The Heart(land) of Empire: "Minnesota Nice" and the Shadows of U.S. Bene/violent Culture in Vietnamese Refugee Lives

Giang Nguyen-Dien

Introduction

In the opening of a bilingual English–Vietnamese publication by State of Minnesota called "Minnesota New Life—Đời Mới" (March 1976), Stanley Breen, coordinator of the governor's Indochinese Refugee Resettlement Task Force, noted:

> We know that all of you have left your homeland because you want freedom and peace.... I assure you that there are thousands of noble Americans throughout the state who are eager to help you become part of their society. They are your sponsors, teachers, your employers, your neighbors.... We are trying hard to assist you, as much and as long as possible, until you are self-sufficient. We hope you will find things much better in the coming days, and you can be assured that we are always behind you in your transition into a new life in Minnesota. With warmest wishes for peace, happiness, and prosperity.[1]

Breen's statement describes the refugee passage to the United States through the lens of choice rather than forced displacement. It pushes into the background U.S. military aggression in Southeast Asia that contributed to the refugee exodus and brings to the forefront the role of ordinary Americans (sponsors, teachers, employers, neighbors, etc.) in the nation's

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 62.3 (2023)

efforts to accommodate Southeast Asian refugees in American society. This statement falls in line with the image of "Minnesota Nice" (referring to Minnesotan kindness and friendliness in the popular cultural imagination) and reveals how the cultural trope of niceness masks the U.S. structure of whiteness and reflects the history of white benevolence that obscures its imperial violence toward nonwhite subjects.

In this article, I ask what it would reveal to explore American goodwill not as political rhetoric to erase U.S. imperial violence or to sustain its self-appointed role as world protector and liberator but rather as a way of life performed by those who "bestow" benevolence and lived by those who are subjected to it. Based on local news and official reports of Vietnamese and Southeast Asian refugee resettlement in Minnesota; the Minnesota Indochinese Task Force newsletter Minnesota New Life, collected at the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) Archives at the University of Minnesota; and oral histories collected in Twin Cities in summer 2021, this article explores how benevolence and violence are woven together (henceforth bene/violence) during the refugee resettlement process and in refugees' daily lives. This intricate bene/violence knot structures refugee life along multiple contradictions. Refugees must navigate their lives as subjects wounded and then "rescued" by the U.S. empire, racialized yet rendered indebted. They must also negotiate the tensions between the pressure of assimilation and the reality of exclusion.

I define bene/violence as the inseparable entanglement of benevolence and violence that produces a disciplinary love to recruit, to use Louis Althusser's words, citizen-subjects among refugees through affected abjection.[2] I argue that anchoring this concept, bene/violence offers a lens to explore how the "tradition of American generosity," as the Minneapolis Tribune put it in 1975, thrives on the naturalization of violence against Southeast Asian refugees.[3] I employ the lens of bene/violence to emphasize how U.S. benevolence thrives on and naturalizes violence against refugees, rather than just obscuring, erasing, or justifying such violence. Grounding bene/violence as the culture of U.S. empire, this article contributes to an understanding of empire beyond territorial expansion and management, foreign policies, and military interventions by recentering the cultural front as a locale to investigate the visibility and invisibility of colonial governance that are baked in the lives of Vietnamese refugees.

In what follows, I demonstrate how the violence of dispersal policy became the vital condition for the showcase and sustenance of Minnesotan, and more broadly American, kindness and goodwill. The multiple locales of refugee resettlement stories in newspaper reports reflect the reality of dispersal, the violence of which is often brushed away in the local press. I then explore how the appeal to a "nation of immigrants" rationalizes the requirements for refugees to work hard and participate in white capitalist hegemony. Finally, I explore how the cultural trope of "Minnesota Nice" is

the ground to discard racial discrimination as an aberration from the norm of kindness. I weave in Vietnamese refugees' oral histories collected in Twin Cities in summer 2021 to bring attention to the contradictions—between the reality of rejection and the pressure of assimilation and between the semblance of benevolence and the experience of violence—that structure Vietnamese refugee lives in Minnesota. Although accounts of Vietnamese refugee resettlement are gathered from different time frames (from 1975 to the present), the same narrative structure persists across those accounts, reflecting the enduring materialization of U.S. bene/violent culture in refugee lives.

Bene/violence as the Culture of Empire

Building on Amy Kaplan's critique of "the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism [and] the absence of empire from the study of American culture,"[4] my investigation of bene/violence as U.S. imperial culture rests upon the understanding of "culture as ordinary" and as "a whole way of life"[5] that shapes the lives of not just "the foreign subjects of U.S. domination, but [also] U.S. citizens who benefit from it, who are subjugated to it, and who resist it."[6] To understand the culture of empire or understand empire as a way of life is to see empire beyond its territorial occupations and management and as a "decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule" that dictates the reality of life and establishes "the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be."[7] Bene/violence weaves the "tradition of American generosity" and the cultural image "nation of immigration" (as the way things were always meant to be) on the background of coercion of assimilation into whiteness, and the expectations for the "good refugee" performance that is predicated upon neoliberal values of individual autonomy, economic productivity, and upward mobility (as the way things are supposed to be).[8]

In this way, bene/violence becomes a technology of control that disciplines refugees in the "benign" project of Americanizing nonwhite subjects.[9] Therefore, it is a manifestation of what Michel Foucault calls "governmentality," which he defines as "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analysis and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security."[10] In other words, governmentality denotes a set of relations established through social institutions and through formation of certain "forms of knowledge,"[11] as well as organized around political economy to "exercise … surveillance and control [toward citizen-subjects]."[12] I draw on Foucault's attention to "forms of knowledge" to establish bene/violence as a manifestation of imperial culture that establishes norms, beliefs, behaviors, and subjectivities.

My conceptualization of bene/violence is also built on scholarly works of Yen Le Espiritu, Mimi Nguyen, and Neda Atanasoski, who have explored the deployment of humanitarianism as a trope to erase U.S. military violence abroad, as well as to reinstate and reaffirm the reliance on violence in the name of peacekeeping, protecting democracy and the "free world," and offering the "gift of freedom."[13] Rather than grounding benevolence as justificatory tactics for U.S. political agendas of empire building during the Cold War, I regard bene/violence as a cultural praxis that shapes U.S. national identity after World War II (as liberator and protector of human rights) and the lives of the marginalized. I situate bene/violence as a culture of U.S. empire in the pivot of U.S. national identity toward an emphasis on the language of human rights protection, cultural tolerance, and the officialized narratives of "antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity,"[14] which became prominent after the 1960s' social justice movements to legitimize the United States' leading role in the international arena.[15]

Focusing on the performance of benevolence as a "national heritage"[16]—a tradition performed by those who represent the "noble Americans" in Breen's statement—I highlight how the loyal belief in the tradition of American goodwill engenders participation in the tradition of colonization, subjection, exclusion, and racialization. In other words, bene/violence reveals how individual acts of kindness become inseparable from U.S. imperial violence in its domestic sphere. Therefore, bene/violence provides the means to trace the connection between discourse and lived experience, between U.S. imperial aggression in Southeast Asia and its domestic racial violence on Asian American subjects,[17] and between U.S. conduct in international spheres and the trajectory of U.S. national identity projects.[18] Most importantly, through the lens of bene/violence as the manifestation of U.S. imperial culture, I emphasize how empire is ordinary, mirroring Raymond Williams's conceptualization of culture as ordinary.[19] Bene/violence is lived and experienced in ordinary aspects of minority life, turning living in the United States into constant navigation within the sphere of affected subjection—a discipline tactic framed as love rather than for love.

