

Operation New Life

Vietnamese Refugees and US Settler Militarism in Guam

On 5 April 1975, with the Fall of Saigon imminent, Chamorro governor Ricardo J. Bordallo sent a telex to President Gerald R. Ford, asserting Guam's willingness to participate in the "highly commendable humanitarian act" of Operation Babylift and "assist you in the nation's effort to provide relief for the refugees and orphan children from South Vietnam."¹ Two weeks later, Guam was transformed from a US military outpost for combating communism during the US War in Vietnam, to the first major US processing center for South Vietnamese refugees displaced by that war.² Although covering just 210 square miles and containing a 1975 population of roughly 93,000, from 23 April to 1 November 1975 Guam played a central role in US evacuation efforts, processing more than 112,000 refugees accepted for parole during what became known as Operation New Life: a name that starkly juxtaposes the co-constitutive forces of militarism and humanitarianism, or what historian Jana K. Lipman calls "military humanitarianism," at play.³ While the term "Operation" recalled the very recent history of US military aggression in Vietnam—such as Operation Rolling Thunder and Operation Arc Light—"New Life" promised the rebirth of South Vietnamese refugees newly escaped from communist-unified Vietnam. Such a juxtaposition of terms also indexes the fact that the United States' humanitarian mission of refugee resettlement was underwritten—indeed, made possible—by US military occupation of Indigenous Chamorro land: a particular confluence of militarism and settler colonialism in Guam that is best described using Juliet Nebolon's term "settler militarism."⁴

Drawing from archival research conducted at the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center (MARC) at the University of Guam and the Nieves M. Flores Memorial Library in Hagåtña, as well as oral histories conducted between 2016 and 2021, this chapter details the development of the refugee settler condition in Guam. It argues that the humanitarian rhetoric that newspapers and politicians

used to describe Operation New Life in 1975 retroactively justified settler militarism in Guam and, by extension, positioned Vietnamese refugees in a structurally antagonistic relationship to Chamorro decolonization struggles that opposed military settlement. Putting Neda Atanasoski's concept of "humanitarian violence" in conversation with Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism, I trace how Vietnamese refugees' narratives were appropriated to humanize the US military as a settler institution, irrespective of the refugees' intent.⁵ Structural antagonisms are never totalizing, however. Attending to quotidian cross-racial encounters, this chapter highlights moments of contingency, echoing Catherine Lutz's assertion that empire and its discontents are "in the details"; in other words, identifying the "many fissures, contradictions, historical particularities, and shifts in imperial processes" can "make the human and material face and frailties of imperialism more visible" and, in so doing, "make challenges to it more likely."⁶

This chapter begins by historicizing settler militarism in Guam. It then outlines the structural antagonisms that were formed between Indigenous Chamorros and Vietnamese refugees—two populations differentially racialized by settler militarism—during Operation New Life. Vietnamese refugees were positioned as wards (albeit agential ones) of the very institution—the US military—that had dispossessed Chamorros of their land. However, as Bordallo's opening quote evidences, many Chamorros also empathized with the refugees' plight and welcomed them to Guam, suggesting alternative forms of relationality routed through Chamorro epistemologies of *inafa'maolek*. An expansive term, *inafa'maolek* means "to make good to each other" and "to promote goodwill, friendship, and cooperation," particularly after a conflict.⁷ Whereas "conflict" traditionally refers to a dispute between two Chamorro families, it can also be understood in this context as the Vietnam War.⁸ *Inafa'maolek* connotes generosity and hospitality, as well as reciprocity, interdependence, and mutual assistance. This chapter ends with moments of cross-racial encounter and refugee refusal, in which Chamorro subjects undermined the US military's efforts to divide them from the Vietnamese refugees, and Vietnamese refugees subverted American expectations to express unqualified gratitude for their rescue. Such quotidian acts of resistance challenge the seeming permanence of settler militarism and the refugee settler condition in Guam, suggesting decolonial traces of cross-racial solidarity.

SETTLER MILITARISM: THE US MILITARY'S ROLE IN LAND EXPROPRIATION IN GUAM

Before analyzing the role that Vietnamese refugees played in justifying settler militarism in Guam during Operation New Life, it is important to first establish a longer genealogy of settler militarism on the island. Settler militarism, which I understand as a subset of settler colonialism, is distinguished by the US military's prominent role in dispossessing native Chamorros of their land. Land, according

to Chamorro rights attorney Michael F. Phillips, is “literally the base” of Chamorro culture; it “incorporates special relationships: of clan, family, religion, and beliefs.”⁹ In the words of Governor Bordallo:

Guam is not just a piece of real estate to be exploited for its money-making potential. Above all else, Guam is the homeland of the Chamorro people. This is a fundamental, undeniable truth. We are very profoundly ‘taotao tano’—people of the land. This land, tiny as it is, belongs to us just as surely, just as inseparably, as we belong to it. No tragedy of history or declaration of conquest, no legalistic double-talk can change that fact. Guam is our legacy.¹⁰

Since Chamorro identity is intimately tied to the land, land dispossession produces a “genocidal effect.”¹¹ Chamorro decolonization, conversely, is organized around the reclamation of land.

For the past two centuries, the US military in particular—rather than the US government writ large or individual settler citizens—has been the primary institution responsible for expropriating Chamorro lands and waters. Following the Spanish-American War and the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the US Navy colonized Guam. In 1899, Guam’s first naval governor, Captain Richard P. Leary, issued General Order No. 15, mandating that Chamorro landowners register their lands with the US Navy. Such orders interpolated native Chamorros into a US system of private property relations that cleaved powerful extended family clans into separate nuclear family units.¹² General Order No. 15 resulted in mass land dispossession because it forced Chamorros to make an impossible choice: “either register their properties accurately and lose them because they could not pay the taxes, or not register their lands and lose them because they were not properly registered.”¹³ Naval governors wielded executive, legislative, and judicial authority, so resistant Chamorro landowners, as colonial subjects, had little legal recourse.

Nonetheless, some wealthy landowners were able to pay the required taxes and retain their lands, which they subsequently shared with other families in a demonstration of *inafa’maolek*.¹⁴ Chamorros were thus largely able to uphold their traditional subsistence economy, organized around *lâncho*, until Japanese occupation during World War II.¹⁵ During World War II, American forces heavily bombed the island in order to force the occupying Japanese Army to surrender, destroying Guam’s main population centers, Hagåtña and Sumay, as well as many other villages along Guam’s western coast. About 80 percent of the island’s homes and buildings were demolished.¹⁶ Relocated from “the Japanese concentration camps into U.S. refugee camps,” Chamorros lost their farmlands, coconut groves, and herds of cattle, the foundation of their economic and cultural livelihood, becoming internally displaced refugees—albeit Indigenous ones—on their own island.¹⁷ After the “liberation” of Guam—alternatively remembered as the “reoccupation” of the island—the US Navy refused to rebuild the decimated villages and condemned more than 85,000 acres: two-thirds of Guam’s surface area.¹⁸ Although the US Navy promised to pay rent for the condemned lands and eventually return

them to their original caretakers, the calculated rent was steeply below market value and almost none of the land was returned.¹⁹ In 1946, Colonel Louis Hugh Wilson Jr., commander of the US Marine Corps, admitted the sometimes unlawful nature of land appropriation: "This is American territory and when we landed, the people were scattered and we took what we needed, occupied it, built up the roads, and so forth, *irrespective of the ownership*."²⁰ Judith Won Pat, Democratic speaker of the Guam legislature from March 2008 to January 2017, for example, remembers that her parents and relatives were permanently displaced from their ancestral villages in Sumay, where the 5th Naval Construction Brigade built Naval Base Guam.²¹

