure), the dharma (as the teachings of the Buddha) and the Sangha (as the Buddhist community). These are all reasonable ways to translate different aspects of "refuge" in the different languages of Buddhism.[3]

We draw inspiration from this plurality and wish to experiment with speaking of the promise of making refuge as the work of building conditions of trust and safety necessary for living and dying well together as co-inhabitants of diverse communities and habitats. A pivotal theoretical move for us is to connect Buddhist understandings with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, similar to what Hsiao-Lan Hu (Hu 2011) does in her study on a Buddhist-feminist social ethic for peacemaking in the global community. Hu's work brings an important feminist voice to the scholarly genre of Buddhist critical or social theory (Boon et al. 2015; Hattam 2003; Loy 1997; Ng 2016; Shields 2011; Wallis et al. 2013) to advance the spiritual-activist objectives of engaged Buddhism (King 2009; Jones 2003).

In *This-Worldly Nibbāna: A Buddhist-Feminist Social Ethic for Peacemaking* (Hu 2011), Hu reads the Buddhist teachings of non-self and karma alongside Butler's theory of performativity, which examines both the processes of being acted on and the conditions of possibilities for acting (Butler 1996, 2004, 2006, 2007). The theory of performativity challenges the conventional ways by which individual bodies are either regarded as discrete entities or blended into some amorphous social body. It cuts a middle path between these reductionisms to emphasize the shifting network of relations by which the body is bound, alerting us instead to how the life and action of any given body marked with certain identifiable boundaries is made possible by social and material relations preceding and exceeding those boundaries. Hu formulates a Buddhist analysis of the constructedness of gender by drawing the theory of performativity into dialogue with the Buddhist concept of *rupā* (form). *Rupā* is typically understood as referring to material forms, but Hu demonstrates that it may also include "the social conventions and prescriptions that strongly suggest, support, impose, and reinforce gendered identities and gendered behaviors through gendered colors, toys, chores, career ambitions, postures, uses of language, etc." (Hu 2011, p. 75).

Hu thus provides a feminist-informed corrective to the early Buddhist social theory articulated by the likes of Ken Jones and David Loy. Loy, for instance, mapped the Buddhist understanding of dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) onto broader social structures to speak of social dukkha. He argued that the Three Poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion are conditionings that also take institutional forms, like corporate greed, the military industrial complex, and the public relations machinery of the media. But just as the Buddhist teaching of non-self may liberate individuals from the Three Poisons, it can also be used more broadly to liberate people collectively from institutionalized forms of greed, hatred, and delusion, because such structures and systems have no inherent essence and can be changed (Loy 1997). While Loy's Buddhist social theory attempted to elucidate the relation between personal and collective suffering, it remained unclear how the actions of individual bodies may be mutually impacted by broader conditions. By connecting Buddhist concepts with feminist analysis of subjectivity, Hu addresses this gap and opens channels of inquiry for the broader feminist-inspired reparative task of transformative healing and restorative justice.

We align ourselves with these objectives. The orienting point for our conceptualisation of making refuge will be the fundamental Buddhist teachings on dukkha and anicca (impermanence) (Access to Insight 2013). Particularly, we want to read these teachings with Butler's performative account of the relationship between vulnerability and ethicopolitical agency. The contemplative logic of the First Foundation of the Mindfulness—i.e., of paying appropriate attention to how a body is unavoidably exposed to vulnerability as it navigates the world—will serve as the nexus for this cross-reading of Buddhist and feminist analyses.

3　Muller 2007

2. Paying Appropriate Attention to Vulnerability

On Butler's account, given that the body "is less an entity than a living set of relations. [it] cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living and acting". This means that "the dependency of human and other creatures on infrastructural support exposes a specific vulnerability that we have when we are unsupported, when those infrastructural conditions characterising our social, political, and economic lives start to decompose, or when we find ourselves radically unsupported under conditions of precarity or under conditions of threat" (Butler 2015, pp. 64–65). Understood in this manner, exposure to vulnerability is an ontological characteristic of social and ecological relations as well as a ground for politics and ethics.

This account of vulnerability resonates with the First Noble Truth of *dukkha*, in not regarding the precariousness of the body as a threat to be fought off or a lack to be overcome. Precariousness arises in a "co-extensive" way at birth. The likelihood of any newborn's survival depends on existing relations of material support and the care of others (Lorey 2015, p. 19). These preconditions for living are not just an existential-material challenge facing newborns. They must be accepted repeatedly—momentarily, situationally and ceaselessly—from infancy to childhood to adulthood to old age; that is, unless the vicissitudes of life give way to death. Death cannot be mastered. As Butler (2009, pp. 25–26) puts it: "No amount of will or wealth can eliminate the possibilities of illness or accident for a living body". Or in Buddhist parlance, *dukkha* is a fact of existence, not least because the body will age, decay, and die.

