

**MIMI THI NGUYEN**

**The Gift  
of Freedom**

**WAR, DEBT, AND  
OTHER REFUGEE  
PASSAGES**



# The Gift of Freedom

NEXT WAVE: NEW DIRECTIONS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES  
A series edited by Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Robyn Wiegman

---

MIMI THI NGUYEN

The Gift  
of Freedom

WAR, DEBT, AND  
OTHER REFUGEE  
PASSAGES

---

Duke University Press Durham and London 2012

© 2012 Duke University Press  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper ☺  
Designed by C. H. Westmoreland  
Typeset in Minion with Stone Sans display  
by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.  
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-  
Publication Data appear on the last printed  
page of this book.

FOR MY PARENTS, HIEP AND LIEN,  
AND MY BROTHER, GEORGE

## CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction. The Empire of Freedom	1
1. The Refugee Condition	33
2. Grace, the Gift of the Girl in the Photograph	83
3. Race Wars, Patriot Acts	133
Epilogue. Refugee Returns	179
Notes	191
Bibliography	239
Index	267

## PREFACE

---

Rebuilding Iraq will require a sustained commitment from many nations, including our own: we will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more. America has made and kept this kind of commitment before—in the peace that followed a world war. After defeating enemies, we did not leave behind occupying armies, we left constitutions and parliaments. We established an atmosphere of safety, in which responsible, reform-minded local leaders could build lasting institutions of freedom. In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home.

—GEORGE W. BUSH, February 26, 2003

And there we are, ready to run the great Yankee risk.  
So, once again, be careful!  
American domination—the only domination from which one never recovers.  
I mean from which one never recovers unscarred.  
—AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, *Discourse on Colonialism*

---

In a televised address from the Oval Office on August 31, 2010, President Barack Obama declared the U.S. combat mission in Iraq ended, over seven years after it began: “Operation Iraqi Freedom is over, and the Iraqi people now have lead responsibility for the security of their country.” Outlining an accelerated timetable for complete troop withdrawal by the end of the following year, and the subsequent transfer of security functions to Iraqi forces, Obama continued solemnly:

Ending this war is not only in Iraq’s interest—it is in our own. The United States has paid a huge price to put the future of Iraq in the hands of its people. We have sent our young men and women to make enormous sacrifices in Iraq, and spent vast resources abroad at a time of tight budgets at home. We have persevered because of a belief we share with the Iraqi people—a belief that out of the ashes of war, a new beginning could be born in this

cradle of civilization. Through this remarkable chapter in the history of the United States and Iraq, we have met our responsibility. Now, it is time to turn the page.<sup>1</sup>

The preoccupations at the heart of this statement (and those statements that have come before and after), including responsibility, history, and sacrifice, also capture for us something crucial about the force of time, war, and freedom, and a feeling for them—and so, the observance through these terms of the gifts that pass between an *us* and a *them*, and the debt that follows. The prerequisites for “Iraqi freedom” are now secured at an incalculable cost to the United States, here the steward of human perfectibility and progress, and its consequent achievement is the obligation of racial, colonial others. On the following day, September 1, the operational name for the U.S. presence in Iraq was changed to “Operation New Dawn,” to name the Iraqi peoples’ hard-won return to the continuous history of the world.

What, to borrow from Judith Butler, is the frame for this war?<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the transition from one operation to another appears to occasion not much at all. Despite so-called endings, 50,000 remaining U.S. troops once classified as combat units are designated anew as “advise and assist brigades,” though the practicum that determines each set of duties is not wholly distinguishable, as troops continue to engage in combat and counterterrorism operations. Even with complete withdrawal in December 2011, the U.S. presence in Iraq is transferred from the military to the State Department, which aims to maintain a 18,000-strong contingent in the country, including thousands of armed private contractors (or mercenaries) to man “enduring presence posts.” Occupation, we see, is not ended. On the other hand, that liberal peace is not distinct from liberal war is indeed an urgent predicament. Since September 2001, when Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force against Terrorists Act, the United States has pursued ever-expansive state powers to underwrite the aggressive prosecution of a permanent war. Indeed, withdrawal from Iraq underwrote the intensification of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen, including airstrikes and targeted assassinations. (We might set side by side the practices of Iraqification with Vietnamization, disavowing the final future of freedom, as well as the conclusion of war, while maintaining or even escalating violence in targeted zones.) As of this writing, the United States is embroiled in scores of



martial adventures; in 2010 alone, U.S. Special Operations forces were reportedly deployed for preemptive or retaliatory strikes in seventy-five countries—including the Philippines, Columbia, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa and Central Asia—in what one counterinsurgency advisor has called “an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine.”<sup>3</sup> War further annexes “homeland security”; the domestic front is now contiguous with the battlefield and recruited to a state of permanent potential paramilitarization. The 2012 National Defense Authorization Act codified into law those powers the Bush and Obama administrations had until now claimed as emergency actions for the conduct and intensification of a global war on terror (including indefinite detention, among other programs). Toward this end, the United States as the uncontested superpower on the world stage today instrumentalizes an idea of human freedom as a universal value, and intensifies an administrative and bureaucratic legality as its rational order to reinforce a politics of war, terror, and occupation. We therefore find in the passage between liberal peace and liberal war a “zone of indistinction,” to borrow Giorgio Agamben’s phrase.<sup>4</sup> Because war is no longer finite—no more a violent event “out there,” but instead a vital presence permeating our everyday—we might say that the transition between war and peace is rule by multiple and mutable means. Nor can we yet know this project in its totality (though we know that there are more refugees, and more deaths, being created through both war and peace making), especially because we are still caught in the terrible engines of modernity—perfectibility and progress.

Edward Said observed in the preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Orientalism*: “Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort.”<sup>5</sup> The task before us is to theorize the significant ways in which liberal war and liberal peace as conjoined operations proceed under the *signs* of exception and emergency, and which are neither. Especially with never-ending war on the horizon, it is more crucial than ever to understand how the exception is foundational to liberal empire, while tropes of *transition* and *timetable* in fact prolong the duration of war, terror, and occupation. How then do we parse the seeming paradox in which U.S. military interventions are described through beneficence and defense, and at the same time demand occupations and dislocations of racial, colonial others in the name of the human, through

invocations of peace, protection, rights, democracy, freedom, and security? I describe the premise of a global power that perceives that its self-interest is secured by granting to an other the advantage of human freedom as the gift of freedom, and it is the purpose of this book not only to explore some part of the historical emergence of the gift of freedom as a story about the emergence of U.S. global hegemony from the Cold War in general, and the hot war in Viet Nam in particular, but also to rethink the significant collocations of war and peace, bondage and freedom, that organize contemporary structures of liberalism in an age of empire. Thus, *The Gift of Freedom* endeavors to provide a diagnostic of our present in order to retheorize the terrible press of freedom and its histories unfolding asymmetrically across the globe through the structures and sensibilities of modern racial governmentality and liberalism's empire.<sup>6</sup>

In this attempt to engage the past and near future of empire, I argue the gift of freedom is not simply a ruse for liberal war but its core proposition, and a particularly apt name for its operations of violence and power. It is for this reason that this book brings together in the preface's epigraphs President George W. Bush's declaration that "America" leaves not occupying armies, but constitutions and parliaments, with Aimé Césaire's observation that from "American" domination, one never recovers unscarred. (Half of the world's refugees today are fleeing from the U.S. wars of freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>) In and against the spirit of a "new dawn," *The Gift of Freedom* follows from the ashes of war to understand the cumulative repercussions of enduring freedom (the name, of course, of the U.S. war in Afghanistan), a phrasing that suggests both freedom's duration and also duress. From these ashes rises the afterlife of empire as the promise that presses the moving target into the shape of "finally" human, and as the debt that demands and defers repayment from those subjects of freedom who are even now emerging from the ruins. This book is thus addressed to those crisscrossing histories of our presents in order to reckon with ghosts among us, life after death, the future of life, and more deaths to come.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is perhaps obvious to say that the present work is also a refugee passage, though the route it follows is long and winding, and has no single origin. That said, I cannot begin to acknowledge enough the enduring imprint of my first and most influential interlocutor, Caren Kaplan, whose unfailing friendship and insight have been crucial for me in forms traceable, and as yet unfathomable. To her I also owe my greatest debt as a scholar, a debt I gladly bear into the future. For nearly as long, Inderpal Grewal has been an encouraging and critical commentator, whose brilliant scholarship and deep commitment to the field formation of women and gender studies I hope to honor on my own path. As well, Elaine Kim has been unstinting with her warm and wise counsel, and her intellectual perspicuity and professional generosity are an inspiration. I thank Caren, Inderpal, and Elaine for their ongoing commitment to engage both ethical obligation and critical inquiry in necessary collaboration with others. What good I do as a scholar, a colleague, and a teacher, I owe to their examples.

This book's first incarnations were generously encouraged by May Joseph and George Yudice during my brief time in the American studies doctoral program at New York University. Among my cohort there, I recall with particular fondness Kimberly Johnson, Kristen Elliot Hood, Jerry Philogene, Alondra Nelson, and especially Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, who is both a good friend and a sympathetic collaborator. In the ethnic studies graduate program at the University of California, Berkeley, I am thankful for Sau-Ling Wong, whose kindness as a graduate advisor I remember well; Michael Omi, who greeted my sometimes wild-eyed discourse with good humor; and Patricia Penn Hilden, whose rigor and conviction that theory must be made to matter so informed this project. For demonstrating collegiality and commitment (as well as sharing antics), I thank David Hernandez, Harriet Skye, Karina Cespedes, Steven Lee, Irene Nexica, Kathy Yep, Mercy Romero, Robert Soza, Matt Richardson, and Oliver Wang.

Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez in particular is a comrade in arms, and to her I am beholden not only for her enduring friendship and her insights into empire, but also the good timing that brought forth at once our completed dissertations and my beautiful, brilliant goddaughter Inez.

I consider myself lucky to have as my colleagues in the Asian American Studies Program and the Gender and Women's Studies Department at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Nancy Abelman, Teresa Barnes, C. L. Cole, Augusto Espiritu, Karen Flynn, Stephanie Foote, Samantha Frost, Pat Gill, Moon-Kie Jung, Susan Koshy, Esther Lee, Vicki Mahaffey, Martin F. Manalansan IV, Cris Mayo, Erik McDuffie, Chantal Nadeau, Lisa Nakamura, Kent Ono, Yoon Pak, Sarah Projansky, Junaid Rana, Siohban Somerville, Sharra Vostral, and Caroline Yang. Among other colleagues across the colleges, I am also glad for Susan Becker, Jodi Byrd, Isabel Molina-Guzman, Edna Viruell-Fuentes, and Deke Weaver. Without the dedicated staff, I would be much poorer at this labor. My thanks to Jennifer Chung, Mary Ellerbe, Viveka Kudaligama, and Piavanh Sengsavanh in Asian American Studies, and Jacque Kahn, Virginia Swisher, and April Thomas in Gender and Women's Studies. I received generous support as an Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rackham School of Graduate Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. There, my office mate, Melanie Boyd, offered both good humor and lively conversation during this initial foray into the Midwest. Other support for this project was generously provided by multiple grants from the Research Board at the University of Illinois and the Asian American Studies Consortium of the Committee for Institutional Cooperation, which funded a manuscript workshop at the University of Illinois. Kandice Chuh and Laura Hyun Yi Kang generously read drafts and provided both scrupulously attentive comments and much-needed encouragement at a critical juncture.

As academics we cast wide nets, and though I am separated from some friends and colleagues by long distances, I appreciate those things—times, meals, ideas—we share. Many of the Asian American studies postdoctoral fellows at the University of Illinois have kept company with me during the years, and I often wish I could gather them closer now, including Naomi Paik and Bianca Isaki, who both spent time with parts of this manuscript, and the backyard grill; and Kimberly Alidio, Victor Mendoza, Cynthia Marasigan, and Elda Tsou, who all provided glad fellowship and occasional chocolates on the second floor. Kirstie Dorr and Sara Clark Kaplan

brought Berkeley to Champaign for a brief time, and Minh-Ha Pham, with whom I coauthor *Threadbare*, is my partner in new feminist publics. I thank as well Vivek Bald, Toby Beauchamp, Cynthia Degnan, Christina Hanhardt, Yumi Lee, Nhi Lieu, L. J. Martin, Mike Masatsugu, Golnar Nikpour, Erica Rand, Beth Stinson, and Craig Willse for cerebral and subcultural camaraderie. Lauren Berlant, David Eng, Mino Moallem, Louisa Schein, and Jennifer Terry offer kind words and encouragement whenever our paths cross one another's. Among my former undergraduate students, Stephanie Murphy and Elizabeth Verklan together broke the mold. Far-flung friend and collaborator Mariam Beevi Lam never fails to impress me with her agile mind, and to her I am thankful for unstinting support and buoyant good humor.