Why Minnesota?

I focus on Minnesota to deconstruct the conventional propensity to look to California and Texas (the two states with the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans) as *the* locale for the Vietnamese American experience, following the lead of Stephen Sumida, who critiqued the "Californic paradigm" in Asian American Studies that becomes "not regional, but unbounded, central and broadly paradigmatic."[20] Although there has been substantial research about Vietnamese refugee communities in California and in the South,[21] the experience of Vietnamese refugees in

the Midwest has been understudied. Erika Lee refers to the absence of Midwestern Asian American history in both mainstream history and Asian American scholarship as "double invisibility."[22] I center the Midwest as a point of departure not to claim any distinctness of Vietnamese refugee experiences in the region but rather to explore the regional historical, social, cultural, and racial particularities that intimately affect refugee lives, which, according to Pawan Dhingra, is a more fruitful approach to the study of Asian Americans in the Midwest.[23]

I locate Minnesota as a Vietnamese American place to deconstruct the notion of the Midwest as an "an un-Asian American place"[24] and to reveal characteristics of U.S. empire in its "heartland," the oft-perceived stronghold of national and traditional values.[25] The presence of Vietnamese refugees in the Midwest reflects the violence of forced assimilation through U.S. refugee dispersal policies. Resettled in a place without established ethnic enclaves, refugees were forced to depend on the "noble Americans" for support, as Breen mentioned in his statement. In this way, the Midwest becomes the place where American generosity and goodwill are particularly felt, experienced, heightened, and reinforced. Although I do not claim Minnesota as representative of the Midwest, I anchor on the popular characterization of "Minnesota Nice" as a lens to explore how the popular cultural imagination of the Midwest as pastoral, neighborly, and kind reflects white benevolence that characterizes U.S. imperial logic and mechanisms. In addition, it is on the ground of bene/violence as a culture of empire that the cultural signifier "Minnesota Nice" becomes an important point of investigation.[26] The cultural banner of "Minnesota Nice" provides a way to look at U.S. empire beyond the conventional lens of economic expansions, military interventions, and foreign policies. Rather, it explores modes of conduct that dictate the daily interactions between "bestowers" of American kindness and racialized recipients of such kindness who, in return, are bound to perform their roles as the "good refugees" while resisting the subjugation placed on them.

The Resettlement of Southeast Asian Refugees in Minnesota

Housing 3,800 Southeast Asian refugees in 1975, Minnesota ranked seventh in the total population of Southeast Asian refugees that year (after California, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, the state of Washington, and New York).[27] In 1978, the state ranked second in the Midwest with the largest number of Southeast Asian refugees (after Illinois).[28] Even though there were already Vietnamese who came to Minnesota as students and wives of American servicemen from the 1950s to early 1970s, most Vietnamese came to Minnesota as refugees from mid-1975 to 1995.[29] During this time, Minnesota witnessed both primary and secondary migration of Southeast Asian refugees into the state.[30] From 1979 to 1994, 13,582

Vietnamese refugees arrived in Minnesota,[31] the majority of whom settled in Twin Cities and the rest of whom settled in Duluth, St. Cloud, Rochester, and Willmar—within a two-hour drive of the Twin Cities area.[32]

The arrival and resettlement of Vietnamese in the United States was facilitated by federal and state policies, starting with the formation of the Interagency Task Force and the passing of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act in 1975.[33] In 1979, to reduce of casualties incurred at sea in the second wave of refugee exodus, the Orderly Departure Program was established to facilitate the departure of 1) family members of people in the United States; 2) former employees of the U.S. government, U.S. businesses and organizations; and 3) people who had ties with the United States during the war, including children fathered by U.S. soldiers (Amerasians) and their immediate family members.[34] In 1980, Congress passed the Refugee Act, increasing the number of refugees admitted annually from 17,400 to 50,000 by separating refugee admission from the quota of annual immigrant admission.[35]

In addition, the establishment of the Refugee Resettlement Office under the 1980 Refugee Act allowed for the establishment of nationwide refugee resettlement programs (English language programs, job training and counseling, housing support, cultural orientation programs, healthcare services, etc.) through 100% reimbursement to states for cash and medical assistance.[36] Aside from a few states that directly sponsored refugees (such as the state of Washington, New Mexico, Indiana, Missouri, Maine, Oklahoma, Iowa, and Idaho),[37] voluntary agencies were tasked with finding sponsors who would provide food, clothing, and shelter, as well as help refugees find jobs, enroll their children to schools, provide English lessons, and generally guide them in American customs and ways of life.[38]

Minnesota was among the states that actively engaged in the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees. Under the leadership of Richard Friedman, regional director of Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Minnesota (along with Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois) made efforts to establish statewide support services for refugee resettlement.[39] The establishment of Indochinese Resettlement Office and the Indochinese Refugee Task Force by Governor Wendell Anderson,[40] as well as the advocacy of Breen, Minnesota's coordinator of the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program, contributed to the relative success of the resettlement implementation in the state.[41] The Minnesota Department of Public Welfare (DPW) oversaw the state resettlement program under which the Refugee Program Office (RPO) existed, particularly within the Assistance Payments Division of the Bureau of Income Maintenance.[42]

Resettlement services were delivered through four groups of agencies: 1) RPO in the DPW and associated state agencies; 2) the county human and social services departments; 3) the 50 agencies contracted with RPO to provide refugee education, employment, and health services;

and 4) voluntary agencies, private foundations, and healthcare providers.[43] In Minnesota, local affiliates with four major voluntary agencies were in charge of the resettlement process: the American Council for Nationalities Services, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, US Catholic Conference, and Church World Service. In addition, the Minnesota RPO contracted with 11 adult vocational technical institutes for job training and seven adult basic and continuing education centers and the Minnesota Literary Council for English language training.[44] Finally, the International Institute of Minnesota played a significant role in the state's refugee resettlement efforts, handling 130 refugee resettlement cases in 1975, 1,022 cases in 1979, and approximately 2,000 in 1980, as well as organizing English classes for refugees in the Twin Cities area.[45]

"Vietnam, Minn. – Peace·· and Pain"—Minnesotan Kindness and Refugee Pain

The title of this section comes from the *Minneapolis Tribune* series of seven reports that addresses the "problems and successes in refugees' attempts to adjust to American life."[46] Each of the reports includes a portrait of the refugee whose story is featured, with the phrase "Vietnam, Minn." on the top of the portrait and the phrase "Peace·· and Pain" under it. In this section, I explore peace and pain as a trope that weaves the hypervisible Minnesotan benevolence with the invisible violence in the refugee resettlement process. I highlight how bene/violence is anchored on the "tradition of American generosity"[47] that thrives on the violence of dispersal policy.