After World War II, Guam was transformed into a military fortress that served as a "launching point for strategic bombers carrying nuclear weapons," a "base for Polaris submarines," a "naval station with ship repair and tending capabilities," a "communications base allowing for world-wide military communications," and a "listening post for the tracking of Soviet submarines."²² Within a year of US reoccupation, over twenty-one military bases were constructed in Guam.²³ Subsistence agriculture was replaced with race-based wage labor hierarchies that discriminated against Chamorro workers, reflecting the commander of US Naval Forces Marianas's judgment that the "economic development of relatively few native inhabitants should be subordinate to the real purpose for which these islands are held": "military value" and the "welfare of the United States."²⁴

Even after the Organic Act of 1950 officially ended naval rule, the US military still wielded control over choice beaches and lands. In fact, a day before the Organic Act went into effect, Guam's first civilian governor, Carlton Skinner, signed a quitclaim deed transferring control of the condemned properties from Guam's government to the United States.²⁵ Three months later, on 31 October 1950, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 10178, returning all property in the quitclaim deed to the navy, which divided the stolen land among the military branches without consulting the original Chamorro landowners. As a result, the US Navy and Air Force controlled roughly 49,600 acres, or over 36 percent of the island—a decrease from the initial 85,000 acres but still a substantial percentage.²⁶ In a statement dated 1951, a naval officer voiced the genocidal terra nullius fantasies of the occupying power: "Guam's value to the United States was entirely strategic, a communications point on the way to the Philippines and east Asia. From this point of view, it would probably have been *desirable if there had been no native population* to complicate matters."²⁷

Today, the US military continues to control 39,287 acres in Guam, over one-third of the island's surface area. Moreover, no status of force agreement (SOFA) regulates US forces in Guam. It is this longer genealogy of settler militarism in Guam that provides crucial context for Operation New Life. The same military institution that has expropriated Chamorro land since 1898 facilitated the humanitarian transfer of Vietnamese refugees to Guam, implicating Vietnamese refugees in ongoing structures of settler militarism.

GUAM: AN UNINCORPORATED PACIFIC PROCESSING
CENTER FOR VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

To understand Guam's significance as the first major US processing center for Vietnamese refugees, it is illuminating to look at other counterfactual sites, such as Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines or a US military base in the continental United States. During spring 1975, a tent city adjacent to the Bamboo Bowl sports stadium at Clark Air Force Base had temporarily housed more than 30,000 refugees. Clark Air Force Base was thus initially the intended processing center for Vietnamese evacuees. However, on 23 April 1975, President Ferdinand Marcos announced that the Philippines would no longer accept political refugees.²⁸ Given the impending communist victory in Vietnam, Marcos worried that harboring South Vietnamese government and military officials would jeopardize the Philippines' diplomatic relations with the newly unified state of Vietnam.²⁹ That very same day, the United States pivoted plans to host its main refugee processing center in the Philippines to Guam, though State Department spokesman Robert Anderson "denied that the switch had anything to do with objections from the Philippine government."³⁰ According to First Lady Madeleine Bordallo, "Operation New Life began at 3:00am in the morning when Secretary Kissinger called the governor of Guam, my husband Ricky. We were both asleep and I heard the phone ring, and the security said it was a very important call."³¹ In response to Kissinger's request that Guam host the Vietnamese evacuees, Governor Bordallo reportedly said, "Mr. Secretary, Guam was liberated by the US forces, particularly the Marines. Now, it's our time to give back to the US because of their generosity in liberating us from the occupation."³² As a survivor of Japanese occupation during World War II, Governor Bordallo empathized with the Vietnamese refugees because he "knew firsthand about the misery of war."³³ He also believed that helping the Vietnamese refugees would honor the memory of the Chamorro soldiers who had sacrificed their lives in Vietnam. In a display of *inafa'maolek*, Bordallo therefore responded, "We got to open Guam up, and we got to show our hospitality, and try and take care of these people."³⁴

Governor Bordallo's hospitality contrasted sharply with the general sentiment in the continental United States. Because of high rates of unemployment and the controversial status of the Vietnam War, many Americans strongly protested the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees, whom they deemed unassimilable aliens or potential communist infiltrators.³⁵ According to a May 1975 Gallup poll, 54 percent of all Americans were opposed to admitting Vietnamese refugees, with only 36 percent in favor.³⁶ A couple of weeks after the commencement of Operation New Life, four refugee reception centers were established on the continent for refugees who had already been vetted in Guam: Fort Chaffee Army Base in Arkansas, Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base in California, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and later Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. However, even these "militarized refugees" received virulent pushback: a placard in Arkansas read "Gooks, go home,"

and Representative Burt L. Talcott (R-CA) voiced the feeling in his district that “Damn it, we have too many Orientals.”³⁷ Similarly, a journalist reporting from Fort Indiantown Gap observed that “Asians are about as welcome in some of the small towns surrounding the nation’s newest refugee center as blacks might be at Ku Klux Klan gatherings.”³⁸

Operation New Life commenced in Guam when a planeload of Vietnamese refugees landed at Andersen Air Force Base at 4:01 p.m. on 23 April 1975.³⁹ By midnight, fifteen flights from Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base near Sài Gòn had landed, bringing 2,487 Vietnamese refugees to Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Air Station Agaña. Pacific Command representatives initially calculated that a “maximum of 13,000 people could be sheltered for a short period in Guam,” but on 15 May 1975 the number of refugees in Guam awaiting transfer peaked at 50,430, representing an over 50 percent increase in the island’s population at the time.⁴⁰ Roughly 15,000 Vietnamese refugees arrived by ship on 7 May alone, followed by another 15,000 on 12 May.⁴¹ On 13 May the hundred thousandth refugee landed in Guam: an eleven-year-old girl named Phan Truc Chi “had a lei put around her neck,” was photographed for the local newspaper, and then was rushed back “into the stream of refugees being processed.”⁴²

President Ford assigned Admiral George Steve Morrison, the commander-in-chief Pacific representative of Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and commander of US Naval Forces Marianas, to direct Operation New Life.⁴³ Under Morrison’s command, the US military set up three main camps to host the refugees: “Tent City” at Orote Point (an overgrown World War II airstrip, which at its peak housed 39,331 refugees), Camp Asan at Asan Beach (former hospital barracks used during the Vietnam War and the site of Filipino insurrectionists’ incarceration during the Philippine-American War), and “Tin City” at Andersen Air Force Base (a group of corrugated metal buildings).⁴⁴ Six smaller camps were established at the naval air station, the naval communications station in Barrigada, the Bachelors’ Civilian Quarters in Apra Heights, the naval station gym, the Seabee Masdelco Sports Arena, and Camp Minron near Polaris Point. Private companies, including J & G Enterprises, Black Construction Co., Hawaiian Dredging Co., and the (recently closed) Tokyu Hotel also housed hundreds of refugees during the operation’s height.⁴⁵ During the peak months of May and June, when more space was needed, more than 15,000 refugees were diverted to Wake Island, another unincorporated US territory in the Pacific.⁴⁶