Many others shared with me their love and friendship during the years of writing this book. During graduate school, the *Maximumrocknroll* compound was a second home, and I am grateful for the crucial reminder that we can do it ourselves. Whether green-taping records, hauling bulk mail bundles, or just hanging out at the house or show, Arwen Curry has ever been an incisive and imaginative interlocutor on matters intellectual, political, fantastical, musical. Mark Murrmann has been a stalwart friend for road trips, pinball marathons, and rock 'n' roll. Jennifer Allen, a fellow traveler, taught me invaluable lessons in generous self-care and graceful movement through a sometimes-wearying world. And, to the countless friends whose fierce passions and politics continue to inspire me, I say, "Up the punks!"

Among my colleagues I also found good friends whose generosity and goodwill sustain me. While this list of their virtues is necessarily partial, nonetheless I wish to thank Stephen Hocker for devastating desserts and sly jokes; Dustin Allred for an impeccable aesthetic and wry disposition; Mireya Loza for thrifting adventures and bumping it freestyle; Ian Sprandel for glad fellowship in nerddom; Ruth Nicole Brown for her strength of spirit and commitment to girl genius; David Coyoca for late-night ruminations on human natures and postcolonial fictions; Isabel Molina-Guzman for her openhanded counsel as well as her boundless compassion; Lisa Marie Cacho for her ethical compass and horticultural aptitude; and Soo Ah Kwon for an even-keeled outlook and unwavering solidarity. I must also thank the small people, including Max for sharing so generously with me chocolate cake and butter chicken, Blake for bookending our workdays with his sly smile and mischief making, and Luciano for brightening the last

days of copyedits with his elemental presence. Last, but not at all least, I am grateful to Yutian Wong, who is a paragon for her buoyant, savvy intelligence in all things.

Ken Wissoker has been a tireless champion of this manuscript from its earliest incarnations, even when I was not. To him I extend heartfelt gratitude for editorial guidance and support. At various stages, Anitra Grisales, Mandy Earley, Jade Brooks, and Mark Mastromarino provided cheerful, calming navigation through the labyrinthine publishing process. Beth Stinson and Rachel Lauren Storm rescued me during panicked moments and completed the bibliography and endnotes with good cheer. Hong-An Truong generously provided me with stills from *Explosions in the Sky* and permission to reproduce them, while Hellen Jo illustrated so well the beautiful, but oh-so sinister, presence on this book's paperback cover. I also thank the two anonymous readers at Duke University Press for their insightful reviews and concomitant belief in this manuscript, and the Next Wave series editors, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Robyn Wiegman, for accepting me to their roster.

From my parents, Hiep and Lien Nguyen, I received unwavering love and unconditional, if sometimes worried, support for their wayward daughter. From their example, I learned at a young age to push for more than what is given, and to protect that which is truly important. The consequences at times caused them concern, but these gifts are how I understand what I am to do each day. To them, I will always be indebted, which is no doubt just what they intended. The generous and steadfast friendship of my brother and oldest ally, George, has sustained me through every stage of my journey, and this project. Gina Fan is the kindest sister-in-law I could hope for, welcoming me whenever my wandering heart brings me home. Though we share no blood, Iraya Robles is the soul sister of my heart, and our almost twenty-year-old friendship is a source of constant renewal and pleasure. Smallest but hardly least among those closest to me, Morton always knows my need for an enormous cat to sit on my hands or chest, or to accompany me when I take a turn around the room.

Fiona I. B. Ngô is my heart. The passage that brought me through the final writing of the book and beyond would not have been possible without her love, her luminous insight. There are not enough songs for her, but I will sing them all.

## INTRODUCTION

# The Empire of Freedom

---

### EX-REFUGEE WILL THANK AMERICA WITH A PERSONAL ROSE PARADE FLOAT

*Los Angeles*—Madalenna Lai arrived on U.S. soil in May 1975 after fleeing the Communist takeover of Vietnam in a boat and staying in a Guam refugee camp.

She was 34, penniless and the sole provider for four children, all younger than 10.

Lai quickly created a career for herself, starting beauty shops in El Monte and then in Pomona before opening a cosmetology school in Pomona. She raised her children by herself, although she jokes that at some point some of her children began raising her.

The Vietnamese refugee sees the life she has cultivated in the United States as a gift from the people and country that adopted her, she said. In 1993, she decided to thank as many of them as she could and let the world know how grateful she is.

On New Year's Day she will do just that to a worldwide television audience estimated at 350 million people and an audience along the parade route of 1.5 million. Amid the floral pomp of the Tournament of Roses will come Lai's version of a thank-you card: a fully bedecked parade float that suggests the story of the boat people like her who left Vietnam by sea.

In a year in which the Rose Parade is expected to be awash with red, white and blue patriotism—plus University of Nebraska red—Lai's Vietnam-themed float will carry a simple message from an immigrant: "Thank you America and the world."

—TIPTON BLISH, *Los Angeles Times*

This is not an analytics of truth; it will concern what might be called an ontology of the present, an ontology of ourselves.

—MICHEL FOUCAULT, "The Art of Telling the Truth"

---

On a clear January morning in Pasadena, a fishing boat in the form of a golden bird made of a hundred thousand flowers washed ashore. Floating along a boulevard lined with celebrants, the boat carried refugees to the new world, bearing with them a message of love: “Thank You America and the World.” Two tales surface alongside this particular boat—the chronicle of a refugee grandmother and her profuse gratitude, and the more uncanny story about its making. Fleeing the war-torn country on a small fishing boat; raising her four young children alone in a new world, while her husband remained behind, and missing, for an interminable decade—throughout the long years, the first story goes, Madalenna Lai not only endures but triumphs. Now a prosperous entrepreneur operating beauty salons and a cosmetology school, she wishes to show her appreciation to “America” (and, as an afterthought, “the world”) for the gift of her life, her freedom.<sup>1</sup> For years, Lai had solicited donations in front of local Vietnamese supermarkets and in door-to-door encounters, even going so far as to sacrifice her hard-earned wealth in order to convey her gratitude with the sumptuous, spectacular beauty that America made possible. In interviews she enthuses: “I think this country looks like heaven. I have peace of mind. I didn’t have to worry about the people being unfair.”<sup>2</sup> “The more I see of this country the more I feel I have to say thank you. This is a country of freedom and human rights.”<sup>3</sup> “The United States opened her arms to me and my children. We no longer went hungry and my kids received a good education. I told myself after my children finished school and I reunited with my husband, I would give my life to thank America.”<sup>4</sup>

Her gratefulness invites us to consider a second tale, about the powers through which a benevolent empire bestows on an other freedom. In Lai’s words, we find all the good and beautiful things the gift claims as its consequence—the right to have rights, the choice of life direction, the improvement of body and mind, the opportunity to prosper—against a spectral future of their nonexistence, under communism, under terror. That she is rescued from such psychic death through the gift of freedom as a promise of care encodes a benign, rational story about the United States as the uncontested superpower on the world stage today. But the gift of freedom also discloses for us liberalism’s innovations of empire, the frisson of freedom and violence that decisively collude for same purposes—not just because the gift of freedom opens with war and death, but also because it may obscure those other powers that, through its giving, conceive and



shape life. So I begin with a story in which we are invited to know the refugee's sorrow, and her indebtedness for its cure, in order to tell us something meaningful about the genealogies of liberal powers that undergird the twinned concerns of this scene: the gift of freedom and the debt that follows. The present work considers this twofold nature by posing these questions: How is this act of thankfulness, and all that it implies about the gift and its giving, a problem of imperial remains? What special significance does this act carry from a refugee, especially *this* refugee from *that* tarnished war of American ambition? Why are we—those of us who have received this precious, poisonous gift of freedom—obliged to thank? What powers oblige us?

One significant challenge to theorizing the powers of liberal empire is the elasticity of its terms. The coupling of *empire* with the assumed scenes of liberalism—human self-possession as the property and precondition for freedom, especially as the consciousness to act, to enter into contract with others—has led to triumphant claims to an exceptional power, through which the tolerant collectivity of the well governed bears a grave duty to ease the suffering and unhappiness of others. The contemporary political life of this empire often goes by the name *the gift of freedom*, a world-shaping concept describing struggles aimed at freeing peoples from unenlightened forms of social organization through fields of power and violence. This altruistic self-concept has long been under siege, of course. (As we well know, the crucible of the United States, christened by Thomas Jefferson as an “empire of liberty,”<sup>5</sup> is conquest and captivity.) Noam Chomsky, a rigorous critic of the U.S. wars in Southeast Asia, scoffs, “When precisely did the United States try to help the South Vietnamese choose their own form of government and social order? As soon as such questions are posed, the absurdity becomes evident.”<sup>6</sup> So critics of our present moment, wrought through the exception to encompass indefinite detention, brutal torture, and incalculable death, regard with incredulity and outrage the gift of freedom that purports to refute the lethal nature of empire. But the now-familiar “disclosure” that the gift of freedom is an insubstantial ruse for what might be called a liberal way of war, both then and especially now, has scarcely attenuated invocations of freedom as an intuition, and an at-times blunt instrument, for the disposition of hope and despair, life and death.<sup>7</sup> The idea of the gift of freedom therefore may capture something more than bad faith and falsehood, but indeed, an ever-expanding crisis of confusions and conflicts around the ethics and assemblages of liberal

knowledge and power. This book is an attempt to consider freedom as a force, one that can indeed humiliate and exclude but also embrace and inspire—arousing such startling spectacles as refugee thanks spelled out in a kaleidoscopic cascade of blossoms. Because empires thrive on conceptual pluralities, it seems so too must our critiques of empire.<sup>8</sup>

*The Gift of Freedom* forwards a partial genealogy of liberalism's tactile and intangible consequences as empire, including the densely tangled assemblages of power and violence that undergird the promise of freedom, and the subject of freedom, whose humanity is the moving target of this promise. The gift of freedom is not a universal value or a formal structure, but is instead the frequent name for the both familiar and strange ways in which liberal empire marshals its forces for and against others and elsewhere. Rather than challenge the gift of freedom through refutation or inconsistency (which would presume that freedom is something other than a force, and that the ideal presence of freedom is calculable in truth), this concept inhabits the book as an analytic, a lever of sorts, for a historical investigation into the forms and events that constitute us as subjects of its imperial powers. These powers constellate allocations and appropriations of violence with a view toward injury and death, but also with a horizon for the preservation of life—with dispositions and structures of feeling, to invoke Raymond Williams,<sup>9</sup> within and between empire's subjects that rouse and animate love and gratitude, guilt and forgiveness, and other obligations of care levied on the human heart; with political and also phenomenological forms of graduated sovereignty and differential humanity that endure beyond the formal exercise of military operations or occupation.<sup>10</sup> In short, the present moment, such that we find liberal war regarding the whole world as target (to borrow from Rey Chow<sup>11</sup>), in fact warns us that to dismiss the gift of freedom as a trick, a ploy, would be to deny that freedom is precisely the idiom through which liberal empire acts as an arbiter for *all* humanity.

This idiom festoons the parade float that launches this query, three months after the commencement of another war to free more distant peoples from violence, from terror. (In a prior time, the enemy was named communism and postcolonial immaturity; in this time, fundamentalism and global terrorism.) With the fall of Saigon to communist forces in April 1975, and the abrupt close of U.S. operations in South Viet Nam (years after Vietnamization and the Paris Peace Accords proposed such endings), hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese sought haven, or hospitality, else-

where, fearful of the regime to come. Multitudes fled over land or by sea, and of these many fell to brigands or starvation or despair; those who chanced the perilous voyage on the open water were colloquially dubbed *boat people*. This harrowing tale takes a fantastical turn decades later, as a humble fishing boat is transformed into a mythical bird, ferrying her passengers to an Eden of abundance and awesome beauty. As refugee-cum-happy-citizen, Madalenna Lai is similarly converted in the encounter with America, but because the gift of freedom secures her life in multiple dimensions—its preservation, convenience, and pleasure—her debt comes through as literally monumental. Particularly meaningful, then, in these accounts is their economy of arguably impossible equivalence. On the one hand, all that Lai gains through her freedom is coupled with all that she waives in recompense: she sells her home, she invests all her “free” time, and still (she confesses) she cannot hope to acquit her debt. On the other hand, this nonequivalence is “proper,” since the philosophical and political truth of freedom is paradoxically beyond value. Such impossible calculations (enduring debt for all that is given) haunt the reception of this refugee’s homage: “You’re welcome!”<sup>12</sup>

I begin with the particular optimism of this figure of the Vietnamese refugee, not to recoup a different story about her arrival, but to inquire about the powers that promise her freedom and demand an enduring consciousness of her debt. In doing so, I focus on the subject of freedom as an object of knowledge and a critical methodology that discloses for us the assemblages and powers through which liberal empire orders the world.<sup>13</sup> Each chapter addresses those refugee figurations that do not just indict imperial powers as premised on devastating violence, but that also emanate through beauty, through love, through hope—in short, the promise to life—as equally world-making powers, thus allowing us critical purchase on the protracted nature of liberal imperial formations found in both “minor” and major events and encounters.<sup>14</sup> Especially because structures of race and coloniality, as well as organizing forms of gender and sexuality, are at the center of this simultaneous promise and duress—granting access to some intensities of happiness and virtue while impeding others—the gift of freedom emerges as a site at which modern governmentality and its politics of life (and death) unfolds as a universal history of the human, and the figuration of debt surfaces as those imperial remains that preclude the subject of freedom from being able to escape a colonial order of things.

