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Suspended Futures: The Vietnamization of South Vietnamese History and Memory

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The dissertation of Long Thanh Bui is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have survived war and live to teach us about it.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In 1969, President Richard Nixon announced the "Vietnamization" of the Vietnam War, a handover of responsibility for winning the war from the U.S. to its allies, the South Vietnamese. Vietnamization articulated the challenges of achieving political freedom and historical agency for South Vietnamese people. Conceptualizing this term in the early 21st century, I seek to address the ways the war (and its subjects) is called into the present to speak about the representability and addressability of the South Vietnamese now. My chapters examine different figurations of South Vietnamese as subjects of modern discourse in the U.S., Vietnam and the diaspora showing how they are resignified and reimagined not simply as the "lost" side of history but those phantoms of the past that must be recognized and reconciled in a post-millennial moment characterized by the "Vietnam Syndrome." I argue that the South Vietnamese historical experience remains the inassimilable trace of war and product of (geo)political history that poses challenges to how the war is traditionally remembered and for whom.

Employing a cultural studies and Foucaultean genealogical approach, I analyze contemporary efforts to reconfigure and incorporate South Vietnamese historicity. The first chapter on a U.S.-based Vietnam War archive examines how American recent efforts to represent and include Vietnamese American refugees in their memory work and historical preservation is another instance of Vietnamization that tries to give "voice" to the South Vietnamese without contending with the political contradictions such inclusion entails. The second chapter on the 2006 film *Living in Fear* depicts postwar struggles of a South Vietnamese soldier trying to survive in post-reunification Vietnam clearing landmines left by Americans—the enduring consequence of Vietnamization. I end with an examination of a protest over a Vietnamese American art exhibit in Orange County and how the issue of anticommunism that emerged from it revives the unassimilable memories and politicized histories of former refugees from South Vietnam. This last chapter illustrates how the South Vietnamese war memory is not a matter for assimilation into contemporary discourse but provides the grounds for endless conflict in negotiating the terms of a war that for many never truly ended.

INTRODUCTION

This project examines the politics of representation and the problematics involved in recognizing South Vietnamese as proper subjects of contemporary cultural knowledge-production in the early 21st century. My dissertation is therefore concerned with the post-9/11 moment, when the War on Terror allows the US to renew its military ties and regional bases/commitments abroad (Bevacqua 2010), which further removes the history and figure of South Vietnam from public sight and collective memory even while it brings back this phantom of war *in the name of* explaining new foreign wars in the Middle-East. Where the historic construction of South Vietnamese people as the "losers" of war tends to reduce the complexity of their postwar history and struggles, my dissertation develops a conceptual framework that spotlights the residuals of the war and its geopolitical formations in the present. To do this, I re-introduce the term "Vietnamization" to describe the symbolic-historical burdens placed upon the South Vietnamese to emerge as modern subjects of power/knowledge. Vietnamization refers to what would be popularly called the Richard Nixon doctrine which "sought to withdraw American armed forces from Indochina while simultaneously defending South Vietnam, winning the war, achieving peace, and preserving American 'honor.' (Kimball 2006: 59). As a decolonizing move made during conditions of war, Nixon's decision to "Vietnamize" the war in 1969 and pull U.S. forces completely from Southeast Asia by 1972 reveals not simply the later fact that the South Vietnamese ultimately failed to protect themselves from communism and lost the war but signaled their ability to actualize (Western) liberal notions of freedom and sovereignty remains arrested or foreclosed. Lisa Yoneyama (1999) critiques the collective desire to move toward a more

liberated globalized historical future when the production of history and memory is "always enmeshed in the exercise of power and is always accompanied by elements of repression" (27). Following Yoneyama, I argue that the arrested history and freedom of South Vietnam remains the material trace of the war that cannot be easily assimilated to latter-day efforts to rewrite and rearticulate that war's history.

Examining a range of cultural productions and texts produced in the early 21st century, this dissertation project examines representations of South Vietnamese from the perspective of modern Vietnam, the United States and the diaspora. My examination shows contemporary efforts to remember and reconcile with the memory of South Vietnam as posing a problematic within our current "geographies of memory" (Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman 2004). My aim in this project is not to analyze the South Vietnamese history or "postwar" experience in some comprehensive or empirical way. Rather, I seek to reveal the problems of representing and conjuring the ghost of South Vietnam at this point in time when ideas of Vietnam and Vietnamese people are changing rapidly and taking on more diversified forms—and when "South Vietnam" is not part of the official political discourse and geopolitical order. Whereas U.S. manufactured images of South Vietnamese as "helpless peoples" justified U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia, post-millennial constructions of South Vietnamese in Vietnam, the United States and the diaspora seek to revise their traumatic status as the sacrificial victims of the Vietnam War to rid "all the familiar structures and relations of an older modern world [with] promises of universal redemption" (Tadiar 2009: 2). Such universal redemption is made difficult

by our historical amnesia and failure to remember the old (geo)political histories and ghosts of the past as they erupt in the present.[1]

Examining the production of a film produced in socialist Vietnam, a U.S.-based Vietnam War historical archive and a Vietnamese American community protest, what I interpret is a nuanced picture and scope of South Vietnamese cultural representation in the broad spectrum and fleeting instances of contemporary life within history, cinema and political activism. These examples help to contextualize 'Vietnamization' processes in this historical juncture and the specific cultural forms they take. By doing this, I seek to show the material effects and consequences of Vietnamization—which denotes not only the loss of war and South Vietnam but challenges in representing South Vietnamese people as free self-determined subjects and agents of history. Here, I ask the central question: how does South Vietnamese postwar subject-formation challenge ideas of historical progress and redemption and refract the difficult memory of the Vietnam War? How do different cultural actors represent/remember South Vietnam and why do they do so with a sense of urgency in the 21st century, decades after the war has ended? In what ways is Vietnamization not only a military master plan but also a type of cultural discourse and racial project that positioned South Vietnamese in particular ways that never allowed them the opportunity to enter history and the modern political order as self-representing/self-speaking subjects of power?

[1] This is most evident in the war on terror against insurgent groups that emerged as a product of the US Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union and the geopolitical configurations as well as alliances of this struggle.

VIETNAMIZATION: THE FRAGMENTED GENEALOGIES OF WAR

On November 3, 1969 newly elected president Richard Nixon in a televised speech announced the "Vietnamization" of the war in Vietnam at a time when the United States was facing increasing opposition from American citizens for its involvement in Southeast Asia. Vietnamization justified the withdrawal of troops from the region by arguing that the South Vietnamese had to defend their own territorial nation in what Nixon described as "a plan in which we will withdraw all our forces from Vietnam on a schedule in accordance with our program, as the South Vietnamese become *strong enough to defend their own freedom* [italics my emphasis].[2] Nixon admitted that while previous administrations "Americanized the war in Vietnam," his administration was reversing this trend and "Vietnamizing the search for peace" with honor (ibid). This search for "peace with honor" is very much tied to the need to preserve U.S. global standing that denies the South Vietnamese a role in articulating their uncertain fate under the Vietnamization policy and redefines the war as specifically only about the Vietnamese—despite the fact that what is called the "Vietnam War" in the United States is traditionally termed the "American War" by Vietnamese people (Huynh 1993).

Vietnamization was ultimately seen as a failed plan because the South Vietnamese were considered unprepared to handle their new responsibilities in governing themselves and safeguarding their own freedom (Jervis 2010). As it was later revealed in

[2] President Nixon's Speech and address to the nation on the war on Vietnam was made on November 3, 1969 at the Midway Conference. The speech is also referred to as the "Silent Majority" speech since it was directed to the many U.S. Americans who were against the more vocal liberal anti-war "minority.' The Vietnamization program is seen as a corollary or extension of the *Guam Doctrine* which articulated that the U.S. allies were expected to take care of their own military defense and this policy was articulated during press conference a few months earlier in Guam on July 1969, which stated that the United States expected its foreign allies to take care of their own military defense despite U.S. aid.

declassified tapes that became public in the early 2000's, President Nixon conveniently postponed full withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam until the year of his reelection in 1972, "long enough after his final troop withdrawal to make Saigon's fall look like Saigon's fault" (Hughes 2010: 500). Vietnamization served then as a continuation of war by other means that "reflected political calculation" (Hughes 506) and the belief that "more months of American bombing could improve the military situation for South Vietnam" since the U.S. military was not leaving South Vietnam until all American POW's and lives were recovered and accounted for (Hughes 505). The South Vietnamese were painted as inept guileless children in the face of inevitable collapse by Nixon: "Well, if they're—they're that collapsible, maybe they just have to be collapsed…We've got to remember, we cannot—we cannot keep this child sucking at the tit when the child is four years old" (Hughes 505). While this gendered and sexualized metaphor suggests that America's allies are now too mature to rely upon U.S. aid, it still figures the United States as the parent and the South Vietnamese as the dependent inferior children. Vietnamization sought to "bring an honorable end to the war" but served as a cover-up for the fact there was not a subsequent effort to "de-Americanize" the war effort or loosen U.S. control over the discourse surrounding this war (Kimball 2011: 225).

Under Vietnamization, the U.S. sought to protect American lives with Americans by training South Vietnamese soldiers in military tactics and weaponry, shifting the burden of ground troop fighting primarily from the U.S. onto South Vietnam. The U.S. continued bombing the country indiscriminately as a form of "disengagement with escalation" of military violence with the South Vietnamese stuck in a "bloody test of

arms and will" (Kimball 2011: 217). Not simply a military strategy, Vietnamization served as a symbolic gesture that "implies that a specific part of Southeast Asia is a nation [where]...the use of Vietnamization indicates that there is a Vietnam…[and] it becomes linguistic evidence for the political integrity of South Vietnam and, curiously, for the legitimacy of American soldiers fighting to preserve its integrity as a nation" (ibid). This "we-win-even-when-we lose syndrome," as Yen Le Espiritu (2006) might call it, posits South Vietnam and Vietnamese people as the necessary sacrifice for Americans Cold War politics. It undergirds the consideration of South Vietnamese as the "necessary" sacrifice as well as "collateral damage" for greater freedom and democracy by reconfiguring their inevitable defeat as a symbolic triumph. In effect, this myth has been publicized as an "organized and strategic forgetting of a war that went wrong" and American's re-imaginings of themselves in the "self-appointed role as liberators" for not only Vietnamese but also Iraqis, Afghanis and other groups in the post-Cold War period (ibid: 330). The Vietnam War was rescripted as an internal civil war between peoples of the same nation, rather than one begun and exacerbated by foreign aggressors. Vietnamization serves as an alibi and allegory of war, a type of skewed transference of power that shifts the prior imperial rationale for conquest and colonial administration in Indochina (often called the White Man's Burden) onto colonized peoples who are now seen as responsible for making real *their* own self-determined desires for freedom.[3] The "failure" or flawed strategy of Vietnamization in delivering this freedom to the South

[3]This transference is a classic case of the transition from what has been traditionally called the "White Man's Burden" to the postcolonial situation. In the postwar/colonial period, this suggests that there is something wrong with the Vietnamese to if they fail to fully adapt to the demands of neoliberal globalization—the economic-political structure built on principles of individual freedom, economic rationalism, private enterprise to encourage open markets and a more "open" multicultural democratic world.

Vietnamese is often blamed on the corruption of the South Vietnamese government, the poor education of South Vietnamese soldiers in using sophisticated U.S.-military equipment and the lack of will power of the South Vietnamese to fight for their nation to become part of the Free World (Willbanks 2008).[4] If the South Vietnamese people failed to become a liberal democracy on their own terms, it was reasoned, it was "their" fault in lacking the innate moral capacity to do so.

In trying to theorize this historic term Vietnamization and extend into the current moment to speak about South Vietnamese now, I employ it differently than Nixon by speaking to the never-fulfilled desires and belated struggles of former colonized groups to become "free" modern subjects on their own terms, and their "arrested" ability to achieve political freedom—a disability often seen as owing to their cultural "difference" and deficiencies rather than the structures of colonialism, racism and violence. As a scripted way of representing and speaking for the subaltern "other," the term Vietnamization generally describe not only the particular conditions of war for the South Vietnamese but also the nostrum and challenges of giving political power/recognition to colonial subjects in U.S.-involved conflict zones such as Yugoslavia (Horowitz 1999) and Iraq (Laird 2005). Vietnamization describes the handing over of power to inferior not-yet-modern political subjects who are not yet ready or be free but who nevertheless must be *made* free and given a "voice." It is also a temporal metaphor that suggests that historical agency is always deferred since it is tied to winning a war or the fact that it had to be "given" from a superior power. Drawing attention to Vietnamization as an ongoing

[4] Despite the United States' failure to deliver that promise of freedom to the South Vietnamese, the doctrine of Vietnamization incidentally led to the escalation of fighting and bombing (which included the invasion of Cambodia in 1970), pushing the war for another half decade until the total collapse of South Vietnam to North Vietnamese communist forces.

discursive and symbolic process for South Vietnamese people today, I contend that in many ways the Vietnam War never truly ended. The origins of Vietnamization, rooted in "allowing" South Vietnamese to become modern subjects of politics and discourse, affect contemporary concerns with how to still represent and recognize them in the present.

Vietnamization does not denote simply the hasty *conclusion* of the Vietnam War, I suggest, but the hegemonic cultural discourses and practices which continue to delimit South Vietnamese political agency and subject-formation. Rather than signify a declaration of independence for Vietnamese people, Vietnamization acts as a premature pronouncement to end a decades-long military war, obscuring the fact that the most bloody violence and intense bombings happened right *after* implementation of this exit strategy, where the policy served as coverage and subterfuge for the fact that certain peoples were seen as dispensable for the United States, who managed to reduce their soldier casualties through Vietnamization while Vietnamese deaths skyrocketed (Asselin 2002: 22). According to Denise Silva (2005), Vietnamization renders a moral and political indistinction in matters of sovereignty that tells the story of

> a people who have been welcomed into the territory of freedom [who] find themselves infiltrated by enemies of freedom—or their agents. Because they are unable to help themselves, the U.S. sends troops to liberate and/or protect the new friends of freedom, who would otherwise fall prey to the enemies of freedom…this story reproduces the ethical program as it narrates the trajectory of a mind toward self-determination…not a self-regulating and self-developing subject, without military and economic aid from the friends of freedom, the 'new friend of freedom,' subject-in-becoming, would not be able to sustain itself as a self-determined polity (125).

A population comprised of poor peasants indicated this cultural/developmental difference between the South Vietnamese and the Americans and the need for U.S. intervention in

order to lead Vietnamese toward self-rule and modernity (the same justification used for U.S. colonization of the Philippines, Guam, Samoa, Hawaii and Puerto Rico earlier). Vietnamization tries to install and inaugurate a new historical context that demands the recognition and inclusion of those once seen as outside modernity, in a "postcolonial" new world order built on the unfinished business of imperial warfare and colonialism.

Beyond its strict historicized and geopolitical meaning, I see Vietnamization as a conceptual structuring device or critical scaffolding for understanding the "arrested" histories of South Vietnamese people in contemporary cultural history. Vietnamization provides a type of racialized and militarized lexicon for my study of South Vietnamese representations in the first decade of the millennial era, provoking new questions about history and memory to reassess how "Vietnamization involves more than just the asking of new questions [but how] it also aims to provide new answers for some of the oldest and most persistent questions about the war" (Miller and Vu 2009: 2). Recognizing the productive nature of the term outside its negative connotation, I recognize that Vietnamization supplies a convenient shorthand or catachrestic phrase for highlighting the vexed political trajectory of South Vietnamese. To clarify my goal, I am not trying to argue that South Vietnamese people *should be* recognized as self-determined political subjects and modern subjects of history (since this argument is based on a sense of absence and lack which reproduces the logic of Vietnamization as the *positive* need to make visible and assimilate them into a sense of freedom and history). Instead, I want to problematize and interrogate how the South Vietnamese (re)emerge as important social figures able to challenge hegemonic distinctions between freedom/captivity, past/present and victory/loss within postwar discourses about the Vietnam War.

THE (VANISHING) HISTORY AND MEMORY OF SOUTH VIETNAM

My project identifies the South Vietnamese as the "surplus" and ghostly trace of the Vietnam War and its contested historical meaning and cultural memory. The legacy of the Vietnam War is important in order to resituate and understand current efforts by the U.S. to "Vietnamize," for instance, the Iraqis and Afghanis under the aegis of American interventionism (Craig 2003, Kaplan 2011, Schram 2010). In this context, the specter of (the loss of) Vietnam is invoked as a cultural metaphor that uses "a nightmare we understand to conjure up a nightmare we cannot even imagine" (Jameson 1992: 43)[5]—a move that forgets the specificities of the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese to express the cyclical sense of military loss and historical amnesia upon which U.S. empire is based. Recognizing the ways the phantom of Vietnam is brought back again in this current moment as an empty signifier (what is called the "Vietnam Syndrome") with little sense of history, I believe it is an important moment to revisit the historical salience and implications of the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War which ran from 1945-1975 (it was never formally declared a war), Vietnamese people were depicted in iconic general terms as communist threats, guerrilla peasant soldiers or Third World peasants that constructed and posited them as gooks, subaltern racial/colonial subjects without a human voice or agency. South Vietnamese were seen as all those things because many Americans could not distinguish between the faces of the enemy and ally and thus saw all Vietnamese in culturally and racially different terms (Leventman and Camacho 1980). The Vietnam War was not

[5] As Jameson goes on to explain, this allegory is based on the idea of "destroying counter-insurgency and making an example of the repression of a revolutionary movement [that] is comparable to the attempt to bring enlightenment, education and medicine to a feudal and medieval country locked in clans and vendettas only in the number of dead bodies produced by both efforts." See Jameson, p. 108.

simply a military enterprise but an image-making and 'subject-making' event that determined the ways Vietnamese entered historical modernity as "a nation without its own history, culture, heritage and political agenda" (Espiritu 2005: 313). Given this symbolic erasure, I see the need to engage a critical project that speaks directly to the specific disavowal of South Vietnamese from the historical memory of that war, one that does not seek to merely recuperate their suppressed voices in history but locate it within a field of contemporary power relations and cultural contestations.[6]

It is important here to briefly revisit the historical origins of South Vietnam to provide context. Engaged in anti-colonial struggles for centuries without peace, the Vietnamese people struggled to gain independence and recognition as a sovereign nation, mobilizing collective desires for emancipation from foreign aggression like France, China and Japan (Bradley 2000). While the French who controlled Vietnam and Indochina from 1885 to 1954 sought to forcibly subjugate all of Vietnam and Southeast Asia as a colonial territory, Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh emerged as national revolutionary heroes in the first half of the 20th century to defeat the French during the first Indochina War (1946-1954). The plans for a postcolonial Vietnamese nation was articulated in the 1954 Geneva Accords which created a demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel, temporally dividing the country into two parts with the North controlled by Viet Minh and the southern region under the foreign "administration" of the United States—a separate independent state formed by self-declared president Ngo Dinh Diem in violation

[6] This is not to say that Vietnamese are not in control of their own cultural representations but that the epistemological question of how these former colonial racial subjects emerge within discourse remains important still in the 21st century, especially as it relates to their ability to speak as subjects of modern power/knowledge—where their political agency and desires have been obfuscated, deterred and bound up to certain socio-discursive conditions and lineages of war.

of the planned national elections to be held in 1956 that would allow *all* Vietnamese to decide their collective fate and national leadership (Vlastos 1991: 55-57).

The failure to unify Vietnam under one rule created a split country that found itself at war with no compromise or hope for unification. With French colonial influence waning in Indochina, the U.S. played a major role in the second Indochina War or what now is called the "Vietnam War." Using the racial language by the French to deny Vietnamese self-determination from the assumption Vietnamese could not govern themselves (Bradley 2000: 167-170), the U.S. took over France's imperial mantle, acting as the colonial power in South Vietnam (to give the Vietnamese people a supposedly better future) due to Cold War concerns in Southeast Asia (SarDesai 2005).[7] The Vietnam War and its abrupt, hasty conclusion with the quick fall of South Vietnam to northern forces in 1975 and the mass exodus of millions of people from Southern Vietnam did not end the struggle for the South. Instead, South Vietnam had been molded in America's image of a liberal democracy, providing a new global-historical context for understanding what it means to be "South Vietnamese" in world shaped by U.S. American empire and the spoils of war (Chomsky 2004).

It is not my intention to conceptualize contemporary Vietnamese subject-formation as Vietnamese people are circumscribed by tropes of war and spectacularized violence (Chong 1995). Nor is it my intention to ignore the experiences of North

[7] Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 and sought U.S. assistance and support. Instead of supporting Minh, the U.S. and other European powers legitimated French claims to Vietnam. The first Indo-China War was fought by the Viet Minh with the French from 1946 to 1954 and resulted in the division of the country into South and North Vietnam. By the mid 1960s, France, in the wake of another colonial war in Algeria, was too weak to be a colonial power there and the United States became the major supporter of South Vietnam. The fight between the North, supported by the Soviets and Chinese at different times, became to infiltrate the South this led to the Second Indo-China War which in the US is known as the Vietnam War but the American War in Vietnam.

Vietnamese by talking only about South Vietnamese. Indeed, I do not see "South Vietnamese" as a discrete, bounded homogenous category of identity. However, I do recognize the historical specificity and complexity of this seemingly anachronistic category of geographic/ cultural identification as an analytical lens to challenge the idea that the contested politics of the Vietnam War ended with a return to normative politics and the nation-state. Recognizing South Vietnam as a ghostly "metaphor of sovereignty" (Lowe 2010) that holds relevance and salience for so many people today, I do not read South Vietnam and South Vietnamese as subjects relegated to historical obscurity, absolved of their violent past and absorbed into some neoliberal post-Cold War future marked by the end of ideological conflict and the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992).[8] By addressing them now, I seek to get at the messiness, ruptures, discontinuities and contradictions of the current moment, characterized by the ongoing "Vietnamization" of South Vietnamese peoples and their "arrested" forms of historical agency and futurity.

This dissertation deems culture a central site for understanding the place of South Vietnam at the turn of the 21st century. Where the political is often imagined in terms of competing state-controlled interests and antagonisms, the agonist politics of culture announces the more muddled affective, aesthetic and symbolic economies that are able to expose and reveal those elements of social life that cannot be represented or captured under traditional understandings of "politics" (Lowe 1996). Culture reveals how the historical experiences and memory of the South Vietnamese persist even after the figure

[8] In his influential book *The End of History and the Last Man* Francis Fukuyama argues that we are at the end of history as marked by the triumph of liberal capitalism as the dominant ideological and political form of organization in the world. He however cautions toward the rise of fundamentalism as a challenge to liberalism as well nationalism and other forms of racial and ethnic consciousness that provide "contradictions" in the new world order.

from South Vietnam has vanished from public consciousness and formal political discourse.[9] From cinema to community-based artwork and historical archives, I recognize the production of culture and cultural meaning as those important sites of reflection and interpretation where intersubjective ideas about racial/cultural difference, nation, community and identity are processed and re-processed.[10] The psychic and social afterlives of the Vietnam War offer new challenges and conundrums for understanding how South Vietnamese are positioned and reconfigured within modern discursive regimes (especially since they are outside of contemporary political discourse). Employing Vietnamization as an analytic of war in the "post-Vietnam" period, I maintain that in our current historical amnesia regarding the Vietnam War, discussions of South Vietnamese recalls the complicated history of the Vietnam War and serves as the emergent as well as insurgent terrain for recognizing the contradictions and unresolved politics of that war.

Attentive to cultural production's power to reveal the struggle over historical meanings and memories that are often made invisible, I selected three case studies to examine the South Vietnamese "postwar" condition in various spatial contexts. Looking across and through different frames of reference illuminates the various points in which

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[9] Interesting enough, the most famous photographs taken from the war happened in South Vietnam such the little girl running naked from her village (by napalm dropped by the South Vietnamese army), the soldier suspected as a Vietcong with a gun cocked to his head; and the burning monk setting himself on fire as an act of self-immolation and defiance of the Diem regime. These are famous examples of the Western cultural texts and textual images disseminated and circulated throughout the world as visual evidence of the Vietnamese as affected and representational subjects that present ambivalent and contradictory ideas about South Vietnam.

[10] Alongside the sensationalizing cultural work of *Time, Life*, and *National Geographic* and the documentary record left of the *first* televised and filmed war in U.S. history, there is a massive popular archive about the Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans from the perspective of the U.S. but the question of *how* they enter the terms of cultural discourse historically dominated the interests of the U.S. is a different matter now when Vietnamese are not those passive, voiceless subjects to be seen and observed but those whose voices must be incorporated and recognized on their own terms.

South Vietnamese are signified as the absent presence existing within modern cultural discourse, occupying the in-between space and interstices of historical consciousness. These disparate sites involve a desire for making South Vietnamese people more visible or prominent. Putting these things together creates an intertextual, multi-sited conversation about the differential terms through which Vietnamese people from that "lost" nation or political geography called South Vietnam must reenter present moment. All these examples were chosen because they deal with people trying to "move on" after the war, indeed decades after the war's memory, attempting to construct a new type of discourse about South Vietnamese in the early 21st century—possible now given certain conditions related to the rise of multiculturalist discourses and globalization processes. It is important to revisit the Vietnam War moment not only because the U.S. is engaged in its new military quagmires that resemble "Vietnam" abroad but because the post-9/11 millennial moment has been defined by a moment of "crisis" for understanding history and memory, where the older colonial and Cold War orders that structured hegemonic ideas of historical modernity have been transplanted by a "new historical era" where there is a lack of "moral narratives" about the world (Maieer 2000: 807-809). The memory of major past wars and historical touchstones in the 20th century such as the Vietnam War then becomes the mnemonic site through which people in the 21st century must try to renegotiate unsettled questions of "historical truth" today.

Drawn from the first decade of this century, my case studies collectively articulate a set of concerns about South Vietnamese representability in the first decade of the Western millennium. They span a field of inquiry that include a Vietnamese film called *Living in Fear* (2006) made about the struggles of South Vietnamese after the war to

U.S.-based archivists trying to position the uncertain place of Vietnamese refugees in history of the Vietnam War to Vietnamese American refugee communities seeking to re-define themselves and their identity through anti-communist politics and art. What is compelling about these disparate, multisited examples is that they demonstrate the problematic and polemics of representing South Vietnamese as modern-day subjects of uneven knowledge-production: from socialist Vietnam's efforts to remember the war from the perspectives of the defeated South, the challenges faced by American archivists to include Vietnamese American voices and stories in Vietnam War historical archives and the struggles of Vietnamese diasporic refugee communities over constructions of artwork and anti-communist ideology. These trans-local examinations see cultural work as memory work. Through them, I demonstrate the fraught nature of mnemonic projects that aim to remember and represent the contentious politics of the past in the present. Using this rubric of Vietnamization to mark the non-closure and endurance of war memory, I am reminded of the geopolitical tensions of the Vietnam War which I contend *must* be continually negotiated rather than suppressed or seen as disappeared. In doing so, I advocate for a more nuanced ethical and political engagement with the historical question over the fate of the South Vietnamese.

SOUTH VIETNAM/ESE AS PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

> You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.
>
> Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1989: 80)

In the United States, the perceptions of South Vietnamese people remain circumscribed by the ineptitude of the South Vietnamese government, prostitutes or

girlfriends serving American GI's, Viet Cong forces trying to subvert the South from within, and the "boat people" who fled their country after the Fall of Saigon—cultural tropes that often do capture the geopolitical realities and often endure even after South Vietnam ceased to exist. These static perceptions cannot account for the shifting, contingent meanings and representations of South Vietnamese in culture where culture "does not refer only to individual works of cultural production, but encompasses a system of meaning-making, a system ordered by relations of power" (Hong 2006: xii). Indeed, a whole academic industry and popular cultural industry emerged after the Vietnam War to concretize the status of South Vietnamese in history as those who lost the war, failing to live up to the gift of freedom that Americans gave them. Here, South Vietnamese carry the "burden of responsibility" of never being able to become speaking subjects within postwar cultural discourses (Lam 2006: 24). This burden makes it hard to write their symbolic and material presence into contemporary existence, a task complicated by their position as the defeated peoples as seen by both the U.S. and the communist regime of Vietnam (Caplan 1989).

My dissertation challenges the abundance of postwar studies about the South Vietnamese, the voluminous texts produced on the South Vietnamese as ill-fated "freedom fighters," American-sponsored "godchildren," U.S.-saved "boat peoples" and successful "model minorities" that often diminish any nuanced sense of South Vietnamese postwar subject-making (Nguyen 2003: 14). By speaking of South Vietnamese subject-making over three decades after the "end" of war, I evoke the irrepressible specter of the past that is imbued in the present to make sense of that which seems gone but remains with us. Following the more recent interventions of scholars like

Yen Le Espiritu, Viet Nguyen, Lan Duong, Thu-huong Nguyen-Vo among many others who discuss the ghostliness of the war and its pernicious effects on the ways Vietnamese Americans are seen, I seek to write against the dominant perception of former South Vietnamese people as either assimilated or victimized products of war. In doing so, I shift the conversation about South Vietnamese history and cultural subject-formation as based on loss and failure towards discussing the hegemonic signifying processes through which Vietnamese people are continuously "Vietnamized" and erased.

My aim is not to provide a more "correct" version of history to include those whose voices have been suppressed or ignored. Instead, I see South Vietnam as the palimpsest of the Vietnam War, a political signifier of history that resists reduction and assimilation as a "proper" subject of modern discourse. Cultural production presents a complex semiotic terrain for revealing how things that are forgotten become knowable or legible again. Recently, there has been a growing number of studies by emerging Vietnamese diasporic scholars who see the need to reassess what being "Vietnamese" means now in the current context as it is tied to the complicated legacy of the war (Lam 2006, Vo-Dang 2008, Vo 2009, Duong 2005, Nguyen 2004). My work contributes to this emerging field of study of Vietnamese/American cultural studies by analyzing and apprehending the South Vietnamese not as forgotten and forsaken survivors of dominant history, but acknowledges how they are (re)figured as modern subjects of power/knowledge within a new historical context where they still struggle to be recognized or represented outside their traditional image as "incarcerated subjects of cultural difference" and historical failure (Silva 2007: xxxv).

My title *Suspended Futures* gestures toward the imagined possibilities of a South Vietnamese history and future that is not eschatological, where the making of South Vietnamese as modern agents of history is attached to normative ideas of sovereignty, group identity and an independent nation-state. If Vietnamization suggests that the future of South Vietnamese has finished due to their military defeat, what does it mean to imagine the *future* of South Vietnam(ese) that follows a sense of "loss," displacement and disappearance from cultural memory? Following the conquest of Tibet as an incorporated territory of China and Cold War battleground, cultural anthropologist Carole McGranahan observes in the "arrested histories" of Tibetans "some pasts had not been publicly converted into histories" under currents efforts to "control knowledge of the past, to reproduce power structures in the present, and to secure particular futures" (574-575). What does it mean for group of people to be associated with a particular political geography that is no longer in existence or recognized as legitimate, real or living? I take McGranahan's consideration of some histories as arrested as an informative point of departure for resituating the problematics of South Vietnam in a future where South Vietnam floats as a symbolic reference and signifier of that which once was or could have been but never more.

CHALLENGING HISTORICAL TEMPORALITY IN 'POSTWAR' CULTURAL STUDIES

Situated in postwar/colonial studies, ethnic studies, history and memory studies, my dissertation highlight concerns regarding the politics of representing South Vietnamese organized around the politics of recognition (Thomassen 2001). How society recognizes particular social groups consists in a struggle not only over *whether* to accept

them for who they really are (identity), but also *how* to represent them, involving questions of who gets to represent whom, and whether certain representational spaces and discourses present a viable opening for particular subaltern subjects to speak. Recognizing the difficulty of re-presenting and speaking about *South* Vietnamese political subjectivity in the 21st century, I speak to unresolved questions of temporality, memory and history within the "time-space" compression of late modernity (Harvey 1990). Remembering the South Vietnamese creates what Priscilla Wald (1992) calls "the return of the cultural repressed"—those things and subjects whose representability within dominant material culture must always reemerge in a less complete form because they cannot be properly exorcised. If we acknowledge the "fall" and Vietnamization of South Vietnam as an always incomplete racial project, what types of new modes of seeing and historical consciousness can we develop if we think about the "end" of the Vietnam War as itself an always foreclosed possibility? The figure of South Vietnam brings up the incongruity in historical modernity where historical modernity is a "mode of relating to contemporary reality" through questions not only of the past but power (Foucault 1969: 100).

My project recognizes South Vietnamese as complicated "postwar" subjects engaged in a type of new (but not necessarily new) political struggle for recognition in a time in history defined by a sense of historical totality and globality that suggests the erasure of historical and human differences toward an open and more egalitarian inclusive future for all (Gilroy 2004). As Yen Le Espiritu reminds us, however, "It is imperative that we always look for the 'something more' in order to see and bring into being what is usually neglected or made invisible or thought by most to be dead and

gone—that is, to always see the living effects of what seems to be over and done with. We need to see, and then to do something with, the 'endings that are not over'" (2005: xxi). These endings I believe do not replicate the Vietnam War in the post-Vietnam era but impel a continuous examination of that which has been made invisible or neglected.

