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The Politics of Translation

Competing Rhetorics of Return in Israel-Palestine and Vietnam

In the second stanza of "Packing Poem," Vietnamese Israeli poet Vaan Nguyen translates between images of stillness and movement, rest and migration, to capture the complex contradictions of being both an Israeli-born citizen in Historic Palestine and the daughter of Vietnamese boat refugees displaced by war:

> The chopsticks rest diagonally
> matching the movement of birds along a waterfall.
> How can they stall their transmission and keep eating rice
> before their night migration?[1]

Invoking images of Vietnamese culture—chopsticks, birds, rice—Nguyen paints a scene of reluctant "night migration": a desire to "rest" and "stall" before leaving one's homeland for the unknown. When offered resettlement in Israel, Vietnamese refugees often hesitated, uncertain about their prospects in a seemingly embattled Zionist state. For Vietnamese Israelis, resettlement, or "rest," is therefore always undercut by the "movement of birds": an unsettled and migratory form of belonging in the settler colonial state.

This incessant translation between stillness and movement informs the narrator's invocation of Armageddon in the latter part of the poem's second stanza, in what can be read as a nod to more recent waves of refugee migration to Israel-Palestine:

> Under the cover of delusions,
> all I wanted was to point and warn everyone "that's Armageddon"
> to ask whether foreigners have
> inflatable boats.[2]

Dismissing as "delusions" the Israeli media's alarmist representations of recent asylum seekers from Eritrea, Sudan, and Syria as a foreign invasion, the narrator instead warns of impending "Armageddon," referring to the biblical battle between good and evil before the Day of Judgement. Anticipating a conflict over the nation's soul, the narrator wonders: Will Israel embrace the new refugees or succumb to exclusionary rhetoric? And, if turned away, will the refugees have "inflatable boats" to carry them along their "night migration," or will they sink into the sea, the *nước*, as so many Vietnamese boat refugees did during the exodus of the 1970s and 1980s?

This chapter analyzes cultural representations of Vietnamese Israelis and their descendants—the first non-Jewish, non-Palestinian group of refugees to be granted asylum and eventual citizenship in Israel-Palestine—through the trope of translation. Translation indicates both physical movement, the removal from one place to another, from the Old French *translater*, derived from the Latin *translates* (*trans* "across, beyond" + *latus* "borne, carried"), as well as linguistic movement, from one language to another, a meaning that developed in the early fourteenth century. The spatial translation of Vietnamese refugees from Vietnam to Israel-Palestine and back necessitates a series of symbolic translations across language, nation, culture, and memory: translations that are ongoing and multilayered, shaped by both Vietnam's anticolonial civil war and Israel-Palestine's settler colonial context. In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin argues that seamless translation is impossible, given inherent differences in syntax, symbols, and worldview. Likewise, postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes translation's inevitably "catachrestic" nature.[3] Both argue, however, that translation is a necessary and ethical project, as every translation extends closer to the horizon of "pure language," which Benjamin defines not as an expression or approximation of thought but rather as something greater: the Word itself.[4] Whereas Benjamin probes the spiritual dimensions of pure language, in this chapter I explore its decolonial possibilities. Like Spivak, I argue that the goal of translation is not to collapse difference, but to recognize and communicate across it: to understand translation as an "incessant shuttle" that can destabilize structural antagonisms between Vietnamese Israelis and native Palestinians in order to render legible emergent solidarities between seemingly incommensurable subject positions.[5]

Translation intimately shapes Vietnamese Israelis' modes of subject formation. Linguistically, Vietnamese Israeli families must translate between Vietnamese, the language of first-generation refugees, and Hebrew, the language of subsequent generations born in Israel-Palestine, in their everyday interactions. Conceptually, Vietnamese Israelis translate their understandings of home-making, belonging, and refugeehood from Vietnam to Israel-Palestine and back. Analytically, researchers who study Vietnamese Israelis must translate between existing scholarship on Vietnamese refugees, the majority of which derives from North America, and the racial politics of Israel-Palestine. Translation, in sum, operates across multiple

vectors—language, culture, space, time—and multiple scales—local, global, diasporic, archipelagic.

This chapter analyzes the politics of translation in Israel-Palestine and Vietnam via the work of the prominent Vietnamese Israeli poet and actress Vaan Nguyen. Born in 1982 in the coastal city of al-Majdal Asqalan (renamed Ashkelon by Israeli settlers), Nguyen is one of five daughters of Vietnamese refugees who came to Israel-Palestine in 1979 as part of the third wave of refugee resettlement. After moving around, her family settled in Jaffa Dalet, a working-class neighborhood in the southern part of Yafa (renamed Tel Aviv–Jaffa) heavily populated by both Mizrahi immigrants from abroad and Palestinians displaced from the older part of Yafa, near the sea.[6] In 2005, Nguyen starred in Duki Dror's documentary film *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*; in 2008, she published her first chapbook of poetry, *The Truffle Eye* (*Ein Ha-kemehin*); and in 2018, she published her second collection of poems, *Vanity Intersection* (*Hituch Hehavalim*). Nguyen participated in "Guerrilla Culture" (*Gerila Tarbut*), an activist collective founded by Mati Shemoelof in 2007 that staged social justice demonstrations through poetry and music.[7] Issues addressed include the occupation of Palestine, labor unionization, and antiracist critique.

Originally written in Hebrew, Vaan Nguyen's poems are marked by their translation into English. Indeed, Vaan Nguyen's name itself is inflected by its passage from Vietnamese, to Hebrew, to English, reflecting Trinh T. Minh-ha's insight that "translation seeks faithfulness and accuracy and always ends up betraying either the letter of the text, its spirit, or its aesthetics."[8] "Vân," meaning "cloud" in Vietnamese, becomes the homophonic "ואן" in Hebrew, which is transliterated into "Vaan" in English—the doubling of the vowel *a* a characteristic absent from both the Hebrew and Vietnamese. "Vaan" is thus an inherently archipelagic name, bearing the residue of its translation across multiple languages, continents, and cultures.

Translation, furthermore, invites comparison across seemingly incommensurable rhetorics of return: the Law of Return for Jewish immigrants to Israel, the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees and exiles to Palestine, and the journey of return for Vietnamese refugees to postwar Vietnam. Whereas Jewish return has been facilitated by militarized violence and settler colonialism, Palestinian return, rooted in humanitarianism and international law, remains a yet-to-be-realized aspiration. Vietnamese return, in turn, does not necessarily resolve the refugee settler condition. Translation, however, can facilitate decolonial solidarities between Vietnamese Israelis, displaced by war, and Palestinians, displaced by settler colonialism: two groups otherwise divided by structural antagonisms in Israel-Palestine.

As Israeli citizens, resettled Vietnamese refugees and their descendants are politically implicated in the Israeli state's ongoing settler colonial violence against Indigenous Palestinians. It is important to note that Vietnamese Israelis such as Vaan Nguyen serve in the Israel Defense Forces, which terrorize Palestinians within

Israel as well as the Occupied Territories. Although both Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians are marginalized by the Zionist state, wherein cultural citizenship is equated with Jewish identity, their marginalization operates unequally: while the former suffer cultural exclusion despite their de jure citizenship, the latter are systematically dispossessed and displaced from their lands. While the Israeli state racializes Palestinians as terrorist threats to national security, Vietnamese Israelis are upheld as proof of a multicultural democracy. De jure inclusion of Vietnamese Israelis directs attention away from Israel's settler colonial exclusion of Palestinians, a strategy that Candace Fujikane has critiqued as "yellowwashing."[9] Indeed, the very inclusion of Vietnamese Israelis in the so-called Jewish democratic state promulgates the racialization of Palestinians as the ultimate Other, against which Vietnamese Israelis as "model refugees" can be comparatively absorbed.[10]

Palestinians, in turn, are not a homogeneous group. Rather, their different political statuses derive from their distinct geographical relationships to Israeli settler colonialism: third-class citizens within Israel's 1948 borders, surveilled subjects in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, displaced refugees in a neighboring camp, or resettled exiles residing abroad. Politically, however, Palestinians embody a unified nation; as displaced native people, they are united in their Indigenous claim to Palestine. The refugee settler condition, therefore, implicates Vietnamese Israelis in the dispossession of *all* Palestinians, regardless of political status, inhibiting any meaningful coalition between the two communities from yet being realized in the present. Indeed, Vietnamese Israelis often come to identify with the Israeli security state, seeing their fate as tied to that of Jewish Israelis (*người Do Thái*). Despite the fact that "the overwhelming majority of Palestinians have not demanded Jewish-Israelis removal" in their calls for decolonization, but rather "only a relinquishment of their desire to rule," Vietnamese Israelis worry that if Palestinians were to regain sovereignty, they too would be expelled from Palestine, becoming refugees yet again.[11] Therefore, Vietnamese Israelis' affective and material investment in resettlement—what this book calls refugee settler desire—translates into an implicit investment in settler colonialism.