*The Gift of Freedom* queries just how an empire of liberty, and the contemporary United States as an exemplar of this beautiful, sinister regime, brings into being the world as a target across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If the gift of freedom is no untruth, but instead coexists with violence, or because of violence that appears as something else, then the concept of the gift of freedom must encompass all those forces that promise new subjects as well as new forms of action, new events, a new order—such as a grateful refugee or enduring war.

### The Gifts of Freedom

In what follows, I give a brief overview of the political and theoretical problems the gift of freedom raises for consideration. I draw on multiple critical genealogies of those powers that claim to care for or protect life and liberty to argue this concept. First, in observing that both terms named by the gift of freedom are complexly wrought through asymmetry and calculation, I look to the works of Jacques Derrida, who argues that the gift (especially the gift that announces itself as gift) incriminates an economy of exchange and obligation between giver and recipient, and Michel Foucault, who suggests that liberal government proposes to manufacture freedom, and in turn, that freedom is never anything more than a “relation between governors and governed.”<sup>15</sup> Second, I consider how structures of race and coloniality underpin modern concepts of human freedom and progress, and the government the human deserves. Postcolonial and other critics aptly observe that though imperial expansion promises enlightenment and civilization, these are themselves violences—and that through such a cluster of promises, we encounter at least one violence as an ontology of time (through its measure, organization, limit). If, as Derrida argued, “a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain ‘spiritual’ or ‘abstract,’ but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth,”<sup>16</sup> postcolonial and other critics query just what *events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth*, the gift of freedom, as an object of desire and dominance, holds out—or circumscribes—as possible futures. These critical genealogies inform this book’s naming the gift of freedom as the workings of liberalism in its imperial form and as a metaphor and a medium for grasping continuities and innovations between operations of power and violence. Enfolding Derrida and Foucault with postcolonial and other

critiques, then, I observe that the dual character of freedom as the development of capacities and the intensification of power, to draw from Foucault once again,<sup>17</sup> has ever operated as a global-historical project of modernity hinged upon structures of race and coloniality, and through which liberalism's empire unfolds across the globe through promises to secure it for others.

*The Gift and Freedom* As so many others have understood before, the gift is a great and terrible thing. The counterintuitive continuities between gift and appropriation, giving and taking, have long preoccupied anthropologists, linguists, and philosophers.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this book, I am drawn to, and depart from, the concept of the gift as articulated by Derrida (in response to Marcel Mauss) as the impossible. The aporia of giving can be condensed as follows: the gift as the transfer of a possession from one to another shapes a relation between giver and recipient that engenders a debt, which is to say that the gift belongs to an economy that voids its openhanded nature. "For there to be [genuine] gift," Derrida acidly observes, "there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt."<sup>19</sup> For there to be gift, the giver cannot recognize that he or she is giving, because to do so would subsume the gift as testimonial to the self who gives so generously, and the recipient cannot know who is giving, lest he or she be obliged to reciprocate in equal or greater measure.<sup>20</sup> The gift thus is annulled by consciousness of the gift as being or appearing a gift, by anything that proposes equivalence or recompense, because pure gift must not demand commensurability or otherwise calculative reasoning. This gift that is not an entirely gratuitous gesture is instead an aporia, through which the gift conveys these conditions of possibility and impossibility, and that is also the issuance of its power. Derrida notes of the gift's capacities, "one may say as readily 'to give a gift' as 'to give a blow' [*donner un coup*], 'to give life' [*donner la vie*] as 'to give death' [*donner la mort*]."<sup>21</sup> He elaborates further:

To overtake the other with surprise, be it by one's generosity and by giving too much, is to have a hold on him, as soon as he accepts the gift. The other is taken, caught in the trap: Unable to anticipate, he is delivered over to the mercy, to the *merci* of the giver; he is taken in, by the trap, overtaken, imprisoned, indeed poisoned by the very fact that something happens to him in the face of which he remains—having not been able to foresee any-

thing—defenseless, open, exposed. He is the other's catch or take, he has given the other a hold. Such violence may be considered the very condition of the gift, its constitutive impurity once the gift is engaged in a process of *circulation*, once it is promised to recognition, keeping, indebtedness, credit, but also once it *must be, owes itself to be* excessive and thereby surprising. *The violence appears irreducible, within the circle or outside it, whether it repeats the circle or interrupts it.*<sup>22</sup>

To give a blow, to give life, to give death—the gift is itself a surface on which power operates as a form of subjection, and its magnitude might indeed be profound. As Judith Butler notes of Foucault's concept of subjection, it is, "literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. This notion of subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject."<sup>23</sup> To accept a gift is to be compromised by the one who gives (*to overtake the other with surprise, the other is taken in, caught in the trap, imprisoned, indeed poisoned, the violence appears irreducible, within the circle or outside of it*), to enter into an economy of indebtedness that is the concession or negation of his or her desires or directions. The gift is freighted further with asymmetry and nonequivalence, with the dispensation of power *over time*, because the gift cannot be returned straightaway lest its significance be undone. Describing this "given time" during which the consciousness of the debt must be sustained, Derrida notes, "There must be time, it must last, there must be waiting—without forgetting."<sup>24</sup> Even more, counter-gift or recompense may well fail to equal the gesture of giving and relieve the debt; it may instead prolong its duration. For these reasons, Derrida comments that what is given is always in excess of the gift.

This critical purchase on the gift as a *power over*, and its duration *over time*, underscores this book's critique of liberalism's benevolence, posited through both abundance and altruism (put another way, things enough to bestow surplus on another). My concerns here draw upon the awesome power of the gift's subjection, first through the want or absence of those things of which the gift consists and second through the debt that holds the giftee fast, as these powers produce his or her possible desires, movements, and futures. (These powers also engage multiple temporalities, both as an event perpetrated on an other and as the debt that commits an

other to continuous subjection.) We can observe here that in the first mode through which the gift of freedom functions, the gift stages the circulation of persons and things (in the case of war, troops and armaments) to bind a relation of giver and recipient across the globe. In the second, duration and deferral take on deep resonance as concepts of time in which what is given here—that is, sovereignty, freedom, virtue—is always “to come” because the debt extends endlessly. It is on these grounds that the gift is not just an alibi of power but the first conceptual wedge that pries open the arguments of this book.

The second is freedom, one of the most common multitudinous concepts with which critics have long labored because freedom is so complexly bound to notions of human nature and questions of justice. For example, Hegel writes, “No idea is so generally recognized as indefinite, ambiguous, and open to the greatest misconceptions (to which therefore it actually falls victim) as the idea of Freedom: none in common currency with so little appreciation of its meaning.”<sup>25</sup> Kant presents freedom as nothing less than the “keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason,” while Jean-Luc Nancy observes that freedom might be experienced as “thing, force, and gaze.”<sup>26</sup> These remarks, proliferating ever-widening questions rather than answers, are nonetheless useful for reckoning with freedom as a radical plurality, or at least seemingly limitless in its workings. Indeed, we might propose that with freedom, presumably *all is given*.

Though freedom is often surmised to be the end of a universal evolution of consciousness, and all human life believed to harbor a desire for freedom, freedom is not already everywhere. For these reasons, liberalism as a practice, a principle, and a method for the rationalization of the exercise of government claims at its heart freedom as the reference for its politics, as power’s problem. In the lectures collected as *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault suggests that liberalism is a consumer of freedom, “inasmuch as it can only function as a number of freedoms actually exist: freedom of the market, freedom to buy and sell, the free exercise of property rights, freedom of discussion, possible freedom of expression, and so on. The new governmental reason needs freedom therefore, the new art of government consumes freedom. It consumes freedom, which means that it must produce it. It must produce it, it must organize it.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Foucault observes, “So, freedom in the regime of liberalism is not a given, it is not a ready-made region which has to be respected, or if it is, it is so only partially,

regionally, in this or that case, et cetera. Freedom is something which is constantly produced. Liberalism is not acceptable of freedom; it proposes to manufacture it constantly, to arouse it and produce it, with, of course, [the system] of constraints and the problems of cost raised for this production.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, liberalism not only produces freedom as a property of its modern art of government, but it also ceaselessly subjects it to review, to regulation. Foucault further cautions, “Freedom is never anything other—but this is already a great deal—than an actual relation between governors and governed, a relation in which the measure of the ‘too little’ existing freedom is given by the ‘even more’ freedom demanded.”<sup>29</sup>

Foucault stops just short of addressing at least one problem of freedom as a force, when he insists that “we should not think of freedom of as a universal gradually realized over time, or which undergoes quantitative variations, greater or lesser drastic reductions, or more or less important periods of eclipse,”<sup>30</sup> or, we might suppose, as a universal that can be *given* or even *earned* (what Foucault might call *the problems of cost*). Foucault means to unseat liberalism’s manufacture and consumption of freedom—which calculates, and conceives of, freedom as a property—but we might also usefully linger here to consider just how freedom is thought in these terms. Indeed, an attachment to freedom is foundational to liberalism’s claim to a heightened attention to its presence or lapse, an attention that thereby continually commits free peoples to sustain or manufacture it in all directions, across the globe. I argue, both with and against Foucault, that freedom as never anything other than an actual relation between governors and governed, and as that which functions as an object of calculable, quantifiable exchange between them, is precisely the story of liberalism as empire.<sup>31</sup>

Calculations of freedom include criteria for organizing, assessing, and manufacturing its ideal presence. Such criteria require liberal government as the consolidation of apparatuses that underwrite political freedom through state citizenship, economic liberty as wage labor and market exchange, and civilization as the education of desire, among other things, and also a self-conscious subject as the rationale, and the target, of their governance. Under modern humanism, this individual is understood to be “free” on the condition that he or she act autonomously, that his or her actions reference—and be the result of—his or her own will and self-direction rather than external force, whether this be custom or other coercion. The consciousness of the modern subject thus proceeds through self-referential



enclosure as a precondition for rational action and contract with like others, including wage labor, marriage, and family deemed the most natural of such forms, through which *possessive ownership* is perceived as a historical necessity for human freedom. As Lisa Lowe succinctly observes, drawing on Hegel's original formulations: "Through property the condition of possibility of human self-possession—of one's body, interiority, and life direction—is established."<sup>32</sup> But in this and other accounts, liberal theories measure and manufacture freedom for the human person and society in terms that also presuppose the alienability of the self—or *dispossession*. Thus, we might grasp the abstraction of human freedom as a property—both as capacity and capital—as the necessary ground for ethical interactions with others and its profound consequences. Ideas of gender, race, and coloniality are central to these assumed scenes of liberalism, and to the global empires that found liberalism's emergence.

This productive encounter between these critical genealogies helps us not to dismiss the experience of the gift of freedom as a ruse, or revert to the very terms that are under scrutiny, in the hope that an ideal presence might lie elsewhere. (As Chandan Reddy observes, "the unevenness in the meaning of freedom"—an unevenness that nevertheless establishes features in common, alongside failures in application—fueled so many twentieth-century struggles and revolutionary movements.<sup>33</sup>) Bringing together Derrida and Foucault now, we chance on an uncanny, semantic plurality between "to give" and "to govern." Foucault further registers "to govern" multiply, as "to conduct someone," in the spiritual sense of the government of souls; "to impose a regimen," in the form of command or control that one might exercise over oneself or another, "body, soul and behavior"; or "to an intercourse, to a circular process or process of exchange between one individual or another." We might well consider that "to give" holds these same powers and properties in hand, through obligation and recompense.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, and as I elaborate throughout the book, it is precisely in their crisscrossing compulsions we find the measures of the "'too little' existing freedom," "'even more' freedom demanded," and "all is given," setting liberalism's empire in motion.