To frankly admit that choiceless exposure to vulnerability makes one materially and relationally dependent allows one to take an affirmative stance regarding the precariousness of life. *It affirms that living is only possible with care, trust, and safety*. We are not speaking of refuge just because it is a convenient allusion to the vows of the Triple Gem, even as it admittedly allows us as engaged Buddhists to speak of our dharma commitments more forthrightly. The precariousness of life allows us to affirm the Buddhist truths of dukkha and anicca. But affirming the precariousness of life also invites a consideration of how everyone is given over without choice to a certain promise of making refuge. This promise is an open-ended task of bearing truthful witness and becoming responsive to vulnerability, whether human or nonhuman, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, "believer" or "non-believer". Precariousness here refers not to the life of any specific body but to the conditions of its existence—not conditions that make everyone the same, but *conditions shared by everyone*. Precariousness is always *shared-in-difference*, because it is at once a "commoning" and a separating factor; the exposure to vulnerability we share with everyone is also what distinguishes us from others.[4] Political theorist Isabell Lorey explains that precariousness denotes a relational difference or "a shared differentness" that is at once divisive and connective: "What is connective is not a pre-existing common good to which one could have recourse; instead it is something that is only engendered in political and social agency" (Lorey 2015, p. 19).

It is important to consider a second dimension, the hierarchizing of precarity, as a relational difference that does not exist apart from (but which is constitutive of) social, ecological, and political interdependence. Under the power arrangements of existing material conditions, precarity is expressed as a "classifying and discriminating differentiation". Prevailing logics of domination exploit (unequal) existential-material exposure to vulnerability by targeting those perceived to be a threat to be fought or even exterminated. Exposure to vulnerability is thus shared-in-difference not just in an ontological sense, but also in a sociopolitical sense, since precariousness is shaped by hierarchies that discriminate and judge what lives are worth living. This segmentation produces what Butler (2009, pp. 25–27) describes as the "differential distribution" of symbolic and material insecurities. The exposure to

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[4] The term "commoning" is used here also to connect the proposal for making refuge with discourses and practices aimed at cultivating systemic conditions of flourishing-in-difference as a response to the failures of capitalism and the planetary crisis (Bollier and Helfrich 2015; Johnson-DeBaufre et al. 2015; Kostakis and Bauwens 2014; Mulder 2015; Walsh 2018). We discuss commoning below.

vulnerability we share in difference also implies exposure to existential-material inequality and injustice, because precarity is always both an ontological and sociopolitical condition. Lorey writes:

> Precarity can therefore be understood as a functional effect arising from the political and legal regulations that are specifically supposed to protect against general, existential precariousness. From this perspective, domination means the attempt to safeguard some people from existential precariousness, while at the same time this privilege of protection is based on a differential distribution of the precarity of all those who are perceived as other and considered less worthy of protection. (Lorey 2015, p. 22)

In Butler's writings, she speaks of how the longstanding War on Terror and prevailing modes of imperialist-militaristic domination have rendered certain lives ungrievable (Butler 2006, 2009). We invite you to consider our claims about the differential distribution of precarity, not just in terms of their logical consistency, but also against your own lived experience of responding to the exposure to vulnerability we share in difference. Because if you're an academic reader (especially in the United States), you may have heard of or participated in the signing of petitions or the forming of committees to address concerns about academic freedom, social justice, or the safety of students of diverse backgrounds since the election of the 45th President of the United States. If you are a nonacademic reader (in the United States or otherwise), we trust you would have at least witnessed through your daily media practices the fears caused by growing precarity, if not participated in various conversations or collective actions to assist, comfort others, or to fight and guard against present and looming dangers. Amidst all this, we trust too that you would have witnessed the stubbornness and unreasonableness of certain habits and systems of power we live under, like the resurgence of white nationalism, fascism, and Nazism.[5]

3. Making Refuge as Engaged Buddhist Praxis

The notion of making refuge pivots around the intersections of Butler's account of vulnerability (Butler 2016) and the Buddhist understanding of *dukkha* and *anicca*, both of which are predicated on mindfulness of contingency and conditionality. Butler expresses this when she says: "Although precarious life is a generalized condition, it is, paradoxically, the condition of being conditioned." (Butler 2009, p. 23). Making refuge is thus formulated as a conceptual placeholder and analytical rubric for bringing Buddhist perspectives into dialogue with other knowledge practices, to examine this generalized condition of being conditioned in specific domains. Making refuge not only refers to the interdependence between human bodies and communities with the material and symbolic structures of support (or the lack thereof), but also to the planetary interdependence between human and nonhuman lives as well as the ecological systems that support them (or don't).

