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The Politics of Staying

The Permanent/Transient Temporality of Settler Militarism in Guam

By 22 May 1975, the Vietnamese refugee camp called Tent City at Orote Point, Guam, boasted many of the amenities and characteristics of an urban metropolis: "two newspapers, an orphanage, two hospitals and 19 doctors," "hotdog vendors, beggars, thieves and daily church services," "eight dining halls, five movies, 300 showers, 303 bathrooms and a bank that's open seven days a week," plus "a beach, a civic stationery, and a squad of Xerox machines spitting out copies of forms, copies of sheets and copies of copies."[1] This "city"—a square mile block consisting of 3,200 tents to house more than 39,000 Vietnamese refugees—even had its own fire department, police force, and zip code: F. P. O. San Francisco 96630. Despite its approximation of normative urban life, however, Tent City remained an "unincorporated community," mirroring Guam's own status as an unincorporated territory with limited rights under the US Constitution.[2] Moreover, despite its illusion of permanence, Tent City was ultimately transient: "Thirty years ago," the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* reported in 1975, "this rocky plot of red coral dust was an airfield for Japanese Zeros. Thirty months ago it was a drag-strip for off-duty sailors in T-shirts. Thirty days ago the area was an overgrown clump of stubby trees, scrubby brush and snails."[3] And roughly thirty days later, on 25 June 1975, Tent City would be closed in anticipation of the upcoming typhoon season, the majority of refugees having already left for permanent resettlement elsewhere.

Tent City's permanent/transient dynamic is indicative of a larger permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam—a temporality, I argue, that makes Guam distinct from other spaces of settler colonialism.[4] In the continental United States and Israel-Palestine, settlers project a permanent attachment to territory: a long-term investment in private property that disregards preexisting and ongoing Indigenous relationships to native lands and waters. In Guam, in contrast,

the as-of-yet *permanence* of militarized occupation is undercut by military *transience*—the turnover of individual servicemen who transfer between different military bases, caught up in an archipelagic circuit of deployment. Stationed in Guam for short periods at a time, these military settlers are unable to invest in long-term property ownership at the individual and nuclear family level. Their relative *transience* as individuals does not preclude, however, the concurrent *permanence* of the US military's occupation of Guam as an ongoing and iterative structure.

Nonmilitary settlers who immigrate to Guam also play a role in upholding settler militarism. Leland R. Bettis, who served as executive director of the Guam Commission on Self-Determination from 1988 to 2003, offers insight into how "colonial powers have often used immigration to distract, confuse, and subvert the issues of decolonization." According to Bettis, "Immigrants serve to dilute the strength of the native people in a colonized area. Since most immigrants are either citizens of the colonizing country or attempting to become citizens, their loyalties and support will lean toward the colonizing country. This makes them useful colonial tools. In essence, immigrants are part of the colonizing process. They are colonizers not colonized."[5] Lured by the promise of US citizenship, many immigrants come to Guam to pursue the American Dream. In the process, they disrupt Chamorros' genealogical relationships to the lands and waters and undermine decolonial efforts to counter US colonization. Moreover, like military settlers, many of these immigrant settlers embody the peculiar permanent/transient dynamic of settler militarism in Guam. Between the US reoccupation of Guam in 1944 and the lifting of the US Navy's mandatory security clearance in 1962, for example, Guam was overrun by "transient migrants," to quote Bettis, recruited by the US military to build new infrastructure after the devastation of World War II: "U.S. military personnel were only assigned temporarily, and non-U.S. citizen laborers were usually transient hires."[6] The transience of individual military and immigrant settlers, however, coincided with a more permanent increase in the percentage of non-Chamorro settlers in Guam, as "'turn-over' rates were offset by newly-arriving military personnel or contract hires."[7]

After 1962, the demographic makeup of Guam's non-native population changed but did not abate. While the percentage of white Americans from the continent dropped, the number of immigrants from the Philippines, Korea, and the surrounding Pacific Islands increased sharply, attracted by the promise of US wages through participation in Guam's tourism and military industries. Like many of the pre-1962 immigrants, these new arrivals, in Bettis's analysis, "tend to be transient," using Guam "merely as a stepping stone to secure U.S. citizenship before moving on to the U.S."[8] As these immigrant settlers leave for the continent, they are replaced by new waves of immigrants, ever decreasing the demographic percentage of native Chamorros in Guam.[9]

In contrast to immigrant settlers who migrate to Guam in search of better economic opportunities, Vietnamese refugees were products of war, displaced by

both communist repression and US military intervention in Vietnam. As such, they had less agency over their routes of resettlement. Nonetheless, when refugees seek refuge in settler colonial states, they too become structurally implicated in settler colonial policies of Indigenous dispossession, evidencing the refugee settler condition. During Operation New Life, Vietnamese refugee settlers embodied the permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam. Their processing in the unincorporated territory of Guam marked both their permanent incorporation into the settler colonial United States as well as their transient stay in Guam in particular, which served as a temporary layover for the vast majority of refugees. Likewise, the refugee camps that housed Vietnamese refugees during Operation New Life were but transitory infrastructural iterations of the ongoing settler militarist project of occupation, which has shifted forms as Guam's role in US settler imperial policy has changed over time.

Today, Chamorros in Guam must contend with the US military's decision to host an additional 2,500 marines transferred from Okinawa (a decrease from the original proposal of 8,000 thanks to activist pressure) and to destroy sacred sites such as Pågat and Litekyan to build a live-fire range.[10] According to political geographers Jenna M. Loyd, Emily Mitchell-Eaton, and Alison Mountz, support for such military buildup projects in the present are "at times premised upon the memory of the Vietnamese refugee operations" during Operation New Life.[11] Indeed, "many of Guam's public officials have pointed to historical refugee operations in Guam as evidence of the island's capacity for expanded populations (i.e. refugees, asylum-seekers, *or military troops) and military operations*."[12] A former immigration officer in Guam cited the island's capacity to house the Vietnamese refugees in 1975, albeit temporarily, as evidence that it could accommodate the influx of 2,500 marines and their dependents—whose stay would be indefinite.[13] Conflating the *impermanent* temporality of Operation New Life with the *transitory* circulation of individual marines in a more *permanent* structure of military buildup, this officer collapsed the multiple temporalities and contradictions of settler militarism, arguing that Guam's humanitarian response to the Vietnamese refugees in 1975 necessitated an equivalent hospitable welcome of the incoming marines in the present. The settler militarist rhetoric surrounding Operation New Life, therefore, continues to haunt the present, justifying further militarization of the island and necessitating a decolonial analysis of the distinct temporality of settler militarism in Guam.

To unpack the dynamics of this permanent/transient temporality, this chapter examines three narrative representations of Operation New Life and its afterlives: a Chamorro high school student's article from 1975, a Vietnamese refugee repatriate's memoir translated into English and published in 2017, and a Chamorro-Vietnamese college student's blog from 2008–9. Countering settler militarism's material and rhetorical force in Guam necessitates a turn to these more quotidian sources: forms of self-expression available to subjects with little cultural or political capital.