Although many Guamanians embraced the opportunity to contribute to Operation New Life—offering to adopt and sponsor refugees, as well as volunteer as babysitters and cooks—others expressed concerns about overcrowding.⁴⁷ Several of Guam’s legislators noted potential food and housing shortages, public health risks, the probable inadequacy of federal funds to reimburse local transport and labor costs, and uncertainty as to whether tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees would choose to stay in Guam, indefinitely straining the island’s limited

resources during an economic recession.⁴⁸ Although some of these complaints can be attributed to party politics—Republican senators criticizing the decisions of Democratic Governor Bordallo—they nonetheless leveled a distinct critique of settler militarism in Guam. Republican senator Ricky Salas, for example, said, “I felt it was always their plan to leave people on Guam. . . . Kissinger and the representatives from [the Department of D]efense will deceive the people of Guam again. That is the reason the U.S. cannot be believed all over the world. We can’t believe the leaders of our nation.”⁴⁹ He further accused the State Department of being “willing to sacrifice us on Guam to protect those citizens on the Mainland who don’t want permanent resident aliens.”⁵⁰ Highlighting the unequal weight of Guamanians’ voices in US democracy, Republican senator Jerry Rivera observed: “Federal officials may be thinking that it is easier to handle the protests of Guam rather than the protests of the 50 states.”⁵¹ In these critiques, Vietnamese refugees figured as metonyms of federal overreach and exploitation: rather than merely reproduce the racist anti-refugee sentiments expressed on the continent, Guam’s representatives invoked the Vietnamese refugee figure to condemn US settler militarism in Guam. Because Guam’s residents were neither fully incorporated into the United States nor independently sovereign, however, they ultimately had little say in the matter, subject as they were to the federal government’s plenary powers. Indeed, Guam’s colonial status was a “precondition” for its role as the first major US processing center for Vietnamese refugees displaced by the US War in Vietnam.⁵²

OPERATION NEW LIFE: HUMANITARIANISM AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR SETTLER MILITARISM

According to media reports, Operation New Life prompted a marked shift in the US military’s role in Guam from wartime aggression to humanitarian care. Newspapers praised the “tremendous compassion” of US military personnel who worked long shifts—sometimes up to twenty-four hours—to shelter and feed the Vietnamese refugees.⁵³ In an article chronicling the efforts of the US Construction Battalion (more commonly referred to as CBs or “Seabees”) to hastily clear 500 acres of tanga-tanga trees and set up 3,200 tents, 191 wooden toilets, and 300 showers at Orote Point to house up to 50,000 incoming refugees, reporter Lyle Nelson notes the “Phoenix quality” of the operation, characterizing it as a “rebirth for [the Seabees’] efforts for the Vietnamese people and a symbolic windup to 13 years of sweat (and some blood).”⁵⁴ Likewise, *Pacific Daily News* (PDN) reporter Paul Miller wrote that “one of the many things in which Americans can take pride these days is the performance of our military in flying endangered thousands out of Vietnam and caring for them in hastily built staging areas such as the U.S. territory of Guam.”⁵⁵ Staff Sergeant Clarence Randall, Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, testified, “This is one of the few times in the Army that I’ve had

a chance to be on a peace mission. Most of the time when the Army is called on, it's to destroy something. But here we have the opportunity to do something to help somebody. I am proud to be here."⁵⁶

Building on the work of Jana K. Lipman, Ayako Saraha, Heather Marie Stur, and YẾN Lê Espiritu, I argue that the media's characterization of Operation New Life as a Phoenix-like "rebirth" facilitated the discursive transformation of the United States "from a violent aggressor in Vietnam to a benevolent rescuer of its people," as well as 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."⁵⁷ Such humanitarian rhetoric, however, entailed not the end of settler imperialism but rather what Simeon Man would call its "recalibration."⁵⁸ In other words, the rescue of Vietnamese refugees during Operation New Life was *co-constitutive* with the ongoing displacement of Indigenous Chamorro people; the "conversion" of US military bases in Guam into "places of refuge" for Vietnamese refugees did not preclude the settler imperialist role these bases continued to play in securing US interests across Asia and Oceania.

By centering US military actions, such humanitarian narratives also flattened the chaotic and often complex experiences of Operation New Life's Vietnamese refugees. Many Vietnamese subjects did not think they would become permanent refugees when they fled Vietnam. In "Of Luggage and Shoes," Thuy Dinh, who left Vietnam on 21 April 1975, writes, "While preparing for the trip, I never thought of the possibility that I may leave my birthplace forever, or at least for a very long time before I could return."⁵⁹ Lien Samiana has a similar story. In April 1975, Samiana had been living with her husband, Feliciano C. Samiana—a Filipino American employed by Pacific Architects and Engineers, Inc., and stationed with the US Army—and their five young children in Sài Gòn, when Feliciano received orders to leave Vietnam.⁶⁰ Hurriedly, they packed one suitcase with some clothes, important documents, and \$1000, and rushed to Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base, where they were loaded onto C-141 cargo planes. After a harrowing flight during which Samiana suffered motion sickness and witnessed a woman give birth, the family landed in Guam and were brought to Camp Asan.⁶¹ There, the family slept on hard cement and endured long food lines. Samiana initially believed the indignities would be temporary; when she left Sài Gòn on 24 April in anticipation of the communist advance, she thought she would return to Vietnam. But as 30 April passed and she heard the sounds of Sài Gòn falling on the radio, she sobbed and resigned herself to her new life. Samiana's story attests to the contingent decisions Vietnamese evacuees were forced to make, qualifying the military's unilateral narrative of humanitarian rescue.

Overall, these narratives of humanitarian rescue provided moral justification for a US military outpost in Guam: without it, the settler militarist logic went, the anticommunist refugees would have perished at the hands of communist aggressors. Indeed, the temporal effects of these humanitarian narratives extend

both backward and forward, retroactively vindicating the post–World War II construction of US military bases in Guam to combat communism during the Vietnam War, and proactively validating future military projects to further secure US-style democracy and racial capitalism across Asia and Oceania. Such settler militarist logic elides, however, the role that the US military played in displacing Vietnamese refugees from their homes in the first place, via aerial bombing campaigns, counterinsurgency plots, Agent Orange poisoning, and escalated tensions with North Vietnam.⁶² It also interpolates the displaced Vietnamese as refugee settlers, structurally at odds with Chamorro efforts to liberate Guam from military rule.⁶³

CROSS-RACIAL ENCOUNTERS: CHAMORRO PARTICIPATION IN OPERATION NEW LIFE

According to Lanny Thompson, “Colonial discourses distinguish multiple ‘others’ with the intent to rule them differently.”⁶⁴ However, as Patrick Wolfe reminds us, “the incompleteness of racial domination is the trace and the achievement of resistance, a space of hope.”⁶⁵ The structural antagonisms that pitted Vietnamese refugees hosted by the US military against Chamorro self-determination efforts to challenge that same military’s settler control were constantly being negotiated via quotidian cross-racial encounters. In truth, it is too simplistic to declare Operation New Life a unilateral settler militarist imposition. Many Guamanians, including native Chamorros, genuinely sympathized with the plight of the Vietnamese refugees and assisted the asylum efforts by volunteering in the refugee camps or donating toys and clothing to the new arrivals.⁶⁶

