ASIA COLLOQUIA PAPERS

Vietnam, the Philippines, Guam and California: Connecting the Dots of U.S. Military Empire

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In the 2015 Asia Lecture at the York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR), Dr. Yen Le Espiritu views the Vietnamese refugee flight—from Vietnam to the Philippines to Guam and then to California, all of which routed the refugees through United States (U.S.) military bases—as a critical lens through which to map, both discursively and materially, the legacy of U.S. military expansion into the Asia Pacific region and the military's heavy hand in the purportedly benevolent resettlement process. She makes two related arguments: the first about military colonialism, which contends that it was (neo)colonial dependence on the U.S. that turned the Philippines and Guam into the "logical" receiving centers of the Vietnamese refugees; and the second about militarized refuge, which emphasizes the mutually constitutive nature of the concepts "refugees" and "refuge" and shows how both emerge out of and in turn bolster U.S. militarism.

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I wanted to just say a little bit about the connection between this talk on Vietnamese refugees and my book, *Home Bound* (Espiritu 2003), that maybe some of you are more familiar with. My intellectual, personal and political interest is in thinking about the ideological work that the figures of the migrant and the refugee do for nation states. I'm speaking in particular about U.S. context, but I'd be happy to speculate or to answer your questions about Canada, using what I know, during the question and answer period. I'm interested in the ways in which the U.S. has been able to represent itself ideologically as a nation of immigrants, even as we all can recite U.S. history of conquest, of colonialism, of militarism, slavery and so on. Ideologically, this "nation of immigrants" narrative implies that immigrants come to the U.S. voluntarily and that the U.S. is undisputedly a nation of opportunities.

This "nation of immigrants" narrative, I argue, disables us from seeing the many costs of U.S. interventions in Asia. In *Home Bound*, I examined U.S. colonialism in the Philippines, and in my new book, *Body Counts* (Espiritu 2014), I analyzed the U.S. war in Vietnam. I'm interested in rethinking these questions: Who are the original "border-crossers"? Who has the ability to cross borders without permission? And who gets stopped at the borders? I live in San Diego at the U.S./Mexico border, where these issues are very central. So I'm always thinking about how to recast terms such as "border crossers" that are used all the time to denigrate migrants of color, how to imbue them with new and more critical meaning.

In *Body Counts* (Espiritu 2014), as I will elaborate in my talk, I re-conceptualized the notion of the refugee. I wanted to think about the refugees from Vietnam, not only in the context of Vietnam and the U.S., but in the much larger history of U.S. connections and interventions dating back to the Pacific Islands but also the Philippines and Vietnam. I will then re-read that history differently, using the refugee as a lens. I also wanted to hopefully reach out to more people in the audience by having a talk that links different spaces in the Asia-Pacific region.

The talk today will come from my book *Body Counts.* A few words about the title: "body counts" is meant to refer to the term that the U.S. military used during the Vietnam War. I don't know how many of you are familiar with that term. During the war, the

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U.S. Army employed "body counts"—the number of confirmed Vietnamese kills—to chart U.S. progress in the war. I wanted to use this very same term as the book's title to foreground that this was really a very violent encounter. But there is a double meaning. I also wanted to use "body counts" to insist that bodies—Vietnamese bodies—should count. In the U.S., we Americans tend to talk about the Vietnam War as what had happened to Americans, and I wanted to foreground the Vietnam War as what happened to the *Vietnamese*.

The first half of the book focuses more on the history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The second half focuses on Vietnamese refugee memories. I am not going to be discussing this in my talk, but I'd be happy to talk about it in the Q&A, in particular, what it means for children of Vietnamese refugees to grow up with that label and history and yet not have a space in the home or elsewhere to discuss what that means. I know for Vietnamese Americans, this is a really big question that makes it difficult to think about what it means to be Vietnamese in the world today, and particularly in the U.S. I have a chapter that looks at what I call "internet memorials". Since Vietnamese war dead aren't being memorialized in the U.S. at a physical site, I looked at what happens online and how Vietnamese memorialize themselves and the different web pages that they have erected to commemorate these deaths.