We also learn from this unfaithful passage through Derrida and Foucault, bringing us to the work of postcolonial and other critics, that the gift of freedom does not merely replicate liberal subjectivization, even if we are to understand freedom as a rationale of government, and as the development of capacities and the intensification of powers, for all persons. These

forces produced by the intersection of gift and freedom are not additive, but exponentially, distinctly new. The gift of freedom as a cluster of promises therefore produces *events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth*, far beyond what the gift of freedom claims to do. In this manner, the ethical and moral force of the gift of freedom, as a means of connecting individuals to the world and to each other through a mutual if uneven attachment to freedom as a universal end, can become a medium through which ever more comprehensive forms of power connect these affective intensities to geopolitical interventions. As to that which I now turn, the gift of freedom that “discovers” an absence to next graciously confer presence is fraught with volatile questions of power, inclusion, exchange, and imperial reason.

*The Subjects of Freedom* What, then, is the gift of freedom? For our purposes of this book, we can begin to understand it as an assemblage of liberal political philosophies, regimes of representation, and structures of enforcement that measure and manufacture freedom and its others. To elaborate further: where the attachment to freedom appears an intuitive, universal issue, the implementation of its measure as such (as an absolute value) conceives, and consolidates, fields of knowledge and power whose function lies in the idea that freedom’s presence cannot manifest in the present of some peoples and spaces for whom it is currently absent, and that produces a regime of control and interference that provides *and* defers its substantiation for an indefinite time. In the terms of our discussion, the attachment to freedom and its implementation through gift giving are therefore precisely the forms through which the encounter with the racial, colonial other can be appropriated, through an existing continuity with imperial discourse, into liberal empire.

Consider the example of President Harry Truman’s 1949 inaugural address that proposed a four-point program for ensuring the liberty and prosperity of the United States and the world. Revisiting some of the tenets from his 1947 address that set forth the so-called Truman Doctrine (including the stratagem of containment, discussed in the first chapter), Truman unequivocally places the United States against coloniality, and “that false philosophy of Communism.” He grieves that so many of the world’s peoples suffer, often “in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to

them and to more prosperous areas.”<sup>35</sup> As the final point in his four-point program, Truman pledged to share technical knowledge and skills with such miserable peoples in so-called primitive places to aid and assist in their development:

The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing. . . . Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people. Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world in triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies—hunger, misery, and despair. . . . Slowly but surely we are weaving a world fabric of international and growing prosperity. We are aided by all who wish to live in freedom from fear—even by those who live today in fear under their own governments. We are aided by all who want relief from the lies of propaganda—who desire truth and sincerity. We are aided by all who desire self-government and a voice in their own affairs. We are aided by all who long for economic security—for the security and abundance that men in free societies enjoy. We are aided by all who desire freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom to live their lives for useful ends.<sup>36</sup>

This historic speech is less an origin story than an immensely useful clustering of the concepts and targets that underwrite the gift of freedom. Such that the hope to unite all the world’s peoples under the signs of universal virtue are at the heart of liberalism’s empire, the gift of freedom calls for the realignment of heterogeneous social forms of organization with abstract categories and properties, rendered natural, ineffable, and inalienable, but also *objectified*, *calculable*, and *exchangeable*—in one form, as an example, we know them as human rights. Freedom therefore replicates other commitments, other investments—in American imperium or liberal capital, for instance, which also goes by the names of democracy and development—rendered analogous to liberty and prosperity for all. But especially clear because this speech preceded imminent war in Korea and what was then Indochina, such ambitions to sovereignty and virtue—truth, social health, compassion, freedom, abundance, beauty—are realized through the alibi of the wanting other, the negative image. Truman’s speech is concerned with this other’s desire and its education for freedom, “implanted within (underdeveloped) subjectivity,” as María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo notes, and

“evinced by ‘wishes,’ ‘desires,’ ‘voice,’ ‘longing,’ and ultimately choice.”<sup>37</sup> These ambitions and alibis are thereby epistemological, inasmuch as they shape a politics of knowledge about those persons or social formations through calculations of an ideal presence, and they are also ontological, because these constitute categories of human life for sorting, saving, or, in Foucault’s well-chosen words, “letting die.”<sup>38</sup> These coordinates name a politics of life that finds Truman declaring, on the eve of empire, a civilizational divide between humanity and those who wait: “For the first time in history, *humanity* possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of *these people*.”<sup>39</sup>

In the following chapters, I outline some of the continuities and innovations that toggle between colonial schema and liberalist alibi, through the gift of freedom. First, an annotation: this book is not necessarily about abandonment and social death and human ruin, though the devalued, the dead to others or marked as dead, populate this book as spectral.<sup>40</sup> But it is also not *not* about these persons, those who are targeted, who are the terrible cost or condition—for gift, for empire—as either the reason for its delivery or the awful result. Whether its primary focus or collateral damage (and the distinction is indeed blurred), such racial deaths found liberalism’s empire, and they certainly secure what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls the “globality of race,” and what Lisa Marie Cacho calls the “violence of value,” causing death and committing the dead as a life necessity for others.<sup>41</sup> That is, a biopolitical regime may transfigure a human person into what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life,” devoid of rights or history, or what Hortense Spillers refers to as “mere flesh,” a body that is killable or trafficable with impunity, in the name of the human.<sup>42</sup> As Derrida observed so aptly: “The just measure of ‘restoring’ or ‘rendering’ is impossible—or infinite. Restoring or rendering is the cause of the dead, the cause of deaths, the cause of a death given or requested.”<sup>43</sup> The gift of freedom bears such racial deaths as its macabre overture, rendering real not just the divisions between those who possess full humanity and those who are the constitutive outside, but also those whose partial or possible realization of freedom as a universal consciousness arbitrates and advances liberalist powers and politics of life, and unlife.

In other words, liberal empire claims an interest in improving, and prolonging, the life of a subject of freedom as a rationale and a target for governance, even while the lethal circumstances that make this claim possible (that is, those schema of race and coloniality that relegate some

peoples to the outside) remain foundational to its project. In this sense, the gift of freedom introduces a vexing problem both as judgment and solution. In the carving out and delimiting of areas of social existence and belonging, the gift of freedom is normative, as a means of making other ways of being in the world appear to be insecure, illegible, inadequate, illegal, and illiberal, and it is also instrumental as a means of partitioning the world into spaces commensurate or incommensurate, comparable and incomparable, with the rule of liberalism, which thus require certain forms of action, or force, to manufacture freedom. In doing so, the gift of freedom inevitably calculates and coheres an ordered taxonomy of what is deemed necessary for human being, a movement that stretches from the loss or absence of certain properties, such as reason and rights, into the often brutal achievement of the conditions for their possibilities in the future.<sup>44</sup> As a promise to freedom-loving peoples that refits structures of race and coloniality, even as this promise registers these structures as a political affront, the gift of freedom gives imperial reason new life, and more time. The postcolonial or anticolonial unease with such dreams of sovereignty and virtue thus derives from both the coordinates of such a promise and their practicable implementation. As Lila Abu-Lughod warns of another war engaged for the gift's delivery: "When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her *from* something. You are also saving her *to* something. What violences are entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her?"<sup>45</sup>

The injurious properties of freedom are well documented in the complicity between philosophical discourses of human consciousness and metaphysics of racial and sexual difference since the Enlightenment. Intruding here is the brutal history of violence operating—insidiously and insistently—through the instrumentalization of colonial cartographies and racial classifications that sort and grade stages of human being. These cartographies and classification schemata are central to the genealogy of human freedom, not exceptional to it. Liberalism hypostatizes areas in which we find freedom and unfreedom, and it shapes a politics of knowledge about those persons or places with differentiated access or acclimation to freedom that are symptomatic of other measures—of cultural difference, technical competence, or a nonbiological, but nonetheless evolutionary, sociology of race—that mark out anew the racial, colonial other. If we think again of Truman's atlas of enlightened obligation, naming those "under-

developed areas” where half the world’s peoples are plagued with hunger, disease, primitive economies, and other “conditions approaching misery,” we see these distinctions map tidily onto the colonial globe.<sup>46</sup>

Nor is the picture of unfree peoples—captive to misery, atavism, primitivism, poverty—complete without imperialist ontologies of time. Humanism’s ideal presence does not just conceive freedom as autonomous self-enclosure but also as persistence or passage through historical time.<sup>47</sup> Imperialist discourse framed coterminous territories and peoples as primitive and anachronistic, or in other words, intransigent, or impassive, to forward movement or progress; such discourse encloses racial, colonial others as *on the outside* through instrumental uses of time. Thus do post-colonial critics reveal these temporal modes as worlding processes that fire the crucible of empire, of modernity. On the outside is what Anne McClintock calls “anachronistic space”: “According to this trope, colonized people . . . do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency—the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive.’”<sup>48</sup> In what Johannes Fabian calls a “denial of coevalness,” humanist knowledges such as anthropology thereby engage “a persistent and systematic tendency” to contain the racial, colonial other to a time other than the present of the modern observer.<sup>49</sup> Imperial discourse further establishes a linear, evolutionary view of history that is deterministic and teleological. Bliss Cua Lim, drawing on the work of Henri Bergson and Dipesh Chakrabarty, comments: “The colonial trope of time-as-space, of *the globe as a kind of clock*—with the metropolitan center marking the path to progress, while the colonized other remains primitive and superseded—is a version of what Bergson exposes as the ‘all is given’ logic of homogenous time.”<sup>50</sup>

The gift of freedom is both a continuation and an innovation in imperial time consciousness. Where freedom’s absence appears as an empirical issue—for example, perceived through anachronism, underdevelopment, or failure—the assessment of subjects, practices, and geographies as such may coincide or become complicit with the temporal logic of colonialism. Because the measure of freedom underscores the distancing of some peoples from, in Walter Benjamin’s phrasing, the secular, empty, and homogeneous time of history, the gift of freedom hinges upon a historicist consciousness through which the future of the anachronistic human is already known. But though dependent on structures of race and coloniality, liber-

alism's empire is also distinctly new. While wrought through concepts of historicism and teleology that comprehend history as the actualization of an ideal presence, which here goes by the name of human freedom, *the gift of freedom presumes to knowingly anticipate and manufacture this present and presence* through liberalism as the rational course of human progress and historical and political transformation. Putting it another way, one in which a colonialist sharing of time is “not given but must be accomplished [and can be denied],” as Rey Chow cites and builds on Fabian, suggestively hints to us that the liberalist distinction *is* this given time, which of course brings us again to Derrida, who notes of the gift that what it gives is time.<sup>51</sup> The provocations of given time as liberalist alibi are therefore multiple. If we return to the linear, evolutionary view of colonialism, given time might refer to a deterministic understanding of time that forecloses the future. But given time also names the liberalist power *to set and speed up the timetable*—the timetable for progress through known processes or discrete stages toward freedom as the achievement of modernity. In other words, the gift is among other things a gift of time: time for the subject of freedom to resemble or “catch up to” the modern observer, to accomplish what can be anticipated in a preordained future, whether technological progress, productive capacity, or rational government. But the invitation to coequality also imposes violence—including a politics of comparison, homogeneous time, and other commensurabilities—through the intervention (a war, or development) that rescues history for those peoples stalled or suspended in time. We could say that the gift of freedom aims to perfect the civilizing mission.

But the gift of freedom also eclipses the scope of colonialism inasmuch as its claims to universality (through which liberty and prosperity are the due and desire of all) are precisely the mandate of liberal empire to address its powers to *all* peoples. The liberalist alibi of given freedom thus revolutionizes imperial discourse and opens up histories of racial, colonial powers for regimes of subjection but also subjectivization, through which persons are actuated as free—to contract their labor, to educate their desire, for instance. What then does it mean for a racial, colonial other to “finally” possess freedom? How can it be that the possibility of “owning” freedom is worth everything and nothing? These questions return us to Derrida and Foucault, who configure for us the gift of freedom in terms of a differential (found in “‘too little’ existing freedom” and “‘even more’ freedom demanded”); a differential, furthermore, that administers the gift

through its cost and calculation and incorporates freedom's others (misery, hunger, poverty, communism, terror) into a chain of appropriations to secure its authority, and then to order elimination, if necessary. Where misery and hunger are forged out of contrast with ideal freedom, for instance, this equally shows that an abject people's access to freedom is also a social construction forged from the same contrast. Therefore, because the suspect genealogy of human consciousness is wrought through ideas of dispossession and dependency as its constitutive outside, the gift of freedom is not an escape from these chains of signification but is instead *their extension*.