Given this refugee settler condition, how can we begin to theorize solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians? As in the previous chapter about settler militarism in Guam, countering such structural antagonisms between refugee settlers and displaced natives necessitates a turn to the literary and visual arts. We do not yet have the political vocabulary to articulate solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians across the impasses of settler colonialism, but a close reading of poetry and film from these respective communities renders legible resonant "structures of feeling" that have yet to be fully articulated in the present.[12] Such resonances, in turn, invite emergent translations between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians along the axis of displacement from ancestral lands: a key theme in Palestinian cultural production.[13] In this analysis, cultural production is not prescriptive but rather suggestive: slippages and gaps opened up by translation's catachresis present opportunities for imagining otherwise.

This chapter proceeds in two parts. Identifying affective and thematic connections between Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* and Vaan Nguyen's *The Truffle Eye*, the first section attends to incessant translations between the unstable signifiers of native, settler, refugee, and exile. Destabilizing the very categories that divide Palestinians and Vietnamese Israelis under the refugee settler condition, I posit an exilic poetics that critiques the settler colonial state's forms of exclusion in favor of more pluralized modalities of belonging. Such poetics not only "disrupt the incommensurability of Jewish and Palestinian belonging" but challenge the seeming incommensurability of native Palestinian and Vietnamese refugee settler belonging as well.[14] Key here is an engagement with temporality: a critique of linear narratives of autochthony in favor of recognizing what Barghouti calls overlapping "shape[s] of time" (*shakl awqātinā fīhi*).[15]

The chapter's second section focuses on Duki Dror's 2005 film, *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, to examine the translation—or rather, inevitable mistranslation—of the refugee setter condition from Israel-Palestine back to Vietnam. What happens when Vietnamese Israelis travel to Vietnam to reclaim their own ancestral lands, which were redistributed by the communist government when they fled Vietnam as refugees, and translate the political vocabulary of competing land claims from Israel-Palestine to their own postwar homeland? In a key scene in the film, Vaan Nguyen's father, Hoài Mỹ Nguyễn, identifies the Vietnamese family that settled on his ancestral lands in Vietnam as *olim khadashim*, or "new immigrants," which in the Israeli context refers exclusively to Jewish immigrants who migrate to Israel under the Law of Return. Derived from the Hebrew term *aliyah, olim* infuses Jewish immigration to the Holy Land with the religious connotation of an ascension to Mount Zion. In another layer of translation, the film's English subtitles translate *olim khadashim* not as "new immigrants" but as "settlers," with all of the latter word's political connotations in the Zionist state. This startling translational collision of multiple political contexts invites archipelagic comparisons between the distinct yet parallel processes of settlement and land appropriation that have structured both Israel-Palestine and postwar Vietnam. In sum, an archipelagic framework probes how questions of land, water, Indigeneity, refugeehood, settlement, and exile resonate across multiple narratives of belonging and return, shaping political possibilities for Jewish settlers, Palestinian natives, and Vietnamese refugee settlers in a reimagined Israel-Palestine.

EXILIC POETICS: TRANSLATING BETWEEN NATIVE, SETTLER, REFUGEE, AND EXILE

Born in the West Bank in 1944, Mourid Barghouti (Murīd Barghūthī) was "struck by displacement" on 10 June 1967.[16] Because he was taking his final exams at Cairo University when Israeli forces conquered Ramallah, Barghouti graduated a stateless man. Published in 1997 under the Arabic title *Raʾaytu Rām Allāh, I Saw Ramallah* charts Barghouti's reflections upon returning to Ramallah after thirty

years of forced exile. Blending memoir, essay, and prose poetry, *I Saw Ramallah* contrasts Barghouti's memories of Ramallah and the neighboring village of Deir Ghassanah, his hometown, with the reality of his present moment, marking continuities and disjunctures between his experience as a displaced exile returning to Palestine and the experiences of Palestinians who stayed in the occupied West Bank after the Six Day War of 1967, which Palestinians commemorate as al-Naksa. Originally published in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the book negotiates the politics of fledgling statehood, embodied by the Palestinian Authority's newfound, though limited, jurisdiction over the Occupied Territories and the subsequent "legal and geographic fragmentations separating Palestinians from one another."[17] According to Anna Bernard, *I Saw Ramallah* addresses this national fragmentation by employing "a materialist aesthetic which emphasizes both the circumstantial diversity of Palestinian lives and Barghouti's sense of his own responsibility, as a poet, to resist the temptation to reify the dynamic materiality of that diversity."[18]

Awarded the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 1997 and the Palestine Prize for Poetry in 2000, *I Saw Ramallah* was promptly translated into English by Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif in 2000. In his foreword to the English edition, Edward Said praises *I Saw Ramallah* as "one of the finest existential accounts of Palestinian displacement."[19] Translation thus mediates the book's international circulation as a representative Palestinian text.[20] Although *I Saw Ramallah* does not claim to represent the Palestinian experience writ large, especially given the varying political subjectivities of those living under occupation, as third-class citizens in Israel, and as refugees and exiles outside Palestine, it does "envision a Palestinian unity that does not rely on a narrative of shared identity" and is therefore a productive text for examining the diversity of Palestinian positionalities vis-à-vis Vietnamese Israeli refugee settlers.[21] While this section attends to the specificity of Barghouti's positionality as a Palestinian exile, it also forwards Norbert Bugeja's reading of *I Saw Ramallah* as an "exilic-realist" narrative that forges "specific affinities between different forms of exilic conditions both within and beyond the homeland itself."[22] Barghouti's exilic poetics, in turn, resonate with the exilic affects of Vietnamese Israelis resettled in a Zionist state that too often excludes them.

As the daughter of Vietnamese refugees, Vaan Nguyen was granted citizenship at birth into the very state that displaced Barghouti. In 2005, her first published poems appeared in *Ma'ayan*, an Israeli anti-establishment journal committed to social justice.[23] Three years later, *Ma'ayan* released both digital and print copies of Nguyen's chapbook, *The Truffle Eye* (*Ein Ha-kemehin*), the first collection of Hebrew poetry published by a Vietnamese Israeli. In 2013, Nguyen's chapbook was revised and expanded into a book with the same title, and in 2021, Adriana X. Jacobs published an English translation. Rich, sensual, and fleeting, *The Truffle Eye*'s free-verse poems interweave images of sexuality, illness (both physical and mental), beauty, and decay, citing cosmopolitan cities in Israel-Palestine, Vietnam, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. According to Jacobs, the title of

the collection "invokes the image of the truffle in opposition to domestication, settlement, adaptation, and absorption"—themes that resonate across the poems.[24] Eschewing the affective investment in permanent settlement upon which settler colonialism hinges, Nguyen's poems instead imbue a second-generation restlessness: a refusal to exemplify the "model refugee."

Whereas some Israeli critics have deployed Nguyen's biography to exotify her work, other scholars have emphasized *The Truffle Eye*'s resonance with Jewish literary themes of diaspora and exile.[25] Jacobs, for example, argues that Nguyen's work instantiates "cosmopolitan and transnational movements" characteristic of "twenty-first century Israeli mode[s] of travel and translation."[26] What has yet to be examined, however, is how Nguyen's poetry may instead be translated into a *Palestinian* literary tradition of displacement and dispossession, as exemplified by Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*. Although Nguyen's and Barghouti's poetry differ in style, parallel themes of dislocation and alienation across the two texts work to unsettle the settler colonial state. More specifically, *I Saw Ramallah* and *The Truffle Eye* translate across and, in the process, destabilize the seemingly fixed categories of native, settler, refugee, and exile.

Barghouti's text does not explicitly refer to Vietnamese Israelis, who, confined by Israel's borders, do not reside in the West Bank. Similarly, when I asked Palestinians in the West Bank about the Vietnamese, they fondly recalled Palestine's solidarity with Vietnam during the Third World Liberation movement (discussed in chapter 1) but had little knowledge of the Vietnamese refugees resettled in Israel-Palestine less than a decade later.[27] Nguyen's poetry, in turn, does reference Palestinian subjectivity across different geographies of settler colonialism. In "Nomad Poem," Nguyen bears witness to the Zionist erasure of native Palestinian villages: "At the entrance of every city / there's an address written by the victors."[28] Calling to mind Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*, "Chaos" depicts collapsing "buildings in Beirut," the site of four major Palestinian refugee camps, and characterizes the contemporary moment of settler colonial violence as "an ongoing epidemic, poetry's slaughter."[29] In "For the Sake of Innocence," Nguyen depicts the militarization of Israel-Palestine's landscape—"Tanks / are standing quietly in the desert"—and indexes the Zionist logic of elimination with a haunting image of an old poet "on the bus / from Abu Dis," an occupied Palestinian village bordering Jerusalem, who "wonders / if his dead wife is / his last one."[30] "Status," meanwhile, juxtaposes the defeatist sense that "nothing will change" with a call to "liberate Gaza and shake up our parents."[31]