The title of my talk is "Vietnam, the Philippines and California: Connecting the Dots of U.S. Military Empire". I want to begin with a newspaper account of a suicide, a murder-suicide, in New York. On April 3, 2009, Linh Phat Voong, a 41-year-old Chinese-Vietnamese immigrant shot and killed 13 people at the American Civic Association and the Immigrants Services Center in downtown Binghamton, New York. He then shot and killed himself. This was an account I read in the *Los Angeles Times. The Times* article concludes its story on the killing with this summation and I quote: "Whatever drove [him] to take his pistols to the American Civic Assn. on Friday *may never be known*" (Drogin, Baum and Tran 2009, emphasis added). For me, this raises questions, theoretically, of what is knowable and what is unknowable, and how those things are constructed, what we are taught to know and what we are taught to see.

I argue that, indeed, we may never know what drove

Voong to commit this murder-suicide: one, because, not only did he not leave a suicide note, which is what the article claims, but more so because no one has bothered to connect the dots of his life. There are clues, and by clues I mean the things that are mentioned in the article, but they didn't resonate in any way except as tidbits about his life. But the clues are there: Voong's father was a South Vietnamese soldier who spent years in a reeducation camp; after close to twenty years in the United States, Voong still struggled with English; he was chronically unemployed and lived in subsidized housing alongside other refugees from Bosnia, Iraq, and Somalia; and he claimed to be a victim of a string of police taunting and torture that chased him from California to New York.

Although newspaper reporters recounted Voong's story as an isolated incident committed by a "delusional" man, his life accounts make visible the connections between U.S. war in Southeast Asia, language and anti-immigrant discrimination, urban poverty and police brutality in the United States. In other words, this murder-suicide occurred not in a vacuum, but at the intersection of local, national and international acts of racialized violence.

This is the methodology that I'm using in this talk and throughout the book. It revolves around what I term "critical juxtaposing"—the deliberate bringing together of seemingly different historical events in an effort to reveal what would otherwise remain invisible: the contours, contents and limits of the U.S. empire. In this case, I am bringing together Voong's life in Vietnam, his life in the U.S., his experiences with the police, his experiences with language discrimination, to insist that these things are connected. I call this critical juxtaposing, and I am stringing all these things together purposefully and to make a point.

It is definitely about connecting the dots. And I want to stress that this is not the same as what social scientists call comparative projects. The traditional comparative method, I argue, conceptualizes groups, events or places to be discrete, already-constituted entities. If we are comparing African Americans and Vietnamese Americans, for example, we tend to assume that we know who belongs in which category. I am arguing instead that their identities are, in fact, fluid rather than

Pakistan's class structure is far more complex than is assumed in the classical dichotomies of the historical materialist canon.

static and are always in formation. But most importantly, they need to be understood in relation to each other and within the context of a flexible political discourse. To get at this we need a methodology of relationality, to see that groups are relationally constructed, nations are relationally constructed, men and women are relationally constructed and wealth and poverty are relationally constructed. They are not discrete entities that have always existed.

I want to step back for a minute to talk about the book *Body Counts*—why I wrote it and the questions that I raised. I became interested in writing this book not because I wanted to write about the Vietnam War. In fact, even though I came from Vietnam, for a long time, I didn't know how to write about the war and the Vietnamese refugees. In the U.S., Vietnamese refugees were always seen as victims, people who frantically left Vietnam and then assimilated into U.S. society; and I didn't know how to enter the conversation in a way that wouldn't continue to replicate that narrative. I didn't know how to write that story until the Iraq War, when I realized that I wanted to write about U.S. militarism and to use the refugee as a lens through which to understand how militarism works.

The ethical and political questions for me were and continue to be: why do certain killings of racialized bodies not lead to an ethical crisis? Why do certain nations continue to be able to engage in war, seemingly without consequences? Or, to ask Judith Butler's question, what makes for a grievable life? In thinking about Iraqi refugees and Iraqi and Vietnamese lives specifically, why are certain lives more "grievable" than others (Butler 2009)?