There is another history of the promise of freedom that we might well remember. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson traces the concept of manumission, the master's act of granting freedom to a property, a slave. This gift replaces the property of the slave-turned-freedman with something else—not self-possession, but the duration of the freedman's devotion, which includes continuing labor as well as his indebtedness. *This property passes to the master and not the slave*. It is in this way that manumission, that act of granting freedom, comprises a will to subjectivity (what Saidiya Hartman, in her brilliant study of “scenes of subjection,” calls “a burdened individuality”<sup>52</sup>) that is also the perpetuation of domination and subjection in another, perhaps more pernicious, form. Patterson resumes, “Everywhere the freedman was expected to be grateful for the master's generosity in freeing him, however much he may have paid.”<sup>53</sup> For Patterson and Hartman, manumission does not replace captivity with freedom, but translates a state of alienable life into a stage of anachronistic human.<sup>54</sup> Under liberalism's purview, the transmutation from possession to personhood (at least to “full” personhood) is impossible, because there is no gift without debt—which is to say, no gift without claim on the other's existence. For the anachronistic human targeted for transmutation, freedom is not generated from his or her own interiority but is manufactured, in the sense that this freedom bears the provenance of another's hand. It is at once an incomplete possession and a permanent relation of bondage, securing his or her government ceaselessly, exhaustively (in the senses Foucault lists: “to conduct someone,” “to impose a regimen” or “an intercourse, . . . a circular process or process of exchange between one individual or another”). *To be given freedom is a process of becoming without being*. Thus does the gift of freedom carry a stubborn



remainder of its absence—this trace may be called race or gender, among other names, and does not subside with the passage of time.

Another name for this trace is debt, first as those properties that are provisionally held and in constant danger of suspension, and second as the duration of the past as continuous subjection. For Derrida, “there where there is gift, there is time. What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift is also a demand of time. The thing must not be restituted immediately and right away.”<sup>55</sup> Especially because the gift of freedom is the promise of human being in time, and is hence *the gift that keeps on giving*, the debt it imposes (both *power over* and *power over time*) troubles the recipient far into the foreseeable future. To be freed, as Hartman remarks, is to be a debtor forever. The nature of this duration is also twofold. The debt first requires the perseverance of anachronism, the trace of what was once absent, and second imposes the onus to recompense the spirit of the gift to the one who gives.<sup>56</sup> (Of the former, we might further observe that debt is the echo of what Lim lyrically calls “immiscible times”—“multiple times that never quite dissolve into the code of modern time consciousness, discrete temporalities incapable of attaining homogeneity with or full incorporation into a uniform chronological present.”<sup>57</sup>) In this way, the gift sits alongside debt as the subject of freedom’s absolute condition of existence. Made to desire a presumably complex personhood that circumscribes agency and consciousness as autonomous and self-governing, while bound indefinitely to those particularities of race or gender that are traces of his or her debt, the subject of freedom is obliged persistently, without possessing fully, a liberal ideal. Turning once again to Derrida’s given time, what is given is time to diminish—but never to close—the distance between the anachronism and the modern, and time to linger under the lengthening shadow of debt. This dilemma might also be phrased: *They will never be like us; they can never catch up*. If duration is the condition of subjectivity—or, as Lim observes, “an ever accumulating ontological memory that is wholly, automatically, and ceaselessly preserved”<sup>58</sup>—debt requires an open register on which anachronism or absence is inscribed forever.

On the one hand, then, a truth of the gift of freedom lies in value as exchange. Although freedom has so often claimed an exemption from crass political maneuvering, freedom defined as a universal virtue regularizes an equivalency between its constituent parts (bourgeois interiority, constitu-

tional democracy, human rights) for social and political exchange.<sup>59</sup> We know this in freedom's longtime consignment to a function of the market economy, for example, or in the contemporary wartime adage "freedom isn't free." On the other hand, another truth of the gift of freedom is value as debt. Also voiced in this adage, the obligation to remember and return the value of the gift means that freedom is imperfect, and alarmingly provisional. As it turns out, the gift of freedom is not the end but another beginning, another bondage.

Unfolding with the codification of a universal right to national self-determination precisely timed with decolonization movements across the globe, the gift of freedom thus renews and innovates imperial reason. For us, this historical moment unflinchingly returns us once again to liberal war. Though liberalism names war as excessive and external to sociality, a violent event believed to happen "out there," liberal war avows an exception. War perpetrates deliberate violence to injure the bodies and properties of a named enemy; liberal war perpetrates violence that it claims is incidental to its exercise of power to free others from a named enemy who is in their midst (giving rise to the computational concept of *collateral damage*). Such violence is vital to the genealogy of human freedom in which freedom, as liberalism's impetus for the preservation of life, conceives of war and violence as calculative functions for a biopolitics. Such are the calculations that require us to fathom liberal war not just as militaries and machines (as I argue in the third chapter), but also as the continuous government of freedom. This seeming contradiction—that liberalism's empire purports to free others from violence and captivity through more violence and captivity—instead points us as critics toward a radical plurality to which our analyses must be addressed. We need not neglect war as the will to injury in order to also observe through the gift of freedom the normalization of liberal war as a productive force. What else might be made of the claims that to grant freedom is to be at once observant to the aliveness or the need of other persons, and cognizant that our self-interest and security are enriched by unfree peoples having the advantage of freedom?<sup>60</sup> (Or, as President Lyndon B. Johnson once stated, "if freedom is to survive in any American hometown it must be preserved in such places as South Viet Nam."<sup>61</sup>) That is, democratic ideals can themselves be the scenes of violence. We might understand this ominous pledge again through Foucault, who observes: "Liberalism formulates simply the

following: I am going to produce what you need to be free. I am going to see to it that you are free to be free.”<sup>62</sup>

For these reasons, the other side of the coin—that the gift of freedom is incidental to the exercise of power to kill others—is equally not true. The gift of freedom is no mere excuse or authorizing ruse, and even if it were, recall Derrida’s prescient caution: “Even if the gift were never anything but a simulacrum, one must still render an account of the possibility of this simulacrum and of the desire that impels toward this simulacrum.”<sup>63</sup> Moreover, war is only the most spectacular form through which empire grants freedom. Once again, the semantic plurality of the concepts that present themselves as either gift or freedom (and the multiple apparatuses that secure them, including but not restricted to state forms) are here precisely the origin of their power, their politics of life.<sup>64</sup> No comparison may seem possible between the expenditure of lives and resources in combat operations; nation building in the form of contractual economies and democratic polities; displacement and encampment in the name of sanctuary; economic development by international aid and agencies as the capitalization of resources and productive capacity; the dissemination and discipline of expert knowledges about hygiene, health, and “right living”; and even witness to evil, as kinds of exchange, but these are in fact collocated in the calculations of freedom all the time.<sup>65</sup> Nor are these distinct from the gift of being, which is both a philosophical statement about an experience of the world and also a social practice for the development of capacities and structures of feeling (such as chosen sociality or lavish beauty) comprising a will to subjectivity by another’s power. While distinguishing between these political, ethical, and economic forms is crucial, nonetheless it is this conceptual multitude, with its confusion of categories and crises of referentiality, that invests the gift of freedom with its tremendous power. For all these reasons, the gift of freedom compels us to think in terms other than calculation, contradiction, or comparison in order to see beyond ideal presence. This requires holding a multitudinous concept of the gift of freedom as a property presumed to bear a particular shape or dimension, nevertheless unfolding through time and space as the diffuse transmission of power from empire to other that can suddenly, violently—but also slowly, lovingly—seize control over life and death.

*The Gift of Freedom* thus haunts empire, not just with mournful ghosts but also with beautiful visions.<sup>66</sup> The task of this book is not to peer

beneath or behind the gift but to understand the concept of the gift as a medium and a metaphor for grasping continuities between operations of liberalism's powers. Observing the emergence of the gift of freedom (and with it, a politics of life and a concept of the human) as conceived and shaped by murderous structures of race and coloniality, this book reads the gift of freedom as relating to a set of compelling, connected, but not commensurate discourses about the signals, sensations, and mandates that freedom is believed to emit and the uses for which these promises—to make alive, to make live, as well as to make dead—are pressed into service. Bringing together critiques of liberalism and its continuous government of human freedom with postcolonial approaches to the modern cartography of freedom and progress, I propose the gift of freedom as the name for liberalism's difference from coloniality, but also its linkage to it—through which freedom as “thing, force, and gaze” re-creates modern racial governmentality for a new age.

### Refugee Passages

To create the new American out of the pipe dream of “We, the People,” or out of the bogus concept of the world's policeman, or to give democratic ideals a kind of moral luck is to forget the violence at the origin.

—GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, “Acting Bits/Identity Talk”

It is with these concerns in mind that *The Gift of Freedom* identifies the war in Viet Nam—and Southeast Asia more generally—as a particularly pressing and durable event to query what messages of power are transmitted through the gift of freedom. As the Cold War United States christened Viet Nam (though of course the war trespassed throughout Southeast Asia) the key theater for the Asian conflict with communism (a proxy, as it were, for the Soviet Union), we find the simultaneous emergence of modern forms of state power and biopolitics that inherit colonial and imperial schema, including those historicisms that order human life and freedom through stratum and asymmetry but that also mediate between liberal imaginaries of the good and the true, those things that enliven compassion and beauty, and liberal structures of government, including contractual economies, democratic politics, and chosen sociality. That is, in this historical moment a modern paradigm for liberal government and empire emerges, codified in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

preamble (which begins: “whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”<sup>67</sup>), through which freedom is calculable, and hence subject to maximization and securitization by freedom-loving peoples that they may promise and produce, according to need and want, new configurations of the global order of things. Underwriting this declaration, which is also a directive, are arrangements of intuitive and institutional knowledges establishing that no one is free unless all are free. We might abridge these knowledges as *all peoples wish to be free and one is free under liberal government*. As the defender of the “free” capitalist world, then, the United States during the Cold War justified its campaigns throughout Asia in response to anti-colonial struggles and decolonization movements where those struggles and movements rendered those places deficient in proper governance and disqualified from the rights of sovereignty, and hence susceptible to occupation and control by other powers.<sup>68</sup> As I elaborate in the first chapter, the war in Viet Nam and its aftermath illumine for us the conditions of possibility that structurally link new forms of action with emerging configurations of violence and power, in which managing the “crisis” of the human requires the mobilization of both armies and aid.

The refugee figure from this war is subject to the gift twice over. In the first instance as an object of intervention in the Cold War, and in the second as an object of deliverance in the aftermath of military defeat, the gift of freedom suspends the distinctions between those processes that play out in former colonies and those that appear at the imperial centers. Throughout April 1975, the United States marshaled its battered forces to protect and preserve what could be from a disastrous war. The Defense and State Departments evacuated hundreds of thousands of Saigonese denizens and displaced persons from around the country and encamped these refugees at military bases throughout the Pacific archipelago, where foregoing wars had established imperial outposts, and the U.S. mainland. On May 23, 1975, the U.S. Congress, at the urging of President Gerald Ford, passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, granting refugees from South Viet Nam and Cambodia unprecedented large-scale entry to, and residence in, the United States. Coordinating both state and civilian institutions, these operations were auspiciously dubbed New Life and New Arrivals, presumably that which is given to the subject of freedom. In the decades that followed, the United States granted asylum to

tens of thousands more refugees, the enduring echo of what President Ronald Reagan called a “noble cause.”<sup>69</sup>

This book’s task is to engage with the refugee figure as a target and also an instrument for the gift of freedom, as an object marked for rescue and refuge, and as a subject emerging from these claims to care. Toward this end, the fantastical tale that opens this book, the flowering fishing boat that recalls earlier and more desperate voyages, is a stunning illustration of the labor that the gift of freedom performs on behalf of liberal empire. In this scene we find the metamorphosis of the boat people, those unmoored persons who fled in the war’s aftermath, forced onto small boats to share unsafe space and time on the open water. In *Slander*, the Francophone novelist Linda Le satirizes the spectacularization of the boat people within this story of life in suspension: “Remember when your people began to leave the Country. The fugitives piled by the hundreds into little boats as fragile as giant matchboxes. They crossed the ocean on these boats. Back here, people rubbed their hands together. *They had found the ideal victims, they called them freedom fighters*. Why, the frivolous people were just about ready to run to their yachts and go rescue the victims. They piled into boats in their turn, overloaded with cameras and photographic equipment, fighting to get the first shots of those victims with such sweet, sad eyes.”<sup>70</sup> In this brief passage, Le underlines a compulsory visibility that operates through the commonplace convergence of photographic media with modern humanitarianisms. The coupling of subjection and subjectivity also slips into the frame, here in the names *ideal victims* and *freedom fighters*.<sup>71</sup> Both names, cited simultaneously, christen the subject of freedom for whom the West might imagine itself a benefactor.<sup>72</sup> This conjoined figuration, and certainly its pathetic spectacularization, precedes the parade float as its historical referent (its “before” snapshot) in order to irrefutably revise this image once the gift is given. The flowering boat with its happy passengers draws attention to this lamentable past in order to attest to a thriving present (in multiple senses of the word *present*, as contemporaneity, against absence). A common trope in refugee figurations, the wretched collectivity of boat people is at once denied and embraced as the othered past of ourselves.<sup>73</sup> This transmutation of object into subject precisely conceives the doubled temporal consciousness of the gift of freedom and the debt as an enduring trace of liberal empire.<sup>74</sup> Toward this end, *The Gift of Freedom* examines that gift, composed of pipe dreams, bogus concepts, and moral

luck as well as violence at its origin, through its spectacularizations in other such refugee figurations and imperial remains.

