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Operations New Life/Arrivals: U.S. National Project to Forget the Vietnam War

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
Requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Ayako Sahara

Committee in charge:

Professor Yen Le Espiritu, Chair  
Professor Denise Ferreira da Silva  
Professor Lisa Yoneyama

2009

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my grand mother, mother and sister—Yae Sahara, Akiko Sahara and Maki Kuwano. Your love and support made me to go through.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Operations New Life/Arrivals: U.S. National Project to Forget the Vietnam War

by

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Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Yen Le Espiritu, Chair

My thesis examines how the Ford administration created and took advantages of the political symbolic value of refugee at the end of the war. This paper argues ways in which the Ford administration turned South Vietnamese allies into refugee subjects to position the US as a moral nation and included them as provisional immigrant subjects.

In the first chapter, I critique rescue narrative of the evacuation by analyzing South Vietnamese refugee narratives and Ford's administrative decisions, since the evacuation was the US abandonment of South Vietnam and not fully planned for South

Vietnamese people. Although Ford claimed it was moral obligation to help South Vietnamese people and asked military force to alleviate the situation, the main issue was to execute the evacuation of Americans safely.

In the second chapter, I reveal the resettlement of South Vietnamese refugees was not as humanitarian operation but rather as military operation and management by analyzing resettlement policy and narratives of Americans and South Vietnamese. Refugee camp was not a “refuge” but an ex-legal/ national space where “differential inclusion” took place. Most of all South Vietnamese had to go through refugee camps to be processed, sponsored and educated and for them those processes were legal subordination, economic exploitation and cultural degradation. Operations New Life/ Arrivals were US national project to forget the defeat of the Vietnam War as South Vietnamese refugees embodied the defeat of the war and the US recuperated its confidence as a moral nation. The idea of the US as a moral nation dismisses the US military violence in Southeast Asia.

## Introduction: Operations New Life/ Arrivals

For too long, we have lived with the “Vietnam Syndrome”.... It is time that we recognized that [in Vietnam] ours, in truth, was a noble cause. A small country, newly free from colonial rule, sought our help in establishing self-rule and the means of self-defense against a totalitarian neighbor bent on conquest.... We dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful, and we have been shabby in our treatment of those who returned. They fought as well and as bravely as any Americans have ever fought in any war. They deserve our gratitude, our respect, and our continuing concern.<sup>1</sup>

In the above epigraph, Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, at the convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on August 18, 1980, renarrated the Vietnam War as the good war. Reagan erased invasive aspect of the Vietnam War and highlighted the noble cause. However, as Marita Sturken writes, “the Vietnam War has been memorized as the war with the difficult memory,”<sup>2</sup> the war was “a war that left the United States as neither victor nor liberator.”<sup>3</sup> Some saw the Vietnam War as evidence of the US nation’s expansionist and imperialist ideology. Daniel Bell once remarked on the defeat of the Vietnam War as the end of American Century and of American Exceptionalism. After the Vietnam War, as he said, “There is no longer a Manifest Destiny or mission.”<sup>4</sup> However, according to Fred Turner, the image of the Vietnam War as an “amoral

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *New York Times*, 19 August 1980. Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: Trauma, Memory, and the Vietnam War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, originally from Anchor Books, 1996), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 122.

<sup>3</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the ‘Fall of Saigon,’” *American Quarterly*, vol. 58; no. 2, (June 2006), 329.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys, 1960-1980* (Cambridge (MA): Abt Books, 1980), 255.

whirlwind” or “indiscriminate killing” of Vietnamese civilians had largely disappeared already in 1979.<sup>5</sup> He notes, according to a Harris poll, 73 percent of Americans felt that “The trouble in Vietnam was that our troops were asked to fight in a war which our political leaders in Washington would not let them win.”<sup>6</sup> Lisa Yoneyama illustrates how “dominant American war memories are tied to what might be called an imperialist myth of ‘liberation and rehabilitation,’ in which violence and recovery are enunciated simultaneously.”<sup>7</sup> War memories sometimes happen to serve to legitimize violence. This is how McCain represents his position in Iraq, as having emerged from his experience in Vietnam. An article in *Newsweek* mentions: “He, like other veterans, believes that we could have ‘won the Vietnam War,’ but the politicians panicked and caved in to public sentiment and withdrew prematurely.”<sup>8</sup> His revision of Vietnam War history, as we see also in Reagan’s speech, suggests that many veterans do not accept the defeat of the war and continue to believe in the moral mission of the US.

Yen Le Espiritu explains the recuperation of the Vietnam War especially by war veterans, as a “we-win-even-when-we-lose” syndrome that has energized and emboldened the perpetuation of US militarism.<sup>9</sup> It is important for people like former president Reagan and presidential candidate McCain to remember the Vietnam War as the war that the US could have won in order to legitimate continuing US militarism

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: Trauma, Memory, and the Vietnam War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, originally from Anchor Books, 1996), 64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice: Americanization of Japanese War Crimes at the End of the Post-Cold War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 6; No. 1 (February 2003), 58-59.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Hirsh, “The World According to John McCain,” *Newsweek*, April 7, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 58; no. 2, (June 2006), 329-348.

abroad.<sup>10</sup> Espiritu clearly argues that the ongoing renovation of US mythic “innocence” and popular narrative of Vietnamese refugees have been deployed to “rescue” the Vietnam War for Americans.<sup>11</sup> She writes: “Vietnamese refugees, whose war sufferings remain unmentionable and unmourned in most US public discussions of Vietnam, have ironically become constituted as the featured evidence of the appropriateness of US actions in Vietnam.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Vietnam War is understood not only as the war that the US could have won, but rather one that they DID win; and the presence of the refugees testifies to that moral certitude through the trope of the Vietnamese refugee, in other words, “an imperialist myth of ‘liberation and rehabilitation.’”<sup>13</sup> I definitely agree with Espiritu that the emergence of the Vietnamese refugee figure played a significant role in the construction of US memory of the Vietnam War.

In addition to the discussion of refugee figure in war and memory, I suggest that denying and forgetting the defeat of the Vietnam War already took place at the end of the war through the production of refugee subjects. I want to point out the significance of the creation of political symbolic value of the refugee figure by the US government as a rewriting of the Vietnam War. By turning South Vietnamese allies into refugees, the Ford administration positioned the US as a rescuer, not as a deserter of them. Rescuing

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<sup>10</sup> This overlaps the argument that Lisa Yoneyama makes about US war memory and the Second World War. “Historical memories of the Second World War have thus been called forth repeatedly to legitimate US military maneuvering during and after the Second World War.” Lisa Yoneyama, “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 6; No. 1 (February 2003), 59.

<sup>11</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 58; no. 2 (June 2006), 329.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 6; No. 1 (February 2003), 58-59

refugees dismisses US abandonment of South Vietnam. South Vietnamese were US allies, but at the end of the war, they became “refugees.” It was the US that turned South Vietnamese allies into refugees. Thus, I want to problematize US actions of evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese refugees, showing how US policy makers created the political symbolic value of the refugee figure and managed South Vietnamese as refugees.

Therefore, my research questions ask; how did the “Vietnamese refugee figure” emerge at the end of the Vietnam War? How did the US government create political symbolic value of “refugees”? What is the significance of the US evacuation and resettlement of “Vietnamese refugees”?<sup>14</sup> How did US policy on refugees, biopolitics and governmentality, provide possibility and impossibility of South Vietnamese collective existence? I examine both the US evacuation and resettlement policy on South Vietnamese, Operations New Life/ Arrivals, as Foucault’s notions of biopolitics and governmentality (I explain them later), since the Ford administration created and controlled South Vietnamese refugee subject. Operation New Life is the name for evacuation and reception of South Vietnamese refugees in the Pacific, and Operation New Arrivals is the name for resettlement of them from there to mainland US from April 1, 1975 to June 1, 1976. Although the policy produced the category of the refugee, evacuation and resettlement were a dynamic process that involved many actors pushing various agendas. Thus, I will consider the ways in which South Vietnamese people themselves participated in the construction of the refugee figure as they became

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<sup>14</sup> I say “Vietnamese refugees” here, because, at the end of the Vietnam War, refugees were South Vietnamese not North Vietnamese, but later it does not matter which side refugees are originally from.

provisional immigrant subjects during and after refugee camps through processing, sponsorship and educational programs.

The US government has been rewriting Vietnam War history through accepting “Vietnamese refugees” and erasing its own violence. Nonetheless, revision of Vietnam War history was not successful immediately after the war. As Francis Fukuyama clearly shows, it was not until the end of the Cold War when the US fully regained its confidence in freedom and democracy that a re-scripting of the Vietnam War became possible. Without the context of the Cold War, we cannot understand the role of refugee figure. Aihwa Ong writes: “The withdrawal of US troops from mainland Southeast Asia was in a sense the beginning of the end of the cold war.”<sup>15</sup> From her perspective, it is possible to consider that the end of the Vietnam War is the part of the victory of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War was the significant moment for the US government and public to revise its history, and from this perspective, the loss of the Vietnam War disappears and the war’s end becomes the beginning of the grand victory of the Cold War.

When Francis Fukuyama declared US victory of the Cold War, he claimed that the Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government as follows: “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”<sup>16</sup> It is not evolution that calls Western liberal democracy into being, but the military force that makes it possible. However, we always

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<sup>15</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “*The End of History?*” <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>

tend to forget militarism. For example, Operations New Life/ Arrivals and later policy on “Indochina refugees” allow the US public to see the US as a benevolent nation and to forget the war. A staff member of the International Rescue Committee, Cindy Jensen who was also a staff worker for South Vietnamese resettlement in 1975, says, “It’s a joy watching these people succeed.... They love their freedom, they love their new country, and they love the opportunity to succeed on their own.”<sup>17</sup> In this quote, the US becomes the land of freedom, where people can enjoy freedom. US militarism, which in the first place makes refugees flee their homeland, disappears. Consequently, American democracy is affirmed by the existence of refugees. As Lisa Yoneyama urges us to question “why and how we remember—for what purpose, for whom, and from which position we remember,”<sup>18</sup> I believe helping the refugees at the end of the Vietnam War was crucial event for the US to remember the war differently.

Of course, the end of the Cold War confirmed the value of US freedom and democracy. Building “democracy” or defending “freedom” has been an extension of Manifest Destiny, particularly through US militarism. Denise Ferreira da Silva writes, “To be sure, during the past fifty years, the United States has waged wars not to protect its territory and the lives of its citizens but to defend Freedom.”<sup>19</sup> As a national expansion ideology, spreading the value of US freedom and democracy has been a cause of Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny, as Reginald Horsman explains, came out of nineteenth-century racism and justified the conquest of Native Americans and expansion

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.theirc.org/media/www/san\\_diegos\\_dynamic\\_duo.html](http://www.theirc.org/media/www/san_diegos_dynamic_duo.html)

<sup>18</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, “A Tale of Two Cities,” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 31, no.2 (2005), 122.



of US territory.<sup>20</sup> It is a convenient racist concept for the US expansionism and militarism, since it sustains expansion of its territory and justifies Anglo-Saxon racial hierarchy. Since the Vietnam War was the war which the US helped to build democracy and defend freedom in South Vietnam, although it was not a territorial expansion of the US, I consider the Vietnam War was the extension of Manifest Destiny of the US.

The self-proclaimed rhetoric of saving “Vietnamese refugees” works to maintain the cause of the Vietnam War in which the US supports South Vietnamese freedom. For example, former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger remembers the end of the Vietnam War as follows: “Twenty years of hope, frustration, and discord over Vietnam had now been reduced to a single objective: to save the maximum number of potential Vietnamese victims from the consequences of America’s abandonment.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, the fact the US helped many South Vietnamese became the highlight of the end of the war. On the coverage of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Saigon, former president Ford recalls the day when 50,000 South Vietnamese and 6000 Americans were saved.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, my thesis suggests that the Operations New Life/ Arrivals were the significant moment when the Ford administration produced “refugees” and refashioned the US as a “humanitarian” defender of freedom. I use the word refashion because the US could not defend South Vietnamese military any more at the end of the war, and actually abandoned South Vietnam entirely, but still was able to show itself as a humanitarian leader through its

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<sup>20</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Since Manifest Destiny can be applied for space that the US considered as a sphere of barbarism, it does not have to be territorial space.

<sup>21</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 544.

<sup>22</sup> Evan Thomas, “The Last Days of Saigon,” *News Week* (May 1, 2000), 26.

“rescue operation.” The refugee operation has to be examined as the moment that the US kept its faith in freedom and democracy. The US as the rescuer is not new in US history, as we see it in previous wars before the Vietnam War, yet turning former allies into refugees was new at this time.

In this paper, I will problematize the US refugee evacuation and resettlement efforts in 1975, Operations New Life/ Arrivals, as the Ford administration’s justification of the war as a moral and just cause to defend South Vietnamese freedom. The Ford administration was able to describe the war as the moral war through the “Vietnamese refugees” at the end of the war. The Ford administration produced the “Vietnamese refugee” at the end of the war to demonstrate how the US was the humanitarian and moral subject. Through Operations New Life/ Arrivals, the evacuation of South Vietnamese became “rescue” and the US maintained itself as a “refuge.” I will explore two sites, evacuation and resettlement, at the end of the war to investigate the creation of the refugee figure and to critique the idea that the US as a refuge. Certainly, the figure emerged through the US mass media during the resettlement process. However, I will mainly investigate discourses of the Ford administration to view the ways in which the administration turned South Vietnamese into refugees, because the policy makers actually subjectified South Vietnamese as refugees. I believe policy provided an indispensable condition for South Vietnamese to become refugees at the end of the Vietnam War. As Melani McAlister reminds us, “foreign policy is a semiotic activity, not only because it is articulated and transmitted through texts but also because the policies themselves construct meanings.” Foreign policy is “a site for defining nation and

its interests.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the US presents itself as a moral nation through its foreign policy. Through the evacuation of South Vietnamese, the US set up the system of refugee resettlement throughout the world, which continued for over twenty years after the war. As most of the work in the establishing the “Vietnamese refugee” or “Indochinese refugee” resettlement system throughout the world was already completed at the end of the war by the US, Operations New life/ Arrivals were the touchstone for the US to claim itself as a moral nation. I will also explore South Vietnamese experiences of the evacuation and resettlement by using their memoirs to show gap between their situations and US policy. The gap tells us how a refuge is controlled and managed in the reality, no matter how the US government claims itself as the refuge. In chapter one, I will examine the site of evacuation and the US government’s logical shifting of South Vietnamese from the category of allies to refugees as the significant moment for the production of “refugees” and “rescue”. Chapter two will investigate refugee camps as the space of production of voluntary immigrants and technology of the US government, since the government controlled South Vietnamese refugees to resettle them.

### Biopolitics of Operations New Life/ Arrivals

As I noted earlier, I view Operations New Life/ Arrival through concepts of biopolitics, or governmentality. Michel Foucault writes biopower as a new type of power that emerged in eighteenth century, through statistics, controlling of the population. He

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<sup>23</sup> Melani MacAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001 and 2005), 5.

explains the ways in which the power of a state became a particular form which managed and controlled its population. Foucault notes: “The family will change from being a model to being an instrument; it will become a privileged instrument for the government of the population rather than a chimerical model for good government.”<sup>24</sup> He also claims that this shift is “fundamental.”<sup>25</sup> People, through structure of family, became an object of government. He also claims: “Governing a family is not fundamentally directed toward the aim of safeguarding the family property, but essentially means having the individuals who compose it, their wealth and prosperity, as the objective, the target; it means taking possible events, like death and births, into account.”<sup>26</sup> This figure of power, which enables a state to control lives of people, is what Foucault terms as “state control of the biological.”<sup>27</sup> According to him, this is the new right of sovereign to make live and to let die, as compared to the right to take life or let die.<sup>28</sup> This is a “biopolitics” of the human race, the new nondisciplinary power applied to the living man, to man-as-living-being, ultimately to man-as species.<sup>29</sup> What he means by nondisciplinary power is that it is a matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized.<sup>30</sup> Biopower is the power of

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78* [Sécurité, territoire, population.] (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan: République Française, 2007), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* [Il faut défendre la société.], trans. David Macey, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2003), 240.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 242-3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 247.

regularization, and it consists in making live and letting die.<sup>31</sup> Foucault explicates biopower as a political technology that “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/ power an agent of transformation of human life.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Foucault shows us the mode of governance in which the state controls and manages its population.

Rethinking this distinction between biological existence (*zoe*) and political life (*bios*), Giorgio Agamben questions how Western politics has constituted itself through an exclusion of bare life from its beginning.<sup>33</sup> He challenges Foucault’s idea of biopolitics, as Agamben believes that Foucault characterizes the modern form of power as inclusion of *zoe*. Agamben claims:

together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.

By revealing that the exception of bare life is at the heart of democracy, he wants to show the similarity with totalitarianism.<sup>34</sup> Agamben has a messianic desire to conceive new politics that is “a politics no longer founded on the *exceptio* of bare life.”<sup>35</sup> To do so, he reexamines the concept of sovereignty and camp.

In contrast to Foucault who distinguishes government from sovereignty, Agamben claims that biopower and sovereignty are fundamentally incorporated, to the extent that

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid..

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 143.

<sup>33</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 11.