Indeed, as the telex that opens this chapter reveals, Governor Bordallo actually *volunteered* Guam as a staging ground for refugee processing, weeks before President Ford demanded Guam’s assistance. To note that Bordallo invited Operation New Life, which rhetorically worked to justify settler militarism in Guam, is *not* to suggest that Bordallo was a mere puppet of settler militarist control. On the contrary, in 1974 Bordallo ran his grassroots, patronage-based gubernatorial campaign for the Democratic ticket on a popular platform of Chamorro rights, articulated in both English and Chamorro.⁶⁷ Although his inaugural address seemingly embraced the US military—“You are a vital part of Guam. We welcome your valuable contributions to the growth of our island. You have our cooperation in all endeavors which are of mutual interest to our country and this territory”—Bordallo also emphasized that protecting Chamorro sovereignty over Guam’s natural resources and affairs was a top priority of his administration.⁶⁸ *Los Angeles Times* reporter David Lamb described Bordallo’s attitude toward the military as “cool but accommodating.”⁶⁹ Bordallo’s commitments to both Chamorro rights and Operation New Life are not contradictory; rather, they are an assertion of Chamorro self-determination. Chamorros fought—and continue to fight—for the right to



FIGURE 5. Guam school bus used in Operation New Life, 1975. From the collection of the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center.

determine when, how, and to whom they opened their island home. An embrace of displaced Vietnamese refugees need not entail an embrace of the military institution that hosted them.

During Operation New Life, barbed-wire fences and strict security protocols prevented substantial interactions between Vietnamese refugees and the island's residents. However, some Chamorros still found opportunities to interact with the Vietnamese refugees. Chamorro public school bus drivers transported refugees and supplies between the different camps; public health nurses gave refugees vaccines, checked for illnesses, and attended to pregnant Vietnamese women; Red Cross volunteers helped to locate and connect refugees; and others provided or prepared meals.⁷⁰ Norman Sweet, senior coordinator with the Agency for International Development (AID) refugee task force, observed that the "hospitable" people of Guam "show genuine interest in the welfare" of the refugees.⁷¹ Even President Ford commended Guamanians' "warm and outgoing response" and upheld the island's residents as an "outstanding example to other Americans and the rest of the world in meeting an international emergency."⁷²

Many Chamorros played key roles during Operation New Life. In April 1975, Raymond T. Baza (introduced in chapter 1) was invited by Admiral Morrison to help organize volunteers and translators to assist the Vietnamese refugees.⁷³ Baza tapped into his network of about ten Chamorro veterans who had married Vietnamese women. When the first plane of refugees landed at Andersen Air Force Base, Baza and the volunteers logged names, directed refugees to the food and clothing stations, and made sure they got on the right bus headed for Camp Asan, Orote Point, or Tumon Heights. His wife, Lee T. Baza, translated for the Vietnamese refugees, helped exchange money, assuaged fears about displacement, and explained the resettlement process.⁷⁴ During the height of Operation New Life, she worked twenty-four-hour days, attending to the people who arrived on planes at all hours.

Over the course of their interactions, the Baza couple developed close relationships with the Vietnamese refugees. When a refugee died, Raymond felt the loss personally and would accompany the family to Guam's naval cemetery for burial. He also loved engaging with the children: "That thing when a small child comes to you and says thank you, it really touches me because they needed help and we helped them."⁷⁵ During Operation New Life, the Bazas sponsored six Vietnamese refugee children and serve as godparents for several others. Their actions were not uncommon: "When we asked local people if they can sponsor, help us out, they were welcoming the children. Some of them adopted children. They offered shelter, families in their home."⁷⁶ Overall, Chamorros "really opened their arms and welcomed" the refugees during Operation New Life.⁷⁷

Joquin "Kin" Perez, meanwhile, was the youngest member of Governor Bordallo's cabinet and the commercial port director during Operation New Life. He remembers large US container vessels that had carried military cargo from Guam

to Vietnam during the war being repurposed after the Fall of Saigon to transport 10,000–15,000 refugees at a time to Guam.⁷⁸ Other ships, which had transferred food supplies up and down the Mekong Delta, were Vietnamese owned. Most ships had no sanitary facilities, and refugees were given no food during the seventeen-day voyage from Vietnam to Guam. When the refugees reached the port, Perez ferried them by barge to the naval station, set up public health facilities to check for infectious diseases, and arranged for the refugees' transport to Orote Point. Afterward, the government commissioned Perez's team to clean the vessels that were still seaworthy: "We had to go in there with steam cleaners, and my people had to wear protective clothing because it was really bad."⁷⁹ Perez also arranged for the disposal of the unseaworthy ships in the Marianas Trench, the deepest natural trench in the world.

According to Perez, one time a Vietnamese captain refused to surrender her ship, which had been entrusted to her by her parents. "She tied herself to the mast and when the security tried to take her off, she opened up her dress, her jacket, and she had hand grenades tied around her!"⁸⁰ Fortunately, Perez was able to bring in translators who de-escalated the situation and explained to the captain that the vessel was no longer seaworthy and that the US government would compensate her for the ship's cost. Another Vietnamese captain refused naval orders to wait while the harbor was being cleared. Once he caught sight of Guam, he rushed through the harbor, with "all of these tugboats and these security vessels running after him," because he "just wanted to make sure that he got his people and the people that were on that ship to safety."⁸¹

One high-profile incident started with a rumor that one of the refugee ships, the 3,300-ton *Tan Nam Viet*, owned and mastered by Huynh Phy Qui, contained national treasures from Vietnam. On 23 May 1975, a refugee told port officials that the ship's fifty-four packing crates contained the South Vietnamese national archives and national art treasures worth as much as \$150 million.⁸² In response, the governor's office and the US military frantically debated over who had jurisdiction over the ship and its crates. Finally, they mobilized GovGuam customs officials and M16-toting Special Enforcement Detail policemen in an operation that began at 6:00 a.m. on 24 May 1975 and lasted for sixteen hours. As the commercial port director, Perez supervised the operation: "You would not believe the security that came down on that one. The State Department, they all gathered down at the port and told us to bring the ship up to the dock."⁸³ As it turned out, however, the rumor was false. Although the ship's cargo was worth between \$70,000 and \$80,000, it consisted not of national treasures but merely the household goods of a wealthy South Vietnamese civilian who had commissioned Huynh Phy Qui to transfer his belongings out of Vietnam.

