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Abstract

There is a new “refugee religious iconography” that includes converting sites of suffering into sites of commemoration, affirming new social ties in a new land, and worshipping different versions of the “Virgin Mary”.

These images of the Virgin Mary are all part of new pilgrimages that Vietnamese refugees have developed since the “loss of the country” in 1975. This paper examines the relationships between refugees and pilgrims—displaced persons forced to leave their homeland and intentional travelers who seek a restored sense of religious purpose by traveling to a new destination. It explores the relationship between three purposes for pilgrimage—to show appreciation for refuge, to form political solidarities, and to forge new ties across overseas communities in different countries.

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Three Faces of Mary in the Vietnamese Diaspora

Tens of thousands of pilgrims gather each steamy August in Carthage Missouri, in what is both the largest gathering of Catholics in the US and the largest gathering of Vietnamese Americans.¹ Thousands circle a fountain crowned with a statue of “Our Lady of Refugees” (*Đức Mẹ Di Cư*)—a European woman holding baby Jesus on her shoulder and reaching down with her left hand to help a young Vietnamese boy, precariously balanced on top of a globe. They form into a candlelight procession to follow a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, depicted as European queen holding a rosary, the same “pilgrim statue” that toured southern Vietnam in 1965-66 when the fighting had intensified in the civil war that tore apart the country. The procession weaves its way past another statue of Our Lady of Lavang, featuring the Virgin Mary in Vietnamese dress with Asian features, holding the baby Jesus in her hands and surrounded by young girls and boys in Vietnamese tunics waving blue and pink flowers.

These three images of the Virgin Mary are all part of new, alternative pilgrimages that Vietnamese refugees have developed since the “loss of the country” in 1975. As separate but related faces of compassion and courage, they each help to define the relationships between refugees and pilgrims—displaced persons forced to leave their homeland and intentional travelers who seek a restored sense of religious purpose by traveling to a new destination. Vietnamese Americans represented the largest single group of refugees in US history,² and included many Catholics but also Buddhists, and followers of indigenous religions like Caodaism and the Way of the Mother Goddess. The Virgin Mary therefore takes her place among other sacred female deities who are worshipped in Vietnam and in the Vietnamese diaspora. I will argue in this paper that these three faces also represent three moments in refugee reflections on their own history: the desperate search for refuge, then a postwar consolidation behind an anti-communist solidarity, and finally a turn to building transnational ethnic affiliations, as the Vietnamese diaspora in many different locations has become re-connected through rituals, images, and global pilgrimages.

Vietnam has a long tradition of venerating mother goddesses, and this tradition has recently been revived in the increasingly popular performances of spirit possession ceremonies (*Lên Đồng*) addressed to local and national female deities—a practice once referred to as the Four Palaces but since 2008 codified and recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage and the “way of the Mother Goddesses” (*Đạo Mẫu*). The Virgin Mary also makes an appearance among the many “sacred mothers” venerated in the syncretistic new religion of Cao Dai, which is Vietnam’s third largest religion (after Buddhism and Catholicism). Here, she is worshipped as part of another trinity of “mothers”—the Taoist Queen of the

¹ Tuan Hoang, ‘Ultramontanist, Nationalism and the Fall of Saigon: Historicizing the Vietnamese American Catholic Experience’, *American Catholic Studies* Vol. 130 (1), 2019, 1-26. See also Tuan Hoang, ‘Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Will Prevail: Vietnamese Marianism and Anticommunism 1940-1975’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* Vol 14(2-3), 2022, 126-157.

² Sucheng Chan. (ed.), *The Vietnamese 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight and New Beginnings*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.



Western Heavens Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, the Buddhist Boddhisattva Quan Âm (Kuan Yin in China) and the Catholic mother of Jesus. While Jesus is represented in the nine-figure pantheon of deities pictured above the altar of all Caodai temples, Mary is not generally depicted in the iconography, but individual Caodaists, especially women, often refer to having visions of her as part of their spiritual calling.³

While Marian apparitions are a global phenomena coordinated under the guidance of the Catholic Church, local worship practices and pilgrimages have developed in the past century at the intersection of Vietnamese folk religion and diasporic experiences of displacement, loss of political agency and the forging of new transnational ties.

(1) Theoretical questions: mobilities in search of meaning

The connections between migration, refugee journeys and pilgrimages are theorized as “mobilities in search of a meaning”—displacements subject to different motivations, goals and measures of success. The refugee journey is involuntary, “forced to leave the country”, but the sacrifices of rebuilding a life in a new place can be redeemed by pilgrimage, a voluntary journey. While former refugees from many other countries can return in triumph to their own home country, many Vietnamese who felt they “lost the country” (*mất nước*) after 1975 fear they would not be welcomed. A large proportion of them were the families of close to a million people who were incarcerated in “re-education camps” after the communist victory for serving as officers in the Army of Southern Vietnam, being part of the Saigon government, working for American military forces or in hospitals. They do not want to return to a country “still under the communists”, so they have developed new alternative pilgrimages—to former refugee camps, new gathering places, and older ones infused with a new connection to the homeland.

This paper examines several of these alternative pilgrimages, and analyzes a new “refugee religious iconography” that includes converting sites of suffering into sites of commemoration, affirming new social ties in a new land, and worshipping three different versions of the “Virgin Mary”—one with refugees and their welcome by Catholic Relief Agencies, another with struggle against communism, and a third with trans-national ethnic solidarity. “Our Lady of Lavang” is the most recent of these, embodied in a Virgin Mary with Vietnamese features and clothing who can now be found in the Holy Land in Israel, in diasporic temples from Germany to California, and in the huge Marian festival in Carthage, Missouri held annually since 1978. The impetus to sacralize the diaspora and create

³ Janet Alison Hoskins, *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015, 191.

alternative pilgrimages comes from a history of trauma, but it seeks to build new sacred landscapes across the global map of Vietnamese overseas communities.