In *I Saw Ramallah* and *The Truffle Eye*, Barghouti and Nguyen "shake up" the Zionist state's monopoly on refugee discourse. As elaborated in chapter 4, Israel enshrines the figure of the Holocaust refugee while denying Palestinian claims to refugeehood and, by extension, the Right of Return. Indeed, Palestinians have had a vexed relationship with the term "refugee" ever since its codification as a legal category. Following the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 1949, Palestinians were excluded from the purview of the international 1951 Refugee Convention and the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR). Moreover, after 1967, many Palestinians shed a "self-perception as mere refugees" and adopted a concurrent "new identity as revolutionaries," a moniker that noted refugeehood's "connotations of defeat, passivity, and reliance" and instead emphasized "self-reliance, agency, and pro-activeness in reclaiming their homeland."[32] In *I Saw Ramallah*, Barghouti further problematizes the use of the term "refugees" to describe Palestinians who fled their villages in 1948 to resettle in the West Bank, in the hope of one day returning home:

> How can we explain today, now that we have grown older and wiser, that we on the West Bank treated our people as refugees? Yes, our own people, banished by Israel from their coastal cities and villages in 1948, our people who had to move from one part of the homeland to another and came to live in our cities and towns, we called them refugees! We called them immigrants! Who can apologize to them? Who can apologize to us? Who can explain this great confusion to whom?[33]

In a series of provocative questions and exclamations, Barghouti cautions against identifying the part of Palestine that lies within the State of Israel's 1948 borders as ontologically distinct from the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza—a political division that the Palestinian Authority, since the Oslo Accords, has indeed accepted. The legal-political category of the refugee marks geographic displacement from one's native land—Palestinians displaced to refugee camps in Beirut, for example—rather than the renaming of one's land by a colonizing power. To call '48 Palestinians "refugees" (*lāji'īn*) and "immigrants" (*muhājirīn*), therefore, is in effect to naturalize and dehistoricize the State of Israel's control over '48 Palestine, relinquishing Indigenous claims of belonging. Put another way, Barghouti's searching questions—"Who can apologize to them? Who can apologize to us? Who can explain this great confusion to whom?"—criticize not only the Zionist state's policies of forced displacement but also the Palestinian Authority's acquiescence in abandoning a politics of resistance.[34]

Barghouti's own Indigenous claim to Palestine does not reproduce Zionist logics of exclusion: a mere transposition of "Israel for Jewish Israelis" to "Palestine for Arab Palestinians," which would in effect erase the subjectivity of Arab Jews, the Mizrahim, who make up the majority of Israel's population.[35] According to Palestinian American legal scholar Noura Erakat, although Zionist sovereignty "engenders fragmentation, partition, separation, and population transfer," the "inverse is not true: Palestinian sovereignty is not to control; it is to belong."[36] Belonging, furthermore, is marked in Barghouti's text by exilic poetics. According to Bryan Cheyette, the term "exile" is "disruptive and intransigent and not redeemed by a sense of nationalist return."[37] Likewise, in "Reflections on Exile," Said eschews the term "refugee"—"a creation of the twentieth-century state"—in favor of "exile,"

positing the latter's "contrapuntal" "plurality of vision."[38] This plurality is characterized by a recognition of the multiple cultures, narratives, and homelands existing within a single landscape, necessitating what Zahi Zalloua identifies as a "double consciousness, a parallax perspective" that can "bear witness to the interdependence of viewpoints or voices."[39] Exilic poetics, in turn, "unsettle the cultural script of rootedness and national belonging" and, by extension, unsettle the exclusionary logics of the settler colonial state.[40]

Barghouti's exilic poetics are apparent in a passage near the beginning of *I Saw Ramallah* that identifies overlapping narratives of belonging. Crossing the Amman Bridge separating Jordan from Palestine for the first time in thirty years, he reflects: "And now I pass from my exile to their . . . homeland? My homeland? The West Bank and Gaza? The Occupied Territories? The Areas? Judea and Samaria? The Autonomous Government? Israel? Palestine? Is there any other country in the world that so perplexes you with its names?"[41] Barghouti acknowledges multiple mappings of the land: what was once Palestine is now claimed by Israel; what the international community, since the Six Day War, has called the Occupied Territory of the West Bank, is to the Israeli government the Judea and Samaria Area and to the Palestinian Authority the jurisdiction of its Autonomous Government. But these mappings are also claims to belonging, at once political, historical, imaginative, and affective: "their . . . homeland?" (*waṭanihim*); "my homeland?" (*waṭanī*). Barghouti's use of punctuation here undercuts any false equivalence between these two claims to Palestine. While "their . . . homeland?" seems to acknowledge Zionists' claim to autochthony—the assertion that the Jewish people, prior to exile, lived in Eretz Israel long before the arrival of Palestinians—Barghouti's ellipses and question mark simultaneously query and challenge such a claim. This is followed not by a declarative claim of his own but rather by another, albeit less hesitant, question: "My homeland?" By posing his Indigenous claim to Palestine as a question, Barghouti destabilizes divisions between the native and exile positions, embodying both: as a native Palestinian, Barghouti insists upon Indigenous claims to the land while simultaneously acknowledging overlaid temporalities of belonging, thus demonstrating an exilic contrapuntal sensibility that, in Said's words, "diminish[es] orthodox judgment and elevate[s] appreciative sympathy."[42] To be clear, such sympathy does not condone Zionist dispossession of native Palestinians but rather opens up a space for recognizing Palestinians' Right of Return alongside Jewish claims for refuge. More probing than declarative, Barghouti's string of questions points us toward an emergent binationalist politics that would encompass native Palestinians and Jewish (refugee) settlers alike under a unified, democratic Palestine, as has historically been imagined by leftist groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

In *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Judith Butler also invokes the promise of binationalism to bring justice to displaced Palestinians. Arguing that the "Palestinian diaspora" remain crucial to "any understanding of

the Palestinian nation," she proposes a deterritorialized conception of nationhood wherein "the nation is partially scattered," the "rights of those who have been forcibly expelled from their own homes and lands" are honored, and "Palestine is not bound by any existing or negotiated borders."[43] Butler explores how a radical sense of binationalism—that is, a nationalism articulated through the differences and connections between Palestinian and Jewish exilic longings for home, rather than the cementation of ethno-nationalist difference propagated by a two-state solution—could reimagine the very configuration of the nation-state.[44] Connecting Butler's theory of binationalism to Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism, Erakat questions how "a state-centric legal order that sanctifies the sovereignty of settler states [can even] rectify and stem ongoing dispossession and native erasure."[45] She concludes that "statehood, as a remedy, does not correspond to the reality and scope of Palestinian grievances today."[46] Likewise, in "We Refugees," Giorgio Agamben highlights the contested territory of the Golan Heights as a model of archipelagic belonging organized around refugee subjectivity:

> The no-man's-land [between Lebanon and Israel] where [Palestinians] have found refuge has retroacted on the territory of the state of Israel, making holes in it and altering it in such a way that the image of that snow-covered hill has become more an internal part of that territory than any other region of Heretz Israel. It is only in a land where the spaces of states will have been perforated and topologically deformed, and the citizen will have learned to acknowledge the refugee that he himself is, that man's political survival today is imaginable.[47]

While it is important not to romanticize forced displacement or colonial occupation, what Butler, Erakat, and Agamben identify is the potentiality of Palestinian refugeehood, as a political "vanguard," not only to unsettle the settler colonial state of Israel but also to trouble the exclusionary logics of nation-statehood more broadly.[48] Such refugee politics is refracted through exilic poetics and Indigenous resistance, as exemplified in Barghouti's writing. Pushed further, this archipelagic reconfiguration, which challenges the exclusionary Westphalian logic of "one people, one land" and destabilizes the divisions between the native, settler, refugee, and exile positions, opens up a "third space" for those who are neither Palestinian nor Jewish in a reimagined Israel-Palestine.[49] That is, a radical *multi*nationalism may engender a form of Vietnamese Israeli belonging predicated not on Palestinian dispossession but instead more ethical forms of relationality.

Like displaced Palestinians, Vietnamese Israelis such as Vaan Nguyen have a vexed relationship to the term "refugee." In interviews, Nguyen often protests being labeled a refugee: "Whenever a humanitarian crisis pops up, various communication outlets approach me to request an interview on the refugee experience, but the only thing I can do is read poetry at one of *Ma'ayan*'s flash readings, because I am a poet who does not feel like a refugee."[50] Because she was born in Israel-Palestine, Nguyen does not fit the legal-political category of a refugee who crosses borders in order to secure asylum outside their homeland. However, her

citizenship in the Zionist state *is* predicated on her *parents'* status as Vietnamese refugees, since Israel does not grant automatic birthright citizenship to non-Jewish subjects. In other words, Nguyen's status as an Israeli citizen derives not from the Law of Return, which governs Jewish immigrants, nor the Citizen Act of 1952, which restricted Israeli citizenship to Palestinians who did not leave their villages during al-Nakba, but from her parents' exceptional absorption into the State of Israel under Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

In 1977, Nguyen's parents escaped Vietnam by boat and ended up in Camp Palawan in the Philippines. After years of waiting, they were granted asylum in Israel-Palestine in 1979 as part of the third wave of Vietnamese refugees. Once they were resettled in the Negev town of Sderot, however, they were "forgotten forever":

> My parents were transparent: No one took any interest in them. They left the *ulpan* [intensive Hebrew course] after three months without having learned Hebrew, in order to work in factories in the Sderot area. Very quickly they decided to move to the big city in the expectation of finding a better livelihood. They moved around between Holon, Rishon Letzion and Bat Yam, and in the end settled in Jaffa—not the pastoral tourist part, but the section that is far from the sea. My parents worked mostly in kitchens, doing jobs that did not require language.[51]

Unable to smoothly assimilate into the Hebrew-speaking country, Nguyen's parents struggled to accomplish the upward mobility they had hoped for.