According to Perez, Operation New Life did not hurt Guam's economy, as some senators had feared, and "actually helped a little bit" because the US government brought a lot of food, medicine, and housing supplies to Guam and purchased

others from local vendors.⁸⁴ The Naval Regional Medical Center, for example, spent \$35,857.27 in support of refugee medical aid.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Department of Defense reimbursed the government of Guam for expenditures related to Operation New Life.⁸⁶ Overall Perez described Operation New Life as “a good experience for Guam” and “a good experience for a lot of us that were personally involved in it.” It was “a period in Guam history that showed us how man can be compassionate with other human beings.”⁸⁷

Monsignor David I. A. Quitugua, who grew up in Talofofo, lived through the Japanese occupation of Guam during World War II, and, on 11 February 1964, became the fifteenth Chamorro to be ordained, also played a key role during Operation New Life. In April 1975, Quitugua received orders from the archbishop and the United States Catholic Conference in Washington, DC, to set up a refugee resettlement office in Guam.⁸⁸ During Operation New Life, he managed social workers, processed refugee documents, and coordinated with military officials.⁸⁹ Vietnamese refugees who wished to stay in Guam were referred to Quitugua, who tapped into his church network to find sponsorship and employment for the refugees so they could be released from the camps. Often Quitugua would sponsor the refugees himself: “Sponsoring a family of refugees, I mean, it’s a risk, because you are responsible for them, you know. But it’s fine with me, as long as these people are out of the camp and can resettle in the place, then it’s fine with me.”⁹⁰ He remembered Operation New Life as “a great story” that he was “very happy to be a part of,” and the Vietnamese refugees as “just so easy, they don’t want trouble, all they want is peace, to have work, something to support their family, and that’s it.” In his view, Operation New Life brought “life to the people”—not only Vietnamese refugees but also Chamorros who participated in the process—and “culture to the island”: a cross-racial encounter facilitated by settler militarism in Guam.⁹¹

Judith Won Pat, meanwhile, served as a teacher during Operation New Life. For a couple hours per day, she taught Vietnamese refugee children basic English through games and songs. Decades later, as a senator, she interacted further with the Vietnamese American community in Guam, whose members told her “how hard it was for them to just take whatever they could only physically carry, which is not a lot, you know, what they consider their valuables, and to start all over, and they just don’t know how they are going to make it.”⁹² These stories of Vietnamese displacement reminded Won Pat of other forced displacements compelled by the US military, such as the dispossession of Chamorros from their villages after World War II to make room for US military base construction, and the removal of islanders from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean between 1968 and 1973 to make way for a joint US-UK military base. These archipelagic connections inform Won Pat’s political critique of settler militarism in Guam today.

Rather than dismiss these Chamorro contributions to Operation New Life as examples of false consciousness—a settler militarist appropriation of Chamorro humanitarian labor made to further consolidate the US military’s hold over

Guam—I take seriously these Indigenous acts of hospitality, or *inafa'maolek*, which undermine the structural antagonisms between refugees and natives that formed as part of the refugee settler condition in Guam. Even though Chamorro decolonization activists remain critical of colonial settlers, including refugee settlers, many Chamorros also recognized the plight of Vietnamese refugees in need of temporary asylum. Older Chamorros like Governor Bordallo drew comparisons between the experiences of the Vietnamese refugees and their own World War II experiences under Japanese occupation, associating the communist regime in Vietnam with the imperial Japanese occupiers. In a slightly different vein, Jesus Quitugua Charfauros, a retired Chamorro naval radioman chief who lived in Guam during Operation New Life, compared the US military to the Japanese occupiers, thereby critiquing the military's role in incarcerating the refugees in camps.⁹³

Importantly, Chamorros' desire to aid Vietnamese refugees did not entail their acquiescence to the US military's continual destruction of and encroachment upon their native lands and waters. Although many Chamorros genuinely welcomed the opportunity to participate in Operation New Life, they did *not* sanction the presence of Agent Orange on Guam's military bases during the Vietnam War or the spraying of the pesticide malathion to kill mosquitoes in order to reduce the number of malaria and dengue fever outbreaks during the operation—toxins that seeped into the environment and likely tainted civilian water sources.⁹⁴ Won Pat recalls that when the military planes that dropped Agent Orange on Vietnam were hosed down at Andersen Air Force Base, the contaminated water ran off the tarmac and trickled down into civilian water wells located on the north side of the island, poisoning Chamorro residents living near the base.⁹⁵ Even in its destruction, Agent Orange posed a threat to Chamorros and other Micronesians. In 1977 the US Air Force incinerated the remaining herbicide left over from the Vietnam War off the coast of Johnston Island, contaminating the Pacific Ocean.⁹⁶ In his critique of Operation Pacer HO, Tony Hodges, Environmental Protection Board member of the Trust Territories, suggested that “the disposal be carried out in the courtyard of the inner ring of the Pentagon” because the “people who manufacture this material and use it should take the risk, not the people of Micronesia.”⁹⁷ Micronesians had already borne the brunt of centuries of settler militarism; it was cruel to subject them yet again to the chemical afterlives of the US War in Vietnam.

In sum, Chamorro resistance to settler militarism in Guam did not manifest as a rejection of Vietnamese refugees during Operation New Life. It is true that Chamorros' acts of hospitality toward the Vietnamese refugees risked symbolic appropriation by settler militarist rhetoric, which conflated this hospitality with Chamorros' acquiescence to toxic contamination and land dispossession. Challenging this conflation, however, presents one way to undermine the structural antagonisms enacted by the refugee settler condition in Guam. Only then can we fully appreciate Chamorros' acts of critical empathy, grounded in the value of

inafa'maolek, as expressions of sovereignty: a refusal to comply with settler militarist attempts to divide Indigenous subjects from refugees. *Inafa'maolek*, however, involves not one-sided hospitality but rather reciprocity, necessitating a response from Vietnamese refugees “to make good.” The following section examines how Vietnamese refugees also subverted settler militarist attempts to fix them in the position of the “grateful refugee,” thus challenging the humanitarian violence of settler militarism during Operation New Life in quotidian ways.

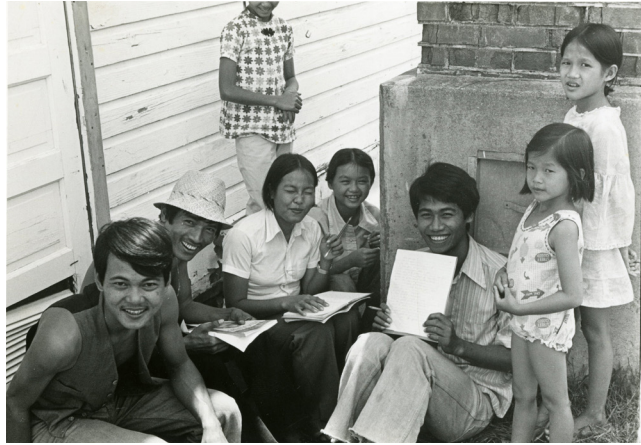
REFUGEE SUBJECTIVITY, SOCIALITY, AND REFUSAL: NEGOTIATING FORTUNE, FAMILY, AND FOOD

Vietnamese refugees were agential subjects who made the most of their incarceration in the refugee camps. Via everyday acts of survival, they undermined the US military's dominant narrative of humanitarian rescue, which both retroactively and proactively sought to justify the US military's settler colonial presence in Guam. In contrast to previous refugee studies that have focused on the biopolitical and necropolitical dimensions of the camps as spaces of “bare life,” in this section I attend to what Yǎn Lê Espiritu calls the “politics of living”: “how Vietnamese refugees, as devalued people, scripted new life histories—and indeed new lives—on the margins of sovereign space.”⁹⁸ I read these moments as acts of refugee refusal, in which Vietnamese refugees subverted American expectations to express unconditional gratitude for the “gift of freedom.”⁹⁹

Compared to the detention centers and closed camps for boat refugees established throughout Southeast Asia during the late 1970s, the Operation New Life camps in Guam were better resourced and structured for shorter stays.¹⁰⁰ The first wave of Vietnamese refugees processed in Guam, furthermore, consisted primarily of those who were well connected to the US military and government: ARVN military officials, political elites, those who worked for the US embassy or US businesses, and their families and loved ones. As a result, they were, on average, wealthier, more educated, and better connected than those in succeeding waves of forced migration from Southeast Asia. Moreover, sovereign power is never totalizing. Although the US military controlled refugees' mobility, sustenance, and political status in the camps, they still found ways to subvert military power via quotidian acts of survival.