(2) Wider ethnographic context: “Little Hanoi and Little Saigons”, Vietnamese Overseas in a “bipolar diaspora”

The study of how refugees can become pilgrims is part of a wider study of “Little Hanoi and Little Saigons”, overseas Vietnamese communities made up primarily of former refugees in the U.S., Canada and Australia, as opposed to other communities made up primarily of labor migrants in the former socialist countries of East Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland and Russia.⁴ In 2018, I started fieldwork with a Vietnamese anthropologist, Nguyen Thi Hien, who is associated with the Hanoi Center for Cultural Heritage, and we traveled together to visit four European cities—Paris, Berlin, Prague and Moscow---which had significant overseas Vietnamese populations. Two cities had deeply divided populations, with substantial numbers of people who came from both sides of the Cold War divide: Paris, which has the longest history of Vietnamese migrants, has somewhat more former refugees, while Berlin, which experienced heavy migration in the 1980s, has somewhat more former labor migrants. Conflicts between the pro-Hanoi and pro-Saigon communities in Paris have a long and occasionally violent history, and there have been similar conflicts in a divided Berlin.⁵

Heonik Kwon has described this as the “radical political bipolarization of postcolonial processes” which created diasporic divisions in the new homelands of both Vietnamese and Korean migrants.⁶ Studies of this “bipolar history” in Vietnam are complicated by the fact that the largest Vietnamese Catholic communities formed in the 17th century in northern Vietnam, and many members of these communities became “domestic refugees” who moved from their homes in the north to the south after Vietnam was divided into two, supposedly temporary, states on different sides of the 17th parallel. The 1954 Geneva Accords offered the civilian population the right to join the zone of their choice during a transition period of 300 days. By the end of this regroupment, more than 900 000 Northerners of whom 500 000 were Catholics left the North for political and religious reasons.⁷ Peter Hansen estimated that

⁴ Janet Hoskins and Nguyen Thi Hien, ‘Vietnamese Transnational Religions: The Cold War Polarities of Temples in Little Hanoi and Little Saigons’, in Philip Clart and Adam Jones (eds), *Transnational Religious Spaces: Religious Organizations and their Interaction in Africa, East Asia, and Beyond*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, 183-209. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690101>

⁵ Gisele Bousquet, *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Homeland Politics in the Parisian Vietnamese Community*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. Phi Song Su, *The Border Within: Vietnamese Migrants Transforming Ethnic Nationalism in Berlin*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2022.

⁶ Heonik Kwon, ‘The Transpacific Cold War’ in Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen, (eds), *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014, 68.

⁷ Phi Van Nguyen, ‘A Secular State for a Religious Nation, The Republic of Vietnam and Religious Nationalism, 1946–1963’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 77(3), 2014, 741 – 771. See also Phi Van Nguyen, ‘Victims of Atheist Persecution, Catholic Solidarity and Refugee Protection in Vietnam, 1954– 1958’, in

50-70% of all northern Vietnamese Catholics chose to leave their ancestral homes to move to the south, usually following the advice of their parish priests with the argument that “the Virgin Mary was headed south”.⁸ Fearing that they would not be allowed to practice their religion freely under a communist-dominated government, this mass migration made anti-communist Marian devotionism a central part of Catholic life during the American war in Vietnam.⁹

The largest number of Vietnamese refugees in the US are the family members of formerly incarcerated persons (former soldiers in the South Vietnamese army, but also Catholic priests, Caodai religious leaders, Buddhist monks, and members of the former Saigon regime). The Orderly Departure Program was specifically developed to classify all southern Vietnamese who had served for three or more years in re-education camps as “political refugees”, and to help them to travel to the US. This program resettled 623,509 refugees from 1980-1997 and was developed as an alternative to the dangerous illegal escapes of the “boat people” after 1975. While some formerly incarcerated persons have returned safely, many still fear that they would be surveilled and possibly arrested if they returned.

Religion was also a very influential factor in determining which Vietnamese left the country after 1975, as my own earlier research with Caodaists and Buddhists has also shown.¹⁰ Vietnamese immigrants were the only Asian immigrants to cite “religious freedom” as one of the main motivations for their leaving their country,¹¹ and the proportion of religious clergy of all faiths who chose to leave was very high—especially for the one Catholic order of religious men which was founded in Vietnam, the Congregation of Mother Co-Redemptrix, originally founded in northern Vietnam, but moved in its entirety to a suburb of Saigon after 1954.¹² Fully half of its members chose to leave the country after the communist victory, and this small order has since become one of the most influential in the diaspora. They are the reason why hundreds of thousands of Marian pilgrims travel to honour Vietnamese versions of the Virgin Mary at their campus in Carthage, Missouri.

The “bipolar politics” of the second half of the 20th century have also produced “bipolar diasporas”, where the percentages of Catholics and Christians in the diasporas as a

Peter Van der Veer and Birgit Meyer (eds), *Refugees and Religion*, London: Bloomsbury, 2021.

⁸ Peter Hansen, ‘*Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959*’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4(3), 2009, 173-211.

⁹ Tuan Hoang, ‘Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Will Prevail’, 138.

¹⁰ Janet Hoskins, ‘Caodai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion’s Struggle for Identity’ in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (ed.), *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2006, 191-210.

¹¹ Conrad Hackett, Brian Grim, Marcin Stonawski, Vegard Skirbekk, Noble Kuriakose, and Michaela Potancokova, ‘Methodology of the Pew Research Global Religious Landscape Study’, in *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014, 167–75.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004275065_011

¹² Tuan Hoang, ‘The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugee Religious, Priests, and Seminarians in the United States, 1975–1977’, *U.S. Catholic Historian* 37.3, Summer 2019, 99-122.

whole are much larger than in the home country. The Vietnamese are the fourth largest Asian group in the US (with 1.73 million people). A recent Pew Research Institute survey determined that Catholics make up 30% of all Vietnamese Americans, although the percentage of Catholics in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is officially only 6%.¹³ After the communist victory, Catholics were five times more likely to choose to leave the country than Buddhists. Vietnamese Catholicism is associated with anticommunism and has become an “exilic religion” with its own politically infused imagery and iconography.