The series of Vietnamese refugee resettlement stories by the *Minneapolis Tribune* in 1975 demonstrated how the refugees had escaped the chaos of war to enter a society of peace and how such peace was intertwined with the pain of loss, isolation, adaptation, and survival. Yet any resettlement story was described as "not one of despair or deprivation," for the following reason:

> Many of the sponsoring churches and families … have responded generously to the immediate physical and social needs of the refugees. The sponsors have provided food and clothing, arranged for jobs, transportation, and social contacts, sometimes have given them cars.[48]

As such, the reports continued, "[r]esettlement officials attribute the 'Minnesota refugee story' largely to the work of the sponsors, [who have] devoted countless hours to the refugees."[49] Although federal policies were criticized for "dump[ing] the refugees onto American society, as if to wash its hands of them," local communities became a source of the nation's pride as they "worked for months with the refugees helping them

find homes and jobs and even helping to support them financially, [demonstrating how] the heart-warming, people-to-people effort is in the best *tradition of American generosity*" (emphasis added).[50] Newspapers were filled with stories of Minnesotan hospitality and generosity,[51] "ideas [to help refugees] that started with the people,"[52] and testimonies of refugee gratefulness to the supports that helped them get back on their feet and to be reunited with family members.[53]

The highlight of Minnesotan kindness and generosity overshadowed that local support for refugees was conditional on the dispersal of refugees across the state. The rationale behind dispersal was to reduce social and economic impacts on local communities, as well as to facilitate faster assimilation into American society.[54] In addition, since 54% and 66% of Americans were against resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees in the United States in 1975 and 1980, respectively, and the rate of unemployment rose to 9% during those years, dispersal was even more necessary to reduce the visibility of refugees.[55] Indeed, the *Minneapolis Tribune* explained that Minnesota was able to avoid any major public reaction against refugees because with the wide dispersal of refugees, they were deemed as posing "no major job threat."[56]

First-wave Vietnamese refugees (those who left during the last days of the war up until 1976) were heavily impacted by the dispersal policy, because without established communities or family ties, their resettlement depended entirely on sponsorship.[57] Apart from a few who could influence, relatively, their resettlement placement due to previous connections with U.S. businesses or organizations, the majority came to Minnesota through sponsorship "without the luxury of choice."[58] The violence of forced placement had negative impacts on first-wave refugees' mental health as the lack of emotional support from ethnic communities aggravated the isolation and disorientation.[59] Ms. Nga Truitner, a caseworker at the Minnesota International Institute, spoke of how "only a Vietnamese can help them," since "American sponsors cannot give the refugees the moral and emotional support they need."[60] The pain of forced dispersal was more intense for refugees who were placed in rural areas, where they lacked access to many social services, English language classes, and staple Vietnamese food and ingredients, as well as facing the challenges of being hypervisible.[61] However, such pain was attributed to their lack of English proficiency and familiarity of Western culture and presented as temporary and conditional to an individual refugee's perspectives or expectations. Through this lens, as Espiritu has pointed out, the so-called refugee problems are situated in the Vietnamese themselves rather than in the legacy of U.S. military aggression in Southeast Asia or in the dispersal policy.[62]

The creation of pain interwoven by forced displacement from Vietnam and forced placement into Minnesota forged the ground for the

urgency and indispensability of Minnesotan kindness and generosity. The Vietnamese had to suffer the violence of U.S. military aggression in the Vietnam War to be "rescued" afterward as refugees. Then, the refugees had to suffer the violence of dispersal to be "helped" or "rescued" again by American sponsors. For instance, not long after being resettled in Merle Olson farm, six miles from Blue Earth, Minnesota, a small town two hours south of Twin Cities, Grandmother Nho took an overdose of sleeping pills to end her life of loneliness and depression. The local news depicted how the Blue Earth communities "came to Grandmother Nho's side during her difficult time, bringing flowers and visiting her at the hospital." The people also contributed money to open a bank account for her family and helped with a $1,500 downpayment for the family's new car.[63] Against her plights, the kindness of Blue Earth communities and sponsors was perceived as not only urgent but also indispensable to her survival.

In addition, the violence of dispersal is not just to highlight American kindness but also to reconcile the contradictory desire to showcase benevolence and to maintain white dominance. The Tran Que family (which includes Grandmother Nho) and Huynh An family were sponsored to Blue Earth together so that the two families could "associate with each other to avoid being totally isolated in the small town."[64] The assumption that sponsoring two refugee families in Blue Earth would be sufficient to "help" them feel less isolated reveals how American kindness functions within the parameter of white dominance. Having two refugee families was deemed enough to demonstrate Minnesotan kindness and thoughtfulness without threatening the established racial order. Hence, the tradition of American generosity performed by local communities is intertwined with the tradi-tion of xenophobia and white supremacy in U.S. nation building,[65] as well as the imagined anxiety over the "yellow peril"—the perceived threat of Asian invasion and domination through labor competitions and potential miscegenation with white women.[66] This demonstrates how Minnesotan niceness can only operate upon the scattering (and hence invisibility) of refugees within the area.

The thriving of Minnesotan kindness and generosity on refugee pain reveals how bene/violence works. This narrative of American generosity is a continuation of the practice of "rescue" through the creation of war, which restores U.S. righteousness and moral superiority after war[67] and transforms U.S. war violence into "prepaid debts" for the liberation of the colonized[68] and for "the gift of freedom," which aims at "freeing peoples from unenlightened forms of social organization through fields of power and violence."[69] In addition, the focus on the tradition of American generosity obscures the long history of sugar-coating U.S. colonial governance in the language of love and care to justify the violence used to "uplift" those deemed incapable of self-governance[70] and discipline those deemed in-

capable of self-sufficiency.[71] As such, the so-called tradition of American generosity reflects a tradition of bene/violence of U.S. empire that not just masks violence under benevolence but also employs violence to feed and build benevolence.

"Nation of Immigration": Economic Self-Sufficiency and the "Benign" Americanization Project

Bene/violence also relies on the cultural image of a "nation of immigrants" to naturalize the violence of assimilation into whiteness. The benign Americanization project entails participation in a violent white capitalist hegemony. According to the *Minnesota New Life* published in 1976, the first step toward assimilation is to become productive individuals in the economy, because "the very fact of working, no matter what job, should put the refugee in a situation which will help him—indeed, will force him—to learn English, [and] the very fact of being with Americans, in a day-to-day situation, could help him adjust more easily to a new culture."[72] The cultural reference of the "nation of immigrants" was employed to explain that

> a nation of immigrant may be quick to establish special programs, as the U.S. has, to help refuges with initial resettlement. But the historical memory and the personal experience of Americans remind them that many immigrant groups have had to confront the difficult problems of resettlement without long-term special assistance. Thus, Americans, in expecting any group of newcomers to seek work as soon as they can, are only expecting them to do what many in this country have already done.[73]

The emphasis on "no matter what job" facilitated placement of refugees in low-paid sectors of the economy, especially for those on cash assistance. *Minnesota New Life* highlighted that "the basis for successful resettlement is self-sufficiency" and praised "many [refugees who] have taken jobs below their capacities; many women and young people are working."[74] Those on welfare "must be registered with the employment agency and must accept 'suitable' employment that the agency finds. 'Suitable' employment means work that the person is physically or mentally able to do. It means that the work site is accessible by foot, by bus, or by other appropriate conveyance. It does not mean that the work must be within one's preferred or primary occupation."[75] The hyperfocus on self-sufficiency entailed forced placement of jobs, which was constructed as beneficial for the refugees.