Cutting across hierarchies of value, these texts are not only intimate and personal but also indicative of how settler militarism attempts to cement structural antagonisms between Indigenous decolonization activists and refugee settlers. As textual objects, they embody settler militarism's permanent/transient temporality in both form and content: they are simultaneously cultural ephemera—transient snapshots of lived experiences of settler militarism that have not yet risen to the status of the literary or historical canon—that have nonetheless persisted, finding their ways into more permanent archives and online platforms. Together, these texts evidence how Operation New Life and its legacies have been understood by native Chamorros, Vietnamese refugees, and Chamorro-Vietnamese subjects—the last of whom embody both Indigeneity and refugeehood. A decolonial analysis of these texts reveals potentials for unsettling the refugee settler condition in Guam.

Overall, this chapter grapples with the politics of staying: refugee settler homemaking in the unincorporated territory of Guam. The vast majority of Vietnamese refugees who were processed during Operation New Life left Guam after a few months, resettling more permanently in the continental United States. One might argue that this departure absolves them from ongoing processes of settler militarism in Guam—that they have complied with Chamorro decolonization activists' calls for self-determination by vacating Chamorro land. This argument, after all, has been made in many other settler colonial states such as Israel, where decolonization entails the removal of illegal settlements and repatriation of native Palestinian land.

Given the distinct permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam, however, transient populations that pass through Guam, avoiding permanent resettlement, do not necessarily disrupt settler militarism but rather occlude and even facilitate its endurance. By vacating the space of contested sovereignty, these transient populations evade calls for decolonization, leaving the US military's control over the island unchallenged. In the words of one refugee processed during Operation New Life, "Yeah, I forgot about the Guam thing."[14] Therefore, this chapter makes the counterintuitive proposition that it is actually Vietnamese refugee settlers who stayed in Guam, rather than those who left for resettlement elsewhere, who more intimately bear witness to the ongoing violence of settler militarism and Chamorros' calls for decolonization. Such intimacy informs emergent potentials for cross-racial coalition building. Even though a mass solidarity movement between Chamorro decolonization activists and Vietnamese refugee settlers has yet to be realized in the present, the cultural texts discussed in this chapter present examples of what Quynh Nhu Le identifies as "inchoate refusals" of the refugee settler condition: "workings that move and are moved by the dynamic processes and assemblages that compose the thickness of their settler colonial worlds."[15] Such solidarities are as of yet speculative. Nonetheless, they present a political blueprint for relating otherwise in Guam.

RACIAL MISATTRIBUTIONS: CHAMORRO AND VIETNAMESE IDENTIFICATIONS IN THE CARCERAL CAMP

Buried under layers of official newspaper clippings, military documents, and government speeches that make up the "Operation New Life" documents archived at the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center is an issue of George Washington Senior High's school newspaper, *The Banana Leaf*, dated 16 May 1975. Named after one of the founding fathers of the US settler state, George Washington Senior High was the first public high school in Guam to serve native Chamorros. In this particular issue of the *Banana Leaf*, a two-page article by Edith Iriate entitled "Concert for Orote Point Refugees" chronicles Iriate's experience visiting Tent City with a group of classmates a few days prior.[16] Such encounters between Chamorro students and Vietnamese refugees were not uncommon: in another article in the *Banana Leaf*, a classmate reports that three busloads of students—chorus members and the Girls' Glee Club—went to sing at Camp Asan to entertain the refugees.[17] What makes Iriate's story notable, however, is its narrative arc of shifting racial identification: though she begins the article by marking her racial difference from the foreign Vietnamese refugees, she is then misidentified as a refugee by American soldiers at Tent City. By the end of her story, this misattribution is replaced with a more genuine sense of identification with the Vietnamese refugees along an axis of parallel yet distinct experiences of US military violence.

One day in mid-May 1975, Iriate and about twenty students from George Washington Senior High rode to Tent City in three pickup trucks and a Volkswagen to attend a concert. This was the first time Iriate had encountered the Vietnamese refugees in person. Initially, she marks her distance from the refugees, voicing shock at their poor living conditions: "'Wow!' The johns were just boxes . . . and the air was full of their scent."[18] Staring openmouthed at the sheer mass of refugee bodies, she observes, "It looked as though this camp went to the tip of the island, you couldn't see the end of the rows of tents." Packed so closely together, the refugees, she comments, "were like ants." This insectoid simile betrays her apprehension at the thought of being overwhelmed by the crowd of "25,000 foreign people"—a potential Indigenous critique of colonial immigration that nonetheless echoes nativist fears of yellow peril invasion.[19] But Iriate also expresses sympathy for the plight of the refugees: displaced by war and temporarily resettled by the US military in Guam, they were suffering crowded conditions in the carceral space of the camp.[20]

Iriate's fear of getting lost amid all the foreign refugees became accentuated when she and several other girls got separated from the other students. Starting to feel "panicky" as the sky began to darken, Iriate and her friends approached three pairs of military personnel to ask for directions.[21] The first pair of GIs laughed at

the girls and assumed they were joking about a concert. The second pair of GIs also cracked jokes at the girls' expense, misidentifying them as Vietnamese refugees. The third pair, "two navy dudes," repeated the mistake, asking Iriate and the girls again if they were refugees. In the *Banana Leaf* article, Iriate complains, "We couldn't understand why everyone asked us that. To us it seemed obvious that we weren't Vietnamese."[22]

This point of the story marks the first shift in Iriate's racial identification. At the beginning of the article, Iriate expresses distance from and even slight repulsion by the nameless mass of "foreign" refugees. However, in the eyes of these American soldiers at Tent City, Iriate, a native Chamorro high school student, was racialized as a Vietnamese refugee. In other words, she was racialized as a homogeneous brown Other; although Indigenous to Guam and a US citizen, she was misread as a foreigner. The race of these individual navy sailors remains unmarked in Iriate's account; regardless, their comments reproduce the structural white gaze of the US military as an institution, which racialized both native Chamorros and Vietnamese refugees alike as nonwhite wards of US military jurisdiction.[23]

Although it is the GIs and navy men in this story who are actually more "foreign" to Guam than Iriate and the other native Chamorro students, it is *the students* who were racialized as not belonging in Guam—or rather, as belonging too much, to the carceral space of the camp in particular. On one hand, Iriate and her friends' misidentification as Vietnamese refugees stripped them of their US citizenship and marked them as foreign to Guam. On the other hand, the students' misattribution as refugees suggested that they belonged *in excess*—not to Guam as a Chamorro homeland but to the refugee camp in particular as a space of military control. Although it seems "obvious" to Iriate and her friends that they are not Vietnamese, in the eyes of these military men, the differences between the two nonwhite populations, placed in positions of military dependence, were blurred. In this encounter, native Chamorros—whose homeland had been militarized—and Vietnamese refugees—processed in Guam by the US military—became interchangeable. Both were depicted as passive subjects of military care: Chamorros as natives not yet ready for self-government and the Vietnamese as victims of a bloody civil war. Rhetorically, these racializing practices worked to justify the continued settler militarist presence in Guam: the US military, it was rationalized, must stay to look after of its dependents.

