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Militarized Refuge(es)

As battles become bases, so bases become battles; the bases in East Asia acquired in the Spanish American War and in World War II, such as Guam, Okinawa and the Philippines, became the primary sites from which the United States waged war on Vietnam. Without them, the costs and logistical obstacles for the U.S. would have been immense.

Catherine Lutz, *Bases of Empire*

Just days before the Fall of Saigon,[1] my mother and I were among the thousands of people who were waiting anxiously at Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport to board overloaded U.S. military cargo carriers that were evacuating American personnel and their South Vietnamese allies. Since cargo carriers are not designed for passengers, we crouched uncomfortably on the aircraft floor, packed tightly against other exhausted bodies, as the carrier hurriedly exited the city, heading toward the Pacific. Approximately three hours later, the aircraft landed in the Philippines, where a group of Catholic nuns greeted us with refreshments and prayers; after refueling and a brief rest, the carrier flew us to a hastily assembled refugee center on the U.S. territory of Guam. The next evening, in our makeshift "tent city" on Guam, we heard on the radio that the Communist North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops had captured Saigon, forcing the South Vietnamese government to surrender. To this day, I remember the stillness of a stunned people, suddenly without their *quê hương* (homeland). After a short stay on

Guam, where we spent our days waiting in long lines for just about everything, we boarded a commercial aircraft and flew about 6,000 miles to our final destination: California.

In all, U.S. military aircraft carriers airlifted approximately 130,000 Vietnamese citizens out of the city in the final days before the Fall of Saigon. It was only in conducting research for this chapter that I discovered that the route my mother and I took was the one most frequently used for airlifted refugees: from Vietnam to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines to Andersen Air Force Base on Guam to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California; over 41 percent traveled it.[2] An additional 19 percent went from Vietnam to Guam and then on to Camp Pendleton; another 32 percent traveled to Camp Pendleton, making stops in the Philippines, Guam, or Wake Island. My research also revealed the oft-hidden *colonial* and *militarized* nature of these evacuations. With the Defense Department coordinating transportation and the Joint Chiefs of Staff–Pacific Command in charge of the military moves necessary for the evacuation, Vietnamese were airlifted from Saigon on U.S. military aircrafts, transferred to U.S. military bases in the Philippines, Guam, Thailand, Wake Island, and Hawaii, and delivered to yet another set of military bases throughout the United States: Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, or Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. Moving from one U.S. military base to another, Vietnamese refugees in effect witnessed firsthand the reach of the U.S. empire in the Asia-Pacific region. That few scholars, including myself, have questioned these military connections speaks to the power of the myth of U.S. "rescue and liberation" to make un-visible the militarized nature of the evacuations.

In chapter 4, I will argue that the narrative of the "good refugee" has been key in enabling the United States to turn the Vietnam War improbably into a "good war"—an ultimately necessary and moral war. Here, I show that the good-war narrative requires the production not only of the good refugee but also of the good *refuge*. The making of the "good refuge" was launched in April 1975 as U.S. media and officials extolled and sensationalized the last-ditch efforts to evacuate and encamp the shell-shocked refugees at military bases throughout the Pacific archipelago. Ayako Sahara has argued that the end of the Vietnam War and its aftermath were the moments that the Ford and Carter administrations represented

Southeast Asian refugees as the white man's burden, and the United States as the magnanimous rescuers, in order to facilitate national rehabilitation for the loss of the Vietnam War.[3] U.S. efforts to reposition itself as the savior of Vietnam's "runaways" suggest that humanitarian interventions are not merely about resolving a problem; they are also practices that "work principally to recuperate state sovereignty in the face of specific historical challenges."[4]

To upend U.S. self-presentation as the good refuge, this chapter exposes the militarized nature of what has been dubbed "the largest humanitarian airlift in history."[5] Methodologically, I trace the most-traveled refugee route via military aircraft as a critical lens through which to map, both discursively and materially, the transpacific *displacement* brought about by the legacy of U.S. colonial and military expansion into the Asia Pacific region. I make two related arguments: the first about military colonialism, which contends that it was the region's (neo)colonial dependence on the United States that turned the Philippines and Guam—U.S. former and current colonial territories, respectively—into the "ideal" receiving centers of the U.S. rescuing project; the second about militarized refuge(es), which shows that *refugees* and *refuge* are mutually constituted and that both emerge out of and in turn bolster U.S. militarism. American studies scholars have written extensively on the epistemic and symbolic violence of war making, but this chapter examines war in terms of "militarized violence": the raw, brutal, and destructive forces that Western imperial powers unleash on the lands and bodies of racialized peoples across time and space.

MILITARY COLONIALISM: ABOUT ISLANDS

As indicated above, about 92 percent of the first-wave Vietnamese refugees who fled to the United States in 1975 trekked through the Philippines, Guam, or Wake Island—all islands, all with prominent U.S. military bases.[6] Not mere happenstance, these stopovers followed the dictates of a "militarized organizing logic"[7] that reflected—and revealed—the layering of past colonial and ongoing militarization practices on these islands. Since the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States had colonized islands—Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean,

and Guam, Eastern Samoa, Wake Island, Hawaii, and the Philippines in the Pacific—and transformed them into strategic sites for advancing American economic and military interests. In all these islands, the United States established coal stations, communication lines, and naval harbors, wreaking havoc on the local population, economy, and ecology in the process.[8] Calling attention to the connections between colonialism and militarization, Robert Harkavy reports that, from the nineteenth century until and beyond World War II, most overseas bases throughout the world were "automatically provided by colonial control and were an important aspect and purpose of imperial domination."[9]

The Philippines: America's "First Vietnam"