“it can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.”<sup>36</sup> Using Schmitt’s concept of state of exception, Agamben illustrates sovereign power in the West is constituted by a state of exception or ban. He claims that “the original relation of law to life is not application but abandonment.”<sup>37</sup>

Agamben also critiques the Foucault because he “never dwelt on the exemplary places of modern biopolitics: the concentration camp and the structure of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century.”<sup>38</sup> He illuminates the concentration camp as the most extreme form of politicization of life.<sup>39</sup> Agamben views the concentration camp as a space where biopolitical power works in a significant way, as people in the camp were turned into bare life. *Homo Sacer* thus provides the possibility to centralize the significance of the camp.

Jenny Edkins argues that the form of camp can be traced through a series of location.<sup>40</sup> She draws parallel between the concentration camp to the famine or refugee camp, in the sense that in all those locations “we find people who are produced as bare life, a form of life that can be killed but not sacrificed, a form of life with no political voice.”<sup>41</sup> Of course, refugee camps for South Vietnamese were not the death camps. However, as Edkins points out, in the refugee camps, people were produced as bare life. South Vietnamese refugees in refugee camps became objects of the host countries, or

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78*, 98; Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>39</sup> Politicization of life means that politicization of bare life. Ibid., 119-180.

<sup>40</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 196.

targets of total control. Liisa Malkki explains a refugee camp in this regard: “The refugee camp is a technology of ‘care and control.’ .... A technology of power entailing the management of space and movement—for ‘peoples out of space.’”<sup>42</sup> Refugee camp as well as concentration camp, is a space where governmentality or technology of government takes place.

Takashi Fujitani’s argument on biopower of the Japanese and American wartime regimes, especially on Japanese internment camp helps me to further my analysis. He examines the internment camp as a productive space where the US government turned Japanese/ Americans into civilian and military labor. His elucidation of the internment camp as not to exterminate but to prolong the lives of people there shows the significance of the camp as a tool of the state. Fujitani notes: “Rather than segregate or even exterminate their minority and colonial subjects, these two nation-state based empires were forced to begin a process of including these previously despised populations in need of life, welfare, and happiness.”<sup>43</sup> As his paper suggests, sovereign right to make live is what I want to further explain in this paper.

This resonates with the ways in which Aihwa Ong argues the refugee camp as the space where governmentality works as a technology of citizen subject making.<sup>44</sup> According to her analysis, refugee camp is a site where production of citizen takes place. To understand how citizenship is constituted, Ong considers culture, race, ethnicity, or gender is not the automatic analytical domain. She writes, “what matters is to identify

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<sup>42</sup> Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 7: no.1 (February 1992), 34

<sup>43</sup> Fujitani, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding*.

the various domains in which these preexisting racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural forms are problematized, and become absorbed and recast by social technologies of government that define the modern subject.”<sup>45</sup> As her work suggests, we need to study South Vietnamese resettlements as one of the examples of U.S. technologies of citizen making. Ong defines the technologies of government as “the policies, programs, codes, and practices (unbounded by the concept of culture) that attempt to instill in citizen-subjects particular values (self-reliance, freedom, individualism, calculation, or flexibility) in a variety of domains.”<sup>46</sup> South Vietnamese did not automatically become citizen subjects, yet they had to become provisional immigrant subjects (parolees).

Provisional immigrant subjects is what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls as the “new friends” which are “juridical figures such as Vietnam and Iraq can only remain in the territory of freedom with the help of their foremost champion, namely the United State.”<sup>47</sup> South Vietnamese refugees were “saved” by the US, and then became the “new friends of freedom” who remain fully outside the territory of freedom.<sup>48</sup> They are “objects of US rescue fantasies,”<sup>49</sup> so that they reinforce the image of the US as rescuer which is a moral superior in the world. Thus, refugee camps were space where this US as moral was displayed and South Vietnamese refugees became objects of the US.

Therefore, I will examine Operations New Life/ Arrivals through the concept of biopolitics which, on the one hand, made South Vietnamese into provisional immigrant

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<sup>45</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding*. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Denise, 123

<sup>48</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, “A Tale of Two Cities: Saigon, Fallujah, and the Ethical Boundaries of Empire,” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 31; no. 2 (2005), 128.

<sup>49</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “Towards a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, (Vol.1, Number. 1-2), 425.



subjects, and the other hand, kept them as racially different group which signifies the US as moral superior.

### South Vietnamese Refugee as Critical Beings

About 130,000 South Vietnamese people were accepted into the US as parolees right before and after the Vietnam War by mid-1976. Resettlement did not take place at once. Most of all South Vietnamese went through the processing center in Guam, and they were sent to refugee camps in mainland US. The four US camps are Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. The US government controls overall resettlement processes. Nevertheless, previous works on the evacuation and resettlement do not argue both actions as the US war efforts because they tend to separate post-war resettlement, assuming that the war has “ended.” Thus, according to Yen Le Espiritu, “Vietnamese refugee” images are categorized in two types: the immigrant figure (refugees who become successfully incorporated as new Americans) and objects of rescue (refugees who desperately need help).<sup>50</sup> The former category erases the political military cause of refugee movement. This context ignores the US involvement of the Vietnam War. The latter image justifies the cause of the Vietnam War and the US becomes the rescuer.

Since the evacuation was not temporary but resulted in resettlement in the US, many scholars study the US evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese as an

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<sup>50</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “Towards a Critical Refugee Study,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.1, No. 1-2, 425.

immigrant narrative which “locates the problem *not* in the political and economic oppression or violence that produces massive displacements and movements of people, but within the bodies and minds of the migrants themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Many studies did not examine the Vietnam War as the cause of displacement and movement of people in the first place. They ignore the context of the war which created huge number of internal refugees. For example, Paul James Rutledge locates that evacuation and resettlement in the beginning of waves of “Vietnamese” refugees fled their country, and summarizes as “emigration to the United States.”<sup>52</sup> His view simplifies Vietnamese displacements as immigration to the US. Accordingly, “Vietnamese refugees” become those who want to come to the US, almost the same as voluntary immigrants. Thus, many studies on “Vietnamese refugees” focus on their refugee experiences as socioeconomic adaptation to US society.<sup>53</sup> For example, sociologist Gail Paradise Kelly describes South Vietnamese resettlement as the process that transforms them from refugees to voluntary immigrants.<sup>54</sup> Mae Ngai clearly asserts, “Americans want to believe that immigration to the United States proves the universality of the nation’s liberal democratic principles; we resist

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<sup>51</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Paul James Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America* (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 15-34.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United State*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans: Patterns of Resettlement and Socioeconomic Adaptation in the United States* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979).

<sup>54</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America: A Chronicle of the Vietnamese Immigration to the United States* (Boulder (CO): Westview Press, 1977). In her book, she refers to South Vietnamese as Vietnamese, and does not differentiate them from the North Vietnamese. Immigration scholars usually do not distinguish South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese, nor do they clarify which Vietnam they reference. Previous works view the people as “Vietnamese” without their specific political affiliations.

examining the role that American world power has played in the global structures of migration.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, I will highlight the political intention of the US by analyzing the evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese, and illustrate the technology of citizen making to speak to these gaps.

In spite of many studies of Vietnamese refugees that collapse them into an immigration framework, some works emphasize their refugee characteristics. Anthropologist Ikuo Kawakami examines how the “refugeeness” of Vietnamese experiences results in the construction of their own Vietnamese ethnicity in Japan and how those experiences encourage them to retain their ethnic identity.<sup>56</sup> He elucidates how Vietnamese experiences of instability, displacement, and separation from original family members tie together the homeland and themselves. For South Vietnamese refugees, because South Vietnam no longer exists, their relations to homeland should be more complex than Kawakami explains. However, on the one hand, the “refugeeness” differentiates Vietnamese from other immigrant groups, on the other hand, it deprives power from the people and people become rightless. Thus, some studies construct South Vietnamese as powerless and passive victim.

For example, in their book *Transition to Nowhere*, William Liu, Maryanne Lamanna, and Alice Murata study South Vietnamese resettlement as political-military decisions and emphasize their refugee status by depicting how their transition is from Vietnam to “nowhere.” They employ the concept of refugee from Kunz, who notes “the

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<sup>55</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ikuo Kawakami, *Family in Transition: Living World of Vietnamese Japanese* [Japanese] (Tokyo: Akashi-shoten, 2001)

refugee must be distinguished conceptually from the voluntary migrant.”<sup>57</sup> The authors claim:

Because the refugee status arose from political-military decisions and events, not from the individual decisions and desires of the individuals involved for an envisioned better life or the natural social development of the group of people, the solution to some of these problems must be political in the sense of societal action through the political action and resources of the government.<sup>58</sup>

Liu, Lamanna, and Murata critique the US refugee evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese, since the government treats them insufficiently as their psychological issues were left behind in their resettlements though they need more assistance than immigrants. They write, “Despite the humanitarian concerns this country is noted for, to quickly get rid of the refugee problem and close the camp was too simplistic and ‘efficient’ an operation.”<sup>59</sup> I agree with the way they differentiate South Vietnamese from immigrants, and in particular how they stress “refugeeness.” However, their treatment of refugeeness essentializes South Vietnamese as victims of the war and US operations, thus they become passive subjects.<sup>60</sup> By characterizing the refugees as powerless, these authors dismiss the power behind the process of refugee making.

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<sup>57</sup> William Liu, Maryanne Lamanna, and Alice Murata, *Transition to Nowhere: Vietnamese Refugees in America* (Nashville: Charter House Publishers, 1979) 29.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>60</sup> In a similar vein as Liu, Lamanna and Murata’s work, James Freeman demonstrates Vietnamese refugees as pure victims of the war and resettlement. He writes oral histories of Vietnamese refugees, which reveals how they have various personal war experiences. However, he shows how their experiences of war and their refugee experiences do not provide any positive aspects for their lives, only sorrows. James Freeman, *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese American Lives* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989). This is what Liisa Malkki explains “as a singularly expressive emissary of horror and powerlessness” for the refugee subject. Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1995), 10.

Therefore, while I will examine Operations New Life/ Arrivals as a refugee resettlement operation, I also consider the ways in which South Vietnamese refugees themselves participated in the operation. How can we consider the concept of refugee not as immigrant or powerless?

Giorgio Agamben suggests the difficulty of defining the refugee figure politically.<sup>61</sup> He writes, “A permanent status of man in himself is inconceivable for the law of the nation-state.”<sup>62</sup> Nation-states cannot provide a permanent status of man. Agamben emphasizes the importance of the existence of the refugee figure as it represents “bare life.” He writes:

The refugee should be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human right.<sup>63</sup>

We have to mark a refugee as a border concept. Patricia Tuitt points out that “the question of the refugee identity has been reduced in simple term to ‘a legal term of art.’”<sup>64</sup> To expand the notion of rightlessness beyond the legal refugee, she suggests we conceive of the nation differently.<sup>65</sup> Tuitt notes:

As I have argued above, the refugee, far from representing the destruction of the nexus of the state, territory and identity, as some accounts would

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<sup>61</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 131.

<sup>62</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “We Refugees” *Symposium*, 49: 2 (Summer 1995), 116.

<sup>63</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 134.

<sup>64</sup> Patricia Tuitt, “Refugees, Nations, Laws and the Territorization of Violence” in Peter Fitzpatrick and Patricia Tuitt eds., *Critical Beings: Law, Nation and the Global Subject* (Hans (England): Ashgate, 2004), 38.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

insist that he or she does, exists rather as the tangible product of a legal imagination that is all too wedded to the territorially bound nation.<sup>66</sup>

As she articulates, stateless people are objects of nation-state, and cannot be treated as stateless once they resettle. Nevertheless, stateless people do not disappear as part of nation, but they can maintain their in-betweenness, as they are “critical beings.”<sup>67</sup> Yen Le Espiritu is critical about the concept of refugee in the US.<sup>68</sup> She notes:

We need to imbue the term “refugee” with social and political critiques—that is, to conceptualize “the refugee” not as object of investigation, but as a paradigm “whose function [is] to establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems.”<sup>69</sup>

I like her idea to see the refugee as a paradigm to think about power. In South Vietnamese refugees’ case, it was the US that defined them as refugees. There are nation-states that control their borders and citizenship. We have to conceptualize refugees not through the parameters of the nation-state paradigm but in a way that can destabilize a nation-state. But at the same time, we have to consider the political situations that created the conditions for stateless people or refugees in the first place.

Jennifer Hyndman points out, “what often get lost in discussions of immigration, refugee law, and international migration more generally are the transnational processes, politics, and multiple positionings that transcend or subvert the primacy of the nation-

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>67</sup> Patricia Tuitt and Peter Fitzpatrick explain this “critical beings” as people those who are “excluded or marginalized in the persistent but ever unsettled processes of national/global affirmation.” Peter Fitzpatrick and Patricia Tuitt eds., *Critical Beings*, xi.

<sup>68</sup> She writes: “In particular, I am interested in how and why the term ‘refugee’—not as a legal classification but as an idea—continues to circumscribe American understanding of the Vietnamese, even when Vietnamese in the United States now constitute multiple migrant categories, from political exiles to immigrants to transmigrants, as well as a large number of native-born.” Yen Le Espiritu, “Towards a Critical Refugee Study” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol.1, no.1-2 (2006), 411.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 421.

state as the de facto unit of migrant identity.”<sup>70</sup> To view South Vietnamese evacuation and resettlement as transnational processes, I will show how those policies are part of the US war effort. Yen Le Espiritu argues that immigration to the US involves a form of “differential inclusion—a process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation, but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing.”<sup>71</sup> South Vietnamese were included differently to US society as refugees. Aihwa Ong clearly describes how the process of inclusion works for refugees:

In official and public domains—refugee camps, the welfare state, the court system, community hospitals, local churches, and civic organizations—refugees become subjects of norms, rules, and systems, but they also modify practices and agendas while nimbly control and interjecting critique.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, while considering the refugee as paradigm, we need to examine the political and juridical technologies of the US government at the end of the war. Therefore, in the following section, I will review the literature on South Vietnamese evacuation and resettlement, and refugee camps.

### Reconsidering Humanitarian Effort as Military Action

Aiwa Ong analyzes the refugee as an “ethical figure” in the US policy. Ethical figure signifies moral value. She remarks: “The moral imperative to offer refugees shelter has been a hallmark of US policy since 1945—a break from earlier policies,

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<sup>70</sup> Jennifer, Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 163.

<sup>71</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 211

<sup>72</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding*, xvii

which privileged race, language, and assimilation over concerns about human suffering.”<sup>73</sup> The acceptance of refugees enables the US to represent itself as a moral nation. Ong’s analysis conveys that the humanitarian effort is a political act. Receiving refugees has been managed by “calculated kindness” which has categorized refugees who fit “into America’s global anticommunist agenda” or not.<sup>74</sup> “There is no pure, apolitical humanitarian solution to the politically charged events of mass human displacement,” Jennifer Hyndman notes.<sup>75</sup> Thus, it is essential to envision US evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese through the “ethical figure” of the refugee. Hyndman also reminds us that, “humanitarianism is an increasingly well—funded and politicized process of balancing the needs of refugees and other displaced persons against the interests of states.”<sup>76</sup>

However, “Vietnamese refugee” policy has been studied as US humanitarian action. In this way, US refugee policy is separated from US militarism. Moreover, because of the nature of the hectic evacuation, previous works on US evacuation of South Vietnamese agree with the humanitarian aspect of the act without questioning the US legal authority to evacuate South Vietnamese nationals from South Vietnam. For example, Darrell Montero describes the evacuation as an “American altruism in the form of the costliest and most comprehensive resettlement program in the history of the United

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<sup>73</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding*, 80.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 81. On the nature of US immigration and refugee policy, see Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer, Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 163.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3.



States.”<sup>77</sup> In the same stance, Paul James Rutledge claims the evacuation as follows: “Collective altruism, then, was the hallmark of those initial years.”<sup>78</sup> As we see, most previous works do not treat it as part of US war efforts. Accordingly, US refugee policy and the evacuation and resettlement processes are viewed as existing outside the Vietnam War, or militarism. For example, the evacuation of Vietnamese at the end of the Vietnam War has been understood as the beginning of US refugee policy in former Indochina. The US has admitted 753,528 Vietnamese refugees out of the number of 2,432,096 refugees including parolees during 1975 to 2000.<sup>79</sup> This number does not include Vietnamese admitted to the US by the Orderly Departure Program. Considering that number, Vietnamese refugee admission to the US had a great impact on US refugee policy in general.

Accepting refugees to the US has an important political meaning especially during the Cold War, since the people left communism were perceived as “freedom fighters,” those who voted for democracy with their feet. In this context, the evacuation of South Vietnamese at the end of the Vietnam War has been understood as one of US anti-communist refugee policies.<sup>80</sup> Vietnam War history considers refugee operations as among one of the US evacuation processes. For example, Gabriel Kolko emphasizes the significance of US emergency aid, not the refugee operation: “Aid was not a matter of

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<sup>77</sup> Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America*, 41.

<sup>79</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, “Refugee Arrivals to the US from Southeast Asia, Fiscal Year 1975-2000” [http://www.searac.org/refugee\\_stats\\_2002.html](http://www.searac.org/refugee_stats_2002.html); US Department of State, “US Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Program” Fact Sheet released by Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, March 1, 2001. <http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/2001/2134.htm>

<sup>80</sup> For example, Gil Loescher, John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

preventing defeat or saving scarce resources but rather a symbolic defense of US commitments and credibility.”<sup>81</sup> It was not aid but refugee operations that allowed the Ford administration to demonstrate a symbolic reinvigoration of US commitments and credibility in a time of public skepticism about US involvement in Southeast Asia. I want to emphasize that South Vietnamese refugee evacuation and resettlement are parts of US military action and of Vietnam War efforts, as the US army considers their action as closing a “challenging chapter in US Army history.”<sup>82</sup> As I will explain in the following chapters, the Department of Army was involved not only in the evacuation but also in the resettlement of South Vietnamese refugees. Former President Ford asked US Commander in Chief Pacific to establish processing areas in Guam, Wake Island, the Philippines, and Thailand.