This racialization—this blurring of the native and the refugee as a composite brown Other—was violently imposed from without. But, by the end of the story, Iriate starts to identify with the Vietnamese refugees *on her own terms* as a Chamorro student. Fortunately, the last pair of navy men take pity on Iriate and her friends and offer to drive them around the camp to find the concert. Eventually, "we got close to Gab Gab beach and we heard the band." To shake off their unsettling experience of militarized racialization, Iriate and her friends "went to a coke machine" and put "quarters in like crazy, because we all needed a drink."[24]

The girls end the adventure-filled night by dancing and socializing with the Vietnamese refugees. Iriate is especially taken by a French-Vietnamese refugee named Nick Tran, who had just arrived in Guam from Vietnam that morning: "He is 16 years old, in eleventh grade, he speaks Vietnamese and French, and a little German and Spanish, he loves to play tennis, and his father owns a coffee and tea plantation." Communication prompts connection and identification: "I really got to know him and I was amazed at how much his life was similar to ours."[25]

In her article, Iriate focuses on common high school experiences as the impetus for her identification with Tran: "He knows how to play tennis, and I don't, he goes to a French school and learns to speak English, he said that once his professor was asking him something and he answered him with a 'yeah' rather than a 'yes' and his professor told him don't try to get the American accent. Weird huh."[26] But what connects Iriate and Tran are not only their mutual experiences as students and consumers of American language and culture, but also their shared racial difference in the eyes of the US military. Both are marked by US military intervention in their communities—settler militarism in Guam and settler imperialism in Vietnam. This shared racialization may have sparked a politics of recognition in Iriate. While she began her story by voicing apprehension at the faceless mass of "foreign" refugees, by the end of her account in the *Banana Leaf* she acknowledges the refugees' individuality and expresses a desire to get to know them better: "[Tran] was so nice, now it's got me thinking how many more of him are there around of the 25,000, maybe more!"[27] Distinct yet entangled histories of US militarism ultimately shaped Iriate's sense of connection with the Vietnamese refugees.

Iriate's penultimate sentence best encapsulates the permanent/transient dynamic of this racial encounter between the two youths: "When we were leaving [Tran] asked me to stay, I told him I couldn't but if he ever gets out of there to check-it-out at GW!!"[28] This sentence marks the residual structural difference between native Chamorros and Vietnamese refugees: the latter are confined to the camp, while the former are free to leave after the concert ends. This suggests Iriate's relative mobility and Tran's lack thereof. However, at the level of syntax, this sentence actually indexes Iriate's lack of mobility, not Tran's: "he asked me to stay, I told him *I couldn't*."[29] Tran may suffer from *temporary* immobility: as a refugee, he must be processed by the US military before he can leave the carceral space of the camp. But in the long run, Tran's class privilege as the mixed-race son of plantation landowners, plus his status as a parolee absorbed by the US government, affords him greater transnational mobility than Iriate has. As a transient refugee, Tran will have the option to leave Guam and remake his life abroad; in contrast, it is actually Iriate, as a native Chamorro, who will continue to be misread and underestimated by US military personnel stationed in Guam. Iriate may not want to leave Guam: indeed, as an Indigenous subject, she could likely be invested in a politics of staying, to decolonize her native homeland. However, to stay is also to continue to bear the brunt of US military power on the island. Tran, in

contrast, can forget his temporary participation in the settler militarist project in Guam, vacating his body from the space of ongoing occupation. If he resettles in the continental United States, he will have to confront the refugee settler condition there—but he would be seemingly absolved from grappling with his vexed positionality on Indigenous Chamorro land. In sum, Iriate's story makes apparent the complex dynamics structuring the permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam: without decolonial intervention, transient refugees facilitate rather than challenge the more permanent structure of US military occupation of Chamorro land.

SHIP OF FATE: VIETNAMESE REPATRIATES AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN

In contrast to native Chamorros like Edith Iriate who have stayed in Guam to contend with the US military's ongoing occupation, the vast majority of Vietnamese refugees who were processed during Operation New Life went on to resettle in the continental United States. This steady flow of refugees to the US continent was interrupted, however, by a vocal group of roughly two thousand Vietnamese protesters who over the course of six months demanded repatriation to their homeland of Vietnam. Their reasons were manifold: some wanted to return to families left behind in Vietnam, some pledged loyalty to their homeland irrespective of communist control, and a few even identified with the new communist government.[30] Vicky Ritter, a local Chamorro who volunteered with the Red Cross during Operation New Life, recalls: "People got separated in the chaos of leaving, in the panic. Families got separated. Kids came without parents. Some were pretty young. . . . So, a lot of them wanted to go back."[31] Her husband, Gordon Ritter, who was also working for the Red Cross when the two met, remembers one blue-eyed Vietnamese refugee in particular who helped to sew "black-and-blue, typical pajama-colored dark clothes" for the repatriates to wear "so at least when they got back [to Vietnam] they weren't wearing US T-shirts."[32] According to historian Jana K. Lipman, the Vietnamese repatriates "inverted Americans' understanding of 'rescue' and positioned themselves as the captives and the U.S. military as the captor," drawing strategic comparisons between their situation and that of American POWs in Vietnam, given parallel conditions of "barbed wire, military security, and indefinite waiting."[33] In this way they challenged the US military's narrative of humanitarian rescue—a narrative that in turn has been used to scaffold settler militarism and Indigenous land dispossession in Guam, as detailed in chapter 3.

By emphasizing the carceral dimensions of Operation New Life, these refugee protesters argued that they were being held in the military camps against their will. They demanded that Governor Ricardo J. Bordallo, the US government, and the UNHCR allow them to return home to Vietnam. The federal government pushed back, citing a lack of diplomatic relations between the United States and

FIGURE 9. Governor Ricardo J. Bordallo and First Lady Madeleine Bordallo wave to the Vietnamese repatriates aboard the *Việt Nam Thương Tín,* October 1975. From the collection of the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center.

the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Resorting to public protests, hunger strikes, and riots to pressure the federal government to give in to their demands, these repatriates asserted that they had never intended to leave Vietnam permanently. Some had been stationed on a military plane or ship that had been diverted to the Philippines or Guam after the Fall of Saigon; some had been under the false impression that their stay in US custody would be temporary; and some had simply changed their minds regarding their desire to resettle abroad. In one of the more extreme accounts, thirteen Vietnamese men alleged that the US military had drugged and kidnapped them to bring them to Guam.[34]

After months of protests, the US government finally gave in to the repatriates' demands. Phone conversations between Governor Bordallo and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger resulted in the United States granting the repatriates a ship—the largest South Vietnamese ship that had evacuated to Guam, the *Việt Nam Thương Tín*—to facilitate their return.[35] On 17 October 1975, 1,652 repatriates sailed back to their communist-unified homeland under the leadership of Trần Đình Trụ, a former naval captain of the fallen Republic of Vietnam (RVN).[36] Stressing a "politics of contingency," Lipman cautions against reading this reversal of the dominant flow of refugees out of Vietnam to the United States as a "triumphant rejection of U.S. imperialism or a romanticized revolutionary victory."[37] Despite the *Việt Nam Thương Tín*'s efforts to fly the Vietnamese communist flag and display a huge

portrait of Hồ Chí Minh, the southern Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) and the northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) interpreted the repatriation initiative as an American scheme to sabotage Vietnam. As a result, the repatriates were imprisoned in reeducation camps upon their return.[38]

After thirteen years in a reeducation camp, Trần, the naval captain who piloted the *Việt Nam Thương Tín* from Guam back to Vietnam, immigrated to the United States with his family in 1991 under the Humanitarian Operation, a program that, like Operation New Life, sought to rehabilitate US imperialism as an act of humanitarianism by stressing the comparative *in*humanity of the communist government that had imprisoned the repatriates as political prisoners.[39] Soon after his arrival in the United States, Trần began to document his life story "in stolen hours between working the night shift in a convenience store and helping his children adjust to life in the United States."[40] He initially published two thousand copies of his four hundred–page memoir under the title *Việt Nam Thương Tín: Con tàu định mệnh*, one copy of which he donated to the Library of Congress and the rest he distributed to Vietnamese American bookstores. Almost twenty years later, Lipman found the memoir while conducting research at the Library of Congress. With Trần's permission, she edited and translated it into English with the help of Vietnamese American language instructor Bac Hoai Tran.