In 1898, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, the United States brutally took possession of the Philippines over native opposition and uprising, thereby extending its "Manifest Destiny" to Pacific Asia. Linking U.S. war in the Philippines to that in Vietnam, Luzviminda Francisco dubs U.S. imperial aggression in the Philippines the "first Vietnam" in order to dispute the contention that the violent U.S. war in Vietnam was an "aberration" of American foreign policy.[10] It was during the Philippine-American War (1899–1902)—which resulted in the death of about a million Filipinos, the destruction of the nationalist forces, and the U.S. territorial annexation of the Philippines—that the United States established its first military bases there. For the next century, the Philippines hosted, often unwillingly, some of the United States' largest overseas air force and naval bases. As a consequence, the Philippines was key to U.S. power projection capabilities in the Pacific Basin, serving as its prime military outpost and stepping stone to China and the Asian mainland.[11]

Established as a direct consequence of the U.S. colonial occupation of the Philippines, Clark Air Force Base (AFB) was initially a U.S. Army Calvary post, Fort Stotsenburg, until the creation of the Air Force in 1947. From 1903 to 1979, Clark provided a vital "umbrella of security and surveillance to the Pacific region."[12] Even after the Philippines' formal independence in 1946, the Military Bases Agreement, signed one year later, formalized the establishment of twenty-

three air and naval bases in strategic parts of the Philippines, the most important of which were Clark AFB and the Subic Naval Base.[13] Although the agreement was signed in 1947, its preliminary terms had been arranged before World War II, in effect making it an agreement between the United States and its colony, not between two sovereign states. In comparing this Military Bases Agreement with similar postwar military arrangements between the United States and other countries, Voltaire Garcia II concluded that "the Philippine treaty is the most onerous" and that its provisions "made the bases virtual territories of the United States."[14] In 1951, the United States and the Philippines signed the Mutual Defense Treaty, which obligated both countries to provide joint defense against any external military attack in the Pacific on either country, further entrenching U.S. military control over the Philippines.[15] Although the treaty was purportedly about military cooperation for the good of both nations, it was in effect a colonial project, with the American military machine allegedly "protecting a feminized, brown Pacific."[16]

During the Cold War, Clark grew into a major American air base. At its peak, it had a permanent population of 15,000, making it the largest American base overseas.[17] In 1979, pressed by Filipino intellectuals and nationalists who objected to the pervasive U.S. military presence, the Philippines and the United States signed a new agreement that established Philippine sovereignty over the bases but still guaranteed the United States "unhampered" military use of them. It was not until a 1991 vote for national sovereignty by the Philippine Senate that the U.S. Air Force transferred Clark back to the Philippine government, some ninety years after the first U.S. troops landed in the Philippines.[18]

Guam: "Where America's Day Begins"

After World War II, colonialism and militarism converged in the Pacific. Willfully aborting the decolonization movement in Micronesia, American military leaders turned the region's islands into a Pacific "base network" that would support U.S. military deployment in allied Asian nations as part of the containment of

communism.[19] Once they had secured American hegemony in the Pacific, military leaders proceeded to build permanent facilities on key islands in Micronesia, primarily Guam and Kwajalein Atoll. As the largest of more than 2,000 islands scattered between Hawaii and the Philippines, Guam's role in the geopolitics of the Pacific was transformed from the prewar situation, "in which Guam was a lonely American outpost surrounded by hostile Japanese islands, to one in which Guam was the center of an American-dominated lake that encompassed the entire western Pacific Ocean," second in importance only to Hawaii. By 1956, Andersen AFB, a 20,000-acre site located on the northern end of the island of Guam, had become Strategic Air Command's chief base in the Pacific, one of thirty-eight overseas bases that encircled the Sino-Soviet Bloc.

The militarization of Guam was swift and expansive. On August 11, 1945, Admiral Chester Nimitz informed the U.S. chief of naval operations that to convert Guam into a "Gibraltar of the Pacific" would require 75,000 acres, or 55 percent of the island. About a year later, the Land Acquisition Act was passed, authorizing the Navy Department to acquire private land needed for permanent military installations on Guam.[20] By the beginning of 1950, the U.S. federal government controlled close to 60 percent of the island. Today, the U.S. military maintains jurisdiction over approximately 39,000 acres, or one-third of Guam's total land area;[21] given Guam's location relative to the International Date Line, it seems fitting that the island's motto is "Where America's Day Begins." According to anthropologist Catherine Lutz, "Guam, objectively, has the highest ratio of U.S. military spending and military hardware and land takings from indigenous U.S. populations of any place on earth."[22]

MILITARIZED REFUGE: RESOLVING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The Philippines and Guam—Pacific Stopovers

Grafting the colonial histories of the Philippines and Guam onto the history of the Vietnam War, this section illuminates how residual and ongoing effects of colonial subordination "constitute the conditions of possibility for ongoing forms of

militarization."[23] Therein lies the crux of what I term militarized *refuge*: it was the enormity of the military buildup in the Pacific that uniquely equipped U.S. bases there to handle the large-scale refugee rescue operation. Felix Moos and C. S. Morrison describe the U.S. decision to use the military infrastructure in the Pacific for the rescue operation as "inevitable": "An operation of this magnitude, and one requiring immediate execution, eliminated any alternative."[24] In short, U.S. evacuation efforts were not a slapdash response to an emergency situation that arose in Vietnam in 1975 but rather part and parcel of the long-standing militarized histories and circuits that connected Vietnam, the Philippines, and Guam, dating back to 1898.