My analysis starts with images of Mary in refugee camps in Indonesia and Malaysia, then turns to Our Lady of Fatima as a rallying image for anti-communism, before turning to the emergence of a “Vietnamese” Virgin Mary in the California diaspora, and her spread to many other locations, including the Holy Land. It finishes with “Marian Days”, the huge Catholic pilgrimages to Carthage, Missouri which started in 1978 and seem to have reached their peak in 2017. Now that Vietnam has relaxed travel restrictions, opened up to foreign investment and permitted an open Catholic festival at the La Vang site of her apparition, the impetus for these alternative pilgrimages may be diminishing.

(3) The Patron Saint of Boat People in Vietnamese Refugee Camps

Fig 1: Saint Mary of the Boat People in Galang

The first category of pilgrimages that I will discuss are return visits to refugee camps organized by Archives of the Vietnamese Boat People, a transnational organization with offices in the US and in Australia. In the period from 1977 to 1996, a number of refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees offered temporary housing to escaped Vietnamese in Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Philippines. While many have fallen into disrepair, two of the largest camps—Pulau Galang in Indonesia and Pulau Bidong in Malaysia---have been turned into heritage sites and tourist destinations which have revitalized the local economy.¹⁴

Most visitors to the former refugee camps are what are called “purposeful tourists”, meaning that they are former camp residents, descendants, or members of their extended families. Although it is a secular site, I would include these “purposeful tourists” in the category of pilgrims, since they are journeying to a place that is in some way sacred to them,

¹³ Hackett et al. ‘Methodology of the Pew Research Global Religious Landscape Study’, 2014, 175.

¹⁴ Ashley Carruthers and Boitran Huynh-Beattie, ‘Dark Tourism, Diasporic Memory and Disappeared History’, in Yuk Wah Chan, ed., *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the Boat People*, London: Routledge, 2011, 147–60. Linda Ho Peche, ‘Religious Spaces: “Boat People” Legacies and the Vietnamese American 1.5 and Second Generation’ in Faith G. Nibbs, and Caroline B. Brettell, (eds), *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/social/detail.action?docID=4833688>

and their journey carries with it aspects of religious devotion. In an account of a 2011 visit, Linda Ho Peche reports that one woman who was born in the Pulau Galang refugee camp has returned there three times. Two other families came to search for the tombs of relatives and assure that they were properly buried. One in particular had a vision of his sister's ghost while there and she instructed him to decorate her grave. Visitors bought incense, incense holders, fresh flowers, vases and paper money in the Indonesian town of Batam to bring to the island, where prayers were led by both Catholic priests and Buddhist monks who were part of the tour group. While some families may decide to disinter the remains, on this particular visit the participants decided that the cemetery was well maintained as a park by the Indonesian government and surrounded by beautiful rainforest so that was not necessary.¹⁵

All members of the group burned paper money for the 503 grave sites to appease the spirits of those people whose relatives were not able to visit the island. They also photographed the tombstones to post them online for people still searching for the final resting place of their relatives. A makeshift altar was moved to the construction site of a new Buddhist temple, which would welcome more "purposeful tourists" or pilgrims who came to visit. Catholic Mass was celebrated by a priest and fellow tour participant in "an old musky Catholic church built by the refugees over thirty years ago".¹⁶

There was another shrine, called Miếu Ba Cô (Shrine for the Three Ladies) which marked the site where three young girls who had been raped at sea by pirates hung themselves from a grove of coconut trees. A sign nearby identifies the site as the "body tree", where their bodies once hung, and an oblique reference to the park pamphlet's description of this site as having the "bodhi tree" of Buddhist enlightenment. In Vietnamese belief, the spirits of those who have died a grievous death may remain trapped on earth as a hungry ghost. They can be adopted by the living, and if they receive care through offerings and prayer, they can be transformed into responsive deities who will show compassion for others who have suffered as they have.¹⁷

Both the Buddhist pagodas and a large new Catholic Church have now been rebuilt on the island of Galang, with funds contributed by Vietnamese diasporic communities. A Buddhist rite called a *lễ mong sỡn* was sponsored by one tour group to appease the lost souls (*cô hồn*) and lead the spirits of the girls back to the righteous path which would allow them to be saved. Since none of them was a blood relative of the young girls who killed themselves, there was a debate about whether this rite would be efficacious. Ho Peche argues that:

...by acknowledging these three spirits, and, in the process, negotiating for their return to a spiritually safe place, this Vietnamese group is claiming the "Body/Bodhi Tree" narrative and staking an ownership of the space. At a time when different groups

¹⁵ Ho Peche, 'Religious Spaces', p. 157.

¹⁶ Ho Peche, 'Religious Spaces', p. 157.

¹⁷ Philip Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise; Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004.

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are vying for differing stories—tourists, locals, the Indonesian and even Vietnamese government—it has become a sacroscape that serves as a didactic device for former Vietnamese refugees and their children to individually and collectively craft a mnemonic experience and a new mode of cultural production with a particular purpose.¹⁸

In sponsoring these memorials, Buddhist and Catholics have worked together to express a shared concern for the lives lost both at sea and on land. Memorials erected by the Archives of the Vietnamese Boat People have been erected not only in Pulau Galang, but also at former camps in Malaysia, and in California, Germany, France, Switzerland and Australia. Mounting pressure on the local Indonesian and Malaysian governments from Hanoi caused the memorials erected on Galang and Bidong to be demolished in 2005.

The Vietnamese government has acted over the past few decades to counter efforts to memorialize, record, and document South Vietnamese narratives of trauma. The camp and its small museum today have been curated to exhibit signs of suffering and bureaucratic processing without informing the visitors of the historical circumstances which produced these refugees. A billboard encourages people to see it as “a memory of a past trauma”, but the trauma seems to be primarily that of the dangerous boat escapes, where many were attacked and died on the high seas. Local camp managers responded to Vietnamese government concerns by removing the signpost saying “Vietnamese refugee camp” to replace it with the more generic “refugee camp” in 2014.¹⁹ By 2019, the area had been re-named “Vietnam Town” and been developed as an official tourist designation with tickets sold and guides for hire, but the term refugee was no longer used on signs.