There has been an upsurge in studies recently on Vietnamese culture and identity that focus on issues of diaspora but this conceptual frame has "an assumption or a desire for access to an originary homeland" that "oversimplify the historically complex mechanisms of cultural production" that allow people to remember or represent the homeland (Lam 2006: 43). For many South Vietnamese, the loss of and return to the "homeland" is fractured by tentative considerations of South Vietnam as not an idyllic place of ancestral return but a geopolitical formation and nation. In his study of postmodern film, cultural critic Fredric Jameson (1992) interrogates what he calls our "geopolitical unconscious" that refashions "national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being-in-the world" (3). In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), he argues for a "cognitive mapping" and critical reading/interpretive practices that "constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us" (3). Jameson seeks to identify those global processes embedded in our everyday lives that lie outside our social consciousness and sense of reality, especially the specter of the Third World in the First World gaze. Jameson's over-reliance on postmodern notions of audience spectatorship does not recognize the problems inherent to representing Third World subjects within cultural knowledge-production. Identifying South Vietnamese as the material trace of geopolitical history and living legacy of the Vietnam War, I seek to address the ways in which the geopolitical

history of the Vietnam War continues to mar or make it difficult to recall the figure of South Vietnam in the present production of culture.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Situated in the overlapping fields of ethnic studies, cultural/media studies, postwar/diaspora studies, my work contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on history and memory in order to provide critiques of contemporary cultural representations of Vietnamese people that are simultaneously critiques of American identity, empire and nation since Americans and Vietnamese have a dialectical relationship in how Vietnamese are written into modern cultural history. My critical project charts the differential, uneven ways in which South Vietnamese subjects are articulated and re-presented across different fields of study. Using a Foucaultean methodological approach that traces the discursive formation of knowledge/power and genealogy of modern subjects to particular material histories and systems of power that are dispersed and fractured, I recognize the Vietnamese postwar condition as not marked by the cessation of violence and the conclusion of war but a continual Vietnamization and reconfiguration of South Vietnamese political freedom and agency. In doing so, I examine how cultural production from contemporary film to community-based art to historical archives can be productive sites of meaning-making that interrogate the historically disavowed agency and submerged memories of the South Vietnamese. In doing so, I interrogate the ongoing processes and problematics involved in representing the South Vietnamese as both historical agents as well as modern subjects of knowledge-production in the age of globalization. Where "politics is the continuation of war by other means" according to Foucault (2003: 15), I examine how cultural politics and struggles over cultural meaning

and representation provides an open terrain of contestation for continuing and negotiating the Vietnam War.[1]

Using a Foucaultean genealogical methodology where genealogy is the study of descent and emergence, the shattering of the belief in unitary cultural identities and progressive history. For Michel Foucault (1984), a critical genealogy tries to disrupt dominant representations and specific rationalizations to "invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them" (86). For Foucault, the production of knowledge is linked to power formation and the ways we think about things and ideas and who gets to determine the conditions of discourse and what actors have the authority to dictate political and historical truth. Resituating the term Vietnamization to invert the meanings of ineffectuality/victimization attributed to Vietnamese people by the U.S., I pay attention to contradictions, slippages, discontinuities and gaps in knowledge that comprise our popular understandings of South Vietnamese in present historical reality. Where Foucault never fully brought his theoretical discussion of modern subject-formation and power/knowledge to non-European colonial populations, I provide a genealogical tracing of South Vietnamese representation and signification as a way of speaking about the challenges of seeing the South Vietnamese as "human beings transformed into subjects" (Foucault 1982: 777). As I see it, Vietnamization as a strategy and exercise of Western power to *make* South Vietnamese into modern liberal subjects—and Westernized subjects of disciplinary power/knowledge—is predicated on making them representational subjects.

My main contribution to the field of Vietnamese/American studies is a critical methodological approach that seeks to challenge the idea of Vietnamese as victimized

subjects of the past or liberated agents of history (since this writes them into a teleology of backwardness either/or progress). My intervention interrogates the range of cultural projects the layering of cultural representations about the Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans. What constitutes this postwar layering is refracted through from the perspective of Vietnam, the U.S. and Vietnamese America. Here, a cultural studies intervention interrogates the conflicting spatialities, temporal orientations and competing cultural interests over how to represent the South Vietnamese. I recognize that the legacy of the war did not simply vanish with the passing of time (especially for one that was never officially declared a war) but that its historical significance erupts with a renewed urgency as type of historical marker or anchor in 20th century for speaking about power relations within a new context of global interconnectedness, futurity and complexification (Apparadurai 1996).[11] I believe we need to understand our sense of historical futurity as mediated by the unresolved issues of the past and not see the future as a horizon of limitless possibility, inclusion and fulfilled desires. My study deals not only with the Vietnamese people in the strictest sense but also examines and interrogates those cultural texts produced by or about Vietnamese as a means of opening up discussion about the "new geography of power" created by post-Cold War neoliberal discourse (Sassen 1996:

[11]Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2001) believes globalization is creating a disjunctive global economy of flows that has challenged the way we see culture and cultural difference in the world. Appadurai advocates for a multi-dimensional approach to 'culture' that takes as its substantive property the schisms in group difference: "Culture, unmarked, can continue to be used to refer to the plethora of differences that characterize the world today, differences at various levels, with various valences, and with greater and lesser degrees of social consequence. I propose, however, that we restrict the term culture as a marked term to the subset of these differences that has been mobilized to articulate the boundary of difference (13).[11] Appadurai chooses to move away from culture and its traditional associations with ethnicity and 'essence' to culture as the concern with group identity boundary-maintenance and social interactionism that concern the boundaries between groups of people and races where "Culture 1, constituting a virtually open-ended archive of differences is consciously shaped into Culture 2, that subset of differences that constitutes the diacritics of group identity" (14).

5). My critical project offers a discursive analysis of popular texts, reading the interactive nexus between the "production" of culture and the "politics" of culture to analyze the ongoing 'Vietnamization' of the South Vietnamese.[12]

This dissertation fosters new grounds for investigation in studies of cultural politics, history, media/communications and diaspora/community studies. Given the "disappearance" of South Vietnam as a political geography, I selected three case studies that examine the South Vietnamese postwar condition within different spatial frames that might help us locate the reimaginings of South Vietnam today. The value in looking across different spaces is that this illuminates the various points of reference in which South Vietnamese can be found. What links my disparate sites together is the fact that they involve some form of struggle over historical representation and memory regarding the South Vietnamese. Studying and suturing these locations together creates an interesting conversation about the differential sites through which Vietnamese people must enter modern cultural discourses. By looking at the production of a Vietnamese film made in socialist Vietnam, a U.S.-based American historical archive and a local Vietnamese American community art protest, I gain a more nuanced picture and tri-focal scope of South Vietnamese representation in the broad spectrum and fleeting instances of contemporary cultural life.

Chapter 1 entitled "Spectral Knowledge: The Vietnamese as the Material Trace of the Vietnam War Archives" examines the Vietnam War Center and Archive, the largest collection of personal artifacts and materials related to the Vietnam War in the United

[12] It is important to note that while Vietnamese were colonized subjects (an ethnic group dominated for centuries by the Chinese, Japanese, French and Americans) and who are themselves *colonizers* (of Cambodians, Laotians and ethnic minority groups like the Cham).

States. Where this historical archive seeks to document all narratives and artifacts related to the war, including those of Vietnamese refugees who are often denied a voice in American nationalist recollections of that major historical event, I am interested in the archive's failure to properly incorporate or *re*-present the Vietnamese as historical actors and participants in its "living memorial" to the war, one that institutionally privileges the American GI. Rather than seeing it as a neutral place that processes the memories of war, I see the modern-day historical archive as a warring ideological terrain for understanding how war-torn communities and identities are displaced once again in the post-Cold War historical era. Their (re)emergence as modern historical actors and subjects of history requires us to see war and history anew in terms of a constant politics of negotiation (rather than reconciliation) with the ideological contradictions and disruptions that inclusion of the history of South Vietnamese refugees might provide for this American war archive.

Chapter 2 entitled "Phantom Violence: Living in Fear and the Filmic Representation of South Vietnamese Struggles in Postwar Vietnam" looks at the film *Song Trong So Hai* (Living in Fear) in order to speak to still issues of symbolic and material displacement as well as violence in postwar Vietnam. Produced in 2006, this award-winning feature involves the story of a former soldier of South Vietnam who finds work as a clearer of land mines, the undetonated bombs and ammunition left behind after the war. The home and land of the protagonist named Thai is taken from him by the newly victorious communist regime in power and he is resettled on land that is full of landmines. Lacking a job because of his prior position in the former South Vietnamese government, Thai takes employment in land mine clearance to support himself. I argue

that the film's sympathetic and neo-realistic portrayal of the postwar struggles of South Vietnamese soldiers in Vietnam—an anomaly in Socialist Vietnam which often restricts such subject-matter—can be read as the ambivalent understandings of national memory and history that have arisen since Vietnam adopted market reforms in the 1980's that opened up its economy as well as cultural industry. In this chapter, I read the process of Vietnamization in relation to the internal displacement of the many South Vietnamese who *stayed* in Vietnam while their brethren fled overseas. Here, South Vietnamese must locate new modes of political and material survival within a dangerous new terrain and context where South Vietnam no longer exists except as the shadow of war much like the millions of American landmines that lay dormant throughout the country.

Chapter 3 "Warring Desires**:** Through the Looking Glass of Vietnamese American Community Art and Protest" examines the history legacy of war as it continues to shape social conflicts within the Vietnamese American community over the issue of cultural art, communism and political freedom. Specifically, I investigate the 2009 controversy in Orange County, California involving mass protests by hundreds of people demonstrating against a community-based art exhibit produced by the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association. Artists' creative reinterpretations of the former South Vietnam national flag and Vietnamese women's role as proper gendered national subjects fueled a public outcry against the exhibit as profane, pro-communist trash. Insofar as this public battle consists of mostly older male military veterans organizing against a non-profit organization led by younger more educated women and artists, my case study interrogates the entwined struggles of gender, class and generation as they play out in issues about who gets to represent the community, decide what cultural

products are appropriate for showing and what symbolic meanings can be associated with the exiled nation (and its social bodies). This chapter aims to broaden the scope for studying Vietnamese "homeland politics" that suggests such politics is not just about refugees remembering their forgotten nation—fighting another war amongst themselves—but speaks to complex ambivalent ways diasporic communities and identities are shaped, circumscribed and policed in the current day. I believe community-based politics acts as a critical juncture for studying postwar struggles for recognition by Vietnamese Americans who came from former South Vietnam still lives on within U.S. society. My study brings to light the complex lives of displaced communities produced from a common history of war and facing present-day challenges in finding common meanings about home, family and community within expressive cultures and new political settings.

CHAPTER ONE**:** Spectral Knowledge: The Vietnamese as the Material Trace of America's Vietnam War Archives

> The Vietnam Archive stands as a living memorial to all those who played some part in the nation's 'Vietnam experience.
>
> Official Mission Statement from Vietnam Center and Archive[13]

I was born in small city called Lubbock located in the panhandle of Texas. My parents originally came to Lubbock as "resident aliens" sponsored separately as refugees from Vietnam in the late 1970's. In less than a year after settling in this place, they decided to leave and go to Houston where they could find better social services, job opportunities and a large co-ethnic community. During my childhood, I never heard my parents or family members mention the war or how they came to the U.S. and adapted to life here. There existed no letters or photographs from Vietnam. This material and knowing silence inspired my journey back to Lubbock three decades later to do research in the Vietnam Center and Archive. In this historical archive, I found myself searching for what I have come to see as the untold stories and ambiguous positionality of Vietnamese Americans within cultural knowledge-production about the war. My visit to an archive which happens to be in Lubbock marks a homecoming of sorts to the place of my birth, the place I did not know or remember but where I must find the absent trace of those who like my parents exist in the margins of the U.S. historical imaginary and cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

This chapter looks at the Vietnam War Center and Archive, the largest collection of personal artifacts and documents related to the Viet Nam War in the country. Located

[13] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/general/#archive Accessed May 31, 2011.

in Lubbock, Texas and housed at Texas Tech University this institution seeks to document the *social* experiences of those involved in the Vietnam War,[14] preserving the testimony and personal materials of individuals who participated in this event. While there has been much scholarly attention to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. and the ways it ignores and excludes Vietnamese in U.S. cultural memory and war commemoration (Sturken 1991, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991, Tatum 1996), there has been no study of the Vietnam Center and Archive as an equally important space for cultural meaning-making and memorial discourse about the Vietnam War. I believe this archive is important to study because it is the biggest historical archive in the country dedicated to the Vietnam War outside the National Archives and stands "alone as a single entity for the study of the Vietnam War."[15]

The Vietnam Center and Archive contains the personal belongings, written record, oral histories and testimony of soldiers and civilians—both American and Vietnamese. I contextualize this archive as more than a physical site of material and historical recovery; rather it is a discursive space to meditate on issues of war, memory and historical representation. I argue that in this archive[16] funded by the Texas state government Vietnamese Americans hold a vexed place as contentious subjects of U.S. Vietnam War history. Conceptualizing their material and symbolic erasure in this archive, one dominated by the interests of American GI's, I do not believe the solution is to make Vietnamese stories and history more visible (conceived as a negative lack that

[14]Statistical records related to the military and government are managed and held in Washington D.C. by the public National Archives and Records Administration. The Vietnam Center and Archive is
[15] Interview with Kelly Crager on September 8, 2010.
[16] Every year the Texas state government has certain congressional line items in the state budget earmarked for special historical preservation projects every year and the Vietnam Center and Archive is a beneficiary of this line item.

needs to be filled with more materials). Rather, I interpret the archive as a productive site for critiquing the racial underpinnings embedded in archivists' concerning the South Vietnamese historical experience as "the other side" of America's Vietnam War history. A full inclusion of Vietnamese Americans as legitimate members of Vietnam War history I believe is not possible given the incompatibilities between the ways Vietnamese Americans are remembered differently than non-Vietnamese American soldiers in U.S. cultural history. Following Jenny Edkins (2003) who argues in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* that memory cannot be settled or bounded but rather "encircled," I do not believe Vietnamese Americans can be easily incorporated in U.S. archival memory work but rather located in a position of encirclement given the difficulty of making their historical experiences a normative part of American nationalist history.

My chapter is rooted in an analysis of one specific archive an important one at that, examining its institutional discourse and ideological work and its material content. The Vietnam Center and Archive (from here on called the Vietnam War Archive or VCA for short) presents a rich source for examining contemporary archival practices and questions about the archival production of memory and public discourse surrounding the Vietnam War. Given that there has been no analysis of the Vietnam Archive itself as an actual object of study, despite its past importance for scholars and everyday people who have used its resources to construct their own historical studies, the Vietnam Center and Archive as a U.S. institution locates itself within a contested politics of representation centered around dealing with the historical position of the Vietnamese in what Marita Sturken (1997) observes as "the war with the difficult memory" (122). The center's mission statement makes the following declaration, "We want to preserve a complete

history of the war. To do otherwise would be a disservice to history."[17] This desire to create a complete history of the war now includes a Vietnamese American Heritage staff member and a bigger commitment to attaining more materials from Vietnamese Americans (begun in full force in 2008 because of a large donation of Vietnamese political prisoner records), a project made difficult by the fact that this institution is traditionally dedicated to preserving U.S. nationalism that marginalizes Vietnamese Americans. Recognizing the archive as a space of discourse requires figuring out what materials are contained there, how it's organized, who organizes and for what purpose.

Created in 1989 by Dr. James "Jim" Reckner, a history professor at Texas Tech, along with a dozen former veterans in Lubbock, the archive found it institutional base in the university where he happened to teach. Through Reckner and these veteran's efforts, Vietnam Center and Archive is today the premiere institute in which personal and donated materials from the war are kept, containing over 3 million pages of scanned material.[18] James Reckner, the founder of the archive was a history professor teaching at Texas Tech University when he asked his class of undergraduate students one day about the Vietnam War and was shocked by their lack of knowledge about it. As a Vietnam veteran, he was especially concerned when he brought up a famous name like General Westmoreland and most students did not know who this person in U.S. history was. Students' historical amnesia inspired Reckner to begin an archive to preserve the U.S. American experience in Vietnam, culling materials from American veterans in the local

[17] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/general Accessed May 31, 2011.
[18] The vast majority of the archive's users as revealed to me by the reference archivist are American veterans. I am not interested in the users of the archive, given the difficulty of tracking them down, but what role the archive serves to them. Interview with Amy Mondt September 9, 2010.

area he knew personally.[19] The archive was funded exclusively with a shoestring budget from the university and the private funds of individuals like Dr. Reckner which shows the ambivalence of American society toward commemorating, supporting and institutionalizing the Vietnam War in public life.

This archival site is a central location to examine current Vietnamization processes where the archive is a place where meanings about the role of various participants in war are actively made and remade. Whereas Vietnamization refers to Americans giving South Vietnam some form of political recognition as self-determined agents *of their own* history, I analyze the rhetoric used by Vietnam War archivists that often suggests that it is the responsibility of South Vietnamese to give up their anticommunist political cause against the North and work with the archive to bring history to everyone. Since the archive promotes healing for all sides of the war, South Vietnamese in this context are no longer forced to defend their freedom against communism but rather forced to give up their politics in order to have a voice; this time for the sake of unity articulated under the conditions set by Americans. Insofar as Vietnamization served as a means of justifying U.S. power-granting authority over South Vietnamese, I spotlight the problems of including South Vietnamese in American archival history that also includes Vietnamese communists. In this chapter I ask, how does the elided history of Vietnamese Americans create "new" representational spaces within the archive? How does the archive seek to inscribe a new type of Vietnamese position in U.S. history that constitutes another form of Vietnamization that strives to

[19] This task is difficult given that Lubbock does not have a huge veteran population/association or military outfit/base and so the archive had begun out of the will and enterprising spirit of Dr. Reckner.

give historical agency and recognition to Vietnamese Americans through celebrating their unique war histories that often collide with American efforts to honor the war as an American sacrifice rather than a Vietnamese sacrifice?

My critical project speaks to the "technologies" of knowledge-power through which history is constructed, I build on scholarly critiques of historical representation and war memory (Yoneyama 1999, Klein 2000, Blight 2001) to examine the Vietnam War archive not only as a material space but a figurative site of power, focusing less on what it contains; but moreover what it symbolically *represents*, investigating its organizational mission, supporting my observations with interviews with eight key members of the dozen staff members who make this "living memorial" come alive every day.[20] Interviewing the founder, the director, head oral historian, reference archivist, digital archivists and director of the Vietnamese American Heritage Project, my aim was to show how the archive functions as a human enterprise and institution. Used to dealing with scholars or visitors who come to extrapolate information from the archive, the staff I interviewed were surprised that I came to study the archive itself. Some thought it strange that I wanted to learn more about this place but were happy to tell me why they thought their work was important. They guided me to particular important collections that often related to military enterprises and explained how the archive basically works. In doing

[20] I contacted and interviewed staff members based on their official role in the archive and their relevance to my research. I interviewed the main reference archivist, the head of the Vietnamese American Heritage project, the director of the oral history, the executive director and head technician of the digitization technology portion of the archive. I tried to get an interview with the only Vietnamese staff member in the VCA, the Associate Director for Viet. Affairs, Dr. Khanh Cong Le, who works under the executive director but he said he was not a staff member (even though he has official duties and a desk) and refused my request for personal reason. Other staff members suggested that as a part-time member but he told me he was too busy to do interviews and didn't want to do one. His relationship with the Vietnamese American community as a representative of the archive is important but does not detract from my larger argument about the archive's limitations.

so, they helped me articulate my understanding of the war historical archive as a *form* rather than simply a place for holding material content, and this helps me to analyze it as a cultural medium for transmitting the hegemonic ideologies of American imperialism and exceptionalism.

The Vietnam War Archive's mission statement argues that it is "a living memorial to all those who played some part in the nation's 'Vietnam experience'" where those who use it "can study and better understand the people, places and events of this critical time in history."[21] Despite its officially stated desire not to represent only one side of the story and "collect and present all sides and viewpoints of the era,"[22] the archive nevertheless finds itself within a particular U.S.-centered militaristic construction of Vietnam War experience bound to its institutional character and thematic focus. Reformulating the "apolitical" nature of this archive to study how such neutrality suppresses heated feelings and controversy surrounding the memory of the war, I challenge this idea of archival work and history as transcendent and overcoming of politics. Such neutrality I show prevents South Vietnamese Americans from having a strong institutional presence in the archive since their historical recognition as subjects of history necessarily requires

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[21] The rest of the mission statement explicates this mission to representing all sides: "The Vietnam Center seeks to provide a forum for all points of view and for all topics relating to Indochina, particularly - but not limited to - the American military involvement there. At our conferences and symposia, we encourage the presentation of papers by veterans and others who directly participated in and supported wartime events as well as by individuals who opposed the war. We encourage participation by our former allies in South Vietnam but also offer the same participation to those who supported the government in Hanoi. Similarly, we place equal importance upon preserving records relating to all aspects of the Vietnam War. It is as important to us to preserve the records of US veterans, military and civilian, who served in Southeast Asia as well as civilians active on the homefront to include the antiwar movement. We want to preserve a complete history of the war. To do otherwise would be a disservice to history." http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/general/#center Official Mission Statement Accessed April 28, 2011.

[22] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/ Accessed May 31, 2011.

foregrounding their politics and highly politicized experience rather than suppressing it in the name of history.

This chapter has three main sections focused around particular sites of inquiry. First, I provide a brief history of the origins of the archive, recognizing its founding in the need to preserve the memory of U.S. American veterans in a country that would rather forget them. Here, I analyze how the archive acts as an institutional site for national memory, one founded upon what the U.S. did in Vietnam as a noble cause and hence the archive must reflect this historical sense of U.S. nobility. Second, I look at the ways the archive's attempt at including Vietnamese Americans who served as the allies of these soldiers, who are a very select group of the Vietnamese American community, studying the Vietnamese American Heritage Project and oral history program. In doing so, I show that an archive is not an apolitical place where all historical experiences and subjects are represented fully or equally and that including the voices of South Vietnamese refugees in a place meant to preserve the history of America's fallen heroes brings up ideological contradictions that are not easily subsumed under a discourse of universal suffering, honor and reconciliation which the archive promotes. I conclude with a brief reflection on the challenges and tenuousness of doing archival work on Vietnamese Americans. This chapter addresses numerous question such as how are materials organized? What is the archive's ordering system? Building upon the different sections, I make two interrelated arguments: 1) this archive's is built around a perspective of American exceptionalism and multiculturalism and 2) and this inclusion of the Vietnamese American historical perspective is problematic insofar as their experiences cannot find a proper place within the archive's narratives of multiculturalism and U.S. exceptionalism.

This chapter first mentions the controversy surrounding the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a national case of the contentious politics of representing and remembering the Vietnam War, then delineating the origins of the Vietnam War Archive in its founding mission to honor the sacrifices of American GI's, followed by a deconstructive examination of the multicultural ethos of its Vietnamese American Heritage program and oral history project, moving onto reflections on methodology and studying the problematic place of Vietnamese in our archival history of war and finishing with the Virtual Vietnam online project that dislocates the already de-territorialized positions of Vietnamese in history within cyberspace and concluding with personal reflections on the archive.

AMERICA'S CHALLENGE IN REPRESENTING THE VIETNAM WAR

> Whereas a monument most often signifies victory, a memorial refers to the life or lives sacrificed for a particular set of values.
>
> Marita Sturken (1997: 97)

In the United States, there are few memorials and recuperative memory projects dedicated to the Vietnam War given the controversy surrounding it. Many scholars have written for instance about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial built in 1982 as a controversial piece of national commemoration both in the way it was built and how it represents America's soldiers and nationhood (Griswold and Griswold 1986, Haas 1998, Wagner-Pacific and Schwartz 1991). As a contested space of remembrance, this public space is dedicated to U.S. veterans who are celebrated as national heroes but whose problematic inclusion in American national history necessarily required that they be transformed into figures of sacrifice and bravery. Unlike WWII, an event that Americans overwhelmingly remember in positive terms, the history of Vietnam War is marked by

the absence of what historian Carol Blair (2007) calls "consensus memory." American Studies scholar John Carlos Rowe echoes this by stating that the war is "the most chronicled, documented, reported, filmed, taped, and—in all likelihood—narrated war in history, and for those very reasons, it would seem, the least subject to understanding or to any American consensus" (197).

The controversy surrounding the commemoration of the Vietnam War involves a contestation over how and who gets to represent the war. U.S Veteran organizations opposed the designs for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial targeting the memorials' architect Maya Lin, a young Asian American woman, considered unfit or unable to represent the war and the nation. Another multicultural statue of three male soldiers identified as white, black, and Latino standing together was built next to the Vietnam Veteran Memorial, serving as a compromise to veterans' opposition to Lin's simple black monolithic design which they saw as recalling America's silent "national humiliation" (Wagner-Pacific and Schwartz 1991: 395). Race and gender played such an important part of the controversy over this public monument that the Vietnam Women's memorial was added as a supplement to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1993 to address the failure of the memorial to honor the role of servicewomen in the war.[23] In these cases, there existed no public consensus on how to narrate the memory and history of the war.

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[23] Recognizing their exclusion and effacement in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Vietnamese American local community members and leaders funded and built the Vietnam War Memorial in Orange County, California in 1995 to commemorate the joint allied forces of the U.S. and South Vietnam. Yet, even this monument was also marred by differing opinions and conflicting ideas on how to represent the complex historical status of the Vietnamese Americans seeking to recover and make public their "histories which intersect, rather than coincide, with American nationalist history." Some issues around the politics of representation of this monument included resistance from non-Viet politicians who felt this status was a form of intrusion by the Vietnamese American community in the area (Nguyen-Vo 2005: 159).

Despite the politics of representation related to the construction of public memorials to the Vietnam War, there is another problem of representing the history of Vietnam. For instance, most historical scholarship in the U.S. about the war is overwhelmingly biased in reflecting only the American side of things, usually centered on military concerns with counterinsurgency and pacification of communism. Since the 1990's, however, there has been a shift from scholarly and popular interpretations of the Vietnam War as a lost cause to be forgotten toward reconceptualizing the war as a historical event that needs some form of national healing and reconciliation. This trend toward revisionist history is an effect of the official discourse of multiculturalism that emerged in the U.S. in the late 1980's with the conclusion of the Cold War, globalization processes, normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam, and changing perception of Vietnamese Americans as successful "model minorities." The year 2000 marked the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and like any major anniversary milestone (and generational distance in years from the direct memory of war); the collective need to give tribute and remember the past becomes imperative in order to make peace with a traumatic past through new rhetoric (Dionisopoulos 1992). There is less attention to nation-building and American exceptionalism as a subtext of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and how the war figures different meaning for Americans and South Vietnamese (Fisher 2005). In this context, the Vietnam War Archive presents a valuable space for interrogating the ways the history of war is constructed and the rhetoric means it is re-presented as a primary site for national commemoration.

HONOR, HEALING AND SACRIFICE: CREATING A PLACE TO REMEMBER AMERICA'S VIETNAM VETERANS

How does the archival representation of the Vietnam War and its participants offer a nationalist framing of the war and determines how history is viewed today? For what purpose and for whom does this Vietnam Center and Archive serve? Though the center is supposed to have "no political agenda,"[24] it still participates in its own form of politics, especially when its efforts to make a living memorial to history must confront the living and dead of history whose ghosts continue to haunt the ways we see and re-present war now. Following Yen Le Espiritu, I treat archival work less as an accumulation of facts to construct "reality; instead I understand "cultural memory's role in naturalizing certain understandings of the past, in interpellating and producing subjects, reinforcing specific concepts of the U.S. nation" where cultural memory does not refer to personal memory but public and collective forms of memory (Espiritu 2006: 332).

The Vietnam War Archive began as a place to honor the sacrifices of U.S. Vietnam veterans, many of whom were shunned when they first returned home and the negative public response of the country toward them.[25] Just as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was funded and conceived by a small group of veterans rather than the United States government, the Vietnam Center and Archive presents the difficulty in honoring the memory and participants of an "unwon war" for the United State (Ehrenhaus 1989). Unlike the Vietnam War archives in the U.S. National Archives, a storage place for

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[24] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/oralhistory/interviews/index.htm Accessed May 31, 2011.
[25] Interview with James Reckner on September 9, 2010

primarily official governmental statistics and bureaucratic memos, this archives is more personal in nature. In a newsletter written to patrons of the center, Reckner makes the following call to others to join him in his mission to establish an archive based on collecting veterans' stories as a means of teaching the younger generation about a war that the nation wanted to forget:

> We must work to preserve records of the war; to preserve and honor the memory of those of our comrades who made *the ultimate sacrifice* there; and we must encourage younger generations to study the American Vietnam experience. There is much to be learned from our missteps there. *And our success, too*. In the end, I suspect younger generations of Americans will judge those who served in Vietnam much more *favorably* than have our peers who for various reasons did not serve [italics my emphasis].[26]

This statement affirms the necessity of intervention in the Vietnam War, one that many Americans regarded as unnecessary or even evil and one in which American soldiers were regarded as bad people because of negative press coverage of events like the My Lai massacre. On the other hand, the archive goes against the idea promoted by war hawks that supported the war as a "lost victory" or missed opportunity (Hagopian 2009: 24). This strategy of recovery and representation of veteran stories tries to personalize the war with the aim of creating a universalizing story about patriotism, humanity, innocence, healing and sacrifice which elides the specificities of US war in Vietnam as one that heavily afflicted the Vietnamese who made the ultimate sacrifice given the fact that all fighting happened in Vietnam and Vietnamese suffered the most casualties compared to the U.S.

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[26] Reckner, James. "Approaching Vietnam." Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 5, Issue 3 October 1998 Vietnam Center Collection.

The photos selected for commemorative posters, newsletters and public exhibits feature photography images whose mood range from triumph to melancholia but never abject failure or loss. These images promote the archive that comprise beautiful scenic vistas of Vietnam but also many photos of American military veterans and sometimes with Vietnamese diplomats shaking hands (there are less photos of South Vietnamese vets) at conferences. Other photos include or captures of American soldiers rescuing Vietnamese refugees from helicopters or leading them through deadly rivers. Sometimes ARVN soldiers can be seen with American soldiers hanging out in their respective outfits during the war. These ennobling pictures instill a sense of goodwill and cooperation; they are not meant to be divisive or offensive (obviously for attracting funding and public respectability). Yet, there remains the question of not only what types of visual subjects are portrayed but what type of historical subjects are pictured. There is careful effort to exclude any photos of gruesome scenes or bloody military fighting as well as anything that shows the American as abandoning the South Vietnamese or killing the North Vietnamese. This Americanization of war memory projects the reconciliatory multicultural nature of postwar relations, predicated on the symbolic inclusion of South and North Vietnamese in promotion pictures even when there are few Vietnamese Americans involved in the archive itself.

This need to "preserve and honor the memory" of fellow comrades that made a sacrifice for their country is tied to a particular hope that teaching the future generation through the archives will help alleviate the public animosity veterans faced when they came back, especially from anti-war protestors. He believed that as the younger generation learns more about the grim realities of the war through the personal voices of

the veterans, they will have less of a poor reception toward the war and Vietnam soldiers.[27] James Reckner believes that this archive is important in its ability to possibly revise the public discourse on the war, one that for him "evokes more people than war."[28] Focusing only on people's personal experiences such as oral histories reveals how people experience the war at a personal level but it is necessary I believe to also think about what this archive symbolically represents overall and what type of larger cultural discourse it promotes.

Indeed, this archive does not merely preserve the documents of the Vietnam War but grapples with the politics in representing the war in all of its conflicted meanings. In summer of 1989, the first meeting of local Vietnam veterans formed to discuss creating an archive on the Vietnam War and begin to collect local veterans' personal materials for use by students at Texas Tech in what was initially called "The Archive of the Vietnam Conflict."[29] A formal proposal for establishment of the archive was later approved that year calling for establishment of the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict.[30] In 1990, the center opened (it officially changed its name to the Vietnam Center and

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[27] Reckner donating his personal documents and memoirs from his two tours of duty in Vietnam as the original materials to be included in the archive including personal letters written to his parents and family. At the time of my interview with him, there was not yet a oral history featuring James Reckner who hasn't taken up the idea of doing an interview.

[28] Ibid.

[29] This need to call the war a "conflict" reveals the difficulty of assimilating the Vietnam War into American cultural history since naming the war *as* a war would immediately evoke loss and defeat for the U.S. At the time of its founding, it was too controversial to call the Vietnam War an actual war since doing so conjures the idea of competing sides with winners and losers; where the term "conflict" provides a vague connotation. For a more detailed timeline and chronology of the archive see its website highlight the first twenty years of the institution. http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/exhibits/timeline/index.htm

[30] Over the years, the archive has planned Vietnam War conferences with participants from around the country and internationally, inviting generals and former veterans to participate. In 2000, the Vietnam Archive receives support from the U.S. congress to digitize its records.

Archive in the late 1997 institutional changes)[31] with the proposed mission of educating the public about the war as it relates to the history of the U.S. Despite his ambivalence toward the brutal excesses and effects of the war, especially for the Vietnamese who suffered more casualties than the U.S., Jim Reckner believes the Vietnam War was "necessary" for the U.S. to claim political "victory" in the Cold War:

> Americans remain divided about Vietnam. Some see in our Vietnam failure a sort of cosmic justice for a nation grown too affluent, too powerful and too self-assured. I cannot accept that view. To me the American effort in Vietnam was a *noble cause* unrealized. I believe Vietnam was a *necessary*, *extended skirmish* in the global struggle that contributed significantly to the larger *American success in the Cold War*. It was one factor, I believe, in the ultimate defeat of a greater '*evil empire'* [italics my emphasis].[32]

As a navy veteran and scholarly expert on Theodore Roosevelt, Reckner brings a strong militaristic background and U.S. nationalist ethos to the center.[33] Calling the Vietnam War an extended "skirmish," one where the U.S. was involved for two decades, makes it seem an episodic event rather than a long, drawn out war that implicated the U.S. as colonial oppressors in Asia.