Therefore, for first-wave refugees, job placement was not always a positive experience. When Vo Van Canh, former commander of the 10,000 troops of the 23rd Division in the highlands of South Vietnam, came to

Rochester, Minnesota, in 1975, he took the bus boy job (for $2.10 per hour) to please his sponsor, Redeemer Lutheran Church, even though he disliked the job. He quit two months later and found a different job as a hospital housekeeper for $3.75 per hour. He criticized the sponsoring churches for "depriving refugees of their freedoms, controlling their finances and giving them little choices of jobs."[76] The moment Canh subverted the benevolence of resettlement and the job placement process, he was cast as ungrateful. A St. Cloud resident responded that he should be grateful for "small blessings," because there were "citizens who '[didn't] have that much.'"[77] Canh was supposed to be grateful because he took a job to which an American was entitled. While participating in the low-paid workforce was heralded as a pathway to be part of the "nation of immigrants," refugees were also cast as foreigners who took away American jobs. This shows that the benign narrative of inclusion embedded in the image of a "nation of immigrant" works in tandem with U.S. anti-Asian sentiments in U.S. bene/violent culture.

In addition, the push for refugees to take any kind of job forced them into low-paid sectors of the economy, which is often left unexamined in news reports. Stories of refugees' strong work ethic overshadowed their struggles for survival with low wages. In refugee oral history interviews, however, such struggles reveal themselves more vividly. Incorporated into one of lowest levels of the economic ladder, they often had to take two jobs to survive. One participant in my oral history interviews, who came to Minnesota in 1975, took two jobs to support her family. She was working for a company that made aprons (for $2.15 per hour) and then for a store that made men's clothing from 4 pm to 9 pm (for $3 per hour). She also brought home extra clothes to sew on labels, with which her four daughters helped as well. As such, she and her daughters were pushed into an economy that thrives on the exploitation of minority and disadvantaged women, through what Lisa Lowe calls the "racialized feminization of labor," in the name of "helping" refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency.[78] It is within the sphere of the "nation of immigrants" that the culture of bene/violence manifests itself the clearest when the logic of helping refugees become self-sufficient translates into an endorsement for the exploitation of gendered and racialized subjects in low-paid economic sectors. Although such work would not help refugees learn English, acquaint themselves with American culture, or make them accepted as American (as rationalized in the *Minnesota New Life*), it was still proclaimed by mainstream media as the pathway to become American.

The IHRC documents about Vietnamese refugees contain folders labeled as "achievements" or "economic self-sufficiency," which include stories of hard work and success presented on local news as an "American success story,"[79] as examples of the American dream achieved,[80] or as testimony to hard work.[81] Successful refugees were compared to "the

first settlers of the New World"[82] or referred to as the "twentieth century pilgrim"[83] to signify how they was incorporated into the U.S. national fabric. Yet white anxiety over "yellow peril" would resurface again when refugees became unexpectedly successful. Through hard work, Son Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee who came to Minnesota in 1981, established NEI Electronics in 1986 that generated $1.2 million in 1990. Although his hard work was accoladed, he was asked, by the *Blaine Banner* newspaper, whether he received welfare, and "[w]hat, if any, special benefits did he receive because he was Asian; benefits such as not being required to pay income taxes for five years?"[84] Although hard work and economic self-sufficiency are deemed the pathway to becoming American, Vietnamese refugees would never be accepted as part of the U.S. national fabric. This demonstrates that for Vietnamese refugees and Asian Americans, assimilation is never attainable but always required and deemed beneficial for the refugees.[85]

The requirements for refugees to work hard and be self-sufficient to be part of the "nation of immigrants" is also a form of discipline. In a 1986 essay in the *People's Press* of Owatonna, the story of Ms. Tuoi Pham's efforts to overcome her hardship reminded the writer of "those former immigrants who came to this country by the tens of thousands—not be subsidized by a generous government—but to be given the opportunity to develop their abilities and skills." Yet he did not forget to mention how "there seems to be a lack of individual drive and determination as shown by Miss Tuoi Pham" in "certain segments of our community."[86] The author appealed to the "nation of immigrants" and "generous government" that characterizes the spirit and essence of the United States to justify the requirement for refugees to prove their worth. Ms. Tuoi Pham's story was used to discipline those who were deemed "failing" to perform their worthiness through hard work. As such, the refugees are subjected to the tropes of hard work, individual autonomy, and economic productivity, all embedded in the cultural image of a nation of immigrants, to coerce conformity into standards of American values that have historically been based on "possessive individualism"[87] as the core of the nation of, for, and by whiteness. Therefore, bene/violence thrives on the "benign" project of incorporating refugees into the "nation of immigrations" to reconcile mutually exclusive imperatives of capitalists' need for cheap, exploitable labor and the national desire to maintain white hegemony and homogeneity in the society.[88]

"Xứ Lạnh–Tình Nồng" (Cold Place–Warm Love): "Minnesota Nice" and the Erasure of Racial Discrimination

Although the "Minnesota Nice" narrative carries the benevolence logic of "white love" that masquerades as U.S. imperial governance, it is not simply a justificatory rhetoric. Its self-reproduction mechanism is

indicative of a bene/violent culture of empire. "Minnesota Nice" is what Mariam Beevi calls "epistemic violence"[89] that thrives on restructuring the imagination of American kindness as the norm and racial discrimination as an aberration. The more the reality of racism is obscured, the more "Minnesota Nice" is solidified, thereby enhancing the "stickiness"[90] of Minnesota as a "cold place [with] warm love," or "xứ lạnh, tình nồng," as one refugee put it. Consequently, the cultural apparatus of "Minnesota Nice" regulates refugee articulation of racial discrimination. On local news, refugee testimonies are employed to evidence the uniqueness of Minnesota as a welcoming place. Although refugee affirmation of "Minnesota Nice" should not be read as indicative of their absolute beliefs in such utopian construction, the stickiness of "Minnesota Nice" works to downplay the pervasiveness of racism in refugee lives. As I demonstrate, refugees often weave the "Minnesota Nice" narrative into their critiques of U.S. racism to avoid being seen as overcritical or ungrateful, thereby facilitating the reproduction of "Minnesota Nice."

The discursive construction of "Minnesota Nice" emerges as a mode of storytelling that employs refugee testimonies to bolster the image of Minnesota as a welcoming place while trivializing refugee experience of exclusion and thereby rejecting the complex experience of Vietnamese refugees as racialized subjects in the United States. In this mode of storytelling, racism is expressed in the euphemized language of "little prejudice" or "concern." For example, the *Daily Times* (1992) reported that one of the reasons for the Huy Tran family to stay in St. Cloud was "neither [Texas nor California] had the hospitability they had found in St. Cloud." The Trans disregarded the "little prejudice" they faced as an irregularity and concluded that "[o]verall, St. Cloud ha[d] been more supportive of the Asian-American community than other places."[91] In this case, "Minnesota Nice" becomes the filter through which the refugee experience in the United States is painted in the rosy color of acceptance even as the experience of prejudice and isolation is whitewashed.