Why should members of the second generation feel compelled to revisit these sites of suffering? Ho Peche answers for herself and other participants who she interviewed that the visit offered a sort of rebirth:

It is in these refugee camps—which over thirty years ago were depicted and experienced as the liminal space between political and economic uncertainty and newfound citizenship— that the diasporic community has found a significant space of identity to own and appropriate. It explains why many would choose to revisit spaces that seem at first to reinforce narratives of dislocation, liminality, and nostalgic longing.²⁰

Vietnamese diasporic Catholics have not only rebuilt the once very simple church but have also erected a statue called Saint Mary of the Boat People, dedicated on September 30, 1995. Mary stands on top of a globe, with Vietnam just below her feet, to represent the dispersal of people from the camp who now live all over the world. On the pedestal is a prayer

¹⁸ Ho Peche, ‘Religious Spaces’, p. 161.

¹⁹ Carruthers and Huynh-Beattie ‘Dark Tourism, Diasporic Memory’ p. 151.

²⁰ Ho Peche, ‘Religious Spaces’, p. 164.

in Vietnamese and English: “Mary we are all deeply grateful for your protecting presence on our way to freedom. We always entrust our loves to you. Your care for us will be highly appreciated in our heart forever”.²¹ There is also an elaborate bronze version of the Fifth Station of the Cross, showing Jesus falling down in a boat as he tries to lift the cross. The legend in Indonesian reads “Jesus fell down to save all of us”. The different religious landmarks are part of a narrative of collective survival which has helped to forge a diasporic identity by telling new stories of a collective heritage.

(4) Our Lady of Fatima and Anti-communism

Although all manifestations of the Virgin Mary are honoured, it is Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of La Vang who are given the greatest attention. “Just as our Lady of Fatima had saved Russia in 1989, so too will she save Vietnam”, said a priest in the Sunday Vietnamese mass sermon at the 2011 Marian festival. On the altar next to him and facing the attendees were statues of Our Lady of Fatima in a white robe and Our Lady of La Vang in the Vietnamese traditional costume of a tunic and pants.²²

Our Lady of Fatima represents the international struggle against communism, and prayers to end war and establish the reign of the “queen of peace”. Our Lady of La Vang, in contrast, has come to represent the overseas Vietnamese Catholics and their status as refugees, since she is identified with specific ethnic clothing and physical traits. While Our Lady of Fatima is depicted as a queen, wearing a crown and imperial robes, and holding the rosary in her hands, Our Lady of La Vang is a mother, holding the infant Jesus and offering comfort and consolation.

Our Lady of Fatima is a Marian apparition reported in 1917 by three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal, who described receiving a series of prophecies which were not shared more widely until 1942. When first widely publicized in the English-speaking world, the Fatima prophecies were heralded as signs that the Virgin Mary wanted to warn the world at the dawn of the Bolshevik Revolution about the threat that communism would be to people of faith. Our Lady of Fatima asked for Russia “to be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart”, and said:

²¹ “September 30: Bunda Maria diatas perahu, Bulau Galang, Lubuk Baja, Riau, indonesia”, Where We Walked Website: https://www.wherewewalked.info/feasts/09-September/september_30.htm (accessed May 22, 2024)

²² Thien-Huong Ninh, ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary Wears Áo Dài: Marianism in the Transnational Public Sphere between Vietnamese Catholics in the U.S. and Vietnam’ in Kato, Atsufumi (ed.) *Alternative Intimate Spheres for Women in Vietnam*, Working Papers, 2012 (Next Generation Research) 71, Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Global Program for Reconstruction of the Intimate and Public Spheres in 21st Century Asia 2016, 221.

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“If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church”. The rosary was weaponized against the secular atheism of Marxist regimes.²³

The idea that Our Lady of Fatima told these shepherd children about the intervention of God in history on the side of Christians and Christendom was related to stories of the origins of the place name in the 12th century defeat of Muslims by Christian forces, in which the Christian victor was awarded the daughter of the conquered Muslim king. Fatima, which is also the name of the Prophet Mohammed’s daughter, was a place where Christianity had had to defend itself against powerful enemies²⁴.

In 1961, the newly appointed Vietnamese bishop Ngô Đình Thục (older brother of then President Ngô Đình Diệm) organized a huge Marian celebration at the La Vang shrine, establishing it as a national centre of pilgrimage and a minor basilica with up to 300,000 attendants.²⁵ A statue of Our Lady of Fatima with an open heart on her chest started to tour as the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue in the late 1940s, and visited South Korea in December 1952. In 1965, this Virgin Pilgrim Statue arrived in Saigon and was greeted with huge crowds who were instructed to pray to Mary “to stop the communist disaster” and restore peace to Vietnam, in a tour initially planned for three months but extended to two years.

The inspiration for the tour itself was global, stemming from a tour of the Pilgrim Virgin in South Korea in December 1952, an event that devotees believed to have caused the signing of the armistice eight months later.²⁶

Was the Virgin Pilgrim Statue not efficacious in providing peace to a nation torn by civil war? When I asked Vietnamese Catholics this question, they explained to me that Catholicism is not like Vietnamese popular religion, where “efficacy” is measured in instrumental terms—a goddess who can bring wealth or restored health or material benefits. What the Virgin Mary has always offered is consolation, compassion and divine love, so this love is in no way invalidated by military defeat.

²³ Una M. Cadegan, ‘The Queen of Peace in the Shadow of War: Fatima and U.S. Catholic Anti-Communism’ in *U.S. Catholic Historian* Vol. 22 (4), 2004, 1-15, p. 9.

²⁴ Cadegan, ‘The Queen of Peace in the Shadow of War’ p. 7.