While his training in Asian history helps Reckner recognize the influence of the thousand-year colonialism of China over Vietnam as a much older history that demands that we "understand where we [Americans] fit in,"[34] for him the United States was not an

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[31] The Vietnam Center is the logistical, publicity and administrative service center for the Vietnam Archive, the latter concerned exclusively in archival preservation work.
[32] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 11, Issue 3 Fall 2004.
[33]The founder of the Vietnam Center and Archive James Reckner is a former military serviceman and scholar whose area of specialty is Theodore Roosevelt and American naval power. The connection helps us to see how Vietnam is an extension of Roosevelt's imperial policies helped further pushed American interests into Asia and Latin America In regards Latin America, the Roosevelt corollary (to the Monroe Doctrine) suggested that the U.S. intervene in any Latin American country that manifested economic problems and that the U.S. would serve as the "policeman" of the Western Hemisphere a policy which eventually created much resentment in Latin America and Asia.
[34] Interview with James Reckner on September 9, 2010.

imperial aggressor in Vietnam but a country morally compelled to enter a foreign conflict that was a "noble cause unrealized" since it helped the U.S. win the Cold War (even this victory is debatable given later U.S. military involvements with Al-Qaeda, Iraq and Afghanistan that came out of the problems of the Cold War). This "we-win-even-when-we lose syndrome" as ethnic studies scholar Yen Le Espiritu (2006) might describe it posits Vietnam and Vietnamese people as the necessary sacrifice for Americans success against communism, a fight which enabled the U.S. to become the sole superpower in the new world order. This revisionist sense of the Vietnam War as politically "necessary" presents an "organized and strategic forgetting of a war that went wrong" yet one that was pivotal in articulating the postwar posture of "America's self-appointed role as liberators" (330).[35]

Relying on traditional Cold War logics, Reckner finds some victory and honorable sacrifice for the United States (but not the Vietnamese) in the "erasure of the plain and indisputable fact that the United States lost the war in Vietnam" (Beattie 1998: 28). This sense of U.S. victory in the Vietnam War is transposed into the Vietnam War archive where the representation of the war is built upon a sense of U.S. exceptionalism. Following Lisa Yoneyama (2005), I see the irreparability and unredressability of conflicts over meanings of the war, especially when those meanings are pivoted around the rallying myths of American goodwill, historical progress and universal brotherhood that

[35] The "winning" of the Cold War and Vietnam against the Soviet Union however opened up an ideological-political vacuum which continues to embroil the U.S. within post-Cold War military struggles (i.e., Afghanistan, Iraq) characterized by prolonged fighting and fears of loss and what many U.S. policy makers have called the "Vietnam Syndrome." While the U.S. lost the war in Viet Nam, it continues to be haunted and embarrassed by a major military defeat against Third World colonial peoples which by many saw as inferior to the Americans. With this heavy blow to American masculine egoism, the Vietnam War continues to mark one major moment in the reproductive and symbolic acts of war and empire that accompany the cyclical stages of U.S. militarism in places like Iraq and Afghanistan among other places.

have been used to justify U.S. foreign aggression in the Asia-Pacific.[36] Analyzing the 1995 controversy over the Smithsonian's Enola Gay museum exhibit, Yoneyama (1997) problematized American WWII veteran's opposition to displaying the effects of the atomic bomb on Japanese in the same way as historians' demands that veterans put their trauma, politics and emotions aside to respect the work of historiography. Rather than accepting the binary between emotions/politics and historical work, Yoneyama studied the controversy in terms of who has the power to determine public discourse and by this, she found that the historians had more legitimacy and authority than the veterans; she thus advocates the necessity of studying how power works in these historical institutions rather than take particular sides of history or accept these places as neutral sites of intellectual objectivity and dispassion. As an archival project that works from an a priori notion of U.S. benevolence and exceptionalism, the Vietnam War archive must contend with the specific historical erasure of South Vietnam from America's traumatized nationalist memory and Americans' desire to "never again" see "another Vietnam," since the war shattered and splintered any coherent sense of U.S. national identity and was the "most powerful symbol of damaged ideals and the loss of trust, unity, shared myths, and common values" (Isaacs 1997: 7). While I take the critical position that the history of South Vietnamese do not simply need to be integrated in the Vietnam War archive but that we need to analyze who has power in this archive and how are its politics of history, representation memory shaped. For instance, the first prominent public supporter and visitor of the Vietnam War archive was General Westmoreland who was famous for

[36] Lisa Yoneyama in another essay on a controversial Enola Gay museum exhibit discusses the conflict between U.S. veterans and critical historians over images in depicting the effects of the atomic bomb; and the struggle that operates between ideas of pure intellectual "history" and traumatic, emotional memory. See also Yoneyama 2001.

saying publicly that the Oriental does not put the same price on life as the Westerner, a reminder of the phantasmal and racialized status Vietnamese people historically occupy in the U.S. imperial imaginary. What does it mean to have someone who thinks Vietnamese people are subhuman entities as a major supporter of the archive? The archive is not just a material site for holding cultural documents but it serves as a form of cultural *production* that (re)produces hegemonic meaning about history and the war through its institutional workings and the way represents its identity to the public as an open and inclusive place.[37]

While the archive contains controversial material casting veterans in a negative light (e.g., eye witness accounts of soldiers who participated in the My Lai Massacre),[38] the overall impression and public image of veterans put forth by the archive is one that promotes the veterans' heroic service to the country. When queries were sent to the archive concerning the logo used on official newsletters which are sent out to the public and patrons, a statement was made about the logo in connection to the archive's philosophy. The logo used in informational literature is a reproduction of the special design of the medal-ribbon authorized by President Johnson in 1975 awarded to members of U.S. armed forces who served in Southeast Asia. "We selected this logo for our organization because it is the universally recognized symbol of American Vietnam

[37] General Westmoreland's infamously said in the award-winning 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds* states that the Oriental "does not put the same high price on life as does a Westerner" which some saw as justification of military's cover up of the My Lai massacre, the usage of Agent Orange defoliant and other genocidal tactics that made Southeast Asia the primary site of spectacular and enduring forms of violence. Here, we can ask the hard question, what does it say about an institution that its first advocate was the man who saw Vietnamese as sub-humans or disposable beings?

[38] The archive contains material documents about the investigation of the My Lai atrocity, notes on the CIA's secret counterinsurgency efforts in Southeast Asia, legal briefs on the libel case against General William Westmoreland by CBS; and government reports of antiwar resistance from inside the military army.

Center and the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University are guided and very strongly supported by Vietnam veterans. Without their support, this organization would not exist."[39] The logo according to the statement is that it symbolically represents the individuals who served in the war however the center is still open to all topics related to including the Hanoi perspective, allies of South Vietnam as well as antiwar protestors. A contradiction exists in this explanation of the official logo through the archive's philosophy insofar as the archive is committed to showing all sides of the war but uses a design that puts forth a very militaristic insignia associated with American soldiers' sacrifice and honor for the country. Newsletters show former soldiers decorated, shaking hands and joined in community meetings from over the years at hosted events at the archive. In my review of the "Friends of the Vietnam Center" and quarterly newsletters, I found the consistent use of patriotic language and military terms such as "sacrifice," "honor" and "service" to describe veterans and soldiers in ways that reinforce American militarism rather than critique the ways veterans were deplorably treated by their country after the war.

On a permanent display in the hall that visitors discover before entering the archive exhibit features a cowboy figure standing over and facing the horizons of the Southwest plains, eyeing the expansion of the U.S. colonial nation.[40] This display represents the Southwest historical archive that provides temporary space for the Vietnam War archive until the latter finds a permanent space (the Southwest Archive and the

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[39] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 4, Issue 2 July 1997 Vietnam Center Collection.

[40] The Vietnam Center is physically situated in a part of the country and state considered "cowboy country." This geographic setting helps me think about the Vietnam Center and Archive in terms of the Western frontier mythology and American cowboy ethos that animates so much of U.S. imperialism and military history.

Vietnam War archive are the central archives in Texas Tech sharing the same building space). In the window display panel right next to this installation is an illustrated picture featuring an American Vietnam soldier standing almost in the same exact pose as the cowboy and holding the same countenance, but with the solider standing over the foreign lands of Southeast Asia at the service of U.S. global expansionism. In this powerful visual representation of the Vietnam Archive, one that does not feature South Vietnamese or ARVN soldier, the American military soldier epitomizes the strength and resilience not tragedy of America. Juxtaposed with the cowboy who overlooks *his* respective "frontier," this public display featuring the iconography of the Vietnam soldier presents a masculine and military personification of the nation for those entering the archive.

While the archive contains material documents ranging from soldiers' personal memoirs to military maps and equipment donated by soldiers to family heirlooms, oral histories occupy a special and central place in the archive. The archive collects voluntary oral histories from volunteers from all over the country (such interviews often conducted over the phone given physical and budget constraints) from veterans willing to tell their stories with identification where the selection of the speakers occurs as "a matter of happenstance—in this case, word of mouth and ongoing connections with veterans' associations rather than a more systematic sampling" of the veteran population as a whole (Hagopian 2003: 191). Most of the oral histories, according to the director of the oral history project, reflect a positive bias from veterans who "are proud of their service, are very proud of what they were able to do in serving the country, answering the call and serving with the people whom they served for a worthy cause and they were serving a

noble goal and higher purpose."[41] Those American veterans that resisted the government and were traumatized or hated their country for putting them through the war are a small minority in the oral history collection which has much to do, according to the head oral historian, with the voluntary nature of the program and the fact that it is the more patriotic veterans who see their service as a sacrifice that are willing to participate in the archive.[42] Standard questions asked by interviewers cover overly specific operative and logistical questions related to tour duty but other general questions include: "What did you think about the Vietnamese soldiers that you worked with?" "How did the war most affect you personally?" "What did you think about Vietnamization and the decision to pull out of Vietnam in 1973?" The last question almost always reflected American veterans' ambivalence toward the war and whether South Vietnamese could win on their own. Three oral historians conduct the interviews and even the archive's current executive director was once the head oral historian which shows the import of the oral history project in the archive.

While the archive contains material documents ranging from soldiers' personal memoirs to military maps and equipment donated by soldiers to family heirlooms, oral histories occupy a special and central place in the archive since oral histories personify and individualize history and bring in "people's views and what they have to say on a personal level."[43] The archive collects oral histories from volunteers from all over the country willing to tell and submit their stories with identification and selection of the

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[41] Interview with Kelly Crager on September 8, 2010.

[42]Kelly Craig says many of the veterans who volunteer their stories are proud of their service but since the stories are on a voluntary basis, the sample pool might preclude the stories of those veterans who do not wish to speak out of fear or political resistance to a historical project that seems to be associated with the state. Despite the tendency of most oral histories to display positive conception of war, the stories are imbued with new meaning through multiple readings in conjunction with what people remember and their positionalities in history.

[43] Interview with Kelly Crager on September 8, 2010.

speakers as "a matter of happenstance—in this case, word of mouth and ongoing connections with veterans' associations rather than a more systematic sampling" of the veteran population as a whole (Hagopian 2003: 191).

While all veteran oral histories are generally respected and open for inclusion in the archive's oral history project, there are some oral stories of non-white veterans of color who experienced racism during the war as well as those whose stories of racism are *not* told. The archive's head oral historian recounted an interesting story in which an African American sergeant was reading an oral interview located in the Vietnam War archive by his former white commanding officer where the officer in his interview said he never saw any racial discrimination in his unit. The sergeant was so disturbed by this wrongful observation of history that he called the archive and talked to staff members to express his anger over what the oral historian calls the "myth and memory" of the war. The archival historian offered the sergeant the opportunity to tell his side of the story as a participant in the oral history program to act as a counter-weight or rebuttal to his commanding officer's testimony but the Black sergeant refused to participate in the archive and saw this exercise as useless. This example shows that archival activities do not occur outside the domain of politics but serve as the realm of political struggles over who or what is deemed historically or culturally significant. While an oral history from the Black sergeant can provide some alternative narrative to the blind racism of his commanding officer, it does not erase his subordinate place (and other racial minorities' place) within both the military structure and cultural memory of the Vietnam War as

centered Cold War geopolitics rather than Civil Rights, imperialism and racism (Westheider 1997).[44]

This example shows the Vietnam War's enduring racial politics as manifesting in the contested *institutional* spaces of archival representation and the ways people *refuse* to participate in an historical project that cannot fully account for the marginal position of people as well as the always subaltern, invisible voices of history. As a form of political agency, such actors bring forth another repertoire of desires and embodied practices that comprise what performance theorist Diana Taylor (2003) describes as the diffuse moments of "protest" within the hegemonic archive of our cultural memory—the trace of "ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" and the memories of racism and injustice that rarely gets acknowledged or told in public discourse (20). I believe the cultural and historical particularity ascribed to Vietnamese Americans of U.S. racial project that seeks to re-present the war that seeks South Vietnamese as an additional and missing "version" of America's Vietnam War history that fails to acknowledge how their identities and histories and stories are not as accessible as those from Americans. Many American veterans who talked to Richard Verne, an oral historian at the center, were regretful of South Vietnam and believed "that the United States abandoned an ally. But they also are proud of their individual service [since] they did their duty; they served their country honorably; and they came home and went on with their lives" (Westbrook 2005). Where American veterans escaped to tell their story, Vietnamese Americans as the "other side" of the American experience in Vietnam tell another dimension of the war. When center

[44] Ethnic Minorities from African Americans, Chicanos and Native Americans participated in the war in larger numbers disproportionate to their size in the U.S. population (this high proportion of military service continues today).

officially opened in 1990 (in a space shared with the university's Southwest History archive) Vietnamese Americans were not included in the Vietnam War archive in full force until 2006 when the archive received its biggest donation and records from the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation which held and released the applications of former Vietnamese political prisoners that immigrated to the U.S.[45] The 100,000 applications written by the political prisons include many hand-written letters (restricted from public access) written to justify sponsorship in the U.S., revealing challenges of their immigration process and a web page has been created where individuals can search a database of applicant file names, but the public cannot view the name and content of the files themselves unless they request it directly from the archive.[46] Hence, even the biggest collection of materials from Vietnamese Americans is restricted to only individuals looking up their immigration records or those of their family members but not available for public viewing to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. This brings up another phantasmal aspect to archive where information is available but protected because of the sensitive personal/political nature of information.

Recognizing the institution's bias towards Americans, the archive's founder Reckner believes there needs to be more contributions and interest from Vietnamese Americans since this would complete the overall meaning of the archive to represent the "American experience" in Vietnam. As the archive's founder, Reckner's is the most important and central individual in understanding the meaning of archive, which is why I

[45] The other more comprehensive collection of South Vietnam records is the 1999 collection of 98 boxes that were donated from the Vietnamese embassy in Paris with South Vietnamese records and daily press releases.

[46] The web page includes instructions for individuals whose applications are held by the archive to restrict their files from public access.

focus on his perspective the most in this chapter and why most staff members told me to speak directly to Reckner about the archive. Reckner imagines the archive as merely documenting or recording the Vietnam War experience rather than actively reproducing those larger colonial histories and structures in which this experience is derived. What does this process of inclusion therefore entail? How does the archive deal with the fact that the Vietnamese American historical experience is not easily incorporated in an archive built around the planning and original interests of American GI or have a legitimate part of the "American" national story? The Vietnam War archive is different than the Vietnam Veterans Memorial because the former actually tries to include the Vietnamese American perspective despite limited success. I explore then how the archive became interested in including the Vietnamese American side of thing and explain the decision to finally work towards "including" them.

THE MISSING GAP: VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STORIES AS A HISTORICAL ABSENCE THAT CANNOT BE FILLED

> Americans of all kinds are still haunted by the war, if not by the Vietnamese, haunted by the question of what to do with all those dead and missing people, the millions in whose name the war was ostensibly fought…at the existence of the Vietnamese in these memories and stories as they hover phantasmatically between being faceless names or nameless faces
>
> Viet Nguyen (2006: 23)

The key staff members I interviewed (all born during or after the war and have no personal experience to it) pointed out that the biggest lacuna in the archive is the lack of materials and oral histories from Vietnamese Americans.[47] In 1999, the archive publicly

[47] As many of the staff members were not employed at the archive from its inception, they comfortable with speaking about the history and symbolic meaning of the archive. All directed me to the archive's

launched an initiative that in its statement promised to preserve documents related to the Republic of South Vietnam through Vietnamese Americans. As it says on the official statement for the initiative:

> Our goal with this project, quite simply, is to preserve for future generations as much as possible of the record of the Republic of Vietnam. Future generations of overseas Vietnamese, it seems certain, will seek answers to many questions about their ancestors, the role they played in the Republic of Vietnam, and why, ultimately, they came to be *viet kieu* (overseas Vietnamese)…ultimately, the task must be accomplished by the older generation of Vietnamese, who lived through the traumatic events which shaped, and ultimately ended, the Republic of Vietnam. In this effort, we appeal to the sense of history of the Vietnamese people. We must work to preserve the history of South Vietnam or subsequent generations of Vietnamese who left Vietnam following the following the war will be condemned to a future without a past.[48]

This need to preserve the historical record of South Vietnamese stems from a transcendental and filial understanding of history; where archival preservation of material history is necessary or Vietnamese "will be condemned to a future without a past." This sense of being condemned to an uncertain future presents a kind of Vietnamization, where Vietnamese are finally given a historical trajectory and allowed an opportunity to survive through the help of Americans. Yet, how does this inclusive project reckon with the vexed marginal place of Vietnamese people in U.S. Vietnam archival history?

The archive seeks to get more oral histories and personal immigration stories from Vietnamese Americans who survived the war.[49] Nonetheless, out of 800 oral interviews

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found and said I should speak with Reckner since he is the person most identified with the center and can speak for it best.

[48] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 6, Issue 1 February 1999 Vietnam Center Collection.

[49] There is a missing symbiotic connection here that cannot be fully revealed insofar as the American Vietnam experience as historically imagined did not include the former Vietnamese allies of the U.S. except as their subordinate or junior partner. Cold War political discourses presented the Vietnam War as a

that have been recorded and/or transcribed and made available to the public online, only 14 of the interviews feature Vietnamese Americans, mostly former generals, ambassadors and high-profile public officials of the South Vietnamese regime rather than civilians (again something that emphasizes the militaristic aspect of the war).[50] According to Viet Nguyen (2002), the postwar period is defined by not only the issue of representing but reconsidering the silence about South Vietnam that has come to haunt American veterans remembrance of the war:

> In terms of the American debates around U.S. involvement in Vietnam, there is the danger that many American veteran intellectuals can absolve themselves through the speech of the Vietnamese. This absolution is done by paying lip service to the "oppressed" Vietnamese, by seizing on or lifting up "representative" speakers for admiration while ignoring the uncomfortable realities of those whom these speakers ostensibly represent— realities in which the First World subject is materially implicated (112).

As both a subject and object of Western knowledge, Vietnamese Americans are given a nominal space to be represented in the U.S. Vietnam War archives. Ultimately, the struggle over how the war is remembered by those who lived during the Vietnam War generation is a struggle over meaning for the post-Vietnam War generation. As Reckner puts it,

> That in working to preserving the record of the American experience in Vietnam for future generations, the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech is filling an important role. We are building a Vietnam memorial, not for Vietnam vets, but for future generations who will have no first-hand knowledge of the war. In encouraging today's younger generation to study the Vietnam experience, examine the record and arrive at their own conclusions, the Center and Archive offer today's students not only an understanding of our immediate past, but also some basis upon which to

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U.S. global fight against communism or regional fight against Viet Cong or a civil war between the North and South Vietnamese in which the U.S. became an outsider meddler.

[50] Last content analysis and update May 14, 2011.

> formulate more intelligent approaches to America's relations with the world in the years ahead….[51]

I believe Reckner's effort to educate the future generation and not build simply a memorial to vets denies the fact that so much of the archive's activities are dedicated to making the place a memorial and tribute to veterans. Part of this need to educate the next generation is based on new learning tools such as the Internet, which I discuss next.

Despite this promise to include more South Vietnamese documents, the Vietnam Archive did not have a substantial collection of Vietnamese-related material until 2006 when the archive received a huge donation from the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation, a non-profit Vietnamese American organization based in Austin, Texas which helped over 12,000 former political prisoners for the Orderly Departure Program to apply and settle in the U.S. from 1979 to 1999. After a signed memorandum in 2005, the foundation gave the Vietnam War Archive the records of former South Vietnamese political prisoners, the first major batch of records related to Vietnamese Americans for the archive.[52] Though the archive was created in the late 1980's, the Vietnamese American Heritage Project was born in 2008 to address the void of Vietnamese-related documents in the archive through the impetus of Vietnamese Americans rather than the archive.[53] With grant funding from the National Historical Research and Publications Commission, the archive was able to hire a full time Vietnamese American Heritage

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[51] Reckner, James. "Why are America's Top Vietnam Veterans Supporting Texas Tech University's Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict?" *Friends of the Vietnam Center Newslette*r, 1:1 (1994/05/01), Vietnam Center Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

[52] The Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA) helped over 10,000 former Vietnamese reeducation camp detainees and their families to immigrate to the US and other countries through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee's Orderly Departure Program (ODP).

[53]This also included the hiring of Vietnamese language specialists, translators and archivists (most international exchange students who volunteer for the center).

Archivist and part time student assistants (usually international students from Vietnam) to collect, preserve, and make accessible Vietnamese-language materials that "document the war from all perspectives by providing documentation of the post-war history of Vietnamese Americans who immigrated to the United States during and after the Vietnam conflict."[54] The program seeks to also increase Vietnamese participation in the archive's oral history project, conducting community outreach activities celebrating holiday and festivals, and developing cooperative relationships with other Vietnamese American organizations. This federal government funded project for preserving the papers of the Vietnamese American political prisoners receiving letters of support from government officials and congressmen such as John McCain, John Kerry and George H. Bush. Such papers are worthy of collection and received national recognition only because political prisoners are tied to interstate diplomatic relations where exchange in POW's has mediated U.S.-Vietnam relations over human rights and civil liberties (Allen 2009). Moreover, this inclusion of South Vietnamese political prisoners reinforces rather than challenges U.S. claims of benevolence and exceptionalism since this act of preserving the application materials of former Vietnamese political prisoners provides hard evidence of how the United States helped to save its South Vietnamese allies from communist political suppression and incarceration.

The oral history collection does not make any classifying distinction between people of race, class gender or nationality, demarcating all interviews based solely on the basis of whether an individual served in the military with their title and rank or whether they are civilian. There is no difference made between Vietnamese and American stories

[54] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/resources/projects.htm. Accessed May 10, 2011.

and this makes it hard for anyone wanting to access Vietnamese American oral histories to locate them. This organizing basis for oral interviews frames the history of war from a strictly military basis that props up the idea of the Vietnam War as a primarily military event even though these personal stories are meant to depoliticize and demilitarize the war's discourse. Users, many of whom are military scholars or former veterans, must follow and comply with the archive's militarized ordering system in order to use and access it.

Vietnamese American community organizations across the country are compiling their own oral history projects in cities with large Vietnamese populations such as Austin, New Orleans and Orange County. The Vietnam War Archive's staff members hope that the VCA can get access to these stories, but the archive's own collection of Vietnamese stories is minimal. Staff attribute this dearth of Vietnamese American oral histories to a number of reasons: 1) the lack of Vietnamese translators and interviewers in the center; 2) the special circumstances of Vietnamese refugee experience, especially for the many thousands who fled their homeland in such haste leaving little evidence of their involvements; 3) the silent refusal of many to participate in telling their stories oftentimes out of fear of political repercussions for themselves and their families who still remain in Viet Nam; and 4) the geographic isolation of the institution from large urban centers with a big Vietnamese population.

The head of the oral history project says the main issue the archive is working on is increasing participation from the Vietnamese American community in the oral history program. He believes that there is a slant in the archive's materials toward American

veterans that has much to do with the ways the U.S. remember the war from an American-centered perspective:

> We think about the war from the American perspective and as tumultuous as it was and as divisive as it was, and the fact that you know 50,000 Americans died in the war, millions of Vietnamese died in the war from both sides of the conflict, and *many* Vietnamese came to the United States after the war and they are a big part of this, a *very* big part of the story as well in terms of the sacrifice of lives and sacrifice of property, you know the Vietnamese suffered more than the Americans did so we do want to reach out to the Vietnamese American community more and try to include them…that's the primary shortcoming in our holding right now…obviously most of our interviews are with veterans of all levels and stripes and all services.[55]

The common reasoning for including the Vietnamese side according to the head of the Vietnamese American Heritage Project is that all of us need to heal, every individual has different voice and valid perspectives even if those voices clash with one another but all perspectives are equivalent. Ann Mallott, the director of the project, observes the necessity of capturing stories from the Vietnamese Americans. "The Vietnamese American history is not well-known. It's not very well documented right now. Stuff is now being discovered and part of that I think is that with all that the Vietnamese Americans went through as refugees."[56] The Vietnamese American Heritage project has hosted Vietnamese film screenings and the annual Asian Pacific Heritage Month. In 2011, the project even hosted a guest lecture with speaker Kim Phuc, the famous "girl in the photo" running from her bombed village naked, whose fear-inducing image changed Americans' opinion of the war. Such activities make the archive an emerging site for representing the history of Vietnamese Americans but the absence of oral histories and

[55] Interview with Kelly Crager on September 8, 2010.
[56] Interview with Ann Mallott on September 8, 2010.

personal artifacts related to Vietnamese Americans suggest efforts to increase representations of Vietnamese in the archive remains a challenging project.

In general, distance from large communities of Vietnamese American populations hampers Mallot's expansion of the Vietnamese American Heritage Project through extensive outreach with Vietnamese American community organizations and individuals. Moreover, as an American who does not speak Vietnamese, she finds problems in reading mostly Vietnamese texts or speaking with the community on top of the issue of attaining trust. As she put it bluntly, "You have to understand, I'm an outsider looking in, trying to learn and understand so a lot of this is what and how I perceive it and the way I'm learning…I'm a whitey, I'm an outsider; you have to earn the trust [of the Vietnamese]."[57]

The archive's biggest collection of Vietnamese-related documents is the government applications used to process Vietnamese political refugees. The ODP (Orderly Departure Program) instituted by the U.N. High Commission on Refugees in 1979 granted thousands of mostly former Vietnamese political prisoners asylum status in the U.S. and other places. In these letters of application, applicants give data on where they were born, military awards, family members they brought with them, their sponsors, U.S. contact, certificate of release from reeducation camps in Vietnam. Such official records provide some personal insight and statistics in the immigration process of South Vietnamese. Despite the very overly political aspects of the ODP program, the head of the Vietnamese American Heritage Project sees these documents as telling a story of

[57] Interview with Ann Mallott on September 8, 2010.

generational history similar to European immigrants who came over through Ellis Island. As she notes:

> We kind of call it the Ellis Island of Vietnamese Americans because not only did they lose stuff during the war just through events but then they emigrated, they couldn't take everything with them…just from the ones that have shared with me, I don't think they realize how important their stories are 'cause they feel that everyone went through it, it was hard time for everyone. What's so special about my story? It is special and your kids wanna know and this part of history, you need to save your stories before they're gone.[58]

The trope of family and immigration is evoked to show why Vietnamese Americans are important to history and why their stories are important for sharing with the next generation.[59] This comparison covers up historic differences in the way Americans racialized Vietnamese political refugees and treated them differently compared to the mostly European immigrants that went through Ellis Island (Rand 2005: 124). At the same time, the staff member recognizes that many Vietnamese Americans in their exodus could not carry many personal belongings to the United States. This material loss suggests that while the archive is interested in receiving diaries, uniforms, medals, letters, photos from Vietnamese Americans and their families (things that many American veterans were able to carry with them), Vietnamese Americans' ability to produce such materials remains interrupted and always underdeveloped. Their recognition as historical subjects with material artifacts that document their history in turn remains "arrested" since an archive only shows what has been physically preserved.

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[58] As she goes on to say, "We started the oral history project trying to get more oral histories of Vietnamese Americans and I've started compiling a list of Vietnamese American associations to reach out and contact them, to build rapport with the Vietnamese American community and try to find more sources and preserve more stories because it's been awhile since the war, but you really need to get those stories when you can

[59] While archive focuses mostly on veterans of war, it also includes the widows and children of U.S. soldiers—something that promotes the family unit as the basis for national unity.

When asked why there is a serious lack of participation by Vietnamese Americans in the center's archival projects, founder Jim Reckner admits that he doesn't know:

> I don't know if it's reluctance to give materials or their memories to an organization that is 100% American as opposed to some Vietnamese American [organization]. I don't know if there's resentment because we invite Vietnamese communists here but to be true we have to invite Americans who served in the war, Americans who opposed the war, Vietnamese communists and Vietnamese non-communists because all of them had a unique and important part of the story…*so we'll interview anyone with a point of view* about Viet Nam. We don't pass judgment, the archive is *neutral* in that respect. We simply provide and preserve the materials, the memories, the documents, whatever we can….and why the Vietnamese [Americans] have proven reluctant to join us in that, I don't know.[60]

Reckner idea of the archive as "neutral" in its mission of examining all sides of the Vietnam War pictured as coeval attempts to neutralize the politics of war but his suspicion that such impartiality causes resentment among Vietnamese Americans sheds light on the unsettled political divisions that underlying the singular telling of the war as "a story." Reckner hopes that in time Vietnamese Americans can see the altruistic aims of the archive and respect its decision to occasionally invite communist military officers and leaders to the archive. In seeing the Vietnamese as resistant or reluctant and the archive as neutral, he places the burden on the Vietnamese Americans to step outside of their given politics and politicized histories *in order to* donate their materials and memories to an archive that is still seen as "American."

Given the historical amnesia of mainstream U.S. society regarding the place of Vietnamese Americans in U.S. history of the Vietnam War (beyond the image of refugee boat people), a critical assessment of the archive and its politics of representation (based

[60] Interview with Jim Reckner on September 9, 2010.

on liberal notions of multicultural inclusion) should move away from the idea of archival work as concerned only with facticity and truth toward understanding it as a contested site of power. Reckner's inability to see why Vietnamese Americans are reluctant to participate in this archival enterprise puts the burden on the Vietnamese to put their anti-communist politics or problems aside for the larger goal of historical knowledge-production and mutual understanding—a project of scholars who study the politics of national reconciliation argue is a challenge given the ways certain groups of people are marginalized in dominant historiography, especially those on the losing side of war (Blight 2002, Wilson 2001). As I see it, this is another form of Vietnamization of Americans giving historical agency to the former allies of the U.S. but where the Vietnamese become new political subject-position under the terms placed on them by Americans. It is a democratic gesture of inclusion that belies the hierarchal power dynamics that preclude the possibility of including Vietnamese voices in *all* their political, social and historical complexities and help us to ask which party has the power to determine historical/public discourse about war. The process of collecting oral histories from Vietnamese is almost random but while the archive has strong links to American veterans associations, it does not have a strong relationship with Vietnamese veteran groups owing to a lack of a South Vietnamese liaison who could do that type of building with veterans; moreover, the archive is most used to dealing with American veterans since it is Americans veterans who started and ran the archive. The lack of a Vietnamese-speaking historian also limits oral history collection and while listening to the few Vietnamese stories that are available in the archive, I notice many interviewees' struggle with speaking and conveying their thoughts in the English language which is not

their native tongue, thus making it difficult for listeners to fully understand the speakers, limiting how much of their memories and overall experiences can be fully communicated.

Cultural history affects the way things are categorized and represented in the archive. While looking into the archive's oral history database for stories and documents about Vietnamese refugees, I found the term "gook" an important finding aide. The archive's classification system based *on* donor name (e.g., the Pike collection) makes it hard to find specific things (unless one knows what collection to look for), and database searches based on keywords like "Vietnamese" or "Vietnamese American" produced a strange assortment of photos, military records mostly from U.S. American veterans (since there is an marked absence of Vietnamese donation of personal items). Eager to help me upon seeing my initial frustration in finding Vietnamese American oral histories, for instance, the archive's reference archivist suggested to me that if it may be more useful to utilize the term 'gook as a search keyword, especially since most American GI's commonly used racist words like gook to refer to the Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians in their interviews. "We don't censor the material," she told me "and it's bad that we're perpetuating that [kind of racist material] but that's what the archive does."[61] The racial terminology of war is linked to the continued use of such terminology in the archive and provides a guiding tool for my search for Vietnamese materials in the archive. Instead of oral interviews where I could hear actual voices and stories, the

[61] Informal conversation with Amy Mondt. In order to make sense of the term gook, one must make sense of the racialized past with the term gook serving as a signifier not only of war but the de-humanization of Vietnamese by the U.S. at not only a individual/group level but institutional/national level. How would visitor ever look and know about the term gook as unless they ask the reference archivist; searching for the gook shows how racial meaning and terms live beyond their specific historical moment and have a longer shelf life than we think.

"gook" marks the epistemological limits through which I locate and trace the material presence of Vietnamese presence within the oral history project. The term 'gook' as an understood term of identification for the enemy reveals so much about the phantasmal place of Vietnamese Americans in the archive, since Vietnamese American stories don't have to be physically present in the archive or the oral history program since they are *always* present in *any* discussion of the Vietnam War by American veterans whose perspectives about "gooks" are represented.

The oral history project not only recalls people's personal memory of war but cultural memory. Marita Sturken (1997) writes, "Cultural memory designates those aspects of memory that are collective, yet not official, and which are often in tension with historical discourse. It is not necessarily a site of resistance, but often where political difference operate in tension over what should be remembered, how, and in what form" (174). While the archive appears as a neutral site based on "historical discourse" devoid of politics, the racially-coded stories told by American servicemen and the prevalence of the "gook" sits as an irrepressible eruption of history and the profane figure of popular cultural memory and racial politics that disrupts the multicultural purpose of the archive and narrative of the U.S. nation and history as one of progress and acceptance. Oral histories are not just about personal reflection but disclose "how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott 1991: 777).

The center's has difficulty in finding Vietnamese American participants for its oral history program because of various reasons that are geographic (Lubbock is far away from Vietnamese American communities), financial (it lacks the funding to go out and

get interviews from people far away) and linguistic (it lacks Vietnamese staff who can be interviewers and translators). These factors contribute to reasons why the Vietnamese American component of the archive is almost non-existent or minimal.[62] At the same time, the director suggests that the archive's geographic isolation gives it freedom to do its work and be "free from outside influences" such as the anti-communist demonstrators that live in predominantly Vietnamese American communities. Thus, there is a tension between a desire for Vietnamese American oral histories yet there is also a sense of relief having distance from the contentious community-based politics that comes with being in proximity to the Vietnamese American enclaves. Here, the archive cannot tame or gentrify the community politics that has shaped so much of postwar Vietnamese American identity but still seek out their voices.

VIETNAMIZATION VS AMERICANIZATION OF WAR MEMORY?

