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The Gift of Freedom

WAR, DEBT, AND OTHER REFUGEE PASSAGES

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INTRODUCTION

The Empire of Freedom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—TIPTON BLISH, *Los Angeles Times*

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

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

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

Her gratefulness invites us to consider a second tale, about the powers through which a benevolent empire bestows on an other freedom. In Lai's words, we find all the good and beautiful things the gift claims as its consequence—the right to have rights, the choice of life direction, the improvement of body and mind, the opportunity to prosper—against a spectral future of their nonexistence, under communism, under terror. That she is rescued from such psychic death through the gift of freedom as a promise of care encodes a benign, rational story about the United States as the uncontested superpower on the world stage today. But the gift of freedom also discloses for us liberalism's innovations of empire, the frisson of freedom and violence that decisively collude for same purposes—not just because the gift of freedom opens with war and death, but also because it may obscure those other powers that, through its giving, conceive and shape life. So I begin with a story in which we are invited to know the refugee's sorrow, and her indebtedness for its cure, in order to tell us something meaningful about the genealogies of liberal powers that undergird the twinned concerns of this scene: the gift of freedom and the debt that follows. The present work considers this twofold nature by posing these questions: How is this act of thankfulness, and all that it implies about the gift and its giving, a problem of imperial remains? What special significance does this act carry from a refugee, especially *this* refugee from *that* tarnished war of American ambition? Why are we—those of us who have received this precious, poisonous gift of freedom—obliged to thank? What powers oblige us?

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

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

The Gifts of Freedom

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

circuit that renders the object of intervention, the subject of freedom, a moving target. Thus, the transition, the "not yet," is both the principle that exhibits the gift of freedom to its best advantage and the foil that denies blame for its failure. Anachronism or other-possession presumes to name the alterity of the other, the not-same, the heterogeneous—what remains recalcitrant to transition to modern, homogeneous time. It is precisely this trace of race and coloniality that are "the continuities between the remains of war and the rehabilitations of peace" underwriting liberal empire.[62]

The Refugee Condition

CAVANAUGH: Now how do you set up that kind of housing almost overnight?

JONASON: Oh, my gosh, you know, they had Marines and sailors and civilians and everybody just chipping in 24/7 building the tent cities, using—cleaning out Quonsets, the Quonsets at Talega, excuse me, at San Onofre were not really ready for people to move in so they had to be prepared, cots brought in, trenches made, you know, all kinds of wash situations created, food brought in. Clothing, a lot of these people didn't have clothing. Some of them didn't have shoes. . . .

CAVANAUGH: Right, that's—so when you receive the refugees, were—describe to us the way they came to Camp Pendleton.

JONASON: Well, they landed at El Toro, as I understand, and then they were bused down from El Toro, sometimes in the middle of the night, depending on what group they came in. And then they were housed in the various camps that were set up for them, and they were crowded in. I mean, you could barely, you know, step over all these people that were sleeping all over the place trying to find a place to stay.

CAVANAUGH: What kind of condition were they in when they arrived?

JONASON: It's my understanding that they were, some of them, in pretty bad condition as far as, you know, they'd been traveling, they were frightened, they were displaced totally. These were people not knowing what the next day was going to bring, and so they were happy to be here.

—"Camp Pendleton's Tent City Housed 50,000 Vietnamese Refugees," the KPBS *These Days* host Maureen Cavanaugh's interview with the Camp Pendleton Museum historian Faye Jonason, April 29, 2010

In April 1975, after training thousands of military personnel who would secure the foreign policy aims of the United States in Korea and Viet Nam, Marine Base Camp Pendleton in Southern California began preparing for another part in the Cold War—this time, as a city of refuge. (It bears noting here that the camp bears the name of Major General Joseph Henry Pendleton, a career officer whose imperial adventuring sent him to Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, Cuba, and the Philippines at the dawning of the twentieth century.) With reports of North Vietnamese forces marching toward Saigon triggering panic and plans for withdrawal, President Gerald Ford established the Special Interagency Task Force for Indochina on April 18, charged with coordinating eighteen federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, for the evacuation of "high risk" Vietnamese with ties to the U.S. occupation infrastructure, and the Senate Judiciary Committee approved emergency asylum for more than 150,000 "Indochinese."[63] Continuous with the war's waging, a concept of transition is reintroduced in the name of Operation New Life.[64] In a matter of days, Camp Pendleton became the first of four military installations, reorganized into centers of care and control, to receive Vietnamese evacuees as once again subjects of freedom.[65]