For me, the questions that arose were: How has the United States been able to fold the Vietnam War, a controversial war that it lost, into a list of eventual war triumphs through to the end of the twentieth century? How have U.S. actions in Vietnam been re-presented to be not only "successful", but also "just" and even "necessary"? To answer these questions, I argue that we need to bring together Vietnam War studies and refugee studies. U.S. scholarship has largely separated war studies and refugee studies into different fields of study. This decoupling obscures the formative role that U.S. wars play in structuring the displacement, dispersion and migration of refugees to the United States and elsewhere. In *Body Counts*, I juxtapose refugee

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studies and war studies and contend that it is the presence of Vietnamese refugees that enables the United States to recast its aggressive military actions as a benevolent intervention. I thus situate my discussion of Vietnamese refugees not at the moment of flight or at the moment of rescue, which is how Vietnamese tend to come into American consciousness, or even at the moment of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Rather, I situate them within a specific frame of reference: the long, long durée of U.S. military colonialism in the Asia-Pacific region. I argue that the refugees are widely publicized objects of U.S. rescue fantasy, the people that the U.S. have evacuated and resettled. As such, Vietnamese refugees, whose war sufferings remain unmentionable and unmourned in most U.S. public discussions of the Vietnam War, have ironically become the featured evidence of the appropriateness of U.S. actions in Vietnam: that the war, no matter the cost, was ultimately necessary, just and successful.

To back up a bit, this work emerged out of a conversation that I had with my colleague Lisa Yoneyama, who is now at the University of Toronto. Her work has consistently shown the power of the master narratives of the Second World War—in which the U.S. allegedly rescued desperate people from tyrannical governments and reformed them "into free and advanced citizens of the postwar democratic world" (Yoneyama 2005: 886). In the context of Asia, the Second World War became a moment when the U.S. entered world history, triumphantly, and claimed credit for "rescuing" and "rehabilitating" a number of Asian countries including Japan, South Korea and so on. I was thinking that this master narrative did not work in the Vietnam case because the U.S. can't point to Vietnam and say that it has liberated the country, since the U.S. lost the war and Vietnam became and remains a socialist country. That was a puzzle that I wanted to solve. I wanted to understand how the U.S. was able to explain and explain away not only its defeat in Vietnam, but also its eventual ability to claim victory in Vietnam. I argue that in the absence of a liberated Vietnam and people, the U.S. has produced a substitute: the freed and reformed Vietnamese refugees.

Many people are familiar with the iconic image of the U.S. rescuing frantic Vietnamese from the top of a building near the U.S. embassy via helicopter in Saigon in April 1975 (see Figure 1). Such iconic images of the Vietnamese scrambling to escape

communist Vietnam, I argue, have discursively and visually transformed the Vietnamese from a people battered by decades of U.S. warfare in Vietnam to those only persecuted by the Communist government and rescued by the U.S. In this sense, while refugees have often been represented as a problem for the U.S.—for its mental health institutions, schools, work places—I argue that they constitute a solution for the U.S. because they have become the featured evidence of the appropriateness of U.S. actions in Vietnam, thus allowing the U.S. to recast its aggressive military strategy as a benevolent intervention. The term "refuge", which in this case is the U.S., and the term "refugees" are thus mutually constituted. If the U.S. can re-present itself as a refuge, then it can discursively move itself away from being a war aggressor.

Figure 1. Vietnamese civilians trying to board a U.S. helicopter near the U.S. embassy in Saigon, 1975. (Hugh Van Es) © Bettmann/ CORBIS

I then charted the field of what I call "critical refugee studies," a term which I will summarize at the end of the talk. Essentially what I wanted to do was to (re)conceptualize "the refugee" in academic discussion and popular discourse not as an object of rescue, but rather as a *paradigm* "whose function [is] to establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems" (Agamben 2002: 1) such as colonialization, war and displacement. Instead of looking at Vietnamese refugees as people that we assimilate and make into a success or continue to see as a problem, I argue that we should look at them as a critical site of social and political critique. As you trace their lives, other erased histories will become visible, like the history of U.S. colonialism

in the Philippines and military colonialism in the Pacific Islands, and so on. This is the idea that if you resurrect the history of the displacement and flight of the Vietnamese people, you will simultaneously call attention to other histories that have been systematically erased.

I am going to now talk about two concepts: "military colonialism" and "militarized refuge". I do a lot of my work quite intuitively, and it derives from personal stories, often from my students or from people who attend my talks. I think about "why would this be the case?" and then try to think about how one might theorize from a personal anecdote. So the ideas for this chapter emerged from my own story of leaving Vietnam and coming to the United States.