US evacuation and resettlement policies of South Vietnamese were not only political and military but also deeply dependent on racial politics. The goal was to scatter South Vietnamese so as to not let them create a strong ethnic community and become a “public charge.”<sup>83</sup> The US government adapted the Refugee Dispersal Policy. This policy served four purposes: 1) to relocate the Vietnamese refugees as quickly as possible so that they could achieve financial independence; 2) to ease the impact of a large group of refugees on a given community which might otherwise increase the competition for jobs; 3) to make it logistically easier to find sponsors; and 4) to prevent the development

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<sup>81</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 535.

<sup>82</sup> Department of the Army, *After Action Report: Operations New Life/ New Arrivals US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program*, 1 April 1975- 1 June 1976, ix.

<sup>83</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian American through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993)

of an ethnic ghetto.<sup>84</sup> As a result, South Vietnamese who wished to resettle in the US had to accept their sponsorship anywhere in the US. Since the Ford Administration did not plan resettlement well before the end of the Vietnam War, the whole resettlement processes were designed simply to meet the needs of the moment and to prioritize the conditions of US society. Some studies demonstrate how the dispersal policy affects Vietnamese American community building. For instance, Bill Ong Hing reveals the ways in which the US desires control over Asian, including Vietnamese, immigration to the US.<sup>85</sup> He describes US immigration and refugee policy as a technology of racialization and gendering.<sup>86</sup> US named South Vietnamese as refugees internationally and treated them as parolees legally. In this way, they are racialized as “Vietnamese” by the US imagination, and subjectified as “Vietnamese refugees.” As a result, US refugee policy created South Vietnamese refugees who were thus no longer US allies. Therefore, it is indispensable to examine Operations New Life/ Arrivals as US military action, and not as humanitarian action.

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<sup>84</sup> Hien Duc Do, *The Formation of a New Refugee Community: The Vietnamese Community in Orange County, California*, MA thesis, University of California Santa Barbara, 1988, 46.

<sup>85</sup> He writes, “The Vietnamese American community has been shaped by complicated, sometimes contradictory self-serving and humanitarian foreign policy objectives, which create and reflect a close and controversial relationship between used strategically to control the size, location, and livelihood of the Vietnamese community, sometimes creating discernible tensions.” Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian American through Immigration Policy*, 138.

<sup>86</sup> I do not talk about gender as a part of my thesis, but I would like to talk about how the governmentality re/formed gender relation among South Vietnamese refugees in chapter two.

### Refugee Camp as a Tool of Government

As refugee operation is military-run, refugee camp is a militarized space. However, because of the humanitarianism view of refugee camp, South Vietnamese refugee camp has not been studied as militarized space. However, governing refugee is a political act. As Robyn Lui claims, “Since being refugee was an anomalous condition in the regulatory citizen-state arrangement, the task was to convince the host state that the refugee had the necessary temperament to become a good citizen.”<sup>87</sup> Refugee camp is thus a space where citizen making process takes place.

However, as I stated earlier, in previous works on Vietnamese refugee studies, refugee camps are situated in the process of evacuation to resettlement, and South Vietnamese who resettled in the US are assumed to be immigrants on the path to becoming US citizen. In this way, refugee camp is demilitarized. Even the political aspect of refugee camp is minimized. For instance, Gail Paradise Kelly maintains, “Vietnamese went into the camps as refugees; they came out of the camps as immigrants.”<sup>88</sup> As she describes, previous studies view refugee camps as spaces that transform South Vietnamese to immigrants, since South Vietnamese had to adjust to American way of life regardless of whether they wanted or not. Or, Liu et al view South Vietnamese resettlement as “transition to nowhere.” Since most refugees had to get sponsor to leave the camps and resettle in the US, I suggest that both these views of the camps fail to consider different aspects of the camps. Refugee camps were neither a no man’s land as Kunz and Liu et al. explain nor a transit space to America as Kelly

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<sup>87</sup> Robyn Lui, “Governing Refugees 1919-1945,” *Borderlands (e-journal)* vol.1, no.1 (2002), 49.

<sup>88</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 62.

described, but rather were spaces where South Vietnamese refugees had to face the loss of citizenships and negotiate with it.

Ethnomusicologist Adelida Reyes states, “Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States greatly disoriented by their flight from Vietnam, by the years most of them had spent in camps that fostered dependency and passivity, and by the long geographical and cultural distance they had traversed. Under these conditions, they had to confront two monumental crises: ‘crisis of loss and ‘crisis of load.’”<sup>89</sup> Her analysis is on the later wave of Vietnamese refugees, but those crises are applicable to the first wave, South Vietnamese refugees, too. Sociologist Ruben Rumbaut explains, the “crisis of loss” means coming to term with the past and the “crisis of load” means coming to term with the present and immediate future.<sup>90</sup> Refugee camp is a space where the “crisis of load” takes place. Refugee camps were spaces for South Vietnamese to face their loss of their South Vietnamese citizenship. They lost citizenship, home and things that they could not carry with them. For South Vietnamese, refugee camps were the spaces where they had to negotiate their loss. I will further study this aspect of refugee camp in chapter two.

As I explained, on the one hand, refugee camps were space of negotiation for South Vietnamese refugees. On the other hand, refugee camps were space of management and control of the host country. In both roles of camps, South Vietnamese refugees were emerged as signifier of the US as a nation of immigrants, since US citizen making maintains and strengthens the image of the US as a nation of immigrants. Donna R.

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<sup>89</sup> Adelida Reyes, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>90</sup> Ruben Rumbaut, “The Agony of Exile” in Frederick L. Ahearn, Jr. and Jean L. Athey eds. *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 57.

Gabaccia critiques the representation of the US as a nation of immigrants, in which incorporation of foreigners symbolizes the promise and accomplishments of American democracy.<sup>91</sup> In her article, she considers the US immigrant paradigm as American Exceptionalism, and reveals that the paradigm exists because of the history of slavery in the US. She says, “The racial dynamics of the United States best explain the creation and persistence of an immigrant paradigm that ignores, when it does not also falsify, the history of African Americans.”<sup>92</sup> Inderpal Grewal also argues: “The power of American nationalism was visible in its ability to produce provisional national subjects out of immigrants and refugees.”<sup>93</sup> Particularly in the US, producing national subjects has been strengthened the concept of liberal citizenship, or neoliberal citizenship and allows the state to govern people through the notion of the ideal citizen. Since my project is to critique the US as the refuge, I am conscious about citizen making discourse can be problematic as it sustains the ideal of liberal citizenship. I do not think it is that the capability of the US which makes citizen subjects out of refugees. Rather, I like to reveal the power of the concept of liberal citizenship that allows the US to control the South Vietnamese people and turn them into voluntary immigrants through biopolitics and governmentality.

Through analyzing how power works through Operations New Life/ Arrivals, I hope to mention the South Vietnamese side of its operation. They became refugees

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<sup>91</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, “Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” *The Journal of American History*, 86: 3 (Dec., 1999), 1115-1134.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1133.

<sup>93</sup> Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminism, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 8.

during their evacuation and had to become self sufficient to resettle in the US. Thus, this paper is also about the story of South Vietnamese survival. “As we listen to stories about both the past and present,” notes Lisa Yoneyama, “we must be acutely attentive to the multiple and contradictory elements that refuse subsumption into the existing categories and boundaries of nation-states or exclusionary collectivities.”<sup>94</sup> To attain a conception of history that is in keeping with the insight that questions the very principle of the inscription of nativity and the trinity of state/nation/territory, we need to understand what South Vietnamese had to go through.

### Methods

The methodology for my study is historical, particularly based on discourse analysis of primary sources, previous interviews, and media, to analyze the US refugee policy on South Vietnamese and refugee camps in 1975. For the US government materials, I researched *Congressional Records*, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald R. Ford*, and declassified Vietnam related papers from Ford Presidential Library. For the refugee evacuation and resettlement, I investigated US army report on Operations New Life/New Arrivals from *Immigration: Special studies 1969-1982*. [Micro Film]

At the end of the war, several researchers interviewed South Vietnamese evacuees and published books based on those interviews, thus I will use them as primary materials. Besides her book called *From Vietnam to America*, Gail Paradise Kelly donated her

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<sup>94</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 217.

interview tapes and un-published materials in refugee camps. I researched her Vietnamese Immigration Collection in the library archive at the State University of New York (SUNY), Buffalo. The collection consists of interviews with Vietnamese nationals who left their country during the collapse of the South Vietnamese government in April 1975, English and Vietnamese language newspapers, and US government reports on Vietnamese immigration. The collection includes eighty-two cassette tapes of interviews with Vietnamese evacuees conducted in Vietnamese and English; interviews with case workers and other persons connected with the relief agencies; interviews with civilian and military workers in the camps, including administrators, aids, teachers and others. Besides her work, I use *Transition to Nowhere* by William T. Liu, Maryanne Lamanna, and Alice Murata.

In addition to these, I examined published memoirs especially by South Vietnamese. For example, Jackie Bong-Wright's *Autumn Cloud* is a great memoir of the war and its aftermath by a South Vietnamese woman. Pham Kim Vinh wrote many books on South Vietnamese exiles right after the war. His works are useful to look at South Vietnamese as exiles. There are some anthologies edited by Americans on the fall of Saigon, among them I cite Larry Engelmann's *Tears before the Rain* since it collects South Vietnamese stories of the evacuation and the end of the war. I use Tran Mong Tu, Thuc Ngan, Le Ton, Vu Tu Le's *Thơ Việt Nam*, to examine South Vietnamese experiences of their end of the War through poems. Materials I am going to utilize for this research are both in Vietnamese and English.



## Chapter One: Production of Refugee

According to Yen Le Espiritu, the US media represented the Vietnam War, 25 years later; through a narrative trope she calls the “we-win-even-when-we-lose” syndrome. She notes, “On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the US war in Vietnam is renarrated as a noble and moral mission in defense of freedom and democracy, rather than as an attempt to secure US geopolitical hegemony in Southeast Asia, and by extension, in Asia.”<sup>95</sup> Reinscribing the US evacuation of South Vietnamese as “rescue” obscures US geopolitical intention. For instance, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *Newsweek* depicts experiences of some Americans in South Vietnam as moral struggles; “To many Americans, the fall of Saigon seems about as remote as Appomattox, but to the men who were there, caught in a swirl of moral ambiguity, high drama and dark absurdity, the memories are haunting.”<sup>96</sup> In particular, the memoir of Frank Snepp highlights the moral struggle of Americans in Saigon. “Like his fellow spooks in Saigon, Snepp, a CIA analyst in the American Embassy, was desperately looking for ways to get his friends and informants out of the country before the South Vietnamese regime collapsed and the communist reprisals began.”

However, at the end of the war, from April to May 1975, the media did not report on the “rescue” aspect of evacuation, but rather illustrated the government’s struggle of accepting refugees and the wary reception by the public. For example, *New York Times*

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<sup>95</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 58; no. 2, (June 2006), 337.

<sup>96</sup> Evan Thomas, “The Last Days of Saigon,” *Newsweek*, May 1, 2000.

described how the US was struggling to resettle South Vietnamese on April 24.<sup>97</sup> *New York Times* also announced that there was “wide hostility” towards “Vietnamese refugees.”<sup>98</sup> *Time* described Americans’ attitude towards Vietnamese as “a cool and wary reception.”<sup>99</sup> There was an article claims that the US does not have any choice but to accept the refugees, since accepting refugees is a US tradition.<sup>100</sup> This is a part of “rescue” narrative that the US is the nation which has been accepting refugees. *New York Times* reported that President Ford asked the “nation to open its doors to the refugees.”<sup>101</sup> Media did not criticize the administrative decision on receiving the refugees. Therefore, South Vietnamese became “the newest Americans,” according to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*. The article also claims; “Nothing can be done for the dead of Vietnam, for the future, healing war’s wound.”<sup>102</sup> It revealed the US desire to quickly forget the Vietnam War. US Media was not interested in evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese at this time. Nor was the US public.

Congress did not agree with the administrative plan for the evacuation of South Vietnamese either. The bill, called “the Vietnam emergency relief act,” authorized 327 million dollars for evacuation from South Vietnam and “humanitarian aid.” It was passed by the senate on April 26, but rejected in the house on May 3, 1975.<sup>103</sup> Even after the fall of Saigon, there were concerns that the bill’s authorization would lead to the

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<sup>97</sup> “US Struggling to Resettle Refugees” *New York Times*, April 24, 1975.

<sup>98</sup> “Wide Hostility Found To Vietnamese Influx; Hostility Found Across the Country as the First South Vietnamese Exiles Arrive,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1975.

<sup>99</sup> *Time*, May 12, 1975, 24.

<sup>100</sup> “We have No Choice, Our Tradition,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1975.

<sup>101</sup> “Ford Asks Nation to Open Doors to the Refugees,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1975.

<sup>102</sup> “The Newest Americans,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1975.

<sup>103</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, vol.33, no.18 (1975), 904.

reintroduction of US troops in Vietnam.<sup>104</sup> Thus, congressional members persuaded the administration to formulate a plan for the care and evacuation of refugees before approving the aid. Accordingly, the bill was cleared May 16, while the authorization act, providing up to 455-million dollar, was not sent to the President until May 21, 1975.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, only the Ford administration kept claiming to help South Vietnamese refugees. For example, the Department of State was deeply involved in planning and carrying out the evacuation. In the Department of State, in particular, Frank Kellogg, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Refugee and Migration Affairs, and Daniel Parker, Administrator of Agency for International Development in the Department of State played an important role. The deputy of Frank Kellogg's office, Louis Wiesner concludes that evacuation was the result of the mercy of Americans. "Fortunately, some concerned and courageous Americans, headed by President Ford, were prepared to assume responsibility for rescuing those to whom we owed a moral obligation."<sup>106</sup> This moral obligation means that the responsibility of the US for South Vietnam, which allows the US to attack Vietnamese "communists" to protect South Vietnam.

However, receiving South Vietnamese to the US was the worst-case scenario that the Ford administration had. The best scenario the administration wanted was emergency military and humanitarian assistance to stabilize the situation in South Vietnam. Ford explains:

The options before us are few and the time is very short.

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<sup>104</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, vol.33, no.18 (1975), 907.

<sup>105</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, vol.33, no.19 (1975), 1006-1007, vol.33, no.21 (1975), 1075.

<sup>106</sup> Louis A. Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Viet-Nam, 1954-1975* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 365.

On the one hand, the United States could do nothing more; let the Government of South Vietnam save itself and what is left of its territory, if it can; let those South Vietnamese civilians who have worked with us for a decade or more save their lives and their families, if they can; in short, shut our eyes and wash our hands of the whole affair—if we can.

As Ford told, the Ford administration could not shut their eyes and wash their hands of the affair, because the US has moral obligation for it.

Or, on the other hand, I could ask the Congress for authority to enforce the Paris accords with our troops and our tanks and our aircraft and our artillery and carry the war to the enemy.

There are two narrower options:

First, stick with my January request that congress appropriate \$300 million for military assistance for South Vietnam and seek additional funds for economic and humanitarian purposes.

Or, increase my requests for both emergency military and humanitarian assistance to levels which, by best estimates, might enable the South Vietnamese to stem the onrushing aggression, to stabilize the military situation, permit the chance of a negotiated political settlement between the North and South Vietnamese, and if the very worst were to happen, at least allow the orderly evacuation of Americans and endangered South Vietnamese to places of safety.<sup>107</sup>

For President Ford, bringing military stability to South Vietnam was a moral obligation of the US.<sup>108</sup> The moral obligation granted the power to the US to protect South Vietnam.

The US had sovereignty over South Vietnam. The moral obligation is rhetoric of colonialism and justifies actions of the US. Accordingly, the Ford administration wanted military force to alleviate the situation. The Administration hoped to get the money in the name of humanitarian act to use the military force to help South Vietnamese army. In addition to that, military and humanitarian assistance to the South Vietnamese is the key for the US position in the world. Ford also claims:

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<sup>107</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald R. Ford, 1975*. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977), I: 179.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

I am also mindful of our posture toward the rest of the world and, particularly, of our future relations with the free nations of Asia. These nations must not think for a minute that the United States is pulling out on them or intends to abandon them to aggression.

I have therefore concluded that the national interests of the United States and the cause of world stability require that we continue to give both military and humanitarian assistance to the South Vietnamese.<sup>109</sup>

In this chapter, I will explore the political aspects of the evacuation and ways in which the Ford administration produced “Vietnamese refugees” as a rescue object of the US, because the category of South Vietnamese as “refugee” was not a legal category but rather a de facto category. As I explain later the concept of South Vietnamese as refugee did not fit international law concept of refugee. In addition, the evacuation of South Vietnamese was not thoroughly planned prior to the Fall of Saigon since the real goal was the safe removal of Americans from South Vietnam. The evacuation of South Vietnamese was planned to facilitate evacuation of Americans. Evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese was not humanitarian operation but rather simply political decision by the Ford administration. Illustrating evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese as humanitarian operation, South Vietnamese became “refugees” not US allies. The rescue narrative of South Vietnamese, or humanitarian operation, conceals the context of the Vietnam War in which the US involved. The former South Vietnamese became victims of communism not the US militarism. Thus, it is important to reveal political aspect of the operation. Ford Administration planned evacuation of South Vietnamese to execute evacuation of Americans. My goal in this chapter is to demystify the rescue narrative of the Ford Administration and to reveal the evacuation of South Vietnamese as a US political decision as opposed to humanitarian. First, I will show how

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

the site of evacuation of South Vietnamese was multidirectional and unplanned displacement. Evacuation was not the US “rescue” process for South Vietnamese, but rather the US abandonment of South Vietnam. Second, I will elucidate the ambiguity of the category of South Vietnamese refugees. Third, I will examine evacuation as the process in which the US constructs the refugee figure, shifting their view of South Vietnamese from allies to refugees.