The archive acts in the independent role of bringing together all sides of war and this requires forcing individuals to suppress their political beliefs in the name of learning and healing from the war. "From the beginning, then, we have placed equal emphasis on preserving records and memories reflecting the many American viewpoints about Vietnam. We have made it our policy that our former allies, the South Vietnamese, will

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[62] UT Austin is already starting its own Vietnamese American oral history project under the guidance of Khuc Minh Tho, a long-time community activist and leader who has been a major supporter of the Vietnam Center and Archive. One the Vietnamese interviewees to be featured and highlighted in archive is Khuc Minh Tho who discusses her experiences growing up in Vietnam, as well as her experiences immigrating to the United States. Tho is the founder and president of the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association and she is a major supporter of the Vietnam Center and Archive, gathering materials and participants for its material collection, advocating for its presence within the Vietnamese American community. [62] Unlike other interview's, Tho's interview has no written transcript yet so when one downloads the audio file of the interview session, one must hear Tho captivating voice as captured in streaming digital form with a duration of three hours. Hearing Tho's speak in difficult English and terms with the interviewer who cannot speak Vietnamese, one gets a sense of the difficult yet still interpersonal interaction between the subject and the person asking the questions and wonders whether if conducting the interview entirely in Vietnamese would change the story gained.

always have a place at our conferences and in our records; *however,* at the same time, we work with, preserve, and make available the Hanoi view of events, also" [italics my emphasis].[63] Here, Reckner gestures toward but evades the ongoing ideological conflict between North and South Vietnamese, both groups recognized and treated equally in the Vietnam Center and Archive. At its Vietnam Symposium in 1999, the VCA faced a tense situation since it managed to get top ranking officers in the U.S. military North and South Vietnam to come and tell their contrasting perspectives on the war. At this meeting, a Vietnamese general criticized the actions of the United States in the Vietnam War, referring to the "American aggressors" and went on to criticize U.S. support "of a rotten (South Vietnamese) administration" (Altenbaum 1999). With the attendance of South Vietnamese veterans, James Reckner told the audience that "there would be no protestors," an admonishment that specifically targets Vietnamese Americans who are known for protesting the physical presence of any Vietnamese communists in the U.S. (ibid). Acting as a type of authority figure, Reckner sought to flatten or quell political differences as a way to allow information to "flow freely and easily" and forestall the imminent threat of protest by Vietnamese Americans and their feelings of animosity (ibid). Here, South Vietnamese feelings are not allowed to flow freely and easily for the sake of information and knowledge, an intellectualizing project that does fully open questions about how memories are not just about the flow of information but emotions that cannot contained. If Vietnamization refers only to the U.S. bequeathing to South Vietnam the right to have political autonomy but American hegemony, this example shows the power of Americans once again "mediating" the polar sides of the Vietnam

[63] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 8, Issue 3 August 2001 Vietnam Center Collection.

War with the Vietnamese Americans occupying an "arrested" political position in their ability to protest and expose their opinions for the sake of reconciliation. Here I ask, what does reconciliation mean or entail? Does Reckner's injunction for neutrality equalize everything and the contentious politics of the war?

Challenging the work often assigned to such archival institutions as purely apolitical, I see this center's decision to publicly include South Vietnamese and commitment to telling the American national story as another form of "Vietnamization" where U.S. authorities give political/historical agency and recognition to South Vietnamese subjects, except this time under the auspices of historical documentation and education. The current executive director of the center, Steve Maxner, suggested that the archive has helped improved diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, serving as the liaison between the U.S. government and diplomats visiting from Vietnam, holding military documents from the North Communist side of the war and inviting diplomats and military men from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Indeed, the Vietnam War archive is open to preserving communist-related materials and extends invitations to former North Vietnamese soldiers or diplomats to speak in annual conference panels, collaborating and teaching state archivists from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam modern archiving techniques such as how to scan large format documents and creating digital films from audio/visual materials. This intimate exchange between the Vietnam War Archive and contemporary Vietnam stems from the growing relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam in post-2000 moment when bi-national relations between the two countries have dramatically improved since normalization a decade, such that the United States has become Vietnam's biggest trade partner (Twining

2007: 86). Here, the growing power and voice of socialist Vietnam's has taken on primacy for the United States which seeks to increase trade with its former enemy despite the dissenting opinions of many South Vietnamese Americans and former ARVN veterans who might find this new geopolitical relationship troubling. Due to the low pay of professors in Vietnam, Texas Tech goes to Vietnam and gets cheap service for English to Vietnamese translation of documents. On various trips to Vietnam, archival representatives present scholarships to students in Vietnam (as well as Cambodia) and provide archival seminars for Vietnamese universities. Reckner reflects that while during the war he was "working for the mutual benefit of America and the South Vietnamese," these recent trips "improve the lives of Vietnamese who are not political, just people…[where] we are in a position to do something positive for relations between the United States and Vietnam. Until we have positive relations, we'll never put the war behind us" (Altenbaumer 1999). Reckner articulates a contradiction in this statement insofar as he believes the archive can improve diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam while not participating in politics even though the desire for positive relations between two sovereign countries are always political and based on international negotiations and commitments.

The diplomatic relations between the Vietnam Center and Vietnam adds to the archive's problems of dealing with Vietnamese Americans. At the 2006 conference, the theme focused on the unacknowledged contributions of Army of the Republic Vietnam, the South Vietnamese forces allied with the U.S. The conference's keynote speaker, a former ARVN Lt. Gen. Lan Lu, was like many Vietnamese Americans initially suspicious of the archive given its outreach work in socialist Vietnam. Moreover, the

archive's effort to present all sides regardless of politics made it seem like "merely a place where former enemies came to make their account of the battle in the past" (Blackburn 2006). When addressing the silence of South Vietnamese veterans to speak about their experience, Lu cited language barriers and shame that prevented them from doing so. Many still feel frustrated by how their contributive efforts to the war are remembered by the U.S. but feel unable to speak out against it he said. "How can I, a man who gets defeated, stand in a position to say that?" Lu said. Nevertheless, Lu pledged to help find more documents from Vietnamese-Americans. Stephen Maxner said the conference said that "by coming out and participating in this conference, I think they're [Vietnamese Americans] reclaiming some of their pride," Maxner said. "Some of the pride they should have always have had in their country and their history" (ibid). Ambassador Nguyen Xuan Phong, a senior research associate for the center claims that the archive has not yet successfully reached out to the Vietnamese-American community, a problem the center was changing but Vietnamese veterans also have a complex relationship with the war that makes it difficult to share their experience, he said (ibid). Southern Vietnamese veterans lost everything—their country, democracy and homes.[64] "They are so diverse, conflicting, and the whole thing is still, after three decades, extremely emotional," Phong said (ibid). The issue of South Vietnamese having a voice in history as exemplified in these statement to the need to empower South Vietnamese again, this time to speak about the war through the archive, despite their emotional and linguistic barriers in speaking *to* Americans about how they have been denied a chance to

[64] Vietnamese families often had members that fought on both sides of the conflict with differing interpretations of what they were fighting for yet the political divisions that split families were often not easily resolved.

talk about their defeat. In this space, Vietnamization rears its head again; this time as a way of finding a voice for South Vietnamese who feel defeated and shamed in their historic silencing by the United States.

In 1998, a decade earlier, the archive identified the problem of South Vietnamese historiography. An open call published in its newsletter "Preserving the South Vietnamese Story" stated:

> We at the Vietnam Center are increasingly concerned that little is being done to preserve the record of the struggle of the South Vietnamese people during the war. While we find it easy to acquire publications from Hanoi that outline their interpretation of events, such is not the case for the Saigon point of view. Because of this, we are particularly keen to encourage donations of books, articles, newspapers and other materials from South Vietnam, 1945-1975, for permanent preservation. We particularly encourage members of the *Viet kieu* community to consider this problem and how it might be resolved. Without a concerted effort to gather and preserve materials related to South Vietnam, including memoirs of South Vietnamese participants, correspondence, and any records that might have survived, there will be little left for future researchers anxious to obtain a balanced understanding of the war.[65]

This call places responsibility on the Vietnamese American community to consider "this problem" and how it might be resolved, whereas historical documents from the Vietnamese government have been easy to obtain. This call does not contain a proposition as to how this specific issue of *archival* documentation can be resolved but asks that the Vietnamese Americans themselves donate their personal belongings and physical artifacts from the war even though many Vietnamese refugees who survived the war possess few if any retrieved items from the war. This void of historical materials forever lost or destroyed in the war thus points up a historical absence that *cannot* be

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[65] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 5, Issue 2 May 1998 Vietnam Center Collection

completely filled and signals the postponement of finding things or impossibility of locating them.

Expanding on my conceptualization of Vietnamization as a discursive formation and ongoing political-historical process in which South Vietnamese are rendered as disempowered subjects unable to fully realize the conditions of modern freedom or agency—this chapter builds upon my main argument that Vietnamization structures the South Vietnamese as tragic figures of history, and this victimizing narrative informs the archive's mission problems in trying to tell a more "complete" story of the American Vietnam experience that includes Vietnamese Americans. This places a burden on Americans to represent the Vietnamese while giving the South Vietnamese the undetermined opportunity to figure out and realize their own (potential) representation within dominant history. The inherent tension between what Americans and South Vietnamese desire within this politics of representation is not fully disclosed. Indeed, at a time when the archive is strengthening its ties to Vietnam, what happens then to the South Vietnamese question and historical experience? Jim Reckner acknowledges the key role of the archive in fostering better dialogue between U.S. and Vietnam in the voice of Vietnamese Americans:

> I know such a sentiment will draw cries of outrage from some Vietnam veterans, and from many Vietnamese-Americans. However, we must fact realities. The way ahead, in my view, is for those of us who were involved in the war to provide powerful positive images of America to the younger generation of Vietnamese in Vietnam…For subsequent generations of Vietnamese-Americans (or Americans of Vietnamese ancestry), I am afraid it may already be too late for the Hanoi government to attract them, with their advanced education and valuable skills, back to their homeland to assist in its development. Over the past 25 years, these sons and daughters of Vietnamese immigrants have become fully integrated into the American mainstream. They serve as officers in our

> armed forces, as distinguished faculty members in our universities, and as valued members of our communities. That is Vietnam's great loss. And America's remarkable gain."[66]

This statement articulates the need to project American greatness and openness to Vietnamese in Vietnam despite the reservations of Vietnamese Americans. Vietnamese Americans at the same time are projected as assimilated "model minority" subjects of the U.S., helping to boost the status of United States. An incongruity exists in identifying Vietnamese Americans as assimilated to American notions of greatness and strength but also resistant subjects to improvement in U.S-Vietnamese relations. In the next section, I analyze how digital processes not only increase transnational collaboration between the archive and Vietnam but "globalize" the archive and the effect this process has on the already phantasmal and virtual place of Vietnamese Americans in the archive.

VIRTUAL VIETNAM: DIS-EMBODYING AND DIS-LOCATING REFUGEES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

The Vietnam Center and Archive has an online database called "Virtual Vietnam" that tries to broaden its impact on the world beyond Lubbock. Created in 2000 through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and since 2002, the archive has been actively digitizing all of its documents undertaking a process other history archives around the world are experiencing to keep up with the times. In past years, the archive's efforts to "virtualize" its collection have created new spaces of representation and modalities for thinking not only about archival work but also how archival subjects are resignified. Instead of taking the word "virtual" as an understood term synonymous with electronic media, what does virtual mean, especially in relation to Vietnamese Americans

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[66] Friends of the Vietnam Center Newsletter - Volume 9, Issue 2 June 2002 Vietnam Center Collection.

who are already rendered virtual subjects in the Vietnam War archive? The "virtual" by definition is not simply a term synonymous with new media communication and electronic mediation but denotes something as "being such in essence or effect though not formally recognized or admitted" (Merriam-Webster 2010).[67] I read the archive's digitization/virtualization process as an emergent space for thinking about what types of things or subjects are allowed to be realized and unrealized in historical representation. I recognize that the digitization of the Vietnam War archives serves as a unique moment for understanding the ways in which Vietnamese Americans as the "absent presence" and "virtual" subjects of official historical knowledge-production are assimilated into new discursive spaces that both consign and disperse meaning attributed to them (Derrida 1996).

In March 2002, the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University announced the launch of the Virtual Vietnam Archive with a grant of five hundred thousand dollars from the federal government to scan and digitize its photographic, written and audio documents (Hagopian 2003: 189). The purpose of "The Virtual Vietnam" archive is to make the Vietnam Center and Archive's holdings available for public access and use in digital format on the World Wide Web, accessible through an official website (http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu) with a powerful search engine that allows a user to access documents. By 2011, the VVA included more than 70,000 photos 50,000 slides, and 1000 maps. Documents are scanned everyday and this virtual archive is searchable by subject matter and keyword/category finding aids. This archive however does not offer a clear organization of its contents, classifying files primarily by the name of individual donors.

[67] www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary. Accessed 9/11/2010.

In the absence of identifying information and markers about the collection in terms of thematic subjects, "its content remains obscure, and as a consequence, so does the shape of the virtual archive as a whole" (Hagopian 2003: 190). Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese materials are not distinguished from another; hence the search for Vietnamese-related items is made difficult. Search aides "Vietnamese" or "Vietnamese American" bring up a random assortment of things that are often not related specifically to Vietnamese refugees given the difficulty of narrowing anything down to Vietnamese people in a Vietnam War archive.

For the Virtual Vietnam archive, all documents are scanned and digital facsimiles are created of the originals. Despite variable reprographic quality and readability, the documents contained in the virtual archive also offers easier access to the oral histories, allowing downloading and easy reading of the transcribed interviews and their audio recording. Digitizing this vast array of materials and putting them online to anyone with Internet-connection makes the archive less restrictive to certain users and visitors and less bound to geographic, institutional and material conditions. At the same time, the transformations in "form" also potentially change ideas about content since content and form are mutually constitutive. The variety and easy use value of the virtual archive's total holdings make this archive more amorphous and less intimidating than visiting the actual archive in Lubbock and opening a box full of familial personal collections that force one to figure out how things are sorted out and what things are important (all collections are preserved the way they were originally received from donors).

This virtual archive is one of the most thorough online archives in the country but this wealth of material also makes it difficult to find things. The Virtual Vietnam archive as a staff member told me is a simulated "representation" of the actual material archive located in Texas Tech. While only 10% of the archive's materials are online, the wealth of data that is available already in cyberspace is astonishing but still lacks materials related to Vietnamese Americans.[68] The purpose of digitization according to the head oral historian is making the archive and its contents more open to the public. He states:

> To make it available to anyone with Internet access, free of charge…that is democratic history right there, it's open to everyone, it's available to everyone, it's a fabulous resource in that way, and it makes it more useful, what good is it to have all this stuff if people don't have free and open access to it?[69]

Digitization provides another form of spatial removal and alienation that shifts the archive's traditional role as a storehouse of physical documents and transforms the archive into a virtual medium where historical materials now take on lives of their own. Where visitors go to the archive to see "copies" or original documents that are preserved in pristine condition, the digital archive mirrors the physical archive but organizes it in a way for easy access and spatially removes the user from the documents. Virtual imaging prevents the need to physically touching found objects in the archive but also denies a more visceral, embodied exchanging allowing one to "interact with objects, get up close and personal with history."[70] Digital archives represent a new mode and means of representation that aims to better promote or allow access to its materials beyond the physical site. Digital or electronic archives as historian Rene Sentilles (2005) argues

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[68] Interview with Amy Mondt on September 9, 2010.
[69] Interview with Kelly Crager on September 8, 2010.
[70] Interview with Amy Mondt on September 9, 2010.

gives a broad scope of things that are largely ephemeral and the tension between the "real" archives and those things we cannot see (136). Recognizing that digital environments reproduce issues and dominant representations of race, class, gender and sexuality (Ignacio 2005, Nakamura 2008, Lee and Wong 2003), I recognize how the Vietnam War archive seeks to reproduce Vietnamese histories into pure sources of information for the world to discover and study such histories in ways that might potentially reify how people already perceive the Vietnamese as the historical "other" of the Vietnam War.[71]

While scholars often use online archival sources as open sources and public depositories of data, I consider how Vietnamese oral testimonies and photographic images change properties when mediated through electronic virtual environments and audio-visual streams of the Internet. Digitization put the stories and images of Vietnamese refugees in new phantasmic cyberspaces and places the personal accounts and visual products of war as "evidence of experience" in fragmented non-material form (Scott 1991). As the archive becomes more digitized and its materials more "virtual" and extended into global data streams, the archive becomes a more liquid medium and evinces "the ascendency of transmission over storage" of data (Chow 1993: 174).

The Virtual Vietnam Archive therefore offers another way of making its documents more accessible to the world but also re-inscribes U.S. cultural hegemony and technological power in representing the war. Where digitalization expands the spatial reach of not only archive but also the United States, I spotlight the Virtual Vietnam

[71] The project will receive $1.8-million in grants over four years from the federal government's Institute of Museum and Library Services which already contains more than 750,000 documents and 60,000 photographs. The archive is adding 30,000 pages a month to its online database.

project as another example of American technological and cultural dominance in the post-Vietnam War period in having authority in representing the Vietnam War.[72] Today, the expansion of the Internet as a type of secular global communitarian space for democratic participation cannot elude its original history as a product of the U.S. military-industrial complex and product of war.[73]

This digitization of the archive is tied to transnational globalization processes and capitalist expansion that have helped build ties between national archivist in Vietnam and staff members at the Vietnam War archive in the U.S. A pact and memorandum of understanding was formalized during a 2007 visit by a delegation of Vietnam's State Records and Archive Department who came to Texas Tech to participate in digitization-training and learning workshops from staff at Texas Tech.[74] From this archival learning

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[72]The war in Southeast Asia enabled American technocultural control and global imperialism in the 20th century, one in which the Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought to win the Cold War through foreign nation-building and bringing countries like Viet Nam "into the twentieth century." "Back to the Stone Age": Origins of a Cliché By Nick Cullather, *Asia-Pacific Journal* http://www.japanfocus.org/-David-McNeill/2245 This quote is seen as originating a June 1967 humor column by Art Buchwald who used it to mock the Goldwater administration's treatment and attitude toward the North Communist Vietnam but one abstracted to the rest of the Vietnamese. In his 1968 memoir, Air Force General Curtis LeMay suggested instead of negotiating with Ha Noi, the United States should "bomb them back to the stone age…until we have destroyed every work of man in North Vietnam." Vietnam and the Vietnamese were alien to modern times and hence outside the history and work of Man (one not brought forth by American and French colonial modernizers). But we know the end of that story; those Third World colonized peoples did not simply dwell in the Stone Age; rather they used their spiritual technologies, their spiritual and cultural technologies to thwart the "superior" weaponry of the US military-industrial complex.

[73]For instance, the formal entry of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia happened in the 1960's, the same decade that the U.S. government developed what would be the beginnings of the Internet and computer communication for military purposes. The Vietnam War and the Cold War provided the impetus for creating many of the modern technologies of warfare which the U.S. government utilizes still today. Interesting enough, the 1990's was a time when the Internet fully blossomed into a global medium and a time also when the U.S. normalized its relations with Viet Nam.

[74] "The Center plays a vital role in enhancing the relationship between the United States and Vietnam in trade, medical projects, and humanitarian activities that involve Texas Tech, Lubbock, and the State of Texas. As a result, the Vietnam Center has been recognized by leaders in both nations as fostering a better future for our countries by contributing directly to the "reconciliation between the United States and Vietnam."[74] Dr. Stephen F. Maxner "Celebrating 20 Years of Preserving the Past for a Better Future." http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/events/20thAnniversary/program.pdf. Accessed May 20, 2011.

practice and exchange, Texas Tech became the first U.S. institution to sign an agreement with the Vietnamese state. Thus, while the Vietnam War Archive has a hard time getting personal stories and materials from South Vietnamese Americans to complete its U.S. archive, it is part of bi-national partnership with the national archives of socialist Vietnam. The physical distance of many Vietnamese American communities to the archive gives the latter a neutral space to do its daily operations, one predicated on avoiding Vietnamese anticommunist politics (there have not been any protests of the archive so far).

As a process specific to archiving, digitization contributes to the historical flux and spatial drift of Vietnam War cultural memory by creating a more "borderless" archive produced by electronic communication. Through the Virtual Vietnam archive, where one can download transcribed interviews and documentary film with ease, war narratives and historical experiences are dismembered, extracted and recomposed from their original context and placed in a new "virtual archive" of knowledge-production (Featherstone 2000, Bolick 2006). Digital dissemination and circulation transform Vietnamese refugees into digital refugees, floating in the electronic waters of cyberspace that mimics what Jameson (1991) observes as the spatial logic of postmodern capitalism where things and people are everywhere but also "nowhere." Within Virtual Vietnam—a multi-media online site created as a proxy or supplement to the physical archive—what kind of global virtual audience does it seek to cater to? Rather than accept the idea of digitized historical archives as contributing to the mass expansion and democratization of public knowledge, I seek to apprehend its "spectral truth of delusion or hauntedness" (Derrida 1996: 87) as a means of apprehending how certain subjects and "bodies of

knowledge" become dissimulated, assembled and dissembled within new mediums of social exchange. For instance, on the Vietnam War Archive's website, there are very few representative pictures of Vietnamese and plenty of photos of American soldiers in military poses and action scenes. Searching in the online database, one photo I found captivating depicts a frightened mother holding her children in times of war (See Figure 1). This picture's chilling image stands in contrast to the numerous photographs featuring American's fixing helicopters or military servicemen rescuing Vietnamese from danger.

Figure 1: Vietnamese Woman Holding onto Child

The official description of the photograph is written as such:

> Tay-Loc, South Viet Nam: Stark terror is written in the face of a young South Vietnamese mother as she comforts her child. She was among the villagers of Tay-Loc who evacuated their homes when Marines of the 1st Battalion strafed Viet Cong positions from helicopters recently. Jet bombers were also used in the action.[75]

Photographs bring an affective dimension embodied in the pictorialized subject that is not reducible to rationalization and 'data-fication.' Indeed, how do we read "stark terror" in

[75]Photograph VA005549, No Date, Douglas Pike Collection: Other Manuscripts - American Friends of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

the face of this Vietnamese mother? Who is the anonymous marine standing behind her with his head cut off? Is this the terrified look of someone about to be killed or saved? Is she comforting her child or actually trying to shield his body from terrorizing forces already around her? Is this a safe evacuation or an imminent massacre? Is she a Viet Cong being fished out of her village position or someone being protected by U.S. Marines? These are questions to think about and ponder when looking at photographs rather than assume that their captions describe exactly what we're seeing or supposed to see since historical records are representations of a given past reality, confirmed by those who name . Indeed, President Nixon himself doubted the authenticity of the Pulitzer-prize winning photo of Kim Phuc, the naked girl screaming and burned from napalm, as a real photo and thought it was staged or simulated by the photographer (Chong 2000). The specific context of the terror is discernible only if one locates corresponding story about the marines and activities in Tay-Loc at that specific time in the archive but the women's story is *not* in the archive. How are we to identify with the pain and terror of this "young South Vietnamese mother"? What does the qualifier South Vietnamese add to her youth and marker as a mother? What cultural and literacy do we employ in reading this image in a historical moment that seems past? Do we simply read her today as a Vietnamese mother or specifically a South Vietnamese mother? Is her protective nature and terror different from a North Vietnamese mother protecting her child? Recognizing that we cannot assimilate the sense of trauma or experience this photo conveys, the Vietnamese woman becomes an unassimilable subject of American war memory and historiography. Yet, where such photos are circulated on the Internet and used in various ways, how can users of the archive recognize the discursive conditions that freeze and frame this image

of this mother and the temporal and ontological "difference" attributed to her? How would our spatial and affective relation to this figure change if we had the chance to hold the actual small Black and White photograph that holds this image? Would the photo have a different aura of importance and tactile sensibility? I believe that when photographs from the war, especially those of Vietnamese people, are digitized into bits of consumable visual media products, it becomes difficult to know how things are situated in the physical archive and how they are "processed" and contained in archival conditions that reveal much about where, who, how and why things become an object and subject of war.[76]

Where the center's main focus is dedicated to preserving the materials of the war housed at its physical archive in Texas, today it is focused on transforming and digitizing its entire archival domain into a huge virtual database where anyone in the world can enter and use without ever physically visiting the material archive, freely viewing and taking its products at their discretion, able to download digital copies of photographs and images without touching the old relics held in the archive. Vietnamese American stories and images are placed in a vast virtual library that do not distinguish them *as* Vietnamese artifacts ignore how markers of difference ground the "navigable space" of the Internet (Chun 2002: 250).[77] This virtual library proposes to make the Vietnamese postwar experience part of the intellectual enterprise of U.S. archival data collection, giving new

[76] Moreover, the physical absence of Vietnamese stories and objects in the archive is not felt much when browsing and visiting the Virtual Vietnam archive but going to the physical location of the archive and seeing the boxes in arrangement next to one another and what types of items they contain.

[77] As Wendy Chun observes about the cyberspace: "These spaces, for all their unfamiliarity, and all their inhabitants, can be reduced to humanly accessible information—to a vast virtual library. Indeed what makes these public spaces 'navigatable' yet foreign, readable yet cryptic are differences, differences which, rather than indicating discrimination or exclusion, serve simply as an information marker, as yet another database category…Difference thus grounds cyberspace as a 'navigable space,' because difference is the marker by which we steer, and sometimes conquer." See Chun (2003), p. 241-254.

room for learning about Vietnamese American refugees whose histories remain absent or ignored by society in general.[78]

The traditional role of Vietnamese Americans inhabit within U.S. cultural memory and representations of the Vietnam War is a place of absence given the ways the U.S. nation-state imagines and projects its self-aggrandizing ideas of superiority and civilization (Kelly 1977, Scott 1989, Montero 1979). In the face of this larger cultural absence, uploading more materials online about Vietnamese Americans will not change unless there is an effort made by the archive that seeks to address the politics of the war beyond discourse of healing, inclusion and reconciliation to speak about issues of power, representation and even militarism. To do this would require first recognizing that the Vietnamese Americans are not subjects whose memoirs and memories of war can be *ever* assimilated into the cultural memory and history of the Vietnam War. An archive that tries to preserve the record of the war without directly confronting the politics of representation that constituted the war's history will suppress the contradictions and conflicts in meaning through which the war was understood in the first place within American society.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE ARCHIVE OF WAR

> In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.
>
> Francis Fukuyama (1998: 18).[79]

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[78] The archive contains little material related to ethnic minorities and other sorts of Southeast Asian groups (Hmong, Montagnard etc.) equally affected the war but whose historical record in the archive remains sparse because of their general absence from the broader discourse and remembrance of the war. How will the Vietnam Archive allow for the corollary tales from the proxy and corollary wars related to Vietnam such as the CIA-backed Secret War involving Hmong in the Laos and peoples?

[79]This notion of a post-historical world ignores the multitudinal and ongoing "struggles for recognition" that exist within our modern times. Drawing on a Hegelian formulation of world history, Fukuyama sees all human desires and actions under a temporal unfolding of History, one bound up to the telos of neoliberal structures and economic rationalities that suggests there is no outside to Western liberalism and capitalist

In this chapter, I argues that the Vietnam Center and Archive is a place to situate ongoing struggles over the historical representation of Vietnamese Americans within the discourse of the Vietnam War, one that foregrounds the impossibility of their "differential inclusion" (Espiritu 2003) into common narratives of reconciliation, sacrifice, honor and healing. I believe the archive is a site of warring desires and contestation in thinking about how to represent Vietnamese as proper subjects of U.S. archival history. Where Vietnamese refugees and soldiers are the material excess of the nation's remembrance of the war and thus informs this archive's challenge in assimilating this excess, I read the archive's purpose and efforts to include Vietnamese Americans and the stories in the archive as a project to naturalize, objectify and authenticate the American war experience. As a place to institutionalize official material history and sacrosanct forms of memory, I find the absent material presence of Vietnamese within the archive as an example of how the South Vietnamese are not only historically effaced to represent but how they cannot be re-membered nor presented as proper assimilable subjects of dominant history.

Today, the Vietnam War archive is committed to preserving its records of everyone and location for future generations and it does this by trying to expand the capabilities and roles of the archive. A planned Vietnam War museum will be housed next to the Vietnam War archive as a popular and academic base for understanding the war. This is an archive that we all must build and ultimately examine time and again. As

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modes of production. The reference to the "perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history" suggests that human history has now reached a point of resolution in which desires for freedom, cultural differences and human desires are Hegel calls a "complete and firmly established world" to which all of us must be incorporated and become transparent (1975: 58). See also Fukuyama 1989.

more stories are digitized and placed online, what is the purpose of visiting the physical archive and its collections? Though the Vietnam War Center and Archive appears to bear "no political agenda" as it official states on its website,[80] I believe it still participates in its own politics of history and representation. As Jenny Edkins (2003) notes, a compelling question about cultural and archival "memory work" is not examining what is represented but who "gets to mourn, in what way, and with what political outcomes" (81). This sense of mourning as an emotive sensibility for reading the archive, one designed to honor and pay tribute to those who died in Vietnam, is important to remember.

As site of cultural knowledge-production, the Vietnam War archive presents a rich and evocative place for thinking about the postwar discourses and the politics of representation/memory for Vietnamese/Americans. How might paying attention then to the archive as both a concrete as well as "abstract paradigmatic entity" (Sekulo 1986:17) allow us to reassess the archive as simply a repository for storing texts of record? Beyond its utilitarian function, such archives serve to manufacture "the pertinence of particular kinds of evidence and particular casts of historical actors [where] this ability to differentiate creates the discursive boundedness that characterizes all historical subjects" (Fritzche 2005: 186). In this regard, the Vietnam Center and Archive's efforts to make the Vietnamese Americans into new global/digital subjects of knowledge seek to inscribe them in new diffuse spaces of representation that portends a new form of Vietnamization where their voices gets lost in space and time.

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[80] http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/oralhistory/interviews/index.htm. Accessed May 10, 2011.

I was interested in what the Vietnam War archive's institutional work only as a way of understanding its ideological work and what "subjects" of history are privileged in its domain. The Vietnam War archive is a U.S. site where the silenced histories and struggles of Vietnamese for postwar recognition and agency is that political theorist Francis Fukuyama calls the "end of history." The success as well as limitations of the Vietnam Archive has helped conceive another institution called "The Archive for War & Diplomacy in the Post-Vietnam War Era" to be also be housed at Texas Tech University as part of the Institute for Modern Conflict, Diplomacy and Reconciliation. According to its official mission statement, the purpose of the Archive for War & Diplomacy in the Post-Vietnam War Era is to encourage, support "the long term study and preservation of all aspects of America's diplomatic and military experiences and involvements on a global scale, beginning in 1975 and continuing to the present."[82] This archive will follow all U.S. military wars that came after Vietnam, including, but not only limited to, Operation Desert Storm, the September 11th attacks, the Bosnian War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will also encompass issues regarding national security, government intelligence and military defense, homeland defense, diplomacy while centering the "personal experience of American servicemen and women in the post-Vietnam era." The historical starting date for the focus for this future archive of war is 1975, the year that Saigon fell and the Vietnam War ended, and the planners say the "terminal date remains open" as long as there exist wars in which the U.S. is involved.

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[82] "The Archive for War & Diplomacy in the Post-Vietnam War Era" http://www.pvwc.ttu.edu/ Accessed May 5, 2011.

This temporal open-endedness suggests that the future of war remains limitless given the militarized nature of our modern society and U.S. foreign policy. By using the end of the Vietnam War as its point of its departure for archival research (a unique thing since historical archives usually have a particular time frame), the archive of post-Vietnam conflicts (of which the Vietnam Center and Archive is a part of) provides the indeterminate grounds for a sustained critical analysis and study of political conflicts that have emerged after the Vietnam War—a place for engaging future "Vietnams" and ongoing promises of peace that though seemingly indeterminate and open also remain foreclosed due to certain structures of power. Recognizing that some stories, voices and perspectives of war will *never* be brought to light despite great archival work and historiography, I understand that the silences and absences of history act as a productive force that reveals those who cannot emerge in representation. Here, I understand that the story of Vietnam and its peoples as open-ended, always partial and incomplete. It begins with the end of the Vietnam War and faces an open future without a definite and determinate history but one always full of struggle and ambiguity. To conclude, I want to reiterate my position that I do not believe the Vietnam War Archive can exclusively be faulted for its failure to address the Vietnamese perspective because in general the U.S. nation is unable to remember/recognize/represent the Vietnamese American war experience.[83]

[83] For many of us, the archival project of reconstructing the historical post-war experience of South Vietnamese American is an indeterminate project that the American nation cannot absorb, since this reconstructive project as I and so many others must undertake on our own terms, where we return to that place which we do not remember or know but find ourselves and the remains of history.

CHAPTER TWO: Forgotten Phantoms: *Living in Fear* and the Representation of South Vietnamese in Postwar/Contemporary Vietnam

> The creation of a common past is a means of defining what and who belong, and what and who deserve to be consigned to oblivion.
>
> Hue-Tam Ho Tai (2001: 227)

In the last chapter, I looked at a U.S.-based archive to show how Americans represented and tried to include their forgotten former "allies" in their living memorial to the war. In this chapter, I examine how South Vietnam is represented in socialist Vietnam today to show the complications involved in representing the enemy in a country that for decades sought to eradicate the trace and legacy of South Vietnam. I provide a reading of a contemporary Vietnamese language film *Song Trong So Hai* (*Living in Fear*) in order to discuss the postwar representation and displacement of South Vietnamese in post-reunification Vietnam. This is an important issue to look at since it shows how the memory of South Vietnamese had vanished or been assimilated into the Vietnamese nation-state. The 2006 directorial debut and narrative feature from award-winning director Bui Thac Chuyen[84] casts the postwar life of South Vietnamese soldiers in a satiric light which I believe sheds light on the conflicting, contradictory and ambivalent

[84] The Vietnamese International Film Festival gives a good biographer of the director to show how every single ofh his work has accolades of some kind: "Chuyen began his prolific film career in 1991 with a 29-minute video short entitled, Eternal Sadness, winner of the Golden Swift Wing Prize at the 1st National Viet Nam Festival of Short Movies. In 1998 his documentary, Xam, received the Annual Prize of the Viet Ham Cinema Association for Best Documentary. In 2000, Bui produced the short Night Run [Cuoc Xe Dem] on 35mm celluloid film. This film won Third Prize in the Cinefondation at the Cannes Film Festival and went on to win various awards at Taipei Film Festival, Film Festival of the Association of World-Wide Cinema Universities, Namur Film Festival (Belgium), Poitier Film Festival and other International Film Festivals. In 2002 his documentary The Digger received the Silver Kite Prize at the Viet Nam Cinema Association for Best Documentary. Living in Fear [Song Trong So Hai] is Bui's debut narrative feature film, and has already picked up the Best Film New Talent Prize in the 2006 Shanghai International Film Festival, as well as the awards for Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Main Actor, and Best Supporting Actor at the 2006 Viet Ham Cinema Association." See http://www.vietfilmfest.com/2011/tag/bui-thac-chuyen/ Accessed May 9, 2011.

understandings of South Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon in 1975 Vietnam—a moment in history involving much uncertainty over what to do with those soldiers formerly loyal to the U.S. In this critically acclaimed work, the story centers on a poor man who faces daily fears on the job as a landmine clearer and develops an obsession with locating landmines that eventually consumes his life and destroys his mind. The film provides a satiric and non-polemic meditation on the harsh realities of war's aftermath, challenging viewers to see both the landmines and the South Vietnamese as the invisible yet living ghosts of Vietnamese postwar national history—the shadows of society not memorialized in the official discourse occupying the dark quotidian spaces of everyday life and public memory.