²⁵ Hoang, ‘Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Will Prevail’, p. 143.

²⁶ Hoang, ‘Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Will Prevail’, p. 148.

(5) Our Lady of La Vang: the Virgin Mary represented as a Vietnamese woman

The globalization of a representation of Mary with Vietnamese clothing and features is one of the most significant new developments in 21st century forms of folk Catholicism.²⁷ This statute had its origins in Orange County, California in 1994, when sculptor Vạn Nhân depicted her in the Vietnamese national dress of a tunic and long pants, with her head wrapped in a Vietnamese golden head cloth at the Santa Ana Catholic Center. His desire to show “Mary with an Asian face” was motivated only by a desire to celebrate Vietnamese Catholics living overseas, and she was not initially identified as Our Lady of Lavang. But the Catholic Church wanted to find a new way to mobilize its members after the Đổi Mới Renovations that started in 1986 developed more liberal policies towards religious communities. Popular tradition about a Marian apparition in La Vang in 1798 provided an impetus to celebrate this anniversary by re-opening a pilgrimage center which had been closed since the communist victory.

The sculptor was commissioned to create another Our Lady of La Vang statue in 1998 which was shipped to Rome, blessed by the Pope, and then sent to La Vang, Vietnam on the 200th anniversary of her apparition in 1798. The “Vietnamese Virgin Mary” is now prominently displayed at this pilgrimage center, which receives roughly 200,000 visitors a year.²⁸

The history of her apparition sets the stage for the contemporary meanings invested in her and in pilgrimages to her shrine in La Vang. Catholic missionaries visited Vietnam in the 16th century, and the first substantial communities were established in northern Vietnam from 1627-1630. In the late 1700s, Vietnam was torn by a civil war, with French Catholic advisors working for members of the Nguyễn dynasty, who opposed Emperor Cảnh Thịnh in Central Vietnam. Fearing the spread of French influence and of Catholicism, the Emperor persecuted Catholic communities and planned to execute Catholic leaders. In 1798, a group of Catholics sought refuge in the rainforest of La Vang, central Vietnam, and were visited by a divine apparition, as explained in a text accompanying a mural in Santa Ana:

Each night, they gathered under a great tree to pray the rosary, and one evening, a beautiful woman in a magnificent cloak appeared with a baby boy in her arms. She declared that she was the Mother of God, offered them fern leaves to treat their physical ailments, and promised to receive their prayers with maternal generosity. As

²⁷ Thien-Huong T. Ninh, *Race, Gender and Religion in the Vietnamese Diaspora: The New Chosen People*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

²⁸ Thien-Huong Ninh, ‘Our Lady of Lavang, Vietnamese Virgin Mary, Made in California’, Boom California, April 6, 2008: <https://boomcalifornia.org/2018/04/06/our-lady-of-la-vang/> (accessed May 22, 2024)

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persecution continued, the faithful saw the woman appear again and again at the same spot, offering consolation and encouragement.²⁹

The people who gathered in La Vang later returned to that site to pray and offer incense, and eventually constructed a chapel there in 1820. Over time, a total of 117 Vietnamese martyrs were put to death due to the Emperor's persecutions, and they were canonized as a group by Pope John Paul in 1988. On the same day, he recognized the figure of Our Lady of Lavang as an important popular religious figure, and said he hoped to rebuild a Basilica there on the 200th anniversary of her apparition. In 2012, the New Basilica was rebuilt, after securing the approval of the Vietnamese government.

The first statues of the Virgin Mary, erected in 1900 at the newly rebuilt church in La Vang had European features, and were modelled on the French "Our Lady of Victories", as was common practice in Catholic churches throughout Vietnam. In 1954, the Geneva accords divided Vietnam into North and South at the 17th parallel, about twelve miles north of the Our Lady of Lavang sanctuary. Advised by their local Catholic priests that they would not have religious freedom under a communist government, almost two thirds of all Vietnamese Catholics in the north chose to relocate to the south, where the US backed regime was led by the Catholic President Ngô Đình Diệm. Many settled around La Vang and built new churches there, and the Vatican supported them by elevating the La Vang sanctuary to a national Marian centre of pilgrimage in 1959 and a minor basilica in 1961.³⁰

During the tumultuous years of American military intervention, the Vatican endorsed Our Lady of Fatima as a much better-known religious figure than Our Lady of La Vang, and prayers to her were often explicitly linked to anticommunism. Since the region of La Vang was at the centre of the fighting, the sanctuary was caught up in the "red summer battles" of 1972 and was destroyed, with a great many Catholics sheltering in the area also killed. This violence was one reason why Catholics were much more heavily represented than non-Catholics among those Vietnamese who left the country after 1975.³¹

The La Vang Sanctuary was rebuilt and re-established as a pilgrimage center, and its prominence gradually increased as the communist government "opened its doors" to foreign investment after 1995 and began to grow economically. In 2011, more than half a million people attended the Jubilee Year closure mass. By that time, the "ethically Vietnamese" version of Our Lady of Lavang, dressed in a Vietnamese *áo dài* tunic and with her head wrapped in a Vietnamese turban, had been in place since 1998, and the stage was set to see

²⁹ 'Remembering the Martyrs of Vietnam', June 11, 2021, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, <https://www.nationalshrine.org/blog/remembering-the-martyrs-of-vietnam/> (accessed May 22, 2024)

³⁰ Thien-Huong Ninh 'The Blessed Virgin Mary Wears Áo Dài' p. 221.

³¹ Cf. Thien-Huong Ninh 'The Blessed Virgin Mary Wears Áo Dài'

this version of Mary as reaching out to a transnational community of Vietnamese Catholics now scattered throughout Europe, North America and Australia.