With this passage between war and refuge, I point to the crossing of racial anachronism from its being a sign of subject status for the new friend of freedom, to its making as a symptom of the refugee diagnosed through arrested affect or potentiality, a discursive, medico-juridical disposition I am calling the *refugee condition*. In doing so, I veer away from the refugees' "hearts of sorrow," so familiar to us from official papers, literary archives, academic writing, and individual testimonies, and I turn instead toward the schema and stakes underlying this figuration.[66] A more critical reading of the refugee condition as an object of biomedical study, without denying or dismissing profound psychical disturbance, may demonstrate how a racialized rhetoric of anachronism reenters through the diagnosis of abnormality. Whereas the transition targeted the absence of necessary institutional structures for self-government, with more or less elliptical reference to psychical structures, the condition specifically diagnoses the dearth of psychical structures, with more or less oblique reference to institutional structures for the same. That is, the compulsive interiorization of a refugee consciousness may also be complicit in liberal

schema for distributed life capacities: first, in the form of the condition described as a state of arrested development or traumatic compulsion with its assumption of an empirical normalcy; second, in the causal background the refugee condition in particular names; and third, in the refugee condition as a target of disciplinary action. To note that the condition is underpinned by liberal epistemes is to insist on the genealogical character of scientific-technical and affective knowledges about the space and time of the refugee. I argue that in naming the condition (after the manner of transition), the cluster of references that establish abnormality dramatizes for us more their usages for liberal governmentality than as empirical evidence of the psychical failures the condition purports to categorize and codify. For these reasons, I consider the refugee condition less a record of psychic disorder and more an embedded sign whose evidentiary status decisively connects deprivation, development, and discipline.[67]

In the lectures collected as *Abnormal*, Foucault concludes his genealogy of the abnormal individual with an outline of the condition as that which targets, and focuses, disciplinary systems through powers brought to bear on the thing called the psyche (what he dubs the "Psy-function"—or, elsewhere, "the psychiatric, psychopathological, psycho-sociological, psycho-criminological, and psychoanalytic function"[68]). Not an illness, but also not not-an-illness, according to Foucault, "the condition is a sort of *permanent causal background* on the basis of which illness may develop in a number of processes and episodes. In other words, the condition is the abnormal basis upon which illness become possible."[69] In a "normal" state, human consciousness is aimed toward possible action and probable consequence, in a universe that is knowable through empirical measures. This capacity for human freedom and intercourse with others rests in discriminating by moral reasoning between that which belongs to the interior, and to the exterior, of the subject. The condition therefore names the absence of an underlying structure, or the underdevelopment of such a structure, that would otherwise commit the faculties of human consciousness to their proper place and proportion.

It is not difficult to find statements imputing to the refugee the underdevelopment, or arrested development, of apperception, understanding, and reason. Indeed, out of the refugee camps emerged a disciplinary specialization that, as Aihwa Ong observes, sought the "systematic naming and ordering of refugee illnesses."[70] Thus did anthropologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, and other "experts" perceive that "Anxiety, fear, frustration, and emotional disturbance appear, and often the refugee regresses to a more infantile state, loses his willpower, and becomes apathetic, helpless, or manic and aggressive."[71] "The refugee loses structure, the ability to coordinate, predict and expect, and his basic feelings of competence."[72] Consider also the following statements from camp ethnographers, in which we find a refugee consciousness absent of interest or calculation: "The Vietnamese role was passive: things were done to them; they did very little. And, like much of the camp life that followed, they stood in interminable lines waiting for something to happen."[73] Or, in this fanciful description, refugee passivity and powerlessness: "This mental state [of helplessness] resembles that of a billiard ball which, devoid of inner self-propelling force, allows its path and movement to be governed by outside forces beyond its control."[74] Such reports from camp ethnographers and biomedical personnel, echoed in refugee testimonials, reinforce that the condition, to borrow from Foucault, "is precisely the characteristic structure or structural whole of an individual who has either been arrested in his development or who has regressed from a later to an earlier state of development."[75] He is profoundly, painfully, stuck in time.