This book focuses not on objects that are lost and must be recovered, such as subjectivity or sovereignty, though these objects might be otherwise understood in these terms. Instead, in pursuing what Yen Le Espiritu has dubbed a “critical refugee studies,”<sup>75</sup> each chapter focuses on a figuration of this refugee’s reception of these objects, those properties of freedom, to get at something significant about the imperial forms and forces that endure beyond the cessation of military intervention and occupation.<sup>76</sup> It is without a doubt an understatement to observe at this stage that the refugee is no simple figure. A historical event, a legal classification, an existential condition of suspension or surrender (Agamben understands the refugee as “nothing less than a limit concept”<sup>77</sup>), and a focal point for rescue or rehabilitation, the refugee figure is mired in complicated and ever emerging matrices and crises of referentiality within political as well as ontological processes of signification and subjectivization.<sup>78</sup> This book focuses on the impact of some of these figurations of crisis, connecting a series of specific events and conditions in a time and a place to implicate the Enlightenment project of modern liberal humanism, now mobilizing the gift of freedom as a system for reordering the world. As I demonstrate in what follows, the gift of freedom helps us to map those other forms and forces that include mutable measures of a human person and his or her self-possession; greater or lesser calculations of partial sovereignty and ambiguous rights; and certainly the manufacture of sentiments and structures of feeling within and between empire’s subjects as part of imperial statecraft, including gratefulness for the gift, and forgiveness for those trespasses that are the sometimes unfortunate “error” in its giving. Thus, even as declarations of reciprocity obscure the violence of liberalism’s powers (for example, the letter from a minor government functionary at the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to Madalenna Lai that praises her due diligence in honoring her debt in the spirit of the gift, through which being free also denotes forms of right living), they also aim to affirm the desire for freedom and the course of its development, under liberalism’s empire. Each chapter considers some part of this refugee’s passages—or, more precisely, the uncanny story of those passages as a movement from subjection to subjectivity, and the poisonous promise of this movement. In doing so, as Fiona Ngô puts so

well, I hope to discern the troubling “continuities between the remains of war and the rehabilitations of peace.”<sup>79</sup>

In theorizing the gift of freedom throughout these chapters as collocating liberalism, colonialism, and modernity, I locate this book at the interface of transnational feminist studies and postcolonial cultural studies, especially scholarship on questions of race and war that interarticulate fields of inquiry that have each exerted considerable influence, but whose mutual implicatedness as knowledge formations has only recently been theorized. (The often-troubled encounter of ethnic studies and area studies, for example, has long looked away from their shared connections as postwar U.S. academic phenomena that can and do follow from the dangerous premise of a national order of things.<sup>80</sup>) This work thereby follows from Kandice Chuh’s proposal that we pursue studies in “comparative racialization and intersectional projects that deliberately unravel seemingly stable distinctions among identificatory categories and disciplinary divisions,”<sup>81</sup> and Lisa Lowe’s motion that our queries address the “economy of affirmation and forgetting” that structures the intimacies of four continents (such as refugee thanksgiving, for instance).<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, as Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal press us toward transnational feminist cultural studies as a methodological guide, informing this book’s genealogies in particular are theories that pay particular attention to the materiality of signification, and in doing so query the politics of knowledge, referentiality, and normativity.<sup>83</sup> From such scholarship, as well as its uses and challenges to poststructuralist claims, it follows that the ideas in which we traffic—for instance, freedom and security, humanity and sovereignty—must be interrogated not as unambiguous values but as transactional categories that are necessarily implicated and negotiated in relation to contests of power, their colonial histories and imperial futures. My work builds on all these analytic insights about the theoretical and structural antagonisms between liberal and neoliberal political philosophies and institutional exercises and transnational and postcolonial feminist theories, as programs of rescue or rehabilitation are increasingly understood as inseparable from deployments of structural and other forms of dominance.

The first chapter looks closely at the occasions of war and refuge to outline the dual character of freedom as the development of capacities and the intensification of power as these are bound to the passage of time as a historical necessity. This crucial dimension of the first chapter follows from Derrida’s given time to consider the achievement of freedom over



time, alerting us to the confluence of colonial schema with liberalist innovation in those disciplining intents and powers that target the new friend in wartime and the refugee in the aftermath, to induct him or her to the truth of freedom. In doing so, this chapter considers multiple analytical concerns, first through the temporalizing concept of transition as liberalism's difference from brutish coloniality, and second through the traumatic diagnostic of the refugee condition as difference from crude racialization. In elaborating further on these passages from war to refuge, I turn to Timothy Linh Bui's *Green Dragon*, a refugee camp melodrama set at a Marine Corps base in Southern California, and in particular to the two incidents of violence it portrays—the first being the aerial bombing that begins the film, and the second being the midnight removal of a willfully anachronistic refugee from the camp. In reconciling us to these incidents, the story about a benevolent hospitality that this film tells collocates the operations of power and violence that usher the refugee from anomalous time and space into a universal, modern consciousness—or, as the filmmakers insist, “from purgatory to a newfound freedom.”<sup>84</sup>

It should be clear by now that one of this book's imperatives is to challenge the wish for a founding presence, as well as a guarantee of recovery. As Foucault would put it, I am less interested in an analytics of truth than in an ontology of ourselves. In this regard, it is the willing of subjectivity and sovereignty (such as that which occurs in the refugee camp) that is precisely the seduction of the gift of freedom, premised on a transparent subject of universal consciousness and, in all its insidious implications, self-possession. We might even say that this willing of subjectivity is the surprising form through which decades-old imperial ambition returns, as the overdue achievement of President Johnson's wartime counsel—which we might read as an imperative in retrospect—that “the ultimate victory will depend on the hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there.”<sup>85</sup> This premise should serve as a caution against the resurgence—even or especially in this instance, in which I query the particular resonance of this refugee figure as well as her losses and gains—of a compulsive interiorization, a wish for a metaphysics of voice or a kind of nature, whether attached to a condition (being a refugee) or other presence (a self).<sup>86</sup>

To be sure, the refugee figures I consider in this study might awaken just such a wish or a will, inasmuch as these might otherwise appear inscrutable or inassimilable to a political project critical of empire. Certainly, the figure

at the heart of the second chapter, Phan Thi Kim Phúc, illumines this “problem.” Because the image-event of napalm burning her child’s body is so often cited as an indictment of *something terrible*—sometimes empire, sometimes the nature of war—her forgiveness might appear unfathomable. But though we need not understand Madalenna Lai and Phan Thi Kim Phúc as identical to their public selves—devoted partisan or angel of mercy—neither can we divine their true feelings through modes of difference or depth (“Does she really feel grateful? Does she really forgive?”). This book refuses to conjecture that these figures might, or should, disclose to us *something else* simmering beneath the surface, perhaps an interiority, ambivalence, or some other sign that would seem more theoretically tenable as resistant, or disruptive. I am mindful that Caren Kaplan cautions against appointing critical insight as a consequence of distance or estrangement; Sianne Ngai questions the long-established belief that true feelings (including the more politically efficacious ones) await release in internal spaces; Saba Mahmood warns that the category of resistance as a progressivist ontology (another map for the troubling historicist consciousness that persons desire, or can be made to desire, to be free) may obstruct our analytics of power; and Rey Chow worries that in search of a resistant figure, our critical labors in fact lose their specificity.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, I focus on these refugee passages to grasp something vital, and vivifying, about the liberal imperial structures that actuate and shape subjects without my own wish for transparency, or a will to subjectivity. Instead, my chapters elaborate the need for a reading that is attuned to the political traffic that glimpses into the heart perform, and to constructions of the *freed* subject, in order to trace the phantoms of colonial classifications and imperial remains that might be found there. To do so is necessarily to push against metaphysical fantasies of otherness as authentic resistance, or of sameness as common humanity—both of which presume transparency as well as the truth of interiority. For these reasons, the specter of the gift of freedom here haunts the overdetermination of our political hopes.

The second chapter elaborates on the iconic photograph of the napalmed girl to consider both the failures of empire and the humanist critique that profoundly undermines an analytic of it. In liberal theories of freedom that trope failure as the dissolution or denial of personhood, “*the presumption that if a body is found, then a subject can be recovered*” (to borrow Anjali Arondekar’s neat turn of phrase<sup>88</sup>) is one course that liberalism’s empire might take to atone for its violence. In a counterreading of

the humanist critique, I trace the arc of the subjectivization of the girl in the photograph through the rhetorical formation of her as an autonomous subject across a series of flashpoints—her longing for beauty and chosen love, which also inform her capacity for forgiveness. In doing so, my second chapter wrestles with multiple concerns, through which relations of seeing in particular animate the force of liberal war. Both bomb and picture interpolate a feeling observer who, shuddering before the scene of the precarious other and desirous of diminishing her misery and misfortune, may himself or herself suffer harm in doing so. To put another way, the vexing issues presented by the girl in the photograph as a consequence of imperial violence allegorize precisely the “problem” of liberal empire—both as a model for subjectivization through war, through the gift of freedom, and as an analytic of it.

Furthermore, the imperial archive that had once fixed this photograph as forensic evidence of the horror of this war is transmuted when the girl in the photograph recompenses our gaze with her grace. The scene of communion between victim and perpetrator—the girl in the photograph grieves at a monument to the warrior dead, beside a seven-year prisoner of war—further conceives of the war as a shared, traumatic ordeal. Here a profound, affective investment in a humanist covenant, in which empathy, compassion, and grace negotiate the painful distance between self and other, informs the bind wherein liberal discourse, in rehabilitating the victim, also redeems her violator. In the juxtaposition of these scenes (the photograph, her pardon), I hope to shed light on a significant trope of the gift of freedom, to theorize the place of *feeling* subjectivity in the order of liberal empire as a reason for pursuing war—to want to give of itself, its surplus—and the rationale for pardoning its crimes.

In the final chapter, I return to liberal war making and the normalizing of race war on behalf of freedom as life necessity in the present moment. In an age of empire ascendant, the United States pursues what could be considered supersovereign powers, contravening international and domestic law in the name of exception—which here coincides with the gift of freedom. Untimely comparisons between the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the wars in Southeast Asia of the previous century become enveloped in the continuous history of liberalism’s empire as an empire of humanity, and the Vietnamese refugee is recruited to testify to the gift of freedom and to recompense the debt through its extension to others. This is purported to be a loving gesture, inasmuch as it proclaims gratefulness

to the empire, which gives so well, and a sense of empathy and obligation to those others bereft of freedom (as the refugee once was). But it is also a violent gesture, which returns the gift in the same spirit. Pledging unceasing war, authoring radical new powers to police and imprison, and devising more devastating weapons to destroy and kill, as the patriot acts in this chapter do, the refugee patriot as a imperial figuration allows us to connect and comment upon the refugee and his *other other*, the terrorist, as limit figures through which all human life becomes a rationale and a target for global governance, and continuous histories of liberal war claim to produce the rule of freedom in a neoliberal age. Through his or her receipt of the gift of freedom, which I here name *transnational multiculturalism*, the operations of sovereign violence via a Foucauldian concept of race war are established through the biopolitical imperative to prolong life—through asylum, through preemption—and to allow some death as a necessary expense. And, inasmuch as the refugee patriot manifests a living memory of *what has already come to pass*, and *what has not yet come*, he or she lends this memory as prosthetic to liberal empire, enabling permanent vigilance, and continuous intervention into life itself, in the name of acquitting his or her debt for freedom.