Operation New Life refugees upended American stereotypes of the refugee as a poor, destitute, and malnourished figure, prone to recuperation as a passive object of humanitarian aid. *PDN* articles fixate on the “well-dressed” status of the refugees, noting their diamond rings and parasols and obsessing over their unexpected wealth: “Rumors about refugees carrying ‘hundreds of thousands of dollars’ are widespread.”¹⁰¹ Many refugees indeed brought large percentages of their life savings to Guam by sewing gold taels into their clothes or packing baht chains in their bags.¹⁰² Once word got out, bank officials from Deak & Company, the American

FIGURE 6. Vietnamese refugees at Camp Asan, June 1975. From the collection of the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center.



Savings and Loan Association, and Bank of America flocked to the camps, setting up “little wooden building[s] amid the tents” to purchase the gold in exchange for opening savings accounts.¹⁰³ For several months in 1975, the refugee camps in Guam hosted “the most active gold exchange house in the world” and the “biggest gold rush in recent times,” which amounted to “millions of dollars in gold wafers.” In fact, “individual sales of up to \$400,000” were “not uncommon.”¹⁰⁴ Although selling their gold freed refugees from having to worry about theft inside the camps, some companies were accused of profiting off the refugees’ plight, prompting Guam’s government to step in to regulate gold prices.¹⁰⁵

The Vietnamese refugees’ deviation from the destitute-victim stereotype prompted some Guamanians to question whether they were even deserving of US aid. In a letter to the *PDN* editor dated 1 May 1975, for example, Betty L. Johnson, a self-identified US Navy dependent, wrote:

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t begrudge the people help if they really need it, but just take a look at the pictures in the April 24 edition of the *PDN*. *They don’t look like refugees to me*. Look at the clothes, the rings, watches etc. on these people. Look at the picture of all the baggage, people who can afford to buy suitcases like that certainly in my book cannot be classified as refugees. They say a picture is worth a thousand words so just take some good long looks at these pictures and tell me truthfully that these people are in need of food and clothing.¹⁰⁶

What does it mean to “look like a refugee”? Previous studies have critiqued how displaced subjects from Vietnam were compelled to articulate a particular anti-communist narrative in order to be granted asylum in the United States.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in the quoted passage, Johnson conflates class status with the condition of political asylum: despite (and often times because of) their material wealth, the refugees were unable to guarantee their safety in a communist-unified Vietnam.

Furthermore, Johnson's ahistorical focus on class elides the role that French colonization and US imperial aggression played in destabilizing the refugees' homeland in the first place. Johnson goes on to say that the United States should instead divert some of the resources spent on Operation New Life to "our own people," those "US citizens that are needy."¹⁰⁸ However, Johnson misidentifies the primary beneficiary of those resources: the bloated US military, which initiated the settler imperial wars in Asia in the first place, rather than the refugees displaced by that aggression, regardless of their former class status. Furthermore, despite her attempt to distinguish between worthy and unworthy refugees from Vietnam, Johnson betrays her nativist anxieties regarding *all* racialized refugees when she writes, "What will happen when all these 'refugees' get into the United States and try to take it over?"¹⁰⁹ Overall, this letter demonstrates the shortcomings of an oversimplified class analysis underwritten by yellow peril racism.

In spite of the financial concerns of Guamanians like Johnson, the US military spent millions of dollars funding Operation New Life. One of the main expenses was food. Over the course of the first month, refugees housed at Tent City alone ate "some \$1.6 million worth of food"—roughly \$63,870 per day, or about "\$2 a day per refugee."¹¹⁰ This amounted to "52,000 pounds of ham, pork chops, canned meat, rice, milk, eggs, and fruit."¹¹¹ Food studies scholars have argued that control over food distribution constitutes a form of biopolitics.¹¹² During Operation New Life, refugees were subject to the US military's control over their very bodily sustenance. However, refugees also pushed back, pressuring the US military to acquiesce to their culinary demands. Indeed, one of the biggest grievances that refugees had about the camps concerned the food. Although military personnel kept the kitchens running for twenty-four hours a day, food lines stretched for hours, especially during the first weeks of logistical confusion.¹¹³ According to twenty-six-year-old Minh Luong Ngoc, a former security guard for the US consulate at Cần Thơ, life in Guam consisted of "getting up, standing in long lines for breakfast, eating fast, resting, standing in line for lunch, resting and standing in line for dinner."¹¹⁴ Admiral Morrison, commander of Operation New Life, admitted that "our worst problem is too many people standing in line for food."¹¹⁵

Refugees also rejected American canned goods, demanding that the US military accommodate their palate preferences.¹¹⁶ In response, the navy ordered "100,000 chopsticks" from Japan, diverted "500 tons of rice" to Guam from "a ship bound for other Far East destinations," and started placing "fish sauce, dried curry powder, coconut cream, bamboo shoots, greens and dried beef and pork" on "most tables"—what one journalist termed a "Vietnamizing" of the food, in ironic reference to Nixon's failed policy of Vietnamization.¹¹⁷ Refugees were less successful in acquiring fresh leafy greens, though their lack of success should not be attributed to a lack of effort. Ronald Klimek, a white social scientist conducting research on "what the Vietnamese were like at the time of their immigration to America," recalls:

The refugees complained repeatedly that they were not being given vegetables and that the portions of meat and rice were more than they needed. They wanted vegetables, as they defined them [not the American-given legumes], substituted for meat. They argued that vegetables are cheaper than meat and that here was a chance for them to get what they wanted while the government saved money.