Published in 2017, *Ship of Fate* is notable for providing a first-person account of the refugee camps in Guam, as well as a full snapshot of Trần's life beyond the high-profile repatriate experience. In matter-of-fact prose, Trần details his *multiple* experiences of forced displacement structured by Western intervention in the decolonizing country of Vietnam. Born in 1935 in Ninh Bình Province in northern Vietnam, Trần joined other Catholic families in moving south in 1954, following the French colonists' defeat at Điện Biên Phủ and the political division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel. This was his first refugee displacement. He then volunteered for the RVN Navy and, after two years of training, became a naval officer. Displaced from the land to the sea, Trần sailed far from home for months at a time. Right before the Fall of Saigon, Trần and his crew evacuated Vietnam on a ship bound for Subic Bay in the Philippines, initiating a months-long separation from his family left behind in Năm Căn. On 13 May 1975 Trần landed in Guam, where he was interned first at Tent City and then, following Tent City's closure in June 1975, Camp Black Construction Co. and Camp Asan. Unable to imagine life without his family, Trần joined the repatriate movement to reunite with his loved ones. After five months in Guam, Trần sailed back to Vietnam, only to be incarcerated in a reeducation camp until 1988. In 1991, Trần moved a final time: bypassing Guam, he flew to the continental United States under the tutelage of the US government, this time accompanied by his wife and children.

Unlike other Vietnamese American writing that focuses almost exclusively on life in the United States, Trần's memoir details multiple journeys out of Vietnam that preceded the post-1975 refugee exodus, evidencing pre-1975 settler militarist

connections between Asia, Guam, and the continental United States. Following the 1961 escalation of US involvement in Vietnam, for example, US officials began inviting RVN sailors to train at US military bases in Japan, the Philippines, California, and Guam.[41] Trần's five-month internment in Guam as a refugee was actually prefigured by two prior visits to the island as an RVN sailor, including a five-month stay to service a broken RVN ship in 1972—an experience that he describes in his memoir as a "beautiful" memory.[42] Standing in Tent City in May 1975, he recalls that, just three years before, he had "gone for many picnics on rest days on this hill, which was covered with trees and located near Gab Gab Beach," the site of Iriate's concert.[43] Now that hill had been leveled, and the military uniform of his fallen country shed. Trần's "beautiful" experience of Guam as an RVN sailor belonged to the past.

In her introduction to the memoir, Lipman observes that although Trần does not explicitly use the "language of empire" to describe Guam, his diction does index Guam's "nebulous, almost limbo status" as an unincorporated territory.[44] At times Trần refers to Guam as "American soil," "free land," and a "part of the United States," but at other points he notes Guam's isolated and colonial status, describing it as a "lonely small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, so distant from every continent," that remains "under the control" of the United States.[45] In a passage lamenting his loneliness in the camps, Trần compares the status of the refugee repatraites with that of Guam itself: "In some ways, Guam's isolation reminded me of my own separation from my loved ones. For these six months, I had lived like a parasite, day in and day out, stretching out my hand to receive food like a beggar. My life had no meaning whatsoever."[46] Extending the analogy in the first sentence to the following two lines, this quote evidences, in this moment of slippage, a radical critique of Guam's territorial status: as long as Guam remains a "parasite" dependent on the US government for recognition, "life"—that is, political life, what the ancient Greeks distinguished as *bios*—would be meaningless.

Although Trần depended on the US military for food and shelter during Operation New Life and, during the war, had collaborated with the United States as an RVN naval officer, his memoir does not unilaterally praise the Americans. In fact, at one point he even characterizes them as "imperialists."[47] What makes *Ship of Fate* unique, however, is its articulation of an *anticommunist* critique of US imperialism, distinct from both the communist critique of imperialism outlined in chapter 1 and anticommunist displays of gratitude more commonly associated with resettled refugees. "Americans always placed the interests of their country above all else," Trần observes, "and so small and weak countries were only pawns in a larger game. America had taken part in the war in Vietnam for years, but not only did it *not* win the war in that country, it had also abandoned it. To the United States, the war had been a game."[48] Identifying foremost as a South Vietnamese nationalist, Trần faulted the United States for putting its own imperialist interests above its political commitment to defend democracy in South Vietnam.

In his memoir, Trần also repudiates the carceral logics of the military-controlled refugee camps. He notes that although the camp had "plenty of activities, and all our basic needs were met," it was was still "surrounded by barbed wire and had a gate. On the one hand, the base could be seen as an apartment complex, but on the other hand, it could also be seen as a detention camp. It was all the same."[49] This last insight—"It was all the same"—highlights the confluence of humanitarianism and carcerality that characterized Operation New Life, exemplifying the paradoxical rhetoric of imperial benevolence.[50]

Trần's critique of US militarism does not, however, necessarily entail a critique of *settler* militarism—that is, the *settler colonial* aspects of US military occupation in Guam that work to dispossess native Chamorros. Indeed, in *Ship of Fate*, Trần does not distinguish Chamorros from the larger population of Guamanians. When Trần notes "Guam's ongoing hospitality" during Operation New Life, he conflates native and settler positions, homogenizing the two groups.[51] Likewise, when he quotes Governor Bordallo's compassionate response to the repatriates' riots—"We have been trying our best to create a comfortable life for you on the island of Guam. Even though you have organized many protests and created instability on the island, we have tried to help"—he elides Bordallo's concurrent advocacy of Chamorro rights as well as contemporaneous discussions of Indigenous self-determination.[52] Lastly, Trần reproduces stereotypes of Guam as a tranquil island paradise and thus occludes a longer history of transpacific militarized violence. For example, he writes that Guamanians were likely shocked by the repatriates' sometimes violent protests because "the people here lived in peace and had never experienced anything that upset their lives."[53] Such commentary erases Guam's recent history of Japanese occupation during World War II, as well as the role that Guam's military bases played in facilitating US intervention during the Vietnam War. In sum, although Trần's story of Vietnamese repatriation critiques the carceral logics of US militarism, it does not account for the concurrent structure of *settler* militarism on Chamorro lands and waters.

Like Nick Tran in Edith Iriate's story recounted above, Trần and the other Vietnamese repatriates embodied the permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam: as transient refugee settlers, their stay in Guam was temporary, even as the US military that incarcerated them has so far remained permanent. Although the repatriates' act of returning to Vietnam challenged the dominant US narrative of humanitarian rescue and unidirectional resettlement in the continental United States, it did little to undermine the US military's ongoing settler militarist occupation of Guam. Indeed, even though the repatriates physically vacated Chamorro land, by leaving Guam, they also avoided any responsibility for addressing the military's role in expropriating the land in the first place. If anything, the repatriates' return to Vietnam contributed to the postcolonial Vietnamese state's own nation-building project, which discriminated against Indigenous ethnic minorities within its own borders in an attempt to organize

what Nguyễn-võ Thư-hương has called a "national singular": a cohesive Vietnamese body politic predicated on the elimination of "the nation's racial other to make imaginable redemptive universal citizenship."[54] Effective challenges to the permanent/transient temporality of settler militarism in Guam necessitate a politics of staying, then, rather than a politics of repatriation. To theorize possibilities for decolonial solidarity, the following section examines moments of mutual recognition between native Chamorros and Vietnamese refugee settlers who stayed in Guam.