The "Making Refuge" workshop, funded by the Mind & Life Institute and Lenz Foundation, tested the viability of making refuge as an act of sociopolitical healing and activism through collective practices of contemplation, ceremony, and hospitality. It also examined how making refuge is shaped by the differing degrees of exposure to vulnerability facing racialized subjects living under white supremacy in the United States, and with regard to planetary challenges posed by the Anthropocene.[6] The participants considered the conceptual-analytical reorientation outlined above by relating them

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[5]   A related notion of "sanctuary" has regained political currency in the U.S. under the Trump administration, where "sanctuary cities" provide a range of political and social refuge, to limit Federal enforcement of immigration law to deport undocumented immigrants (Cottle 2018). Buddhist Peace Fellowship has hosted a dialogue/online curriculum on the inner (spiritual) and outer (political) dimensions of sanctuary with dharma teacher Zenju Earthlyn Manuel and grassroot educator Eddy Zheng (Buddhist Peace Fellowship 2018). We note these here to highlight prevailing movements that resonate with our proposals for making refuge, and which can serve as interlocutors to refine and tease apart the overlapping notions of "refuge" and "sanctuary".

[6]   The summary report for the workshop has been submitted to the Mind & Life Institute, and the findings will be forthcoming online.

to their respective areas of experience and expertise with these overarching questions: *what is refuge? where and when do we encounter refuge? who or what makes space for refuge?* Participants collectively explored mindfulness while considering (unjust and unequal) exposure to vulnerability by considering the following passage from Butler as a dialogical ground for secular and Buddhist approaches:

"[V]ulnerability is not a subjective disposition. Rather, it characterizes a relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge on or affect us in some way. As a way of being related to what is not me and not fully masterable, vulnerability is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and responsiveness are not clearly separable from one another, and not distinguished as separate moments in a sequence; indeed, where receptivity and responsiveness become the basis for mobilizing vulnerability rather than engaging in its destructive denial" (Butler 2016, p. 25).

We suggested this passage as a guide for reflection because it demonstrates the flexibility and relevance of refuge for Buddhist and non-Buddhist or secular traditions. The conceptualization of vulnerability articulated here turns on the theory of performativity, which conceives of the body in terms of the processes of being acted on and conditions of possibilities for acting. This is amendable with the basic Buddhist understanding regarding the conditions of change giving rise to dukkha and to karmic agency without self-essence (Hu 2011). The further clarification of these intersections between Buddhist nondualist understandings and a radical nonbinary critique can help to develop the genre of Buddhist critical theory in reciprocity with the broader development of engaged Buddhism.

By paying attention to existential-material vulnerability in this manner, we are also giving space for the 4E cognition model that is informing contemplative science research. Embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (4E) approaches to cognition provide new ways of understanding how minds and bodies are coproduced in interaction with environments (Thompson 2007; Hutchins 2010). Such innovative approaches help Buddhists and contemplatives better understand the role of cognition in social and ecological systems, affording us new ways to more consciously and sustainably design structures and systems to support ethical values. Mindfulness and Buddhist concepts (like interdependence and no-self) help us not only become aware of our own subjective (cognitive and affective) processes, but also become aware of the social and ecological conditions underlying our existence and the possibilities for transforming perception and behavior "intra-actively" with material transformations (Barad 2007; Giorgino and Walsh 2018).

Interpreting making refuge across religious and secular contexts further accounts for the ways oppression and liberation are shaped not only by psycho-spiritual development, but by rapidly changing political and economic landscapes, impacted by the emergence of powerful new technologies like smart and conscious cities, the rise of automation, computational algorithms, and postcapitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006; Mason 2016; Rifkin 2015; Srnicek and Williams 2015). Across such diverse contexts, making refuge investigates the contingencies of responsibility and how to become more responsible in an era beset by great social transformation and anthropogenic climate change, while at the same time providing a horizon for liberation struggles that accounts for people's disproportionate exposure to vulnerability and their shared response-ability to provide the common conditions for flourishing-in-difference.

Commoning provides the conditions for flourishing-in-difference through the harmonious and ever-complexifying contrast between commoner's self-determination and ever-expanding sense of community solidarity. Bauwens and Ramos (2018) envision an ecology of the commons created through "dynamic solidarities and collaborations across ontologically different commons communities" (Bauwens and Ramos 2018, p. 3), which together constitute the seed forms of a postcapitalist phase transition. Commoning illustrates how freedom and self-determination are dependent on building richer, more intricate connections to communities of human and nonhuman beings, forces, and objects. In his essay, "Reality as Commons," Weber (2015) writes that "the commons describes an ontology of relations that is at the same time existential, economic and ecological (Weber 2015, p. 371) commoning considers the coexistence of living things on this planet as a joint, creative process, one that increases

the aliveness of the biosphere and the cultural sphere" (Weber 2015, p. 378). Sharing resources in common is needed to make refuge for those disproportionately exposed to vulnerability in a warmer world racked by instability, conflict, and growing resource constraints.

