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Mimi Thi Nguyen. The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages

Gina Velasco^a

^a Keene State College, USA

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Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8223-5239-6.

The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages critiques the bio- and necropolitical functioning of the liberal discourse of freedom as a form of subjection and subjectivization. Nguyen adeptly describes how the 'gift of freedom' constitutes gendered and racialized subjects of liberal empire, while simultaneously subjecting them to the murderous violence of war in the name of freedom. Nguyen's compelling discussion of the discursive construction of the Vietnamese refugee as a gendered subject, as both an arbiter for peace and forgiveness, as well as an agent of US state violence, left me with further productive questions: How are bio- and necropolitical discourses of freedom always already constituted in relation to gender and sexuality? How does the 'gift of freedom' constitute queer subjects? While the answers to these questions may exist beyond the scope of this text, the theoretical framework introduced by Nguyen provides a generative starting point for future feminist and queer critiques of the 'gift of freedom'.

Nguyen introduces the notion of the 'gift of freedom' as a conceptual framework for understanding how liberal empire extends and reworks colonialism's racialized and gendered logics. Nguyen draws on Derrida's notion of the gift as an impossible aporia, in which the giver can never give without the expectation of repayment, and the receiver is bound in a relationship of indebtedness. The 'gift of freedom', which liberal empire endows to its subjects, is simultaneously a process of subjection and subjectivization. The Vietnamese refugee, as the recipient of the 'gift of freedom', is constituted as a *subject* of liberal empire, as she is simultaneously *subjected* to the gift's implicit condition: murderous war.

Nguyen traces the figurations of the Vietnamese refugee within US state and popular discourse, examining the discursive construction of this figure through the liberal notion of freedom. Drawing on Foucault, Nguyen argues, 'Liberalism not only produces freedom as a property of its modern art of government, but it also ceaselessly subjects it to review, to regulation' (p. 10). Within the framework of liberal empire, freedom functions as a form of property, a commodity that is bestowed on the subjects of empire. The gift of freedom is simultaneously a relation of time, as it assumes a temporal relationship between receiver and giver. The receiver of this gift, the Vietnamese refugee, not only must repay the debt within a given amount of time, but she is also gifted with the (always deferred) future promise of modernity, of escaping the 'anachronistic time' to which colonized peoples are relegated

(McClintock 1995). Nguyen's critique of the dual nature of this temporal relationship is crucial for understanding the racialized and gendered dimensions of the 'gift of freedom'.

Nguyen follows the developmental arc of the figure of the Vietnamese refugee within US popular and state discourse. Originally viewed as a maladjusted figure 'stuck in time', the refugee shifts from the alien 'stranger' to the 'new friend' of the US empire, whose gratitude fuels her patriotism for the US state. Examining the image of the 'napalmed girl', Kim Phúc, the iconic image of civilian suffering during the Vietnam War, Nguyen argues that the ensuing narrative transforms this figure from the most visible victim of the Vietnam War to an ambassador of peace and forgiveness, who serves to legitimize the murderous violence inherent within liberal empire's promise of freedom (pp. 86–7). The US War on Terror positions the Vietnamese refugee – the 'new friend' of the US state – as opposite the newly refuged enemy, the 'terrorist'. The patriotic, grateful Vietnamese refugee becomes antithetical to the racialized 'terrorist'. Analyzing two Vietnamese-American former refugees who gained prominence in US popular media for their roles in the US War on Terror – Viet Dinh, the architect of the Patriot Act, and Nguyet Anh Duong, a weapons designer for the US military – Nguyen describes how the Vietnamese refugee becomes interpellated within discourses of US multiculturalism, which operate necropolitically to distinguish those who will live from those who will die. Her analysis illuminates the co-imbrication of US discourses of multiculturalism with the bio- and necropolitics of liberal empire in the War on Terror.

Gina Velasco

Keene State College, USA

Email: gvelasco@keene.edu

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Notes on contributor

Gina Velasco is assistant professor of women's and gender studies at Keene State College in New Hampshire. She holds a PhD in the History of Consciousness from the University of California at Santa Cruz. Gina was an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program at Bryn Mawr College from 2008–10. Her research examines how gender and queer sexuality inform notions of nation, diaspora and transnational belonging within contemporary Filipino/a diasporic cultural production. Her research, writing and teaching encompass a range of fields, including queer studies, transnational feminisms, women of color feminisms, diaspora studies, ethnic studies and Asian American/Filipino American studies. Her essays have been published in the *Review of Women's Studies* and *Women*

and *Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. She is completing a book manuscript titled *Queering the Transnational Filipina Body: Gendered and Sexual Nationalisms in the Filipino Diaspora*.

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Fatima El-Tayeb. *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8166-7016-1.

European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe is a book about cultural practice, identity and resistance among racialized minorities in continental Western Europe. Fatima El-Tayeb documents a wide selection of minoritarian practices that she theorizes as a 'queering' of ethnicity. 'Queer' here is understood as a verb, to describe how racialized Europeans challenge the rigid construction of Europe as white and (post) Christian. By engaging 'queer' with Caribbean theories of creolization, El-Tayeb theorizes 'queering ethnicity' as a set of wide-ranging practices that involve excavating counter-historical memory, contesting spatial governance and re-articulating identities and communities. Each of the book's four main chapters juxtaposes a different manifestation of the dominant discourses of Europe with a different set of minoritarian practices of resistance.

In the dominant discourse, Europe is 'raceless': there is no racialization in Europe. Those who are visually marked as Other are externalized as not-European. Within this discourse, the use of the concept 'migrant', for instance, relies on the spatial-temporal imaginary of migration in order to externalize racial minorities as non-European, as 'eternal newcomers, forever suspended in time, forever "just arriving"', even when many so-called migrants have lived in the same structurally impoverished urban neighborhoods for their entire lives (p. xxv). El-Tayeb discusses many examples of how racialized Europeans make visible, challenge and thereby queer this racialized spatial-historical imagination of Europe. For instance, she writes about how disenfranchised minority youth use hip-hop to claim a stake in their neighborhoods, construct trans-local (i.e. between poor minority neighborhoods across Europe) solidarity, and articulate connections between colonialism, the Nazi regime and police violence against their communities today.

El-Tayeb frequently uses the term 'minorities' to counter the externalization that is performed in dominant discourse. Minorities, unlike migrants, are fully in the 'here and now'. But the value of the concept is also its limitation: 'minority' reaffirms a nation-centered epistemology and is not adequate to theorize the connections that are being forged across ethnic and national