A seemingly humanitarian gesture, the U.S. designation of Clark AFB as a refugee staging point was intimately linked to, and a direct outcome of, U.S. colonial subordination and militarization of the Philippines. Because of that base's prominence and proximity to Saigon, U.S. officials promptly designated it the first refugee "staging area": a temporary housing site for Vietnamese en route to the continental United States to complete the necessary screening and paperwork.[25] Flown there by military aircraft C-141s and C-130s, more than 30,000 refugees, including over 1,500 orphans, transited through Clark AFB in the spring of 1975.[26] At its peak, in April and May, as many as 2,000 refugees at a time were housed in a tent city adjacent to the base's Bamboo Bowl sports stadium.[27] However, as the flow of refugees surged, Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos informed the U.S. ambassador on April 23 that the country would accept no more Vietnamese refugees, thus foreclosing the most promising staging area in the Asia-Pacific region.[28] In response, that very same day, U.S. officials moved the premier refugee staging area from the Philippines to Guam, and they ordered the local Pacific Command representative on Guam and the Commander Naval Air Forces Marianas to prepare to accept, shelter, and process the refugees as they were being evacuated from South Vietnam.[29]

The swift U.S. decision to designate Clark AFB as a refugee staging area, and the Philippines' equally quick refusal to accept any more refugees, reflected the ambiguous nature of the 1947 Military Bases Agreement: though the United States had control of the bases, the Philippines had sovereignty over them. In the case of

Guam, there was no such ambiguity. Since Congress had passed the Organic Act in 1950, which decreed Guam an unincorporated organized territory of the United States under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, the federal government had held plenary powers—that is, full authority—over the island.[30] On an island where the U.S. military controlled one-third of its territory, Guam—more specifically, its air and naval bases—became the "logical" transit camps for the processing of evacuees.

With total land area of about 200 square miles and meager local resources, Guam was hardly an ideal location for the large-scale refugee operation. That it became *the* major refugee staging point in the Pacific had more to do with the U.S. militarization of Guam than with U.S. humanitarianism. Directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff–Pacific Command's local area commander, Operation New Life was a massive undertaking, requiring the resources and manpower of all military branches on Guam as well as those of neighboring Pacific and mainland bases.[31] In all, nearly 20,000 military personnel, including the crews from visiting ships and aircrafts, were directly involved in the Guam refugee operation. Military bases, as the largest and most resourced institutions on Guam, doubled as refugee shelters. Refugees were initially housed in temporary barracks on Anderson AFB, on the Navy field at Agana, and at the U.S. Marine Corps Camp at Asan Point, and subsequently in the hastily constructed but massive tent city on Orote Point within the U.S. Naval Station, which provided tent space for about 50,000 people, including my mother and me.[32]

At the onset of the refugee influx, the Pacific Command representatives on Guam estimated that, even with the use of all military structures and all available civilian rentals, Guam could shelter a *maximum* of 13,000 people for a *short* period of time.[33] However, in all, more than 115,000 evacuees passed through Guam, a number that exceeded Guam's civilian population at that time by at least 25,000.[34] At its peak, as many as 3,700 evacuees were processed through and airlifted out of Andersen on any given day.[35] The sheer volume of refugees overwhelmed Guam's limited resources. Locals found their access to lagoons and beaches reduced, their water supply rationed, and their travel restricted as military vehicles jammed busy roads. Children had no transportation to school

because all of the 181 school buses were being used to transfer refugees from the various air and ship terminals to the temporary military housing and campsites. Overall health conditions also deteriorated, as mosquito and sewage-borne diseases proliferated.[36] Not only did more refugees come than expected, but they also stayed longer than anticipated, thereby pushing the actual refugee population on Guam beyond an acceptable limit. Begun on April 23, 1975, Operation New Life was not officially closed until October 16 that year, and it was not until January 15, 1976, that the last evacuee left Guam. According to a local newspaper, however, even as of April 1976 Washington had yet to reimburse Guam for refugee-related costs that totaled nearly $1 million.[37]

The Vietnamese refugees were not supposed to linger on Guam; they were to be processed almost immediately and then sent on to the continental United States. However, some U.S. states initially refused to accept the refugees or postponed the arrival date, in part because of a lack of planning and proper facilities but also because of adverse reactions by the public and strong opposition by state officials to the influx of refugees. As an "unincorporated territory of the United States" with second-class citizenship status, Guam had little choice but to continue housing the refugees until U.S. states decided to receive them.[38] Thus, the U.S. decision to designate Guam the primary staging ground for refugees, even when the island's resources were severely stretched and its inhabitants adversely affected, repeats the long-standing belief that indigenous land is essentially "empty land"—that is, land empty of its indigenous population. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, faced with strong public opposition to the influx of Russian and East European refugees, U.S. Cold War strategists likewise attempted to resettle the refugees on what they considered to be empty—or, more accurately, emptied—land on the Virgin Islands, or on "some other insular possession."[39] Commenting on U.S. intentions to reconstitute these "empty lands" as new homelands for refugees, Susan Carruthers opines: "Shut out by the 'paper wall' that immigration restrictionism erected around the United States, [Eastern Bloc] escapees were imagined reenacting the founding drama of a territory similarly conceived by its first colonists as 'unused' land."[40] In some ways, the U.S. carpet bombing of Vietnam was also symptomatic of an empty-land

mentality—a flagrant dismissiveness of the country "as a worthless piece of land."[41]

In short, the refugee situation on Guam bespoke the intertwined histories of U.S. military colonialism on Guam and its war in Vietnam: it was the militarization of the colonized island and its indigenous inhabitants that turned Guam into an "ideal" dumping ground for the unwanted Vietnamese refugees, the discards of U.S. war in Vietnam. Moreover, the refugee presence bore witness not only to the tenacity but also to the limits of U.S. empire, critically juxtaposing "the United States' nineteenth-century imperial project with its *failed* Cold War objectives in Southeast Asia."[42]