Nguyen's family's narrative reflects many Vietnamese Israelis' experiences. Today, Vietnamese Israelis number between 150 and 200. Since the 1970s, many Vietnamese refugees have left for resettlement elsewhere, a number of Vietnamese women were brought over from Vietnam to marry Vietnamese Israeli and Jewish Israeli men, and a handful of children were adopted from Vietnam during the 1990s.[52] Most Vietnamese Israelis live in urban, immigrant neighborhoods and are concentrated in low-income jobs such as restaurant cook, hotel chambermaid, or factory worker. A couple of families own Chinese restaurants, but there is a distinct lack of the sort of Vietnamese-language storefront signage that characterizes other Vietnamese diasporic communities.[53] First-generation refugees struggle to learn Hebrew, and second-generation citizens face racial and religious discrimination in an already saturated job market.[54] Moreover, Vietnamese Israelis are often mistaken for Asian guest workers from Thailand, China, or the Philippines, who have no legal pathway to citizenship in the Zionist state.[55]

Such experiences of alienation and cultural exclusion inform the exilic aspects of Nguyen's poetry in *The Truffle Eye*. But do exilic poetics preclude refugee aesthetics? Timothy K. August contrasts the aesthetics of Southeast Asian refugees to that of exiles, arguing that while the latter—often marked by the figure of the elite intellectual—occupy multiple worlds and thus critique the very idea of a singular mode of belonging, the former defiantly claim space within the nation-state in order to critique exclusionary nationalism from within.[56] But what are the ethical and political implications of claiming space in a *settler colonial* state,

which inevitably implicates refugee settlers in Indigenous dispossession? Exilic poetics, as exemplified by the contrapuntal layers of Nguyen's poetry, present one potential way for Vietnamese Israelis to move beyond the structural antagonisms imposed by the refugee settler condition. Read next to Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, Nguyen's *The Truffle Eye* troubles the refugee/exile distinction by questioning the presumed teleology of the refugee as a "problem" to be solved via absorption into the "national order of things."[57] Instead, refugeehood is inherited by the second generation in the form of exilic affects. In other words, exilic affects are not in opposition to refugee subjectivity but rather to just the narrow legal definition of refugee status. Indeed, Nguyen's exilic poetics align with the cross-generational temporality and mode of relationality captured by the term "refugeetude."[58]

Like *I Saw Ramallah*, which opens with Barghouti's crossing of the Jordan River into Palestine, *The Truffle Eye* begins with a scene of *nước*. In the opening poem, "Mekong River," Nguyen invokes exilic affects to describe her second-generation condition of refugeetude. Over twenty-six lines divided into two odd-numbered stanzas, the poem shifts between the rivers and seas of Southeast Asia and West Asia, marking fleeting but intense bodily encounters. Charting restless movement and multiple entanglements, the first stanza begins by tracing the multiple geographies that shape Nguyen's Vietnamese Israeli identity—a bricolage of places that are simultaneously grounded in spatial referents and metaphorically brought together in the archipelagic space of Nguyen's poem:

> Tonight I moved between three beds
> like I was sailing on the Mekong
> and whispered the beauty of the Tigris and Euphrates.[59]

"Mekong" refers to the Mekong River, which runs through Vietnam and enters the sea at its southeastern border. Although the narrator references the Mekong, suggesting placement in Southeast Asia, she also whispers "the beauty of the Tigris and Euphrates" (*yephi ha-Perat ve-hakhideqel*), rivers that run through Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Kuwait—Arab countries that surround Israel and challenge the Zionist state's settlement and occupation of Palestine. Moreover, the narrator's boat voyage serves as a simile for her movement "between three beds," suggesting the inability to find any one bed, or one space, to call home. Here, Nguyen characterizes exile not as loss but as multiplicity. It is this multiplicity, or this refusal to claim Israel as one's sole bed or space of belonging, that renders possible another plurality—the inability to claim Israel solely for oneself.

As Said reminds us, multiplicity is not to be romanticized; rather it is always already conditioned by the exile's forced displacement and "discontinuous state of being."[60] Marking this violence, the first stanza of "Mekong River" continues:

> Under an endless moment
> looking
> below the left tit

I have a hole
and you fill it
with other men.[61]

Problematizing the refugee settler condition, the refugee/exile narrator calls attention to modalities of alienation: how Vietnamese Israelis remain unsettled, futilely looking "under an endless moment" for the sense of belonging promised by the Zionist state. The state, in turn, violently penetrates the narrator, violating her body with its own multicultural narrative: "I have a hole / and you fill it / with other men." Staged as a sexual encounter, these lines call attention to Vietnamese Israelis' intimate entanglement with the settler colonial state that "saved" them from statelessness, yet continues to overwrite their narratives. In a similar vein, other poems in *The Truffle Eye* also employ gendered second-person address to index Vietnamese Israelis' complicated feelings of indebtedness to a state that militarizes their everyday lives: "I'll drool just for you, / solider, master of beret, rank, and whip"; "Once, you were a pilot with seven strikes on enemy territory."[62] Via spatial and affective proximity, Vietnamese Israelis become implicated in the Zionist state's military violence as "model refugees."

To return to the beginning of the first stanza of "Mekong River": If we read Vietnam (Mekong) as one bed/home of belonging, and Arab nations (the Tigris and Euphrates) as another, then what space does the third bed connote? Interpreted as metonymy, the concluding two lines of the first stanza—"Notes of Tiger beer / on your body."—offer one suggestion: the United States.[63] Tiger Beer, an American Adjunct Lager–style beer brewed by Asia Pacific Breweries Ltd., indexes the obfuscated role of the United States in connecting the previous two beds/homes in an archipelagic manner, thus producing the conditions of emergence for the Vietnamese Israeli figure. US military intervention in Vietnam contributed to the post-1975 refugee exodus, and US defense aid to Israel supports Israeli settlement and occupation of Palestine.[64] In order to project itself as a Western democracy sympathetic to international concerns, Israel followed the United States' humanitarian example of resettling Vietnamese refugees.

A turn to another poem in *The Truffle Eye*, "Highway 1," supports this reading of the United States as the third bed/home in "Mekong River." The title of the poem, "Highway 1," references not only Highway 1 in Israel, which connects Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but also National Route 1A (Quốc lộ 1A) in Vietnam, which runs the length of the country, and US Highway 1, which runs along the East Coast.[65] The poem's first stanza—"On Highway 1, America's fixed on a gun / The hilltop greening / *a place and a name*."—invokes the name of the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, Yad Va-shem (Isaiah 56:5), entangling US militarism with Holocaust exceptionalism, which in turn denies refugeehood to displaced Palestinians.[66] The poem goes on to suggest that such Zionist narratives, which "stitch an ancestry for you / and a tradition" on Palestinian soil, are ultimately untenable, built as they are on a decaying foundation of "worms."[67]

The second stanza of "Mekong River" continues the first stanza's images of restless movement and fraught sexual encounters, referencing the "crickets [that] drone south of Laos," the "showers of cold air from Hanoi," and an "ink stain on the belly."[68] The poem concludes with six lines that further question the political implications of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in Israel-Palestine:

> I'll release roots at your feet,
> I want to come to puke
> specks of dust
> in my crotch. Rest your hand
> in my pants. Make it personal
> Who dares abandon a disease mid-sea?[69]

Comparing the releasing of roots to the puking of specks of dust, the narrator problematizes the romanticized narrative of the refugee planting new roots in the adoptive country of rescue. Roots instead signify a settler colonial attachment, that—like an invasive species—threatens the Indigenous landscape. Furthermore, the act of releasing roots originates not from personal desire but from external imperative: "I'll release roots at your feet" suggests an imposed genuflection, an enforced capitulation, to the settler colonial narrative touted by the Zionist state—one that upholds Vietnamese refugees as proof of Israel's multicultural democracy while directing attention away from displaced Palestinian refugees and exiles.