### Site of Evacuation of South Vietnamese

Former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger remembers the end of the Vietnam War evacuation as follows. “Twenty years of hope, frustration, and discord over Vietnam had now been reduced to a single objective: to save the maximum number of potential Vietnamese victims from the consequences of America’s abandonment.”<sup>110</sup> The self-proclaimed rhetoric of saving “Vietnamese refugees,” works to maintain the cause of the Vietnam War in which the US supports South Vietnamese freedom. The fact the US helped many South Vietnamese became the highlight of the end of the war, as on the coverage of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Saigon, former president Ford recalls the day when 50,000 South Vietnamese and 6000 Americans were saved.<sup>111</sup> This is what Yen Le Espiritu describes as “to turn US defeat—the fall of Saigon—into a feat of heroism by extolling US last ditch efforts to evacuate Americans and Vietnamese.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 544.

<sup>111</sup> Evan Thomas, “The Last Days of Saigon,” *News Week* (May 1, 2000), 26.

<sup>112</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” *American*

What actually happened at the end of the Vietnam War was not rescue but abandonment of South Vietnam. Americans deserted South Vietnamese. For their safety, many South Vietnamese people tried to get out of South Vietnam by any means. They evacuated from South Vietnam by taking air flights, helicopters, or boats. The US Department of Army mentions that there was the admission for 150,000 Indochinese refugees by the Attorney General under his normal parole authority.<sup>113</sup> While 150,000 people were allowed to come to the US, this number did not necessarily reflect the population that left South Vietnam. South Vietnamese left by themselves throughout Asia. The book, *Terms of Refugees* notes that the United States directly evacuated by air or boat about 65,000 Vietnamese, and another 65,000 Vietnamese got out on their own in 1975.<sup>114</sup> Accordingly, half of South Vietnamese who resettled in the US in 1975 or early 1976 evacuated by themselves. Besides, there were quite a few people outside of the US resettlement process. There were South Vietnamese people who were unaccounted for the US government. A South Vietnamese in refugee camp in Fort Indian Town Gap (Pennsylvania) knows this situation says, “In Thailand, there are people who want to come here but they don’t have means.”<sup>115</sup> South Vietnamese who reached Southeast Asian countries were accepted gradually to other countries. Even though in some countries like Thailand, they were considered as illegal immigrants.<sup>116</sup> Because of the

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*Quarterly*, vol. 58; no. 2 (June 2006), 337-8.

<sup>113</sup> Department of the Army, *After Action Report: Operation New Life/ New Arrivals US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program*, 1 April 1975- 1 June 1976, ix.

<sup>114</sup> William Cortland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), 18.

<sup>115</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape #57: three former soldiers, Nov 20-21, 1975.

<sup>116</sup> William Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 8.

nature of evacuation, some of them left their country without knowing where they actually would go.

From the beginning of 1975, the Ford administration was not able to aid South Vietnam as they promised after the Paris accords and the CIA and Defense Attaché Office concluded that it was impossible to maintain South Vietnam in the end of March 1975.<sup>117</sup> At that time, expectations of the collapse of South Vietnam brought the evacuation operation in action, though there were no practical plans about who they would save or where to resettle those “refugees.” Besides, there was no instruction given to South Vietnamese people for evacuation. Since there was no clear instruction and information on evacuation for South Vietnamese, evacuation became displacement of people. Especially for South Vietnamese, what was represented to be an “evacuation” ended up to be a “displacement” of people, since, as I noted before, half of South Vietnamese refugees left their country by themselves. Besides, since the US government did not plan mass resettlement of South Vietnamese to the US at the end of the war, South Vietnamese had to transit several places before they arrive in the US mainland. Considering the government of South Vietnam did not function at the end of the war, the evacuation itself became the chaos for South Vietnamese. As many of them did not know where they headed when they evacuated, they lost their family members and friends. A South Vietnamese who was in the Indian Town Gap Camp 1975, Binh explained movements of people as follows.

...by the end of April, we are not sure and no one of us can tell that our country then lose so quickly that by the time when know that we cannot

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<sup>117</sup> Frank, Snapp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1977), 280.



stay with communist and we have to run out. We have to find out the way out anyway we think that we can get out Vietnam. We have finally someone get out by ship, boat, so easy to get lost, you know that... By the time when we get out Vietnam, someone came to Guam, someone came to Subic Bay, [and] someone got started in Bangkok, Korea and some other countries...<sup>118</sup>

As Binh describes evacuation of South Vietnamese results in mass displacement of people, since after their evacuation from South Vietnam, many of them had to stay in different places throughout Asia and the Pacific for short time or long time. Of course, it was the end of the war and the pending arrival of the Vietnamese “communists” that led to the chaotic and hectic exit. However, it was April 22, 1975, that the US Justice Department announced a plan for waiving entry restrictions for over 130,000 aliens from Indochina, including 50,000 “high risk” South Vietnamese.<sup>119</sup> Until then, there was no category for South Vietnamese (except dependents of US citizen) to be rescued, or practical evacuation plan for them. Thus evacuation plan for South Vietnamese was a makeshift operation. The hectic evacuation resulted in divided families and homesickness in many cases. South Vietnamese left their country in uncertainty. Besides, there was not enough time to prepare for leaving. Nguyen Ting Duc describes his departure as follows. “It is very sad for me to talk about that [the departure] because the situation in Vietnam, it changes so quickly that we do not have any time to prepare our departure.”<sup>120</sup> As Duc mentions, South Vietnamese did not have time to prepare to leave their country. They also did not have many options of where to go. Most air flights

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<sup>118</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape #20: Binh, Oct 15, 1975.

<sup>119</sup> Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 411.

<sup>120</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 31.

were going to the Philippines or Guam. For example, Jackie Bong-Wright describes her hectic evacuation by air flight as follows.

The C-130s were swooping in every fifteen minutes to take the refugees away. They flew to the Philippines, unloaded their passengers in Manila, and returned immediately to Saigon for more—a nonstop ferry service. It was spectacular to see these giant crickets, with their bright eyes, flying up and down in the dark.”<sup>121</sup>

Unlike Jackie, many South Vietnamese did not know where the flights would go. Dr. Nguyen Thi Thanh-Nguyet took a flight on twenty-fourth of April; originally it was going to the Philippines, but changed its destination.

That night when we left Saigon it was very dark. At the airport there was a big confusion. We did not know for sure that we would be able to take off until the plane actually started to leave. We flew directly to Guam because by then the government of the Philippines was not accepting any more Vietnamese flights.<sup>122</sup>

Since the Philippines recognized South Vietnamese as illegal immigrants, the government did not allow more people to come.<sup>123</sup> As a result, without knowing where they were going, South Vietnamese evacuated. This was especially apparent when they escaped by boat. They did not know exact points where they would reach US Navy ships or fleets, although the US navy was picking up South Vietnamese in territorial sea of South Vietnam.<sup>124</sup> Many people hoped to be picked up by the US navy. For example,

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<sup>121</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud: From Vietnamese War Widow to American Activist* (Herndon (VA): Capital Books, 2001), 201.

<sup>122</sup> Dr. Nguyen Thi Thanh-Nguyet, “Why Didn’t You Bring My Grandson Here?” in Larry Engelmann, *Tears Before the Rain: Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam* (New York: Da Capo Press Edition 1997), 269.

<sup>123</sup> *New York Times*, April 18, 1975.

<sup>124</sup> “US Rescue Fleet is Picking Up Vietnamese who Fled in Boats,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 1975.

Tran Minh Loi, a South Vietnamese was able to board a ship on April 30, described his evacuation below:

When we got out on the South China Sea we met an American Navy ship. We signaled an SOS and they came aboard. They tried to repair our engine for us but they said it couldn't be done. And they said we could not go very far on just one engine. So we all left our ship and went on the American ship. After they had taken us all off our ship, the American ship fired big cannons at our ship. They missed several times, but finally they hit it and it caught fire. When we last saw it, it was on fire, drifting back toward Vietnam.<sup>125</sup>

Nguyen Ngoc Bich left a day earlier than Loi, and experienced an unexpectedly crowded boat evacuation.

We finally left by the wharf at midnight on the twenty-ninth. We went out pass Vung Tau and were finally picked up by a ship, the *American Challenger*. It was absolutely hell. The capacity of the boat was 1080 people. They picked up something like 7500 people. They intended to go to Subic Bay and drop us there. But offshore from Vung Tau they picked up more people. That was too many people, so they proceeded to Wake Island.<sup>126</sup>

Unlike, Bich and Loi, some people reached neighboring countries by themselves. For example, Captain Nguyen Quoc Dinh had his own boat to leave his country and arrived in the Philippines.

After we went out from Vung Tau we saw the American Seventh Fleet. We thought they would come to pick us in the morning. But they had disappeared by then. Then a Vietnamese Navy ship came by us and we followed them for seven days and seven nights.... Finally we came to the Philippines, to Subic Bay, and from there we were taken to Wake Island and then Fort Chaffee.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Tran Minh Loi, "They Could Not Move So They Could Not Shoot Us," in *Tears before the Rain*, 263-4.

<sup>126</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Bich "Absolutely Hell" in *Tears before the Rain*, 265.

<sup>127</sup> Captain Nguyen Quoc Dinh, "Oh, Man, Get Out of My Boat" in *Tears before the Rain*, 252.

His interview illustrates that they did not plan their escape. If the ship headed to Thailand, they would go there. All three cases illustrate that South Vietnamese went out to sea in the hopes of being picked up by US ships.<sup>128</sup> Similar to the stories mentioned above, Hai Van Le of the South Vietnamese Air Force, talked about his evacuation as unplanned. According to his interview, Le shows that he did not prepare for leaving or did not have any destination.

On the morning of April 30 all of the pilots were talking about a message they had heard on the emergency radio channel. They said that the American fleet had told all Vietnamese pilots to bring their aircraft out to the ship so that they would not fall into Communist hands. Many of the pilots took helicopters filled with people out to the American fleet after they heard that message.... I wasn't sure that I wanted to leave. So I didn't go out on a helicopter. I knew that there were still soldiers fighting in the Delta. So I thought maybe I would go south and join them. But then, late in the morning [April 30], I heard that the government had already surrendered to the Communists. Only then did I decide to leave.... I went with a friend down to the Saigon River. There was a boat that was just leaving, so we decided to get on it. We were feeling bad about leaving, but when the government surrendered, there was no more hope.... When our boat went down the Saigon River no one fired us. There were more than 3000 people on the boat—men, women and children. We had no food or water on the board and we did not know what would happen once we got into the South China Sea.... We were in the South China Sea for three days without food or water. On the third day a Danish ship found us. They took the women and children off and took them to Hong Kong. Then they gave us food and water so we wouldn't die at sea and they told us how to get to Hong Kong. During the rest of the journey we didn't talk to each other because we were so sad about losing our country.<sup>129</sup>

Le's story tells us that the US army had overall power to instruct South Vietnamese army. The US army wanted to stop fighting and leave at first. Though, Le remembered that he did not want to follow the order, since he wanted to join the fight in Delta. Of course,

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<sup>128</sup> Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> Nguyen Phuc Thieu, "Stand Back, Boys. The War Is Over" in *Tears before the Rain*, 248-9.

these interviews are narratives that show masculinist desire to protect the nation. I do not want to emphasize his nationalistic desire but I want to introduce his exit story to show it as how abrupt and crowded. When he found out that South Vietnamese was about to collapse, he finally made up his mind to leave his country. As Le informs us, the scenario of 3000 people on the boat without food or water shows how abrupt all the people on the boat left. And also as they did not know where exactly they go once they got to South China Sea. In Le's case, a Danish ship saved them, not the US. Le said that he wanted to join soldiers fighting in the south, but he figured out the situation and decided to leave. At the end of the war, those who belong to the South Vietnamese military were able to decide what they would do next, since they knew the situation better than South Vietnamese civilians. In Le's situation, he had to decide whether to stay and fight or to evacuate. There are some cases of people staying behind to fight then ended up evacuating. For instance, Second Lieutenant Nguyen Phuc Thieu planned to fight on April 30, but heard that Americans had told that all Vietnamese helicopters to fly out to the Seventh Fleet to keep their aircraft from falling into Communist hands. Therefore, he flew to the fleet:

We thought that when we landed on the American ships, we would be resupplied and then regroup. Then, we thought, we would go back to Vietnam and fight and the Americans would go with us. We thought they were calling us out in order to make new plans for a counterattack. And that sounded like a good idea. We were still ready to fight.... But as soon as we had landed on the ship, American Marines took away our weapons. We thought that was very strange. Then they led us to another part of the ship. And then we watched them start to push our helicopter over the side. Some of our men started shouting and they tried to run over to stop the Americans. But a Marine stopped our men and said, 'Stand back boys. The war is over.'... Some of the men started to cry. And when they saw our helicopter fall into the sea and they knew we would not be going back to Vietnam, some of them tried to jump in the sea. The Marines stopped

them. Many of our men had left their families in Saigon and they wanted to go back to their families. But now there was no way.<sup>130</sup>

Thieu's recollection shows us how Americans ended the war. They stopped South Vietnamese from fighting and from going back to their country. This is the same case to Le's story before that they narrate their exit as they did not want to leave but they had to leave. They show their desires to fight back but they could not. In Thieu's case, South Vietnamese did not have any choices for their own, but followed Americans. These stories also show how evacuation becomes nationalist narrative.

Many people got out by themselves at the end of the war, and some of them did not expect to resettle in the US. In the next chapter, I will show how this situation creates the repatriation issue in refugee camps. For South Vietnamese Evacuation from South Vietnam did not necessarily mean resettlement in another country. However, the US treated them as "refugees" and developed a resettlement program. In the process of the hectic evacuation many South Vietnamese families were divided. South Vietnamese lost their citizenship due to the Fall of Saigon in April 30, 1975 and South Vietnamese had to decide whether they would stay or leave.

### Ambiguous Category of South Vietnamese as "Refugee"

The Ford Administration used the term "refugee" for South Vietnamese at the end of the war.<sup>131</sup> Although this usage of the word did not fit with definition of it in the 1951

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 246-7.

<sup>131</sup> On March 29, 1975, President Ford first mentioned the term "refugees" in reference to South Vietnamese. Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*,

United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention's 1967 Protocol. The term “refugee” applies to any person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”<sup>132</sup> As the word “outside” demonstrates international law concept of refugee is people who already left his own country and seeks his refuge to another country. The US treated South Vietnamese as refugees when they were still in their country, international organizations such as the United Nations did not provide aid for them, because they were not refugees. Naming South Vietnamese as “refugees” yet-to-be-displaced persons was a political decision of the US. Since viewing South Vietnamese as “refugees” had a political implication which new Vietnam would be Communist country thus people were fleeing from it. Courtyard Robinson writes, “The point, in an obvious sense, was political: these people were not fleeing an old conflict, the Americans were saying, but a new fear of reprisal at the hands of the communist regimes and that should be acknowledges by UNHCR and the international community.”<sup>133</sup> Therefore, definition of South Vietnamese as refugee was a de facto category, not legal category.

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I: 163.

<sup>132</sup> Chapter I, Article 1, A (2), Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, [http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/o\\_c\\_ref.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm)

<sup>133</sup> William Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 22

The Ford Administration named South Vietnamese as refugees internationally and treated them as parolees in the US legally. Until October 1977, when President Carter signed Public Law 95-145, former South Vietnamese in the US were not eligible to apply for permanent resident status or citizen status.<sup>134</sup> By then, South Vietnamese people who entered to the US as parolees were provisionally immigrants by US immigration law. US government subjectified South Vietnamese as “Vietnamese refugees,” but in the reality they were parolees those who were allowed to come into the US society. It was the Ford Administration that controlled the movement of “Vietnamese refugees.” US government had the discretion to accept South Vietnamese as refugees, therefore, South Vietnamese people became US objects of rescue in the very beginning of their movement and had to go through the US operated resettlement processes. But evacuation and resettlement processes did not take into consideration the specific needs and desires of the people the US government was supposed to help.<sup>135</sup>

In fact, the Department of State had planned the evacuation of Vietnamese after the Paris Agreement in 1973. That the plan for evacuation was put in place two years before the official end of the war suggests that we need to consider these efforts as part of the war, rather than as its aftermath. It indicates that the Department of State planned evacuation of Vietnamese to withdraw US military. To evacuate the US military from South Vietnam, the Department of State believed it was necessary for a mass removal of South Vietnamese. Thus, the Department of State has outlined the evacuation based on the assumption that large numbers of endangered South Vietnamese people would have

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<sup>134</sup> United States, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Indochinese Refugee Processing Guide* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979).