To host the semantic resonances of these different sets of discourses, dharma, and secular aspirations, we are inspired by Donna Haraway's recent writings on the challenges of the Anthropocene. She speaks of the need to variously inhabit passion and action, detachment and attachment to cultivate "response-ability"— a collective knowing and doing that enacts an ecology of practices. This involves the task of "making kin" across "lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (Haraway 2016, p. 1). We affiliate the idea of making refuge with the task of making kin.

As a counterpart to making kin, the promise of making refuge must extend beyond human lives. Making refuge must be a multispecies affair. There is thus an opening to bring Buddhist wisdom into dialogue with current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences questioning human exceptionalism. Studies on multispecies ethnography, new materialism, posthumanism, bio- and ecocentrism, and indigenous wisdom for example, attempt to overcome anthropocentrism by considering the agency of nonhumans (Livingston and Puar 2011; Ogden et al. 2013; Parreñas 2018). They favor relational ontologies over dualistic ontologies predicated on binaries like human/nonhuman, domesticated/wild, and culture/nature. These studies do not just acknowledge that humans coexist with other life forms, but argue that our messy entanglements with nonhuman lives, landscapes, and technologies must factor into accounts of existence. How might Buddhist teachings on interdependence and nonharm, for example, dialogue with such outlooks to cultivate more compassionate ways of living with nonhuman others?[7]

Consider the practice of 放生/fangsheng (releasing life) performed by Buddhists in places like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Practitioners would release small mammals or birds or fishes into the wild as an act of merit-making. But this has led to unintended consequences. The practice has spawned unethical businesses of animal breeding. Because the animals were bred in captivity, they lack the capacity to survive in the wild, not to mention that some of the animals released may be invasive species that threaten native species (Wordie 2017; Sherwood 2017). In response to these problems, a Buddhist-inspired organization in Singapore called Animal Human Alliance (AHA) has been advocating for an alternative practice of 生/husheng (protecting life), which nurtures conditions of safety for animals living precariously in an ongoing day-to-day manner, rather than performing periodic acts of freeing captive animals (Animal Human Alliance n.d.; Chan 2016).

In Singapore, there is an estimated population of 60,000 street cats, most of which are found in the densely populated, high-rise public-housing estates that house some 80% of the 5.6 million population. Cats in the estates live in a liminal zone because it is technically illegal to keep cats as pets within the flats (although some residents do keep cats at home and the authorities do not intervene unless a neighborly dispute leads to complaints, for instance). But the boundaries that criminalize the life of cats in the residential areas of Singapore are extremely porous, because there is no law to prohibit them from inhabiting the common corridors and shared public areas of the housing estates. Cats are routinely abandoned in these areas when they are no longer wanted, and should the authorities be called to deal with the overpopulation of street cats or any purported public health nuisance caused by them, they would be rounded up for culling. This has prompted a vibrant cat welfare scene in

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7   This challenge of embodying relational ontologies over dualistic ones has implications on pressing political issues of the day, such as the refugee crisis facing the world and the mistreatment of migrants. For example, Hsu (2018) has argued that the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy of detaining and prosecuting migrants attempting to cross the U.S. border draws on a dualistic ontology that dehumanizes racialized subjects as "animals", and replicates the ideology used to incarcerate Japanese American citizens during the Second World War. The work of making refuge beyond human exceptionalism thus relates to the historical erasure of Asian American Buddhists which we discuss below, and we underscore here the relevance of posthumanist thinking for a more compassionate future for both humans and nonhumans.

which groups and individuals volunteer to feed, rescue, nurse, foster, and rehome cats or maintain a safe environment for them as community cats. Volunteers also engage in trap, neuter, and release activities to manage the cat population. Social media plays a pivotal role in the sharing of sightings of abandoned, abused, sick, or injured cats, as well as appeals for donations to cover food costs or vet fees, especially for elderly volunteers without an income.

Cat welfare in Singapore emerges from the contingencies of human and nonhuman coexistence. The shared vulnerabilities of people and cats are entangled with the affordances and prohibitions of the built environment and digital technologies. AHA brings the dharma-inspired practice of *husheng* to cat welfare, raising awareness of issues and donating supplies to support volunteers, including monasteries sheltering cats (as well as dogs). The practice of *husheng* offers a more expansive, relational approach to merit-making than *fangsheng*, which inadvertently subjugates animal lives and the environment for human benefit, and thus reproduces human exceptionalism. *Husheng* provides an example of making refuge in practice, one that does not just attend to animal lives, but which also holds the potential to decenter dualistic ontologies between human and animals, and between so-called domesticated and stray lives.