The poem's last line—"Who dares abandon a disease mid-sea?" (*Mi me'ez la-azov ma-halah be-emtsah yam?*)—exemplifies a politics of refugeetude refracted through exilic poetics. Israel, like many nation-states, represented the Vietnamese boat refugees as a "disease"—an aberration to the nation-state order—that needed to be cured via resettlement and citizenship. As political philosophers such as Arendt and Agamben have shown, however, the normative body of the nation-state inevitably *produces* displaced populations, by the very nature of its exclusive borders.[70] Parodying Israel's self-righteous accusation that its neighboring Arab nations are *not* humanitarian since they did not absorb Vietnamese refugees—"Who dares abandon a disease mid-sea?"—the poem reminds the reader that Israel itself is responsible for millions of Palestinians' forced displacement. Lastly, the poem leaves the temporality of "disease" ambiguous: once resettled, do Vietnamese Israelis continue to be marked as diseased subjects, suggesting a latent threat to the Jewish body politic? If so, then perhaps this association with illness is one vector by which Vietnamese Israeli refugee settlers can infect the settler colonial state from within via a radical politics of refugeetude: "I *want* to come to puke / specks of dust / in my crotch."[71]

"Mekong River" marks geography via *nước*, blurring divisions between Southeast Asia and West Asia, refugee and settler, exile and citizen. At first glance, the poem's last line—"Who dares abandon a disease mid-sea?"—seems to characterize the "sea" as a transitory space from which to be saved. The sea, however, teems with possibility. To embrace the sea is to open oneself up to more archipelagic

forms of belonging. In Vietnamese diasporic literature, the sea (*biển*) marks boat refugee passage as well as rebirth and renewal. In post-1948 Palestinian literature, the sea (*al-baḥr*) represents the promise of reunification: a return to the Mediterranean for Palestinians confined to the West Bank and exiled abroad. In Hebrew literature, from the Book of Jonah to contemporary Israeli poetry, the sea (*yam*) is "a space for voyage and discovery, loss and transformation, not to mention a radical alternative to settlement and territory."[72] In sum, the sea, with its fluid borders and shifting perimeters of belonging, has the potential to erode the exclusionary logics of the settler colonial state.

"Culture Stain," the twelfth poem in *The Truffle Eye*, builds upon the themes introduced in "Mekong River." In this three-stanza poem, "culture" operates as a "stain," a disease, that marks Vietnamese Israelis' ethnic and political difference and inhibits easy assimilation into the Zionist state. In the first stanza of "Culture Stain," the Mekong, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers, introduced in "Mekong River," converge on a "riverbank," near which a second-person character digs to extract "seeds of nothing."[73] Such seeds, like the roots in "Mekong River," are infertile. If the second-person "you" is understood as the figure of the Vietnamese Israeli, these lines suggest the ultimate failure of refugee resettlement—a failure that can be characterized not as a loss but as an opening for relating otherwise to the land of Palestine. If "you" references the figure of the Jewish Israeli, however, as other poems in *The Truffle Eye* seem to suggest, these lines also indicate the inevitable collapse of what Lila Sharif has termed the Zionist project of "eco-occupation"—that is, "the planting of nonnative trees to resemble European landscapes and the appropriation of the natural habitat to expand colonial settlement."[74] In "Culture Stain," Zionists' attempts at settler eco-occupation are ultimately "seeds of nothing" that will fail to take permanent root in the land of Palestine.

In the third stanza of "Culture Stain," Nguyen depicts a vexed romantic encounter between the Vietnamese Israeli narrator and a Jewish Israeli addressee:

> A rosy sun sets
> on a musical Monetbach lake in your eyes—
> When we hold each other
> you'll ask where I came from. I'll say
> I came from this rot.
> Where did I come from, you're asking,
> I mean, parents?[75]

The couple's intimate embrace—indicative of the way Israel embraced the Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s by offering asylum—is interrupted by the Jewish Israeli lover's query as to the narrator's origins, a question that calls to mind the perpetual foreigner stereotype often imposed on Asian immigrants who do not fit the phenotypical markers associated with the presumed national body politic. The narrator, however, disrupts expectations by answering "I came from this rot," simultaneously insisting on her belonging to Israel-Palestine as an Israeli-born

citizen while also eschewing any pride in that nativity. "Rot" indicates the dust and decay of the underresourced neighborhoods Vietnamese Israelis like Nguyen grew up in, as well as the rotten seeds of Zionist settler colonialism—and by extension, Vietnamese Israelis' refugee settler condition—in Palestine more broadly.

While the lover attempts to clarify the question as one about the narrator's parents' origins—indexing how parental refugeetude is inherited by the second generation—the poem undermines this very line of questioning. According to Jacobs, the syntax of the last two lines actually "dislocates the subject," so that "Where did I come from" is "both a question posed to the speaker and the one that the lover appears to ask himself."[76] Turning the question of origins and "seeds of nothing" back on the questioner, the poem prompts Jewish Israelis to interrogate their own claims to settlement and occupation and instead consider Palestinian calls for decolonization. This interrogation of origins is marked by water, by *nước*, framed as it is "on a musical Monetbach lake" in the lover's eyes. *Nước*, then, marks geographies of decolonization that trouble settler colonial claims to Indigenous land.

In *The Truffle Eye*, Nguyen's poems translate not only across different spaces but also across different verb tenses, bringing together an archipelago of temporalities in a collage-like manner. Translating between multiple temporalities is key to articulating contrapuntal forms of belonging that destabilize exclusionary divisions between natives, settlers, refugees, and exiles. Such temporal translations can be characterized by Barghouti's concept of a "shape of time" (*shakl awqātinā fīhi*).[77] Toward the middle of *I Saw Ramallah*, Barghouti asks what David Farrier has identified as the "central question" of the text: "Does a poet live in space or in time?"[78] Answering his own query, Barghouti replies: "Our homeland is the shape of the time we spent in it."[79] For exiles, "homeland" is not only a space but also a time, a memory of a place prior to forced displacement. This temporality of memory, however, need not be characterized by nostalgia or autochthony, a teleological logic of property rights based on the question of origins: Who was here first? Who owns the original title to the land? Rather, this temporality of memory invites new forms of political organization, a "project of building something new" and "going back to an unknown future."[80] In other words, this forthcoming "shape of time" can encompass Palestinian claims to Indigenous belonging while also acknowledging Jewish Israeli attachments to the Holy Land and Vietnamese Israelis' longing for a state of refuge.

Indexing overlapping modalities of belonging, Barghouti writes of Israel-Palestine: "the place is for the enemy and the place is for us, the story is their story and the story is our story. I mean, *at the same time*."[81] Such parallelism and coevality do not equate to "two equal rights to the land," however, given that the Zionists "took our entire space and exiled us from it." Barghouti clarifies that "when we were in Palestine, we were not afraid of the Jews," and only *after* they "took the space with the power of the sacred and with the sacredness of power, with the imagination, and with geography" did they "bec[o]me an enemy."[82] Barghouti orients readers toward a time and place before Zionist settlement and occupation—a shape of

time *before* Jewish settlers and native Palestinians were considered enemies, *before* Vietnamese Israelis would have been positioned as refugee settlers—in sum, a shape of time toward which to orient decolonial futures. Although Zionists used "imagination" (*al-khayāl*) and "geography" (*al-jughrāfiyyā*) as tools for Palestinian dispossession, such tools can be repurposed to build a radically multinational, contrapuntal Palestine.

In the middle of the second stanza of "Mekong River," Nguyen also questions the teleology of origins, suggesting more archipelagic understandings of time:

> Sketch me a monochrome
> flow chart
> on fresh
> potted flowers.[83]

While a "monochrome / flow chart" (*tarshim zerimah / be-tsevah akhid*) connotes linear temporality and unambiguous causality, "fresh / potted flowers" promise verdant growth, marking the potential for this flow chart to blossom and elongate in unexpected directions. These fertile shoots—which disrupt linear causality by extending forward, backward, and horizontally—resonate with Barghouti's vision of a shape of time oriented simultaneously toward the memory of pre-1948 Palestine and the future of decolonization. Indeed, when Barghouti writes that he "want[s] borders that I later will come to hate"—the modicum of security promised by the Palestinian Authority's autonomous government—he articulates a desire for a "flow chart" that can flower and change, blooming into a more expansive vision of Palestinian self-determination.[84]

Translating Vaan Nguyen's *The Truffle Eye* into a Palestinian literary tradition, as exemplified by Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, presents one way to work through the structural antagonisms produced by the refugee settler condition. In these two texts, exilic poetics, refracted through refugeetude and Indigenous politics, query not only the exclusionary logics of the settler colonial state but also the "sovereignty trap" of the Palestinian Authority's politics of statehood, in order to imagine more contrapuntal visions of a decolonized Palestine.[85] In *The Truffle Eye*, poems traverse space and time, marking tendrils of belonging in both West Asia and Vietnam. The following section hones in on the space-time of postwar Vietnam and interrogates what happens when Vietnamese Israelis translate the vocabulary of land settlement and occupation from the Israel-Palestine context back to their communist-unified homeland.

"*OLIM KHADASHIM*": TRANSLATING "NEW IMMIGRANTS" FROM ISRAEL-PALESTINE TO VIETNAM

Prior to the release of *The Truffle Eye*, Vaan Nguyen starred in the 2005 documentary film *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen* (*Hamasa shel Vaan*). Directed by Duki Dror, an Israeli filmmaker of Iraqi heritage, *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen* premiered at

the Jerusalem Film Festival on 29 September 2005 and proceeded to achieve global acclaim: it won a Remi Award at the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival and was an Official Selection of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam.[86] The documentary is one of the first cultural texts to prominently circulate the story of Vietnamese Israelis to a global audience, as well as debut Nguyen as a poet: shots of Nguyen journaling, speaking into a voice recorder, and writing in her online blog, "A Jaffran in Saigon," are interspersed with archival footage of Vietnamese refugees arriving in Israel-Palestine in the late 1970s and receiving Hebrew language instruction at an *ulpan*.