California's Camp Pendleton—Refugees' First U.S. Home

From Guam, many Vietnamese refugees journeyed to the other side of the Pacific—to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, a 125,000-acre amphibious training base on the Southern California coast, in San Diego County. There, at a U.S. military base, the largest Vietnamese population outside of Vietnam got its start in America. Like Clark and Andersen AFBs, Camp Pendleton emerged out of a history of conquest: it is located in the traditional territory of the Juaneno, Luiseno, and Kumeyaay tribes, which had been "discovered" by Spanish padres and voyagers who traveled to Southern California in the late eighteenth century, "owned" by unscrupulous Anglo-American settlers for about a century as the California state legislature repeatedly blocked federal ratification of treaties with native communities, and ultimately "acquired" by the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942 in order to establish a West Coast base for combat training.[43] Camp Pendleton's prized land—its varied topography, which combines a breathtakingly beautiful seventeen-mile shoreline and "extensive, diverse inland ranges and maneuver areas," makes it ideal for combat training[44]—is thus "stolen land," an occupied territory like Guam.[45] This fact remains unacknowledged, replaced with the myth of empty land. According to the official website of the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, "Spanish explorers, colorful politicians, herds of thundering cattle, skillful vaqueros and tough Marines have all contributed to the history of this

land."[46] Conspicuously absent in this official origin story is an account of the stolen land and of the San Diego native communities that have been made landless and destitute as a result. Nonetheless, this buried past has continued to surface—sometimes literally. As of 2001, there had been seventeen inadvertent discoveries of Native American remains and objects involving three major military projects on Camp Pendleton, including "complete burials, human bone fragments, and funerary objects."[47]

The first military installation on the U.S. mainland to provide accommodations for Vietnamese evacuees, Camp Pendleton temporarily housed over 50,000 refugees between April and August 1975. Like other refugee centers in the Pacific, setting up the tent city to house the refugees was a massive undertaking: nearly 900 Marines and civilians worked for six days to erect the 958 tents and 140 Quonset huts.[48] Heavily covered by national and international media, Camp Pendleton's participation in the U.S. military's 1975 relocation effort, dubbed Operation New Arrivals, was key to U.S. efforts to recuperate after the defeat in Vietnam; its importance to the nation was underscored by First Lady Betty Ford's May 21 visit to the camp to greet newly arrived Vietnamese children.[49] For a nation still reeling from the shock of defeat and the agony of a deeply divisive war, watching images of U.S. Marines—the central players in that very war—working "around the clock to build eight tent cities and to provide water, food, clothing, medicine, electricity, power, and security for the first 18,000 refugees"[50] must have been cathartic, a step toward reclaiming faith in America's goodness and moving beyond the extremely unpopular war. For American soldiers like Lewis Beatty, a Camp Pendleton Marine with two tours in Vietnam who "helped put up tents, built latrines, [and] hauled clothes and diapers," assisting the refugees provided a sense of redemption. Looking back on his war experiences in Vietnam thirty-five years later, Beatty confided that "we saw things that no person should ever see." Yet the arrival of the Vietnamese and their touted assimilation into the United States turned his sorrow into joy, enabling him to put the war behind him and to revel in their (presumed) shared experience of parenthood: "Here it was joy. In their kids, I could see my kids. . . . The hard times those people had to go through to assimilate into our society."[51]

These warm images, replayed on every anniversary of the Fall of Saigon—of soldiers caring for Vietnamese evacuees, of Vietnamese spouting gratitude for American generosity—tell only half-truths. They conveniently erase the fact that the majority of Americans did not welcome the refugees' arrival. A Gallup poll taken in May 1975 indicated that 54 percent of the respondents opposed the settlement of Vietnamese in the United States. In numerous letters and phone calls to public officials, many Americans urged that little or no government assistance be allocated to the refugees.[52] This opposition was racially charged. In California, then-governor Jerry Brown actively opposed Vietnamese settlement, even attempting to prevent planes carrying refugees from landing at Travis Air Force Base near Sacramento, claiming that the Vietnamese would add to the state's already-large minority population.[53] California's Republican representative to Congress, Burt Talcott, exclaimed to his constituents, "Damn it, we have too many Orientals."[54] In the communities near Camp Pendleton (and the three other refugee receiving centers), which were battling high unemployment rates, residents loudly opposed the settlement of refugees in their neighborhoods, spurring the State Department to disperse the refugees as widely as possible throughout the country in order to minimize the financial burden on any single locality.[55]

The warm images also made un-visible the connection between the refugee recovery mission and the military violence that preceded it—the fact that both were executed by the same military outfit: Camp Pendleton's 1st Marines. Indeed, the same individual, General Paul Graham, directed both combat and rescue efforts, further blurring one into the other. In 1967, Graham served as assistant chief of staff of the 1st Marine Division in South Vietnam and, later, as commanding officer of the 5th Marine Regiment. In April 1975, now advanced to the rank of brigadier general, Graham, as the West Coast Marine Corps coordinator, processed over 50,000 Vietnamese and Thai refugees from Southeast Asia at Camp Pendleton. While serving in this capacity, Graham was awarded a Gold Star. Upon his retirement, he was presented with a personal Certificate of Appreciation from President Gerald Ford for "meritorious service in the resettlement of Indo Chinese refugees in the United States, as well as the

Distinguished Service Medal."[56] Graham's "meritorious service" in the resettlement of the refugees included setting up a tight security system in the tent city, making sure that "there were MPs [military police] everywhere," and "quell[ing] all the conflicts immediately. He was keeping it in total control."[57] Graham's illustrious career, his promotions and recognitions, was thus built in part on the role that he played in executing both the violence against and the recovery of Vietnamese bodies.