To cultivate more sustainable ecologies of relations entangling human and nonhuman lives, the promise of making refuge must also pay appropriate attention to the roles of *objects* and *things*, because there can be no vitality without the agency of "vibrant matter"—the agency of tectonic plates, glacier movements, rocks, rivers, bacteria, insects, styrofoam, silicon chips, and other "hyperobjects"—whose effects reverberate over durations of time that far exceed but coexist alongside the much briefer duration of a human lifespan (Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013; Moore and Rivera 2010; Morton 2013, 2016; Tsing 2015). These all constitute cross-modulating forces and conditions of im/possibility for living and dying.

The promise of making refuge can host a dialogical space for Buddhist and secular approaches to mindfulness to converse with the posthumanist and new materialist turn in critical humanities and social science research (Bryant et al. 2011; Coole and Frost 2010; Crockett and Robbins 2013; Malik and Avanessian 2016; Rieger and Waggoner 2015). Making refuge should be explored not just in sociopolitical life but also on a planetary scale. What would it be like to mindfully cultivate a fresh way of "planetary thinking", so that by learning to relate to the world-in-becoming on very long timescales, "human history and culture can take on unfamiliar shapes [that alter] conceptions of what makes something 'important' and what does not" (Clark 2012, p. 101). This is admittedly a long-term hope, but we don't think it is wishful thinking to take these seemingly idealistic matters seriously in the present moment, even if the immediate effects or applications are not apparent. Regardless of whether we practice mindfulness for stress reduction, creativity, or awakening, mindfulness does not provide a quick-fix solution because the existential-material exposure to vulnerability we share in difference has no quick-fix solution.

4. Heritage Buddhism and White Supremacy in the United States

To demonstrate the applicability of making refuge as an analytical framework, a guiding ethos and praxis, consider the cultural erasure facing heritage Buddhists in the history of Buddhism and the development of secular mindfulness in the U.S. Hsu (2016a) has interrogated the unacknowledged operations of white supremacy alongside the neoliberal logics of governmentality shaping the adaptation of mindfulness in educational contexts. She connects analogous critiques of how race and cultural appropriation shape the mainstreaming of yoga (Antony 2014; Puustinen and Rautaniemi 2015) with Joseph Cheah's study of white supremacy vis-à-vis the Burmese American Buddhist experience. 2011. Cheah argues that a system of white racial superiority functions invisibly as the "standard of normality for many white Buddhists and sympathizers" (Cheah 2011, p. 4). He draws a distinction between cultural rearticulation and racial rearticulation. The former allows the cosmological understandings and customary practices of a different cultural tradition and those of a host culture to be mutually intelligible and worthy of respect, while the latter refers to a process of infusing the

knowledge practices of others with "new meanings derived from one's own culture in ways that preserve the prevailing system of racial hegemony" (Cheah 2011, p. 60).

One instance of racial rearticulation in the mainstreaming of mindfulness is evident in the response given by insight meditation teacher Trudy Goodman when asked about the critique of mindfulness. Rather than address the logics of the critique, she says:

> I think these critiques come from Buddhist fundamentalists. I mean, if you really want to see watered-down Buddhism, travel to the beautiful Zen temples of Korea, a country where Buddhism is still alive and well, and you'll see all the ladies in temples working their malas, chatting about their kids, sometimes shucking peas; the temples are very much village and urban gathering places. How many people are deeply practicing?
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> quoted in (Lion's Roar 2015)

This response is problematic, not least because the claim that critics are fundamental Buddhists is an *ad hominem* fallacy, but also because Goodman erases the historicity of diverse Buddhist heritages when she evokes the anachronistic idea (emerging out of the historical trend of Buddhist modernism) that a meditation-centric approach to Buddhism has always been the normative standard of "deep practice" (McMahan 2008).

Goodman clearly does not appreciate the social obligations or familial ties that bring caregivers and children to the temple when she dismisses their merit-making or devotional practices as superficial dharma. What is the purpose of trivializing the spiritual, emotional, and material labor of women, "othered" by virtue of their race and religion, when she evokes the imagery of nonwhite Asian women shucking peas? In her response, there is no substantial examination of pertinent issues, just the deflecting of critique with one-upmanship and even (unintentional) racism.