In these reports and studies, we confront once again the measure of capacities as an empirical concern, through which notions of the viable human are acted out in the global arena, and through which the condition of being a refugee is construed as a generalizable state of abnormality, shorthand for deprivation, deindividuation, and deficiency. It is also important to note that the refugee's arrested time consciousness, in this telling, forecloses the hope that time in its forward progress and plentitude might soothe his or her pain. Consider this 2001 supplemental report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: "Studies document high rates of mental disorders among these refugees. A large community sample of Southeast Asian refugees in the United States found that pre-migration trauma events and refugee camp experiences were significant predictors of psychological distress even five years or more after migration."[76] Or, as one reporter muses, "How long does a refugee remain a refugee? Perhaps forever. Even after settling in a new land, a refugee may find that being rootless and adrift is not a transient condition but a permanent, sometimes debilitating state of mind."[77]

In this way, the refugee condition also acts as an explanation for the

fervent response–understood as an interpretative gap, a jarring noncoincidence between event and meaning—to any undistorted figuration of Ho Chi Minh.[78] Consider this complicated chain of causally disparate, but discursively linked, image-events behind the shuttering of the English-language, youth-produced television show *Vietnamese American eXposure* (VAX), formerly broadcast on Saigon TV—based in Westminster, California—in response to hostile denunciations of the show's screening of a brief clip from the 2004 documentary *Saigon, USA*. The documentary, which aired on PBS nationally, is loosely organized around the 1999 Hi-Tek incident in Little Saigon—in which a Vietnamese video store owner dared to hang a poster of Ho Chi Minh, alongside the Vietnamese flag, in public view—and the fifty-two days of massive protests and rallies that followed. Following the national news coverage that spotlighted the Hi-Tek incident, the documentary includes a seconds-long clip from a CNN news report featuring a camera close-up of the poster hanging in the store, gaily decorated with Christmas lights. This brief moment, appearing as part of a five-year retrospective about the months-long controversy by VAX, inspired enough outcry and accusation of communist sympathy for Saigon TV's chief executive officer to cancel the show. Even this highly mediated sight of Ho Chi Minh, trauma tells us, destroys the refugee's precarious peace of mind. In which feelings are also subject to a rational, and rationing, governance, the condition operates as a gauge for them, in their proportion and duration.[79] Here are multiple layers of what might easily be characterized as the derealization of reality. Such confusion, so systemic that it might be understood as a symptom, appears "secondarily, as a sort of epiphenomenona, with regard to this condition that is fundamentally a condition of abnormality."[80] With the dissolution of those structures that perceive causality and continuity, the refugee cannot distinguish between subconscious ghosts and external stimuli, between forms and genres of image making or storytelling, or between two temporally distant moments —as in the near-instantaneous response to the five seconds of a documentary image of a poster of Ho Chi Minh, five years after the Hi-Tek incident and the months-long protests that followed, three decades after the revolutionary leader died and the war ended in defeat.[81] The condition thereby is a prison house, in more ways than one. Allowing for both the diagnostic imposition of illness, as well as the discovery of a comprehensive cause, the condition has an absolute power that structures all signification. Foucault writes: "It allows any physical element or deviant behavior whatever, however disparate and distant they may be, to be connected with a sort of unified background that accounts for it—a background that differs from the state of health but nevertheless is not an illness. Consequently, this notion of condition has a formidable capacity for integration: It refers to nonhealth, but it can also bring into its field any conduct whatsoever as soon as it is physiologically, psychologically, sociologically, morally, and even legally deviant."[82]

Such disturbance also goes by the familiar name *trauma*. What comes through so clearly in innumerable narrations of protest (sympathetic or condemnatory) or other perturbation is the rhetoric of noncontemporaneity and captive consciousness, for which the principal cause seems obvious.[83] War is a catastrophic event, and, as Marilyn Ivy observes, "provide[s] the occasion for the most sustained theorizing of the traumatic."[84] The traumatic consciousness finds that one is not at one with oneself, that one is divorced from and dispossessed of self-knowledge. Drawing on Freud, the literary critic Cathy Caruth names trauma a "wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and world."[85] Because those internal structures that preside over the faculties of human consciousness are missing or maimed, the sufferer cannot integrate those faculties for a rational, and timely, calculation of interest or consequence. Trauma, as the concept tells us, instead imposes itself again and again on his or her consciousness, as nightmare or repetitive compulsion. The force of grief is so disturbing that he or she cannot perceive reality as fixed and knowable, and thereby subject to will or intervention. It is in these terms that war in general, and the war in Southeast Asia in particular, triggers the nomination of such illnesses as post-traumatic stress disorder, in which nightmares and revenants plague individuals who are damaged by the catastrophic, and as the so-called Vietnam syndrome, in which pathological doubt arrested the capability and willingness of a nation or state to conduct further war.