Here, I deal with a group that is referred to as the first-wave Vietnamese refugees—those who left soon after the Fall of Saigon in April 1975. I left Vietnam with my mother in 1975 on one of the military aircrafts that the U.S. provided. We travelled from Saigon, Vietnam to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. From there we went to Anderson Air Force Base in Guam and eventually to Camp Pendleton in California. I didn't realize until later that over 40 per cent of the Vietnamese who were airlifted out by the U.S. and eventually landed in the U.S. took this very same route as my mom and I did.

What did these geographic points on our journey have in common? The commonality was that they were all military bases, and this is the quickest summary of what I call militarized refuge. I thought, "Gosh, I've been doing ethnic studies for 25 years and I didn't recognize the significance of this pattern." I've told this story of my flight over and over again, about how we got here, and I just saw it as going from place to place, almost randomly. I never thought seriously about which places we landed at and why, and the fact that we went through all of these different military bases. It's not an accidental, random route or something that we just came up with. This particular refugee route could have only been possible with the long history of U.S. military interventions in Asia, dating all the way back to 1898, and I would argue even before then if you think about settler colonialism in the Americas, which made possible U.S. military overtures overseas in the first place.

I wanted to think very seriously about what it means to have these military bases be called "refugee centres". The

simultaneity of violence and recovery is something that I am really interested in. In the very space touted as the one in which Vietnamese were being rescued and showered with affection, benevolence and so on, was the very same space from where the war in Vietnam was launched and made possible. I came up with this term "militarized refuge"—with its intended jarring juxtaposition—in order to challenge the powerful narrative of America(ns) rescuing and caring for Vietnam's discarded that erases the role that U.S. foreign policy and war played in inducing the "refugee crisis" in the first place. To make a case against U.S. militarism, I argue that we need to expose the militarized violence behind the humanitarian ideas of refuge and refugees. That's the intention behind the term in the book's title: "militarized refuge(es)".

Another term that I want to call attention to is "military colonialism". In my department, Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego, we take issues of indigeneity really seriously, and so settler colonialism is a key lens through which we understand how power works. But I also think that there are places around the world where colonial powers don't necessarily settle, except militarily. So I coined the term "military colonialism" to describe these militarized spaces, particularly in the Pacific Islands. I'm very interested in Guam and even Hawai'i (even though Hawai'i is now considered part of the U.S.) as places that continue to be considered primarily sites to house U.S. military personnel and weapons. The Philippines at one point in time was also very much a subject of military colonialism. It is important for us to theorize about the specificity of militarized colonized spaces, in addition to thinking about settler colonialism and about colonies in general.

In *Body Counts*, I am concerned with displacing the dominant memory of the U.S. as a masculine and benevolent state, not only by pointing out that it disavows U.S. imperial wars in Asia, but also because it creates and solidifies a humanitarian discourse that permits the justification of U.S. wars in the Middle East and West Asia and Afghanistan, and rationalizes the further, continual militarization of Asia and the Pacific Islands. I think that the Pacific Islands are really the hub that enables so much of what happened in Asia militarily. And it's really a space that ideologically has been emptied. I'll talk a little bit more about that

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later on.

Going back to the airlifted refugees in April 1975, you may recall that the Americans were very self-congratulatory about how much work they were able to do in such a short time, to move all these refugees, like myself, and encamp them at military bases throughout the Pacific archipelago. And, true, it was an enormous undertaking if you think about it: moving over 100,000 refugees in a matter of days and trying to find places to house them. The logistics were quite overwhelming, even mind-blowing. What I realized was that they were able to accomplish this feat because there was already an infrastructure in place – a *military* infrastructure. I contend that it was the region's neo-colonial dependence on the U.S. that turned the Philippines and Guam, the U.S.'s former and current colonial territories respectively, into the "ideal" receiving centres of the U.S. rescuing project.