It bears noting here that the crux for this book surfaced with, but also *against*, the wish for historical continuation, and the seduction of retrieval, in the aftermath of war. That is, this book's crucible might be said to start with another origin story, told at Operation Homecoming, a twenty-year commemoration of the refugee camps at Camp Pendleton, north of San Diego, California. Held in 1995, and attended by a thousand Vietnamese from all over the United States, Operation Homecoming bespoke a hunger for objects and voices assumed lost or at the least neglected in the sweep of the war's history, and their recovery as the sanction and celebration of a surviving present.<sup>89</sup> On the campground, dotted with decommissioned helicopters and other arsenal from past conflicts, former refugees wandered through the small-scale reenactment of the tent city, overseen by a uniformed marine; before a cleared field where vendors hawked food and souvenirs; a sweat-drenched musician plunked on his electric keyboard; dignitaries and celebrities orated about American benevolence and refugee success. Issuing a "THANK YOU, AMERICA" (as the stage's banner trumpeted), the event intimates that affirmation and presence are not exceptional to empire's violence. Also troubling, what appears to be gratefulness for the gift of freedom is also the normalization of

war, not simply as a cornerstone to the U.S. self-image of enlightenment and altruism but also as a *refugee* feeling for state sovereignty.<sup>90</sup> Yet the commemoration's disquieting palimpsest (of war, through refuge) echoed most for me in a vivid encounter with the gift's principle of danger and shadow of death as concomitant with its promise of life. Under the bright lights of a barrack converted for the event into an impromptu display room for historical artifacts, glamour photographs, and abstract paintings, a young white man in a buzz cut fingered a photograph of Vietnamese dead tucked into a pile of other loose materials before pushing it across the table in my direction, with a smile. (He enthused, "Viet Cong, man!") Struck dumb with horror, I could not know if he pushed the photograph toward me to say, "We saved you, and you are now one of us," "We saved you, but you owe us," or "We saved you, but you can still be undone," as each promise seemed to flex the particular power of a liberal politics of life, as the complex history of modern racial governmentality. Rather than understand this uncanny chance encounter with a brash marine as distinct or apart from the celebratory tenor of the larger event, which located the camp as a *home*, I propose that it is in fact the event's menacing backstory. The questions that struck me then are still the same: What sequence of subjection and subjectivity brought "us" here, not just to "America," but to this particular story of restoration and renewal? How do we grasp the violence of value (to again borrow a phrase from Cacho), or the imposition of indebtedness?<sup>91</sup> And how do we parse the partial sovereignty and ambiguous endowment that underscores the gift of freedom with the threat that freedom can also be revoked from those to whom *it had to be given*?

This "minor" event set the scene and the tone for this book, which could be described as a collection of other jarring, unsettling encounters with both the tactile and intangible powers of U.S. dominion. To understand this event, as well as the other events it references (the commemoration, the exodus, the war), at which the history of modern racial governmentality haunted me so, this book brings together other figures, other stories, that fold empire into debt—a grandmother sells her house to enter a parade to thank her benefactors, a film director stages a frightening midnight removal as a rescue, a scarred woman offers her forgiveness on global television, a patriot acts to bestow the gift of war he has been given on others. Caught up in the narrative possibilities of the gift of freedom, the scenes collected in this book may tell us something terrible about the

will to subjectivity when this will is also the affirmative assignation of a person or devastating event to the limbo of a progressive history.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, this book counsels against the seduction of access and reclamation that so often accompanies the citation of the archive.<sup>93</sup> Against the impossibility of comprehensive retrieval, *The Gift of Freedom* is instead a provisional account, pieced together from fragments of evidence, of the conditions that permit a particular discourse or discipline to arise and order worlds, which give the gift of freedom a particular form in ways that speak to its simultaneous making of life and death. As such, this skirmish also marks the point at which I wish to end, not with an answer that can illuminate for me the young marine's "real" meaning, but with an understanding that the liberal promise folds all potential meanings (value, debt, threat) into the lineages of freedom's empire. With this, we might reconceive debt not as the duration of gratitude, or the demand for repayment, but instead as a troubling reminder of unfinished histories that continue to cross us.

It may be freedom's task to banish the specter of misery or captivity, but it accomplishes this only by enforcing equivalences impossible to recompense because all is given, and foreclosing upon a presence invariably compromised through its giving. But the gift of freedom need not be true (whatever this might mean) to nonetheless hold sway as a structuring principle of liberalism's empire. We need not deny the violence and destruction that undergirds the gift of freedom to also take seriously its promise to reverence beauty, or respect aliveness, because these are part of its power. That the cause of death and the life necessity that calls for more are not after all distinct, requires of us an analytical and political alertness to their collusions and complicities within histories that target the subject of freedom for its force. As unending war and enduring freedom traverse the globe to produce more stateless nonpersons, more refugees, and more dead, the ways in which a onetime refugee might compose a beautiful scene from her life's debt may prove to be a minor worry, but they may also confirm the frightening mutability of liberalism's imperial pretensions. This book is one effort to understand how these pretensions might metamorphose into the form of a beguiling gift, the promise of freedom.

## NOTES

### Preface

1. Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq.”

2. Butler, *Frames of War*.

3. Karen DeYoung and Greg Jaffe, “U.S. ‘Secret War’ Expands Globally as Special Operations Forces Take Larger Role,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 2010. For further discussion of these special operations forces, see the May 2011 PBS/*Frontline* special “Kill/Capture,” and the official summary by Gretchen Gavett, “What Is the Secretive U.S. ‘Kill/Capture’ Campaign?” (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kill-capture/what-is-kill-capture/>).

4. The concept of the “zone of indistinction” is examined at length in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. We might also observe that in the Obama administration, such “secret wars” and aggressive policing actions—including deportations of undocumented people—are rapidly increasing, not decreasing, from numbers posted by the previous Bush administration.

5. Said, *Orientalism*, xxi.

6. As Obama declared in his August 31, 2010, speech, “Throughout our history, America has been willing to bear the burden of promoting liberty and human dignity overseas, understanding its links to our own liberty and security” (“Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq”).

7. United Nations High Commission on Refugees, “UNHCR Global Report 2010” (<http://www.unhcr.org/gr10/index.html#/home>). Today’s refugees include 4.7 million people fleeing wars—namely, the wars now being waged by the United States—and almost 5 million Palestinians.

### Introduction

1. I enclose “America” in quotes in order to signal, first, that this shorthand for the United States elides the contiguous Americas, including Central and South Americas, and, second, that I hereafter mean “America” as the epistemological and ideological terrain for such erasure and U.S. exceptionalism.

2. San Chu Lim, "Vietnamese Woman Thanks America with Parade Float," *Asianweek*, January 16, 2002, 13.

3. Dan Whitcomb, "U.S. Woman Sells Home for Parade Float," *Reuters*, December 28, 2001 (<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/011228/80/cmofs.html>).

4. Daisy Nguyen, "Vietnamese Refugee Sells Home to Buy Rose Parade Float as Thank-You Gift to Nation," *Associated Press*, December 29, 2001.

5. Quoted in Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 1, 237–38.

6. Chomsky regularly denounced the "good impulses" of liberal empire during the course of the war in Southeast Asia, observing in an interview: "When precisely did the United States try to help the South Vietnamese choose their own form of government and social order? As soon as such questions are posed, the absurdity becomes evident. From the moment that the American-backed French effort to destroy the major nationalist movement in Vietnam collapsed, the United States was consciously and knowingly opposed to the organized political forces within South Vietnam, and resorted to increasing violence when these political forces could not be crushed. . . . The liberal press cannot question the basic doctrine that the United States is benevolent, even though often misguided in its innocence, that it labors to permit free choice, even though at times some mistakes are committed in the exuberance of its programs of international goodwill" (Chomsky and Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate*, 112–13).

7. For an extensive examination of the liberal way of war, see Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*. As a contemporary example of the denunciation of the gift of freedom in its multiple permutations, Vijay Prashad observes that humanitarian intervention is "the window dressing that imperialism needs to counter our wider ideas and aspirations for democracy" ("Conversations Uptown"). Other speakers at this fundraising panel for Critical Resistance and the Brecht Forum included Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Laura Flanders.

8. Stoler and Bond, "Refractions off Empire," 95.

9. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

10. For studies of some of these forms and logics of liberal empire, see Ahmed, "The Politics of Bad Feeling"; Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*; Stoler, "Imperial Debris;" Stoler and Bond, "Refractions off Empire."

11. See Chow, *The Age of the World Target*.

12. Katherine Nguyen, "Vietnamese Celebrate Their First Roses Parade Float: Tears and Cheers Greet the Tribute to Immigrant Heritage, Eight Years in the Making," *Orange County Register*, January 2, 2002.

13. Amy Kaplan writes: "The denial and disavowal of empire has long served as the ideological cornerstone of U.S. imperialism and a key component of American exceptionalism" ("Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today," 3).



14. Here I use *imperial formations* in much the way that Stoler describes them as “relations of force.” For Stoler, these formations “harbor political forms that endure beyond the formal exclusions that legislate against equal opportunity, commensurate dignities, and equal rights. In working with the concept of imperial formation rather than empire, the emphasis shifts from fixed forms of sovereignty and its denials, to gradated forms of sovereignty and what has long marked the technologies of imperial rule—sliding and contested scales of differential rights” (“Imperial Debris,” 193).

15. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 63.

16. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 89.

17. Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?,” 47–48.

18. A bibliography of the gift would be enormous, including anthropological, philosophical, theological, and sociological inquiry. Some key works include, Mauss, *The Gift*; Bataille, *The Accursed Share*; and Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*.

19. Derrida, *Given Time*, 12.

20. Derrida writes: “The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude” (*Given Time*, 23).

21. *Ibid.*, 12.

22. *Ibid.*, 147.

23. Butler, “Subjection, Resistance, Resignification,” 230.

24. Derrida, *Given Time*, 41.

25. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, 239.

26. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 3; Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, 96.

27. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 63.

28. *Ibid.*, 65.

29. *Ibid.*, 63.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Here I am reminded of Gayatri Spivak’s insight: “Sometimes it seems as if the very brilliance of Foucault’s analysis of the centuries of European imperialism produces a miniature version of that heterogeneous phenomenon: management of space—but by doctors; developments of administration—but in asylums; considerations of the periphery—but in terms of insane, prisoners and children. The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university—all seem to be screen allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism” (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 279).

32. Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents,” 200.

33. Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*, 220.

34. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 121–22.
35. Harry S. Truman, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1949 (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/viewpapers.php?pid=1030>).
36. *Ibid.*
37. Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*, 25.
38. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 247.
39. Truman, “Inaugural Address” (my italics).
40. For brilliant studies that urge our attention toward the dead, see A. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*; Holland, *Raising the Dead*; and Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.
41. See D. Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; Cacho, *Social Death*.
42. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”
43. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 30.
44. See, for instance, K. Silva, “AID as Gift.”
45. Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”
46. Truman, “Inaugural Address.”
47. For instance, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*. For a critique of homogeneous, world-historical time, far beyond my own capacity in this book, see Bliss Cua Lim’s brilliant *Translating Time*.
48. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30.
49. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31.
50. Lim, *Translating Time*, 14.
51. Fabian cited in Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 66. The words in brackets are hers.
52. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 115.
53. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 241.
54. “There were three kinds of claims that the patron could make on his freedman (in ancient Rome during late republican and imperial times). First, there was the *obsequium*. This basically meant the showing of proper reverence and gratitude to the patron and his kinsmen. . . . The second and more practically significant claim of the patron was the *operae*. This was the obligation of the freedman to work for the patron which ‘sprang, not from the status of *libertus*, but from an oath which the freedman took after manumission.’ . . . The third kind of claim the patron had on his freedman was the right to half, and in some cases all, of the freedman’s estate on his death” (*ibid.*, 242).
55. Derrida, *Given Time*, 41.
56. In other words, to turn to Marcel Mauss (*The Gift*), this is the twofold obligation of receiving and reciprocating the gift.
57. Lim, *Translating Time*, 12.
58. *Ibid.*, 15.
59. Rey Chow observes in China’s release of political dissidents in exchange

for Western trade agreements the commodification of human rights: “It would perhaps be more productive, in light of Foucault’s notion of biopower, to view the West and China as collaborative partners in an ongoing series of biopolitical transactions in global late capitalism, transactions whereby human rights, or, more precisely, humans as such, are the commodity par excellence” (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 20).

60. Also noteworthy here is that in the gift exchange, according to Mauss, objects acquire greater moral power, animated with the spirit of the one who gives them, which ensures that the gifts return to their place of origin.

61. Quoted in Bower, *Why America Fights*, 179.

62. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 63.

63. Derrida, *Given Time*, 31.

64. In an essay on *Given Time*, Marcel Hénaff proposes that Derrida’s concept of the gift is imprecise, and therefore “the entire reasoning runs the risk of collapsing” (“The Aporia of Pure Giving and the Aim of Reciprocity,” 217). Hénaff goes on to distinguish three categories of gift-giving—ceremonial and public, gracious and unilateral (such as between loved ones), and aid pertaining to solidarity with others—which I argue are much less distinct than he imagines, especially in the context of giving freedom to an other.