<sup>135</sup> Adelida Reyes, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free*, 73.



to escape from the country.<sup>136</sup> From the beginning of 1975, Frank Kellogg's office planned a massive evacuation of Vietnamese and Cambodians.<sup>137</sup> As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, Frank Kellogg was a Special Assistant to the secretary for Refugee and Migration Affairs at that time and planned the evacuation. Louis Wiesner, who was a deputy of Frank Kellogg's office, mentions that removing some people is strategically effective for the defense in the war. He claims that, "removing some endangered and surplus people in a careful manner could be a prudent way of clearing a battlefield and actually helping the defense."<sup>138</sup> Re/moving people in a war had military strategic and humanitarian aspects at the same time. Thus, removing and categorizing South Vietnamese as "refugees" had a strategic meaning for the military and a humanitarian characteristic.

The US Embassy in Saigon and other agencies in South Vietnam under the Ambassador's direction also had been compiling lists of their Vietnamese employees, their families and their contacts that should be removed from the country.<sup>139</sup> The total number was between 200,000 and one million, depending on how to limit.<sup>140</sup> This clearly demonstrates that the criteria for those who needed to be rescued was ambiguous. The former US consul at Can Tho, Wolf Lehman claims the category of Vietnamese at risk were virtually endless. So, he recalls that they brought as many people as possible to Guam and the Philippines.<sup>141</sup> Basically there was no limitation to bring people from

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<sup>136</sup> Louis Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, 328.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>141</sup> Wolf Lehman, "This is the Last Message from Embassy Saigon" in Larry Engelmann,

South Vietnam, but there was limitation to bring them to the US. The territory of Guam and the Philippines (the Clark Air Force Base) were used in this case as spaces where to absorb a large number of refugees to protect the mainland US from the inundation of refugees since in both places the US government has strong military presence. In the case of Guam, it became the major staging area for the evacuation and resettlement operation.<sup>142</sup> This shows that Guam was not perceived to be a part of the US nation, yet one of its territories to be used whatever the US government wants. For example, while the evacuation took place in the end of April to May, South Vietnamese had to stay as long as mid-July to be processed to the US mainland.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, the category had the limitation of the number to enter the US, since the US government controlled the number of South Vietnamese.

Throughout the evacuation of South Vietnamese, there was no open discussion for the evacuation and no approval by congress and senate. President Ford requested Attorney General his parole authority for accepting the Vietnamese as parolees to the US. Even with the parole authority of the President, the Administration did not have the authority to evacuate South Vietnamese from South Vietnam, since the parole is about accepting people into the US, but is not about removing them from South Vietnam. Since South Vietnam was a country, the US technically did not have power to transfer people without permission from the South Vietnamese government. The Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger knew that the US did not have authority to evacuate South

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*Tears Before the Rain*, 38.

<sup>142</sup> Richard Mackie, *Operation Newlife: The Untold Story* (Concord (CA): Solution Publishing, 1998) illustrates how the operation executed in Guam.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

Vietnamese without any paper work of two countries before they left.<sup>144</sup> However, Congress did not care about South Vietnamese authority on evacuation. They were worried about numbers. On April 14, the House committee on Judiciary indicated the plan that paroles for 17,600 US government-related Vietnamese employees and 150,000 Vietnamese of those families.<sup>145</sup> Besides, the operation violated the War Power Resolution, which restricts US military actions in Vietnam. According to the War Powers Resolution, the US president can only use military force in foreign countries without Congressional approval during a national emergency. However, the administration framed the evacuation as an emergency in order to bypass the War Powers Resolution. When asked what will be done if Congress does not clarify the War Powers Act, Philip Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, answered as follows:

You could do this if it is an association—in other words, you have Americans going out an evacuation plane, and you have Vietnamese who have been working with them standing right there. Are you going to kick them off the airplane, or not allow them to get on? I am talking about in an emergency situation; I am not talking about a rational plan, a logical situation. I am talking about an emergency situation, because circumstances that the President is talking about are emergency situations in which there has been and introduction of US Forces in order to extract American citizens.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, April 14, 1975, National Security Adviser Files (NSAF), Memoranda of Conversations (MC), Box 10, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.

<sup>145</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*. 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 157.

<sup>146</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*, Executive Sessions, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1975, 167.

Habib thinks helping South Vietnamese is a good cause which people cannot deny. Thus, the action will be justified without any clarification of law. Thus, declaring a “state of emergency” allows the Ford administration to execute the evacuation.

Policy makers created the de facto category of “South Vietnamese refugee” based on an emergency situation. Since this category of “refugee” was not a legal category different from immigrant, South Vietnamese refugees were considered as legal aliens in the US. Therefore, South Vietnamese became defined as people who *want* to come to the US rather than those forced to flee their homelands. For example, Habib claims;

Many of them may want to come here because, here again, there are relatives and a lot of them speak English. A lot of them have had associations with Americans. A lot of them will feel comfortable in this environment. Besides, we are still the golden land. We are still the land that brought my father here, and I am sure that grandparents or great-grandparents of some of you. Everybody wants to come here. That is why we have laws that let them come here.<sup>147</sup>

Worse than that, South Vietnamese refugees were envisioned as aliens who would be a problem for US society. General Leonard Chapman speaks;

Many of them [South Vietnamese refugees] would go on welfare. They would be looking for jobs. We have already got 8 million unemployed. They would have the merit, of course, of being here legally, which 2 million illegals would not, so it is a very serious question as to the impacts on our society of it.<sup>148</sup>

In these arguments, South Vietnamese who left South Vietnam became objects of the US rescue. None mentioned US military strategy that needed to remove South Vietnamese.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>148</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*, Executive Sessions, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1975, 180.

### Production of Refugee

The US Embassy in Saigon started the evacuation of South Vietnamese. The former US consul at Can Tho, Wolf Lehman asked for immediate authority on March 26, 1975 and dated the actual evacuation with the baby-lift, on April 3, because they were using it for that purpose.<sup>149</sup> American Ambassador to Vietnam Graham Martin claimed that the airlift “would help reverse the current of American public opinion to the advantage of the Republic of Vietnam.”<sup>150</sup> “Operation Babylift” is the action that Frank Kellogg was concerned with the movement of people out of Vietnam. Though responsibility of Frank Kellogg was normally for assistance within foreign countries, he developed the orphan airlift.<sup>151</sup> The orphans were not refugees, but the administration considered the Babylift as the part of the humanitarian assistance to South Vietnam.<sup>152</sup> This action illustrates ways in which the US humanitarianism works. The US government needed the rescue object to show its performance as humanitarian and hide its South Vietnamese evacuation.<sup>153</sup> Lehman began the evacuation of South Vietnamese on April 3 as the same day of Operation Babylift without any authority from the US government. US embassy in Saigon shipped people to Guam and Subic Bay in the

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<sup>149</sup> Wolf Lehman, “This is the Last Message from Embassy Saigon” in Larry Engelmann, *Tears before the Rain*, 38.

<sup>150</sup> [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/peopleevents/e\\_babylift.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/peopleevents/e_babylift.html)

<sup>151</sup> Louis Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors*, 327.

<sup>152</sup> This is clear because Ford’s statement on US humanitarian assistance to the Republic of Vietnam talks about the orphan airlift. Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, I: 166.

<sup>153</sup> President Gerald Ford made use of the photo opportunity, standing before television cameras on the tarmac at San Francisco airport to meet a plane full of infants and children. [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/peopleevents/e\\_babylift.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/peopleevents/e_babylift.html)

Philippines without knowing what they were going to do next.<sup>154</sup> At the house hearing, the former US ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin testified that on April 25 they got admission of 50,000 high-risk Vietnamese to the US.<sup>155</sup>

Above-mentioned actions were contradictory to what the US government tried to demonstrate for Asian countries and South Vietnam. For example, on March 24, the Department of State sent letters to Asian leaders to assure the US aid to South Vietnam. At the same time, Kissinger delivered the South Vietnamese parliamentarians message that says, “We will not abandon you.”<sup>156</sup> Yet, in the reality, the US government was ready to evacuate their troops and needed extra aid for that. In this process, South Vietnamese became those who were endangered and need to be saved. This is what I mean by the US transforming Vietnamese from allies to refugees. To evacuate US troops safely was the primal goal at the end of the war, so there was no obligation to help South Vietnamese allies. However, there was an obligation to help South Vietnamese refugees who were endangered by North Vietnam. In this way, the context of the Vietnam War in which the US involved completely disappeared and former South Vietnamese became victims of communism.

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<sup>154</sup> Wolf Lehman, “This is the Last Message from Embassy Saigon” in Larry Engelmann, *Tears before the Rain*, 38.

<sup>155</sup> House Committee on International Relations, *Vietnam-Cambodia Emergency, 1975. Part3: Vietnam Evacuation: Testimony of Ambassador Graham A. Martin*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1976, 544.

<sup>156</sup> Attached are letters to all Asian Leaders, Memorandum, March 24, 1975, NSAF, MC, Box 10, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor. Memorandum, Talking Points, Meeting with Six South Vietnamese Parliamentarians and South Vietnamese Labor Leader Trang Quoc Buu, March 3, 1975, NSAF, MC, Box 9, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor. Memorandum for Secretary Kissinger, March 28, 1975, NSAF, MC, Box 10, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.

On March 29, President Ford first mentioned the term “refugees” in reference to South Vietnamese. He states:

A severe emergency exists in the coastal communities of South Vietnam which are swollen with helpless civilian refugees who have fled the North Vietnam offensive. They are desperately in need of any assistance we and other nations can provide.<sup>157</sup>

Thus, Ford ordered American navy to evacuate refugees, and also appointed Daniel Parker, administrator of the Agency for International Development, as his Special Coordinator for Disaster Relief. Viewing South Vietnamese as refugees within their country continued as the situation in South Vietnam worsened. For example, on April 3, Ford started his news conference speech by saying:

We are seeing a great human tragedy as untold numbers of Vietnamese flee the North Vietnamese onslaught. The United States has been doing and will continue to do its utmost to assist these people. I have directed all available naval ships to stand off Indochina to do whatever is necessary to assist.<sup>158</sup>

He emphasized the tragedy of South Vietnamese as follows: “I think it is a great tragedy, what we are seeing in Vietnam today. I think it could have been avoided.”<sup>159</sup> He depicted South Vietnam as a tragedy which the US had to help. Ford kept representing South Vietnamese as those who needed the US. For example, he claimed South Vietnamese as hopeless victims: “I hereby pledge in the name of the American people that the United States will make a maximum humanitarian effort to help care for and feed these hopeless victims.”<sup>160</sup> However, the idea to accept large number of South

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<sup>157</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald R. Ford, 1975*. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977), I: 163

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 166

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 179

Vietnamese people confused the members of the subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives. Chairman of the subcommittee, Joshua Eilberg explains;

Likewise, we are uncertain as to the exact nature of the Attorney General's agreement to parole future orphans into the United States and we are puzzled by a statement made by President Ford last week during a news conference in San Diego.<sup>161</sup>

There was confusion over the Administrative decisions on evacuation in Congress, however, the Ford Administration asked Congress to get military and humanitarian aid to South Vietnam on April 10. With the requests, President Ford addressed to the world about the endangered situation of South Vietnamese as quote as follows.

There are tens of thousands of other South Vietnamese intellectuals, professors, teachers, editors, and opinion leaders who have supported the South Vietnamese cause and alliance with the United States to whom we have profound obligation.<sup>162</sup>

He believed that the US should accept the Vietnamese to own country since US had moral obligation to them.<sup>163</sup> For Ford, the US bore moral obligation to South Vietnamese to stabilize their situation. Therefore, moral obligation required military force. Ford claimed:

I hereby pledge in the name of the American people that the United States will make a maximum humanitarian effort to help care for and feed these helpless victims.

And, now I ask the Congress to clarify immediately its restrictions on the use of US military forces in Southeast Asia for the limited purposes of

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<sup>161</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*, Executive Sessions, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1975, 2.

<sup>162</sup> Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, I: 179.

<sup>163</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, April 14, 1975, NSAF, MC, Box 10, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.



protecting American lives by ensuring their evacuation, if this should be necessary. And I also ask prompt revision of the law to cover those Vietnamese to whom we have a very special obligation and whose lives may be endangered should the worst to pass.<sup>164</sup>

Ford also maintained existence of the US moral obligation to South Vietnamese on April 16.

I think we have an obligation to them. To the extent that I can, under the law, or hopefully if the law is clarified, I think we have responsibility them. But I don't think I ought to talk about an evacuation. I hope we are in a position where we can clarify or stabilize the situation and get a negotiated settlement that wouldn't put their lives in jeopardy.<sup>165</sup>

The administration never negotiates with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) or the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. Thus, the US responsibility for South Vietnamese was not politically bounded one. However, at the same time, the Ford administration desired to have military force to execute mass evacuation of South Vietnamese. Ford mentions; "As you know, I have asked the Congress to clarify my authority as president to send American troops in to bring about the evacuation of friendly South Vietnamese or South Vietnamese that we have an obligation to, or at least I think we do."<sup>166</sup>

Moral obligation also meant the US presence in the world. Ford says; "I think we have an obligation to continue to have a presence in the Pacific, in Latin America, in Africa."<sup>167</sup> Particularly for the future relation with Asia, it was important for the US to obtain the assistance to the South Vietnamese.

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<sup>164</sup> Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, I: 179.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., I: 189.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., I: 204.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., I: 189.

I am also mindful of our posture toward the rest of the world and, particularly, of our future relations with the free nations of Asia. These nations must not think for a minute that the United States is pulling out on them or intends to abandon them to aggression. I have therefore concluded that the national interests of the United States and the cause of world stability require that we continue to give both military and humanitarian assistance to the South Vietnamese.<sup>168</sup>

Ford continued to employ the word “obligation” to explain the reason of need of additional fund and of South Vietnamese evacuation. Because South Vietnamese were ultimate victims of the war. For enactment of the bill, Vietnam Humanitarian Assistance and Evacuation Act, Ford states:

Nevertheless, the enactment of the bill as recommended by the Conference Report is the most expeditious method of obtaining funds which are now desperately needed for the care and transportation of homeless refugees.... As I stated yesterday, the evacuation has been completed. The congress may be assured that I do not intend to send the armed forces of the United States back into Vietnamese territory.<sup>169</sup>

Ford requested the House of Representatives to approve the bill assuring no use of the armed forces. Nonetheless, this bill was rejected. Ford expressed his sadness and anger the next day, on May 1.

I am saddened and disappointed by the action of the House of Representatives today in rejecting assistance to the refugees from South Vietnam.

This action does not reflect the values we cherish as a nation of immigrants. It is not worthy of a people which has lived by the philosophy symbolized in the Statue of Liberty. It reflects fear and misunderstanding rather than charity and compassion.<sup>170</sup>

He had to claim the US as the nation of immigrants to pass the act. And to legitimize receiving refugees as the US tradition, Ford insisted the anticommunist belief of the US.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., I: 179

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., I: 224

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., I: 231.

After World War II, the United States offered a new life to 1,400,000 displaced persons. The generosity of the American people showed again following the Hungarian uprising of 1956, when more than 50,000 Hungarian refugees fled here for sanctuary. And we welcomed more than a half million Cubans fleeing tyranny in their country. Now, other refugees have fled from the Communist takeover in Vietnam. These refugees chose freedom. They do not ask that we be their keepers, but only, for a time, that we be their helpers.<sup>171</sup>

Since there were South Vietnamese who were outside their country, Ford Administration needed the bill to allocate the fund. Nevertheless, even among members of the administration it was not obvious that whether US should receive all the South Vietnamese. For instance, Senator Pell suggested President Ford that they should bring the [South] Vietnamese to Borneo because it is located in the same latitude and similar weather to Vietnam.<sup>172</sup> As the president Ford held that there was the obligation to accept them, why did he suggest Borneo? Pell's suggestion signifies that he did not want to admit the South Vietnamese to the US. What Pell said was inconsistent, since the US wanted to rescue South Vietnamese but did not want them in the US. However, some of members of the administration shared the same stance with him. Thus, where the US resettled South Vietnamese turned into central argument of the evacuation. For instance, a member of the committee Philip Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, expected that by working with international agencies, they would resettle Vietnamese all over the world. He claimed, "They [international agencies] will be able to move them [South Vietnamese] around the globe."<sup>173</sup> The Ford Administration wanted

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., I: 231.

<sup>172</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, April 14, 1975, NSAF, MC, Box 10, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.

<sup>173</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*, Executive Session, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 178-179.

to make South Vietnamese Refugee issue as international problem and hoped to have the UNCHR involvement for its solution. John Thomas, the former chief of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, mentioned the evacuation situation as follows. “However, we have to realize that within the United Nations, there is no section or office that is charged with the refugee situation within a given country.”<sup>174</sup> So unlike Habib imagined above, the US did not move the Vietnamese around the globe.

The Department of State also considered the impact of accepting the Vietnamese to the US society was too huge to handle at once, so asked the US Ambassadors at Manila, Taipei, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore, and Seoul whether they could offer staging areas for refugee evacuation.<sup>175</sup> All answers from the embassies were showing their unwillingness to offer the area even if they just involved temporary in the first stage of the evacuation.<sup>176</sup> Under this circumstance, the Ford administration consolidated refugees in Guam and sent them in US mainland camps. Kissinger said Guam became the only possible staging point in his letter.<sup>177</sup> Guam and the Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines played important role in the evacuation process. These places have been playing important role in the history of US imperialism/colonialism.

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<sup>174</sup> House Committee on Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 75.

<sup>175</sup> Department of State Telegram, NODIS 90485, *Staging Areas for Evacuation of Refugees from South Viet Nam*, April 19, 1975, NSAF, Presidential Country Files For East Asia and the Pacific (PCFEAP), Country File Box 8, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.