Whereas *The Truffle Eye* destabilizes the categories of native, settler, refugee, and exile via exilic poetics, *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen* more explicitly grapples with the politics of Vietnamese Israeli return to Vietnam in order to reclaim the lands they left behind as refugees. This emphasis on return may at first seem to reify an ethno-nationalist politics of nativity: an anti-immigrant belief that Vietnamese Israelis suffer alienation in Israel-Palestine because they rightly "belong" in Vietnam. However, read archipelagically, the film actually invites surprising translations between, on one hand, Vietnamese Israelis' journey of return to Vietnam and, on the other, the Law of Return for Jews and the Right of Return for Palestinians in the Israel-Palestine context. In fact, the film suggests the *inadequacy* of a nation-state framework for unsettling the refugee settler condition in Israel-Palestine. Theorizing potentials for Vietnamese Israeli and Palestinian solidarity becomes possible only when one considers questions of land dispossession and competing rhetorics of return in Israel-Palestine *in relation to Vietnam*. This relational politics is captured by Palestinian American scholar Loubna Qutami's concept of the "Palestine analytic," which "elucidates how Palestine/Palestinian resistance can present new global anti/de-colonial opportunities and new solidarities between causes and communities that are not bound by the nation-state."[87] Indeed, the Palestinian struggle for liberation presents one vector by which Vietnamese Israelis can come to understand their own experiences of land dispossession in Vietnam; such archipelagic analogies may in turn engender solidarity with Palestinian liberation in Israel-Palestine, rather than identification with the Zionist state.

The politics and problematics of translation feature prominently in *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, which shows first-generation Vietnamese refugees speaking most comfortably in Vietnamese while their Israeli-born children speak primarily Hebrew. When reading their own poetry, the two main characters of the film, Vaan Nguyen and her father, Hoài Mỹ Nguyễn (identified in the film as "Hoimai Nguyen"), speak in their respective native languages, Hebrew and Vietnamese. But when they speak to each other, they switch, sometimes mid-sentence, between (native) Hebrew, (Vietnamese-accented) Hebrew, (native) Vietnamese, and (Hebrew-accented) Vietnamese, cobbling together a shared language across linguistic difference. Translation also operates at the level of the film's subtitles.

FIGURE 10. Film still from *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen* © Zygote Films.

Because very few viewers are fluent in both Hebrew and Vietnamese—even the Vietnamese Israelis in the documentary sometimes experience difficulty communicating across generation and language—subtitles are indispensable for understanding the film. For Hebrew-language audiences, the film needs to translate only the Vietnamese dialogue. For Anglophone audiences, in contrast, the film offers English subtitles for both the Hebrew and Vietnamese dialogue and, regrettably, does not distinguish between the two. Unless they can identify the auditory differences between Vietnamese, Hebrew, and their respective accented variations, Anglophone viewers may therefore miss the characters' constant linguistic negotiations. In sum, English subtitles mediate Anglophone viewers' understanding of the film: not only are they often inaccurate, but they also smooth out the grammatical inconsistencies and hesitant vocabularies of the Vietnamese Israelis, who communicate with one another without formal training in each other's native tongue. In essence, the film's English subtitles mask Vietnamese Israelis' everyday labor of translation in their quotidian interactions.

At the level of narrative, the film also translates—incessantly shuttles—between two main narratives: that of Hoài Mỹ Nguyễn and his daughter, Vaan Nguyen. In 1972, Hoài Mỹ Nguyễn fled his village in Hội An district, Bình Định province, in central Vietnam, his life threatened by the communist-sympathetic mayor who poisoned his father, Nguyễn Khắc Minh. After his escape and eventual resettlement in Israel-Palestine, Hoài Mỹ's family lands were confiscated by the Vietnamese communist government and redistributed as part of the post-1975 land reform program.[88] In the film, Hoài Mỹ returns to Vietnam to reclaim his ancestral lands. Nguyen's narrative, in turn, emphasizes the exilic affects that characterize her life in Israel-Palestine as a Vietnamese Israeli. Halfway through the film, Nguyen follows

her father to Vietnam to help him reclaim the family's lands. The film frames her journey as one of hopeful return: a desire to assuage feelings of alienation and cultural dissonance in Israel-Palestine with a final sense of belonging in the land of her ethnic heritage. The documentary ends, however, with a scene of irresolution. Nguyen tearfully divulges to the camera that she "feels Vietnamese in Israel and Israeli in Vietnam," bypassing any form of identification with Palestinians.[89]

In *The Truffle Eye*, Nguyen is able to reframe her exilic affects as exilic poetics, with all the contrapuntal possibilities à la Said that such engender. In contrast, in *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, shot and edited by Duki Dror, second-generation exile is represented as a failure to assimilate rather than an opening for radical multiplicity: Nguyen is depicted as unable to fully belong in either Vietnam or Israel-Palestine. In Vietnam, Nguyen's Hebrew-accented Vietnamese, assertive manner, and Western clothes mark her as *Việt Kiều*, an overseas Vietnamese. According to Võ Hồng Chương-Đài, "Despite its seemingly neutral translation, *Việt Kiều* often is used derogatorily and carries with it the baggage of civil war and imperial history—local Vietnamese's resentment toward those who were able to flee the devastated country and who are now citizens and residents of more prosperous, usually Western, nations."[90] For Nguyen and her family, however, this resentment is somewhat misplaced: Vietnamese Israelis typically did not prosper in Israel-Palestine, and they remain alienated in Israeli society. In fact, in the beginning scenes of *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, the majority of Vietnamese Israelis who have gathered in the Nguyens' living room in Jaffa Dalet to watch archival footage of themselves arriving in Israel-Palestine express desire to return to Vietnam and belief that their livelihoods would now be better in their postwar homeland than in the Zionist state.

In an oft-quoted monologue halfway through the film, Nguyen elaborates on the cultural estrangement Vietnamese Israelis feel in Israel-Palestine. Shots of Nguyen packing, waiting in the Tel Aviv airport for her flight to Vietnam to join her father, and then riding in a taxi in Sài Gòn are sutured together by a bitter voiceover in which Nguyen addresses the Zionist state directly:

> Goodbye wonderful country, your humble servant offers you this song on the way to Vietnam. This journey is made out of bitterness and anger—may I never return. I'm not accepted . . . because of my appearance, my religion, my nationality, my immigrant soul. Enough. I'm tired, fed up, traumatized by life's experiences. I want to write. I want to go to the store without having people pry into my private life, asking so many questions because I look suspicious or so very interesting. I want them to quit the UFO investigations and the demand that I politely clap my hands and sing: "I was born in Israel, my parents are Vietnamese refugees, who came in 1979, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who had just been elected, decided that his first official act would be to let in some Boat People as a humanitarian identification with the exile so familiar to the Jewish people." No, I'm not Jewish. I don't know if I'll convert and whether or not my child will be circumcised. I don't know in what section

> of the cemetery I prefer to be buried or according to which religious affiliation. Yeah, I feel sorry for everyone who died or was jailed regardless of whatever religion or nationality was reported in most recent statistics of the last Intifada. I observe Holocaust Day . . . and anyhow I'm not fucking any Arabs at the moment. I have no idea how you tell the difference between Chinese, Japanese, Thai, [Filipino], and Korean. I don't think that my eyes are slanted because I grew up eating rice every day. Yes, I bet my skin is smoother. Yes, I do have cellulite. No, I don't comb my hair a hundred times a day. No, I'm not related to Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan. Hello in Vietnamese is *chào*, I love you is *Anh yêu em*. And [Vân (Vaan)] is a synonym for cloud. Now can I have some peace and quiet?[91]

In this frustrated soliloquy, Nguyen indexes the endless questions about her appearance and her place in Israeli society that she is compelled to answer in her everyday interactions. Despite her birth in Ashkelon and fluency in Hebrew, Nguyen's Vietnamese features mark her as a perpetual foreigner and Orientalist oddity in Israel-Palestine.

As this monologue reveals, Vietnamese Israelis are also considered "suspicious" because they do not easily fit into the presumed binary opposition between Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians. Vietnamese Israelis' loyalties thus remain suspect: Do they plan to convert to Judaism? Whose "side" did they sympathize with during the last Intifada? Do they observe Holocaust Day? Do they sleep with Palestinians, implying both illicit sexual relations and a reproductive threat to the Zionist state's precarious Jewish demographic majority? In this scene, Nguyen refuses to choose a "side," expressing sympathy "for everyone who died or was jailed regardless of whatever religion or nationality was reported in most recent statistics of the last Intifada." At first glance, this refusal to take a "side" may seem an aspiration to binationalism, as discussed in the previous section. However, under the oppressive conditions of the settler colonial state, failing to take a stance effectively translates into upholding the status quo of Palestinian dispossession. Radical binationalism, and by extension multinationalism, is possible only in and through Palestinian liberation.