Because the refugee seems so incontrovertibly traumatized, the condition as a description of ontological destitution importantly constellates knowledge about that which is presumably compulsory for complex personhood. Though the stranger who claims a right to asylum or sanctuary is an archaic figure, in its modern legal classification the refugee is a historical effect of liberal governance and statecraft, a global category of care. In the

mid-twentieth century, the emerging international system regularized the state as the self-evident referent for political being, in which the stateless person—including the refugee—is an abnormality. The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees more narrowly defines the refugee as "any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" or is unable or unwilling to return.[86] Later protocols specific to Africa and Latin America expanded these parameters to include persons fleeing from war or violence in their home country. Most laws governing refugee asylum in European and North American countries, including the contemporary United States, follow from this formula to establish the refugee condition as radically anomalous to what Liisa Malkki calls the "national order of things."[87] As a political noncitizen, the refugee is outside the law, devoid of rights, the effect of a terrible exception through which his or her life is forsaken. The refugee at the same time is an object of imperative concern for the arbiters of law and sovereignty. The refugee is therefore suspended in time and in space, a figure of humanity on the outside. Writing in *The Refugee in the Post-War World*, Jacques Vernant encapsulates such a view:

> The refugee is, in the first place, a symbol of instability. . . . The refugee symbolizes, in the second place, isolation. Social groups react almost with an instinctive mistrust of those who have been cut off or who voluntarily cut themselves off from the community to which they belong by origin or adoption. Lastly, the refugee is the unknown. . . . He is no longer on his land, he has fled his country, he has been cast out by his group, or by those who speak in the name of the national group of which he was a member. The refugee is therefore one whose ties have been doubly cut, both his territorial ties and those with the national group, or, rather, with the state which is its legal expression. What stamps the refugee as a man apart, justifying his classification in a specific social category, is his inferiority; he is inferior both to the citizens of the country which gives him shelter and all the other foreigners, not refugees, living in that country.[88]

Others have thoroughly documented the epistemological and ontological coordinates of the "refugee problem" (expressed so thoroughly by Vernant), through which changing and ever-conditional criteria for asylum demonstrate the instrumental nature of refugee classification, and the

damning conviction of refugee pathology as an existential threat.[89] Of these damning thoughts, Nevzat Soguk writes: "Although an object of compassion and pity at times, in the final analysis she [the refugee] is truly 'unwanted' or 'undesirable,' representing, 'like the plague,' disruptions in the conditions of normality in life. *She stands accused.*"[90]

This phenomenon is indeed well observed, but here we ought to consider again how refugee abnormality incarnates a long and enduring history of liberal humanist ontology. Soguk summarizes the refugee "problem" as follows: "Refugees are seen as incapable of participating as effective, knowledgeable actors in the tasks essential to the efficient and orderly organization of the community—obtaining security, stability, welfare, and self-governance."[91] What is the substance of this incapacity? What is missing, impairing the refugee's humanity, inhibiting his or her actions and passions as untimely? Here the concept of dispossession as a telic and ontic description is telling. Looking once again at the narration of the modern individual who possesses interiority of person, as well as a private household, in the liberal political tradition (with particular attention to Hegel), Lisa Lowe elaborates:

> Property in oneself and in the objects one makes through will, labor, contract—all are levels in Hegel's dialectical development that resolve in the unity of the particular will of the individual with the collective universality of the whole, or the state. "Property" is the way that Hegel explained the individual initially investing will and work into nature, making the nature objective, transforming world and self. Through property the condition of possibility of human self-possession—of one's body, interiority, and life direction—is established. Indeed, Hegel argued that property is an essential condition for the possibility of moral action because without property, without a locus of independence of the individual will, the person cannot be independent, thoughtful, or self-conscious; without property he will be dominated by others, by needs, and by nature.[92]