VIETNAMESE REFUGEE SETTLERS: A "DECOLONIZATION CONVERSATION" IN GUAM

Although most of the 112,000 Vietnamese refugees processed in Guam during Operation New Life continued on to the continental United States or repatriated to Vietnam, an estimated 4,000, or roughly 3.6%, decided to stay and work on the island, contributing to the fishing, cooking, agriculture, banking, cosmetics, engineering, and airline industries, among other skilled professions.[55] On one hand, the refugees who resettled in Guam became permanent rather than transient settlers in the sense that their US citizenship is predicated on, and indeed upholds, US military occupation of the island. On the other hand, their decision to stay in Guam positions them to be more accountable to Chamorro decolonization struggles than those who left. To these refugee settlers, Guam became a permanent home rather than a temporary stepping-stone on the way to the continental United States and the full privileges of US citizenship that such a move afforded. Bearing everyday witness to Guam's ongoing colonial status may spark moments of recognition that the US military that occupies Guam is the same institution that intervened in Vietnam and incarcerated refugees during Operation New Life. Such recognition, in turn, would be the first step in forging decolonial solidarity.

Some of the Vietnamese refugees who chose to stay in Guam after Operation New Life were married to US servicemen stationed on the island or sponsored by other Guamanian relatives; dozens of Vietnamese orphans were adopted by island families. Other refugees cite an interest in Guam's tropical climate, proximity to Vietnam, and welcoming culture as reasons for staying. One resettled refugee, Kien, praised the "community of good feeling" in Guam.[56] Another, Gia, explained: "I love Guam. Here the people are very open. They're friendly. The climate is like Saigon. It is just like home."[57] To these displaced refugees, Guam felt warm and familiar: an island connected to their homeland by *nước*, where they could rebuild their lives.

Many of this initial group of Operation New Life refugee settlers eventually left Guam in search of other opportunities; other Vietnamese have since settled on the island, either migrating from the continental United States or coming directly from Vietnam. Today, an estimated three hundred to four hundred Vietnamese

Americans reside in Guam. Those who have stayed since the 1970s are passionately committed to their compatriots, drawing distinctions between the close-knit sense of community in Guam and the competitive individualism of Vietnamese Americans on the continent. According to one refugee, "The Vietnamese community here really loves each other . . . they help each other out a lot."[58] Whereas Vietnamese American friends on the continent tell stories of closed doors and avoided eye contact, this refugee knows she can count on her community in Guam for assistance. When she recently had to go to the hospital, for example, her Vietnamese American friends visited, brought food, and called her children who were studying in the States. Another refugee who came to Guam in the 1980s from the continental United States agrees with this assessment, citing instances of Vietnamese Americans in Guam helping each other with doctor's appointments, immigration difficulties, and car troubles.[59] According to Kim Bottcher, the Vietnamese community in Guam "has taken on many characteristics of Chamorro culture," including the hospitality and reciprocity embodied in *inafa'maolek*.[60]

Today, Vietnamese Americans in Guam work in a wide range of professions: many own popular Vietnamese restaurants, run bars or nightclubs that cater to military personnel, or work in the local agriculture industry, farming and selling vegetables and fruit. Vietnamese-owned restaurants include Pho Basil, Pho Viet, and Lieng's Restaurant in Tamuning; Queen Bee Lounge in Tumon; and Hoa Mai in Harmon. One former refugee is an optometrist at the 2020 Vision Center in Tamuning; another recently retired from working in the IT department at the University of Guam; one opened up Thiem's Upholstery & Supply in Dededo; another runs Mai Market in Dededo; and more recent waves of Vietnamese immigrants have opened nail salons in Tamuning Shopping Center and surrounding strip malls. Overall, Vietnamese American businesses in Guam reflect settler militarism's permanent/transient temporality: although they have been a persistent presence on the island since the 1970s, many individual restaurants and storefronts are short-lived, lasting only a few years before their owners fold them in pursuit of other business ventures.

Other businesses have found more lasting success. Dr. Hoa Van Nguyen, a retired lieutenant colonel with the US Air Force, retired state air surgeon with the Guam Air National Guard, and founding member of the American Medical Center, owns several clinics on the island.[61] In April 1975, when Nguyen was a child, he and his family left Vietnam. During Operation New Life, they stayed at Camp Asan in Guam for two weeks, transferred to Camp Pendleton, California, and finally resettled in Fort Walton Beach, Florida with their sponsor, US Air Force colonel Thornton Peck.[62] Nguyen first returned to Guam when the US Air Force, which sponsored his college tuition, gave him a choice of serving in either Guam, Hawai'i, or Korea. He fell in love with the island again, and once he had earned his medical degree, he returned to Guam in 1995 to work in a medical clinic. In 2005, he opened the American Medical Center, which serves tens of thousands of

patients. Overall Nguyen is grateful for the opportunities Operation New Life gave his family and is happy to give back to the community in Guam. Every Sunday he goes fishing on his boat, enjoying the Pacific waters.

For the most part, Vietnamese Americans in Guam are not active in politics. Jennifer Berry left Vietnam as a child in 1975 and was recruited by the Guam Department of Education in 1993 from her teaching position in Washington State to replace the English-speaking but heavily accented Filipino teachers who had previously been instructing the children of US military personnel on base. She attests that Guam is like a "small boat and everyone needs to get along."[63] Here, the vehicle of many refugees' escape—the boat—becomes a metaphor for Guam itself: a precariously balanced vessel hosting a diverse community. Continuing the metaphor, Berry explains that Vietnamese Americans are "not activists, so they don't rock the boat. You don't have demonstrations or anything like that. . . . I just think the Vietnamese living here, they're more interested in making money, making a living, and most of them are in survivor mode, and so [they're] just trying to survive."[64] Another longtime refugee resident and community leader agrees with Berry's assessment: "In general speaking, the Vietnamese on Guam [are] rarely involve[d] in the local politics. . . . They are afraid to take side[s], Republican or Democrat, because they want to maintain neutral to keep everybody happy. They don't pay much attention to local politics."[65] As for native Chamorros, in contrast, "politics is in their blood."[66] While not explicitly advocating decolonization, the last-quoted refugee noted that Vietnamese Americans should follow Chamorro activists' example, "first to exercise their rights, and second, to help with the community. With me, having a voice is better than there's no voice."[67]

In 1985, Vietnamese American leaders founded the Vietnamese Community of Guam. Much of their political activism has centered on helping other Vietnamese refugees establish a haven in Guam. One of the organization's first actions was to apply for federal funding to sponsor one or two Vietnamese families from the refugee camps in the Philippines. Then, in 2008, community leaders heard about two undocumented Vietnamese refugees working on a farm in Cetti Bay who had been stateless for almost twenty years. After leaving communist Vietnam two decades before, the two refugees had hidden in the jungles of Indonesia and then traveled by small boat to Borneo, Palau, Chuuk, and Yap, charting archipelagic connections along the way. Unable to qualify for citizenship on the other Pacific islands, they sailed to the US territory of Guam to apply for political asylum. There, they met a Vietnamese businessman who ultimately extorted them by promising refuge in exchange for agricultural labor and exorbitant fees.[68] The Vietnamese Community of Guam contacted Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, director of SOS Boat People, who made a couple of trips to Guam's immigration court to argue on behalf of the refugees. Eventually, they were granted asylum.