MILITARIZED REFUGE: PRODUCING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The material and ideological conversion of U.S. military bases into places of *refuge*—places that were meant to *resolve* the refugee crisis, promising peace and protection—discursively transformed the United States from violent aggressor in Vietnam to benevolent rescuer of its people. In this section, I challenge the logic of this "makeover" by detailing the violent roles that these military bases—these purported places of refuge—played in the Vietnam War, in order to hold them accountable for the war-induced displacement of the Vietnamese people. The term *militarized* refuge—its intended jarring juxtaposition and accent on "militarized"—exposes the hidden violence behind the humanitarian term "refuge," thereby challenging the powerful narrative of America(ns) rescuing and caring for Vietnam's "runaways" that erases the role that U.S. foreign policy and war played in spurring the refugee exodus. These militarized refugee camps had precedents, most notably in the hundreds of work and concentration camps in Germany that were converted into "Assembly Centres" for refugees—the very victims of these camps—in postwar Europe.[58]

In the Philippines, Clark AFB was the backbone of logistical support for U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Soon after the United States proclaimed its campaign to contain communism in the late 1940s, Clark became the headquarters of the 13th Air Force and played a key logistical role in support of the U.S. forces in the Korean War (1950–53). From 1965 to 1975, as the largest overseas U.S. military base in the world, Clark became the major staging base for U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, providing crucial logistical support for the

Vietnam War. Air traffic at Clark reached as high as 40 transports per day, all bound for Vietnam. At the same time, in an exercise of its fledgling sovereignty, the Philippines refused to permit the United States to mount B-52 bombing runs from Clark: the aircraft had to fly from Guam but were refueled from Clark. U.S. troops at Clark also provided vital support to the war because they spent a significant portion of their alleged "temporary duty" in Vietnam. The large number of temporary-duty troops who were sent to Vietnam from Clark, as well as from other U.S. bases in the Pacific, was part of the Pentagon's illicit design to mislead Congress about the number of troops that were officially assigned to Vietnam's combat zone.[59]

The United States could not impose its military will on the Philippines, a sovereign nation, but it could and did on Guam, its unincorporated territory. When the United States was not permitted to mount B-52 bombing runs from Clark, it turned to Anderson AFB, which came to play a "legendary" role in the Vietnam War, launching devastating bombing missions over North and South Vietnam for close to a decade.[60] In this way, Guam's fate was linked to that of the Philippines as U.S. military decisions often triangulated these two vital nodes in the Pacific base network. The two air force bases also joined efforts in providing crucial medical support for U.S. troops during the Vietnam War. Beginning in November 1965, four times a week, C-141 aircraft would fly from Clark into Da Nang to load casualties, return for a two-hour stop at Clark, and then fly on to Guam. The close proximity of these three sites—Vietnam, the Philippines, and Guam, linked via U.S. militarism in the Pacific—meant that injured soldiers were transferred to Guam within two or three days of injury, as flight times between Da Nang and Clark was about two and a half hours and between Clark and Guam was about four hours.[61]

After it became operational as North Field in 1945, Andersen AFB played vital roles in U.S. wars in the Pacific, launching daily bombing missions over Japan during World War II, serving as a focal point for aircraft and material flying west during the Korean War, and supporting rotational bomber deployments from stateside bases after that war—first with B-29s, and eventually hosting B-36, B-47, B-50, B-52, KC-97, and KC-135 units. From 1945 to 1951, Strategic Air Command

used Andersen to train and practice its wartime skills, which would be deployed time and again in Southeast Asia.[62]

Guam's involvement in the Vietnam War began in 1962, when it first served as a support base for the American advisers that President John F. Kennedy dispatched to South Vietnam. In mid-1965, after the United States deployed ground combat units in South Vietnam, Guam's role in the war was greatly expanded: "The number of bombing runs over North and South Vietnam required tons of bombs to be unloaded, for example, at the Naval Station in Guam, stored at the Naval Magazine in the southern area of the island, and then shipped to be loaded onto B-52s at Andersen Air Force Base every day during years of the war."[63] A hornet's nest of intense activity, Andersen rapidly became the largest U.S. base for B-52 bombers—"the eight-engine behemoths that attempted to bomb the Vietnamese communists into submission."[64] Given Guam's proximity to Vietnam, a B-52, which carries 108 500-pound bombs, could fly from Guam to Vietnam and back without refueling.[65] On June 18, 1965, Andersen launched twenty-seven B-52s against suspected Viet Cong base operations and supply lines, the first of thousands of conventional "iron bomb" strikes—dubbed Operation Arc Light—over North and South Vietnam as well as Cambodia and Laos. The Nixon Doctrine, announced on Guam on July 25, 1969, initiated the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from Vietnam but also immediately escalated the U.S. air war, with B-52 bombing missions from Guam increasing in tempo and ferocity.[66] In 1972, Andersen was the site of the most massive buildup of airpower in history, with more than 15,000 crews and over 150 B-52s lining all available flight line space—about five miles long. At its peak, Andersen housed about 165 B-52s.[67] During Operation Linebacker II (named after Nixon's favorite sport), the round-the-clock "Christmas bombing" against the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong in December 1972, bombers stationed at Andersen flew 729 sorties in eleven days. On December 18, 87 B-52s were launched from Andersen in less than two hours. Dubbed the "11-day war," Operation Linebacker II is credited for forcing the North Vietnamese to return to the stalled Paris peace talks and to sign a cease-fire agreement in January 1973.[68] The Nixon Doctrine was thus a racial project: by withdrawing American troops but intensifying the air raid, the United States prioritized

American lives over Vietnamese lives, preserving the former while obliterating the latter, racialized to be dispensable, via carpet bombing.