Hsu has communicated these issues beyond academic circles in an article for *Buddhadharma/Lion's Roar* entitled "We've Been Here All Along" (Hsu 2016b). She makes a plea for greater recognition of the effaced contributions of Asian American Buddhist heritages who have transmitted Buddhist teachings in the U.S. She recounts the stories of the Kimura family and Reverend Ryo Imamura to remind us of how Asian American Buddhists have historically been oppressed and policed, because their race and religion are considered suspicious and perpetually foreign in a society built on white supremacy. As exemplified by recurring fears of Yellow Peril and the incarceration of Japanese Americans, diasporic Asian or Asian American Buddhists have had to suppress or hide their dharma inheritance and the cultural specificities of their ancestral heritages to avoid persecution, while convert white Buddhists (if they are not embarrassed about taking responsibility for this label)[8] enthusiastically declare their expertise of Buddhism by making universalizing claims about its true essence and about human nature, while dismissing the "cultural baggage" of Asian or Asian American Buddhists. Why are the affordances of white supremacy (accumulated at the expense of others) not considered a form of cultural baggage worth owning up to?

Vulnerability ought not to be considered a subjective disposition but a condition of being conditioned by a field of objects, forces, and passions. We do not blame any individual when we decry the affordances of privilege that individuals wield throughout the history of white supremacy impacting Buddhism in the U.S. Rather, we invite mindfulness to be practiced critically with respect to how un/intended effects of harm are perpetuated by people with different affordances due to unequal material conditions of exposure to vulnerability. Privilege is not-self and co-dependently arisen, just as vulnerability is not-self and co-dependently arisen. We invite practitioners to bear truthful witness and become responsive to the un/intentional effects of our actions and subjectivities without taking it personally.

8　See (Payne 2017).

5. The Injustice of Not Being Heard; Are You Listening?

This paper opened with a quote by the late Aaron Lee, a young Asian American who blogged as Arun "The Angry Asian Buddhist" (Littlefair 2017b). Lee came to prominence in the Buddhist blogosphere after he critiqued *Buddhadharma* magazine for excluding Asian American Buddhists in their portrayal of Buddhism in the U.S. (Arunlikhati 2008). When this paper was conceived, we learnt that Lee was diagnosed with lymphoma shortly after turning 33, and it has been estimated he had three months to live (Littlefair 2017a). He shared in a post entitled "Be the Refuge" (Arunlikhati 2016) that because of his minority ancestry, his chances of finding a stem cell donor are very slim. But even at the cusp of life and death, Lee faithfully embodied the promise of making refuge we are describing here. He continued to offer himself in service to others by organizing a marrow donation drive. This, he wrote, proved to be a refuge for his friends from the feelings of powerlessness. It consoled and empowered them, as well as concerned strangers, that they could provide assistance in finding a cure (Arunlikhati 2016). While there was no guarantee that a marrow transplant would cure the cancer, as it eventually happened when Lee died some months after a successful transplant, this was a moment where Lee and friends and strangers shared vulnerability to host conditions of trust and safety for living and dying well together.

Aaron Lee's condition attested to the differential distribution of precarity discussed earlier. It communicated with urgency the unevenness of existential-material exposure to vulnerability that arises in relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions conditioned by the history of white supremacy in the United States. The reality of existential-material inequality also clues us in to why Lee might have had to take on the persona of an angry blogger. The force of passionate anger provided Lee the means to negotiate an existing field of unjust conditions which have historically made it difficult to hear the unacknowledged oppression and exclusion of those un/intentionally harmed.

It is crucial to understand the injustice of not being heard to understand how our proposal for making refuge is guided by an ethos of response-ability. Stauffer (2015) describes the injustice of not being heard as ethical loneliness, which is the feeling of not being heard and being abandoned by humanity. It occurs when people suffer not only the harms of systemic conditions of injustice, but the added harms of having their suffering and calls for recognition of their suffering and for justice trivialized or ignored. Stauffer illustrates the dangers of ethical loneliness through stories of survivors of the Holocaust as well as survivors of large-scale violence in places like Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe. She recounts scenarios from truth commissions where the failure to listen well resulted in ethical loneliness. Ethical loneliness occurs, for example, when those bearing witness fixate on affirming stories of harmony, resilience, or the overcoming of tragedy, and fail to listen to stories of anger, resentment, or destruction. Their fixation with positive stories paints a simplistic picture of reparative justice by assuming there is no place for uncooperative, challenging expressions and encounters. To the contrary, expressions of anger and resentment are reasonable forms of action in the face of continued neglect of suffering. If we learn how to listen by "staying with the trouble" and the discomfort it provokes, then we may hear a call for justice in expressions of anger and resentment. We may hear a call to redress the neglect of the harm suffered and assure that violence will not recur. If Lee communicated with an angry persona, he may have been asking whether we are truly listening.