Given these epistemological and ontological coordinates, the refugee figure is patently bereft of property—possessing neither interior faculties for the rational and moral calculation of interest and consequence, nor external properties for their "right" exercise in intercourse with others, including legitimate citizenship, proprietary rights, or simply things ("Clothing, a lot of these people didn't have clothing. Some of them didn't have shoes."). Profoundly dispossessed, from this perspective the refugee has lost *every thing*.[93]

Giving a name to such violence but also the damage that ensues is a challenge because naming bears far-reaching political stakes. For these reasons, I understand psychoanalytic concepts such as trauma as a form of biomedicine implicated in liberal structures of power, especially those delineating between freedom and captivity, ownership and dispossession.[94] Such a diagnostic vocabulary is why a critique of analogy is crucial to the deconstruction of the refugee condition, especially where trauma and political disenfranchisement act as analogies for each other, which assumes that *one or the other condition might be read through or doubled by the other*. Allowing us to perceive connections between objects through the selection and emphasis of features taken for "the real," and as signs signaling presence, analogies work to make each object known. In this way, my critique of this analogy continues from Susan Sontag's warning that "illness is *not* a metaphor."[95] Consider this early description—by Freud, in a collaborative work with Josef Breuer—of trauma as an external or alien encroachment: "The psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a *foreign body* which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as *an agent that is still operative*."[96] Such analogies of incursion, occupation, and warfare are plentifully available in trauma theory.[97] I make note of their presence because trauma theory too often reproduces a relationship of psychic to political dispossession that is ubiquitous and presumptive.[98] This sequence of figurations allows the circumstances of bankruptcy or disenfranchisement to be viewed as necessarily manifesting abnormality, or something missing. To cite just one example, Hannah Arendt famously draws attention to what she identifies as "an ever-growing new people comprised of stateless persons, the *most symptomatic group* in contemporary politics."[99] In this intriguing phrase, Arendt resorts to a figurative vocabulary of illness to represent the stateless peoples cast adrift in the aftermath of Europe's world-shattering wars. Functioning metonymically, even tautologically, the stateless person is like the mentally ill because his or her mind-set is disturbed; because he or she is outside of reason, outside of civilization; because he or she has no property, if we understand these conditions to be bound to a sense of freedom and human history. (Such statements also warrant refugee encampment and corrective ministrations, as we shall see, in which the refugee—like the ostensibly mentally ill—is involuntarily isolated because he or she is not considered able to judge and act according to norms of acceptable reasoning or volition.) Thus does traumatic consciousness mirror back to political expulsion a shared negativity of reference, and present reason for pause.

The analogy itself thus constitutes a complex historical event, which problematically presumes the increased rationality, comprehensiveness, or logic of each object or term in the comparison. That is to say, such analogies produce not only an ensemble of subjects but also a set of empirical criteria for competency and capacity, which also establish the bounds for a global order of things taken to be necessary and natural conditions of their existence. (These analogies also regularize troubling schema presuming citizens and refugees to be irreconcilable travelers. As Caren Kaplan observes, "many modern subjects may participate in any number of . . . versions of displacement over a lifetime—never embodying any one version singly or simplistically."[100] The refugee is no exception.[101]) In doing so, the terms of these analogies are complicit in the co-construction of categories of normal and abnormal, presence and absence, action and passivity, futurity and anachronism, property and deprivation, freedom and captivity, balance and danger.

It is important to note that the condition has never been aimed solely at the cultural or racial, colonial other, but that it does often bear the weight of colonialist underpinnings. (A civilizational discourse, for instance, was consistently deployed against refugee arrival.[102]) In which the refugee is the bearer of antecedent failure—or what we might call a recalcitrance to transition—the condition that pertains to this abnormal individual is the consolidation of the diffuse structures of liberal humanism as the substance of a global order of things. Thus, the refugee condition as a medico-juridical structure may be read less as a diagnostic of underdevelopment (in multiple senses) than as a sign or symptom testifying to the entanglement of race and temporal distancing with the subtle, insidious forces of liberal governance. As a functional imbalance, the condition names the *alienability* of these faculties, and therefore anything pathological in the body or mind that might be understood to arise from this absence, with especially racializing consequence.