The U.S. air war, launched from Guam, decisively disrupted life on the island, underscoring once again the total disregard for the island's inhabitants. Richard Mackie, a Public Health Service officer, describes the thundering impact of the air war on everyday life:

> There was no announcement. There was no warning. It just started happening. Every hour, day and night, every house . . . would almost shake off its foundation as the deafening roar of three B-52s and a refueling plane would pass a few hundred feet over our heads. . . . Life became tedious, sleep was almost impossible. Conversations were continually interrupted. We found ourselves constantly gritting our teeth and staring angrily at the ceiling as each 'sortie' passed overhead. Guam's main highway was jammed day and night with trucks hauling bombs from the port to the airbase.[69]

Finally, the Department of Defense's busiest training installation, California's Camp Pendleton, trained more than 40,000 active-duty and 26,000 reserve military personnel each year for combat.[70] During the Vietnam War, Marines arriving at the Camp were given fifteen intensive training days, complete with a fabricated Vietnamese jungle village with deadly booby traps, and then sent to Vietnam. Camp Pendleton also was (and is still today) the home base of the illustrious 1st Marine Regiment, whose battalions began arriving in Vietnam in August 1965. The regiment's battalions participated in some of the most ferocious battles of the war, including Harvest Moon in December 1965, the Utah, Iowa, Cheyenne I and II, and Double Eagle battles in the succeeding months, and Operation Hastings in July 1966. Between January and March 1968, the 1st Marines, along with other U.S. Marine and South Vietnamese units, fought to regain control of Hue, the old imperial capital, engaging in street fighting and hand-to-hand combat, killing nearly 1,900 "enemies" in the process. The regiment continued heavy fighting through the rest of the year, culminating in Operation Meade River, which killed nearly 850 Vietnamese. In 1971, the regiment was ordered back to Camp Pendleton—the last Marine infantry unit to depart Vietnam.[71] In all, during the course of the Vietnam War, via its satellite military bases, the United States dropped more explosives on Vietnam—a million tons on North Vietnam, and four million tons on South Vietnam—than in all of World War

II.[72] Four times as many bombs were dropped on South Vietnam as on North Vietnam because the U.S. goal was to decimate the Viet Cong in the South in order to preserve South Vietnam as a non-Communist, pro-American country.[73]

As such, the Pacific military bases, Clark and Andersen AFBs, and California's Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, credited and valorized for resettling Vietnamese refugees in 1975, were the very ones responsible for inducing the refugee displacement. The massive tonnage of bombs, along with the ground fighting provided by Marine units like Camp Pendleton's 1st Marines, displaced some twelve million people in South Vietnam—almost half the country's total population at the time—from their homes. Although there are no statistics on how many North Vietnamese were forced to flee their homes, it is likely that the percentage of the displaced there must have been even higher, because North Vietnam coped with the relentless American air war by evacuating major population centers to the countryside.[74] Yet the literature on Vietnamese refugees seldom mentions the internally displaced. By recognizing only the refugees fleeing Vietnam after 1975, U.S. officials and scholars have engaged in the "organized forgetting" of the millions of long-term refugees who stayed in Vietnam, whose dislocation was the direct consequence of U.S. military's "high-technology brutality."[75] Together, the hyper-visibility of the post-1975 refugees who left Vietnam and the un-visibility of the internal refugees who had been displaced throughout the war enabled the United States to represent itself as a refuge-providing rather than a refugee-producing nation.

"OPERATION BABYLIFT": VIOLENCE AND RECOVERY WITHOUT A PAUSE

In April 2010, marking the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, the Camp Pendleton Historical Society unveiled the exhibit "Images at War's End," which features a series of black and white photographs and paintings by Colonel Charles Waterhouse, depicting life at the "Tent City" refugee camp in 1975. One photograph particularly stands out: dated May 5, 1975, it depicts two Vietnamese children walking barefoot around the camp, their bodies engulfed in extra-long

military jackets (figure 1). Undoubtedly, the gesture was meant to be kind; the jackets were intended to warm their little bodies against the morning cold. Yet the picture encapsulates so vividly the concept of *militarized refuge(es),* with young Vietnamese bodies literally wrapped in U.S. protective military gear as they wandered the grounds of their new home in America—a military base that housed the same 1st Marines who had waged ferocious battles in Vietnam, leaving high numbers of combat deaths in their wake.

The military jackets photo symbolizes the unsettling entanglement between military acts of violence and recovery, with recovery overlaying and at times disappearing (the memory of) violence. As discussed above, Clark AFB, Andersen AFB, and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton were all integral to the U.S. war in Vietnam, and all doubled as refugee camps. The photo also brings to mind Operation Babylift, the controversial U.S. emergency initiative that airlifted over 2,500 Vietnamese infants and children out of war-torn Vietnam in April 1975.[76] Coined by some as "one of the most humanitarian efforts in history," Operation Babylift was hastily arranged and executed. On April 3, 1975, in an effort to reposition the United States as a do-gooder in Vietnam, President Ford pledged $2 million to airlift the children from orphanages to new homes in the United States and granted all parolee status. The majority of the flights were military cargo planes, ill equipped to carry passengers, especially infants and young children. On some flights, the babies were placed in temporary cribs, empty crates or cardboard boxes, lined up corner to corner inside the cargo bays of Air Force planes.[77]

FIGURE 1. Young Vietnamese refugee children, wearing "extra-long" field jackets, walk through one of the refugee camps aboard Camp Pendleton, California. Photo taken on May 5, 1975, by Major G. L. Gill. (Photo courtesy of Camp Pendleton Archives.)