I had a number of evening parties for the Vietnamese who helped me conduct research. I always asked them what kind of festivities they wanted and the response always was the same—vegetable parties. I brought boxes of fresh vegetables—mostly lettuce, tomatoes and green peppers—and the Vietnamese quickly chopped and sliced the food for what turned out to be vegetable orgies.¹¹⁸

Although Klimek slips into Orientalist, sexualizing rhetoric, his article evidences how Vietnamese refugees negotiated with the US military to accommodate their culinary requests. The fact that they were unsuccessful in acquiring fresh vegetables speaks less to their efforts than to the general difficulty of shipping large quantities of perishable produce to an island whose own domestic agriculture had been all but obliterated by centuries of Spanish colonialism, Japanese occupation, US settler militarism, and unpredictable typhoons.¹¹⁹

Food was also one of the main commodities sold on the black market that developed in Tent City. Although an official navy spokesman attested that there “have been no reports of black marketeering” and only “two reports of prostitution,” a *PDN* journalist’s interview with Private First Class Timothy Brander and his anonymous friend “Jelly” suggests a different story.¹²⁰ According to the pair, both Vietnamese refugees and Guamanian civilians purchased food and cooking materials illegally from US military officials and mess attendants. In some cases, sex rather than money was the medium of exchange. Jelly said that “when an attractive Vietnamese girl asks for a can of meat or some other type of food she often ‘pays’ for it by sexual ‘favors,’” and Brander recalled that “he and three other mess cooks were given five hours of extra duty for accidentally interrupting a staff sergeant during intercourse with a refugee who wanted food.”¹²¹ These anecdotes remind readers that refugee agency was of course constrained by the racial and sexual power dynamics structuring the camps. They also demonstrate the extent of settler militarism: the fact that Guamanian civilians felt compelled to make black market deals with US soldiers in order to access federally funded food speaks volumes about Guam’s status as an unincorporated territory rendered dependent on the US military.

Since food was such a large preoccupation for refugees during Operation New Life, it is unsurprising that the topic surfaces often in present-day oral histories. One refugee described an unforgettable day when her older children went out to stand in Tent City’s multihour-long breakfast line while she stayed inside the tent to nurse her baby and young children.¹²² When the children started to walk back with the food, rain began to pour. The paper plates disintegrated, the food melted to the ground, and the children were left with little except their tears to assuage

them until they had to go and stand in line yet again for lunch. The refugee mother cried hard in despair.

For other refugees, the long lines were a marked improvement over their childhood of food insecurity in rural Vietnam. Wendy Tougher (born Le Nguyen Tuyet), who was eleven years old when she arrived in Guam, recalled: "Where I came from, it was the first time I felt safe because I could eat twice a day. You know, we stood in long lines in the sun [at Asan], but twice a day I could eat and that was a lot better than where I came from where every day it was thinking on how to outsmart someone, how to snatch and run. So, standing in line was no big deal at all."¹²³ After Operation New Life, Tougher was adopted by a strict American military family who forbade her to speak Vietnamese, but she reunited with her birth family when a senior in high school. She eventually married Mike Tougher, whom she met as a child growing up in Guam, and spent most of her life in Guam thereafter.

Another refugee, who joined her older sister in Guam in 1989, shared her sister's memory of Vietnamese refugees collecting snails (*bắt ốc*) and catching fish (*câu cá*) in the ocean bordering Camp Asan in order to supplement their military-supplied meals during Operation New Life.¹²⁴ According to Perez, the Vietnamese refugees "actually were permitted to go down to the beach and they would fish. They would catch crabs and they would bring them back up to the camp and they were permitted to have cooking facilities." They scoured the beach so thoroughly that Gab Gab Beach "actually turned white" and at one point "the EPA got scared that they would just wipe out the coral!"¹²⁵ The refugees also picked beans from local trees to eat as vegetables when green and to grind for coffee when roasted. Foraging food from the local environment, Vietnamese refugees subverted the US military's ability to exercise total control over their means of subsistence. In Perez's words: "They were able to take care of themselves."¹²⁶

Refugees also exercised limited control over their forms of social organization. In negotiating US preferences for nuclear family formations, for example, refugees stretched the definition of "family" to ensure the safe passage of as many individuals as possible. One man claimed twenty-eight children as "his 'very own'" to immigration officials, even though he had to "check the[ir] name tags" before "he could fill out the entry forms."¹²⁷ Another couple "explained to immigration authorities that the baby they carried had been found in an abandoned field on their way to the airport and they 'just couldn't leave him there.'"¹²⁸ Sometimes refugees were accused of "fraud" for "adding names to family registers."¹²⁹ However, they also successfully changed the immigration laws restricting entrance into the United States. During Operation New Life, the category of "families" of US citizens and permanent-resident aliens who were allowed entry was expanded to include "aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., on both sides of family."¹³⁰ The Immigration and Naturalization Service even considered "admitting these persons' longtime domestic help," further qualifying what constituted a legitimate "blood relationship" in the eyes of the US government.¹³¹

Refugees also upended American expectations regarding romance and intimacy. In one “tear-jerking drama,” chronicled breathtakingly across the front pages of multiple issues of the *PDN*, Thomas Heijl—a “brown-haired, wiry Farmingdale, N.Y., resident” who had been stationed at Nha Trang Air Base as an air force mechanic in 1971—reunited with his fiancée, Nguyen Thi Ut, at Camp Asan after three years of separation and the tragic loss of their daughter, Linda, who was “killed by Viet Cong bullets” as she and her mother “stood on the shore of Vietnam trying to evacuate the country on a fishing boat.”¹³² The couple promptly married, with Governor Bordallo presiding. However, Heijl found out later that the “cousin” Nguyen insisted that he sponsor and bring with them to New York was in fact Nguyen’s Vietnamese lover, Tran Mong. Nguyen ended up leaving Heijl after a couple of months to live with Tran “in a motel in Florida.”¹³³ Stories like this show how refugees worked creatively within bureaucratic constraints to safeguard passage for themselves and their loved ones.

Refugees also took leadership positions in the camps, at times taking “much work from their hosts, the U.S. Navy.”¹³⁴ At the Naval Communications Station Barrigada barracks, the Vietnamese set up a plan to “work for themselves,” “teaching English” and “performing most of the cooking, cleaning, medical duties as well as setting up lines of communications to help other refugees through the lengthy paperwork process needed by U.S. immigration officials.”¹³⁵ The Vietnamese “camp commander,” Tran Khanh Van, who held a “doctorate in civil engineering from University of California at Berkeley,” formed “intracamp committees” for sanitation, health, cooking, and information. As a result, according to the *PDN* journalist, the refugees’ “stay has been a comfortable one.”¹³⁶

Camp Asan also elected a “commanding officer,” Tony Lam, an extroverted, bilingual, “5-foot-4 North Vietnamese native” and “former mahjong partner of Gen. Nguyen Cao Ky,” who greeted flustered new arrivals, directed families to their tents, helped organize cleaning and sanitation committees, met with US military officials, comforted homesick refugees, arbitrated conflicts, and translated during immigration interviews, “scurrying from one scene to another, advising here and mediating there” over what often became a twenty-hour workday.¹³⁷ Lam’s leadership in Guam prefigured his political career in the United States: Lam became the first Vietnamese American elected to political office when, in 1992, he won a seat on the Westminster, California, city council. For the Fourth of July celebrations organized at Camp Asan, Lam “eagerly directed” the games and contests, which included “sack races, slow-speed bicycle races, a tug-of-war, a beauty pageant, and a fishing contest,” combined with other activities such as a volleyball tournament, special movie showings, and an evening dance.¹³⁸ Colonel General Jinx McCain, the marine officer in charge of the camp, interpreted the Vietnamese refugees’ participation in the festivities as proof of their American patriotism, which, according to him, “was stronger than that in 75 percent of the cities back in the States.”