<sup>176</sup> Department of State Telegram, NODIS Kuala Lumpur 2108, NODIS Singapore 1596, NODIS Seoul 2711, NODIS Bangkok 6824, NODIS Tokyo 5192, April 19, 1975, NSAF, PCFEAP, Country File Box 12, 16, 11, 18, 8, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor.

<sup>177</sup> Richard Mackie, *Operation Newlife*, 13.

Since 1898, Guam has been “one of the United States’ most important overseas military bases and one of its most official, but least contested, colonial possessions.”<sup>178</sup> The Philippines also was annexed as a colony in 1898, and the US “imposed English as the lingua franca, installed a US-style educational system.”<sup>179</sup> US colonialism continued after its independence in 1946 “through trade, foreign assistance, and military bases.”<sup>180</sup> Use of two places as staging areas for resettlement also shows that how the refugee operation was the military action. Since there was no possibility to resettle the Vietnamese all over the world, and in Asian countries, there was no open hearing for “the Vietnamese refugee evacuation.” There was no explanation for the evacuation.<sup>181</sup> Although the administration did not get any helps from other international organizations, Ford wanted South Vietnamese to resettle in the US, so the Ford Administration decided to resettle South Vietnamese people through their program. The Department of State, US Embassy and the administration arranged the operation without any public and congressional consensus.

As soon as the end of evacuation of Americans, the Ford administration quickly declared the end of the war. Ford claimed to look ahead in the statement on the evacuation of American Personnel from South Vietnam on April 29,

This action closes a chapter in the American experience. I ask all

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<sup>178</sup> Michael Lujan Bevacqua, “The Materiality and Fantasy of Empire: The Case of Guam” Presented in the Global Studies Association—North America, University of California, Irvine, May 17, 2007.

<sup>179</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 23.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>181</sup> “Because if you get into this kind of discussion in open session you create concerns and fears on the part of the people concerned.” Senate Committee on Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems Part2: The Evacuation*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 23.

Americans to close ranks, to avoid recrimination about the past, to look ahead to the many goals we share, and to work together on the great tasks that remain to be accomplished.<sup>182</sup>

On May 6, at the News Conference, Ford also maintained the same attitude, let us forget the past and look ahead together.

...The war in Vietnam is over. It was sad and tragic in many respects. I think it would be unfortunate for us to rehash allegations as to individuals that might be to blame or administrations that might be at fault. It seems to me that it's over. We ought to look ahead, and think a Congressional inquiry at this time would only be divisive, not helpful.<sup>183</sup>

Forgetting the past meant erasing the Vietnam War and rewriting US history. Ford narrated US history, as the US has been a humanitarian nation:

We are a country built by immigrants from all areas of the world, and we have always been a humanitarian nation.<sup>184</sup>

Thus, incorporating South Vietnamese became the part of US project for the future. Ford remarked upon establishing the President's Advisory Committee on Refugees, on May 19:

In one way or another, all of us are immigrants. And the strength of America over the years has been our diversity, diversity of all kinds of variations—religion, ethnic, and otherwise....

The people [South Vietnamese] that we are welcoming today—the individuals who are on Guam or in Camp Pendleton or Eglin Air Force Base—are individuals who can contribute significantly to our society in the future. They are people of talent, they are industrious, they are individuals who want freedom, and I believe they will make a contribution now and in the future to a better America.

... Sixty-five percent of those who are coming are children. They deserve a better chance. They deserve the warmth and the friendship which typical of America.

Ford renarrated America as humanitarian nation, through the refugee operation. In his view, the context of the Vietnam War in which the US involved completely disappeared

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<sup>182</sup> Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, I: 221.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., I: 243.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., I: 243.

and former South Vietnamese became victims of communism. Thus, the US turns into rescuer. In the conclusion of the initial resettlement program for Indochina refugees (former South Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees), Ford affirms this stance.

Eight months ago, I initiated a program designed to open America's doors to refugees from Indochina seeking a new life... This demonstration of strength will continually reinforce the refugees as they begin their journey toward becoming fully self-sufficient and contributing members of our Nation's communities.

Initial fears that the refugees would become an ongoing problem are now allayed. The refugees have proven themselves to be hard-working and industrious people with a thirst for education and a deep-stated desire to improve themselves. I am confident that they will follow the example of former immigrants who have so richly contributed to the character and strength of the American system. The warmth and generosity that have characterized the welcome that Americans have given to the refugees serve as a reaffirmation of American awareness of the roots and the ideals of our society.<sup>185</sup>

Refugees were turned into immigrants and were differentially included into US society.

There was no image of war refugee anymore.

### Conclusion

Above-mentioned administrative rhetoric for emphasizing the US as ideal nation implied that the US suffered the loss of the war, since the US government had to appeal itself as the strong nation. Loss of the Vietnam War had a huge impact for US government to position itself in the world. To maintain its leadership, the Ford Administration minimized the defeat and maximized the good image of the US. President Ford explained on May 6 as below.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., I: 746.

We do get reactions from foreign governments wondering what our position will be, asking where we will go and what our policy will be. We have indicated to our friends that we will maintain our commitments. We understand the perception that some countries may have as a result of the setback in South Vietnam. But that perception is not a reality, because the United States is strong militarily. The United States is strong economically, despite our current problems. And we are going to maintain our leadership on a worldwide basis. And we want our friends to know that we will stand by them, and we want any potential adversaries to know that we will stand up to them.<sup>186</sup>

Thus, the rescue narrative of the Ford Administration was for US geopolitical position. As I elucidate above, through US evacuation of South Vietnamese the US turned South Vietnamese into from allies to refugees. However, every former South Vietnamese or Indochinese did not get “refugee” status especially after October 31, 1975. That was the final date for refugees who left Indochina by their own means and in the third countries into the US controlled resettlement system in 1975. It was estimated that time that there were about 80,000 Indochina refugees in Thailand and a small number in other countries in Southeast Asia.<sup>187</sup> In sum, the US government did not help all the refugees, but rather, managed and controlled some of them through its resettlement process. Therefore, I will examine that process as governmentality in the next chapter.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., I: 243.

<sup>187</sup> Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Task Force for Indochina Refugees, *Report to Congress*, June 15, 1976, 618.



## Chapter Two: Governmentality of Refugee Camp

About 130,000 South Vietnamese people were accepted into the US as parolees from right before the Fall of Saigon to December 31, 1975. Ford established the Interagency Task Force (IATF) on Indochinese Refugees under the direction of the Department of State and chaired by Ambassador Dean Brown, to coordinate the evacuation and resettlement on 18 April 1975.<sup>188</sup> Originally the Department of State and Ambassador in South Vietnam Dean Brown established IATF. IATF was composed of twelve federal agencies including the departments of State, Defense, Health, Education and Welfare, Housing and Urban Development; and Justice and Labor.<sup>189</sup> However, main actors of IATF were the Department of State and the Department of Defense in the early stage of evacuation and resettlement. The US army was involved in not just the evacuation but also the resettlement until June 1, 1976.<sup>190</sup> The Ford administration ordered the Department of Defense to set up refugee camps around the Pacific and US mainland.

Operations New Life/ Arrivals were to be run by designated civilian agencies, but the civilian agencies could not handle the processing by itself. Accordingly, the Army

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<sup>188</sup> IATF is managed later under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) with Julia Taft as the director. Department of the Army, *After Action Report: Operations New Life/ New Arrivals US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program*, 1 April 1975- 1 June 1976, ix.

<sup>189</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 64. Kelly does not mention about the department of defense, however, according to *After Action Report*, the Department of Defense played important role.

<sup>190</sup> Department of the Army, *After Action Report: Operations New Life/ New Arrivals US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program*, 1 April 1975- 1 June 1976, I-D-6

filled the gap with military personnel for setting and managing the camps.<sup>191</sup> Besides, the chief administrative officers of each camp, who were responsible for management of each camp, were mostly State Department careerists who worked in Vietnam.<sup>192</sup> There were Vietnamese assistants in the camps; however, they had little authority of their own, since IATF in Washington set overall policy for resettlement and the senior coordinator implemented the policy.<sup>193</sup> Considering involvements of the Department of State and Defense to the Operations New Life/ Arrivals, its resettlement process was military action.

However, earlier studies on Vietnamese refugees describes the resettlement as an “American altruism in the form of the costliest and most comprehensive resettlement program in the history of the United States,”<sup>194</sup> or “collective altruism, then, was the hallmark of those initial years.”<sup>195</sup> Through accepting refugees, the US claimed itself as a moral nation and refuge. As I explained in chapter one, Ford renarrated America as humanitarian nation, through the refugee operation. In his view, the context of the Vietnam War in which the US involved completely disappeared and former South Vietnamese became victims of communism. Nonetheless, refugees were turned into immigrants and were differentially included into US society. South Vietnamese refugees were controlled and managed by the US government through refugee camps. It was not altruism but rather militarism that made the resettlement of the refugees of the Operations New Life/ Arrivals possible. As I noted in chapter one, US society did not want to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 65.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 64-5, 74.

<sup>194</sup> Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans*, 68.

<sup>195</sup> Paul Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America*, 41.

receive them. Thus, the Ford administration designed the whole resettlement processes simply to meet the needs of the moment and to prioritize the conditions of US society. Operations New Life/Arrivals deeply depended upon racial politics and had goals to scatter South Vietnamese so that they would not be able to create a strong ethnic community and become a “public charge.”<sup>196</sup> Resettlement did not take place at once. Most South Vietnamese refugees went through the processing centers in Guam or Wake Island, and then refugee camps in the mainland US: Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. Even though the US government dispersed refugees throughout the country, receiving them proved the US as refuge.

The purpose of the refugee camps was to screen out those who did not have enough money and to find sponsors for them in order to facilitate their movement out of the camps, reducing the possibility of refugees becoming immediate public charges.<sup>197</sup> This is what Jack Derrida explicates how refuge is controlled by a state. He writes: “It is under the control of the demographico-econommic interest—that is, the interest of the nation-state that regulates asylum.”<sup>198</sup> He remarks on police power which becomes powerful force to regulate asylees and refugees as, “the police become omnipresent and spectral in the so-called civilized states once they undertake to make the law.”<sup>199</sup> Police

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<sup>196</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian American through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993)

<sup>197</sup> According to IATF, the purpose of the camps was to see to it “that the possibility of their [the refugees] becoming a public charge is reduced.” Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 62.

<sup>198</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Mark Dooley and Michael Huges, trans. (London: Routledge, 2001), 11-12.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

maintains the line of demarcation of “us” and “them.” Thus, cosmopolitics or hospitality has been politicized by nation-state. As Derrida writes, there has never been the law of hospitality in the concept of citizenship: “The motives behind such a policy of opening up to the foreigner have, however, never been ‘ethical’ *stricto sensu*—in the sense of the moral law or the law of the land (*séjour*)—(ethos), or, indeed, the law of hospitality.”<sup>200</sup> Derrida proposes that accepting a refugee has to be unconditionally welcome.

As Derrida critiques, refuge is highly controlled by nation-state. The US controls refuge through Operations New Life/ Arrivals. It was conditional welcome. South Vietnamese refugee camps were highly racialized and militarized space for South Vietnamese refugees. In this chapter, I would like to reconsider the resettlement process as regulation of refuge by the US government. How did the US government regulate asylum? How did the resettlement process actually take place? What functions did the refugee camps serve for the refugees themselves? Accepting South Vietnamese was a political act that defined the US as “refuge” and forgot the Vietnam War in which the US as an aggressor. What actually happened that made the US as “refuge” was managing South Vietnamese refugees. I want to emphasize that “refuge” does not naturally exist but rather something that needs to be constructed. To become “refuge” the US needed refugee camps and racial politics. Army-run refugee camps provided tremendous advantage for the US government to control and manage the refugees.

There are two distinctive views on South Vietnamese refugee camp. Sociologist Gail Paradise Kelly explains the refugee camp as the place where South Vietnamese refugees become immigrants. She claims that once a refugee is finished with processing,

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 10.

then s/he became immigrant.<sup>201</sup> Kelly views refugee camp as space that transforms South Vietnamese to immigrants, since South Vietnamese had to adjust to American way of life regardless of whether they wanted or not. I do not agree with her view that refugee instantly becomes immigrant through processing, since Kelly's work lacks analysis of functions of the refugee camps which controlled and managed bodies of refugees until they release them. Other sociologists such as Liu et al. think refugee camp was the "midway to nowhere" as Kunz E.F. refers the refugees' condition before they become immigrants of host country as the no man's land.<sup>202</sup> Since most refugees had to get sponsor to leave the camps and resettle in the US, I suggest that their view of the camp also fail to consider the governmentality of the camps. Refugee camps were neither a no man's land as Kunz and Liu et al. explain nor a transit space where refugees automatically get into the society as immigrants as Kelly described.

The refugee camp is an ex-legal/ ex-national space where technology of government takes place. Refugee becomes object of the host countries. Through processing, teaching and sponsorship, IATF managed refugees into assimilable provisional immigrant subjects. Thus, I will make governmentality of the camp visible in this chapter. Refugee camp was not a "refuge" but temporary space where "differential inclusion" took place. Since camp residents lacked stability and permanence, they needed to be included as provisional immigrants to a host country. Yen Le Espiritu writes: "The process of inclusion, for racialized groups, simultaneously means legal

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<sup>201</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 83.

<sup>202</sup> Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 80-81.

subordination, economic exploitation, and cultural degradation.”<sup>203</sup> Those were what actually happened in the refugee camps. I will examine processing, sponsorship and educational programs as legal subordination, economic exploitation and cultural degradation. In refugee camps, South Vietnamese refugees were not South Vietnamese anymore, and they became political pawn and labor force for the US government.

### The Processing and the Refugees’ (In)Decisions

By May 31, 1976, IATF processed 138,869 refugees from former Indochina.<sup>204</sup> 129,792 people resettled in the US, 6,632 people resettled into third countries, and 1,546 people repatriated to Vietnam.<sup>205</sup> Most of the people who resettled in the third countries went to Canada and France. There were only four ways that the refugees could leave the camps; by seeking and getting third country resettlement through the embassy of that third country; by seeking repatriation; by showing a family’s ability to be immediately self-supporting with proof of cash reserve of at least \$4000 per family member; or by finding an American sponsor—either a resident alien, citizen, or group of citizens willing to undertake fiscal and moral responsibility until the refugee became self-supporting.<sup>206</sup> Among those who settled in the US, only 8,000 to 10,000 South Vietnamese were able to resettle without sponsors. As much as 114,871 people resettled through Voluntary

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<sup>203</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 48.

<sup>204</sup> This number included Cambodians and Laotians, but it was mainly South Vietnamese. Department of the Army, *After Action Report: Operations New Life/ New Arrivals US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program*, 1 April 1975- 1 June 1976, ix.

<sup>205</sup> The number includes births (822) and deaths (77). Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 129.

Resettlement Agencies (VOLAGs) which arranged the sponsorship, and less than 5,000 people got state and local government sponsorship. Most of the refugees got sponsorship through VOLAGs. Therefore, the camps were space where South Vietnamese refugees had to work to find sponsors.

In refugee camps, people were processed and registered by the US government. The refugee camps were space of governmentality where South Vietnamese refugees became objects of management by the US government. In Guam, refugees were assigned identification numbers. In US mainland camps, refugees went through two screenings. For every refugee by filling out their information on MCBCP-3305/4 (5-75) commonly known as ADP ID card, US Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) collected information such as family size, last place of residence, job skills, religion, place of birth, the amount of money they had.<sup>207</sup> ADP ID cards were forwarded to the Department of Defense, Department of State, CIA, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and FBI to do security checks on each refugee.<sup>208</sup> HEW provided refugees with immunizations, x-rays, TB tests and examinations by a doctor.<sup>209</sup> The US government paid medical attention to refugees to prevent disease. This particular process relies on a larger racialized discourse that imagines refugees' bodies as foreign and diseased. For example, in Guam, there was a fear that refugees might cause Dengue fever epidemic. Thus, the US government started dengue prevention program there. Richard Mackie who involved the program remembers:

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 80

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

One of my mosquito control personnel was interviewed by a major TV network and he talked about the Dengue problem among the refugees. When this interview was aired in the US, the people living near the relocation camps in the states started protesting. They didn't want a bunch of diseased refugees near them.<sup>210</sup>

As his expression depicts, refugees' bodies were viewed as diseased and supposed to be controlled. Their bodies mattered because the US public was afraid to be contaminated. Therefore, it was not until the screenings were over that refugees were assigned social security numbers and alien numbers.<sup>211</sup>

Indochinese refugees had to go through the refugee camps in Pacific staging area to get to the US main refugee camps. It took a long time for the refugees to get to refugee camps in the US mainland. For instance, according to Liu et al., it took an average of 50.32 days to travel from Vietnam to Camp Pendleton.<sup>212</sup> They write: "The most frequently used route was from Vietnam to the Philippines to Guam to Camp Pendleton—41.1 percent traveled it; 18.6 percent went from Vietnam making just one stop in Guam before reaching Camp Pendleton. About 32 percent traveled to Camp Pendleton stopping in the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island."<sup>213</sup> In every camp, South Vietnamese refugees had to decide to resettle in the United States or another country, or return to Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. As the refugee camps were designed for processing the people to the US or other countries, they had to decide where to resettle. South Vietnamese refugees had three choices: to resettle in the US, to resettle in another

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<sup>210</sup> Richard Mackie, *Operation Newlife*, 44.

<sup>211</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 80.