In other words, whereas the condition acts as an absolute value structuring all signification, conceptualizations of the proper and proportionate reason and tempo for feelings, and for actions, coincide at the suspect scene of modern racial governmentality. That is, inasmuch as trauma discourse individuates the subject, it can also strategically collectivize the condition. In this way, the refugee condition does not only diagnose the

psychic-political subject whose capacities are stuck or stalled, but also diagnoses as a technical-political object a population statistically organized and managed via its features and characteristics, including these medico-biological "problems." Or, as Lisa Marie Cacho offers: "When culture, race, and space appear sutured to 'abnormality,' 'criminality,' and/or 'disability,' through the concept of the 'condition' as its underlying psychological causality, they are acting as interchangeable signifiers for 'affectability.' This fictive condition that renders afflicted people of color vulnerable to irreversible spatial disablement can be traced to what Denise Ferreira da Silva has named 'affectability.' Silva defines 'affectability' as 'the condition of being subjected to both natural (in the scientific and lay sense) conditions and to others' power.' "[103]

It is through affectability that the refugee experiences interruption twice over, first as target and second as origin. Malkki wryly observes: "It is striking how often the abundant literature claiming refugees as its object of study locates 'the problem' not first in the political oppression or violence that produces massive territorial displacements of people, but within the bodies and minds of people classified as refugees."[104] The repercussions (which echo the allegations that the wayward other failed to secure his or her own freedom) ring out through the long years since the end of the war. The seemingly rational observation that such passion as that inspired by the merest glimpse of Ho Chi Minh is out of proportion coincides with a principle of liberal commensurability that, as Sianne Ngai points out, performs a symbolic violence "when there is an underlying assumption that an appropriate emotional response to . . . violence exists, and that the burden lies on the racialized subject to produce that appropriate response legibly, unambiguously, and immediately."[105] Given that condemnation and disappointment exist on a continuum, through which moral action depends on resemblance and rationality (including temporal causality), these events and feelings manifest a disturbed condition: "I felt the community was on this slippery slope, that we were not progressing toward having open dialogue and being more tolerant of different political viewpoints." "The war and what happened afterward, of being refugees and having to restart their lives, left scars that have never been dealt with. None of us know if the community is ready for [open dialogue] now, or if it will take another 10 years."[106] "Our families came here because they sought those freedoms denied in Vietnam. They didn't come here to be denied them, once again, in their own community."[107] Such consignment of refugee protests against

communism's seemingly spectral affront to memory and grievance to unreasonable and therefore undemocratic compulsion circumscribes their claims as groundless and dislocates these protests from the surviving present.[108] (To acknowledge some others as persons with legitimate grievances would be to acknowledge capitalism's catastrophic content, or democratic states' terror.[109]) The traumatic tempo of repetition and return increases ugly feelings (to borrow a felicitous phrase from Ngai), such that the refugee, having been contravened and herself contravening against others, becomes the *source* of illiberal violence.

Certain conditions, in this instance unfolding and compounding each the other (the refugee condition that includes welfare dependency thus furnishes the causal background for urban poverty), thus operate as signs of latent criminality. We know, for example, that the refugee is seen to pose a threat to public security because he has lost his rational, and thus moral, bearings. It is in those terms through which the condition renders refugees both disabled and disabling,[110] that legal and political discourses of Southeast Asian "gang violence" understand gang members as especially incapable of moral action, allowing their indefinite detention and, after 2002, eventual deportation as criminal aliens in the wake of new memorandums of understanding between the United States and Southeast Asian countries, in pursuit of new wars elsewhere.[111] The adoption of trauma theory also informs even those compassionate accounts of the 1991 Good Guys "crisis," instantiating the refugee condition and a judgment of abnormality. It seems obvious perhaps that the young Vietnamese men who held forty-one people hostage at a Sacramento, California, electronics superstore in the hope that they might extort arms to return to the scene of the war to *win this time* inherited an overwhelming, alien compulsion. For instance, the sociologists Michael Peter Smith and Bernadette Tarallo, in reviewing the "construction of the 'Vietnamese' other" by news reports and police statements during and after the crisis, describe these youth as alienated from self-knowledge and thus from "meaningful identity,"[112] resulting in "deep confusion" and untimely allegiance "to a precommunist Vietnam where the father, now on welfare, held a position of authority."[113] These youths' violence, according to this diagnosis, occurs in the false hope that the past is indeterminate enough to be changed in the present. (We also know this as the trope of *the cycle of violence.*) In a meditation on the hostage takers titled "Love, Money, Prison, Sin, Revenge," Andrew Lam, son of a former South Vietnamese general, claims profound insight into their distress: "They tried