Making refuge, which involves the task of building conditions of trust and safety for living and dying well together, can be performed in manifold ways. Marginalized voices in American Buddhism face the danger of having one's sense of humanity, sense of belonging, and legitimate expressions of suffering ignored or trivialized. Oppression is not only suffered through large-scale orchestrated acts, but also in mundane heartbreak. This can happen when Asian or Asian American Buddhists hear convert white Buddhists disparage their ancestral and cultural inheritance. It can also happen when a Buddhist magazine speaks of a more promising future for Buddhism without including the history of Asian heritages that provided us the gift of refuge in the first place. Or as it happened, when *Buddhadharma/Lion's Roar* were surprised by a backlash to Hsu's piece, such that they had to publish a statement of support for her views from a respected white male monastic (Deveaux and Amaro 2016).

Why do we have a habit of disregarding others? Why do we hear, but not listen? How might we stay with difficult encounters and learn from discomfort instead?

We can better understand making refuge as a praxis and ethos of response-ability by considering Stauffer's thoughts on ethical loneliness in the context of the harms faced by marginalized heritage Buddhists in the U.S. We redirect our attention from considerations of intent and culpability to considerations of shared exposure to vulnerability and the differing degrees of harms suffered. An ethos of response-ability calls on us to take responsibility precisely because we are not directly responsible for the effects of systemic violence, precisely because the consequences of un/intentional action are not-self. An ethos of response-ability hosts a space for engaged Buddhists to cultivate new insights about teachings of emptiness and interdependence by listening more carefully and compassionately with others across differing lines of affliction and affiliation. An ethos of response-ability reminds us that sovereignty is not to be independent but to be dependent. It reminds us that self-care is impossible outside of our relationship to others. We need others to gift trust, safety, and dignity, to feel value as agential selves, and to live and die well together.

As a praxis, response-ability is embodied as non-normative dispositional ethics ([Beausoleil 2016](#)). A dispositional ethics cultivates moral responsibility as a *situated* and *momentary* practice of *receptivity and responsiveness*. As a situational practice of receptive responsiveness, ethical cultivation is focused on the affective conditions rather than the substantive terms of any moral encounter. Practicing mindfulness according to such a dispositional ethics could take the form of sensitizing oneself to, affirming the dignity of, and becoming response-able for lives subjugated by the logics of oppression ([Walsh 2018](#)).

To draw the paper to a close, we would like to locate an ethos of response-ability in some common practical advice given during mindfulness practice: no matter how many times you are distracted, there's no need to blame yourself or take it personally, just pick it up and start again; if you start a thousand times, that is the practice. Similarly, *an ethos of response-ability is about learning to fail better. Making refuge is a ceaseless task, precarious work*. The promise of making refuge places a universal demand on us to take response-ability for the conditions of safety shared by humans and nonhumans in this precarious world, but this promise of refuge for whomever and whatever can only be fulfilled by giving ourselves over to the contingencies of the particular.

6. Conclusions: #MakingRefuge

This paper has elaborated a series of propositions for the idea of making refuge, which is understood as the work of building the conditions of trust and safety necessary for living and dying well together as co-inhabitants of diverse communities and habitats. While making refuge is inspired by the vows of the Triple Gems and allows engaged Buddhists to forthrightly express their dharma commitments, it is not confined to Buddhist praxis or audiences. We demonstrated this by connecting the dharma understanding of *dukkha* with feminist-informed conceptualizations of the body and vulnerability. Undergirded by this conceptualization of dukkha-vulnerability, the promise of making refuge provides a means to resituate mindfulness for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist purposes.

As part of the work of making refuge, mindfulness needs to pay appropriate attention to the conditions that expose living beings, humans, and nonhumans to differing degrees of vulnerability. In this way, making refuge can serve as a conceptual placeholder and an analytical rubric, as well as a praxis and guiding ethos, for addressing the different situations in which precarity is negotiated. For instance, to address the social and ecological harms of unbridled capitalism, the work of making refuge would not simply utilize mindfulness for stress reduction or personal well-being, beneficial as these may be to the individual. Rather, by locating precarity within a web of relations, the work of making refuge would also examine how existing structures and systems condition the arising of stress, exploitation, and inequality. Engaged Buddhists can perform making refuge through dialogical experimentations with others to explore alternative arrangements in relation to the commons, postcapitalism, and sustainability, for example.

We also considered making refuge in relation to the harms suffered by Asian heritage Buddhists living under conditions of white supremacy in the U.S. The dharmic-feminist conceptualization of vulnerability allowed us to apply making refuge as an analytical rubric to examine the concerns expressed by Asian American Buddhist commentators like Funie Hsu and the late Aaron Lee. Particularly, we considered Hsu's commentary in *Buddhadharma/Lion's Roar* on the cultural erasure suffered by the Japanese American Buddhist community. Unlike Lee, who adopted the online persona of an "Angry Asian Buddhist" to amplify the voices of heritage Buddhists, Hsu's commentary did not adopt an angry tone but a reconciliatory one. Yet, it attracted angry reactions, ostensibly from white readers, that accused her of being a false Buddhist and of sowing discord between heritage and convert Buddhists.