<sup>212</sup> The shortest amount of time was three days; the longest, 122 days. The mean number of stops from Vietnam to Camp Pendleton was four. The number of stops ranged from one to seven. Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 80.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



country, or to go back to Vietnam. Nonetheless, the choice to go back was no choice at all because those who left their country faced the impossibility of a return to South Vietnam no longer there. Through the processing in refugee camps, South Vietnamese refugees faced impossibility of return to South Vietnam.

Soon after the processing process started, some South Vietnamese expressed their will to return. In Guam, some evacuees insisted that they never intended to leave Vietnam and wished to go back immediately.<sup>214</sup> 17 refugees claimed that they wanted to come back to Vietnam in Camp Pendleton in May 1975.<sup>215</sup> Around the same period, in Fort Chaffee, a South Vietnamese refugee Le Minh Tan organized the movement to go back to Vietnam. He said he did not know whether he would be killed if he returned home to Vietnam or not, but he wanted to go back because he could not face life in the United States without his family.<sup>216</sup> This quote also shows how the choice is really not a choice at all because the man said he does not know whether he will be killed or not. It is also not a choice because they no longer have a country to go back to. Nevertheless, on October 16, the *Thuong Tin I* left Guam with 1,546 people aboard.<sup>217</sup>

First of all, neither the US State Department nor the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry was keen on the idea of the issue of repatriation.<sup>218</sup> They did not communicate each other on the issue. UNHCR wanted to wait until new authorities in the South of Vietnam established so that the repatriation would be taken care of by Vietnam. However, as the

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<sup>214</sup> William Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 19.

<sup>215</sup> *Thong Bao*, No. 9, May 21, 1975.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, No.11 May 23, 1975.

<sup>217</sup> William Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 19.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

list of would-be returnees, many of them former military, grew to nearly 2,000 in June,<sup>219</sup>

Julia Vadala Taft, former director of the IATF realized that she needed to send them back.

They [refugees demanding repatriation] were demonstrating, making Molotov cocktails, threatening to cut off their fingers and mail them to President Ford. It was a mess. Finally, I decided that our program was intended to bring people voluntary. We could not make them stay. We had this Vietnamese cargo ship, the Thuong Tin I and decided we would put them on. The State Department was not pleased and neither was UNHCR.<sup>220</sup>

As her recollection explains, the US government did not plan any repatriation for awhile, since the IATF did not expect people who demand to go back. This signifies that the US government or the IATF expected South Vietnamese evacuees to resettle somewhere other than Vietnams. The US government and IATF presumed that resettlement was the only practical solution for South Vietnamese refugees to compensate their loss of citizenship, since they did not have country to go back.

South Vietnamese political instability also complicated the idea of return. It was not only the Department of State and UNCHR but also some South Vietnamese who were not contented for the repatriation. They critiqued those who wished to return by calling them communists. However, Le Minh Tan denied the criticism that maintained demonstrators were communists. He said; “If we were communists, we would never come to the US or if we were communists, we would stay in the US and send information back to VN. We are not communists. We just love our country and want to return.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> *Thong Bao*, No. 29, June 19, 1975.

<sup>220</sup> William Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 19.

<sup>221</sup> Pham Kim Vinh, *The Politics of Selfishness: Vietnam-the Past as Prologue* (San Diego: Privately Printed, 1977), 130.

But, his action was politically judged as pro-communist. South Vietnamese exile Pham

Kim Vinh writes,

Le Minh Tan was former fire inspector for the US defense attaché office in Saigon. He must understand at least as much as many other refugees that he fled South VN because of the communist inhuman policies. He must understand also that the communists never forgive those who have cooperated with the Americans.<sup>222</sup>

Vinh points out that South Vietnamese refugees were people who fled from communism.

The idea of going back to the country without consideration of this political situation

upset him. Pham Kim Vinh also mentioned that one of the many aspects of the refugee problem largely exploited by the communists is the repatriation.

As one probes further in to the problem of repatriation, it is obvious that the communist agents are making increasing efforts to turn the problem into an international scandal to hurt the prestige of the US and to attempt to gain international sympathy for the new regime in Saigon... Requests for repatriation hurt the political cause of the evacuation. Pro-communist people tended to claim that the refugees were forced by the US to come to the US. But the tactics used by the requesters up now proved that they are very much like the political struggle tactics of the communists.<sup>223</sup>

Since after the Fall of Saigon, South Vietnamese no longer had their own government to rely on for their return or resettlement, their choice for their future was not only personal but also political. One unnamed refugee at Fort Indian Town Gap claimed:

Government of Saigon is not concerned about us... [They] do not allow us to return... how we dare return. Evacuees should not agree with new Saigon government.<sup>224</sup>

South Vietnamese political instability complicated the idea of going back home. Their home could not exist outside of the political domain. Their action, or even their desire, to

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>224</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.53, Oct 31, 1975.

return could be judged as pro-communist, as two Vietnams were about to unite in November 1975, and it was seen as a communist government. A former South Vietnamese soldier in Fort Indian Town Gap said: “It seems like, for now, that two sides unite, thus I think it is the communist government.”<sup>225</sup> Thus, for some people their government was no longer there so that they considered that their homeland was lost.

Many South Vietnamese refugees left their family members or got separated in the middle of their evacuations. Therefore, some of them wanted to go back home for their families. A South Vietnamese refugee, Thay Duc, in Fort Indian Town Gap sympathized with people who wanted to go back. He told,

I say I will not go back to Vietnam unless the political situation there is changed. Now the communist is in power...I don't think their choice is political...vast of [their] families are still in Vietnam...so they come back for the sake of their families not for the political choice.<sup>226</sup>

Because many of the refugees left their families and friends, South Vietnamese in camps knew the situation in Vietnams. For example, Nguyen Ting Duc mentioned that there was famine in South Vietnam, thus he was worried about his mother and his six sisters. He said that, “We are very lonely in the US.”<sup>227</sup> This was also an issue of divided families, because if they could not leave South Vietnam as one entire family, they were separated. In the process of evacuation, many South Vietnamese lost their family members. Thus, resettlement in the US was thought to be temporary as Dr. Dao explains.

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<sup>225</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.57: Three former soldiers, Nov 20-21, 1975.

<sup>226</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.16: Thay Duc, Oct. 15, 1975.

<sup>227</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.32: Nguyen Ting Duc, Oct. 30, 1975.

They [Vietnamese] aren't going back home now... When the situation is clear, we may have a hope to go back to Vietnam. Because none of us have feeling that we are not able to be away from home forever.<sup>228</sup>

Longing for home was strongly expressed in camps, but the longing must be contextualized within a politically-charged climate of the changing of regimes in the old country that made the decision to leave, to resettle, or to repatriate more than individual choices. They had to decide by themselves to return or not to return. Since there was no South Vietnam anymore, the choice is whether to go back to a Communist Vietnam or not. One South Vietnamese refugee clearly stated that if the communist system stayed, he would not return, because the communist killed his father.<sup>229</sup> The refugees' choices were circumscribed by the questions of loyalty to one's nation and the uncertainty of their fates under a new communist regime. The personal was political in the camps. Since the processing was to resettle South Vietnamese to another country, their personal became political. Thus, refugee camps were politicized space for them.

#### System of Sponsorship as Economic Exploitation

South Vietnamese who were in refugee camps, had to deal with their situation, politically, socially, economically, and psychologically. If they were not going back, they had to resettle somewhere. Except the people who went back by Thuong Tin I, all of South Vietnamese who were in camps resettled somewhere. When South Vietnamese refugees made up their minds to resettle in the US, they had to fulfill the US

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<sup>228</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.39: Dr. Dao, Oct 31, 1975.

<sup>229</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.54 T.V.D., Oct 17, 1975.

governmental criteria. As I noted before, Indochinese refugees who were not family members of US citizens or were not financially qualified, could not officially enter the US without sponsorship. To resettle in the US, they had to register with a resettlement agency to get sponsorship.<sup>230</sup> The Ford administration claimed that accepting Indochinese refugees is moral responsibility. However, the resettlement process, especially sponsorship system reveals that it was South Vietnamese responsibility to find sponsor to prove themselves as self-sufficient. The US government shifted its responsibility of resettlement onto South Vietnamese refugees. Basically the US government made resettlement process as South Vietnamese self-help efforts.

As I explained in chapter one, due to the hectic evacuation, South Vietnamese could not escape as a whole extended family or with their friends, so that refugee camps became meeting places for them. Refugee camp was a space to reunite for South Vietnamese with their friends and family members. Jackie Bong-Wright illustrated the circumstance:

The camp had become a massive fair. People roamed around looking for their lost husbands, wives, or other relatives who had become separated from them fleeing country.<sup>231</sup>

As more people arrived, families and friends were able to bring news and initiate reunions. The issue of divided family in camps was a huge problem for refugees. Many wanted to wait for other family members or friends to come. One of problems of sponsorship was related to South Vietnamese family size, because it was difficult to place extended family. Especially when families arrived in the US evenly, as they escaped

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<sup>230</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 81.

<sup>231</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud*, 213-4.

separately, they wanted to reunite and resettle.<sup>232</sup> Many South Vietnamese waited for their family members in refugee camps. It was not only family members but also friends that refugees wanted to stay close to. Cindy Jensen from International Rescue Committee (IRC) stated that some refugees wanted “group” sponsors.<sup>233</sup> Liu et al. mention: “A great deal of concern was expressed about leaving other Vietnamese with whom they had regrouped in the camp and know well enough to call companions is crisis.”<sup>234</sup> The refugee camp was as a place to reorganize and disrupt ideals of heteronormative families, as refugees lose loved ones but also remake their social groups, redefining who constitute “kin.”

Solidarity among refugees, which formed or reformed in the camps, was often broken up by sponsorship. Vietnamese American scholar, Hien Duc Do explained ways in which sponsorship broke family and social network as follows.

The extended family network that existed in their homeland was temporarily broken by migration. In order to find churches, social organizations, families and individuals that were willing to sponsor the Vietnamese refugees, many Vietnamese extended families were broken-up. Only immediate family members were allowed to stay together. In addition, many of the social networks that formed while they were abandoning their homeland as well as in refugee camps were also temporarily disrupted.<sup>235</sup>

As he writes, the most significant change that the US government demanded for the refugees through their sponsorship was the structure of family. To get sponsor, the size of a family had to be no more than seven people.<sup>236</sup> The US government rather tried to

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<sup>232</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tony Newman, Box.9.

<sup>233</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Cindy Jensen, Box.9.

<sup>234</sup> Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 153.

<sup>235</sup> Hien Duc Do, *The Formation of a New Refugee Community*, 36

<sup>236</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.31, Oct. 31, 1975.

break up Vietnamese extended family structure than tried to reserve their family size. Resettlement policies promoted and enforced heteronormative notions of family through sponsorship.

However, most South Vietnamese who evacuated did not know that they needed to get sponsorship to get out of the refugee camps. When they entered the refugee camps, they either chose or were assigned a VOLAG which would handle their resettlement.<sup>237</sup> South Vietnamese could request sponsors if they knew them. If they did not know any US citizen for their sponsorship, they had to accept one from a VOLAG to get out the camps. For many South Vietnamese in camp, it was difficult to contact others who were outside the camps. For example, Jackie Bong-Wright did not bring many addresses or phone numbers with her. She left South Vietnam on April 24 on a C130 flight, arrived in the Philippines and was there for a week, after that, in Guam. Jackie Bong-Wright recalled her situation,

More and more refugees arrived, and all of us kept waiting. I wrote to friends at the State Department, but it was not easy to get an answer. There was no incoming mail yet, and no phones were available to us—unless we went to certain place and had enough quarters to call long distance. There were long lines day and night at the phone booth. I knew people in the United States, but I had few addresses or telephone numbers.<sup>238</sup>

It was inconvenient for many who were in the camp to make contact with someone outside. One thing that she was able to do was write letters to friends and wait for their reply.

Twelve days passed, and I had not heard from anyone, so I went to the processing center to see how we could get out of the camp. I was told that

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<sup>237</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 136.

<sup>238</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud*, 210-11.



no one could go anywhere unless sponsored out by an American.... What was I going to do with three young children? How was I going to live? What kind of work was I going to get?<sup>239</sup>

By asking how to get out, she found out that she could not go anywhere unless she was sponsored by Americans. It was so difficult to get sponsorship that some refugees thought that it should not be their responsibility, but rather the US government's responsibility to provide sponsors. For instance, a South Vietnamese refugee claimed "[there is] responsibility for the US government to sponsor [us]."<sup>240</sup>

Bong-Wright fortunately met her acquaintances in camp and asked him to sponsor her out of the camp. They went to the processing center together. Bong-Wright did not know how sponsorship worked, until the staff there explained to her.

He [a staff at the processing center] also explained that we had to satisfy certain criteria; an American could only petition for a refugee as a member of his family or his household.... The man explained that a household member could be a servant or a chauffeur who worked for an American family. I did not belong in those categories either but could think of no other way out. After reflecting a while, half-serious, half-joking, I asked whether Julio would mind sponsoring me out as his servant.... Julio flushed, 'Oh, Mrs. Bong, I would not dare!' he exclaimed. But what else could I do? I did not want to be stuck in the camp forever.<sup>241</sup>

Since she did not want to stay at the camp anymore, she asked her friend to sign her paper to get out. What the man at the processing center explained illustrated the whole concept of sponsorship. Sponsorship was designed for the US government to absorb South Vietnamese in the refugee camps. South Vietnamese refugees (except who were immediate family member of US citizen) had to become servants or chauffeurs. Bong-Wright did not complain it because there was no other way to get out the camp. She had

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>240</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tape no.53: Unnamed man, Oct 31, 1975.

<sup>241</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud*, 211-12.

to accept to be a servant. She was able to get out of the camp in Guam, but then ended up in a camp in California. “Two days later, the children and I boarded a plane for California, with over a hundred other refugees.”<sup>242</sup> She arrived in Camp Pendleton, the largest camp in the US main land. Bong-Wright had to wait again in there.

I had written to some of my American friends, but I had heard from no one. The latest news was that refugees could be sponsored by voluntary organizations if they had no family in the United States. After six weeks of being moved from one camp to another, I had become wary.<sup>243</sup>

Her recollection explains how the system of sponsorship was installed without any consensus with South Vietnamese. As Bong-Wright described, refugees who were not family members of US citizens had to wait until sponsorships were available for them. Sponsorship required fiscal and moral responsibility of a US resident, citizen, or group of citizens that insure the refugees “do not become public charge[s].”<sup>244</sup> A sponsor had to provide food, clothes, and shelter for the refugees until they became self-sufficient. All costs of living of refugees after the camps were thrown on individuals and organizations. Thus, sponsorship often turned into employment possibilities. Kelly explains that the lack of government financing of the refugees increased the possibility of exploitation at the hands of their sponsors, and led to sponsorship tied to contract labor.<sup>245</sup> The IATF did not have any procedures for safeguarding refugees against exploitation in the sponsorship program, but also promoted job-related resettlement venues for the refugees,

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<sup>242</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 212

<sup>243</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud*, 215-216.

<sup>244</sup> Council of Volunteer Agencies Camp Pendleton “Sponsorship Information,” Vietnamese Immigration Collection.

<sup>245</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 133.

which often paid less than minimum wage.<sup>246</sup> Tony Newman from Hebrew Immigrant Aid Service complained about sponsors “shopping” around the camp or looking for “domestics.”<sup>247</sup> There was an obvious commodification of the refugees as cheap, exploitable labor. Newman also critiques the “ordering” of sponsorship, with community sponsors who merely “line them up and ship them out.”<sup>248</sup> The concept of sponsorship itself was problematic in a sense that the refugees became assets of US society. As I explained before, South Vietnamese did not have their own government to rely on, so that in the process of resettlement, they had to become work force to prove their self-sufficiency to get out refugee camps. Otherwise, they did not have any place to go.

Turning down sponsorship was possible until August 1975.<sup>249</sup> For example, Cindy Jensen from IRC described a South Vietnamese who kept turning down sponsorship, in part on grounds that s/he wanted her/his friends to sponsor near her/him, or didn’t like prospective job. Although it was possible, rejecting sponsorship was not widely accepted by IATF. For instance, Jensen from IRC thought that turning down sponsorships indicated the refugee’s basic fear of leaving camp.<sup>250</sup> She considered that refugees had fear of getting out from the camps because they did not know life outside of the camps. This was typical view that many people who worked to help the refugees to find sponsorship shared. They didn’t understand the importance of kinship or friendship for refugees.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 144-5

<sup>247</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tony Newman, Box.9.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 139.

<sup>250</sup> “Fear of unknown is a lot worse than living here in camp.” Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Cindy Jensen, Box9.

Since the refugees could not reject sponsorship offers after August 1975,<sup>251</sup> they had to accept sponsor offer which usually less than minimum wage labor. In this way, the refugee camps became apparently cheap labor pool for US society. IATF authorities wanted to resettle the refugees quickly and cheaply, as they more concerned about the cost that the camps needed than how refugees resettled.<sup>252</sup> Consequently, in September 1975, ITAF set forty-five days limit for each resettlement agency to find sponsors for a refugee and get him/ her out of the camp. Of course, this was a way to speed up sponsorship process. One caseworker commented this situation as a “number game from the army’s standpoint and from the civilians’.”<sup>253</sup> From the standpoints of ITAF and VOLAGs, it was really hard to find sponsorship for the refugees. Jack Harmon from YMCA was disappointed in the general reaction of the American public in September 1975. He complained about how hard it was to convince even his own church to take on South Vietnamese.<sup>254</sup> Tony Newman from Hebrew Immigrant Aid Service also mentioned liberals were not interested in sponsoring military or others involved in war because of their conscience.<sup>255</sup> These difficulties ironically permitted IATF to resettle the refugees based on cost efficacy rather than the refugees’ needs.