(6) A Vietnamese Virgin Mary in the Holy Land

While there is a relatively small Vietnamese community permanently located in Israel,³² there are a much greater number of Vietnamese Catholic pilgrims who visit the Holy Land as tourists who wish to “walk in the footsteps of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the disciples” in the words of pilgrim organizer Fr Anthony Nguyễn Hữu Quảng.³³ For these visitors, the thirty-year Jubilee of the canonization of 117 Vietnamese martyrs in 1988 was celebrated with the erection of a statue of Our Lady of Lavang in the garden of the Church of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant, at 756 meters above sea level, on the north-western edge of the city of Abu Gosh (central Israel). It is a location which is relatively close to the airport and can conveniently be visited by pilgrims who visit Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem as part of an organized tour of the Holy Land. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference encouraged this pilgrimage to the Holy Land as particularly suited to “those who live abroad, and, for various reasons, cannot return to Vietnam”.³⁴

The following day, October 19, mass was celebrated in the Church of the Beatitudes by Vietnamese bishops from Vietnam and from the diaspora. “Like those who were forced to leave behind everything to seek freedom and a life of dignity, we understand clearly the outcry of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land who have to continue to suffer difficulties, challenges, and insecurity,” said Fr Anthony Nguyễn Hữu Quảng. “Let us show them concretely our closeness. Pilgrimages are a form of sustenance for the survival of thousands of Christian families,” he added.³⁵

In May 2019, I traveled to Israel with my former student Thien-Huong Ninh and we interviewed the Vatican representative in Jerusalem, Father Nguyễn Công Đoàn SJ, in his office. Father Nguyễn Công Đoàn was himself imprisoned for 12 years in Vietnam, accused of using the Jesuit centre in Saigon as a rallying point for counter-revolutionary propaganda. After his release, he was sent to Jerusalem to direct the Pontifical Bible Institute.³⁶ At the interview, he wore a tee shirt expressing solidarity with Palestinian refugees, another people

³² Gandhi, Eryn Le Espiritu, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine*, Berkeley: University of California, 2022.

³³ Asia News: ‘Jubilee of the Vietnamese martyrs: a pilgrimage to the Holy Land’ 2018 <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Jubilee-of-the-Vietnamese-martyrs-a-pilgrimage-to-the-Holy-Land-43888.html> (accessed April 28, 2023).

³⁴ Asia News: ‘Jubilee of the Vietnamese martyrs’, 2018.

³⁵ Asia News: ‘Jubilee of the Vietnamese martyrs’, 2018.

³⁶ “Father Đoàn celebrates fifty years of priesthood” in *Jesuits in the Holy Land*, July 12, 2020 <https://jesuitsholyland.wordpress.com/2020/07/12/father-doan-celebrates-fifty-years-of-priesthood/> (accessed May 22, 2024).

displaced by war. He suggested that Vietnamese Virgin Mary, as the “mother” of the only non-Jewish refugees welcomed into Israel, could serve as a point of reconciliation for Catholics, Muslims and Jews in the Holy Land.

(7) Marian Days in Carthage, Missouri: The Largest Pilgrimage

After the fall of Saigon, a great many Catholic clerics and well as laypersons left the country as refugees, including 185 clergy, over half of the priests affiliated with the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix (CMC, in 2017 re-named the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer CMR for *Congregatio Redemptoris Matris*).³⁷ This Vietnamese religious order—the first to be created in Vietnam and now the largest and most influential in the diaspora—established its headquarters in Carthage, Missouri after fleeing Vietnam as boat people just before the Fall of Saigon. Since it hosts the largest gathering of Roman Catholics in the US, the influence of this congregation (which was relatively small in Vietnam) has expanded greatly in the diaspora.

In 1978, they hosted the first Marian Days festival, which summoned 1,500 Vietnamese Catholics from the surrounding region to Carthage. The statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which had visited Vietnam in 1965-67 as the war intensified, was enshrined there six years later in 1984. Every year, pilgrims from near and far gather in Carthage to honour the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary through a procession. The festival includes over two hundred Masses and other ceremonies, plus an assortment of workshops and seminars, live entertainment, opportunities for confession and the massive 3.5-mile procession, in which the Our Lady of Fatima statue is carried in and around Carthage. In recent years, the presence of another statue—Our Lady of La Vang, now depicted in Vietnamese costume and with Vietnamese features—is increasingly visible and public as well.³⁸

The Marian Days (*Đại Hội Thánh Mẫu*, officially *các Ngày Thánh Mẫu*) is the largest annual gathering of both Vietnamese Americans and Catholics in the U.S., although it is held in Missouri—a state with a very small population of both Catholics and Vietnamese Americans. Tens of thousands of attendees come from throughout the United States, while non-Vietnamese locals and some visitors from Canada, Vietnam, and Australia also attend.

³⁷ The name change came at the request of the Pope, who found the Vietnamese Catholics a bit overzealous in their description of Mary as a “co-redeemer” along with Jesus, and thus revised the name to indicate that she was instead simply the mother of the redeemer. See Tuan Hoang, ‘Ultramontanist, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon: Historicizing the Vietnamese American Catholic Experience’, *American Catholic Studies* 130(1), 2019, 1-36, and Tuan Hoang, ‘The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugee Religious, priests, and Seminarians in the United States, 1975-1977’, 99-122.

³⁸ Cf. Ninh, ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary Wears Áo Dài’

Organizers estimated that around 100,000 people attended the 40th annual Marian Days, August 3–6, 2017.³⁹ Almost 100,000 attended in 2018 and 2019,⁴⁰ but it was not held in 2019 or 2020 because of Covid. In August 2022, it was held once again, with an estimated 60,000 people attending.⁴¹ The much smaller numbers may be related to lingering fears of Covid, but also might signal the fact that the refugee generation is now getting older, and many younger Vietnamese may choose to travel to Vietnam itself rather than coming to this alternative pilgrimage. There was also a competing festival in California in 2022: A version of “Orange County Marian Days” was held on July 1-2, in the community with the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans. This California Marian Days was held at the Christ cathedral with a new 12-foot statue of Our Lady of Lavang and 4000 people attending. A similar festival was scheduled to be held July 12-23 in 2024.⁴² In 2023, the Marian Days Festival in Carthage was held from August 2-5 and a somewhat larger crowd attended, estimated at about 80,000.