As a contemporary filmic depiction of the failed consequences of Vietnamization, *Living in Fear* provides a sympathetic portrait of a South Vietnamese soldier struggling to make a new life despite mistreatment by the newly triumphant social regime after the Fall of Saigon in 1975. This chapter challenges the usual definition of Vietnamization as U.S. policy that "allowed" South Vietnamese forces to "fail" in their quest for political freedom. Vietnamization as I see it also refers to the ways South Vietnamese must deal with the burden of losing the war *after* the war when Americans have fully pulled out of Vietnam. The film's ability to retell the story of the war from a South Vietnamese perspective in the 1975 reunification suggests also the current transformation of socialist Vietnam into a modern, democratic liberal country that does not purportedly practice censorship and allows for many perspectives. Here, the film shows how Vietnamization is tied to the Vietnamese state's attempt in the 21st century to claim a new status as "free" and modern by now including the once repressed voices of South Vietnamese. Since the

text is produced after the turn of the 21st century, I offer two interrelated arguments: that Vietnam's growing participation in the global market and demands for a commercial culture-consuming public creates a new cultural environment that helps allow the production of complicated filmic projects of revisionist history such as *Living in Fear*. Secondly, I contend that the satire and dark humor of the fictional film provides a novel way of retelling the national story of reunification (*Doan Ket*) that is not too politically controversial, an aesthetic choice that is not simply about avoiding government censors but emerges out of the contradictory and indefinite ways of remembering the historical trauma and memory of the war in relations to certain problematic subjects of history. In this regard, I situate this context of the film in the fluctuating conditions of seeing Vietnam's difficult past in ongoing efforts to define who belongs in the nation. The film renders South Vietnamese postwar identity into representational form, not as enemies of the communist state but as complicated subjects in postwar Vietnam history as well as contemporary national history. Vietnamization here does not simply speak to U.S. preemptive ending of the war on its own terms but how South Vietnamese continue to find political freedom and deal with the consequences of the war.

MEMORY IN VIETNAM AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SOUTH VIETNAM

In this section, I briefly touch upon historical projects and memory work in contemporary Vietnam, reviewing the literature on the recent memory work in Vietnam. While there has been much scholarly attention to how the United States remembers as well as forgets the war, less attention has been paid to how Vietnam deals with the legacy of the war, one that affected this country and its people in terms of recovering divided families, finding new homes after displacement and new modes of survival in a poor war-

torn country littered with landmines. Academic works such as *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* by Heonik Kwon or *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* by Christina Schwenkel (2009) contend that Vietnamese society and the state are very much engaged in commemorative memory work that often goes against traditional socialist ethics and views. There is an emergence of new work on how film and cultural media from the South Vietnamese diaspora has impacted and been crucial to the rearticulation of Vietnamese national identity from Vietnamese American scholars such as Lan Duong, Cam Vu, Chuong-Dai Vo and Mariam Beevi Lam. Such scholars examine the cultural representation of overseas (South) Vietnamese in an era of transnationalism, globalization and diasporic movement.

The work on the representation of South Vietnam remains missing in the ways scholars discuss contemporary Vietnam and a Vietnamese national context. An important anthology *Country of Memory* (2001) edited by Hue-Tam Ho-Tai reveals this point. Featuring important scholars working in Vietnam studies today, the volume covers a broad range of cultural practices in visual culture and state policies happening in the country today from paintings, war tourism, museum shrines, prison memoirs, cemeteries and film among other things that recognize the upsurge in commemorative projects due to economic liberalization. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (2001) notes in her afterword a major absence of the South Vietnamese in the growing scholarship on Vietnam. Her call to remember the South Vietnamese is not a call to simply honor these forgotten peoples in history but to understand how their unrecognized lives, unmourned deaths and epistemological erasure become the social condition of being South Vietnamese (227-228).

As Tai opines:

> As a southerner with my own ambivalent feelings about the recent past, I must therefore point out a significant lack in the present volume: the lack of a perspective from those who, during the war officially known as the War Against the Americans, fought alongside those Americans, or at least did not consider them enemies. The dead of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) do not figure in the state's commemorative project…ARVN veterans and their families are not entitled to any of the privileges accorded to northern veterans or survivors of revolutionary martyrs. This is not an unusual postscript to conflict… To be truly comprehensive, a task beyond the capabilities of a single volume, the study of commemoration would need to include the dead of the South. To do otherwise risks turning them into the scholarly equivalents of the wandering ghosts of those who, dying unmourned, constantly haunt the living in an attempt to force their way into the consciousness of the community, to be acknowledged as worthy of being remembered if only because they once walked the earth (227-228).

Since the purpose of this chapter is to show how the story of South Vietnam has been erased from Vietnam, it is important to underscore the significance of a film like *Living in Fear* since it brings back the issue of South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese in its story about a former ARVN soldier in post-reunification Vietnam--something other Vietnamese films have not done nor could even do before. It takes the issue of death as metaphoric and real condition that afflicts South Vietnamese and touches upon the question of "living" in constant fear of death. In the context of the film, it is the fear felt by southerners emanating from communists and the landmines embedded in their region. Yet, the question of death has been disregarded in the postwar period. After 1975, military cemeteries dedicated to Southern soldiers were razed and removed from public sight (191). The government created a national monument based in the capitol of Hanoi for the war dead (completed in 1995) as well as other smaller state monuments commemorating those who fought for the North across every locality in Vietnam yet all

these monuments excluded those who served in the army of South Vietnam (Malarney 2001: 67). As Malarney (2001) explains, "When one sees monuments of war dead in contemporary southern or central Vietnam, they commemorate those who fell fighting the French or fighting for the North. Those who died fighting for the South have effectively disappeared from official discourse. The needs of their family members are no less pressing than those in the North, but the state has not dedicated itself to glorifying or remembering them (ibid). The national failure to remember is replicated in the state-regulated popular culture where artistic mediums such as books from southern authors are banned by the Ministry of Culture, even when featuring the South Vietnamese soldier (even when they were not overtly political in any way) in the new repressive postwar period of the late 1970's rebuild around a "command economy" and "forced equalization" later recognized as a disaster by government and opened the country towards liberalization (Kunzle 1991: 31).

Through studying the representation of postwar South Vietnamese life in a 21st century film, I make a case for why my work is important in situating historical temporality and memory that disrupts the nationalized postwar narrative of Vietnam as a country reunified. In the years following renovation policies implemented in 1986 by the government to promote a more "open" but still socialist society, the Vietnamese state and the larger society have been involved in cultural and historical recovery projects that seek to revisit the Vietnam War while engaging the present transnational and commodification processes that occur under economic liberalization, a double movement that bring up conflicted meanings over Vietnamese identity, community and nation. Yet, the history of what is called the "American War" in Vietnam and its "Vietnamization" is a structuring

device for how I think about the representation of the war in contemporary Vietnam during a moment when "commercialism becomes the impetus for facets of national identity construction, specifically with regard to presenting versions of the country's recent history" regarding capitalist globalization (Wood *188).*

The filmic commemoration and memory of the war through a South Vietnamese perspective had been elided by the socialist government. Revisionist films produced in the 1980's however pushed the envelope and opened Vietnam up for Renovation policies in (*Doi Moi*) in 1986, thus allowing for more complicated retellings of the war outside state-sanctioned discourses. *The Girl on the River (*Cô Gái Trên Song) released in 1987 and 1984's *When the Tenth Month Comes (Bao Giờ Cho Đến Tháng Mười)* interestingly enough featured women as the central characters whose complicated roles as the keepers of personal memory competes with official forms of public memory-making. *When the Tenth Month Comes* features a widow who hides the fact of her husband's death from his family despite the socialist government's wish to openly claim his death as a war sacrifice. *The Girl on the River* features a prostitute (from the south) who falls in love with a northern cadre officer who later betrays and leaves her after the war. Such gendered casting figures widows and prostitutes as problematic subjects of war and the nation yet their roles in the film managed to "serve counterhegemonic purposes without interference from the state" (interestingly, these films were sanctioned and released under the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture and helped to liberalize the industry) (Bradley 2001: 215). However, there was a premeditated effort by filmmakers not to portray a male South Vietnamese soldier since doing so would immediately bring up the contentious geopolitical divisions of the war that is usually imagined in terms of masculine violence.

It is not until two decades after *Living in Fear* was produced, that a film had been released about soldiers from the former Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

The rest of this chapter will analyze this film in both its storyline and context as a way of discussing Vietnam's complicated national identity-formation in the postwar 1975 period (as told in the post-2000 liberalization period). As such, this film is not a commemoration of South Vietnam, a mollifying version of communist history or nostalgic ode to a vanished and idyllic Vietnam but reposes and reconstructs the country's contested history from the vantage of those whose place in Vietnam official history remains absent.[85] The economic and cultural liberation of Vietnamese society since the government's decision to liberalize filmmaking standards in 2003 helped create a new cultural setting for thinking about not simply Vietnam's uncertain future under the shadow of globalization but reprocessing the uncertainties of its past. After Bill Clinton normalized trade with Vietnam, there was an increase in the circulation of capital and cultural flows. The 1990s marked the beginning period of open access and shifts in the means of and modes of representation in a massifying cultural market.

As a film funded by grants from the government, *Living in Fear* comprises part of a new movement in socialist Vietnam to capitalize on the cultural memory of war. From museums to the erection of statues to promoting the war tourist industry (for foreign visitors), Vietnam's recent efforts to exploit and commodify its violent war history expresses the "larger problem of engineering memory, especially in political cultures where the identity of the nation-state is in a considerable state of flux…[revealing] the

[85] Only recently have there been films that such as *Journey from the Fall* (dir. Ham Tran 2007) the first film about war and refugees from the perspective of Vietnamese Americans.

tension between familial and state cultures and the increasing importance of formulating a past suitable for tourist consumption. In addition, a dramatic shift in official priorities, from an economy of socialism to one that is market driven, offers much insight into the relationship between state power and public forms of remembering" (Bodnar 2001: x). As John Bodnar writes, this opening up of war as an object of commodification and public discourse evokes "the tortured history of Vietnam and the modern clashes over what most needs to be recalled…[and] has left the Vietnamese with an assortment of issues regarding their past" (ibid). Such issues include the landmines in Vietnam that still strike fear in the masses and forestall any utopian sense of a future without problems.

HOW TO MAKE A LIVING OUT OF FEAR AND DEATH: CONTEXTUALING THE STORY OF *LIVING IN FEAR*

Set in the month *immediately* following the end of the Vietnam War, *Living in Fear* follows Tai a poor South Vietnamese man as he tries to make and construct a normal life out of the new uncertain life into which he was thrown after the end of the Vietnam War, where he must take a job as an unauthorized "sapper," defusing landmines and selling the scrap metal pieces he finds on the black market. Tai must take up this job because cannot find employment with the new socialist regime due to his previous political affiliations and the necessity of supporting two families. After the communists came to his town in green uniforms in the month following the Fall of Saigon in 1975, we hear the following voice-over from Tai: "The soldiers of South Vietnam will be killed, wives and children also, they will be bathed in blood. And while they [the communists] treat us okay I'm still afraid…very afraid. I don't know when I'll stop being afraid." Fearing that the North Viet Cong will arrest or kill all former soldiers fought for the

South Vietnam, Tai is astounded when he is not killed. Instead, he and his family are forced to move to an empty dusty parcel of land next to a large field that has not been cleared of landmines. The communist soldiers led by a female cadre leader Ms. Quyen guides the newly relocated peasants in constructing homes since their old village was going to be razed for collective farming. This collective farming is part of the national reorganization and postwar reconstruction of Vietnam that included reeducation camps for top officers of the Southern government and military, the assimilation of ethnic minorities and the uprooting of southern as well as central populations that precipitated massive waves of refugees and internally displaced peoples from the 1970's until the 1980's (Tsamenyi 1983). To support his second wife Ut and their baby, Tai first goes around stealing rice despite strict ration standards until he discovers the more lucrative if also illegal way to feed his family.

A few short months after relocation, Tai meets a northern communist soldier named Nam Duc where during a drink together Duc tells Tai how to earn good money as a mine clearer. Duc who sells his landmines for alcohol teaches Tai how to clear the mines first by locating and digging out bombs in a campsite once occupied by the Americans. Tai quickly turns to collecting scrap metal and old military product such as bullet shell fragments and barbed wire to earn money. This instance can be read as former enemies coming together to rid of the lasting remnants of the United States and promotes the idea that all Vietnamese are united in problems caused by Americans after the war. While Tai befriends former northern soldiers, he is at the mercy of more top-ranking communist officers who berate him and constrict him to a life of drudgery and hard labor. The officers however are not depicted as bureaucrats removed from the everyday life of

citizens. Indeed, his brother in law and the female cadre officer eventually become more sympathetic to his personal struggles and Tai views them as guardians of some kind. There is some personal tension in the interactions between Tai and these officers, the latter not wanting to totally subjugate this former South Vietnamese soldier but rather reform him and make him a better man for society. Both judge and berate him for having two wives and his former service for South Vietnam but they do not want necessarily him to have a miserable life. *Living in Fear* introduces an important topic that is rarely discussed: the relocation and displacement of the defeated South Vietnamese by revolutionary forces, pushed into working collectives in the name of national redevelopment.

This absence can be attributed to the ways the Fall of Saigon had been depicted as a moment of flight from the country for the South Vietnamese, crystallized by the image of the hundreds of thousands of refugees that fled the country that in turn engendered the "re-liminalization" of the spatial imaginary of the Southern region and its peoples (Carruthers 2008). The spectacular image of exit and the communist takeover ignores the complex social negotiations and politics (rather than the simple reincorporation or takeover of South Vietnam) that took place after the war as well as the complexities and dangers of national "unification." After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the heavily-bombed demarcation line that once separated North and South Vietnam became obsolete. Located at the 17th parallel, the demilitarized zone created in 1954 to split Vietnam into two nations under the Geneva Conference remained a deadly space filled with the residue of Agent Orange chemicals sprayed here and the million tons of landmines that remain untouched in the fields. Tai's family relocated to land next to a field of landmines that

has not been cleared of these explosive devices and poses a threat to the family in their efforts to farm or find materials for housing construction.

As a psychological drama, the film shows Tai's fear of his growing morbid fascination with the mines that threaten to obliterate him. Digging in banned zones marked by signs and fences which he rummages through at night, Tai's new economic incentive supports not only his family but also his growing psychic addiction and need to feel the exhilarating experience of dealing with and thwarting imminent death. This always imminent sense and closeness to death is a sign of the ghostly status he and other southern ARVN soldiers (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) occupy in society. Tai tries to live a proper family life but his polygamous marriage to two women violate the nation's law against such things. He is torn between his love for two women (one from the North and one from the South), a personal metaphor for the split national relations, contested geographies of belonging as well as boundary-space that men like Tai must occupy and must negotiate in postwar Vietnam.

Love and desire are intimately connected and entwined with death and destruction. His two marriages are indicative of the vexed North-South and the difficulties many Vietnamese faced in bridging divided political loyalties within their own family, a balancing act that never ended when North and South "reunited." When the war ended in 1975, he brought his younger second wife and her child to a new home close to an area littered with land mines and bombs left over from the war. The war had separated him from his first wife, so he married a woman in the South. After the war, he decides to resume relations with his first wife and take care of both of them financially. The national scandal of the country of once divided and now unified is reflected in the

scandalous relations of this one particular individual. Over time, he learns how to make bombs safe by disabling them. After every successful de-mining job, as a way of celebrating his deferral and postponement of death, he comes home to make love to his wife as a way to feel the embodied sensation of living once more. Later on, Tai goes back to visit his first wife Thuan and their two children in his hometown. His unexpected arrival creates animosity from his brother-in-law, a communist official who assaults Tai because he regards the latter as a sinful polygamist who not only personally betrayed his sister but also the communist party by working for the South Vietnamese army. This family drama is accentuated in a comedic scene where Tai's two wives happen to get pregnant at the same time and give birth in adjacent hospital beds while the man finds himself frantically but dutifully alternating and attending to both while they were going through labor. Tai's dedication to his wives and sticky dual marital situation acts as an analogue to his fraught obsession with mines that litter his house—an obsession that acts as "a strange kind of absurdist liberation, a space beyond fear" and new a state of mind" (Scheib 2006). This obsession appears like some form of post-traumatic stress syndrome that today is a condition commonly associated with the American GI vet or the trauma of Southeast Asian refugees who fled by boat but not the South Vietnamese soldier.

The film is unusual in showing semi-nude shots of Tai having rough sex with wife in crude positions, featuring rare displays of flesh in Vietnamese film that the actress playing Tai's wife (Thuy Hanh) found initially uncomfortable (Huong 2011). The decision to show multiple graphic sex scenes denotes the loosening ethical and moral standards and the morbid connection between desire and death. The love-making which was not censored by the government review board acts as a way to show not only Tai's

control over bombs and women but signals "the troubled mind of a man standing right on the edge of death" (Hang 2006). However, the sex scenes are not meant to be lurid or casual entertainment purposes, they play a part in the filmic narrative to reveal the intimate human connection to the landmines and how bombs are tied to the troubled psychosis and lives of people.

Where the socialist revolution sought to create a new social order, one that breaks the old Confucian familial tradition, Tai as a South Vietnamese soldier from the defeated side is made to look weak in front of his communist figures such as Ms. Quyen and his brother-in-law, both of whom talk to him by barking orders as he accepts quietly and submissively with his head lowered. Where Tai is depicted as a dunce, someone who speaks and thinks slowly to his superiors, he is quick to temper with his children and second wife. When Tai goes to ask his brother-in-law to look over a job application, his brother-in-law says the following to Tai, "It is fortunate that the war is over. If it was still continuing, I would have killed you…but your family is my family and my sister took you as her husband. Things are different now." The effort at reconciliation between brothers is challenged by their different roles in socialist society and the necessity of moving on despite feelings of animosity. The film depicts the crisis of male identity as linked issues of national citizenship in postwar Vietnam as embodied in the male characters.

Where the film shows Tai's struggle to hold on his status as a man and father, the film does not privilege women who emotionally drive the story and keep Tai stable. With Tai's growing alcoholic problem, the film gives a view of the breakdown of the patriarchal family and assumptive masculine authority of the Vietnamese male subject. It

goes against the idea promoted by the socialist regime that national reunification helped rebuild families. Even the business of landmine clearance involves women even though women have been historically central to fighting in the war as well as postwar rebuilding efforts (Turner 1988). His first wife tries to plead with her brother to be nicer to her peripatetic husband telling him "you know that he's very afraid," implying the potential retribution and punishment Tai fears from communist soldiers. The brother responds in an unsympathetic manner, "What is he afraid of? He should be afraid of going to hell for living with that other woman. It's not that the communists didn't treat him right. A lot of assholes came back from the war and made an honest living, so what?" The sister replies to this with a cryptic and sad phrase, "The more you feel, the more you hurt."

Adding to the sense of narratological chaos and unexpected rupture is the film's refusal to tell a linear story of the protagonist's triumph over adversity and/or evil. While the two communist soldiers that regulate his life (Ms. Quyen and his brother-in-law) are intrusive and the landmines are a constant threat, Tai becomes his own worst enemy. The film does not have an identifiable "enemy" or villain that requires the "comradeship" of the peasants. He drinks everyday and sleeps with the bombs he finds. Tai eventually becomes an expert at de-mining and begins to see the landmines as a personal challenge or hobby that starts to take over his life, one that worries and frightens his wives and fellow villages. There are many scenes where the villagers stand in a line to stick their poles into the ground to locate and nervously defuse the landmines. Tai is not scared of the landmines but knows they can still kill him. This sense of living in fear of death speaks to the threat of violence and destruction that exists after war in "enhancing the remoteness and seeming irretrievability not only of the original moment of loss but even

traces of the loss" of self after war (Yoneyama 1999: 78). The character that most embodies the authority of the state, Ms. Quyen, the militant and assertive female communist soldier always attired in a green uniform even manages to give off a warm and sensitive if also tough persona. She tells Tai not to pursue the landmines on his own since this is the work of professionals and not regular folks (lest people think the communists forced him into situations of death).

Rather than show the communists as evil and southerners as victims, the film seeks to show the complex interpersonal relations among people, the human connections between communist soldiers and those southerners that are now under their rule. As someone born after the war, Bui portrays the immediate postwar/reunification period as neither as a victory nor tragedy but a time of great uncertainty, one worthy of representing and remembering again. While the film does not directly denounce the economic policies of the state, it is not meant to be excusatory for the state's actions nor give a reconciliatory picture of the country. Rather, it shows the simple struggle for survival over poverty, broken family ties and landmine casualty—things that continue to mitigate the postwar search for autonomy and freedom for South Vietnamese people in times of "peace." Here, the U.S. government's desires for an end to the Vietnam War under the policy of Vietnamization is re-represented as the foreclosure of finding and achieving freedom for South Vietnamese who ultimately lost the war. Despite being written as the burden of war placed upon South Vietnam, *Living in Fear* ties Vietnamization back to the U.S. and its lasting war-making technologies.

While the film depicts primarily North and South Viet relations, the omnipresent figure that haunts the film throughout is in fact the U.S. whose lasting impact on Vietnam

can be felt and traced to the landmines, psychological damage and social poverty that threatens postwar subjects like Tai from ever becoming free political subjects on their own terms (to be free from U.S. influence). There is neither peace nor honor for South Vietnam but the grueling hardship involved in reconstructing the psychic and social lives of people (and not an issue of infrastructure and nation-building). The evil that is presented in the film is the evil of war, a historical legacy of Vietnam that affects and also accentuates the fragility of human relationships not reducible to nationalism, geopolitics and ideology (Healy 2010). By focusing on landmines, *Living in Fear* brings back the American military presence in postwar Vietnam. The U.S. had "Vietnamized" the war but "Americanized" the cultural memory and postwar discourse of the war through films like Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* (1993) which showed the U.S. in the position of rescuers saving the South Vietnamese during the Fall of Saigon. Through these films glorifying American violence and benevolence, the U.S. is reimagined as winning the war and American GI's are redeemed of their once pathetic status, and this makes the U.S. nation as triumphing over the loss *of* South Vietnam and the loss *to* North Vietnam. It is the American soldier who is dead and needs to be recuperated but not the Vietnamese soldiers, whose derealized death and dying are seen as excessive to American bodies serving at the "affective site of public and national sentimentality and desire for knowing history" (Nguyen 2002: 113).[86] I believe that Vietnam-produced films

[86] As Viet Nguyen explains, "The discourse of war uses the material reality of the [American] soldier's dead body to substantiate the nation's cultural claims, making them "real." Thus, from the American perspective, it cannot be that Vietnamese bodies are "really" dying; they must be dehumanized, derealized, in order to allow for the humanization of the American soldier and the substantiation of his body and, through it, of American ideology and culture. The American dehumanization of the Vietnamese allows the eroticization of the American GI as the affective site of public and national sentimentality and desire for knowing history" (ibid). See Nguyen 2002.

like *Living in Fear* depict another version of the war, one that brings back the historical presence of South Vietnamese soldiers that considers their failure to win the war as not simply a total loss of humanity and agency but one whose ghostly presence bring up ethical and epistemological questions about history and historical representation and who gets to be recognized within discourses of war. Moreover, the film shows the human side and psychological/material effects of war in the supposedly more peaceful "postwar" period and how people continue to deal with the violence of war in war's aftermath.

VIOLENT LAUGHTER: DARK COMEDY AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF POSTWAR HISTORY

The unique mood and aesthetics of *Living in Fear* is established through dark comedy. Dark comedy denotes a form of humor that plays with serious subject-matter. Unlike slapstick which tends to focus on the physical misfortunes of a person, dark humor uses dead-pan delivery of dialogue and situational irony to illuminate the ridiculous circumstances of those whose lives and living conditions have been and still are chronically affected by imminent violence, war and death. Situational humor centers the strange new developed among people, northerners and southerners, peasants and communist soldiers that convey a sense of "keeping in close touch with the absurdities of ordinary existence [that] are inextricably bound up…[the] inescapable burden of death and mortality" (Betts 1981: 16).

The whole film is filled always with the possibility that a landmine will blow up unexpectedly and shatter any sense of tranquility or normalcy that one might expect in a film that happens "after" war. Strangely, it is often when he talks to young children when bombs unexpectedly go off and thus the younger generation is presented throughout the

film as needing protection from the harms of war. For instance, bombs blow up at random times when Tai when he chit-chats or plays with his children in the outdoors. Upon these spontaneous explosions Tai and other villages look on with a blank awkward, and audiences must decide whether to laugh, cry or freeze in shock. Such moments provide little in terms of exposition and furthering the plot and serving primarily as a creative device to keep audiences in a state of perpetual fear that mirrors the tense feelings of the character in the film. They remind audiences of the fact that the United States dropped more ammunition and bombs than the previous world wars combined in Southeast. With over 6 million tons of ammunition, the impact of these bombs are 100 times bigger than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan (Miguel and Roland 2010: 2). *Living in Fear* comprises a revision and follow-up to the director Bui's 2001 documentary *Tay Dao Dat* (*The Digger*) that explored the land mines that lay in Vietnam's countryside as a material and enduring consequence of the Vietnam War. While the documentary is a serious treatment of the unexploded munitions and bombs that still kill and wound civilians in Vietnam, *Living in Fear* is a black comedy that includes human relationships told in shades of gray rather than cartoonish caricature.

The film tells the story of the burden of responsibility placed on South Vietnamese individuals and families that move away from realist documentary aesthetics or epic melodramas. The screenplay is originally based upon the real life story of Ngo Duc Nhat who cleared more than 2,000 landmines in a deadly occupation that often kills its practitioners. Thac Chuyen Bui was reading a newspaper article about one man's struggle to make a living despite his contributions to the local community by sweeping and clearing mines and became inspired to tell this story to the public which became the

documentary (Vinh 2005). From a screenplay Bui wrote, the director produced the narrative film *Living in Fear* as a means of reaching a wider audience about the legacy of war not as a recent episode in Vietnam history but as part of the country's "legacy of 400 years of continual warfare" as it says on the statement that introduces the film (Scheib 2006). Bui's oddball film won Vietnam's best director and screenplay Golden Kite award, the country's version of the Academy Awards. Chuyen's *Living in Fear* makes light of often overly politicized issues such as government land seizure, population displacement, landmine deaths and social discrimination against war veterans to reveal the personal as well as structural dimensions of postwar trauma. The low-budget feature presents a filmic diegesis that harkens back to socialist-inspired stories of peasant struggles but comes out of a new historical moment three decades after the war that allows for problematic subjects such as South Vietnamese soldiers who fought with the Americans and have not been traditionally heroicized or represented in Vietnamese cinema to emerge. *Living in Fear* shows a newly reconstituted and "reunified" Vietnam, but does not seek to restore or represent a glorified northern victory over South Vietnam. Instead, it portrays the complicated personal and social relations that came out after the war, rupturing the assumption that the former military officers of South Vietnam all fled the country, were pushed into education camps or assimilated/vanished into a unified socialist Vietnam.

Comedy acts as a creative and unorthodox approach to dealing with social problems that come from past national conflicts (Roome 1999/2000, Zelizer 2010, Jacobs 2010). Most of the comedy in *Living in Fear* consists of dead-pan delivery of lines that would often require emotion and situational humor. It moves from the absurd to a sort of

gritty realism that forces laughter out of the recognition of its stunning truthfulness. There is one for instance where Tai makes an offering to the ancestors placing a landmine on top of an alter shrine usually reserved for fruit; this venerating if also banal action links the contemporary products and legacy of war to ancient cultural practices where the identity of the living are always tied to those of the dead. Landmines are symbolized as an abiding and permanent presence enduring as the spirits. As an intergenerational film, the film addresses and targets a "new generation of Vietnamese spectators, who have never experienced war, are turned off by didactic and poorly made state-sponsored Vietnamese films that hark back to the basic themes of the war and the resilience of the people—peasants, poor, etc.—who face hardship with dignity" (Noridr 2006: 47).[87] When a little boy while herding loses a cow in the landmine fields, Tai drags the blown-up carcass of the cow back to its owners, who are so grateful to Tai they offer him a piece of thigh meat as a funny concession. In general, there is no real climax or plot to this slow-paced film since the central conflict involves an internal (trauma) and external enemy (landmines) that cannot be defeated but laughed at or evaded.

[87] Norindr, Panivong. (2006). "Vietnam: Chronicles of Old and New." *Contemporary Asian Cinema: Popular Culture in a Global Frame*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Berg Publishers, pp. p.45-57.

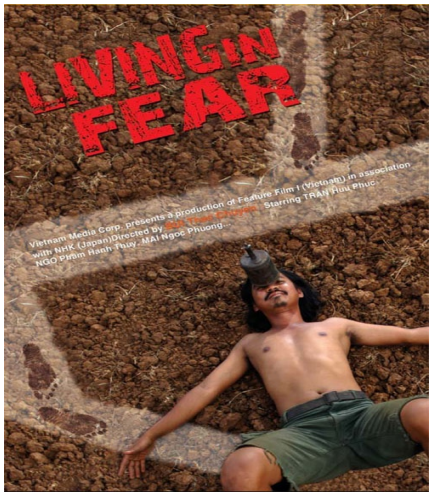

Figure 2: Promotional Poster for *Living in Fear*

The sense of dark comedy is best captured in the English-language poster for *Living in Fear* (See Figure 1).[88] It shows foot prints that line the ground around a sleeping Tai, simulating the presence of the people who died from war and landmines. Positioned in a laying down position on the ground with a landmine placed on his forehead, the picture is at once silly and poignant and captures the rather supernatural quality of dealing with the pervasive threat of death in the aftermath of a bloody war. The visual image serves to address the "gap" between the signifier and the signified, the landmine as a signifier of the war and its violence and our (in)ability to understand what concept is signified by it: the death of individuals, the ghostly remains of history, the "funny" toy of war.

The playful undertone of the film seeks to attract public and state approval in the serious theme it addresses.[89] Humor is shot throughout the film as a type of structuring device for revealing the often unbelievable aspects and absurd elements of postwar social

[88] Vietnam media Corp and promoted by Japanese media outlet NHK which has had an interest in promoting and publicizing Vietnamese film (there remains no international distributor for the film as a DVD.

[89] See Bui's later more popular film 2009's *Cho Voi* (Adrift) which addresses the issue of same-sex desire in Vietnam.

rebuilding. This film foregrounds one man's challenges in reconciling competing familial and romantic relations as a microcosm for the larger difficulty in reconciling the nation's split domestic relations as well as desire for the future (free market capitalism) in opposition to the past (anti-capitalist socialism). This symbolic interplay between material reality and the macabre manifests itself in the tragic cinematic landscape and setting in which *Living in Fear* seeks to portray, an interaction between life and death that essentially locates the often indeterminate and displaced connections of home, family and belonging that have been destroyed during the war. Satire evokes the emotional dissonance between what we expect to see and is "real." During one scene, we see Tai pulling a line to a landmine and it explodes. Tai falls to the ground and his friend Nam and his crying wife hover with concern over his limp body. Tai wakes up and says with an unexpressive face, "Do you have anything to eat?" and everyone laughs. If one can laugh at death, especially death that is all around you, it becomes more than mournful tragedy and starts to resemble something rather uncanny, banal or sublime—a quality that comes from always dealing with the specter of war and death.

Candid straightforward dialogue plays a big role in staving off the paralyzing fear that grips so many of the characters in the film. Whenever someone tries to express their feelings of anxiety about their new reconstructed lives to others; they are not well comforted. Tai's second wife Ut is perhaps more scared of the landmines than her husband and she is always found crying in a corner in fear of death. Tai attempts to comfort her by saying it's been a week since they've moved to their new home and there had not been any explosions since so everything is fine. When she asks him tearfully why recently a cow blew up, he tells her, "because the cow is big and heavy; that's why it

had to explode. We're light-weight like those, why would they [the landmines] blow up?." When she tells him she doesn't believe him, Tai gets angry and shouts, "If you don't believe me, then shut the hell up!" Later in the film, Tai reveals to his brother-in-law his own obsession with the landmine, suggesting that he is a stupid fool and idiot for playing with death, the pathetic shot of Tai crying on the floor is artfully set up to make the situation look tragic but also subtly amusing since Tai plays a dim-witted if also skillful protagonist who is neither completely confident nor completely weak. His personification of the South Vietnamese soldier displays a complexity of character that neither falls in the status of a victim or winner, tyrant or wimp. He embodies at a personal level the consequences of Vietnamization and reflects the challenges of articulating and expressing the unpredictable living conditions of Vietnamese people after 1975.