When the Phu family came to Farmington in 1975 and refused to move five miles farther to a small farmhouse near Farmington to please their sponsors, the family became a source of "concern." Ron Thelen, head of the Farmington parish council, was "concerned" that Phu's sons were "hanging around" the town. One of the sponsors of the Phu family was "worried" that Phu's sons "might get into trouble and cause a public reaction against all the refugee families in the community." The language of worry and concern preserves the kindness of Minnesotans, who cared for refugees' well-being while downplaying the extent to which Asian exclusion factors in the kind of "concern" that Thelen expressed: the "concern" that the refugees might feel "*our country* owes them "and "we are supposed to give them a free ride here" (emphasis added).[92] The language of worry and concern masks the trope of "perpetual foreigners" that has historically

rejected Asian immigrants' rights to claim belongings in the United States.

In the same vein, Tam To's house in Worthington, Minnesota, was described by the *Minneapolis Tribune* as "a separate world, sealed off from the rest of Worthington by a wall of tradition and pride."[93] Such a description glorifies the isolation and segregation of the Tam To family in the name cultural preservation. Depicting the family as "rosy-cheeked, and well-fed" and referring to their house as "a small Vietnam in Minnesota," the *Minneapolis Tribune* showcased the successful inclusion of refugees into the U.S. multicultural scene, facilitated by the kindness of Minnesotans. When contextualized in the cultural frame of "Minnesota Nice," the fact that the family was "sealed off" from the rest of the area also implies that the refugees themselves refused to assimilate. The testimonies of the Tam To family were given to describe how its members "haven't had much trouble fitting in" because of the "very friendly" and "very, very kind" people of Worthington, rendering being "sealed off" from the rest of the neighborhood a matter of their choice, rather than a matter of racial exclusion in a white place.

Vietnamese stories in the mainstream press are interpreted as merely stories of passive victims in need of rescue. This one-dimensional reading dissociates the refugee experience from the common experience of Asian marginalization in the United States.[94] In this way, "Minnesota Nice" is not only a cultural imagination but also a structure of narrative that safeguards white benevolence and serves as the ground on which the denial of racial discrimination takes effect.[95] Told in the binary motifs of the "good refugee" (those who wish to assimilate and demonstrate upward mobility through hard work) and the "bad refugee" (those who are deemed to fail in their performance of gratitude and neoliberal aptitudes), refugee stories in the mainstream press are employed to laud the generosity and morality of whiteness. The good-refugee storyline lends legitimacy, validity, and substance to the "Minnesota Nice" construct. The bad-refugee storyline preserves the "Minnesota Nice" frame by shifting the focus to refugees' inability to acquire cultural competency and capital means and from the reality of white dominance that can expose the facade of "Minnesota Nice."

The "epistemic violence" of "Minnesota Nice" exerts itself both in the narrative structures *about* refugees (as I have demonstrated) and in those *by* refugees. Experiencing both the reality of extensive federal, state, and local support upon arrival and the reality of being racialized and rejected as Asian subjects, Vietnamese refugees need to make sense of racial discrimination in a way that would not contradict their own impression of and appreciation for American kindness. They tend to partly reveal their experience of racism and then minimize it to avoid being seen as ungrateful or overcritical. In this way, the cultural apparatus of "Minnesota Nice" not only masks the whole structure and history of racialization but also regulates how refugees articulate their experience as racialized subjects. As

refugee lives are saturated with the discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism and the discursive demands to perform gratefulness, their minimization of the racism they face becomes their own way of revealing it. The side effect of this minimization of racism is the reproduction and reinforcement of "Minnesota Nice."

Navigating through what Samuel L. Myers Jr. calls the "Minnesota paradox"[96]—the contradictory yet mutually constitutive reality of Asian exclusion and the cultural imagination of American niceness—Vietnamese refugees move back and forth between acknowledgement and denial of the reality of racial discrimination. For some, the back-and-forth navigation manifests itself in the way racism is interpreted as temporary "negative attitudes." Brother L. described how "when [he] first came [in 1988], people were afraid of him, and they kept glancing at him."[97] He then explained that people started to accept him after he demonstrated that he led a "dignified life" ("sống đàng hoàng") and lived in harmony ("sống hòa đồng") with others. He used the words "sống hòa đồng" (an active effort to go with the flow and avoid making a big deal over small conflicts), which reveals how survival in the United States requires brushing aside the "glances." For others, discrimination is explained as distinct individual acts rather than structural issues. For example, Phạm Thị Ngọ, former director of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors program of Lutheran Social Services, mentioned that racial discrimination was one of the obstacles for Vietnamese refugees, but she framed it in terms of misunderstandings caused by language problems and cultural differences or in terms of ungraceful individual reactions.[98] If, for the marginalized, "the personal is political," then "Minnesota Nice" depoliticizes the personal by detaching the personal experience of the refugee from the systemic structure of Asian exclusion in the United States. The more the personal is detached from the larger structural issues, the more "Minnesota Nice" sticks in the refugee imagination of the state and of the nation.

As refugees mitigate the prevalence of racism in their lives, they risk perpetuating the "stickiness," to employ Sara Ahmed's term, of the "Minnesota Nice" rhetoric. Although Ahmed describes "stickiness" as "an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs,"[99] the idea of "stickiness" can also describe how memory of a historical encounter is transformed into *the* reality, the lens through which other realities are juxtaposed or screened out. This is how the stickiness of "Minnesota Nice," as a manifestation of U.S. bene/violent culture, recruits citizen-subjects among refugees through disciplinary love. Adorning the front gate of Phật Ân Buddhist Temple, the first and largest Vietnamese Buddhist temple in the Twin Cities area,[100] is a couplet that alludes to the "Minnesota Nice" construct as the main lens through which many first-generation refugees interpret their overall experience in the United States:

> Ten-Thousand-Lake State, Blessed Land Where All Flowers Bloom.
> Phật Ân Buddhist Temple, Spiritual Support for All Beings.
> (Xứ Vạn Hồ Đất Lành Muôn Hoa Nở
> Chùa Phật Ân Duyên Trợ Vạn Chúng Sinh.)

To understand why Vietnamese refugees tend to minimize their experience of racism, it is important to understand that first-generation Vietnamese refugees did not possess the historical memories of legalized exclusions of Asian subjects, even though their life experience is a continuation of U.S. anti-Asian history. At the time of Southeast Asian refugee arrival, the consolidation of the United States as "a white nation descended from Europe" was no longer achieved through the regulation of Asian immigration (which was equated with the protection of national sovereignty).[101] Instead, white dominance relies on the officialized rhetoric of antiracism to erase the material reality of racial inequality while securing the rise of white capitalist hegemony.[102] As such, Vietnamese refugees experienced a different kind of violence than the Asian immigrants who came before them—a bene/violence that legitimizes and normalizes racial discrimination by ascribing it to the realm of anomaly. Therefore, even though "Minnesota Nice" is more performative than substantive, such performance has material impacts on Vietnamese refugees' imagination of American kindness. That said, I do not suggest refugees are helpless victims, depending on the charity of local Americans for survival. Rather, I draw attention to how "Minnesota Nice" registers in refugee memories. One participant, who came to Minnesota under the cosponsorship of a local church and her brother, who came to Minnesota in 1975, recalled:

> There was an American man. Mr. Bill, from the church. He came to pick us up at the airport.… A few days later he came back to visit us. He asked if we needed anything and if there was anything he could help with. *They [the local people] were very nice/kind.*… Later we asked them we needed help with going to English classes and taking my siblings to the doctors. *They were very nice/kind.* They drove us to English classes two days a week. *They were very nice/kind.*… They offered to take us to the market too.… If I didn't understand what they said, they would write things down for me. *They were very nice/kind.*[103] (emphasis added)

The repetitive affirmation of Minnesotan kindness and, by extension, American kindness reveals the stickiness of the image of nice white people in refugee memories.[104] In this way, the "epistemic violence" Minnesota

Nice exerts itself on refugee lives through how it structures what should stick. As it sticks, the expression "Minnesota Nice" lends more tangibility to the overall imagination of white benevolence and white innocence. In addition, it establishes the uniqueness of Minnesota from the rest of the United States as a place where racism does not exist. Even in the rise of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, "Minnesota Nice" acts as a shield that deflects refugee critiques of racism elsewhere. For example, as Uncle S. observed, No one got beaten up here in Minnesota. The places where Asians are beaten up the most are in Chinatown in San Francisco or in New York, or some other China Towns.[105]

I do not read this statement as a negation of racial discrimination, even though on the surface it seems so. Although the participant shows awareness of rising anti-Asian racism, he establishes Minnesota as distinctly unique, where anti-Asian hate crimes do not happen. Uncle S. likened Minnesota to what Vietnamese often calls "tỉnh lẻ" (small province) to describe the contrast between big metropolitan and rural areas or small towns and suggested that "just like in Vietnam, people in smaller towns are nicer than those in Saigon or Hanoi." Even though St. Paul, where the interview took place, would not register as a "small province," Uncle S. blurs the urban and rural divide and constructs the overall image of Minnesota as a place characterized by nice and friendly people. This impression of Minnesota as a safe place renders fuzzy the reality of anti-Asian racism during COVID-19.[106]

The seamless fusion of Minnesota niceness and racial discrimination reveals how the culture of bene/violence is embedded in refugees' lives as they straddle the tradition of American kindness and the tradition of Asian exclusion in U.S. society. What sets "Minnesota Nice" apart from the state-produced logic of benevolence to justify U.S. imperial agendas is its adherence to the ordinary realm as a cultural construct and its transformation into *the* reality through customary performance. "Minnesota Nice" is a form of "epistemic violence" that reproduces itself through its stickiness in refugee lives and thrives how it regulates the ways in which racism is articulated. In other words, "Minnesota Nice" is not just an explanatory logic but also a materialization of a nonreality through interpellation and performance.[107] As such, Minnesota is "disarmingly nice,"[108] to use David Todd Lawrence's expression, because it allows naturalization of discrimination as an exception and consequently preserves the image of the United States as a benign nation in the refugee mind.

Conclusion

I conclude this article by looking at the short essay "Cookies" by Bao Phi, a Vietnamese refugee and Minnesota-based poet and activist, to highlight how refugee life reflects the bene/violent culture of U.S. empire. Bao

Phi reflects on how the blue cookie tin that the Lutheran sponsors gave his family for the holidays reminds him of his father's story of war: how one of his father's friends "got hit in the side with a rocket while crawling out of a foxhole, and [his father] had to pick up smoking pieces of [his friend] and put him into a cookie tin to send the remains to his family."[109] The cookie tin that represents American benevolence is inseparable from the cookie tin that carries a Vietnamese death during American military aggression in Vietnam. Bao Phi's description of the holiday cookie tin—also a marker of American culture and tradition—encapsulates the essence of this article: how the culture of U.S. empire is a coalescence of U.S. benevolence and its colonial violence. Bene/violence is the lens through which I explore this inseparable entanglement of benevolence and violence.

This article regards bene/violence as a cultural trait of U.S. empire by situating it in the postwar development of U.S. national identity, constructed by a shift of emphasis from being legally white (whiteness secured through legal and state apparatuses) to culturally white (whiteness secured through established norms of individual autonomy, economic productivity, and upward mobility). I demonstrate that bene/violence produces a disciplinary love that recruits citizen-subjects among refugees. The violence of forced resettlement and assimilation into the U.S. structure of white capitalist hegemony is reframed as love and for the benefit of refugees, which in turn becomes the ground to bolster the U.S. "tradition" of goodwill. Through the lens of bene/violence, I examine how U.S. imperial violence is not just obscured or justified through the language and tactics of benevolence but, more importantly, is a ground for benevolence to thrive and reinforce itself.

On this foundation of bene/violence as a culture of U.S. empire, this article also explores the extent to which the cultural particularity of "Minnesota Nice" renders the state an important site to study the bene/violent culture of U.S. empire and how it is embedded in refugee lives. As a narrative structure and cultural apparatus, the frame of "Minnesota Nice" regulates how racial discrimination in the United States is articulated. It preserves the image of the United States as a benign nation by rendering racial discrimination an anomaly and depoliticizing refugees' personal experience of exclusion. As such, "Minnesota Nice" reflects the quintessential bene/violent character of the U.S. nation-state, the benign image of which thrives on its violence against the marginalized.

Notes

1. *Minnesota New Life,* Volume 1, Issue 2, March 1976, 2, IHRC3257, International Institute of Minnesota Records, Box 157, Folder 6, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

2. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (Verso Books, 2014), 190.

3. Joe Rigert, "Refugee Resettlement Work Just Beginning," *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 21, 1975.

4. Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of America Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism,* ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Duke University Press, 1993), 11.

5. Raymond Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary (1958)," in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology,* ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (John Wiley & Sons Publication, 2011).

6. Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America,'" 14.

7. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2020), xii–xiv.

8. For critiques of how the discourse of the "good refugee" transforms US imperial intervention in Vietnam into a good war that facilitates the production of the US benevolence narrative, see Yen Le Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, no. 1–2 (2006), and Yen Le Espiritu, "Militarized Refuge: A Critical Rereading of Vietnamese Flight to the United States," in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field,* ed. Janet Alison Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

9. The technology of control used to discipline citizen subjects reflects Foucault's ponderance about the society of control. According to Hardt and Negri, the society of control naturalizes disciplinary apparatuses and instills thoughts, behaviors, and practices through social and economic networks that extend beyond the boundary of disciplinary social institutions (like prisons, schools, or the police, etc.) (Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 23). Hardt and Negi mention that Foucault did not explicitly articulate the transition from society of discipline to the society of control in his work, and they follow Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Foucault's works (Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 419n1). See also Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control " *October 59* (1992).

10. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* ed. Colin Gordon and Peter Miller Graham Burchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 102.

11. Foucault, "Governmentality," 96.

12. Foucault, "Governmentality," 92.

13. Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (University of California Press, 2014); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Duke University Press, 2012); Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

14. Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

15. Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

16. In a statement prepared for the annual meeting of the U.S. Committee for Refugees on June 21, 1976, James L. Carlin, deputy coordinator for humanitarian affairs (Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs, Department of State) referred to the United States' "national heritage" to care for the homeless and the persecuted to highlight the importance of the United States' role in the "refugee problems" and, most importantly, "to project in countries around the world the image of U.S. humanitarian assistance for refugees." U.S. Committee for Refugees, *Statement by James L. Carlin, Deputy Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs)—Department of State, at the Annual Meeting of the U.S. Committee for Refugees,* 1976, IHRC2640, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants records, Box 2, Folder 1, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

17. Lisa Lowe, "The International Within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique," *Cultural Critique* no. 40 (1998).

18. Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

19. Raymond Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary (1958)."

20. Stephen H. Sumida, "East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 85–86.

21. For research about Vietnamese communities on the West Coast, see Thuy Vo Dang, "The Cultural Work of Anticommunism in the San Diego Vietnamese American Community," *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005); Linda Trinh Võ, "Constructing a Vietnamese American Community: Economic and Political Transformation in Little Saigon, Orange County," *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 3 (2008); Karin Aguilar-San Juan, *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Christian Collet and Hiroko Furuya, "Enclave, Place, or Nation? Defining Little Saigon in the Midst of Incorporation, Transnationalism, and Long-Distance Activism," *Amerasia Journal* 36, no. 3 (2010); Phuong Tran Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon* (University of Illinois Press, 2017); and Elwing Su'o'ng Gonzalez, "Creating and Contesting Refugee Spaces: Federal Policy and Early Vietnamese Resettlement in Los Angeles," *Southern California Quarterly* 103, no. 1 (2021). For research about Vietnamese communities in the South, see Christopher A. Airriess and David L. Clawson, "Versailles: A Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 12, no. 1 (1991); Karen J. Leong et al., "Resilient History and the Rebuilding of a Community: The Vietnamese American Community in New Orleans East," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (2007); Eric Tang, "A Gulf Unites Us: The Vietnamese Americans of Black New Orleans East," *American Quarterly* 63, no.

1 (2011); Marguerite Nguyen, "'Like We Lost Our Citizenship': Vietnamese Americans, African Americans, and Hurricane Katrina," in *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South,* ed. Jigna Desai and Khyati Y. Joshi (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 264–88; and Roy Vu, "Natives of a Ghost Country: The Vietnamese in Houston and Their Construction of a Postwar Community," in *Asian Americans in Dixie,* 165–89.

22. Erika Lee, "Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 256.

23. Pawan Dhingra, "Introduction to Journal of Asian American Studies, Special Issue on the Midwest," ibid.: 242.

24. Barbara Kim, "'Ambassadors' in the Heartland," in *Asian Americans in Michigan,* ed. Sook Wilkinson and Victor Jew (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 71.

25. Thomas Xavier Sarmiento, "Literary Perspectives on Asian Americans in the Midwest," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2019), 3.

26. For more a detailed discussion of "Minnesota Nice," referring to Minnesotan friendliness and neighborliness, see Annette Atkins, *Creating Minnesota: A History from the Inside Out* (Minnesota Historical Society, 2009), 242–48.

27. Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees, Report to the Congress, Washington, D.C., December 15, 1975, quoted in Julia Vadala Taft, David S. North, and David S. Ford, *Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Time for a New Focus* (Washington, D.C.: New TransCentury Foundation, 1979), 182.

28. Taft, North, and Ford, "Refugee Resettlement."

29. Sarah R. Mason, "The Indochinese–Vietnamese, Ethnic Chinese, Hmong, Laos, Cambodians," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups,* ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 582.

30. *The Administration of the Refugee Resettlement Program in the State of Minnesota,* prepared for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1982, 9, IHRC3257, International Institute of Minnesota Records, Box 199, Folder 11, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

31. Minnesota Department of Health—Refugee Health Unit, *Primary Refugee and Immigrant Arrivals to Minnesota, by Year of Arrival 1979–1994,* IHRC2968, Refugee Studies Center, University of Minnesota Records, Box 2, Folder 15, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

32. Mason, "The Indochinese–Vietnamese," 584.

33. Report to the Congress, "Evacuation and Temporary Care Afforded Indochinese Refugees—Operation New Life," June 3, 1976, 27, https://www.gao.gov/assets/id-76-63.pdf.

34. Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, "Refugee Program—The Orderly Departure Program from Vietnam," April 1990, 2, https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-90-137.pdf.

35. Min Zhou and Carl Bankston, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), 32; Sucheng Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginnings* (Temple University Press, 2006), 83.

36. Norman L. Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Policy and Problems," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467, no. 1 (1983): 177–78.

37. Jacqueline Desbarats, "Policy Influences on Refugee Resettlement Patterns," *Kroeber Society Anthropological Papers* 65, no. 66 (1985): 52.

38. The nine major voluntary agencies were the US Catholic Conference, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, International Rescue Committee, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Church World Service, Tolstoy Foundation, American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees, American Council for Nationalities Services, and Travelers' Aid-International Social Services. See Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans: Patterns of Resettlement and Socioeconomic Adaptation in the United States* (Westview Press, 1979), 26.

39. Edwin B. Silverman, "Indochina Legacy: The Refugee Act of 1980," *Publius* 10, no. 1 (1980): 33.

40. Indochinese Refugee Resettlement Office, 1975–1986, August 22, 2016, https://www.mnopedia.org/group/indochinese-refugee-resettlement-office-1975-1986.

41. Silverman, "Indochina Legacy," 33–34.

42. *The Administration,* 13.

43. *The Administration,* 17–18.

44. *The Administration,* 21.

45. *International Institute of Minnesota—Agency History,* IHRC3257, International Institute of Minnesota Records, Box 157, Folder 1, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

46. Joe Rigert, "Adjusting to a New Life," *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 14, 1975.

47. Rigert, "Refugee Resettlement."

48. Rigert, "Adjusting."

49. Rigert, "Adjusting."

50. Rigert, "Refugee Resettlement."

51. Leonard Inskip, "To Do More for State's Asian Refugees," *Star Tribune,* November 26, 1986.

52. Jean Hopfensperger, "Helping Refugees Feel More at Home:

St. Paul Takes Steps to Help Southeast Asians Settle In," *Star Tribune,* October 2, 1990.

53. Deborah Brotz, "Midway Resident Returns Debt of Gratitude by Working with Refugees," *Midway Monitor,* October, 1991; "Family Found Hospitality in St. Cloud—Family Portrait: The Trans," *St. Cloud Daily Times,* September 6, 1992; Shannon Querry, "Nguyen Receives Special Gift: Worthington Mayor Helps Family Reunite," *Worthington Daily Globe,* December 18, 1992.

54. Taft, North, and Ford, "Refugee Resettlement," 123; Desbarats, "Policy Influences," 50.

55. Darrel Montero and Ismael Dieppa, "Resettling Vietnamese Refugees: The Service Agency's Role," *Social Work* 27, no. 1 (1982): 74.

56. Rigert, "Refugee Resettlement."

57. Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans," in *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issue,* ed. Pyong Gap Min (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 270.

58. For stories of refugees who had worked for Minnesotan businesses or organizations in Vietnam or had gone to school in Minnesota before 1975, see Quang Vũ, ed. Hai Mươi Năm Sau Công Cuộc Định Cư Của Người Việt Tị Nạn Tại Minnesota—*20 Years After: The Resettlement of the Vietnamese Refugees in Minnesota* (Plymouth, MN: Precision Graphics, 1997), 117–20, 202–3.