65. For a brilliant analysis of the rhetorics and pragmatics of modern development in the Americas, see Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*.

66. This is, of course, a reference to Ann Laura Stoler’s edited collection, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*.

67. The full text of the declaration can be found at the UN site: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

68. Contemporary humanitarian interventions refer to so-called weak or failed states. See also, Fassin and Pandolfi, *Contemporary States of Emergency*; Jabri, *War and the Transformation of Global Politics*.

69. Ronald Reagan, “Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety,” August 18, 1980, Veterans of Foreign War Convention, Chicago, Illinois (<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>).

70. Lê, *Slander*, 33 (my italics).

71. This doubled interpellation informs my decision to circumvent Agamben’s conception of the refugee as the present-day exemplar of “bare life.”

72. The “West” that rescues “the rest” might come to encompass those who themselves were once rescued, as befitting the gift of freedom. The Vietnamese American nonprofit organization Boat People SOS, formed in 1980 in San Diego, California, conducted joint missions with international organizations every spring for ten years, rescuing over three thousand Vietnamese boat people adrift in the South China Sea. In a 1986 fundraising video, titled “Rescue Mission in South China Sea,” the viewer follows rescuers as they attempt to

guide wooden fishing boats to larger rescue vessels. Following these efforts, the camera focuses on the faces of children staring into the lens with their “sad, sweet eyes.” The actress Kieu Chinh, whose fame as a film star began before and continued after her own refugee flight, offers the following appeal: “They are homeless, they are alone, they are drifting on the high seas with no place in the world.” Parts 1, 2, and 3 are available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8pUiZb5ups>.

73. An exemplar among California-produced Vietnamese musical variety shows is *Paris by Night*, commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the exodus with grainy documentary footage of boat people above a stage full of modern dancers in simple, monochromatic peasant costumes enacting the ordeal and the refugees’ grief, set to sorrowful orchestral music. Films such as the recently released Vietnamese American *Journey from the Fall* (2007, directed by Ham Tran) and the 2005 *The Forgotten Ones*, a collection of photographs by Brian Doan published by the Southern California-based Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association, also return to this spectacular scene. *The Forgotten Ones* is a photo project documenting the last boat people, still residing in a squalid camp in Palawan, the Philippines. These photographs are located in the humanist genre of photojournalism—stretching from Jacob Riis and his photographs of nineteenth-century U.S. urban slums, in which European immigrants were crammed into dark and dangerous tenements; Dorothea Lange and her portraits of Americans suffering from the deprivations of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl as well as the Japanese internment camps (previously withheld from public view lest non-Japanese Americans feel pity for internees); and Sebastian Salgado and his gorgeously composed images of miners engaged in backbreaking labor in the global South—through which the gazes of saviors, both the photographer and the spectator, intersect over the bodies pictured. A reviewer of *The Forgotten Ones* highlighted on the book’s website describes the photographs as “creat[ing] elegiac landscapes of individuals who maintain hope despite their bitter lives.” Two Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalists, including Associated Press photographer Huynh Cong “Nick” Ut (whose most famous photograph I discuss in chapter 2), both describe the refugees in the collection, or the images of them, as portrayed “as suspended in time and space.” For a fascinating study of Vietnamese American cultural productions that reflect or reject the refugee as “our” temporal other, see Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese*.

74. My project in this book does not necessarily pursue the question of what Avery Gordon calls “complex personhood” (*Ghostly Matters*, 4), and what other scholars of “Vietnamese America” argue is the reduction of the Vietnamese migrant to the tragic refugee, and of Viet Nam to a war. Isabel Pelaud observes in her survey of Vietnamese American literature: “To view Vietnamese American texts only as refugee narratives restricts the full recognition of Vietnamese

American experiences and identities.” At the same time, as she next notes, “to view Vietnamese American literature outside the framework of war, in reaction to dominant representations and expectations, is also limiting” (Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell*, 59). These questions and concerns about “complex personhood” are undeniably important inquiries, but they are not quite the focus here, except where complex personhood figures the subject of freedom.

75. Espiritu, “Toward a Critical Refugee Study.”

76. See Claudia Casteñeda’s neat summary of “figuration”: “To use figuration as a descriptive tool is to unpack the domains of practice and significance that are built into each figure. A figure, from this point of view, is the simultaneously material and semiotic effect of specific practices” (*Figurations*, 3).

77. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 134.

78. International, governmental, and juridical narratives; historical and political conditions; and institutional formations intersect to produce and regulate categories of migrants, including the political refugee. It is not in the scope of this book to outline these formations. However, it bears noting that in various ways—including through orientalisms and colonialisms—institutional and ideological discourses and practices gender and racialize groups of refugees to produce categories of need and solicit kinds of affect. Engaging the language of universalism while limiting potential infringement on sovereign states, human rights discourse emerged in the last century as an ideological instrument providing a vehicle for U.S. economic and foreign policy. Presidential administrations from Eisenhower’s through Reagan’s used the authority to grant asylum as an executive prerogative to strengthen certain foreign policies. Accordingly, the State Department initiated decisions to provide special immigration opportunities to certain populations without strong congressional opposition until the late 1970s, when fears about the impact of Southeast Asian refugees on the American landscape gained popular momentum.

Because the genealogy of Western—and particularly U.S.—human rights discourse is intimately tied to the discourse of anticommunism, its usage has always been ideological. With State Department preference granted to those individuals fleeing what were commonly called communist-totalitarian regimes, the political refugee was considered both to bear witness to and provide evidence of a national cultural fantasy of American benevolence. Over the decades, this special immigrant status was granted to Jews fleeing the Soviet Union, anti-Castro middle-class professionals from Cuba, members of the Hungarian 1957 uprising, and—with amendments to the Immigration Act of 1965 allowing for a greater number of migrants from the Eastern hemisphere, especially those fleeing communism—people from so-called Red China. Successive administrations categorized dissidents and other refugees from communist regimes as “freedom fighters,” whether symbolic or literal. Other refugees from other countries were often denied entrance or asylum hearings

because they did not advance the U.S. anticommunist agenda. In some instances, these refusals constituted official foreign policies appeasing right-wing authoritarian regimes that the United States counted as allies, or countries the United States had a hand in destabilizing, including El Salvador, Chile, and Haiti. Thus, despite the formal removal of the ideological litmus test for refugee status in 1980, over 90 percent of refugees granted entry into the United States from the 1950s to the present originated in communist states.

Historically, domestic and popular positions toward refugees and their resettlement were often ambivalent or hostile. Western, and particularly American, concerns with the international human rights order focused on the possible contravention of state sovereignty. In the Cold War United States, many conservatives increasingly viewed international human rights agreements and declarations as Trojan horses, within which lurked dangerous political and social forces. During the formative years of the United Nations and the international human rights regime, these conservatives argued that international human rights standards threatened states' rights to endorse and maintain segregation and antimiscegenation laws and certain racial immigration policies, and undermined state and federal sovereignty at the risk of communist interference and influence. Beginning in the late 1970s, domestic discourses (including in Congress) revived these fears in debates about immigration and infiltration, producing the Vietnamese refugee as an alien creature; a dangerous, unknown agent introduced into the national body. As increasing anti-Asian sentiments coincided with a domestic recession and efforts to contain the ascendancy of Asian-Pacific economies, the foreign policies and practices of the Reagan administration regenerated and reinvented Cold War discourses. This administration argued that there is a need for communist containment to ward against the threat of refugees overrunning the American landscape, explicitly alluding to Southeast Asian refugees. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration adopted new policies toward refugees, repatriating Cubans intercepted at sea and reclassifying thousands of Vietnamese migrants in Southeast Asian camps as economic refugees ineligible for asylum. For more on this subject, see Koshy, "From Cold War to Trade War"; Loescher and Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness*; Buff, *Immigration and the Political Economy of Home*; A. Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding*.

79. Ngô, "Sense and Subjectivity," 97.

80. Debates in the last two decades about the analytical traction of concepts such as *diaspora* and *transnationality* for ethnic studies—especially Asian American studies—are rife with these tensions about the national order of things. See, for instance, Wong, "Denationalization Reconsidered." For works that put pressure on this joint, see Campomanes, "New Formations of Asian American Studies and the Question of U.S. Imperialism"; Chuh and Shimakawa, *Orientations*.

81. Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 151.

82. Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," 206.

83. See Kaplan and Grewal, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies."

84. Timothy Linh Bui and Tony Bui, "Note from the Filmmakers," DVD insert, *Green Dragon*, 2002. I should note that Timothy directed the film, but both brothers are credited for the story.

85. Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at a Dinner Meeting of the Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc.," May 4, 1965 (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26942#axzz1gStwaqYB>).

86. I am thinking here of Chuh's argument for a subjectless discourse: "I mean subjectlessness to create a conceptual space to prioritize difference by foregrounding the discursive constructedness of subjectivity. In other words, it points attention to the constraints on the liberatory potential of the achievement of subjectivity, by reminding us that a 'subject' only becomes recognizable and can act by conforming to a certain regulatory matrices. In that sense, a subject is always also an epistemological object" (*Imagine Otherwise*, 9).

87. C. Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*; Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*; Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*; Chow, *The Age of the World Target*.

88. Arondekar, *For the Record*, 3 (my italics).

89. I first wrote about this event in 1996, not long after it passed, and returned to it continuously over the years; one version is published as M. Nguyen, "Operation Homecoming." This brief paragraph cannot possibly capture all the dimensions of this complicated event, which might also be understood as a rebuke to the Clinton administration's efforts at the time to normalize diplomatic relations with Viet Nam.

90. Indeed, there are innumerable examples of such thanksgiving to the U.S. military apparatus. The black POW flag as well as the U.S. flag often appear alongside the former South Vietnamese flag at commemorations, political rallies, and festivals. Another particularly striking example appears in Lieu, "Assimilation and Ambivalence," 2. Lieu reproduces a still image from *Paris by Night 77*, by Thúy Nga et al. This DVD-event, commemorating the thirty-year anniversary of the "fall" of Saigon, ends with a dedication "To America, Love and Gratitude," in elaborate script and superimposed on a long, perspectival shot of the wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in Washington, D.C. The wall and the profession of "love and gratitude" to U.S. forces both dead and surviving are discussed at greater length throughout this book.

91. Cacho, *Social Death*.

92. In bringing these scenes together, I also hope to illuminate Derrida's insight that amnesia shadows presence: "The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory. . . . But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it" (*Archive Fever*, 2).

93. As Arondekar observes so well in her study of sexuality's relationship to the colonial archive, "the break between what it desires and what it otherwise (re)covers renders its promise inevitably incomplete" (*For the Record*, 5).

## 1. The Refugee Condition

1. Derrida, *Given Time*, 41.
2. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." For a thorough and enlightening study of these temporal strategies, see Lim, *Translating Time*.
3. One article about the 2010 commemoration reports: "Nearly 900 Marines and civilians worked for six days to erect the 958 tents and 140 Quonset huts" (Jeanette Steele, "1975 Vietnamese Camp Relived at Pendleton: Tent City Exhibit Opens Today," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 8, 2010 [<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/apr/08/1975-vietnamese-camp-relived-pendleton/>]).
4. I refer here to Agent Orange, one of the herbicides and defoliants used by the U.S. military in Viet Nam from 1961 to 1971, destroying an estimated ten million hectares of agricultural land and exposing millions of Vietnamese to the toxin, resulting in nearly a half-million people killed or maimed, and another half-million children born with birth defects.
5. D. Silva, "A Tale of Two Cities," 125.
6. Truman, "Truman Doctrine," March 12, 1947 (<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3343>) (my italics).
7. LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–1992*, 52–53.
8. As an influential member of the Secretary of State George Marshall's policy planning staff, George Kennan, using the pseudonym "X," penned "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," published in July 1947. In this piece, he argued of the "thoughtful" Americans that "their entire security as a nation [is] dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear" (Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," 582).
9. Lansdale, "On the Importance of the South Vietnamese Experiment," 127.
10. John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961 (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkinaugural.htm>).
11. The so-called innocence of the United States also underwrote its colonial dominion in Hawaii and the Philippines. See, for instance, V. González, *Securing Paradise; Go*, "Introduction." Indeed, in 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt made this genealogy clear: "The situation there [in Indochina] is a good deal like the Philippines were in 1898. It took fifty years for us to . . . educate them for self-government" (quoted in Mark Bradley, "Slouching toward Bethlehem," 23). As Oscar Campomanes observes, these imperialist excursions are subject to what he calls a "'historical unconscious' that both sanctions imperial practices within and without the American hemisphere while also claiming