Pilgrims sleep in tents, since the town of 15,000 has no room for over 100,000 visitors, and there are a series of outdoor masses, long processions, Vietnamese food, music, and booths from many local Catholic groups, in a four-day festival celebrating ethnic pride, national heritage and refugee resilience. The final procession in honour of our Lady of Fatima is followed by the lighting of two long firecrackers, and the release of dozens of balloons tied to two flags: one flag is blue and white, the colours of the Virgin Mary, and the other has yellow stripes on a red background, the flag of the Saigon government. Priests who officiated at the ceremony said this showed that the “country of Vietnam was offered to be blessed by the Virgin Mary”.⁴³

(8) Conclusions: Refugees, Pilgrims and the Virgin of Many Faces Over Time

Earlier scholars have examined how migration and pilgrimage are related, arguing that by going on pilgrimages “migrants deny the rupture migration has entailed, creating their own sacred geographies that recapture and renew an imaginary wholeness”.⁴⁴ They do not,

³⁹ Wikipedia ‘Marian Days’ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Days (accessed May 22, 2024).

⁴⁰ Tuan Hoang, ‘From Reeducation Camps to Little Saigons: Historicizing Vietnamese Diasporic Anticommunism’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11.2, 2016, 43-95.

⁴¹ ‘Marian Days, City of Carthage’ <https://www.carthagemo.gov/o/carthage/page/marian-days> (accessed April 28, 2024).

⁴² ‘Marian Days at Christ Cathedral’, <https://www.carthagemo.gov/o/carthage/page/marian-days> (accessed May 22, 2024)

⁴³ ‘Missouri Marian festival reconnects Vietnamese pilgrims to their faith and culture’, *Global Sisters Report: A Project of National Catholic Reporter*, August 6, 2022 <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/missouri-marian-festival-reconnects-vietnamese-pilgrims-their-faith-and-culture> (accessed May 22, 2024).

⁴⁴ Claudia Liebelt, Gabriele Shenar and Pnina Werbner, ‘Migration, Diaspora, and Religious Pilgrimage in Comparative Perspective: Sacred Geographies and Ethical Landscapes’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 2016, 19(1):32-50, 32. DOI: [10.3138/diaspora.19.1.03](https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.19.1.03)

however, address the differences between refugee and migrants, and particularly the fact that most refugees feel that they cannot return to the homeland---often because they fear further violence and persecution, but also because they do not identify with or support the current government. The “lost country” cannot be visited so its sacred locations need to be rebuilt elsewhere.

Diasporic pilgrimages “live hope and loss as a defining tension” since the loss of the homeland makes it both a place of the past and “a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity”.⁴⁵ Experiences of discrimination and exclusion constitute this consciousness negatively, but “a sense of attachment to elsewhere, to a different temporality and vision” also constitute it positively, giving this movement a utopian vision. This utopian seeking is very evident in the temporary community and even *communitas* achieved in a gathering like the one in Carthage, or the much smaller but still significant pilgrimages to Our Lady of Lavang in Israel, in California churches, or former refugee camps and burial grounds in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Practicing an indigenous religion like Caodaism in the diaspora is, as I have argued in my book *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora*, in itself a way of “returning to the homeland” through spiritual pilgrimage, infusing an imaginary journey with elements of long-distance nationalism.⁴⁶ Pilgrimage is a luxury that marks the refugee’s journey as a successful one: He or she is now able to choose displacement and embrace a new mobility, no longer forced. No longer the pathetic victim clinging to a precarious boat in unwelcoming seas, he or she is now a cosmopolitan traveler choosing a new, if temporary, destination.

Victor and Edith Turner emphasized the attainment of a voluntarily adopted, emotionally charged state on occasions when “the structures of everyday life had temporarily loosened their grip” and mundane concerns were pushed away. They argue that a “pilgrimage ethic” is more responsive to social change and is thus a source of innovation.⁴⁷ It laid the groundwork, Coleman has argued, for “a multi-sited appreciation of Christianity as a field, mediated through pilgrimages and played out in sites oriented around different forms of locality, history and historicity.”⁴⁸

Victor Turner’s efforts to systematize the study of pilgrimage in anthropology treated pilgrimages as the functional equivalent of rites-of-passage in small scale societies, and as showing us how larger societies could ritualize their own transitions from one form of economy to another and from one homeland to another. The social effervescence and heightened feeling that he called “*communitas*” came from releasing people from quotidian

⁴⁵ James Clifford, ‘Diasporas’, *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3), 1994, 302-338, 312.

⁴⁶ Hoskins, *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora*, 151.

⁴⁷ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

⁴⁸ Simon Coleman, ‘Pilgrimage as a Trope for an Anthropology of Christianity’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 55, No. S10, *The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions* (December 2014), pp. S281-S291, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/677766> <https://doi.org/10.1086/677766>, p. S285.

roles and relationships and allowing them to journey in non-ordinary time and space. For him, one reason why the icons that attract pilgrims worldwide are often female is that figures of maternal nurturance and solicitude work as exemplary symbols of inclusion. Turner saw Marian pilgrimage as the “ordered antistructure of patrimonial feudal systems”.⁴⁹

But Turner’s notion that pilgrimage represents “an escape from modernity” and the suspension of structure is problematic, as Philip Taylor has noted in a study of popular pilgrimage in Vietnam:

A view of pilgrimage as a sort of antistructure has the effect of displacing religion as form of peripheral activity, or as something that is exceptional: something that one does in a sacred place, on a holy day, or in response to an extraordinary event or crisis.⁵⁰

Many modern pilgrimages—including the alternative Vietnamese pilgrimages I address here—are far from liminal, in the sense that they address current social, political, and economic concerns. For this reason, it is perhaps better to see them as responsive to “shifting cultural priorities rather than some property of structural liminality, and this very flexibility infuses these sites with cogency over time”.⁵¹ The multivocal nature of their central symbols—like Our Lady of Lavang or Our Lady of Fatima—allow them to portray a dynamic sense of cultural pluralism and newly emerging forms of subjectivity.