59. Darrell Montero, "Vietnamese Refugees in America: Toward a Theory of Spontaneous International Migration," *International Migration Review* 13, no. 4 (1979): 626. For a discussion of the benefits of ethnic communities on newcomers' mental health and adaptability to new life, see Jacqueline Desbarats, "Indochinese Resettlement in the United States," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75, no. 4 (1985).

60. Joe Rigert, "Split Families Suffer Extra Culture Shock," *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 19, 1975.

61. Joe Rigert, "Grandmothers Mirror Differences in Refugees," *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 20, 1975.

62. Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study," 410.

63. Rigert, "Grandmothers Mirror."

64. Rigert, "Grandmothers Mirror."

65. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (University of California Press, 1971); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2006); David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived Us History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (Verso, 2019); Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (Basic Books, 2019).

66. Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 89. See also Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins*

and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture (University of Washington Press, 2014), 120.

67. Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (University of California Press, 2014). See also Yen Le Espiritu, "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: US Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon,'" *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2006).

68. Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 16.

69. Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom,* 3.

70. Vicente L. Rafael, "White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the US Colonization of the Philippines," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism,* ed. Donald E. Pease and Amy Kaplan (Duke University Press, 1993).

71. Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (University of California Press, 2003), 145–47. For a discussion of the history of racial-uplift narratives that were employed against various minority groups in US history, see Ong, *Buddha is Hiding,* 73.

72. *Minnesota New Life,* Volume 1, Issue 5, Aug. 1976, 8, IHRC3257, International Institute of Minnesota Records, Box 157, Folder 6, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

73. *Minnesota New Life,* Volume 1, Issue 5, 9.

74. *Minnesota New Life,* Volume 1, Issue 5, 7.

75. *Minnesota New Life,* Volume 1, Issue 5, 8.

76. Rigert, "Adjusting."

77. Rigert, "Refugee Resettlement."

78. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), 158. See also Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2015).

79. "The Quang Vu Family: An American Success Story," *Northfield News,* April 28, 1991.

80. Edward Felker, "Couple Realizes Their Dreams with New Restaurant," *Free Press,* January 3, 1990.

81. Wendy S. Tai, "Lanh Hung Duong of Vietnam: Store Is Testimony to Hard Work," *Star Tribune,* September 19, 1994.

82. Felker, "Couple Realizes Their Dreams."

83. "For Twentieth Century Pilgrim America Is Still the Land of New Beginnings," *Blaine Banner,* July 1, 1992.

84. "For Twentieth Century Pilgrim."

85. David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Duke University Press, 2019).

86. Ronald E. Frye, "A Courageous Woman," *Owatonna People's Press,* December 2, 1986.

87. Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 5.

88. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts,* 13.

89. Mariam Beevi, "The Passing of Literary Traditions: The Figure of the Woman from Vietnamese Nationalism to Vietnamese American Transnationalism," *Amerasia Journal* 23, no. 2 (1997): 29.

90. Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 89–90.

91. "Family Found Hospitality."

92. Joe Rigert, "After a Lifetime on the Move, Some Refugees Would Rather Just Stay Put," *Minneapolis Tribune,* December 18, 1975.

93. Mike Norton, "A Small Vietnam in Minnesota," *Minneapolis Tribune,* August 21, 1977.

94. Isabelle Thuy Pelaud has pointed out the limitations of reading Vietnamese American literature as either refugee stories or Asian American immigrant stories. See Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature* (Temple University Press, 2010), 58–59.

95. This discussion of narrative structure mirrors Timothy August's discussion of how the narrative structures about Vietnamese and Southeast Asian refugees lends legitimacy to US military intervention. See Timothy K. August, *The Refugee Aesthetic: Reimagining Southeast Asian America* (Temple University Press, 2021), 67.

96. Samuel L. Myers Jr., "The Minnesota Paradox," in *Sparked: George Floyd, Racism, and the Progressive Illusion,* ed. Walter R. Jacobs, Wendy Thompson Taiwo, and Amy August (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2021), 73–76.

97. Interview with participant in St. Paul, August 10, 2021.

98. Phạm Thị Ngọ, "Công Cuộc Định Cư của Người Việt Tị Nạn Việt Nam tại Minnesota—The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Minnesota," in Hai Mươi Năm Sau Công Cuộc Định Cư Của Người Việt Tị Nạn Tại Minnesota—*20 Years After: The Resettlement of the Vietnamese Refugees in Minnesota,* ed. Quang Vũ (Plymouth, MN: Precision Graphics, 1997), 66.

99. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics,* 89–90.

100. Phật Ân Buddhist Temple is where I conducted many of my oral history interviews while I was volunteering to help in the kitchen every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in summer 2021. The current Phật Ân Buddhist Temple grows from the original establishment of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association by Professor Vũ Khắc Khoan on February 14, 1976. In the early days, the Vietnamese Buddhist Association borrowed the address of the Minnesota International Institute on Como Street for the contact

address. In September 1977, it bought a small house on Dale Street, St. Paul, to establish a place of worship. The current Phật Ân Buddhist Temple is built on a piece of land purchased in August 1983. See *Vietnamese Buddhist Center,* IHRC3257, International Institute of Minnesota Records, Box 202, Folder 4, IHRC Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. See also Nguyễn Trọng Cảnh, "Sinh Hoạt Các Cơ Quan Thiện Nguyện và Các Hội Đoàn Việt Nam—The Activities of Voluntary Agencies and Vietnamese Organizations," in Hai Mươi Năm Sau Công Cuộc Định Cư Của Người Việt Tị Nạn Tại Minnesota—*20 Years After: The Resettlement of the Vietnamese Refugees in Minnesota,* ed. Quang Vũ (Plymouth, MN: Precision Graphics, 1997), 273–75.

101. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects,* 27.

102. Melamed, *Represent and Destroy.*

103. Interview with participant in St. Paul, August 21, 2021.

104. During my interactions with first-generation Vietnamese refugees in the Twin Cities areas, I noticed that when refugees use the word "American," they meant white Americans. Otherwise, they tended to specify race or ethnicity to talk about nonwhite groups. For example, a participant mentioned "Hmong family" to refer to a "Hmong American family" but referred to a white American family as "American family." Aguilar San-Juan had the same observation about what Vietnamese community leaders might mean when they use the word "American." See Aguilar-San Juan, *Little Saigons,* 42.

105. Interview with participant in St. Paul, August 3, 2021.

106. Kong Pheng Pha, "Two Hate Notes: Deportations, COVID-19, and Xenophobia Against Hmong Americans in the Midwest," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020).

107. The term "interpellation" was developed by Althusser to describe the mechanism of the ideological apparatus that transforms individuals into subjects. As such, interpellation turns the racialized labels attached to a racialized subject into a social reality. Here, I use "interpellation" to describe how the cultural imagination of "Minnesota Nice" is transformed into a reality through the act of naming. See Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 264.

108. David Todd Lawrence, "Minnesota Nice White People," in *Sparked: George Floyd, Racism, and the Progressive Illusion,* ed. Walter R. Jacobs, Wendy Thompson Taiwo, and Amy August (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2021), 85.

109. Bao Phi, "Cookies," in *Thousand Star Hotel* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017), 7.