Around the same time, five young Vietnamese men who had escaped abusive labor conditions on Korean and Taiwanese fishing ships, and who were also

secretly living and working on Vietnamese-owned farms in Guam, approached the Vietnamese Community of Guam for help. Although the men were denied political asylum, Guam attorney general Anne Alicia Garrido Limtiaco prosecuted the case as one of human trafficking, with help from officials on Saipan. After a year of legal battles, the men were granted T-visas and were able to safely resettle in both Guam and the continental United States. More recently, Vietnamese Americans in Guam and the continental United States raised money to sponsor a Lone Sailor statue at the Ricardo J. Bordallo Governor's Complex to symbolize "the significant relationship between the Navy, the sea services, Guam, and the thousands of Vietnamese citizens who found refuge on the island during Operation New Life in the ending days of the Vietnam War."[69] For Nga Pham, attending the dedication ceremony on 30 April 2019 "brought back my memory that, the first time I came here with a thousand refugees, we didn't know the future of our lives, but American people, especially in Guam, opened their arms [and] welcomed us to give us hope."[70] By characterizing Guamanians as "American people," however, she elides the specificity of Chamorro hospitality grounded in *inafa'maolek*, as discussed in chapter 3.

According to one Vietnamese American in Guam, "Involvement in politics is beneficial for our own Vietnamese community as well as the larger community of Guam."[71] By invoking the "larger community of Guam," this refugee promotes multicultural inclusion in the US body politic: a right that she believes all displaced refugees and victims of human trafficking, not just those from Vietnam, should have access to. However, this liberal politics does not take into account the refugee settler condition. Political activism regarding refugee resettlement is important and necessary, particularly in the wake of war and displacement; however, in appealing to the US government for asylum and citizenship, Vietnamese Americans naturalize US sovereignty over Guam, in effect upholding the US military's settler occupation of Chamorro land.

As of yet, most Vietnamese Americans in Guam do not actively advocate decolonization. As refugee settlers, they are invested in maintaining Guam's territorial status because their US citizenship rights are predicated upon US jurisdiction over Guam. Given the opportunity, some Vietnamese Americans would perhaps vote for statehood, though others cite the lower tax rates and decreased regulation that come with Guam's unincorporated status as beneficial to their small businesses. In sum, because Vietnamese Americans have few incentives to give up the privileges of US citizenship in exchange for an uncertain political and economic status under Chamorro self-rule, they become structurally invested in upholding settler militarism in Guam. Overall, Guam, like Hawai'i, manifests "a more liberal multicultural form of settler colonialism" whereby Guam's hospitable culture and ethnic diversity are celebrated at the expense of Chamorro decolonization efforts aimed at curtailing US military jurisdiction.[72]

Such "colliding histories," to quote Asian settler colonialism scholar Dean Itsuji Saranillio, point to the challenges to forging solidarity between

Chamorro decolonization activists and Vietnamese refugee settlers in Guam.[73] I therefore turn to *The Decolonization Conversation*, a blog created in 2008 by Vietnamese-Chamorro student-turned-teacher Bianca Nguyen, to offer hints of what a yet-to-be-realized solidarity between Vietnamese refugee settlers and Chamorro decolonization activists in Guam could look like. Nguyen's blog encompasses many of the formal qualities of what Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams termed "structures of feeling," conditions that are emergent but have yet to be fully articulated in the social realm.[74] According to Henry Jenkins, blogs are "grassroots intermediaries" that can challenge governmental, military, and corporate media control over news cycles and knowledge production. They document the gestural and evolving thoughts of a blogger working through complex ideas in front of a virtual audience.[75] Anna Poletti notes that blogs facilitate a "kind of co-presence"—a "transformational environment" and "means of creating scenes" for the blogger to "encounter others in."[76] Blogs therefore can call into being an activist public; they embody an inherent *potentiality* for engagement and eventual translation into political praxis.[77] For South Vietnamese refugees and their descendants in particular, blogs constitute a "diasporic refugee archive."[78] Furthermore, as with the temporality of settler militarism in Guam, blogs are both transitory and permanent: they are simultaneously short-lived and performative, outside the economy of traditional publication and yet archived online to achieve a certain permanence, as long as the website remains active.

Bianca Nguyen grew up in Yigo, Guam, in a Vietnamese-Chamorro household: "Christmas time and any type of holiday, it's always a mix of both cultures on the table. You definitely will have Vietnamese lumpia, fried lumpia, fresh lumpia. But you'll also have red rice and chicken kelaguen on the same table. . . . Some mornings you wake up and you hear my dad playing his Vietnamese music, some days you hear my mom playing some Johnny Sablan or Chamorro music."[79] Sponsored by Nguyen's aunt who had married a US soldier, Nguyen's father and his family left Vietnam as refugees in April 1975, landed at Andersen Air Force Base after a brief stop in Manila, and arrived at Orote Point just a couple hours before the tents of Tent City were pitched. Nguyen's Chamorro mother, meanwhile, was the first in her family to earn a college degree, from the University of Guam, and currently works as a Chamorro language teacher. For Nguyen, "having two different sides, one that is Indigenous Chamorro and one that is fleeing from a country during a time of war," deeply influences her thoughts about decolonization, which to her is fundamentally about "correct[ing] a historical injustice."[80] In other words, Nguyen has inherited the historical legacies of not only US settler imperialism in Southeast Asia but also settler militarism in Guam. After graduating from the University of Guam with a degree in business administration, Nguyen worked as a ghostwriter for a campaigning politician before earning a master of science in early childhood education from Capella University. She currently works as an elementary school teacher for the Guam Department of Education.[81] By invoking asymmetrical

histories linked via US military intervention, Nguyen's blog invites readers to consider how archipelagic histories of US military violence present one analytic by which to theorize cross-racial solidarity between Chamorro decolonization activists and Vietnamese refugee settlers and thereby unsettle the refugee settler condition and address the structural antagonisms formed by settler militarism.

Nguyen started *The Decolonization Conversation* blog in 2008 while she was a student at the University of Guam. In fall 2008, Bianca and her mother attended the Second Chamorro Summit at the university, a convention that sought to educate the Chamorro populace about their different political options regarding decolonization.[82] Eleven years earlier, the Guam legislature had established the Commission of Decolonization for the Implementation and Exercise of Chamorro Self-Determination. The commission originally scheduled a plebiscite for 2000, endorsed by the United Nations, for Chamorros to vote on whether to change Guam's unincorporated territorial status to either independence, free association, or statehood. Notably, this 1997 law restricted the "self" of "self-determination" to Indigenous Chamorros, and instituted a companion Chamorro Registry to register eligible voters as well as record "the progress and identity of the Chamorro people" for "historical, ethnological, and genealogical purposes" more broadly.[83] The Chamorro Registry legislation defined Chamorro people as

> all inhabitants of the Island of Guam on April 11, 1899, including those temporarily absent from the island on that date and who were Spanish subjects who after that date continued to reside in Guam or another territory over which the United States exercises sovereignty and have taken no affirmative steps to preserve or acquire foreign nationality; all persons born in the island of Guam, who resided in Guam on April 11, 1899, including those temporarily absent from the island on that date who after that date continued to reside in Guam or other territory over which the United States exercises sovereignty and have taken no affirmative steps to preserve or acquire foreign nationality; and their descendants.[84]

Although this legislation refrained from articulating a race-based definition, the plebiscite was still critiqued by detractors as a "Chamorro-only vote" that violated the Fifteenth Amendment of the US Constitution and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Accordingly, the 2000 plebiscite was postponed.