We dwell on the matter of anger to underscore the restorative, healing potential when we become mindful of the differing degrees of vulnerability and affordances of privilege (or the lack thereof) unevenly distributed under prevailing arrangements of power. As we write this conclusion, the world has just witnessed the court hearing for the sexual assault allegations by Christine Blasey Ford against Brett Kavanaugh, the incoming U.S. Supreme Court Justice. The whole affair revealed starkly who is allowed to be angry and who isn't. Ford had to maintain composure as she exposed herself to retraumatizing questioning and public scrutiny. Whereas Kavanaugh, at the urging of White House counsel Don McGahn, unleashed anger in his testimony to deflect probing questions. Likewise, Senator Lindsey Graham lashed out at Ford's testimony and even defended Donald Trump's mocking of Ford. As women protestors, many of whom are survivors of sexual assault, confronted Senators at the Capitol, their expression of pain and demand for justice were belittled by Senator Orrin Hatch, who waved them off dismissively and told them to "grow up." While Senator Mitch McConnell expressed glee, saying that he wanted to "thank the mob" because their protest has energized his party's support base to pushback. Angry white men get to claim righteousness while angry women are a hysterical mob (Haenfler 2018).

This contestation of outrage over the harms suffered by women vis-à-vis the privileges enjoyed by men in positions of power, is part of a larger movement that has been gathering momentum internationally—the #MeToo movement, which adopts the phrase used by the Black American woman activist Tarana Burke, as a social media hashtag to demonstrate the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment. As a struggle for restorative justice and transformative healing from the everyday harms of rape culture, the #MeToo movement underscores the conceptualizations of dukkha-vulnerability and an ethos of response-ability we are arguing for in the promise of making refuge. Just as we have shown with the harms of culture erasure suffered by minoritized Asian American Buddhists, the harms of rape culture are enacted under prevailing patriarchal, male-privileging arrangements of power that expose women to greater degrees of vulnerability.

This vulnerability is not a subjective disposition of any given body identifiable as a woman, but is rather a condition that arises relationally when a body navigates a field of forces, objects, structures, and passions. For example, a woman must take precaution when walking home alone at night, or when accepting an offer of a drink at a nightclub, in ways that a man does not. Similarly, for Black people in the U.S., they are exposed to the danger of police shooting in ways that white people are not. As it happened with the killing of Philando Castile who was purportedly pulled over for a broken tail-light but shot by the officer (Garcia and Lopez 2017), or the killing of security guard Jemel Roberson who apprehended a gunman but was shot by the police when they arrived at the scene (Sullivan 2018), Black people are exposed to greater degrees of vulnerability when they navigate a field of forces (e.g., traffic), objects (e.g., broken tail-light), structures (e.g., policing), and passions (e.g., fear).

As discussed with Stauffer's ideas on ethical loneliness, the expressions of anger in movements like #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter—and on a smaller scale in Lee's Angry Asian Buddhist persona—should be regarded as a form of reasonable action, because they are calling attention to the effects of harm, for justice, and for assurance that violence will not recur. Yet, these calls tend to get dismissed or trivialized by dominant or privileged parties; or, as with the backlash against Hsu's article and Kavanaugh's

angry outburst, indignation and righteous anger are denied to the aggrieved party, appropriated and used against them instead. But the injustices and harms perpetuated by white supremacy, racism, cultural erasure, and rape culture are systemic problems distributed across institutional operations and everyday conduct. They need to be addressed at both the macro level of structural change and micro level of interpersonal encounters. Restorative justice and transformative healing require an ethos of response-ability from all parties, on multiple scales, regardless of whether one is a direct perpetrator of those harms or not.

From moment to moment—when we encounter the urgent meowing of an abandoned kitten; when we encounter a traumatic memory co-arising with an unpleasant sensation; when we encounter a man harassing a woman; when we encounter a racist or homophobe abusing a passerby; when we encounter the earth and homes of human and nonhuman others being ravaged for the building of pipelines; when we encounter such digital promises as #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo—there can be no refuge unless we entrust ourselves to the situational capacity for responsiveness: a promise which entangles the self with others and the world in response-ability.

Do we speak up and intervene, or do we look away and keep silent? Do we give space for the anger of oppressed people and listen deeply, or do we dismiss their feelings and police their tone of speech? When we become responsive to the un/intended effects of harm engendered by un/intentional actions, we begin to heal damaged lives and repair broken worlds; we hold the door open for justice. An ethos of response-ability builds the conditions of trust and safety necessary for living and dying well together as co-inhabitants of diverse communities and habitats. This is the promise of #MakingRefuge.

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