In *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians is depicted as not yet a reality but rather as potentiality—shared experiences of structural as well as interpersonal discrimination that, if not acknowledged, may, like Walter Benjamin's image of the past that "flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized," dissolve into missed opportunities.[92] Two scenes in particular depict how Vietnamese Israelis are often grouped with Palestinians, rather than Jewish Israelis, in the bifurcated political geography of Israel-Palestine. About ten minutes into the film, Nguyen's parents visit a Muslim cemetery in Yafa to light incense at the foot of two parallel gravestones featuring Vietnamese as well as Arabic script. In a Vietnamese voiceover, Nguyen's mother explains that in 1983, her twin daughters were born stillborn.[93] Speaking directly to the camera in Vietnamese-accented Hebrew, Hoài Mỹ divulges that the family struggled

to find a cemetery where they could bury the children. They were turned away from first a Jewish synagogue in Yafa and then a Christian cemetery; finally, this Muslim cemetery accepted them. In the film, Hoài Mỹ shares this information matter-of-factly; instead of dwelling on the political implications of this encounter, he concludes simply, "That's all."[94] But this scene presents an opening for cross-racial connections, raising the specter of possible solidarities. The vast majority of Muslim subjects in Israel-Palestine are Palestinian; therefore, this Muslim cemetery can be read as a space of Palestinian sovereignty, in death if not yet in life. By extension, this scene suggests that Vietnamese Israelis may find a final resting place of resettlement not in the Zionist *state* of Israel but in the *land* of Palestine. Indeed, Palestine, liberated from the restrictive logics of nation-statehood, can encompass radical multiplicity, whereas the settler state inevitably reproduces exclusions. Ironically, in Hebrew the word most commonly used for cemetery is also the word for home: *bayit*.[95] Excluded from the possibility of refugee homemaking in the Zionist state, Vietnamese Israelis instead have the potential in this scene to align with Palestinian land-based struggles.

In a following scene, Nguyen's younger sister, Hong Wa, visits a neighborhood playground with her friend Jamillah. Like "Vaan," "Hong Wa" is a name marked by multiple translations: the original Vietnamese name Hoa Hồng, meaning rose, gets transliterated through Hebrew back into English as Hong Wa. In the film, Hong Wa also goes by her Hebrew name, Vered, which similarly means rose.[96] In this scene, the two girls discuss their bilingual experiences while balancing on a swing set. Hong Wa talks about speaking Vietnamese at home with her parents, and Jamillah shares that her family primarily speaks Arabic, though, unlike Hong Wa's parents, Jamillah's parents are also fluent in Hebrew. Their conversation is interrupted by the offscreen taunts of Jewish Israeli children who call Hong Wa "Japanese" and tell Jamillah to "go home."[97] Like the cemetery scene described above, this scene of cross-racial friendship between Hong Wa and Jamillah suggests potentials for solidarity: shared vulnerability to Zionist exclusions that mark the two girls' ethnic difference as well as strengthen their young friendship. If we read copper-skinned and dark-eyed Jamillah as Palestinian rather than Mizrahi, then the children's provocation to "go home" is particularly ironic given that Jamillah is already at home in Palestine; in fact, the right to "go home" is exactly what displaced Palestinians are fighting for via the Right of Return. The film, however, does not explicitly frame this encounter between the two girls as one of political solidarity, and in that way, it risks fading into a missed opportunity.

This scene on the playground is sutured to the previous scene at the Muslim cemetery by a shot of Nguyen's mother brushing her daughter Hong Wa's hair while in a voiceover Nguyen reads, in Hebrew, one of her journal entries chronicling the racial discrimination she has experienced growing up in Israel-Palestine. Nguyen concludes: "At some age I started to blame my parents and to be ashamed of them. Later I started hating the elitist Jewish society. I became angry and rude.

Finally, I remained hating myself, trying to come to terms with those whom I was ungrateful to: family, state, community of any kind. Loneliness of a foreigner who grew up in a desert out of sand storms."[98] In this confession, Nguyen tries to pinpoint who should be held accountable for her experiences of cultural exclusion as a second-generation Vietnamese Israeli. Frustration with her refugee parents evolves as she grows older into a more structural critique of the Zionist state and "elitist Jewish society"; however, in this particular narration of her political development, structural critique ultimately disintegrates back into stultifying exilic affects of self-hatred and loneliness. In sum, Nguyen's narrative, as depicted by Dror in *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, seems to foreclose political agency and, by extension, the potential for solidarity between Vietnamese Israeli refugee settlers and native Palestinians in Israel-Palestine.

But is Nguyen's story the main narrative of the film? The film's title, *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, definitely seems to suggest so. Further analysis of the film's trailer reveals, however, that the title is actually a product of an English subtitle's *mis*-translation—or, more generously, creative interpretation—of the film's Vietnamese dialogue, suggesting that viewers' assumptions about the prominence of Nguyen's narrative over that of her father's may actually be misplaced. In the trailer's penultimate scene, a Vietnamese villager who currently owns a house on Hoài Mỹ's ancestral lands tells Hoài Mỹ as Nguyen looks on, "Người ta nói, cuối cùng, không có đâu giống như quê hương." The English subtitles translate this as "At the end of the journey, there is no place like home," after which the trailer cuts to a closeup of Nguyen walking by herself at night along the streets of Sài Gòn, framed to the left by the text of the film's English title in yellow letters: *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*. The on-screen visual repetition of the word "journey," juxtaposed against the truism "There's no place like home"—a *Wizard of Oz* reference—calls into question the inanity of this supposed truism.[99] For Nguyen, a Vietnamese Israeli who feels alienated both in Israel-Palestine and Vietnam, the platitude "there is no place like home" might speak less to a sense of the cherished uniqueness of an abstract home than to the fact that for those marked by refugee displacement and exilic affects, there is indeed "no place [that can feel] like home." Alternatively, one can read this platitude through the lens of exilic poetics discussed in the previous section, in which case home becomes contrapuntal and archipelagic, exceeding the borders of the settler state. In other words, for those caught in translation between multiple cultures, continents, and languages, there is no *one* place that can feel like home and, by extension, no *one* population that can monopolize Israel-Palestine or Vietnam as their national homeland, to the exclusion of others. Furthermore, it is at the end of the film, "at the end of the journey," to quote the film's Vietnamese character—that is, "the journey of Vaan Nguyen" (from Israel-Palestine to Vietnam)—that Nguyen, and the viewer, may come to this conclusion.

This reading of the trailer's play on words, however, is premised on the film's English subtitles, flashed—not spoken—on the bottom of the screen in white text,

moments before the yellow text of the film's English title appears in the next shot. In fact, a more accurate translation of the Vietnamese man's statement does not even include the word "journey" (*cuộc hành trình*). "Người ta nói, cuối cùng, không có đâu giống như quê hương" translates more precisely to "People say, *in the end*, there is no place like home." Furthermore, the word for "home" used here, *quê hương*, means not only one's hometown or village but also one's homeland or country. In other words, there is no place that can surpass the significance of one's homeland, one's *nước*. Without the repetition of the English word "journey" to connect this Vietnamese man's quote to the title of the film, *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, the above reading of the title's significance, and the centrality of Nguyen's narrative that it purports, unravels.

If the film's title is based on a mistranslation ("in the end" versus "at the end of the journey") and therefore misrepresents the relative prominence of Nguyen's second-generation narrative, then perhaps the film does not completely foreclose the potential for solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians. Indeed, a turn to the other main narrative thread of the film, that of Nguyen's father, Hoài Mỹ, opens up the question of Palestinian liberation to a relational analysis of land contestations in postwar Vietnam. If we understand *quê hương* in the previous quote to refer not only to "home" in the abstract but more precisely to one's ancestral village lands—the lands a family has cultivated for generations—then Hoài Mỹ's narrative invites archipelagic connections between distinct yet parallel experiences of land dispossession in Israel-Palestine and Vietnam.

For Palestinians, the Right of Return to ancestral lands is an Indigenous issue—a political refutation of the Zionist state's ongoing policies of settler colonialism. But how do Vietnamese Israelis conceive of their own politics of return to their ancestral lands in postwar Vietnam? A scene a quarter of the way through the film provides some answers. As the camera cuts between shots of Hoài Mỹ reading a letter addressed to his diasporic siblings, Nguyen and her sisters listening, and Nguyen's mother cooking in the family's small apartment in Jaffa Dalet, Hoài Mỹ's voiceover details how he and his siblings left their homeland decades ago, escaping through the rainfall of bombs. In the letter, written during Lunar New Year (Tết), Hoài Mỹ prays to his ancestors for the ability to return to the family's ancestral lands, bemoaning poetically, "Xa hang đưa vòng trái đất." The English subtitles translate this phrase as "I was torn from roots and lands."[100] The word for land used here, "*trái đất*," takes on the planetary dimensions of Earth, extending beyond the provincial connotations of "*quê hương*" to invite archipelagic connections between spaces on opposite sides of the globe: Israel-Palestine and Vietnam.