In the Babylift mission, the changeover from acts of violence to recovery occurred *without even a pause*. On April 4, 1975, initiating Operation Babylift, a U.S. Air Force aircraft C-5, "which was returning to the Philippines after *delivering war material,*" immediately flew to Saigon to airlift Vietnamese orphans to Clark AFB.[78] In other words, the C-5 was performing two seemingly opposing missions —warring and rescuing—back to back, and yet seemingly without contradictions. In the chaotic days of the rescue mission and even long after, no one noted the irony, or what should be the incongruity, of transporting Vietnamese displaced children in the very aircraft that delivered the war material that triggered their displacement in the first place. Unfortunately, the initial Babylift mission proved to be a disaster, because the C-5 aircraft crashed minutes after takeoff, killing 138

people, most of whom were Vietnamese children. Despite the tragic accident, however, the appropriateness of the recovery mission was so self-evident that Operation Babylift resumed almost immediately.

Without a pause—that was how Operation Babylift was executed. A congressional investigation of the operation concluded that there was "a total lack of planning by federal and private agencies."[79] The emergency nature of the evacuation, stemming from the perceived urgency to get the children out of Vietnam at all costs, rushed not only the transport of the young evacuees but also the safety checks to ensure that they were bona fide orphans. When available, the children's birth records were stowed with them for the flight. But for many children swept up in the hasty evacuation from Vietnam, documentation of their family status was sketchy or incomplete at best. Bobby Nofflet, a worker with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Saigon, detailed the tumultuous days of Babylift: "There were large sheaves of papers and batches of babies. Who knew which belonged to which?"[80] It appears that, on nearly every level, "from the original decisions about which children would be airlifted to the protocols for finalizing adoptions, Operation Babylift suffered from acute disorder and a nearly complete lack of oversight."[81] The hasty and slipshod evacuation, even of children with uncertain family status, reflects the racialized belief that the United States is self-evidently a safer and better home than Vietnam for the children—a belief fortified by years of war and war propaganda waged in the region. As Vietnamese American journalist Tran Tuong Nhu, one of a small number of Vietnamese living in San Francisco at the time who assisted with Babylift arrivals, wondered, "What is this terror Americans feel that my people will devour children?"[82]

On April 29, 1975, at the urging of Tran Tuong Nhu and on behalf of three Babylift siblings, a group of California attorneys filed a class-action lawsuit in the Federal District Court in San Francisco seeking to halt the Babylift adoptions, asserting that many of the children did not appear to be orphans but had been taken from South Vietnam against their parents' wills, and that the U.S. government was obligated to return them to their families.[83] Because so much documentation was missing or fraudulent, the plaintiffs' attorneys claimed that,

out of the 2,242 children who had arrived in the United States, 1,511 were ineligible for adoption. The Immigration and Naturalization Service disputed this claim, but its own investigation found that over 10 percent of the evacuees—263 children—were ineligible for adoption.[84] After ten months of wrangling, as the lawsuit was becoming unwieldy and no documentation was forthcoming, Judge Spencer Williams threw out the case and sealed the records.[85] Eventually, after many years and lengthy lawsuits, only twelve children were reunited with their Vietnamese parents.[86]

As the Babylift children arrived in the United States, with their Vietnamese names imprinted on a bracelet around one wrist and the name and address of their adopted American parents on the other, the violence that brought about their orphanhood—and even their birth, since many were fathered and abandoned by American military personnel—was all but forgotten. Instead, they were celebrated as the lucky ones, bound toward a new life in America.[87] As a testament to the ideological importance of Operation Babylift for the war-weary nation, President Ford appeared on the tarmac at San Francisco airport and, standing before a horde of television cameras, welcomed to the United States the plane full of Vietnamese infants and children (figure 2).

A picture of Ford cradling a Vietnamese infant on board an Air Force bus shortly after carrying her off the plane in his arms—the white father protecting his brown baby—circulated widely and eventually became immortalized in a painting now housed in the President Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan.[88] With the arrival of the Babylift children, America became the white loving parents welcoming the arrival of their brown charges; the transition from warring to humanitarian nation thus completed—all without a pause.

OPERATION FREQUENT WIND: ABOUT GRATITUDE AND AMBIVALENCE

On April 30, 2010, the U.S.S. Midway Museum in San Diego held a special ceremony on its flight deck to commemorate the thirty-fifth anniversary of Operation Frequent Wind—a widely publicized mission when U.S.S. Midway

sailors reportedly rescued more than 3,000 Vietnamese refugees fleeing the Fall of Saigon. Billed as a "remarkable rescue mission" where "untold lives were saved,"[89] the commemoration was a salute to militarized refuge, celebrated on the very ship that had launched tens of thousands of combat missions—that had struck military and logistics installations in North and South Vietnam, downed a number of MiGs, and laid minefields in ports deemed of significance to the North Vietnamese.[90] Indeed, Admiral Larry Chambers, who was captain of the ship on that fateful day, choked up when he recounted the heroic deeds of his crew, causing a newspaper reporter covering the commemoration to begin her article with the following: "The U.S.S. Midway may be made of iron and steel, but deep down it was 'all heart.'"[91]

FIGURE 2. President Gerald R. Ford welcoming Vietnamese infants and children to the United States at the San Francisco airport, April 5, 1975. (Photo courtesy of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.)