REMEMBERING POST-WAR HISTORY IN THE AGE OF POST-NATIONAL LIBERALIZATION

As a film about the immediately postwar moment produced in a time of globalization, the film speaks about human displacement and the impact on Southern communities in two temporal moments. It is important to take into consideration the socio-historical context in which Vietnamese films are made and not see them as products of pure imagination or artistic license (especially when artistic freedom is still restricted by the state). Doing so helps reveal the ways culture and cultural production is tied to political economy and how the past is connected to the present insofar as films like *Living in Fear* distill the oscillating history of the Vietnamese socialist state in first trying to "socialize" and nationalize the country in order to unify it and the state's later efforts to

industrialize the economy and population of Vietnam through market capitalism. Beyond the subtle critiques of the state economic policies, the film is incisive in its critique of the way modern Vietnam fails to remember the historical struggles of the South Vietnamese. In the film, Tai's status as someone forced to work for the postwar state as part of the more than 20 million people from the South displaced after the war even though close to half of the Southern population had been displaced *before* the war began (Desbarats 1987: 47). The displacing effects of war is thus not simply about the crisscrossing of geopolitical boundaries but the overlapping temporalities of the ongoing displacement of people, lives and homes. The film starts off with Ms. Quyen, the female cadre leader telling the peasants that their land is now seized in the name of collectivization under the state and the country's "new economy," and this declaration bears resonance beyond the specific time frame of the film.

At a subtle level, the film provides a social commentary on Vietnam's curren*t* economic state in the 21st century, one that has uprooted and displaced thousands of people from the countryside and pushed into cities under the directives of state-directed capitalist ventures and industrializing demands. The approval of a film about South Vietnam like this gives the appearance that socialist Vietnam is joining the global community in being a 'modern' society by having free media and no censorship, thus opening up enough to allow sensitive issues related to the South Vietnamese that it tried to suppress and not made public now. For instance, the government used to decry the ills, immorality and laziness of South Vietnamese people, refusing to see them as industrious and entrepreneurial modern subjects until the late 20th century (Taylor 2001: 187). This attitude change comes from Vietnam's adoption of U.S. and modernizing standards of

living and industriousness. While *Living in Fear* is a critique of state collectivization efforts and how this provided little benefit for the South Vietnamese in the past, the film's portrayal of a resourceful protagonist able to capitalize on the mistakes from the past suggests that this complicated cultural text serves a dual purpose in showcasing the need to develop Vietnam's human capital *now* and overcome previous mistakes. Indeed, the growing US-Vietnam diplomatic/economic ties requires finally putting the politics of the Vietnam War behind and include South Vietnamese stories into the narrative of national rebuilding and modernity. This inclusion evokes ideas of universal pain, flattening the differences between various Vietnamese subjectivities and the unique costs of war endured by the S. Vietnamese. Although this film is about the post-reunification period in 1975, it is produced at a time when Vietnam is transforming under new state policies regarding how Vietnamese society and history is represented, more and more dominated by commercial interests and capitalist forces.

Living in Fear is not only important because it is the first film to centrally feature the postwar history of South Vietnamese but it also engages in important memory production and political reconstructions of national(ized) history. Vietnam struggled to emerge from the ashes of a devastating war that damaged the political economy (as all fighting happened and bombings happened in Vietnam) but a post-Cold War global context dominated by the economic and political interests of the United States. After the war, the United States placed a trade embargo on the new socialist regime imposing harsh economic sanctions that in turn led to both a famine and economic crisis in Vietnam, making it difficult for the country and its people to recover until the *Doi Moi* politics enacted that introduced economic and cultural "liberalization" policies in the country.

This shift toward liberalization is furthered by U.S. trade policies and "normalization" of relations with its former enemy and the privatization of Vietnam's national industries including the state-controlled and subsidized film industry. This however did not mean suddenly result in a free open space for Vietnamese filmmakers but a more ambivalent national climate where free market forces are tempered still by socialist regulatory controls (Asselin 2009). This contradictory political setting creates fertile space for re-representing Vietnam in new cultural terms even as there are certain limits to how much social freedom/agency is allowed to be shown and expressed in the public sphere (Le 2008, Dang and Thuy 2003, Hamilton 2009). Moral and social issues that remain heavily regulated included the display of sex, nudity, homosexuality in films and media but and how the country's history is written or portrayed. With this newfound freedom, Vietnam's filmmakers began to depict Vietnam's war history in nuanced terms moving away from stories that just prop up communist values or epic narrative about Vietnam's successes over its colonial enemies such as the Chinese, French and the U.S.

The push for privatization and liberalization of the Vietnamese film industry began in 2002 to diversify entertainment and make Vietnam as global center of art and cultural production. This frees up directors telling stories that honors and pays tribute to the country approved by bureaucratic state censors. According to Theresa Do, the government saw the need for an overhaul of the system for regulating the film industry given the poor shape it was in: "Rigid censorship of scripts, a long and slow process of approval, low government budgets, a lack of modern technologies, and outdated (war) themes were until recently the main reasons for the failure of the Vietnamese cinema to be a successful form of popular entertainment" (Do 2006: 175). As a former actor turned

filmmaker, Thac Chuyen Bui is an independent director whose work can be classified as international art house but he always tries to make "accessible" films with titillating subject matter that would otherwise be censored in Vietnam. For instance, his 2009 film *Choi Voi* (Adrift) deals with the issue of homosexuality and the alienation of young people in modern Vietnam. This first narrative film builds on Bui's attempt to make more artistic films that are simultaneously attractive to the masses with commercial appeal. Given that a film like this can be made in Vietnam now is a reflection of the recent changes in the Vietnamese film industry and popular culture. In almost all of his interviews with Vietnamese news media about his film, Bui mentions the low and inferior quality of Vietnamese cinema compared to other Asian countries like Japan, India and China and the need to build up the domestic industry. He does not believe the topic is "old" but that the film's topic found "him" and he did find "it" (ibid). Hence, his debut feature was not centered on youth-oriented topics that are so popular in Vietnam these days.

With a realistic portrayal of widespread poverty in Vietnam that simulates Vietnam's poverty, film's cinematic realism creates a verisimilitude between past and present social conditions. In general, 2000's brought fresh opportunities for looking at Vietnam through reflections of the past.[90] As one movie review observes, "A new breed of characters has replaced the old communist heroes on Vietnam's big screens: hustlers and dancing girls, drug dealers and cross-dressers. But perhaps the most startling

[90] One distinctive feature of the film is that though takes place in the past but *looks* as if it was filmed in the past. There are scenic shots of the workers' fields that provide glimpses and images of Vietnam's countryside that are pastoral and rustic but never romanticized and picturesque. In this film, the war has left Vietnamese in terrible shape and the film's low-budget quality reflects this in showing emptied land full of rocks and untilled fields.

character of all is Tai, a soldier from the former South Vietnamese army" (Stocking 2011). The South Vietnamese soldier is a *contemporary* public figure, once made silent and invisible brought into the Vietnam cultural imagery in the 21st century. Rather than representing the past, this figure poses the continuing problem of making visible those subjects of history. By this measure, *Living in Film* offers a "reading the future into the past" where "memory works forward as well as backward; the past is shaped by the future as much as the future is shaped by the past. Memory creates meaning for particular events or experiences by inscribing them in a larger framing narrative, be it personal or collective" (Ho-Tam 2001: 2). While it brings up hardships placed on South Vietnamese soldiers, the film does not singularly present their trauma in negative terms but shows their situation in satiric, often comedic fashion. It shows the possibility of representing postwar violence and social life that opens up the retelling of the past in a non-linear oblique fashion that disrupts the austerity and seriousness characteristic of most forms of state commemoration in Vietnam.

This film I contend offers a creative way to understand forms of death, dispossession and displacement that lie in the shadows of Vietnam's history and geography now able to be explored given the recent transformations in the country. This chapter examines how visions of the difficult past existing in the present provide the means for apprehending the absurdity and impossibility of truly finding peace in the postwar period. My analysis of dark humor in the film shows how dark comedy serves as a cultural form for renegotiating the absurdity of war and violence and failure to memorialize national in serious terms. Dark humor facilitates the telling of a difficult subject such as war which is usually defined not by geopolitical rationality and policy

calculations (e.g., Vietnamization) rather the often unforeseeable processes and reconstitution of human life that blurs the boundary between death and life. Where Vietnamese war films are usually based in melodrama to show how peoples' lives are "forever altered by violence and dislocation" (Turner 2007: 109), *Living in Fear's* dark comedic dimension is able to tell us the conditions of these lives are situated in the macabre, the abject and the sublime revealing the out-of-the-ordinary "reality" that exists for so many Vietnamese people who survived war but still face the constant threat or specter of death.

Living in Fear resists the temptation to recover the historical experience of South Vietnamese soldiers to give them political agency and canonize (and hence cannibalize) the memory of the South Vietnam. Indeed, South Vietnamese historiography poses a tenuous project of appropriating the dead. As Thu-huong Nguyen-Vo (2008) writes:

> It is too easy to regard South Vietnam as a French or American creation, a mere interruption in the nationalist revolutionary historiography of Vietnam and Vietnamese. All official historiographies forget or appropriate the dead in a symbolization process that runs the dangers of an "eternal return to the self." A South Vietnamese official historiography would likely do the same. Nevertheless, the course of the history that we inherit demands an ethical stance toward this historical other who has been elided by war victors (31).

Anything according to Nguyen that tries to provide a South Vietnamese *official* historiography would likely do the same unless it poses a provocative call to understand the challenges of telling an "official" version or story of South Vietnam. A remembrance of the South's suffering demands an ethical stance toward this historical other elided in state-controlled political discourse to serve as a minor act of interruption in hegemonic cultural consciousness rather than acting as an official form of counter-history or counter-

memory. According to Hue-Tam Ho Tai, “It would be tempting to study the relationship between history and memory in Vietnam in terms of hegemony and counter-hegemony pitting the state against individuals, losers against winners, North versus South. While it is certainly possible to study memory and countermemory through these analytic lenses, Vietnamese attempts to come to grips with the legacy of a century's worth of war and revolution raise issues that are far more complex than a simple story of tension and opposition” (Tai 2001: 7).

As a Vietnamese northerner, I believe Bui is still participating in the Hanoi-based government’s appropriation of South Vietnamese history. While the film is nuanced or polysemous in its textual meaning about reunification, the manner in which Bui talks about the film is less nuanced in his explanation for Vietnamese newspapers (perhaps because artistic meaning can evade government censors easier than explicit interviews). For instance, the director says he wants to center the specific struggles of South Vietnamese but he contradicts himself when he says the story of *Living in Fear* is about the universal suffering of all Vietnamese (again, in a country where political dissent is discouraged, such words cannot be taken literally to exactly mean what people think). As Bui stated once in an interview, "I wanted to show that no matter what side you were on in the war, when it was over, we all started in a land scarred from bombs…but we can adapt and overcome” (Stocking 2005). Here, he correctly notes how all Vietnamese are affected by the war and landmines but he does not mention the specificity of the southern region where the vast majority of landmines and battles were situated (antipersonnel landmines were placed in the south as tactic to block communist infiltration from Cambodia, Laos and the North along the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail in the South)

(Miguel and Roland 2010: 2). His film rather seeks to show this specificity of the Southern condition for audience interpretation.

At the same time, I believe Bui contributes to another gendered narration of society through his masculine auteur gaze. For this reason, his film lacks strong character development for any women portrayed in his film. Rather, the women are portrayed in serene beautified respectful ways like his first wife, Dragon ladies like Ms. Quyen or over-emotional hysterical types like his second wife who seems to automatically cry every time Tai leaves the house. The focus on the trauma of a male soldier (and his sexual conquest over his wives/bombs) typifies the masculine revisionist Vietnamese history that sees men only as the central figures of change, whereas the vast majority of Vietnamese women who fought in the war are re-imagined and marginalized in the postwar period within new domestic gendered roles that serve to regulate femininity and norms within the nation (Pettus 2003, Nguyen-Vo 2008). The fact that Bui is another male director in a male-dominated filmmaking industry creates a gendered modern vision of Vietnam is a detail that cannot be ignored given the ways Vietnamese women operate under different expectations as film directors and cultural workers within the new state-directed sexual economies that seek to "modernize" Vietnam and how women should be seen in this process as mere observers rather than important players in memory work (Duong 2005, Turner 2007).

Despite its subtle critique of socialist historical teleology, Bui's government-funded film is ultimately part of the state-machine and its social engineering efforts in the 21st century. "I was surprised that the government allowed my film to be shown," said director Bui Thac Chuyen stated, "The censorship committee didn't cut anything" even

though the government subsidized the product with grants (Stocking 2006). This government subsidization remains important since there are few film making opportunities for South Vietnam directors given state restrictions of diasporic filmmakers to shoot in Vietnam and the preference for scripts that support socialist propaganda (Charlot 1991). The Vietnamese government recognized the merit of the film in healing the country even though it had a number of objectionable elements that otherwise would have been cut (such as the sex scenes). The tension between freedom and necessity, openness and repression is something that not only affects the making of *Living in Film* but also the director's career goals. When asked by a newspaper whether his film is too serious or too slow for audience, Bui responded accordingly, "I look at things that happen every day that are important. Finding out new things about the revolution is a great thing…We need to give what's new and old to the audience. Moreover, in Vietnam, finding an income for film directors is extremely difficult. There are not many movies to choose from in Vietnam."[91] The demand for greater economic incentives and creative freedom for the film director is tied to more income for filmmakers and building popular interest from Vietnamese audiences. As someone who grew up in the North in Hanoi, the director sees the value of presenting the voice of the South (and working with an all Southern cast) in Vietnam today even if his filmic subject-matter is not the most profitable type of topic to bring to cinema right now. Moreover, it has been met with controversy in the United States when it was screened for Vietnamese American audiences who are overwhelmingly from the South (Duong 2008: 127).

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[91] "Bùi Thạc Chuyên không muốn làm hỏng hình ảnh của vợ." http://vnexpress.net/gl/van-hoa/guong-mat-nghe-sy/2006/08/3b9ed088/

Despite the film's political contentions within the Vietnamese community in Vietnam and elsewhere, the U.S. remains the unspoken culprit in the violence that *Living in Fear* attempts to portray. When asked by an interviewer if he's ever "lived in fear" from something in his whole life, he says that while he did not live through the war, he sensed fear when he first glanced upon a U.S. map that revealed the many sites of undetonated landmines, "Yes…when I looked up a map of the U.S. Air Force, I found a map that had scattered red dots everywhere that anyone who knows what they mean refers to the landmines planted by the Americans" (Linh 2011). In this statement, Bui identifies his biggest source of fear with the impersonal markers of death that populate the Vietnamese landscape, attributable to American influence. This statement points to the enduring material presence of American military power in Vietnam and the authority of the U.S. to turn the country's territory into a weapon of mass destruction with 20 percent of Vietnam still covered in landmines or unexploded ordinance (Schriner 2003). While discourses of Vietnamization made the war about North and South Vietnamese killing and fighting each other, the quote from the director shows that the real enemy and source of fear for Vietnamese today is the U.S. as technological superpower, the foreign power that holds original responsibility for the technologies that destroy, mutilate and obliterate Vietnamese bodies indiscriminately. Thus, the "Vietnamization" of the war, the return of the responsibility of war back to the Vietnamese is a masquerade for the fact that the United States continues to be responsible for the perpetual violence that engulfs Vietnam—where the U.S. is the first country in the world to develop, use and refine landmines in a massive way first in the Korean War and then in Vietnam (Monin 2002). Civil war in this case is not one easily settled by the re-joining of North and South

Vietnam when the country is littered in deathtraps. In the case of Tai, his obsession with the landmines is a metaphor in essence of his obsession with reconnecting or harnessing the power of the U.S. As a former South Vietnamese soldier, he lives in a near-death state as a landmine clearing which shows his need to still profit from as well as triumph over the death-making technologies of the U.S. Tai's uncanny ability to understand the machinery of landmines, detonate them and still live denotes his negotiation of not only his uncertain place within the new economy of the socialist Vietnam but also the historical legacy of U.S. militarism in his country.

THE 'NEGATIVES' OF WAR: RECASTING THE POSTWAR HISTORY OF VIETNAM UNDER THE FILMIC GAZE

Where the U.S. had portrayed the Vietnam War in movies such as Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* that portrayed the Fall of Saigon as a tragedy for the Vietnamese, I see the need to consider how South Vietnamese are figured and represented in the Vietnamese national context to examine the complications involved in the construction of the South Vietnamese as the passive, feminized victims in order to allow the U.S. the possibility of considering reconciliation with the Vietnamese (Nguyen 2002). This subject-making is necessary since a large number of South Vietnamese soldiers, industry service workers and government officials involved with the U.S. military who stayed *behind* in Vietnam are not often recognized or talked about after the Fall of Saigon. While the U.S. forgets the South Vietnamese as the defeated nation the U.S. tried to help, the communist state of Vietnam continues to face a challenge in claiming victory over the south, given the postwar difficulties of getting rid of American/Western cultural influences in this region and instituting Maoist-Marxist social and ideological reforms

(Duiker 1977). The period between Reunification (1975) until Renovation (1986) witnessed state-produced films that attempted to shore up national sentiment and consolidation and offered no more than socialist propaganda depicting the greatness of the socialist regime or the beauty of peasant life (Charlot 1991: 38-42). Films that were too critical of the socialist party of Vietnam were banned from public showing and production. Filmic works that were approved for production portrayed the Vietnamese nation as a place of collective unity that only served to reinforce government's view of itself and society despite problems of political and economic problems.

Cinema thus reflects and shapes the visible changes in Vietnam's national identity and history. Indeed, the first feature length Vietnamese film was the 1959 piece *On the Same River* (*Chung Mot Dong Song*) (dir. Nguyen Hong Nghi, Pham Hieu Dan) which centered on the story of two young lovers separated from one another by the river that demarcated the boundary between northern and southern Vietnam according to the Geneva Accords; these two lovers put their love for one another aside to fight for the reunification of the country under socialism (Bradley 2001: 208). French colonialism introduced cinema into Vietnam as a way of modernizing Vietnamese culture and introducing film as a medium for communicating the character and collective desires of the nation. Vietnam's film industry is divisible into four distinct historical periods, which corresponds to changes in country's history from French colonialism (1887-1954) to the Vietnam War (1954-1975) and the post-1975 reunification period (1975-1986), after Renovation (1986) the more commercial period of market liberalization since 2003 (Norindr 2006: 48). The first two periods in filmmaking presented mostly documentaries, cartoons and feature films featuring the heroism of anti-colonial and anti-

imperialist resistance against France and the U.S. In the post-1975 Reunification period, Vietnam produced social realist films that "aimed at transforming the traditional forms of life and ideology" (Hamilton 2009: 143). After reunification, film production slowed down to a dozen films a year due to the economic problems such as the inflation affecting the country during the late 70's to early 1980's. These films focused on the communist revolution, human suffering and post-war nation-building that did not stray from the community party's line about Vietnamese society and history.[92] Acclaimed Vietnamese films made after 1986 renovation policy included *Co Gai Tren Song* or *The Girl on the River* (1987) and Tran Vu and Nguyen Huu Luyen's 1987 film *Brothers and Relations* (*Anh va Em*) provided a soft critique of the socialist regime and conflicts over the ownership of public memory—the state or people—though both those films focused on North Vietnamese people (Bradley 2001: 197, 214-216).

Under the 1986 policy of *Doi Moi,* the state-run film industry began to build-up the image of Vietnam as a modern, progressive nation which allowed for more complex "revisionist" depictions of Vietnamese society and history that do not overtly or directly criticize the government depicting wartime sacrifice but reflected "a more fundamental unease with the nature of postwar society in northern Vietnam" (Bradley 2001: 216). The question of South Vietnam was never allowed to be represented or discussed, until the early 2000's, when the government-run film studios and the Ministry of Culture implemented a policy to slowly begin privatizing and opening up the film industry; this included allowing more overseas South Vietnamese directors to film in Vietnam (Chu

[92] Films from this time include the classic 1979's *Canh Dong Hoan* (The Wild Field) which depicts American bombings of Vietnam as an imperial transgressive act.

2010). Since then, there has been a further relaxation of government controls with the privatization of the Vietnamese film industry that enabled greater incorporation of controversial themes like gender, class, sexuality, minority rights and other issues that speak to rapid changes happening in Vietnam and Vietnamese social life. This trajectory points to greater freedom in filmmaking and representation; however, it does not suggest a resolution over conflicts in cultural memory.

By the 21st century, war-themed films have become scarce or unpopular in Vietnam due to population change as well as cultural tastes and the rise of what has been dubbed the 'Vietnamese new wave' film movement; therefore, creating a proliferation of more cutting-edge films made by a growing number of Vietnamese filmmakers and cultural workers. At the time of *Living in Fear*'s release, Vietnam was a country set for the "world stage," becoming the "latest economic Asian Tiger" as the fastest growing economy after China (Bradhser 2006). Globalizing trends are shaped by and reflected in film, with movies that run the gamut from Korean-style modern romantic comedies to expensive Hong-Kong style martial arts action flicks that seek to develop Vietnam's fledgling film industry. This surge of diverse cinematic genres was a result of devastating decades of neglect due to the war and the country's poverty as well as private investors' interest to profit from Vietnam's growing middle class and popular-culture obsessed youth that illuminate "individual relations and the effects of market liberalization on people's lives" (Vo 2007: 71). Such films were financed independently by overseas Vietnamese producers and investors, and the impact of former South Vietnamese diasporic film directors, actors and producers on Vietnam's burgeoning film industry is

enormous and brings attention to the representational absence of South Vietnam in Vietnamese cinema (Vo 2009: 111-115).

The stories of these films usually take place in the present-day-- a departure from earlier films that celebrated the improvement of peasant life under communism-- instead addressing issues of globalization and urbanization exemplified by the biggest selling film to date in Vietnam, *Gai Nhay* or *Bar Girls* (dir. Le Hoang 2003). These films portray the mass rural to urban migration that takes places in Vietnam today and the problems this population displacement entails including social alienation, prostitution, drug use, and the deterioration of Vietnamese cultural tradition. Movies like *Bar Girls* present a more "realistic" portrait of contemporary Vietnam, representing the dramatic changes in the country and desires of Vietnamese filmmakers to capture the urban interests of domestic/global popular audiences. Films like *Bar Girls* make up a growing movement to modernize and make profitable Vietnamese cinema in order to bring Vietnam and the Vietnamese film industry into the 21st century (Do 2006).

On one level, the film *Living in Fear* made in the mid-2000's belongs to this liberalizing, globalizing period in Vietnam as it opens up sensitive and painful issues of history that have long been ignored in the country. On another level, it is somewhat out of place in this context since it foregrounds the urban to rural movements of South Vietnamese in 1975, a historical focus that departs from the urbane, bourgeois and commercializing ethos of most other modern Vietnamese films. As a "postwar" film that was not made during the postwar period but several decades later, when Vietnamese cinema had become liberalized enough to allow such taboo stories to be told, the film's story about a South Vietnamese soldier mistreated by his communist brother-in-law after

the war broaches a rarely told experience: a story of abuse toward the South Vietnam by their communist oppressors. At another level, the film also manages to subtly implicate and indict American involvement in VN through the landmine issue, reminding audiences of America's military legacy in Vietnam, the missing element in the narration of South Vietnamese and Vietnam's postwar history.

With greater opportunity to return to the country Vietnamese diasporic cultural producers and overseas filmmakers such Tran Anh Hung (*Scent of Green Papaya)* or Tony Bui (*Three Seasons*). Such films demonstrated a flowering of cinematic production and creative renaissance about Vietnam and Vietnamese people from the diasporic perspective of former South Vietnamese refugees such as Tony Bui and Tran Anh Hung, both part of the mass refugee exodus following the Fall of Saigon to the U.S. and France respectively. Their ability to make films of superior quality owes much to the lack of political restriction placed on them in their Western countries where they live and their easy access to expensive high-quality video and film equipment as well as investment capital to produce films, all of which are often lacking in Vietnam. At the same time, their decision to make films that take place in Vietnam stems from the racism they face in the U.S. film industry and the need to tell the story of Vietnam even from a diasporic perspective. Filmmakers in Vietnam however were restricted both in their content and international exposure/trade under the socialist regime of Vietnam, especially in discussing the postwar struggles of South Vietnamese. A film like *Living in Fear,* made in Vietnam, appears an anomaly since it sympathetically depicts the postwar struggles of one South Vietnamese soldier forced to handle land mines as a living, reflecting the contradictions that arise from the ways Vietnamese national identity has been shaped

from the vestiges of war. This film I argue opens up important issues about history and memory and the challenges in reconciliation and reunification when the conditions of war persist long after war's end.

CONCLUSION

The recent rise in cultural production centered on history and memory in Vietnam has led to an explosion of works such as *Living in Fear* that are able to complicate the historical representation and teleology of this socialist nation, preventing us from easily thinking that we can forget the traces and memory of the war in a time of global capitalism and commercialism. Historical memory in present-day Vietnam is characterized by a desire to retell the postwar history of Vietnam that figures South Vietnam not as the forgotten dead but as the living material trace of the war. Vietnamization is not simply a policy for ending war but concerns the life-chances of and consequences on the South Vietnamese produced from the decisive outcome of the war. *Living in Fear* portrays the haunting effects of war in Vietnam as durable and laughable.

The film retells the history of the postwar period not simply as a moment of reconciliation between North and South or even of the end of the war itself. It instead recognizes the affective, economic and psychic effects of war that continue to create problems for families and communities. The film is neither a serious indictment of the communist regime's treatment of South Vietnam nor a historical nostalgic remembrance of the fallen South, but rather a neo-realist portrayal of the nation's conflicted political history. It brings to light the dialectical history between the communist regime of Vietnam (past and present) and the South Vietnamese side, thus posing a resistance to any form of reified national identity or history. In this current period of globalization,

when Vietnam is no longer simply a war-torn underdeveloped country steeped in poverty and trauma but a booming capitalist economy moving toward global modernity, what role does a film about the postwar period from the perspective of South Vietnam serve or play in revealing the vicissitudes of Vietnamese cultural history then and now? With Vietnam moving towards a capitalist future characterized by state-led growth and immediate concerns with industrialization, why does a film like this even matter in revealing the material trace of war that threatens to bring back the past and remind us that war still affects us today, especially given the ways a large portion of the country is still pockmarked by hidden landmines? The landmines are the perpetual reminders and manifestations of the U.S. presence in Indochina. While the film does not show any Americans, the landmines instruct us to see the American influence in Vietnam as a haunting that will never dissipate. It shows the effects of "Americanization" despite the fact that the film is told from the perspective of the failures and challenges of Vietnamization.

Living in Fear concludes with a scene where Tai's young daughter Lanh hears an unexpected explosion in the field and thinks her dad has been killed by a landmine. She runs frantically to search for him as she has done many times before but when she finds him alive and digging, he tells her "It's just someone's cow, far away, I don't know whose cow." She walks back home and runs off happily to school signaling the bright but uncertain future of the young Vietnamese who must live with the threat of death or injury while trying to receive an education. The film ends with an overhead shot of Tai digging furiously in a lush green field of vegetation that offers no cathartic conclusion or neat closure, leaving a melancholic impression of an individual deeply traumatized by the war

and who remains trapped in his psychosis and obsession with bombs, playing and even lighting the bombs to see how long he can go with his game. Such obsession shows that the human and social problems that emerged from the war--such as mental disturbance, broken family ties, political repression and economic poverty--persist in postwar life. The ending does not leave us with a quiet space for reflection on who is left behind in history and how we represent those ghosts of the past in our present times.

CHAPTER THREE: Warring Desires: Through the Looking Glass of Vietnamese American Community Art and Politics[93]

This chapter looks at the construction of South Vietnamese identity in the diaspora transitioning from the previous chapter on the sites in American mainstream society and modern Vietnam. Linking the different chapters is my ongoing investigation into representation of South Vietnamese people and how ideas about their postwar political agency and cultural subject-making are articulated. In my last chapter on the film *Living in Fear*, I looked at how South Vietnamese are represented in modern Vietnam. This chapter addresses the large population of former South Vietnam refugees who have settled in the U.S. since the end of the war. To date, there still exist few critical accounts of the Vietnamese Americans that investigate their disparate forms of political struggle and organizing (Freeman 1989, Freeman 1995, Kelly 1977, Kibria 1993).[94] A study of the political patterns of Vietnamese Americans argues that the current emphasis on "homeland politics" and anti-communist organizing shows the "lack" of incorporation and assimilation into American mainstream society (Ong and Meyer 2004). These studies do not examine the larger complexity and histories in which Vietnamese anti-communist politics is anchored but often find such politics as outside the norms of the times. My current project seeks to draw out this complexity by looking at anticommunist politics as it erupts within protests against a local art exhibit put on by Vietnamese

[93] This chapter is dedicated to the wonderful women who fill up my life. Thank you to all VAALA organizers, especially the curators. Thank you Tram Le for being a true best friend through the years; you've helped me see why community is always important. Thank you Lan Duong for being a great sister-mentor to me.

[94]The abundant sociological and anthropological literature available on Vietnamese Americans usually focus on narratives of refugee escape, resettlement and trauma and/or the ways in Vietnamese Americans have adapted or assimilated to American life and achieved the American Dream. See Freeman 1989 and Kelly 1977.

Americans in Orange County, California. Through this controversy, this chapter brings a critical analysis absent in the scholarship on the Vietnamese American community politics to critique what is means to be "Vietnamese American" today in the U.S. This chapter examines how Vietnamese Americans create meanings for themselves through art and protest and how the politics of anti-communism does not simply denote a type of "backwards" homeland politics but provides the political language for dealing with unsettled issues within the diaspora over community representation/formation, memory, national identity and political freedom.

The Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association (VAALA) planned a show titled "F.O.B. II: Art Speaks" from January 9 to 18, 2009, in Santa Ana, California featuring 50 established and emerging artists working in different artistic media.[95] This show attracted much local media attention and ire from the more "conservative" sectors of the local Vietnamese American community who found some of the artworks not only communist-inspired but also slanderous toward South Vietnam and the older generation. In analyzing a public controversy, that attracted hundreds of protestors and eventually shut down the exhibit, I show Vietnamese American struggles to define their political and cultural identity through anti-communism is not only about postwar "trauma." This is a reductive argument that does not get at the dynamics and (re)imaginings of the community in the current day or acknowledge how the politics of anticommunism—political movements forged by refugee/exile communities such as Vietnamese and Cuban Americans in fighting communism as a means of challenging the repressive countries

[95] F.O.B. is a derogatory term that is short for "Fresh off the Boat" that usually refers to Asians, especially Southeast Asian refugees.

they left—serves as a reaction by many Vietnamese Americans to the ongoing Vietnamization and historical construction that produce them as subjects whose desires for freedom remain arrested. In this FOB II event, the politics of war converged with the conflict over artistic representations and how to recognize South Vietnamese diasporic identity within shifting cultural meanings. While some of the artworks in FOB II were perceived as provocative, it is important to understand that art does not simply produce political conflict; rather artistic productions and the ways they are interpreted are filtered through certain historical conditions, cultural ideologies and popular vernaculars of understanding that delimit what constitutes "art," especially in ethnic communities who must bear the burden of trying to represent themselves and their political struggles outside of given cultural stereotypes of what those communities signify (Mercer 1990, Dominguez 1998). The FOB II incident is not simply about anti-communist "censorship" as reported often by local U.S. media sources covering the story but people trying to deal with the legacy of war and fighting over the best way to bring South Vietnamese into the realm of freedom.

Through this conflict, I recognize art forms as cultural and ideological forms reflecting not simply a struggle about the past but the present. Art designates the symbolic grounds for Vietnamese American aesthetic articulations for freedom of expression, where the production of art is heavily connected to activism and cultural politics in the community. The FOB II controversy revolves around Vietnamese American protesters who disagreed with VAALA's art exhibit calling it communist propaganda. While the public controversy brought up other issues like gender and generational issues, I analyze the main piece of artwork that incited the protest and read

public statements made by the curators to get at the more subtle meanings of history and memory conveyed or not conveyed in the event. In so doing I seek to ask, how does art speak to present community divisions not defined simply by "generation gaps" (Collet and Selden 2003) and South Vietnamese nationalism but heterogeneous expressions and questions of Vietnamese American identity and historicity today?

This chapter is interested in the arts as a creative vehicle for engaging anti-communist politics. Vietnamese Americans in particular have gained much attention in the U.S. in the past for protesting anything that displays communist symbols. One major event is the 1999 Hi-Tek controversy in Westminster, California that drew 10,000 people in protest against a shopkeeper who displayed a poster of Ho Chi Minh in front of his video store to exercise his freedom of speech but was eventually forced to shut down his business. The Hi-Tek incident demonstrates the furor of anti-communist sentiment in the community over public images and artistic symbols but also generational conflicts and misinterpretations of cultural texts. In 2004, for instance, VAX-TV (Vietnamese American Xposure), a new television station for younger Vietnamese American was launched but quickly shut down by protestors. VAX aired an episode segment and documentary called "Saigon USA" based on the events of the 1999 anti-communist protest in Westminster, CA over the Hi-Tek incident which *necessarily* required reproducing the image that incited the protest but this still upset many to see the image of Ho Chi Minh on television. Protestors assembled outside the television station and made the owner pull the show. The incident not only shows the conflicts that often arise between the younger and older generations but the reaction to anything that appears smack of "communism" in the community. This is significant in showing the difficulties

of resolving the question of political freedom and liberation from the history of the war for many South Vietnamese.