to bring dignity to their fathers by fighting their war. They coveted being good Vietnamese sons: To assuage the old man's grief, the young man must defeat his old man's enemy."[114] But where temporal disjunction appears as an empirical "fact," the traumatic problematic of incoherent causality may coincide with the denial of coevalness, in which the West's colonial or racial others are persistently classified as anachronistic and discontinuous. To demarcate these youths' actions as primitivism and parochialism, as "outdated passions" and "Old World gestures of self-sacrifice and revenge,"[115] is the expression of a politics of comparison through which the encounter with a persistent or perverse heterogeneity can be appropriated into the symptomology of the condition as a scientific system of knowledge and discipline.

The refugee condition as a problem of unfreedom becomes a target of action, whether "indefinite intervention" or provisional transition, once again.[116] Such that war may well be the foremost crucible for trauma theory, it is also the grounds for an ideology of rehabilitation, a system of supervision and procedures for normalization based on notions of the present and presence as necessary properties for normal personhood. In his history of disability, Henri-Jacques Stiker notes that the concept of rehabilitation arose from the scene of modern war as the restoration to the person violently made partial a sense of wholeness: "Mutilation applied to all alteration of integrity, of integralness. It amounted to a degradation, but one by removal—or deterioration—which has the effect of suppression. The maimed person is *someone missing something precise, an organ or function*. Thus, the first image presented by this change in terminology is that of damage. *The war has taken away, we must replace*."[117] Rehabilitation, Stiker continues, "implies returning to a point, to a prior situation, the situation that existed for the able but one only postulated for the others. In any case, reference to a norm."[118]

Neither the metaphor nor the medium of rehabilitation are benign, especially when integrity, integralness, or normalcy is yet to be achieved for the person sutured, as Cacho observes, to "culture, race, or space."[119] Indeed, whether the epistemic and evidential structures that register scales of harm regard an offense as calamitous or routine may enact more harm. It is for these reasons that Fiona Ngô argues disability theory must be brought to bear on critical refugee and war studies to challenge the narrative overdetermination of the forcible inscriptions of trauma and disability on racial, colonial others.[120] Where statelessness is conceived through medical or psychopathological analogies, such analogies sanction intervention as an authoritative form of social action that bolsters its legitimacy with scientific, biomedical rationality, anchored once again in liberal schema for the autonomous individual and for human intercourse. Importantly, then, rehabilitation is absolutely continuous with liberal war in their disciplining intents and powers. Corresponding once again with a historicist consciousness, such disciplinary actions that might accompany this practical system refer to a "final or optimum state," either as the return to the normal or its achievement in the future.[121] This discourse of normalization can be observed, for example, in UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata's diagnosis for the refugee "problem": "Lack of national protection is an aberration of the normal in which the state accepts the responsibility for its own citizens. The objective must be to return to the *status ante*."[122] In this regard, the rehabilitative objective first concurs with the condition as a narration of refugee abnormality that covers over its epistemic violence (in which state and capital collude to produce dispossessed peoples) and then conceals the political stakes for intervention, which present disciplinary actions as technical solutions to social pathologies perceived as *on the outside*. It becomes quite clear that the refugee, because he or she is the aberration, is less the ideal subject of rehabilitation than the sovereign state and the global order of things.[123] These diagnostic conditions and their disciplinary consequences we may say, after Ngô, "[make] visible what is simultaneously apparent—bodies indelibly marked by war, race, gender, disability, and immigration status for particular surveillance—and yet rendered only tenuously visible [the] biopolitical processes engaged through and by states, militaries, media, and the medical-industrial complex."[124] Thus, one potentially devastating consequence for the refugee diagnosed as malingering is the eclipse of other harm that the diagnosis or cure might itself enact. Let me now return to that story.

Green Dragon and Lost Birds

> Rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable.
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> —ANDREAS HUYSSEN, *Twilight Memories*