The Philippines, for example, initially agreed to accept the Vietnamese, but eventually refused to accept any more refugees, thus foreclosing the most promising staging area in the Asia-Pacific region. Even though the Philippines was a former colonial territory, by this time it was a sovereign nation and could in fact say "no" to the U.S. In contrast, when U.S. officials moved the premier refugee staging area from the Philippines to Guam, the Chamorro people (of Guam) did not have the same ability to refuse. As an unincorporated organized territory of the United States, the federal government holds plenary powers—that is, full authority—over the island. On an island where the U.S. military controlled one-third of its territory, Guam became the "logical" transit camps for the processing of evacuees. Recently, I wrote a paper on collateral damage of the Vietnam War, where I argue that collateral damage was imposed on the "other Others", in this case the Chamorros, because of the Vietnam War. I didn't think about it until recently, what it must have meant for the local populations, for all these Vietnamese to all of a sudden descend on this very, very small island, straining the already-strained infrastructure such as water, food, transportation and so on. So I think about the costs to the indigenous people of Guam also as the collateral damage of the Vietnam War.

To sum up this section, I argue that it was the enormity of the military buildup in the Pacific that uniquely equipped the U.S. bases to handle the large-scale refugee rescue operation.

Thus U.S. evacuation efforts were not a slapdash response, as they often say, to an emergency situation that arose in Vietnam in 1975, but rather part and parcel of the longstanding militarized histories and circuits that connected Vietnam, the Philippines and Guam, dating back to 1898. So again, that's what I mean by military colonialism.

In particular, the U.S. decision to designate the island of Guam as the primary staging ground for the refugees, even when the island's resources were severely stressed and its inhabitants adversely impacted, repeats the longstanding belief that indigenous land is essentially empty land, that is, land empty of its indigenous population. In some ways, the U.S. carpet-bombing of Vietnam was also symptomatic of that empty-land mentality—a flagrant dismissiveness of the country as "a worthless piece of land," as characterized by an American official (Dunnaway 2008: 119). This type of military colonization, that of a colonized island and its indigenous inhabitants, turned this island into an ideal colonial dumping ground for the unwanted Vietnamese refugees, the collateral damage of the Vietnam War.

I wanted to just mention one more space: Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California. All of the Vietnamese refugees who arrived in the U.S. in 1975 were first sent to military bases, one of which was Camp Pendleton. What I want to call attention to is the fact that Camp Pendleton also emerged out of a history of conquest: it is located in the traditional territory of the Juaneno, Luiseno and Kumeyaay tribes, which had been "discovered" by Spanish padres and voyagers who traveled to southern California in the late eighteenth century. Then it was "owned" by unscrupulous Anglo-American settlers for about a century. It was eventually "acquired" by the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942 in order to establish a West Coast base for combat training. The camp is about 17 miles long; its shoreline is prized land, and it's beautiful. However, this buried past, of the "stolen land" has continued to surface, sometimes literally, in the form of the inadvertent discoveries of native burials and human bone fragments. In short, this particular refuge space for the Vietnamese refugees, Camp Pendleton, was also enabled by settler colonialism.

In moving from one U.S. military base to another through this Asia-Pacific route, Vietnamese refugees witnessed firsthand the shaping of the U.S. empire in the Asia-Pacific region. This is

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what I mean by looking at, theoretically, the Vietnamese refugee as a site of political critique, versus as an object of rescue. By tracing the routing of the Vietnamese refugees, this inadvertently exposes U.S. colonialism, settler colonialism and militarism, because these are the spaces in which they landed. Just looking at the list of military bases that doubled up as refugee camps would allow you to see these connections.

The second term I use is "militarized refuge". While I recognize the value of conceptualizing war as a "knowledge project or epistemology" (Kim 2010: 8), I also believe that we need to continue to think of war in terms of "militarized violence"—not only epistemic or symbolic violence but the actual physical violence of "guns and bombs" unleashed on those deemed to be devoid of names and faces, family and personal histories, and politics and beliefs.

I am going to give you some quick examples. Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines provided crucial logistical support for U.S. wars in Southeast Asia. This would be the place where you'd land to get refueled. When the United States was not permitted to mount B-52 bombing runs from Clark, however, it turned to Guam. Andersen Air Force Base in Guam played a "legendary role" in the Vietnam War, launching a monthly bombing mission over North and South Vietnam for about a decade (Rogers 1995: 252). Andersen rapidly became the largest U.S. base for B-52 bombers. In such a small space, everything on Guam was completely militarized: personnel, weapons, bases, even culture.