Following in this local tradition of cultural production and protest, The "FOB II: Art Speaks" show sponsored by the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association (VAALA) turned into a firestorm in the local Vietnamese community in Orange Country, attracting hundreds of protestors because it featured artworks that replicated the image of Ho Chi Minh and the communist flag of present-day Vietnam.[96] Anti-communist protests of a large scale are able to happen here because of the size of the Vietnamese population living here, the largest outside of Vietnam itself (Do 1999). The FOB II controversy is fitting for understanding postwar Vietnamese cultural politics moreover since Orange County, California is also the hub of Vietnamese diasporic entertainment and media and the cultural productions made in this locale and the anti-communist politics that emerges from it often attempt to speak for and represent all Vietnamese in the diaspora. The "Little Saigon" community in Orange County where FOB II takes place is thus important because it represents the symbolic center of the many overseas South Vietnamese communities that fled Vietnam after the war. Anticommunism in the FOB II show is not simply about "homeland politics" or the trauma of war but about

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[96] For instance, many singers from Vietnam that come over to the U.S. to perform are often protested and seen as ambassadors of the socialist regime in Vietnam. Moreover, resettled Vietnamese American singers from the U.S. such as Khanh Ha, Elvis Phuong and many others who try to hold concerts in Vietnam have been labeled as pro-communist supporters for going back. Most recently, a protest was made against Dam Vinh Hung What seemed to be a tender moment during Vietnamese pop star Dam Vinh Hung's who was pepper strayed in the eye on stage by an anti-communist activist dressed as a woman at a July 2010 concert in the Santa Clara Convention Center. The person turned out to be U.S. citizen "freedom fighter" Ly Tong who is responsible for vandalizing the FOB II exhibit artworks by Brian Doan and Steven Toly. See for article on the pepper spraying incident. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/21/dam-vinh-hung-vietnamese_n_654775.html

competing cultural representations and who is authorized to speak for overseas South Vietnamese communities. Although the exhibit's organizers wanted to be sensitive toward the community, they also wanted to bridge the gap between the first and second generation of Vietnamese Americans to redraw the "line between free expression and traitorous behavior" (Tran 2009). This redrawing of social boundaries was not meant to be construed as another political battle line, yet in the U.S. mainstream news the "F.O.B II" was presented as a "test to the community" as one article in the *LA Times* put it, questioning whether the community is ready to respect American freedom (Tran 2009). The Vietnamese local media mistranslated this to mean that VAALA was trying to directly mount a challenge to the community and seeking confrontation, even though the exhibit sought to facilitate a public dialogue about serious issues "that are not easily recorded or do not make good news events" (L. N. Le, 2009 quoted in Le 2010). Where efforts for dialogue come from a younger cohort of scholars, artists and activists seeking to confront anti-communist ideology and an older generation through a more progressive politics, the show is part of VAALA ongoing effort to reshape not only Vietnamese American identity broadly but also what it means to be South Vietnamese.

VAALA: AN ARTS ORGANIZATION FOR THE COMMUNITY

> Can they [younger generations] do this away from the shadows of those mostly coming from the 1st generation with their strong views of what constitutes history and memory? Will the term 'community' ever be seen broadly by the people as holding multiple voices versus only one voice and one ideal?
>
> Caroline Kieu-Linh Valverde (2009)[97]

[97] http://loungemonkey.blogspot.com/2009/01/if-art-speaks-it-can-also-be-silenced.html

VAALA is an arts advocacy organization based in Orange County comprised mostly of 1.5 and 2nd generation Vietnamese Americans with the goal of fostering social change. As one of the most prominent non-profit organizations in the community, it has fostered cultural exchange and development within the Vietnamese American community since its founding in 1991, presenting creative and educational programs that explore Vietnamese culture in various forms such as free children's art classes, book fairs, public lectures, musical concerts and the Vietnamese International Film Festival. Unlike other Vietnamese American arts-advocacy groups that tend to focus on more classic forms of art, VAALA showcases the creative contributions and emergent voices of 1.5 and second-generation youth, women and queer people. An organization at the forefront of pushing cultural work as a powerful means for redefining ideas of Vietnamese American identity and culture, VAALA is considered one of the more progressive community-based organizations. The organization's core mission seeks to promote and utilize the arts as an educational tool for exploring the Vietnamese experience with a focus on the diaspora, providing a space for artists and non-artists to "advocate inclusiveness by utilizing the arts to transcend boundaries both within the community and globally."[98]

While the organization does not shy away from controversial political issues, FOB II is one of the few events that VAALA sponsors where community and identity *politics* is centrally fronted, one which curators hoped to push the social boundaries of the community. The decision to hold a FOB II exhibit came from the curators Tram Le and Lan Duong who are also board members of VAALA. The inspiration for the FOB II exhibit begins with the foot spa controversy which occurred two years before, involving a

[98] http://www.vaala.org/history-mission.php

graduate student and former immigrant who painted a foot spa yellow with three bright red stripes reflecting the South Vietnamese flag. Displayed in art exhibitions in Santa Ana and other cities, the artist had hoped to construct an art piece that honors the achievements of her mother-in-law who for many years labored in a nail salon to put the young woman and other family members through college. Certain community members living in these "Little Saigon" districts perceived it as a mocking reference to the South Vietnamese flag (since the foot is the dirtiest part of the human body according to Vietnamese custom) and branded it communist propaganda in its insult of the community.[99] Photos of the artwork were published and showcased in *Nguoi Viet*, a Vietnamese American local newspaper, and two editors were fired after public protests erupted over the photos.

While many commentators recognized the incident as a touchy instance over symbolic appropriations of the South Vietnam flag, there was a gendered and age dimension that was not discussed much, such as the fact that the artist was a young woman whose work and artistic ability was questioned.[100] The fallout of the foot spa incident inspired some VAALA organizers to try to develop and push for new vocabularies for articulating the fraught postwar identity of Vietnamese America.

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[99]The artist was Huynh Thuy Chau and pictures of her work were published in Nguoi Viet newspaper on the Spring 2008, page 194. Street protests erupted and the paper apologized to the public and eventually firing two top editors who sympathized and understood the artist's intention of showing sacrifice not sacrilege for the Vietnamese people.

[100] Foot spas are part of the service profession and industry of pedicures and personal caretaking (for primarily female customers) and the imposition of the flag's almost hints to the reliance of female labor and bodies to enunciate and ground the nation in its postwar political economies. A great number of Vietnamese American refugees and migrants of lesser means entered this booming ethnic niche economy which manages racialized and "refeminize" those working in it this form of skilled labor. If Vietnamese refugees were first feminized as helpless, passive victims needing American assistance, the footbath artwork and profession connects us to the new feminizing meanings of nation, class and community as connected not only to the history of war but also present-day social conditions of Vietnamese living in the U.S. and the politics of dealing with these conditions.

The foot spa controversy demanded alternative interpretations of community, art and politics that did not limit or restrict freedom of expression. As an organized response to the foot spa incident, the FOB II show was conceived to critique and break through the ideological cleavages of the community through the power of art and more open lines of communication. "We felt this prevailing fear around the Vietnamese community after the foot bath incident," commented Tram Le, one of the two curators, "I felt the community was on this slippery slope, that we were not progressing toward having open dialogue and being more tolerant of different political viewpoints" (Tran 2009). FOB II curators put out a public call to artists for participation and chose artworks that would re-imagine the community's sense of national and cultural identity as well as offering a look into how we might imagine its future. Yet, the anti-communist politics that animated the foot spa incident would also embroil the FOB II exhibit and spark further controversy over who can "honor" and interpret the meaning of the South Vietnamese nation in exile.

The FOB II show turned into a major controversy due to the inclusion of certain pieces that depicted the image of Ho Chi Minh, the communist Vietnamese flag as well as artistic reinterpretations of the South Vietnamese flag in ways that many deemed highly disrespectful.[101] At a basic level, FOB II exposes the ongoing contestations that happens within Vietnamese diaspora, more specifically the opposition faced by VAALA's organizers who are primarily younger women educated in the U.S. from mostly older male South Vietnamese military veterans incensed by some of the works

[101] That is, flag aren't just the interface between those who see freedom and those who restrict freedom, While the North Vietnam flag displays the current Peoples Republic of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese flag is a visible signifier of absence, the historical absence of Vietnamese people in U.S. narratives of Vietnam War, the spatial absence of displaced peoples, the material absence of a geopolitical entity that no longer exists. Given the erasure of South Vietnam in their mind, groups in Orange County seek to bring back the nation through policing the ways the flag is used (e.g., cultural holidays) and censored.

displayed in the exhibit. Many of these veterans fought and sacrificed their lives to protect the lost and defeated nation of South Vietnam and bear a dying hatred for anything related to communism. In this contestation I argue that the bodies of women and the icons of the Vietnamese nation such as flags act as the grounds for anti-communist politics that in turn reveal the efforts to anchor post-war feelings of communal displacement grounded upon patriarchal understandings of Vietnamese diasporic nationalism. Following feminist scholars like Gayatri Gopinath (2005), I recognize that diasporic nationalist discourses are gendered because diaspora is often wedged to filial ideas of the woman as an "unsullied sexual being," enshrined as affective figurations of "home," nation and the domestic reproduction of cultural identity for displaced and transplanted groups (15).[102] In the Vietnamese American community, anti-communist politics is a way of policing the borders of the diasporic nation within gender and familial norms.

Vietnamese American artistic production remains a politicized enterprise within the community that comes out of the history of the Vietnam War. Võ (2009) writes,

> The Vietnamese suffered from foreign invasions, the civil war, and the aftermath of the war, all of which created internal chasms within families and within the nation, and the struggles to survive escape and re-create their lives left deep scars. Not surprisingly, these divisions will continue to politicize the first generation, but will also affect the younger generation, even those who want to avoid anything 'political' and to establish their own agenda (97-98).

[102]This cultural hegemony and monopoly has much to do with the fact that the Vietnam-American War destroyed much of the media industry in Vietnam and those residing in western countries were able to access more advanced communication and creative technologies. With over 350,000 Vietnamese Americans living in this area, it is the largest concentration of Vietnamese persons (mostly from South Viet Nam) outside of Viet Nam itself, many of these refugees leading the international fight in challenging and hopefully bringing down the Socialist Vietnamese government in Viet Nam. This comparative advantage has made the influence of overseas Vietnamese (who are staunchly anticommunist) disproportionate to their actual numbers.

For Vietnamese Americans who fled their country after the war, their political efforts to keep alive this memory of war and the nation remain wedded to an anti-communist project that often include street protests against works related to communism, voting for politicians that prop up anticommunist ideology and boycotting any singers or artists deemed complicit with the socialist regime of Vietnam.[103] For many older Vietnamese refugees, there is a sense of urgency and need to protect the community from communist influences. Any form of art or representation that dares to challenge the anti-communist ideology is then considered a betrayal of the Vietnamese American community and South Vietnamese diasporic communities worldwide. For the younger generation, there is a need to challenge this form of politics without dismissing it and the older generation. FOB II thus became another staging ground for connecting art and activism, presenting artists who are willing to play with the images (and ideas) of the Vietnamese family, the nation, the flag and the refugee experience that invited a heated response.

My goal in this chapter is not to provide a study of Vietnamese American anti-communist politics but locate and situate a political moment to elucidate the intra-community ideologies and struggles which anti-communist protests bring to light. Alongside illuminating what appears to be a "generation divide," I highlight how gender makes and marks a "difference" in the cultural reproduction of the community by enabling and propagating certain nationalist politics based on ideas of Vietnamese

[103]FOB II is therefore linked to a longer genealogy art and activism in Vietnamese community that began in the late 1990's when a new generation of artists and youth started to articulate their own postwar identities and subjectivities. In the San Jose Museum of Art (1993, 2000) over the displayed portrait of Ho Chi Minh in the infamous Hi-tek Video Store incident of 1999, the closing of VAX (MTV-style program for Viet-American youth) and the "Foot Spa Incident" at the very first VAALA exhibit (FOB I) in Orange County concerning one artist's use of the South Vietnamese flag's design to honor her family and many other Vietnamese success in the pedicure business.

"tradition" to dislodge the restricted boundaries of diasporic community formation. In this context, the FOB II exhibit pushed this tradition by challenging its artists (and detractors) to consider Vietnamese American postwar identity formation outside a conservative anti-communist framework that had for a long time been the basis of South Vietnamese nationalism and political organizing since 1975, when the first massive wave of refugees first came over to the U.S from Saigon. The FOB II controversy exposes the sacralization of community as inextricably tied to a hatred of communism as a precarious political project based on the unchallenged gendered assumptions about the nation that put the voices of women, youth and other groups outside hetero-normative conceptions of the Vietnamese American community (Lieu 2002, Nguyen 2005).

FOB II: A SHOW FOR A NEW PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL VISION

Insofar as the show's name supplied a type of subversive spoof and re-appropriation of a historically derogatory term often used for new Vietnamese immigrants/refugees, F.O.B. which stands for "Fresh Off the Boat" was meant to challenge one-dimensional stereotypes and popular images of Vietnamese people to show the challenges of representing the community-in-transition, haunted even now by their past construction as dirty, unwanted foreigners. From filmmakers to poets to sculptors to actors, individuals of diverse backgrounds came together for the FOB II show with the purpose of refashioning and reformulating the way community discourse and cultural politics is practiced and considered. The show's artists and organizers wanted a productive discourse and conversation about what it means to be Vietnamese today but were instead met with a public campaign to get their show shut down. Tainted by boycotts, vandalism and even physical threats, the local controversy surrounding the

show epitomizes an unresolved divide between those seeking to redefine traditional gendered understandings of nation against the more entrenched anticommunist ideologies that has dominated the cultural and identity politics of Vietnamese American communities in the past few past decades (Dang 2005, Aguilar-San Juan 2009).

While the "FOB I: A Multi-Art Show" six years earlier was not seen as controversial (as the purpose of the show was not meant to be political but to display the multiple forms of cultural art produced by Vietnamese Americans), FOB II was created in 2009 soon after the foot spa incident as a public response to the foot spa controversy. FOB I was organized not simply as an act of solidarity with the foot spa artist (who would also be included in the FOB II exhibit) but forge some type of public conversation that was lacking in the community.[104] Co-curators Lan Duong and Tram Le (2008) state the show's purpose in the official press release statement from VAALA as such,

> In light of recent events regarding the silencing of dissent in the community and in the country, we want to promote a diversity of voices within the art community in Viet Nam and abroad. We believe that art must speak to times of political turmoil. With this exhibit, we pose the following questions: how do we define ourselves as a community today, and how will we define ourselves as a community tomorrow? As artists, how do you express yourself through art without constraint?

The curators are both 1.5 generation Vietnamese Americans born in Vietnam and immigrated to the United States at an early age. They see their role as bridging the gap between the first generation, many of whom lived through the war, and the next generation, who may not understand the experiences of their parents. What these incidents show is that for many Vietnamese in the diaspora the war never fully ended.

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[104] FOB I was held in a building owned by *Nguoi Viet* Magazine but controversy since the foot spa incident has created turnaround by *Nguoi Viet* which helped organize anti-VAALA protestors in the FOB II protest.

Rather, its many proliferating legacies and phantoms continue to haunt the ways their community politics structured, and thus we need to recognize that a nostalgic sense of memory and history of Vietnamese masks the complicated forms of wars that take shape today. Where the discourse of anti-communism serves as a post-war fight against communism and demonstrates how the legacy of the Vietnam War is never finished, I believe cultural production and politics serve as a unique intersection for negotiating the often reductive idea of communities traumatized by war and reduced to anachronistic politics of (anti)communism. In this essay, I recognize that Vietnamese American politics concern thus not only communist issues or war but a gendered cultural politics over who is allowed to speak for and represent the community and that certain displays of "art" and creative expression tap into people's deepest emotions and register powerful sentiments if they invoke symbols that have been associated with the nation.

This exhibition turned into a public forum for community members and artists to share their own stories through their artwork alongside a musical play, spoken word and other live performances. Indeed, F.O.B. II: Art Speaks is VAALA's biggest multi-art exhibition since it incorporated all media of visual and performing arts presented by the Vietnamese diaspora. This 10-day event is organized by the Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association (VAALA), a community-based non-profit organization that has organized numerous cultural events, including symposia, exhibits, film screenings, concerts, and the Vietnamese International Film Festival (ViFF). At the outset, FOB II expected some negative reaction from the larger Vietnamese American community over its explicit uses of provocative art pieces, especially those with flags. Featuring fifty artists from the community, both amateur and professional, from a range of personal

backgrounds, mostly younger folks but also including some older ones, the exhibit features everything from installations to poetry to sculpture. Participants were selected based on whether their artwork could, as one newspaper headline wrote, "put politics on display" (Tran 2009). A special black room was created for the most controversial works, including some banned art from Vietnam to show censorship from many sides.[105]

The FOB II exhibit ignited a firestorm in the local Vietnamese community, particularly from media and veteran groups. Dozens of protestors consistently picketed outside the building where the exhibit was held. Two Vietnamese veteran organizations spearheaded a massive rally against the FOB II that included a massive protest of 700 people with protestors focusing attention on artists like Brian Doan whose artwork featured the communist flag of Vietnam today (a red flag with one golden star) and an image of Ho Chi Minh with signs that said "VAALA stabs the Vietnamese in the back" or "VAALA does not speak for us." Recognizing community-based artwork as a polyvocal site of desire and interests, I look at Doan's artwork and why it incited so much controversy. In doing so, I see cultural production as exposing the inventive and ideological differences that come to define how the diasporic nation is signified. Vietnamization in this context reflects "post-war" issues of diaspora and exilic national family and the ways in which anti-communism produce a type of politics of representation over who has legitimate authority to speak for the community. Where the

[105] As part of the political intent of the show, the curators created a sideshow of art that was banned in Vietnam featuring audio recordings and writings by dissidents from Vietnam. "I wanted to make the connections with Vietnamese artists that have been banned in Vietnam and this kind of repression that we face here in terms of voicing political opinions," Lan Duong said. "The forms of censorship are not equivalent, but they are similar." The exhibition is divided into five rooms, with the themes of identity politics, reconstructed memories, contemporary politics, sex and the body, and time and space. The exhibit also features a "Black Room," which has highly sensitive political materials included those most protested. "Vietnamese art exhibit puts politics on display," See ran 2009.

problem is not just about representation but articulation, I look at how the FOB II show opened up questions about not only who could interpret not art but represent Vietnamese American cultural identity and the community.

While the protest seemed to revolve around the collision between artistic control and freedom in the community, I believe it was essentially about the conflicting gendered and cultural norms through which ideas of the nation are perpetuated, one where images of women and national flags provide symbolic *content* and efficacy to the ideology of Vietnamese anti-communist politics today. At the center of the mass protests over FOB II was a photograph featuring a girl wearing a T-shirt with the design of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, an image many people considered communist propaganda. This piece opened up struggles over how to interpret the work and reveals the ways in which Vietnamese cultural politics is centrally pivoted around not only communism but the role of women in nationalistic understandings of Vietnamese American identity where women's bodies are inextricably tied to the iconography of the flag (as a metonym of the nation). However rather than rehash the idea of ethnic communities as patriarchal and sexist, I read the controversy over FOB II show as a struggle over meaning in the community, born out the desires of some to reconceptualize the identity of Vietnamese peoples and the South Vietnamese nation.[106]

THE U.S. NEWS MEDIA: ANTICOMMUNISM AS A VIETNAMESE ISSUE

[106] Just as Cuban American anticommunist conservative politics in Miami is not simply about the political and structural conditions of "exile" and their hatred of the Castro regime but the current-day social and material conditions that defined the community (class, race) and their "post-war" diasporic identity, Vietnamese American anticommunist politics in Orange County is not a provincial site for understanding the general condition of postwar (generational conflict) but a site of articulation, conflicts there because of the differences in articulating identity and the nation.

Just as they did in FOB I, VAALA organizers wanted the FOB II to deconstruct the broader U.S. discourse and construction of Vietnamese as docile refugees without political agency. While the United States seems to have "moved on" with the Vietnam War and the politics of communism in many ways, Vietnamese Americans continue to live with the trace of the war and history; this legacy has been used as means of essentializing Vietnamese political desires for engaging their history and issues of freedom. For instance, the *OC Weekly* and *Los Angeles Times* newspapers, two major U.S. news sources in the Southern California region that covered the issue, framed the entire FOB II protest as concerning the internal problems and identity crisis of the Vietnamese American community attributable to their war history, something which the community cannot seem to get past. Told from the dominant perspective of neutrality and objectivity, the distanced gaze of these non-Vietnamese news sources toward the Vietnamese American community ignored the complex history of refugees in the country and why anti-communism is so hotly contested. Instead of a postwar "trauma" derived from the Cold War, this history is based in part on the fact that most of the early refugees that fled South Vietnam in 1975 found sponsorship for resettlement in the U.S. because of their close affiliations with the U.S. government. Moreover, political prisoners who later fled the communist regime continues to bring back the injustices of the war as a reminder of the effects of Vietnamization and the U.S. abandonment of its allies.

A *Los Angeles Time* editorial insinuated that Vietnamese Americans' hatred for communism prevented them from honoring and respecting U.S. cultural values and free speech, reiterating the American Dream narrative with the U.S. as the land of the free and Vietnamese immigrants/refugees as politically conservative backwards people (with little

mention of the imbricated history of U.S. influence in Vietnam). The article suggests that eventually "time" will allow these people to see the "light" and wrongs of *their* present politics and actions: "What are some of the signs that an immigrant community has successfully blended into mainstream society?" and cites the Vietnamese Americans as assimilated immigrants with educated children, good jobs and political engagement. All these things make them assimilated except for their lack of respect for the freedom of expression regarding anything related to communism:

> I've even argued in the past that we should cut some slack for the people especially pained by the war years. Yes, they have over-the-top reactions to all things communist -- reactions that don't conform to American traditions of political freedom of expression -- but it's too glib to tell them to forget the past and get on with things… This lingering hang-up in Little Saigon no doubt will be worked out among Vietnamese Americans. I suspect that time, more than anything else, will resolve things. But they shouldn't delude themselves: People who would smite the artists and free-speechers have to know they aren't writing an especially appealing chapter in the ongoing American story (Parsons 2009).

In the mainstream U.S. news media, stories of political conflict in urban immigrant communities are reduced to "intra-ethnic tensions or 'assimilation problems" which fail to expose larger institutional and historical structures of racism responsible for engendering the type of politics that emerges from particular ethnic communities (Saito 1998, Cohen 1999). Rendering the FOB II protests in a derogatory manner, the LA Times reporter asked in a patronizing way, "Is this any way to assimilate?" The U.S. mainstream media portrayed the FOB II conflict as an anachronistic and agonistic struggle between anticommunist conservatism and U.S. democracy, between communal repression and liberal ideas of artistic personal expression, between an assimilated second generation and an aging traumatized first generation—a reduction that fails to see the

complexities within the community. Such distorted media coverage illuminates the process I have been trying to describe as "Vietnamization" and the enduring burdens of the South Vietnamese to emerge as empowered political subjects and "agents of freedom" in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Constructing this protest as an internal or local problem of Vietnamese Americans "to be worked out" among them that will then let them "get on with things" discounts the broader socio-historical context to which such cultural politics speak and elucidate.

At a time when Cold War struggles against communism are displaced by the global war against terrorism, the anticommunist politics of Vietnamese Americans appear outdated or disjointed from the current milieu, fighting over a passé issue that seems to come from a bygone time or forgotten history. I believe that the provocative actions of the VietAm artists to bring forth a challenge to this communist politics is not simply an attack on the older generation but constitutes a part of a larger effort to bring the "absent presence" of Vietnamese Americans within the U.S. body politics and cultural imaginary. They expose the common assumption that people of color are always fighting, a rearticulation of Vietnamization that ignores the *intersubjective* nature of Vietnamese diasporic subject-making in the present. Richard Chang (2009) from the *Orange County Register*, the main reporter covering the FOB II story, did not look favorably on the protestors, saying,

> While I've written some stories about Vietnamese protests in the past, I don't know the whole history behind the protesters and their concerns. Yet, it seems like they have a lot of power if they can shut down an art exhibit that featured a lot of different kinds of work, much of it non-political, plus get two editors at a local paper fired [the foot bath issue years earlier]. I thought the United States was a place where freedom of speech and expression are protected by the Constitution. But apparently,

those rights are not fully protected or respected in certain communities here. The U.S. news media was biased in its reporting, tending to favor and side with the VAALA organizers, indeed reporting their organizational motives, leaving the intent of the protestors in vague terms, often interviewing random protest attendees rather than protest organizers. SBTN, the major television network of the local Viet community and *Nguoi Viet* newspaper covered most of the activities happening on the protest side and helped organize protestors. For instance, it was SBTN that reported that an emergency meeting was held three days after FOB II opened. An American political blog entry entitled "Van Tran is no hero, but Brian Doan is" deifies the artist at the center of the controversy while calling the anticommunist Vietnamese Americans who protested Doan and VAALA as "rabid protestors," stating that "it is ironic that the same folks in the O.C. Vietnamese community who scream about freedom also practice terrorism."[107] This glib reference to terrorism puts down the older generation, once again ignoring the specific historical experiences of those who survived the Vietnam War but managing to call the legacy of the war into the post-9/11 moment, when the specter of Vietnam returns to help Americans interpret the war on terror. In this situation, however, the hegemonic language of the post-9/11 period—calling anything antithetical to the American political order a terrorist practice—is utilized to explain the poorly understood freedom struggles of the Vietnamese in the U.S.

Challenging the coverage of the U.S. mainstream news media, I contest the simplistic manner ethnic communities in the United States and their "homeland politics"

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[107] See http://www.orangejuiceblog.com/2009/02/van-tran-is-no-hero-but-brian-doan-is/ Accessed April 30, 2011.

are depicted in terms of holding onto their past, as immigrants who simply can't get along or relinquish their foreign culture and identities. Anticommunist politics expand upon what Furuya and Collet (2009) define "Saigon Nationalism" as an "ideological movement to identify, articulate, institutionalize and enforce the symbols and history of the Vietnamese diaspora" through events, artifacts, and ideas that rally around the Communist Party in Viet Nam but more recently around the idea of Little Saigon (191). Furuya and Collet are too quick to reduce the anticommunist issue to nationalism since the question of the 'nation' for the South Vietnamese is not just about socialist Vietnam, the former South Vietnam or Little Saigon but also contestations around U.S. nationalism and its imperial histories in Asia. Anti-communist politics bring to light complicated ideas about nation and community vis-à-vis the U.S. Rather than reading Vietnamese refugee communities as nationalistic or ideologically-bound, I believe the forms of disagreement and conflict that erupt in the community are part of a Vietnamized sense of postwar struggle over issues of freedom related to U.S. hegemony that in turn reflects how Vietnamese diasporic communities are unable to fully articulate and identify a common set of ideological values or desires in a nation that was short-lived, set up for failure by the United States and basically consigned to a "death warrant" under Vietnamization (Wiest 2008: 276). Given this context, how might the issue of "Vietnamese anticommunism" be read outside of nationalist ideology or desires for the nation?

While scholars and others might see this controversy as an intra-generational conflict (one that rehashes the trope of immigrant communities having problems in assimilating to U.S. society), I see it disentangling and unraveling the hetero-familial

binds that have shaped postwar discourses and affective sentiments about "community" in ways that complicate our understanding of the postwar cultural formation of Vietnamese American community. Where anti-communist controversies like the FOB II incident seem to suggest that Vietnamese did not "move on" from the war, forever embroiled in war issues or unresolved hatred for communists, exiled and defeated victims of history, I read this controversy as another instance of Vietnamization to understand that Vietnamese/American desires in the diaspora are nestled in the ongoing legacy and complications of the Vietnam War whose meanings are continually fought out within local communities. The FOB II protest is not about anti-communist conservatism vs. artistic freedom since this buys into a narrative of postwar Vietnamese repression/trauma as well as U.S. liberal democracy. A much richer critique of the FOB II incident sees that the U.S. news media refuses to see the FOB II incident as more than about communism and art but also changing ideas of family and community relations, nation(alism), refugee histories and ethnic identity.[108] In this next section, I provide an analysis of the most controversial work of art included in the FOB II exhibit, highlighting the cultural production of community art as an important prism for apprehending the shifting politics and representative voices of the community.

THE 'STAR' OF THE SHOW: BRIAN DOAN AND THE GIRL IN THE PHOTO

At the center of the FOB II controversy was Vietnamese American photographer Brian Doan's whose artwork focuses on themes of longing, identity and desire within contemporary Viet Nam and the diaspora. Doan's most controversial photograph (see

[108] Outside such critiques, it seems as if Vietnamese Americans are playing bad politics but "bad" politics does not happen because you happen to be Vietnamese but is symptomatic of the fact that you are a Vietnamese American in the U.S. trying to figure your place in a country that only sees you as a bunch of refugees engaged in backward-looking conservative politics.

Figure 1) provides subjective space and room for numerous interpretations of meaning but also captures the historical representation of Vietnamese people in the present as connected to the dark past. Doan explained the meaning of his piece in this way: "My work expresses the spiritual essence of the Vietnamese people, to address what it means to be Vietnamese at this time in history."[109] His notion of Vietnamese people as having a spiritual essence appears to adopt an essentialist argument that requires us to always be attentive to the problematic ways artists see their community in sometimes colored, romantic terms. At the same time, his artwork invites critiques of modern social alienation and globalization that reveal more than the fantasy that Vietnamese people as having a common spiritual essence.

Figure 3: Brian Doan *Avon, MA 2006/ Thu Duc, VN 2008*

Doan's focus on what it means to be Vietnamese in the historical *present* is most evident in this piece Avon, MA/Thu Duc, VN. As a diptych or two images juxtaposed to each other, the photographic work provides a transnational and gendered description of what it means to be Vietnamese today in their spatial de-territorialization, displacement and

[109] Official artist Statement from *FOB II: Art Speaks* Catalogue published by VAALA.

disaffection since the war. Here is how this photographic piece is described by FOB II in the official curatorial statement in the following manner:

> Doan juxtaposes two figures that represent the different paths that people took in the aftermath of the Vietnam/American War. "Avon, Massachusetts 2006" explores the alienation and deep sense of loss and pain that Vietnamese Americans faced in being displaced from Vietnam to the US, and the struggles that they had to endure to create a new life for themselves. "Thu Duc 2008" brings up the relevance of communist ideology in contemporary Vietnamese society, which is driven by consumerism and an internationally fused pop culture (Võ 2009).

Doan's piece distills Vietnamese life in two parts of the world—Avon, Massachusetts and Thu Duc, Vietnam—portraying the people who occupy those different lifeworlds in stark colorful contrast. The Vietnamese in Vietnam are depicted through an unknown woman, peaceful and calm, who is sitting in a simply decorated room surrounded by signifiers of modern Vietnam such as a cell phone and a T-shirt design replicating the flag of Vietnam, all suggesting the alienating effects of mass consumerism. On the left, Vietnamese Americans are symbolized in a professionally dressed man alienated in the dark wilderness of an unknown territory and place which seems to evoke a type of natural enclosure or setting that is ominous in that it presents the United States as a middle-class but foreboding, untamed place (the U.S. is somehow not seen as hyper-commercialized). This juxtaposition demonstrates how the postwar lives of Vietnamese in the U.S. and Vietnam are linked through a common desire for peace and political freedom, mobile and free of spatial constrains. The dissonance of the images tells us Vietnam is bright, feminine and domestic, serenely waiting for *something* that remains unsaid and unfulfilled, and Vietnamese Americans as successful immigrants now fitted in business-

attire forever foraging for something else to capture and cage in the unknown frontiers of the United States.

The controversial portion of the piece that many found troubling features a young woman wearing a shirt made of the colors and design of the official flag of Viet Nam (a shirt design that has become a touristic commodity), featuring the singular yellow star with a solid red background. She is looking out into a window while sitting placidly next to a gold bust of Ho Chi Minh. If one were interpreting it purely from perspective that the artwork promotes communism, the girl seems to be "comfortable" and at peace with her situation in Vietnam; enjoying the life given to her by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese socialist state. Seen in this way, this portrait represents an avowal and facile acceptance of communism. From another perspective, however, the girl's longing gaze toward the light coming from her window presents a wish or secret desire to leave her captive, immobilized life in Vietnam. The photograph's meaning is complex enough to contain and elicit both interpretations. In purely aesthetic terms, the picture is meant to evoke a type of realism that is at the same time evocative of a type of expressive dreamscape where the girl serve as a blank slate for our torn ideas about desire and freedom. The girl's youth (and a cell phone sitting nearby on a table) reveals a photographic subject that is removed from both war and the memory of Ho Chi Minh. She is the youthful face of the Vietnam's uncertain future as seen from the ambivalent, diasporic eyes of Brian Doan.

The young girl's placid demeanor seems to invite people to wonder what exactly "she" wants (as a projection of what *we* want to see through her). Brian Doan says his photo is a commentary on fashion, pop culture and disaffection in contemporary

Vietnam. Yet, when faced with opposition to his work, Doan described his nuanced piece in more explicit terms in news interviews. “She lives in the communist country, but look at her,” he says, “She’s looking away, dreaming. She wants to escape Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh is next to her, but communism is no longer in her. She wants to dream of other things” (Chang 2009). Doan never specifies what these other things are. Controversy exploded over the use of a flag belonging to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that constitutes the design of the shirt the female figure is wearing.[110] This section of the photographic image elicited a passionate response from people who saw a flag as an inappropriate public display of communism. Many claimed that Doan is trying to promote propaganda for the socialist government in Vietnam. Brian Doan who was born in Vietnam and jailed in Vietnam a couple of times for trying to escape Vietnam grew up in Orange County responded by saying, "It's not my intent to do anything to make the community upset.” His father, a high ranking official in South Vietnam, came out publicly to denounce his son in Vietnamese newspapers and even stopped speaking to Brian while Brian’s sister, a painter herself, defended her brother, saying he is simply an artist who is not trying to hurt anyone. Such familial tensions are symptomatic of the Vietnamese American community’s own difficulty in reconciling the family “tightrope” and issues that emerge from the postwar lives of Vietnamese Americans (Kibria 1993).