Since the resettlement process did not care much about refugees’ needs, there were a lot of South Vietnamese troubles with sponsors. Liu et al. elucidates, “trouble with sponsors was the most frequently cited cause of problems in camp.”<sup>256</sup> Sometimes,

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<sup>251</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 139.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>254</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Jack Harmon, Box 9.

<sup>255</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tony Newman, Box 9.

<sup>256</sup> Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 105.

resettled refugees complained that sponsors were not feeding them well.<sup>257</sup> Cindy Jensen from IRC said that 35% of resettled refugees called back. The major problems South Vietnamese were calling in included food or lack of jobs. They complained that they have “been sitting around the house doing nothing,” and the sponsor was not coming through with promised help.<sup>258</sup> However, the goal of the refugee camps was to resettle refugees quickly and cheaply, and thus there was no system of support in place for the people who left the camps. There was a huge gap between the ideal of the US as a place of refuge and actual resettlement policy. Although the US government claimed itself as humanitarian nation by accepting South Vietnamese refugees, it promoted self-help ethic through sponsorship so that the refugees had to work as soon as they left camps. For South Vietnamese refugees, refugee camp was not a place of refuge but a place to admit their status as immigrant. Refugee camp also served as a space for (re)uniting and separation for South Vietnamese refugees at the same time. The refugees had to negotiate with this contradiction by themselves. They had to negotiate the conditions of loss and (re)unite and displacement through and against the regulatory processes imposed upon them by the state.

### Educational Programs as Tools of Assimilation

As I wrote, the purpose of the camps was to screen out those who did not have enough money and to find sponsors for them in order to facilitate their movement out of

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<sup>257</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Cindy Jensen, Box.9.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

the camps, reducing the possibility of refugees becoming immediate public charges.<sup>259</sup>

The US government did not allow those refugees who did not have enough money to prove their financial stability to leave the camps. Financial ability determined whether South Vietnamese refugees could leave or not. In addition to that, South Vietnamese who needed to be sponsored usually had to change their family size to include only the nuclear family. Considering the camps offered educational programs for the refugees, camps were designed as space for turning the refugees into assimilable subjects.

Refugee camps provided educational programs to assimilate South Vietnamese into American society. There were educational programs and cultural orientation programs for school-aged children and adults, including standardized educational programs like “Survival English” and “Transition America” for all camps, but each camp developed own programs as well. “Survival English” was an adult education program employed until late August. It consisted of sixteen lessons in all and focused on “survival” to teach the bare minimum of English skills necessary for functioning in the US.<sup>260</sup> For example, each lesson introduced vocabulary, sentences and phrases, usually in the form of a conversation between a “Mr. Brown” and “Mr. Jones.” “Transition America” was three-hour classes for refugees who found sponsors and were about to leave the camps. It was supposed to supply the minimum of “practical” information its organizers thought necessary for South Vietnamese to have about America.<sup>261</sup> For example, how to get a job and what kind of job to expect, how to find housing, differences between American and

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<sup>259</sup> According to IATF, the purpose of the camps was to see to it “that the possibility of their [the refugees] becoming a public charge is reduced.” Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 62.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Vietnamese family structures, and whom to rely on in case of emergency.<sup>262</sup> It was particularly important for IATF and sponsors that teach South Vietnamese to understand that many social services such as medical care and financial assistance were government-provided rather than family-provided.<sup>263</sup> There were other English language programs for children and adult and cultural orientation programs for adult. Schooling for children was small portion of the whole compared to adult educational programs. Both those programs were designed for learning English and American culture. According to Gail Paradise Kelly, cultural orientation programs were vocational classes like home economics class and orientation sessions called “Transition America.”<sup>264</sup> These English classes and other educational programs in the camps tried to set the term on which South Vietnamese would adjust to the US society. Especially adult education and cultural orientation programs were job-oriented so that the refugees would be able to be self-sufficient and off-welfare.

Nonetheless, people who provided programs assumed that educational programs would reduce refugees’ culture shock and trauma. For instance, education coordinators in Camp Pendleton Ingram and Anderson believed that the refugee camp reduced culture shock and trauma of South Vietnamese.<sup>265</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Brill also deemed the camp could “ease” culture shock.<sup>266</sup> Thus, the Vietnam War was considered the part of the past. For example, Cindy Jensen from IRC told the interviewer that the refugees

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>265</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Ingram and Anderson, Box.9.

<sup>266</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Press Conference, R. Goodenow, Box.9.

“still” had strong “feelings” about the war on October 30, 1975.<sup>267</sup> What did she mean by “still”? Jensen assumed that the refugees would forget about the war to assimilate into US society. She supposed that the camp experience reduced or erased South Vietnamese feelings about the war. This is the same stand point of Brill, Ingram and Anderson who thought that the refugee camp reduced culture shock and trauma of South Vietnamese.<sup>268</sup> People like them, who organized and participated in camp programs, regarded South Vietnamese refugees as new immigrants, thus assimilation was the goal for the camp’s program. For instance, Trachtenberg from HEW viewed South Vietnamese as had ideas of the US as a “land of opportunity,” similar to those of earlier European immigrants.<sup>269</sup>

Translator and teacher in Camp Pendleton, Tran Ngoc Anh mentioned there were orientation programs; lectures daily at 10:00am about driving, American way of life, and “how you have to behave in society.”<sup>270</sup> On June 5, 1975, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Brill mentioned that there were sixty-six English classes going on in Camp Pendleton.<sup>271</sup> In Camp Pendleton, San Diego County Department of Education took over education program from volunteer groups after July 1, 1975. There were four classes per a day of one hour each on English. Over 600 people volunteered to teach those classes; bilingual people were paid up to \$2.50 per hour to work with volunteers; there were 40 bilingual program coordinators.<sup>272</sup> Every teacher took two hour sessions on Vietnamese culture

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<sup>267</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Cindy Jensen, Box.9.

<sup>268</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Ingram and Anderson, Box.9.

<sup>269</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Trachtenberg, Box.9.

<sup>270</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Tran Ngoc Anh, Box. 9.

<sup>271</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Press Conference, R. Goodenow, Box.9.

<sup>272</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Mr. B. Ingram Mr. B. Anderson, Box.9.



provider by the Department of State.<sup>273</sup> Those sessions were very general and designed for preventing insulting behavior. However, educational programs were not designed for mutual understanding Vietnamese culture and US culture.

In sum, educational programs including cultural orientation programs defined American culture as what South Vietnamese had to learn and assimilate into. It was apparently one way street for South Vietnamese to learn it, since Vietnamese culture was largely ignored in resettlement processes. Educational programs taught for South Vietnamese the US society norms. South Vietnamese needed to be taught how to be “civilized” according to white American norms, and they also needed to be trained with skills to acquire an education and succeed in America. How culture was defined in refugee camps came from Chicago school’s assimilationist model. This is what Robert Park defines as the race relation cycle which is in four stages such as contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation<sup>274</sup>. He believes that contacts among different races bring the forms of association—in other words, civilization. Park’s assimilation model which leads to civilization ignores institutional and structural power, as it hides imperialism and justifies Western domination. Even though Park denies the biological concept of race, he views the concept of race connected to the concept of culture. Race, or culture, is understood as the result of a group formation.<sup>275</sup> Park thinks cultural differences are the effect of geography and isolation, so that if the more contacts occur among different races, there will be fewer races and cultures. His assimilation model is imperialist since it affirms western culture as civilization.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Robert Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe (IL): Free Press, 1950), 150.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 139.

Robert Park's work on culture continues to influence contemporary policies on assimilation. For instance, education coordinators believed that education that they provided as an acculturation process for South Vietnamese. Coordinators like Ingram and Anderson also assumed that schools would rapidly acculturate kids. They discussed a South Vietnamese boy who went to high school in Point Loma even though he had no training in camp. Since the boy was doing well, they considered that he would make it in American society because he was becoming an American.<sup>276</sup> Becoming an American was measured in education especially for children. Education coordinators deemed that education in the camp provided the conditions necessary for refugees to assimilate into US society, especially for the children. Their confidence came from their management of the programs. They felt that program as a whole would make the refugees more "reliable" and "off welfare."<sup>277</sup> Their belief also strengthened their pride of the local community. They claimed "probably the best place in the world for a refugee to be is San Diego County." According to them, the reason was because San Diego City schools had bilingual staff and County schools had too. Gail Paradise Kelly explains that English language classes taught American culture at the same time that they taught pronunciation and vocabulary. It is important to note that "the teachers and programs, like the day school for children, were divorced from Vietnamese culture."<sup>278</sup> Refugees in the camps were expected to learn English and US culture. Kelly describes those classes as American intrusion into Vietnamese lifestyle.<sup>279</sup> Nonetheless, Kelly admits efficiency of

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<sup>276</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Mr. B. Ingram Mr. B. Anderson, Box.9.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 114.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 120

the intrusion for the refugees' survival. Assuming American culture and the English language were the desired norm, refugees were expected to conform and adapt these standards in order to succeed in their new lives.

In refugee camps, administrators employed educational programs to provide basic information on English and the US culture for refugees. They believed that those programs helped South Vietnamese to reduce their trauma of war experiences and cultural shock. In reality, those programs were for the US society not to have refugees as economic and cultural burden. Of course, the programs were for their survival in the US, though their survival meant assimilation to the US society.

### Conclusion

The significance of the camps for the refugees was the governmentality of the camps reconfiguring refugees into assimilable and provisional immigrant subject. The efficacy of refugee camps was apparent for the US government to resettle a large number of the refugees in a short period of time. The camps tried to promote an image of the US as good host, even though in reality refugees were responsible for their own lives and their well-being. Militaristic aspect of resettlement is always obscured. It includes not only that the resettlement process was handled by military personnel, but of course the war itself.

South Vietnamese were politically unstable at the end of the war. Because of the Fall of Saigon, they did not have their own government or citizenship that they could rely on. They lost citizenship, home and things that they could not carry with them. For

South Vietnamese, refugee camps were the spaces where they had to negotiate their loss and governmentality. In a refugee camp in Guam, Jackie Bong-Wright recalled,

We all had to try to adjust to our new environment. We had to be patient until we were self-sufficient. But how were we going to cope? No one knew what we were going to do next.<sup>280</sup>

Uncertainty for their lives, as Jackie explained, prevailed in refugee camps. Liu et al. explain that many South Vietnamese refugees showed uncertainty of life in the refugee camp.<sup>281</sup> Even though they did not know what to do next, they had to decide that. Since camps were temporary spaces, camp residents lacked stability and permanence and always had to consider what to do next. Refugee camps served for South Vietnamese refugees as the space of negotiation. They had to negotiate loss of their citizenship, homeland and family (or separation of family) because of the defeat of the Vietnam War. They also had to decide what to do next after refugee camps.

A Vietnamese American scholar Hien Duc Do claims that through resettlement process, the [South] Vietnamese were deprived of the emotional, social and psychological support generated from the extended family and also the support that was generated from a shared culture, language, customs and experiences.<sup>282</sup> However, after their release from the refugee camps, South Vietnamese moved to specific areas and built their communities. This secondary migration proves that they made choices for themselves and their families, sometimes against what was intended for them by resettlement policy. Second migration in the US was popular among South Vietnamese refugees. For example, Trachtenberg from HEW pointed out that there was a South

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<sup>280</sup> Jackie Bong-Wright, *Autumn Cloud*, 210

<sup>281</sup> Liu et al., *Transition to Nowhere*, 76.

<sup>282</sup> Hien Duc Do, *The Formation of a New Refugee Community*, 37

Vietnamese belief that families would get together in “Kansas City” or some other place.<sup>283</sup> Nonetheless, education coordinators Ingram and Anderson argued that the refugees were forming a “ghetto” in California.<sup>284</sup> They knew that refugees would move to Southern California after sponsorship elsewhere.<sup>285</sup> Even though they felt that the camp was “Little Saigon,” they imagined that once the camp is closed it would be over, because they believed that educational programs helped for South Vietnamese to assimilate to US society.

Refugee camp was a contradictory space for South Vietnamese, since it was supposed to be a “safe heaven” but at the same time it was militarized controlled space. This complexity is aptly explained in a poem on Camp Pendleton, *A Poem Written in Camp Pendleton*.

Thanks  
 Thanks Pendleton  
 For offering a tent  
 To slip in and out  
 Stealthily and fearfully  
 Like a mouse  
 Of a yellow race  
 With an empty mind  
 And the useless arms

Thanks  
 The last thanks will go to the future sponsor  
 Who will feed and give me cares  
 Like he does to a child  
 Though I’ve already passed my 30’s  
 More than one half a miserable life of a Vietnamese<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Trachtenberg, Box.9.

<sup>284</sup> Vietnamese Immigration Collection, Mr. B. Ingram Mr. B. Anderson, Box.9.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Du Tu Le, “*A Poem Written in Camp Pendleton*” in Tran Mong Tu, Thuc Ngan, Le Ton, Vu Tu Le, *Tho Viet Nam: Chien Tran Luu Day va Nguoi My* [Vietnamese Poems: War, Exile, and American] (N/A(CA): Gia Van Giu Ngoc, 1976), 79-87.

The author reflects on feelings of ambivalence towards the camp and sponsorship. Even though he starts with thanks, his poem is not about gratitude for camp and sponsorship, but about sorrow being infantilized and emasculated: empty mind, useless arms, and being a child. Refugee camp provides food and shelter, and people there became refugees. The author illustrates his sentiment being a refugee and then provisional immigrant subject.

The US government succeeded to resettle the refugees to scatter them throughout the US when released them from camps. Sponsorship drastically changed the structure of South Vietnamese family and promoted heteronormative family as norms. The concept of sponsorship was deficient system in a long period of time because many of the refugees did not want to stay or could not stay for long in the initial resettlement place. South Vietnamese rebuilt their kinship or friendship by their own through secondary migration. Even though policy attempted to control the refugees, to prevent them from creating their own communities, South Vietnamese built their communities across the US to share their own culture, language, customs and experience. It was not easy practice for South Vietnamese. In this process, the memory of the war is embodied by South Vietnamese bodies, so that the US society forgot it by believing the US society as benevolent nation. Differential inclusion took place through refugee camps and it enhanced the image of the US as a nation of immigrants and the accomplishment of American democracy.

## Epilogue

This paper is derived from my interests of the internationalization of South Vietnamese refugee evacuation, as an “Indochinese” or “Vietnamese” refugee problem. I am always puzzled when I think about “Vietnamese refugee issues” since in those the US represents as a benevolent nation. Thus, I tried to answer this complexity by explaining the erasure of US military violence through Operations New Life/ Arrivals. These operations allowed the US to position itself as a “humanitarian” nation. Accepting South Vietnamese people was a political act that defined the US as a “refuge” and put a side the Vietnam War in which the US as an aggressor.

In chapter one, I investigated the political aspects of the evacuation and ways in which the Ford administration produced “Vietnamese refugees” as a rescue object of the US, because the category of South Vietnamese as “refugee” was not legal but rather a de facto category. I then explained that the concept of South Vietnamese as refugee did not fit the international law concept of refugee. In addition, the evacuation of South Vietnamese was not thoroughly planned prior to the Fall of Saigon since the real goal was the safe removal of Americans from South Vietnam. The evacuation of South Vietnamese was planned to facilitate evacuation of Americans. Evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese was not a humanitarian operation but rather simply a political decision by the Ford administration. Illustrating evacuation and resettlement of South Vietnamese as a humanitarian operation, South Vietnamese became “refugees” not US allies. The rescue narrative of South Vietnamese, or humanitarian operation, conceals the context of the Vietnam War in which the US was involved. The former South

Vietnamese became victims of communism not US militarism.

In chapter two, I demystified the concept of the US as a place of refuge. As Jacques Derrida critiques, refuge is highly controlled by nation-state. The US controls refuge through Operations New Life/ Arrivals. South Vietnamese refugee camps were highly racialized and militarized space for South Vietnamese refugees. I reconsidered the resettlement process as regulation of refuge by the US government. What actually occurred that propagated the idea of the US as “refuge” was the managing of South Vietnamese refugees. I wanted to emphasize that “refuge” does not naturally exist but rather is something that needs to be constructed. To become a “refuge” the US needed refugee camps and racial politics. Army-run refugee camps provided a tremendous advantage for the US government to control and manage refugees.

The refugee camp is an ex-legal/ ex-national space where the technology of government takes place. Refugee becomes an object of the host countries. Through processing, teaching and sponsorship, IATF managed refugees into assimilable provisional immigrant subjects. Refugee camp was not a “refuge” but a temporary space where “differential inclusion” took place. Since camp residents lacked stability and permanence, they needed to be included as provisional immigrants to a host country.

The role of refugees is significant as Yen Le Espiritu explains: “The refugees—constructed as successful and anticommunist—recuperated the veterans’ and thus U.S. failure of masculinity and remade the case for U.S. war in Vietnam: that the war no matter the costs, was ultimately necessary, moral, and successful.” In this paper, I could not fully study the geopolitical context of the political symbolic value of refugee. Even when the US failed its war, it was able to maintain its geopolitical status in Asia through



accepting refugees from former Indochina. I believe this geopolitical value of refugees promoted the US involvement of “Indochinese refugee problems” in the late 1970’s to 1990’s. Operations New life/ Arrivals were just the beginning of the US national project to forget the defeat of the Vietnam War.

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