Another onlooker observed, “The refugees brought out the red, white and blue of the American flag.”¹³⁹ Although many refugees indeed felt a genuine desire to celebrate the patriotic holiday of the country that had fought alongside them during the Vietnam War, others likely just appreciated a break from the normal routine, which included long stretches of waiting and boredom.¹⁴⁰

While Tony Lam was the star of the “national and international media,” as evidenced by a relatively prominent *PDN* article lamenting his decision to finally leave for California after “90 days of volunteer management,” other refugees at Camp Asan organized “Asan Refugee Camp Security,” which consisted of a “commander, an assistant and 10 team leaders or supervisors” who then recruited “10 volunteers for security work.”¹⁴¹ Unwilling to trust the US Navy with something so important as their own security, the organization sought “to keep South Vietnamese from leaving the camp, to keep unauthorized outsiders from entering it, to protect and control the barracks compound, to prevent children from going to the beach and possibly drowning and to provide barrack sentries at night.”¹⁴² Using “five walkie-talkie radios” to communicate, the team patrolled the nineteen barracks of the camp on their own initiative.¹⁴³

Lastly, rotating groups of refugees helped to run and write *Chân Trời Mới* (New Horizons), the Vietnamese-language newspaper that circulated throughout the refugee camps. *Chân Trời Mới* translated messages from the Red Cross and US military officials, demystified immigration procedures, cautioned refugees to save water, featured photographs and written coverage of camp events (such as dances, concerts, and art shows), kept refugees up-to-date on news from camps in the continental United States, and acted as a message board for family members and loved ones trying to find and send notes to one another. *Chân Trời Mới* was written by refugees, for refugees. Rather than describe refugee activities for a voyeuristic observer, the newspaper shared practical information to help refugees negotiate life in the camps.

In sum, camp residents carved out social spaces in which to continue living, refusing to let the war and the refugee crisis define them. They found moments of joy and entertainment within the camp’s confines. Refugees attended mass in silk *aó dài*s, swam in the ocean, played volleyball and basketball, learned English, painted art that would be exhibited in Guam’s Government House, traded comic books across a fence with children of naval families, and greeted Smokey the Bear.¹⁴⁴ At Camp Asan, “the G.I.s would show animated shorts in the open area in front of the barracks,” where refugees would sit, “midway between Vietnam and the New World, with a full moon above us, and a huge white screen in front of us,” watching Bugs Bunny, the Road Runner, *Popeye the Sailor Man*, *The Cat in the Hat*, and *Sinbad the Sailor*.¹⁴⁵ These anecdotes do not diminish the fact that the refugees were separated from the rest of Guam’s residents by “barbed wire, chain-link fences, and armed guards” or that many felt depressed and homesick, to the point

of considering suicide.¹⁴⁶ The US military's narrative of humanitarian rescue was underwritten by the refugees' carceral reality. Through everyday acts of survival, however, refugees could challenge the US military's totalizing control.

ARCHIPELAGIC TRANSLATIONS: VIETNAM, GUAM, ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Vietnamese-Chamorro encounters during Operation New Life were facilitated by translation between English and Vietnamese, native and refugee. But who were these translators? Contrary to the dominant narrative, not all Vietnamese people in Guam during Operation New Life were refugees. Lee T. Baza, for example (cited above as well as in chapter 1) came to Guam several years before the Fall of Saigon. During Operation New Life, she worked around the clock to translate for the incoming refugees. Another key figure was Jennifer Ada, also known by her Vietnamese name, Mai Anh. Ada left Vietnam for California prior to 1975, when her mother remarried a US air force official. In 1974, when her stepfather deployed to Andersen Air Force Base, Ada and her mother moved to Guam, where they encountered the incoming refugees.

Ada was sixteen when Operation New Life commenced. One day, while swimming with a friend on base, she suddenly heard people speaking Vietnamese and thought, "Who are these Vietnamese? Am I dreaming?"¹⁴⁷ Ada walked into the barracks, where she met a military doctor, who was very grateful to see her once he realized that she could help translate for his refugee patients. From that day forward, Ada left her high school classes early every day to volunteer at Tin City and Orote Point, working "day and night" to help the refugees fill out paperwork, exchange their money, and come to terms with their displacement.¹⁴⁸ In response to their complaints about the food, she brought the refugees boxes of *nước mắm* (fish sauce), as well as Tabasco when she couldn't find hot peppers. Although not a refugee herself, Ada empathized with their loss of a country.

Ada's experiences during Operation New Life prefigured her lifelong ties to the island. After moving back to California in eleventh grade, Ada returned to Guam in 1988, became a successful businesswoman, and married into a well-known Chamorro family. Her husband, Peter "Sonny" Ada, is a prominent landowner and businessman; his first cousin, Joseph F. Ada, served as Speaker of the Guam legislature during Operation New Life and as the fifth governor of Guam from 1987 to 1995. These familial connections underwrite Ada's present-day commitment to the Chamorro community as a Vietnamese refugee settler.

Lee T. Baza's and Jennifer Ada's stories exemplify the lasting archipelagic connections between Vietnamese and Chamorros that persisted even after the conclusion of Operation New Life in 1975. They also serve as an important counterpoint to dominant representations of the operation, which have stressed the US military's humanitarianism in order to overwrite settler imperialism during

the Vietnam War and morally justify settler militarism in Guam. Such narratives of humanitarian violence positioned Vietnamese refugee settlers in a structurally antagonistic relationship to Chamorro decolonial struggles against settler militarism. They also ignore the ways Chamorros welcomed the Vietnamese refugees in an expression of *inafa'maolek*, and the ways Vietnamese translators worked side by side with Chamorros to assist the refugees. According to Jennifer Ada, people today have forgotten Chamorros' role during Operation New Life. She seeks to counteract this forgetting, insisting that "the Chamorro people need to be recognized and remembered."¹⁴⁹

Reflecting on Operation New Life, Monsignor David I. A. Quitugua enacts a different kind of archipelagic translation in comparing Vietnamese refugee displacement to the Jewish Exodus, Vietnamese escape from their war-torn homeland to the Jewish people's wandering through the desert for forty years, and the Vietnamese refugees' eventual resettlement in the United States to the Jews' arrival in the Promised Land.¹⁵⁰ In "Of Luggage and Shoes," Thuy Dinh also refers to the continental United States as the "Promised Land," marking archipelagic geographies.¹⁵¹ These metaphors prefigure the narrative tactics that Israeli politicians used to represent Vietnamese refugees in Israel-Palestine, as discussed in the following chapter. Indeed, as the US military processed Vietnamese refugees in Guam during Operation New Life in order to morally justify settler militarism, so too did Israeli leaders resettle Vietnamese refugees in Israel-Palestine in order to direct international attention away from native Palestinians' ongoing dispossession. Like Vietnamese Americans in Guam, Vietnamese Israelis also became refugee settlers.

After chapter 4 details this analogous case study, chapter 5 returns to Guam to discuss cultural representations of Operation New Life and its afterlives. By November 1975, most Vietnamese refugees had left Guam, either to resettle in the continental United States or repatriate to Vietnam. However, an estimated 4,000 refugees decided to stay and make Guam their home. Chapter 5 explores how a critical refugee sensibility can be mobilized to undermine settler subjectivity in order to challenge the seeming permanence of settler militarism and the refugee settler condition in Guam.