In 1972, Andersen was the site of the most massive buildup of airpower in history, with more than 15,000 crews and over 150 B-52s lining all available flight line space—about five miles long on an island that is just 20 miles long. It's interesting to think about space and how it's used. At its peak, Andersen housed around 165 B-52s (Rogers 1995: 252). During Operation Linebacker II in 1972 (named after Nixon's favorite sport: American football!), bombers stationed at Andersen flew 729 sorties around the clock over 11 days. On December 18, 87 B-52s were launched from Andersen to Vietnam in less than two hours. Please keep this in mind when you think about Vietnamese refugees being relocated and encamped into these very same spaces in 1975.

Back in California, Camp Pendleton is the home base of the illustrious 1st Marine Regiment. While I won't go into details, they are called the 1st Marine Regiment, whose battalions began

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arriving in Vietnam in August 1965. The regiment's battalions, who are the most vicious and well-trained in hand-to-hand combat, participated in some of the most ferocious battles of the war. Between January and March 1968, in the city of Hue, the 1st Marines, along with other U.S. Marine and South Vietnamese units, killed close to 2,000 "enemies" in street fighting and hand-to-hand combat. The regiment continued heavy fighting through the rest of the year, which culminated in Operation Meade River, which killed nearly 850 Vietnamese. I recently learned that the general who ran this combat operation, General Paul Graham, was also the man who directed the resettlement efforts of the refugees at Camp Pendleton, further blurring violence and recovery into each other. Indeed, Graham's illustrious career, his promotions and recognitions, were built in large part on the role that he played in executing both the violence against and the recovery of Vietnamese bodies.

In sum, I have argued that Pacific military bases, Clark and Andersen Air Force bases, and California's Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, which were credited and valourized for resettling Vietnamese refugees in 1975, were the very sites responsible for inducing the refugee displacement in the first place. The massive tonnage of bombs, along with the ground fighting provided by Marine units like Camp Pendleton's 1st Marines, displaced some 12 million people in South Vietnam, almost half the country's total population at that time, from their homes.

This is a really nice map that one of my graduate students, Ly Nguyen, did for me (see Figure 2). You can see at the top, the red line is the U.S. military going to the different spaces that I've mentioned, and then the bottom line, the blue line, depicts

Figure 2 – Map of the routing of U.S. military and weapons to Asia and of the "return" of Vietnamese refugees to the U.S. (Ly Nguyen)
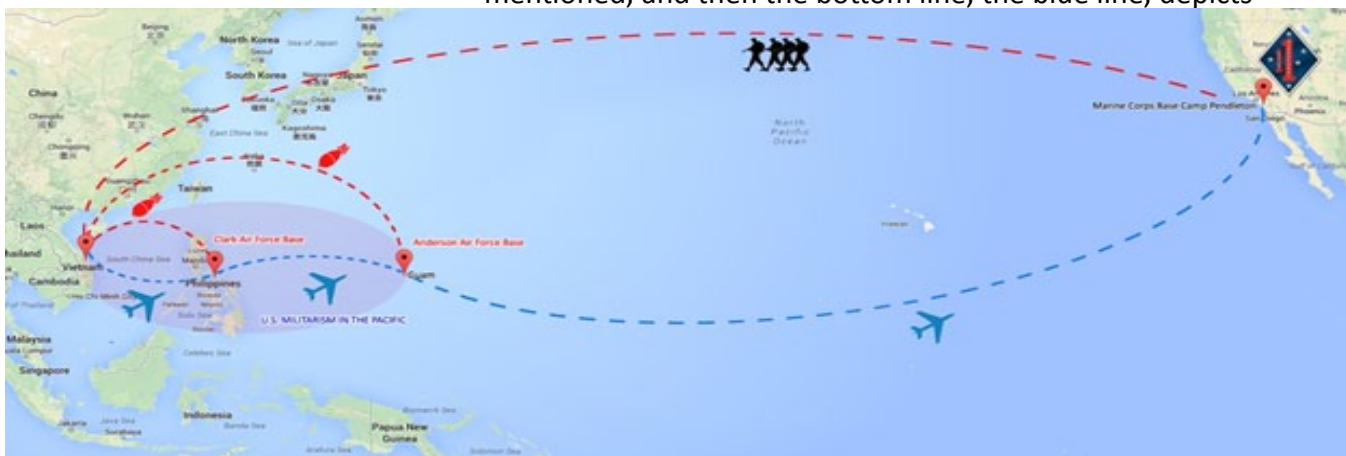
the Vietnamese going back to the U.S. It is a very visual way of thinking about what happened. I remember taking a taxi in the U.S. once and the driver was Moroccan and we engaged in a conversation about imperialism. The driver shared with me that before he came to the U.S. he was in France, a country that had colonized Morocco. He spoke about the youth riots that were taking place in France at the time, whose participants were mostly immigrant kids. He said to me, "you know, the French went to Morocco and took all of our access, and we just followed our access back to France." This map is another example of this: of Vietnamese refugees following the trail back to the U.S.