To address these criticisms, Guam's legislature passed Public Law 25-106 in March 2000, creating a Guam Decolonization Registry (GDR) to replace the Chamorro Registry for recording eligible plebiscite voters. Unlike the Chamorro Registry—a "registry of names of those CHamoru individuals and their descendants who have survived over three hundred years of colonial occupation and continue to develop as one"—the GDR was, more narrowly, "an index of names established by the Guam Election Commission for the purposes of registering and recording the names of the native inhabitants of Guam eligible to vote in an election or plebiscite for self-determination."[85] The law defined "native inhabitants" as "those persons who became US citizens by virtue of the authority and enactment of the 1950 Organic Act of Guam and descendants of those

persons," thus changing the date of legal nativity from 1899 to 1950.[86] In response to criticism of the Chamorro Registry, Public Law 25-106 insisted that the "political status plebiscite shall not be race-based, but based on a clearly defined political class of people resulting from historical acts of political entities in relation to the people of Guam." In other words, what united eligible plebiscite voters was not a shared racial category but the political condition of being forcefully interpellated as US citizens of an unincorporated territory following the Organic Act of 1950. To ensure a representative mandate, the law also specified that 70 percent of the island's eligible voters must be registered on the GDR before a political status plebiscite could be held.[87]

By 2008, the year of Nguyen's first blog post, Guam still had not held a decolonization plebiscite. Because of underfunding, lackluster support from Guam's leaders, and confusion regarding the overlap between the Chamorro Registry and the Guam Decolonization Registry, the GDR had yet to accumulate the requisite 70 percent of eligible voters. As a result, in 2007 the United Nations included Guam in its "Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples."[88] Citing General Assembly Resolution 1514, the report reaffirmed that "in the process of decolonization, there is no alternative to the principle of self-determination, which is also a fundamental human right"; and that "it is ultimately for the peoples of the Territories themselves to determine freely their future political status" after educating the populace about their "legitimate political status options," namely, immersion in the administrating power (in this case US statehood), free association, or independence.[89] Regarding Guam specifically, the report noted Chamorros' concerns about the "impacts of the impending transfer of additional military personnel" from Okinawa to Guam and requested that the United States continue to "transfer land to the original landowners of the Territory" and "recognize and respect the political rights and the cultural and ethnic identity of the Chamorro people of Guam."[90] In short, the UN recognized Chamorros as Indigenous people who had been unjustly dispossessed by settler militarism in Guam.

At the Second Chamorro Summit at the University of Guam, Nguyen and her mother listened to a debate between Trini Torres and Joe Garrido, spokespeople for the Independence and Free Association options, respectively, and spoke to different decolonization activists. They left the summit feeling shocked that they had not heard about the decolonization plebiscite before, as well as uncertain as to which option presented a "realistic plan of action for the protection and preservation of the Chamorro culture and the people residing on the island."[91] This experience motivated Nguyen to start her blog, *The Decolonization Conversation: A Journey through the Events, the Opinions, and the Decisions in Regards to a Burning Question Left Unanswered*. Despite its permanent archiving on the host blogspot.com, the blog is transitory in nature: as of the time of writing, it consists of four posts spanning 25 October 2008 and 24 May 2009, plus a follow-up post dated

19 December 2020, written after my initial interviews with Nguyen. The blog is thus akin to what Walter Benjamin characterized as an image that flares up at a historical juncture, rather than a sustained political movement that has fully erupted into the social sphere.[92] However, *The Decolonization Conversation* is significant for representing a mixed-heritage perspective on the question of decolonization: one that grapples with transpacific relationalities between Indigenous and refugee subjects.

A one-dimensional racial analysis might attribute Nguyen's urgent interest in decolonization events—such as a rally at Skinner's Plaza entitled "Reclaim Guahan: Chule Tatte Guahan" and an event hosted by the Guam Humanities Council entitled "8000: How Will it Change Our Lives? Community Conversations on the US Military Buildup on Guam"—solely to the Chamorro part of her identity. However, I want to emphasize the significance of her Vietnamese refugee inheritances as well. In other words, what if Nguyen is invested in questions of self-determination in the face of military buildup not *despite* her Vietnamese refugee heritage but *because* of it? Given her inherited history of US settler militarism in Guam *as well as* US military imperialism in Vietnam, Nguyen is *doubly-positioned* to critique the proposed military buildup of an additional 8,000 marines to Guam, announced by the US military in 2005, which, in her words, "calls into mind our colonial status; did anyone ask the People of Guam first 'would you like a couple of Marines in a couple of years?' Was there a poll to see whether we wanted it or not? No one asked, but gave an order, and they are coming whether we like it or not."[93] Identifying as one of the "People of Guam," Nguyen critiques the island's lack of self-determination. Indexing Chamorros' complex entanglement with the US military—a large percentage of Chamorros serve in the armed forces and the economy has come to rely on US defense dollars—Nguyen quickly qualifies her statement, however, pointing out that she is "not anti-military or what have you" but that she's "just been kicking back and observing this for awhile"—"this" being Guam's "colonial status" as an unincorporated territory, which doesn't afford residents the same rights or privileges as those residing in the continental United States.[94]

In another blog post, Nguyen recounts an experience of trying to sign up for more information on an American online school's website, facing restricted access because she resides outside the fifty states, and then emailing the webmaster to kindly explain that "Guam was a U.S. Territory." The webmaster responded, "'We don't cater to international institutions.'" Nguyen ends the post—the last from 2009—with this insight:

> Ahh. International. So, we're a part of this thing, but not really.
>
> So I guess Guam's kind of like the new kid in school; he's sort of part of the school (transcript-wise), but socially he isn't. So what do we do about it?[95]

Nguyen's words characterize not only Guam's seemingly paradoxical status as an unincorporated territory of the United States—"a part of this thing, but not

really"—but also Vietnamese refugees' status as recent US citizens living in Guam—"sort of part" of the group but "socially" not. "Group" here can refer to the United States: although US citizens, Vietnamese Americans in Guam face the same political restrictions as other Guamanians, such as the inability to vote for US president. "Group" can also refer more specifically, however, to Guam: although Guamanian, Vietnamese Americans are not Indigenous and thus not typically included in decolonization conversations.

What role can Vietnamese refugee settlers, shaped by a history of US war–turned–rescue operation, play in native Chamorro decolonization efforts? Given their inadvertent role in humanizing and justifying the US military's occupation of Guam during Operation New Life, as elaborated in chapter 3, Vietnamese refugees embody "the power to represent or enact" settler militarism on native Chamorro lands and waters.[96] As settlers who stayed in Guam, they contribute to the ongoing dispossession of native Chamorros. However, Vietnamese refugees' experiences of US military imperialism also present potential points of solidarity with Chamorro decolonization activists who resist US settler militarism. US intervention in Vietnam was predicated upon the colonization of Guam, after all, as outlined in chapter 2. The decolonization of Guam could therefore inhibit future US military interventions in Asia and Oceania, preventing further displacement of refugees by war. In other words, settler militarism in Guam harms not only native Chamorros but also refugees displaced by US military ventures; as such, effective organizing around archipelagic histories of US empire could activate a coalitional critique of US military violence in its myriad forms.