In another key scene regarding land rights in the postwar Vietnam context, Hoài Mỹ visits Chú Kỳ, the landlord in Vietnam who currently owns and rents out his ancestral lands. Distinguished as an "Honorable War Hero" by the communist government, Chú Kỳ received the Nguyễn family's lands as part of the Vietnamese state's postwar land redistribution program, which transferred land deeds from

anticommunist traitors to communist patriots. As the camera looks on, Hoài Mỹ explains his family's attachment to the land and asks Chú Kỳ to "transfer it back to my family, to give it back so that my children may know their roots."[101] But Chú Kỳ responds that the "government has the right to grant [the land] to someone else," and it is he who is the legitimate owner of the house; he has "all of the (Communist) committee's paperwork" to back up his claims.[102] According to Võ, "Hoimai and Chú Kỳ's claims to ownership of the land rest on different systems of legitimacy—the former insists on family lineage whereas the latter asserts the authority of the state."[103] While Hoài Mỹ appeals to the force of tradition—his family's long-term cultivation of the land—Chú Kỳ insists on the newfound government's system of law and bureaucracy.

In this scene, to what degree does Hoài Mỹ's ancestral claim to his family's lands parallel Palestinians' insistence on the Right of Return, in the face of the Israeli government's imposed Law of Return, which legitimizes Jewish immigration to Israel-Palestine at the same time that it denies Palestinians access to the homes that they have lived in for generations prior to forced displacement? When comparing these two cases of contested land claims—Vietnamese refugees in postwar Vietnam and Palestinians in Israel-Palestine—it is important to attend to historical specificity and acknowledge structural differences. Not all ancestral claims to land are Indigenous claims. The Vietnam War was both a war against imperialism and a civil war, in which Vietnamese communists, anticommunists, and those caught in between all claimed national belonging to *nước Việt Nam*. Although the Vietnamese state has enacted settler colonial policies that displace Indigenous minorities, Hoài Mỹ here is not an Indigenous minority but rather an anticommunist former landowner who left Vietnam as a refugee.[104] In contrast, the Zionist foundation of Israel was characterized by a mass influx of Jewish settlers whose rhetorical claim to the land of Palestine was articulated as a "return" to the Holy Land after millennia of exile—an affective attachment that the State of Israel then codified as the Law of Return via the rhetoric of *aliyah*, which infuses Jewish immigration with the religious connotation of an ascension. Both the Vietnamese government and the Israeli government deny the land claims of the families that fled their lands at the time of the government's foundation: 1975 and 1948, respectively. In the Israeli case, the politics of difference is bolstered by the rhetoric of racial and religious difference: the Islamophobic Othering of the Arab Muslim Palestinian figure, regardless of demographic accuracy. Furthermore, the Israeli government continues to wield settler colonial control over Palestinians living within its 1948 borders and in the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank—power that the Vietnamese government does not retain over its postwar refugee diaspora.

In Israel-Palestine, Vietnamese Israelis occupy a vexed political positionality in between Jewish Israelis and displaced Palestinians, between the Law of Return and the Right of Return. But what happens when they travel from Israel-Palestine to Vietnam, necessitating an archipelagic analysis of their refugee settler condition?

Are Vietnamese Israelis' journeys of return to Vietnam more akin to the Law of Return or the Right of Return in Israel-Palestine? In other words, when Vietnamese refugees return to reclaim their ancestral lands in postwar Vietnam, are they asserting a birthright, akin to Jewish Israelis, or are they challenging the legality of the newfound state's land acquisition and redistribution, akin to displaced Palestinians? Or both?

To answer this question, one can turn to another moment of cultural and linguistic translation, or mistranslation, in the film. In a scene toward the end of *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, Hoài Mỹ guides Nguyen and the documentary film crew through tropical trees and rice fields in search of his father's plot of land. As they walk, Hoài Mỹ asks on-looking villagers for directions, invoking the name of his father, Nguyễn Khác Minh. They wave him forward down the road. After orienting himself, Hoài Mỹ raises his arms and calls out excitedly to the surrounding trees, "Ồ, ba má, con đây!" ("Oh father, mother, I'm here!").[105] Nguyen follows, asking her father (in Hebrew) where his house would be. He responds (in Vietnamese) that the house is most likely gone by now. Nguyen spots another house nearby and suggests (again in Hebrew) that they approach and inquire about Hoài Mỹ's familial home. Switching to Hebrew, Hoài Mỹ replies that the neighbors probably wouldn't know, since they are "olim khadashim," or "new immigrants."[106] Surprised by the use of this term, which in the Israeli context refers specifically to Jewish immigrants who immigrate to Israel-Palestine under the Law of Return, Nguyen parrots incredulously, "Olim khadashim? Me-epho?" ("New immigrants? From where?").[107] But before the viewer gets a response, the scene cuts to a different shot of Hoài Mỹ pointing out the vast reach of his ancestral lands while Nguyen looks on admiringly.

Hoài Mỹ's usage of the term *olim khadashim* translates this scene of Vietnamese refugee land reclamation into the vexed vocabulary of Israel-Palestine's own land contestations. *Olim khadashim*, derived from the word *aliyah*, refers specifically to Jewish immigrants who "return" to Israel-Palestine. In identifying the postwar, communist-sympathetic Vietnamese newcomers as "olim khadashim," or "new immigrants" who have the backing of state authority, Hoài Mỹ implicitly positions himself as a dispossessed native Palestinian in this metaphor's binary. To be clear, such a metaphor risks ahistorical erasure of the particular settler colonial dynamics structuring Israel-Palestine. However, by translating the vocabulary of land rights so charged in the Israel-Palestine context into the postwar Vietnamese context, Hoài Mỹ also introduces a possible vector of distinct yet parallel experiences of land dispossession, along which solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians in Israel-Palestine can be further developed. A turn to the English subtitles for this scene further facilitates this possibility. Although the term *olim khadashim* is politically neutral, perhaps even celebratory of Jewish "return" to Israel-Palestine, the film's English subtitles translate "olim khadashim" not as "new immigrants" but as "settlers," adding another complex layer of politicized rhetoric.

FIGURE 11. Film still from *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen* © Zygote Films.

The word "settlers" in white text flashes across the screen twice—once for Hoài Mỹ's assertion, and then again for Nguyen's surprised follow-up question—more explicitly framing Jewish immigration to Israel-Palestine as part of the Zionist state's structure of settler colonialism.

According to Qutami, "The Palestine analytic moves beyond thinking of Palestine as an isolated issue, or an ethnic- or geographic-based cause, and instead allows for thinking through the particularities of Zionist settler-colonialism as informed by and informing structures of oppression globally."[108] Hoài Mỹ's usage of the term *olim khadashim* invites archipelagic comparisons between land dispossession in the settler colonial state of Israel and the postwar communist state of Vietnam, between Palestinians' Indigenous politics of return and Vietnamese Israelis' refugee politics of return. As the previous section on *I Saw Ramallah* and *The Truffle Eye* elaborated, both Palestinians and Vietnamese Israelis suffer exilic affects, though such affects can be rearticulated into contrapuntal exilic poetics, inviting a decolonial future of radical multinationalism. Exilic poetics, in turn, can destabilize divisions between natives, settlers, refugees, and exiles, thereby calling attention to a subject's concurrent location across multiple positionalities. *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*, meanwhile, reminds viewers that exilic poetics are entangled with land politics—the politics of return to the very soil, plants, and waters that sustained one's family for generations. Although the structural antagonisms dividing Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians remain material, the film proposes potential grounds for solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and displaced Palestinians around distinct yet parallel experiences of land dispossession, and subsequent struggles for land reclamation, in Israel-Palestine and Vietnam.

Recognizing their own attachments to their ancestral lands, Vietnamese Israelis can perhaps come to empathize with Palestinian refugees' and exiles' own desires to return to their ancestral villages in Palestine, and work to make those aspirations a reality.

HOME AS AN ARCHIPELAGO

In "Exiled at Home: Writing Return and the Palestinian Home," Palestinian feminist scholars Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud testify, "Our geographies of home transcend territorial borders and nation states and a symbolics of national struggle, even as we insist on our belonging to the homeland we call Palestine, on justice for our people, on survival and life. Home is a space where we remember who we are and where we have been, from our multiple locations across the homeland and the shatat [diaspora]."[109] Here, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud articulate an archipelagic understanding of home—one that insists upon Palestinian liberation at the same time that it deterritorializes nation-state claims to sovereignty and instead recognizes multiple geographies of home-making for Palestinian natives, refugees, and exiles. In "Winter City Poem" ("Shir ʿarim chorpi"), Vaan Nguyen, too, theorizes home as an archipelago. Israel-Palestine, France, and Vietnam—the land of her birth, the former colonizer of Vietnam, and the homeland of her parents—are connected across four stanzas by the image of rain, which provides the backdrop to the narrator's series of missed romantic encounters in Herzliya, Paris, and Đà Lạt. In the poem, rain, another form of *nước*, brings together these different abodes, calling to mind the epigraph by Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez that opened this book: "home / is an archipelago of belonging."[110]

Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud, moreover, conceptualize home as a "psychological and epistemological space" of "radical thinking and becoming."[111] As this book has endeavored to show, archipelagic understandings of home can unsettle the settler colonial state, calling forth decolonial futures of radical multiplicity that facilitate more ethical forms of relationality between refugee settlers and Indigenous subjects. The following afterword elaborates on visions of Vietnamese refugee futurity through the analytics of islands and archipelagos, articulating homemaking in and through *nước*.