Named "Honoring Freedom in America," the event drew not only the "young brave men of U.S.S. Midway"[92] but also thousands of Vietnamese Americans, hundreds of whom credited their escape from Vietnam directly to Operation Frequent Wind.[93] American valor and Vietnamese gratitude were the day's central themes: the daring American soldiers "who made it all possible,"[94] and the indebted Vietnamese refugees "who were plucked to safety."[95] Indeed, many Vietnamese—at the Midway event and elsewhere—have ardently expressed gratitude to their American rescuers, heaping praise on the very militarized refuge that I critique here. For instance, when a public radio talk show host asked Dzung Le, whose family landed on the Midway in 1975, to recount "what it was like to travel on this U.S. military helicopter and land on this flight deck," Le responded by thanking the soldiers of the Midway aircraft carrier for their gentleness and tenderness:

> I remember, it was chaotic but, strangely enough, it's also a feeling of comfort, of safety, because I knew that at the time, as we land, we are saved. . . . One of my sister[s] was quite ill at the time from dehydration, I guess, so the soldier helped carry her down there. They are very tender. And to us, we pretty much weighed about 100 pounds at the time for all of us, and these are 200 pound soldiers. They are like a gentle giant at the time, very tender. Very tender.[96]

The refugees' performances of gratitude risk recasting the history of military-induced refugee flight into a benign story of voluntary migration. They enable historians like Abe Shragge, when asked to comment on the proper tone for the Midway commemoration, to link the 1975 Operation Frequent Wind to the 1886 unveiling of the Statue of Liberty:

> I think somberness, seriousness, some joy as well that we can remember back to 1886 when we opened the Statue of Liberty to the public, that this is a nation that was created by immigrants. It was a nation that was supposed to support and nurture and welcome immigrants. And to have relived that in 1975 in this particular way under these circumstances, I think, is a very fitting tribute to a long historical process and a long heritage and tradition.[97]

Shragge's comment encapsulates the myth of immigrant America, a narrative of voluntary immigration that ignores the role that U.S. world power has played in inducing global migration.

Given the military backgrounds of many of the 1975 Vietnamese refugees and the long-term presence of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam, this instilled appreciation for the American military machine and personnel—for militarized refuge—is unsurprising. In her generative work on the figure of the grateful refugee, Mimi Nguyen has shown how Vietnamese refugees were subject to the gift of freedom twice over: first as an object of intervention in the Cold War, and second as an object of rescue in the aftermath of military defeat. According to Nguyen, to receive the U.S. gift of freedom was to be indebted to the U.S. empire.[98] However, these performances of gratitude are rooted not only in U.S. rhetoric of liberalism and freedom but also in the harsh material reality of Vietnamese refugee life. In light of the staggering losses that Vietnamese had to endure, their grateful words constitute genuine expressions of thanksgiving for having managed to get here, to *this* life, when so many others perished. Between these repetitions of thanksgiving, however, other narratives lie in wait, postponed and archived—and sometimes released.[99] For instance, on the thirty-fifth anniversary of Operation Frequent Wind, refugees interspersed their praise for the rescue mission with laments about being uninformed regarding American evacuation plans, torn from loved ones, and, in some cases, left behind by American rescuers—all of which constitute critiques, however muted, of the American rescue efforts.[100] It is important to note that most refugees, even as they express gratitude for their lives in America, mourn the tattered conditions of their beloved Vietnam and the fact that, thirty-five years later, "millions of millions of our people [in Vietnam] are still suffering."[101] Although this sentiment foremost indicts communism in Vietnam and validates life in America, it nevertheless reminds the public that the Vietnam War is *not* over, as Americans have repeatedly claimed, but that it has continued to exact an untold toll on Vietnamese in Vietnam and in the diaspora.

At the very least, these public sentiments underscore the ambivalence that many Vietnamese harbor about the role of the American military in Vietnam. A 1.5 generation Vietnamese American described this ambivalence: on the one hand, he regarded Americans in Vietnam "as crucial allies who sometimes made

mistakes as they helped South Vietnam"; on the other, he "became disillusioned" with American actions:

> They talked of freedom; [but] they bombed "the hell" out of many villages as they attempted to destroy their enemy. They often did not respond to calls from South Vietnamese soldiers for air support, which resulted in the loss of many lives among those they called "allies." That hypocrisy reflected the American disrespect for Vietnamese lives.[102]

Some Vietnamese have acted on these ambivalent feelings. For instance, during their stay on Guam, some refugees opted to bypass the United States and applied for asylum in France, Canada, England, or Australia because "they asked themselves why they should go to America if the Americans were directly or indirectly the cause of their downfall."[103] In a more openly defiant act, in September 1975, more than 1,500 men and women in a refugee camp on Guam staged a highly choreographed demonstration, demanding that they be repatriated to Vietnam—an "unsettling counternarrative" to the pervasive story of Vietnamese gratitude for U.S. benevolence.[104] These forms of critical remembering, however irresolute and mixed with the politics of gratitude, are key to the potential formation of counternarratives on the Vietnam War and "to the imagination and rearticulation of new forms of [Vietnamese] political subjectivity, collectivity, and practice."[105]

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This chapter has covered seemingly unrelated topics: U.S. colonialism in the Philippines, U.S. militarism in Guam, settler colonialism in California, and the Vietnam War. However, in tracing the most-traveled refugee route via military aircraft, I have knitted these different events together into a layered story of militarized refuge(es)—one that connects U.S. colonialism, military expansion, and transpacific displacement. This is not a traditional comparative approach that treats these events as discrete, equivalent, and already-constituted phenomena. Rather, I have adopted a *relational comparative* approach, which posits that historical memories are fluid rather than static; they need to be understood in

relation to each other and within the context of a flexible field of political discourse. My methodology thus revolves around the concept of *critical juxtaposing*:the deliberate bringing together of seemingly different historical events in an effort to reveal what would otherwise remain invisible—in this case, the contours, contents, and limits of U.S. imperialism, wars, and genocide in the Asia-Pacific region and on the U.S. mainland.[106] In connecting Vietnamese displacement to that of Filipinos, Chamorros, and Native Americans, and making intelligible the military colonialisms that engulf these spaces, this chapter has attempted to expose the hidden violence behind the humanitarian term *refuge,* thus undercutting the rescue-and-liberation narrative that erases the U.S. role in inducing the refugee crisis in the first place.