Moreover, on a small island with high rates of interracial marriage, subject positions and personal histories have become increasingly entangled, making it difficult to discuss "distinct" experiences of settler militarism. For individuals like Bianca Nguyen, caught between divergent histories of Indigeneity and refugeehood, subjectivity is hybrid and liminal—a reflection of Guam's own unincorporated status—as well as "archipelagic," manifesting what Yu-ting Huang calls a "congregation of various geopolitical relations" informed by "interlacing stories" of militarized displacement and settlement.[97] "So," to repeat Nguyen's question, "what do we do about it?" Vietnamese refugees, Chamorro natives, and those caught in the mix must engage in a "decolonization conversation" in order to become "multilingual in each other's histories"—the only way to resist the structural antagonisms enacted by settler militarism in Guam.[98]

"HORIZON OF CARE": DECOLONIZATION IN GUÅHAN TODAY

Since Bianca Nguyen first started *The Decolonization Conversation* blog in 2008, the decolonization movement in Guam has grown dramatically: activist groups such as Independent Guåhan, the Fanohge Coalition, and Prutehi Litekyan: Save Ritidian regularly host events, protests, and educational sessions. Decolonization

is discussed openly on podcasts and the radio, and more people have expressed interest in learning the Chamorro language as well as traditional arts.[99] Yet Guam remains an unincorporated territory, neither fully independent nor fully integrated in the settler imperial United States. In March 2012, Arnold "Dave" Davis, a white American settler and longtime resident of Guam, filed a lawsuit against Guam's government asserting that the Guam Decolonization Registry discriminates against non-Chamorro US citizens. A retired officer of the US Air Force, Davis embodies settler militarism's ongoing attempts to undermine Chamorro self-determination. Davis argued that the GDR violates his Fifteenth Amendment rights against voter discrimination based on race: as a US citizen, he too should have the right to vote in a decolonization plebiscite held in a US territory where (most) constitutional rights apply. In March 2017, US district court chief judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood ruled in favor of Davis, striking down Guam's plebiscite law as unconstitutional and prohibiting the decolonization plebiscite to proceed. According to Judge Tydingco-Gatewood, the plebiscite law violated the Fifteenth Amendment by discriminating against settler voters for not having the "correct ancestry or bloodline."[100]

Judge Tydingco-Gatewood's reference to the Fifteenth Amendment in her ruling naturalized US military occupation of Guam as a permanent ontology, denying the existence of a historical moment *before* the temporality of settler militarism. In other words, the decolonization plebiscite was meant to address not only the structure but also the *event* of US military occupation: to acknowledge that there was a time *prior to* US jurisdiction over Guam and, by extension, prior to the application of the Fifteenth Amendment.[101] Participating in a decolonization plebiscite is *not* the right of all US citizens in Guam, but rather only those who experienced the life-shattering event of colonization, plus their descendants.

Guam's governor at the time, Eddie Calvo, vowed to fight Judge Tydingco-Gatewood's decision in an appeals court. Attorney Julian Aguon argued that the GDR's designation of "native inhabitants" was a political classification, not a racial one. In July 2019, however, the Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Guam. Contradicting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to "freely determine their political status," Circuit Judge Marsha Berzon affirmed the district court's ruling that "Guam's limitation on the right to vote in its political status plebiscite to 'Native Inhabitants of Guam' violates the Fifteenth Amendment," again mistakenly categorizing Indigeneity as a race rather than a political subjectivity.[102] On 4 May 2020, the US Supreme Court denied Guam's appeal of the Ninth Circuit Court decision. The fact that the US courts have the power to arbitrate Chamorros' struggle for decolonization at all further highlights Guam's continued colonial status.

Refusing defeat, Chamorro activists and their allies persist in strategizing different methods for decolonization. Bianca Nguyen expresses hope that "within my daughter's lifetime, we actually do have a plebiscite."[103] Effective decolonization,

however, must take into account the distinct temporality of settler militarism in Guam: the ways the structural permanence of the US military as an institution is often occluded, and even upheld, by the transience of individual settlers, including refugee settlers. Indigenous decolonization does not preclude what Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene First Nation) terms "radical hospitality" toward refugees.[104] Indeed, as Michelle Daigle and Margaret Marietta Ramírez argue, native displacement by settler militarism "compels Indigenous peoples to welcome other dispossessed peoples into their/our homelands, according to their/our own laws, as they become displaced through the violence of racial capitalism" and military imperialism.[105]

In "Care," the first poem featured in his 2018 triptych "Crosscurrents (Three Poems)," Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez models such "radical hospitality," alternatively understood as *inafa'maolek*, while also critiquing the role Western nations play in displacing refugees. Across nineteen stanzas of two lines each, "Care" refracts Perez's admiration for Syrian refugee resilience through his own efforts to soothe and protect his then sixteen-month-old daughter. Imagining what would happen if the space between Syria and his current home on the island of Oʻahu were to suddenly collapse, he writes of the "Pacific trade winds suddenly / [becoming] helicopters" and the shadows cast by "plumeria / tree branches" morphing into "soldiers and terrorists marching / in heat." Perez asks himself if he would be able to display the same strength and fortitude as those Syrian refugees fleeing war: "Would we reach the desperate boats of / the Mediterranean in time? If we did, could I straighten / my legs into a mast, balanced against the pull and drift / of the current?"[106] Here, Syrian refugee passage is marked by water, by *hånom*, by *nuóc*, calling to mind the passage of Vietnamese boat people four decades earlier. Perez thus enacts not only a spatial suturing—Syria to Oʻahu—but a temporal one—the refugee crises of the 1970s and 1980s to today.

"Care" ends by calling on Western countries to open their homes to those in need of refuge, compelled not by paternalistic benevolence but by the instructive teaching of refugees, whose resilient love defies borders and walls. Expressing hope that refugees' love "will teach the nations that emit / the most carbon and violence / that they should, instead, remit the most / compassion," Perez represents refugees not as helpless victims, but as teachers of compassion; resettlement nations, in turn, are depicted not as humanitarian saviors but as perpetrators responsible for violence and global warming, who should learn from refugees.[107] The poem's closing lines query distinctions between "legal refugee[s]"—those who adhere to narrow UN definitions of political asylum—and "illegal migrant[s]"—a term used to describe Syrian as well as Central American asylum seekers to the United States, and which disavows the role Western intervention has played in destabilizing these Global South economies in the first place. In place of these distinctions, Perez envisions a "horizon of care," indexing an opening of homes, an offering of refuge, that does *not* reify the exclusionary power of settler nation-states

but rather suggests a multiplicity of belonging—one that can account for Indigenous sovereignty and refugee home-making alike.[108] In this poem, an archipelagic critique of settler colonialism encompasses both Indigenous "radical hospitality" *and* refugee pedagogies of compassion. Here, distinct yet entangled histories of displacement, via settler militarism and settler imperialism, beget a shared vision of decolonization across Guåhan and the Global South.