The religious festival held in Carthage for all of the Catholic “Holy Mothers” offers an intensification of cultural values rather than the playing out of antistructure. People travel there to meet family members and friends that they may have lost contact with, to eat familiar Vietnamese foods and shop for Vietnamese festival clothing like the *Áo Dài* tunic and pants, and to march in a procession behind Our Lady of Fatima, as others once did in southern Vietnam in 1965-67 when the war was intensifying.

The different faces of Vietnamese Marys express a different relationship to history and temporality. Our Lady of Refugees refers to a specific time frame: the period from 1975 to 1995 when close to a million Vietnamese were admitted as refugees. After the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam in 1995, almost all new arrivals from Vietnam have come through family reunification sponsorship.⁵² Now the roughly 1.3 million refugees are joined by a new generation born in the US, so that the roughly 2.3 million people of Vietnamese descent have come to see themselves as an ethnic community rather than a refugee population. The presence of Our Lady of Lavang (although it refers to an 18th century apparition) is now oriented more toward a new transnational ethnic solidarity, using an

⁴⁹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Penguin Books 1974, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise*, 14.

⁵¹ Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise*, 16.

⁵² 87% of recent Vietnamese immigrants who have become lawful permanent residents or green card holders since 1995 came through family sponsorship. “Vietnamese Immigrants in the United States” October 11, 2023. *Migration Policy Institute*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/vietnamese-immigrants-united-states>

Three Faces of Mary in the Vietnamese Diaspora

emblem of the overseas Vietnamese Catholic community. Walking behind Our Lady of Fatima is in some sense, “a time out of time”, since it returns to a period now more than half a century ago, but the point of participating in this final Marian procession is to share this experience with a new generation—so those born in the U.S. can experience the same intensity of religious feeling and devote themselves to the Catholic faith.

This “refugee religious iconography” is itself in flux—moving away from an icon of refuge and one of the war against communism to focus on an image of ethnic solidarity, the “Vietnamese Virgin made in California” and then exported to Rome, to the Holy Land, and finally back to Vietnam.

Peggy Levitt has described transnational religious spaces as alternative landscapes, which are not only about organized manifestations of faith but also about the alternative spaces of belonging which religious symbols and ideas make possible and ways in which sacred landscapes interact with other political and social boundaries.⁵³ When Vietnamese Catholics felt that they had lost the sacred space of their own homeland, they created new sacred landscapes in the Holy Land (Our Lady of Lavang statue in Israel), at refugee camps (Galang Island in Indonesia) and at a huge religious festival for three different incarnations of the Virgin Mary in Carthage, Missouri. But now their priorities have changed, and the resilience of these earlier pilgrimages is being tested by a more mobile generation, less fixated on Cold War divisions and more interested in global travel and tourism.

Thomas Tweed, in his study of Cuban exiles in Miami, argued that a shrine to their national patron saint allowed migrants to recover a past when they were still living in Cuba and imagine a future where they might return.⁵⁴ Religion was used to extend the boundaries of the homeland to incorporate those living outside of it who felt unable to return. His book, titled “Our Lady of the Exile”, strikes a chord that is similar to the themes of these separate Vietnamese pilgrimages to places of suffering, heritage and cross-generational gatherings where a sense of religious community can transcend the violent separations of the past. Viet Thanh Nguyen, the Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *The Sympathizer*, published a memoir about how his Catholic mother longed to visit the Catholic shrines of Europe as a way to connect with a sense of home that she lost as a refugee in 1975. “For devout Catholics”, he writes, “the real home is not Earth but Heaven, and their longing for it is perpetual”.⁵⁵ He was able to travel to Rome, Lourdes and Fatima with his parents, and remembers that as the time when they were happiest together, before refugee traumas came back to haunt his

⁵³ Peggy Levitt, ‘You know, Abraham was really the first immigrant: Religion and Transnational Migration’, *The International Migration Review* V. 37 n 3, 2003, 847-873, 861.

⁵⁴ Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

⁵⁵ Viet Thanh Nguyen, ‘Departure from Reality’, 2023, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-weekend-essay/a-departure-from-reality-viet-thanh-ngo> (accessed May 22, 2024)



mother and detach her from reality. Religious tourism offered a temporary escape from the reality of the loss of a home and the idea, articulated by Stuart Hall, that although there can be a momentary sense of return, “Migration is a one way trip. There is no home to go back to. There never was”.⁵⁶

I argue that these diasporic alternative pilgrimages offer a compensation for suffering and a redemptive experience of voluntary travel, even the luxury of tourism, to make up for an involuntary displacement and the “loss of country”. They are infused with the “long distance nationalism”⁵⁷ of those who see themselves as political exiles, but also serve to create an “experience of the homeland” for those who say they cannot return home. In saying that these three faces also represent three moments in refugee temporality, I see them as presenting initial gratitude to Catholic Resettlement agencies, then a postwar emphasis on Catholic resistance to communism, and finally the construction of a new transnational ethnic identity. The rituals, images, and global pilgrimages that I describe in this paper have helped to reconnect communities scattered in various countries, building the foundations of an overseas Vietnamese Catholic imaginary.

⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”, in L. Appignanesi (ed), *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, ICA Documents 6, London: ICA, 1987, 44-46, 44.

⁵⁷ Benedict Anderson, “Long Distance Nationalism” in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. London and New York: Verso, 1998, 58-76.

Figures



Fig 1: Saint Mary of the Boat People in Galang, Indonesia
(Photo credit: Marian Anniversaries. Used with permission)



Fig 2: Our Lady of Lavang statue in Orange County, California
(Photo credit Thien-Huong Ninh. Used with permission)



Fig 3: Our Lady of Fatima Pilgrim Statue in Carthage
(Photo credit: American Catholic Historical Association. Used with permission)