Figure 3 – Young Vietnamese refugee children walk through one of the refugee camps aboard Camp Pendleton, California. Photo taken on 5 May 1975 by Major G. L. Gill. (Photo courtesy of Camp Pendleton Archives).

I want to end with an image that visually depicts what I'm trying to say about militarized refuge. This is a photograph from the Camp Pendleton Historical Society photo exhibit in 2010 (see Figure 3), which was the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of Saigon. Dated May 5, 1975, it depicts several Vietnamese children walking barefoot around the Camp, their whole bodies engulfed in extra-long military jackets. Undoubtedly, the gesture was meant to be kind and the jacket intended to warm their bodies against the morning cold—it was very cold for Vietnamese, even in California. Yet this picture, I would say, encapsulates so vividly the concept of *militarized refuge(es)*, with young Vietnamese

bodies literally wrapped in U.S. protective military gear as they wandered the grounds of their new home in America—a military base that housed the very same 1st Marines who had waged war in Vietnam, leaving high numbers of combat deaths in their wake. The military jackets for me symbolize the unsettling entanglement between military acts of violence that I mentioned earlier, with recovery literally overlaying and at times disappearing the memory of violence. Here the jackets literally overlaid and disappeared the young refugees.

Grafting the colonial histories of the Philippines, Guam and the Pacific Islands and the ongoing displacement of indigenous populations onto the history of the Vietnam War also debunks the misguided nostalgia for a "gentler America"—a time of national unity, purity and innocence—that supposedly preceded the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, a sentiment that blatantly denies the reality of a bloody, divisive and disruptive history that included genocide, slavery, lynching, war, the atomic bomb and Agent Orange.

This methodology of grafting—of connecting the dots, critical juxtaposing—offers the promise that even deliberately discarded histories—such as colonialism in the Philippines, settler colonialism, military colonialism, and also Vietnamese lives and stories—will continue to be told as they bump against, intersect with, and route through the lives of kin communities.

To conclude, what I've tried to do in this book is to develop a different way of looking at refugees, one that conceptualizes "the refugee" as an analytic for critical inquiry rather than as a traumatized object of study; as a site of political and social critique, their lives, when traced, make visible the linked processes of colonialism, war and displacement.

Second, critical refugee studies, I think, also helps us to expose the militarized violence behind the humanitarian idea of refuge, to reveal the humanitarian violence that undergirds a rescue/liberation project.

Third is the connection between militarism and migration. I really think that if you map migration on top of militarism and on top of colonialism, they would match up. This kind of layering—of colonialism, militarism and migration—is absolutely important because it challenges the myth of immigrant America—the push and pull narrative of desperate individuals searching for liberty, searching for the promised land. This narrative constitutes the

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underlying logic of anti-immigrant rhetoric and practices, and makes invisible or un-visible the role that U.S. militarism has played in the global structures of migration.

I will end here. As we now witness the continuing movements of refugees around the world, with Syrian refugees being the most visible in the media now, and as scholars interested in social change, it's imperative that we take a very different sort of responsibility for the global conditions of justice, not only to attempt to integrate the world's dispossessed, but also to critically delineate and evaluate the policies and practices that produce displaced conditions in the first place.

Dr. Le Espiritu gave the Asia Lecture on 8 October 2015 at York University in Toronto, Canada.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Yen Le Espiritu is Professor and former Chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego. An award winning author, she has published widely on Asian American panethnicity, gender and migration, and on U.S. colonialism and wars in Asia. Her books include H*ome Bound: Filipino Lives Across Countries, Communities and Cultures* (University of California Press, 2003), *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008) and most recently B*ody Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (University of California Press, 2014).

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