At a lecture that happened after FOB II show that featured the same controversial photograph, Brian stated his opinions regarding freedom of expression: “I don’t believe

[110] Other artists in the collection sought to be even more blatant in their provocation of the flag. One artist for instance built an interactive installation where individuals could choose or design their own national flag, an obviously political project that focuses on personal “choice” and interpretation that flies in the face of national flags and their forced terms of symbolic identification. Yet, somehow these artists weren’t targeted as much I believe because of the ambiguity of their artistic message. The interactive and perhaps overly interpretative nature of the piece did not elicit a strong reaction as others in the show.

in any country…I don't believe in any religions. We should be free."[111] Brian Doan was six years old when Saigon fell in 1975 and his father, a South Vietnamese intelligence officer, was put in a communist prison camp and it was not until 10 years later when the family was reunited.[112] His belief in creative and political freedom pivots not around what communism means for Vietnamese Americans but conversely what "freedom" means for them. Tram Le, one of the show's two main curators, said Doan's work cannot be read solely as communist. She writes "Actually, it's a critique of communism" she suggests, highlighting an anti-communist critique within Doan's work which many are not acknowledging and seeing. In doing this, she points to a larger global economic structure which many Vietnamese Americans are trapped and complicit as economically mobile consumers. As she states, "These symbols are actually banal objects of tourism. They can be bought, sold and exchanged" (Chang 2009). In trying to go against communist accusations, Le is trying to read an anti-communist critique within Doan's work. She is suggesting that we always read his artwork outside this polarizing frame by looking less at the rhetoric and discourse of communism and thinking more about the agency and politics of Vietnamese Americans more closely. If anything, Doan's artwork seeks to explore the discrepant subjectivities and identities produced in postwar Vietnamese communities as well as the trouble of *expressing* their desires for personal and political freedom in various sites of belonging.

REMEMBERING MEANS RESPECT: ON THE PAIN OF THE FIRST GENERATION

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[111] http://artsblog.freedomblogging.com/2009/02/04/photographer-delivers-lecture-at-cypress-college/7280/

[112] Symbolic power: Brian Doan's meditations on Vietnamese history say more than they show" December 22, 2010|Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent. http://articles.boston.com/2010-12-22/ae/29291374_1_symbols-vietnamese-community-vietnamese-american. Accessed April 30, 2011.

Local Vietnamese American newspapers, political leaders and community organizations upon hearing about the exhibit built a grassroots campaign through local community and media networks to shut down this "communist-inspired" exhibit as they had previously done with other controversial art exhibits. Through public-circulated online letters, individuals such as Minh Tam made the point that the artists were using their work not only to insult the Vietnamese American community and hurt the feelings of those refugees who had gone through so much during and after the war. They accuse the VAALA artists as "too educated" misfits who disrespected their parents and their sacrifices.[113] While the protest outside FOB II show building was very public, the viral Internet-based campaign was even more widespread. Given the ways Vietnamese anti-communism has been tied to homeland politics and connecting the different resettled diasporic populations around the world, the Internet has been a central site for Vietnamese nationalistic mobilizations (Lieberman 2003). Indeed, more energy was generated online than through weblogs, circulating emails and letters among many other texts condemning the FOB II show, Brian Doan and the organizers. Phone calls from older folks were made to the VAALA office for instance that threatened to beat up the women while calling them other sexualizing epithets. Many wanted the show curators to remove the offending artwork of Brian Doan from the show as a display of respect to elders. Dozens of protestors rallied consistently in front of the exhibit over a couple of days after news of the show began reaching a critical mass through local Vietnamese media and word of mouth. Voters called their local politicians and representatives to take

[113]Original quote from circulated letter "Tưởng mình học được một mớ chữ Anh, lấy được cái bằng ở Mỹ là hơn cha hơn mẹ đã hy sinh mạng sống đưa mình đến Mỹ." "Chống Triển Lãm F.O.B. Là Đúng" http://thtinfo.com/smcddotinfo/docs/VanNan/2009vaala/Chong_trien_lam_FOB.pdf 13/1/2009

a public stand in making Doan take down his art. These protests were growing to such an extent that the crowds were able to get the local Santa Ana police department and the city manager who were afraid of the protests getting out of hand to force the closing of the VAALA exhibit. The local government's demand for FOB II's closing occurred a day before the demonstration with an estimated seven hundred people organized by local news organizations like the *Nguoi Viet Daily News* (which had been targeted previously for publishing photos of the foot spa). Proud that they were able to stay open for a week without being shut down, Tram Le said VAALA organizers "could not self-censor ourselves even at the risk that it may offend somebody" (Tran 2009).

Repeated efforts were made over the course of a week to pressure VAALA organizers to shut down its exhibit by community leaders. Hai Trieu, a representative from the Vietnamese military writers group,[114] argued that VAALA may pretend to be not affiliated with communist authorities but it is still implicated in a bigger political situation, one that plays into the hands of the communist party in Viet Nam and betrays the Viet immigrant community in Orange County. While anti-communist politics is usually seen as a Cold War-related tactic of labeling people as communists to simply silence or demonize them, I read this interpellation of the second generation as communists or communist abetters as indicative of the intersubjective nature of representational politics for Vietnamese Americans, one that no one can ignore given their membership and implication in the community. Such a gesture tells us that anti-

[114]The original statement can be found in the original text excerpt and letter: "Mầu sơn, mầu sắc trên những tượng, ảnh triển lãm của nhóm VAALA tại Nam Cali dưới cái dù nghệ thuật gian trá, phi chính trị… hoàn toàn chỉ có tác dụng giúp cho tà quyền Hà Nội khai thác về mặt chính trị, nó nói lên trình độ nhận thức chính trị mang tính phản bội chính danh tự nạn của nhóm chủ trương." (Hải Triều "Cờ máu, hình Hồ và VAALA tại Nam California," Nhóm Nhà Văn Quân Đội 12/01/2009 http://thtinfo.com/smcddotinfo/docs/VanNan/2009vaala/haitrieu_comau&VAALA.pdf

communist politics is a manifestation of Vietnamese Americans sense of 'outsiderness' in the U.S. and separation from the homeland. Seen another way, Trieu's political claims symbolically implicates acculturated Vietnamese Americans in VAALA with the Vietnamese state and thus makes them never forget their *place* in the U.S. as extensions of Vietnam itself. It registers a type of ethical *ambivalence* in the construction of Vietnamese American minority discourse (Nguyen 2006).[115]

Tension from the controversy eventually affected the organization of VAALA's leadership. Within VAALA's executive board, for instance, some board members felt the need to pull back the show while the majority of the organizers pushed for continuing. At an invited meeting with the local Vietnamese veterans association, VAALA main organizers were verbally threatened, pushed and manhandled to the point of being expelled before they could even talk in depth with the veterans. Such "rudeness" cannot be explained as a natural manner of doing things in the community but an effect of the ways community discourse is arrested and divided *because* of the challenges in articulating Vietnamese American political desires in the 21st century.

In the face of opposition to his work, Brian Doan maintained the necessity of artistic freedom: "I believe in freedom of speech…I have a choice to eliminate some things in my work. But if I'm afraid and do that, the people (who don't like the photos) will win" (Chang 2009). The speech of freedom trope positions Doan against those who

[115]Viet Nguyen says, "We bear the ethical ambivalence' of minority discourse and as cultural producers we are forever engaged in "an ethics haunted by the dead, the forgotten, the missing" (31) where our "effacement and ennoblement are failures of recognition riddling both minority and majority discourse when they come to narrate stories, memories, and countermemories about the war in Viet Nam, and about the Vietnamese" (21). While Nguyen is speaking of cultural memory in relation to how the war is remembered, I am interested in the missing and silenced voices of today that register a type of haunted discourse of war that is not simply about past "loss" but the structures of inequality that position who gets to determine who gets to seen as part of present cultural discourse. See Nguyen (2006).

presumably seem antagonistic to his rights to free expression. Doan declares to non Vietnamese media when confronted by accusations of being a communist by his own community, "I'm not anti-communist or pro-communist…I'm just an artist."[116]

Figure 4: Protestors march in front of FOB II exhibit building (photo from *OC Register*)

FOB II took place in an abandoned bank building in a historic artistic village (Figure 2), occupying a free open space that expressed the public nature of the event. For about a week since its opening, dozens of protestors had assembled sporadically on various days to rally outside the exhibit. These protests attempted to organize and assemble a large gathering through spreading the news about the show by word of mouth and news reports on local Vietnamese news outlets since there are no alternative outlets to reach a critical mass of people. The controversy shows that South Vietnam/Saigon is not gone but very much "here" in Orange County.

Politicians and protestors demanded that Doan's piece be taken down as a sign of "respect" for the older generation. Rather than ask for pure censorship for the sake of

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[116]As a controversial photographer whose politically-oriented work has been exhibited in museums and galleries across the country, Doan's first book was published by VAALA, a monograph called the *Forgotten Ones*, a collection of photos documenting the hundreds of Vietnamese boat peoples still living in refugee camps in the Philippines decades after the war well until the late 1990's.

silencing the artist, Doan's challengers asked for self-censorship through pushing ideas of family, tradition and respect. These tropes are important because anti-communism is not purely an ideological and political problem of fighting communism in the community but very much a community-based issue, one that requires maintaining the public image and "face" of the community to outsiders and maintaining relations with one another. In this regard, the politics of representation for South Vietnamese Americans as related to art and communism is tied to the politics of kinship and the survival of a community that has been torn apart by war.

At the same time, this "familial" situation involved outside players that were not part of the Vietnamese community. The local police and politicians in Santa Ana felt pressure from protestors to close down the exhibit and demonstrate another form of Vietnamization and outsider effort to end "communist-related" conflicts. The Santa Ana police department which earlier did not have any issue with the art exhibit finally forced VAALA to close, citing the lack of a "business permit" to occupy a public space, even though organizers claimed that they were told that they could apply to the license at the end of the exhibit. In this instance, the police and city officials appeared to want to avoid political upheaval and conflict, inadvertently helping the protestors' cause. On the other side, VAALA organizers had U.S. mainstream reporters on their side to "protect freedom," American democracy, and First Amendment free speech. VAALA organizers finally decided that they would rather shut down the entire show rather than take down one artist's work as a collective support for artistic freedom and integrity. A building inspector came to the exhibit and deemed FOB II as unacceptable for a gallery space. Representatives from the city of Santa Ana decided to make a rush call to the exhibit site

to tell the exhibit organizers that they did not want to spend money in dispatching police to monitor the protests and refused to allow the exhibit to open a couple of more days. I read this hasty government shutdown as a form of Vietnamization where Vietnamese American artists' demands to be taken seriously as political actors and cultural producers are challenged by larger political structures that only *see* the Vietnamese in terms of spectacle, internal civil war and violent struggle rather than meaningful politics which needs to be made public and negotiated. The city's decision to shut down the exhibit not was necessarily because they were taking the side of protestors, but more because they did not see the value of both the artwork and the protests, both of which they found burdensome or trivial.

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo (2005), a scholar who was also part of the VAALA board of directors argues that the public memorialization of South Vietnam as the narrative memory *of* and *for* the living and the dead are central to the unsettled struggle over the politics of knowledge, memory and representation. Seeing Vietnamese anticommunism only as a latent form of Vietnamization where the Vietnamese are "awaiting liberation" and freedom misses the "violence inflicted through post-war policies of dislocation and imprisonment" onto the South Vietnamese by communists and the U.S. (161). This sense of victimhood as tied to anti-communist nationalism must be freed of its assumption that the Vietnamese have not and cannot be free except through the salvation of the United States or exile from South Vietnam and through relinquishment of their memories. As Nguyen-Vo puts it, "Such a position ties subjecthood to a liberatory discourse. Neither puppets nor enslaved people could be seen as occupying human positions with their full implication of human agency. Remembrances from such people cannot be taken seriously

as signification of their free will" (ibid). It is for this reason that while anticommunist politics can be seen as the older generation's loyalty to the South Vietnamese struggle to fight communism, it also relates to the older generation's need to pass on the memory and politics of South Vietnam to the younger generation.

FILIAL PIETY: TEACHING THE YOUNGER GENERATION HOW TO BE VIETNAMESE

An emergency meeting was held by two former South Vietnam soldiers who called the community together "find ways to oppose the [VAALA] organization that exhibited the images that promote the Viet Cong (the red flag with a gold star and pictures of Ho Chi Minh City) and bad mouth our holy flag, the yellow flag three with three stripes" (quoted in Nguyen 2009). Letters of invitation were sent to Vietnamese spiritual leaders, political representatives of the community, civic and military associations, the media and the press to join the movement. About 50 representatives from different associations attended this emergency meeting and gave their formal support to protesting VAALA.[117] Nguyen The Phiet and Tran Trong An Son, representatives from this open meeting made a public call to all former soldiers: "Based on this situation, all the former soldiers and veterans from the former Republic of Vietnam in two organizations, the CCS [an association of former soldiers] and the VNCH [another veterans group], would like to call on the community of Vietnamese nationals to fix this problem. The emergency meeting today is regarding this purpose" (ibid).

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[117] Some of these organizations include the following groups: Đài phát thanh Diễn Đàn Chống Cộng (Great Anti-Communist Radio Forum), Hội Cựu Chiến Sĩ VNCH (Association of South Vietnamese Veterans), Ủy Ban Xây Dựng Sức Mạnh Cộng Đồng (Ô. Frank Trần) · Commission for Building Community Strength (Mr. Frank Chen), Phong trào Tự Do Việt Nam (Nguyễn Quốc Phục Việt) · Freedom Movement of Vietnam (Nguyen Quoc Phuc Vietnam), Diễn Đàn Tiếng Nói Tự Do của Người Dân Việt Nam (Free speech forum of the people of Vietnam).

After the exhibit shutdown, someone sneaked into the galleries and defaced the artwork of Doan and Toly with red spray paint. Photos of the vandalized works were posted on the Internet and the vandal was praised by some in the local Vietnamese community. A few of the posted photos and the defacement was later traced to a famous ardent anti-communist "activist" in the community named Ly Tong. Tong, a well-known prankster in the Vietnamese American community, took it upon himself to vandalize Brian Doan work especially, using women's underwear and a tampon to scrub and deface Doan's work as a symbolic sexualized gesture to degrade the piece and reduce it to mere filth. Such public actions show the power of art to break open explosive issues of sexuality and gender that one man may go so far as to use ladies' undergarments to make his own artistic public statement, one that in turn rendered the women-dominated VAALA organization to sexually objectified objects and/or trash.

Many people cheered Tong in challenging the legitimacy of the artworks put on display by VAALA. Alongside Tong, many protestors brought their own visual art to demonstrations to challenge the more formal artworks based on themes of gender and sexuality. In her study of Filipino American families and their regulation of their daughters' sexuality, Yen Le Espiritu (2003) recognizes that women are seen as "responsible for holding the cultural line, maintaining cultural boundaries, and marking cultural differences" (172). This regulatory mechanism provides a sense of moral superiority and resistance to larger U.S. society that marginalizes them while also enabling these families to control the norms of cultural reproduction and identity-

formation of a community seen by many Americans still as 'foreigners-within.'[118] Recognizing that many Asian communities within the U.S. nation-state come from a racialized and colonial historical context helps to see how complicated the gender politics of certain communities are.

The U.S. news media did not see the value of the act of vandalism. An editorial from *The Orange County Register* saw Ly Tong's vandalism as not only damaging to the artists but also damaging to freedom of speech and expression "which are granted to us by the American Constitution" (Chang 2009). The article's author Richard Chang also brings in President Obama's inauguration to underscore his point: "As we celebrate freedom, equality and new beginnings, let us not condone criminal acts of destruction and censorship. We should think about moving forward, not backward. I, for one, will not stand by silently if these sorts of crimes occur in our community" (ibid). For Chang, the U.S. is moving toward a "post-racial" democratic future and new beginnings, the Vietnamese protestors were portrayed as stuck in the past with a repressive and even criminal mentality. Rather than contextualizing why protesters were angry, comments such as this "Vietnamize" the situation by situating the entire event in terms of the Vietnamese and their failure to respect and aspire towards freedom, especially the kind *granted* by the United States, a country that appears to be more free than others through its constructed image. The FOB II incident cannot be reduced to good vs. bad politics but serves as a catalyst to ask us why did protest take the form it did and why were artists targeted?

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[118]Espiritu writes further about these norms in terms of cultural authenticity: "Enforced by distorting powers of memory and nostalgia, this rhetoric of moral superiority often leads to patriarchal calls for cultural 'authenticity.' Which locates family honor and national integrity in its female members" (178). See Espiritu (2003).

This demand for community survival depends upon political mobilization and cultural consolidation based on filial ideas of the community. A letter that was written by assemblyman Van Tran and signed by other political leaders was sent to the current director of VAALA organizers with a strong request to "discontinue the use of offensive materials" in the FOB II group exhibit. Signed by the mayor of Westminster city and several Westminster city council members, the letter is written by a Vietnamese American Republican politician who drew on the support of his local constituency (mostly older Vietnamese Americans who are registered Republicans).[119] In Tran's letter, there is a demand to represent Vietnamese community based on cultural sensitivity and respect toward the needs of the community at large. I read Tran's plea as reflecting the contemporary Vietnamization of Vietnamese American postwar desires for collective representation and unity, where Vietnamese public visibility is embedded in deep contradictory tensions over how to meet the multiple needs and desires of the community.

Tran's imploration to VAALA organizers is not simply directed toward free speech and community politics but also the definition of "art." In a news interview with the *Orange County Register*, he said: "I don't see it as censorship at all. I don't see it as art. Some of the offensive pieces — it's more propaganda than art. A girl wearing a T-shirt of Ho Chi Minh — I don't see where the creativity is at all" (quoted in Chang 2009). Van Tran's inability to see the creativity in Doan's artwork is mediated by the political pressure he felt to represent his powerful constituencies. Questions over what constitutes

[119] The letter used the analogy of someone putting a picture of Hitler or a swastika flag in a community of Jews. He makes mention of Vietnam's totalitarian regime which restricts freedom of religion (and which many Americans taken for granted) and here Tran says he does not support an outright ban on offensive art given First Amendment Rights but that VAALA artists employ a "wiser decision" toward displaying such art based on common wisdom about the needs and struggles of the many Vietnamese Americans who had tried to escape communist rule.

serious art came up again when protesters brought their own pictures and artwork to anti-FOB II protests. One protestor even brought pictures of a girl in a bikini with the yellow star on her butt urinating into a Ho Chi Minh bust to the VAALA press conference attended by about 100 people. These protestors called their self-produced posters "real art" to diminish the importance of Brian Doan's artwork as well as those of the other FOB artists. Here, art is not solely positioned within personal interpretations and readings of art but centered within the culturally situated imagery and signification of women and the nation *as political tools* to make public statements about the community. The referentiality and iconography of the Vietnamese female—whether pictured in quotidian terms (a girl in a T-shirt) or visualized sensationally (a girl in a bikini)—shows the female body as the symbolic-ideological terrain for fighting over "what" community represents or means. If protestors can bring a picture of a girl in a bikini urinating in a toilet, the question of who is being disrespectful to "authentic" images of the Vietnamese community seems multi-sided.[120]

The first generation Vietnamese Americans seek to teach and reach the younger generation through cultural production. This pedagogical mission hinges upon a gendered and filial sacralization of the South Vietnam flag and nation that calls the second generation into being as war subjects even if many were born *after* the war. Through such "thick" community exchanges and interactions, I see the ongoing demands and burdens of Vietnamese Americans to re-present their cultural histories and address

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[120] Many dissenters of FOB II made mention of the fact that only in the U.S. could artists have the freedom to say and do what they wanted. Art therefore is not only representational (imagined forms which signify a reference and real) but act as the very means by which social reality is made and shaped. For instance, I see humor as elucidating a form of cultural desire that is very much linked to cultural dynamics (humor is one of those creative forms that is culturally specific since audience knowledge of jokes and referents comes from certain community repertoires of understanding).

their pain in the current moment. Overall, the FOB II incident shows how for the first generation the war is *not* done and over with and their refusal to give up their memory of the war shows their refusal to simply "assimilate" and disappear into the U.S. American landscape as another immigrant group. Against the older generation's anticommunist "preservation discourses" based on protecting their memory of South Vietnam (Yoneyama 1999),[121] the younger generation of Vietnamese Americans are at times caught up in a politics that locates Vietnamese American political struggles in the U.S. within the assimilationist discourse of Vietnamese as immigrants. Recasting the in larger context and why art is the method and language they and VAALA artists use to speak to the Vietnamese American postwar condition, I read Vietnamization in this local context as a contestation over filial responsibility and community ideals but also the U.S. national family ideal which "absorbs" immigrants without revealing how their stories and historical experiences do not fit a multicultural model of citizenship.

Venerating their own version of history, Vietnamese Americans not simply haunted or traumatized by the Vietnam War, forever participating in anticommunist protests. Indeed, such politics is not simply about a politics of representation but the "politics of self-representation" (Cooper 1996, Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, 1995, Warren and Jackson 2002). In her study of Vietnamese veteran anti-communist politics in San Diego, Thuy Vo Dang (2005) argues that anticommunism rather than reflecting ghosts of

[121] The first generation's protest and politics constitutes part of what Lisa Yoneyama calls "preservation discourses," driven by nostalgia for cultural tradition and authenticity rooted in the history of the war. As such, they remain arrested in time, stuck in *their* past (80). In her book *Hiroshima Traces*, Yoneyama traces Japan's desire to affirm the end of WWII war and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japanese citizens as a unimpeachable realness of the past that requires the containment of memories from that past that in turn obscure contemporary realities such as the fact that nuclear horror is everywhere and not restricted to the past (72). Following Yoneyama's insights, the identification of Vietnamese Americans' intra-community struggles as only about the past erases clues through which we can reflect critically on how the past continues to insert and assert itself into the historical present. See Yoneyama (1999).

the past, becomes the changing vehicle for "actively constructing a diasporic community for the present and the future…for sustaining an identity and community in the present and serves as a pedagogical tool for the younger generations of Vietnamese Americans" (69). Following Vo-Dang, I believe that anticommunism is a teaching tool that recuperates South Vietnam centered not simply in an exilic nostalgia *for* the past and the South Vietnamese nation but an invocation and staged encounter with the figure of South Vietnam in the U.S. Nguyen Qui Duoc, an artist who had been the target of protests sees the anti-communist organizers as legitimate in their own actions. "As purported fervent anti-Communists," says Nguyen, "their protests are necessary expressions of who they are, a vocal presence that may offer them a sense of confidence and identity" (Nguyen 2009). This "necessary expression" of anti-communism as Vietnamese cultural identity-formation extends to the expressive art produced by protestors of FOB II.

Like recent protests, the Internet was a powerful tool for Vietnamese anti-communist mobilizing. A number of websites have sprung up in recent years that display the effectiveness of Vietnamese in fighting communism through cyberspace (Liberman 2003). Given the difficulty in mobilizing people on the ground, virtual communication helped facilitate the public discourse about FOB II incident via email, discussion boards and the official websites of Vietnamese veteran groups and other online Vietnamese community forums that helped generate public interest in protesting against VAALA.[122] Rather than demonstrating a closed community debate, Kim-An Lieberman (2003) recognizes such online activity and organized protests as the way for Vietnamese

[122] This anti-VAALA websites included the websites of *Vietbao* newspaper and *Thanh Nien Co Vang,* Youth for the Yellow Flag.

Americans to make their voices heard beyond simplistic ideas of them as refugees who need to be assimilated or forsaken—a figuration that implicates the 2nd generation Vietnamese as well:

> Not only has the ability of Southeast Asians to participate in scholarly discourse about themselves been underestimated, but the refugee model, flawed in the first place, is quickly irrelevant. A second, post-1975 generation of overseas Vietnamese, predominantly born and raised in their 'host' countries, is emerging as a separate voice. The term *refugee* simply does not apply to them, literally or figuratively. But the persisting problem in the creation of Vietnamese diasporic identity is not just inaccurate terminology: it is a lack of Vietnamese agency in shaping the entire discourse (78).

Vietnamese political activism and online activities becomes an important statement in articulating the multiplicity and self-determination of South Vietnamese diasporans and their various desires to "establish a cartography" of power within the United States (80).

Other local Vietnamese American arts organization called VAALA organizers unfilial by going against the first generation. The director of Viet Art Center, another local Vietnamese community arts organization, denounced VAALA organizers as "disrespectful cowards," "presumptuous fools" who think they could "engage" and even teach the elders of the community without those elders' input. A publicly-circulated letter by director Michelle Truong (2009) captures this tension in the 'Vietnamized' politics of representation for Vietnamese Americans today:

> No matter how young you were when you left VN, no matter if you were born in the US, no matter how perfect you speak English, no matter how liberal you try to be, you should not just "recognize, respect, and honor" the pain. You must "feel" the pain. In another word, the pain is in your flesh and blood; the pain is "you"; you are "the pain." You are different from the other non-Vietnamese media reporters, the other non-Vietnamese

> artists, the other non-Vietnamese organizations, you are "Vietnamese refugees" and VAALA is a "Vietnamese-American organization.[123]

Denouncing the VAALA folks while also claiming them as the inextricably bad members of the community, this Vietnamese American cultural arts leader did not like the fact that American reports called the VAALA organizers "bold and brave" while making the protestors seem crazy. When VAALA asked Viet Art Center to join the political fight, Ms. Truong responded, "May I ask the battle is between 'who' and 'who'? Who is your "enemy"? Are they [the protesters] "terrorists"? Were they were just "exercising their rights of speech and assembly" and were they your family members? If 'yes' is your answer to these questions, I apologize that I cannot join you in this 'battle.' I can't fight against whom I love dearly" (ibid). Michelle Truong's bold statement at first glance seems to rehash the popular image of Vietnamese as always fighting with one another, a nation in constant war, but she actually argues that political differences within the community are not to be easily dismissed by the second generation. She *reminds* the younger Vietnamese Americans that they are still seen as different from non-Vietnamese, that despite her reservations toward VAALA, she also seems then as constitutive parts of the community. The trope of filial piety and educating is powerful because it invokes two cultural norms that apparently have been broken or violated. Alongside the idea of VAALA leaders as being too educated, Truong is suggesting that one cannot think one is superior to the older generation in attaining a college education and professional status (almost all of VAALA's board members have a college degree). Her conception of the development of community is linear but also radical in that it addresses the young and the

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[123] Emailed letter to VAALA organizers. Wednesday, January 21, 2009. http://vietamreview.blogharbor.com/blog/_archives/2009/1/15/4058463.html

larger American audience as important players in the Vietnamese anti-communist struggle rather than outsiders or observers.

Truong interpellates the second generation as always *beholden* to the demands of the community and war generation. That while some were not refugees or did not personally experience the war, they are still "refugees" and that they must always "recognize, respect, and honor" the pain of the people; they must *feel* the pain since the pain is in their "flesh and blood;" that the postwar youth generation are the source of pain for the older generation and not just the Vietnam War (you are 'the pain'). Truong sees the refugee not solely as a political designation but a cultural and historical condition of being Vietnamese American. Moreover, she articulates intra-community politics as an ongoing *problematic* (not a singular problem) to be sorted out by Vietnamese Americans themselves, conducted in relation to a non-Vietnamese society that often does not care or know about Vietnamese postwar issues and what they have gone and still go through. In doing so, she rehearses Walter Benjamin's (1968) observation that "our image of happiness is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us…In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption" (253-254). The notion of redemption embedded within Truong and other protestors' personal address to FOB II artists (and the 1.5 and 2nd generation generally) is compelled by the desire to make the older generation happy, but also recognizes the divergent temporalities and sense of history/community through which Vietnamese Americans exist. Ysa Le, executive director of VAALA recognizes this relationship and made the following remark, "This was an attempt to get a dialogue

started…Our intent was not to hurt or offend the sensibilities of our community. We are part of this community" (Bharah 2009).

A MORE PROGRESSIVE POLITICS: THE SECOND GENERATION SPEAKS BACK

> For too long, the Vietnamese community has defined "political" to mean either "anti communist" or "pro-communist" with the former being the only acceptable label in this "community.
>
> Tram Le, FOB II curator (2009)[124]

Anti-communist politics in this regard is not merely specific to particular refugee communities and their respective "postwar" conservative politics. They invite multiple responses and understandings about power and identity formation in their web-like constellation of meanings. Indeed, the FOB II controversy asks us not only who is a legitimate Vietnamese artist but also what constitutes a real artist and what types of people are seen as cultural producers and creative contributors to society. How is the post-Vietnam moment not one defined by the legacy and memory of past wars, but one that opens up to other kinds of un-representable struggles and demands for representation in a stratified community? The FOB II was meant to show the nexus of community, politics and art and the controversy surrounding it reminds us of how Vietnamese Americans are still all "FOB's" even if some never experienced the war.

Tram Le, a performing artist and long-time community organizer, says that at first she didn't want FOB II to be all about politics and hoped to center the artworks in a way that exposes the new limits and potential for engaging community politics. VAALA's vision for FOB II is best summarized by Tram Le's (2009) curatorial statement when she maintains that the show explores the uneasy convergence of art,

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[124] http://www.vaala.org/090109-FOBII-Open.php Accessed May 10, 2010.

politics and community: politics of memory, youth culture and identity politics, contemporary politics, body politics, and censoring politics. Artists were selected based on a need to showcase a diverse representation of voices based on geography, age, gender, sexuality orientation and so forth.[125] This is important to underscore when the anti-communist rhetoric of the Vietnamese American community often elides the heterogeneity and complicatedness of community politics by reducing everything to a communist vs anti-communist binary.[126] As Le writes:

> Curating an art show in the Vietnamese community is easy, I was told, as long as you do not show any art that is "political." When the controversy and ensuing protest about a community newspaper exploded centering on an art piece depicting a footbath painted with the flag of the Republic of Viet Nam, we had to ask, "Where does the political end and art begin?" For too long, the Vietnamese community has defined "political" to mean either "anti-communist" or "pro-communist" with the former being the only acceptable label in this "community." Moreover, if the artwork contains any symbols, colors, or images relating to this kind of politics, it is propaganda.[127]

The show's organizers recognized that Vietnamese American art is not simply abstract expressionism but something that can address the symbolic and emotional legacy of the war in the community. As Tram Le (2009) says, "Through the use of imaginary landscapes and homelands, the commemorations of our past and memories, and tributes

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[125] Tram Le. 2009. "Living Without Fear." FOB II Catalog.

[126] The Hi-tech Video (1999) store incident for instance involved about a storeowner who posted a poster of Ho Chi Minh to honor the dead revolutionary in front of his store and elicited a massive response from the local community that attracted thousands of protestors. The idea that protestors were organizing against a man who was exercising his First Amendment right of speech, which can be and has been construed as artistic or creative expression, is brokered by many Vietnamese Americans' own understanding of what is correct. In another instance, the VAX (Vietnamese-American Xposure) was a show created by and for Vietnamese American youth on the local Saigon-TV in 2003 but when programmers showed a documentary on the Hi-Tech video store incident, which *necessarily* had to reproduce the same image of Ho Chi Minh that produce the controversy in order to show what it was all about, protestors saw as media propaganda and effectively protested to shut down the program forever before it could take off.

[127] Le, Tram. "Living Without Fear," *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks* Curatorial Statement, 2009 p. 7.

to our achievements and failures, these are the powerful ways in which we speak about ourselves. Art is not only used to record history, pass on knowledge, and communicate ideas [about the Vietnamese community]" Le urges all of us to "speak out fearlessly" to contest the "toxicity of the legacy of war" (ibid). This toxic legacy is not simply referring to anti-communist politics but also the challenges of speaking about the community's multiple needs and diverse identities outside any singularizing memory of the Vietnam War. This is not a call to just FOB artists but to all Vietnamese Americans to address this common historical legacy of war that has made community relations so "toxic" now. To encourage dialogue and provide explanation, a panel discussion entitled "Slant or Slander?: Community, art, and media coverage*"* was planned. At the panel discussion, invited discussants and audiences got entangled in arguments over Brian Doan's piece and VAALA's insensitivity toward the public. Curators Tram Le and Lan Duong, expecting huge challenges but remaining attentive to the sensitive needs of the local community, decided to hold the press conference but shouting from protestors prevented any form of civil exchange. Efforts at public dialogue with the community were made difficult by the disruptive behavior of some protestors but such disruption is not to be read as craziness but a public performance in their own right that stages their social *presence* as political actors with their own opinions and voices. Community politics is never outside the domain of artistic performance but constitutes a contested site through which historically silenced voices can be heard (Anderson 2011). Such politics is part of the everyday cultural production of Vietnamese American identity, where what it means to be Vietnamese in the U.S. today is reinterpreted beyond their image as loud minorities

and foreign immigrants ignorant of "proper" forms of public dialogue that accord with U.S. liberal norms of civic engagement.

Given the community's diversity, it is important to note that some young Vietnamese Americans even protested VAALA out of respect for their parents' generation. *Thanh Nien Co Vang* (TNCV) (the young organization of the yellow flag) is a group comprised of second generation Vietnamese American youth established with the purpose of fighting for human rights and freedom for Vietnam and promoting the South Vietnamese flag. Phuc Nguyen, a representative organization, said they are protesting in order to infringe on the rights of expression by VAALA but "but merely to bring forth the voices of the vast segment of the Vietnamese community."[128] He says the exhibit did nothing to close the "unhealed wounds" of the war. Another youth representative said the exhibit is "insulting to Vietnamese women," dividing generations further, degrading the South Vietnamese flag and the sacred cultural symbols of the people.[129] A second generation female demonstrator said the anger and pain of her father's generation isn't going away. "There isn't an end to that," said Tina Nguyen (quoted in Bird 2009). I interpret these young people's desires to respect the previous generation as one based on desiring and making sure the whole community survives outside their painful history that has affected them even until today. Artists' intentions were interpreted by Tina Nguyen as inciting controversy, igniting outrage, seeking fame, "telling lies" and mocking the

[128] http://www.thanhniencovang.com/cms/TNCV20090112VAALA.html Accessed May 10, 2010.
[129] The original quote regarding this matter is as follows" "Qua thông báo từ trang nhà của Thanh Niên Cờ Vàng (TNCV) tại http://www.thanhniencovang.com , cộng đồng người Việt tị nạn cộng sản đã có một cuộc biểu tình ngày 17 tháng 1, 2009 để lên tiếng phản đối văn hóa vận 1 chiều (nghị quyết 36 của csVN), hành vi và thái độ khiêu khích, chia rẽ thế hệ cha anh với thế hệ con em, phỉ báng & xuyên tạc lá cờ Vàng chính nghĩa, thiêng liêng của dân tộc Việt Nam, cũng như nhục mạ người phụ nữ Việt Nam của ban tổ chức triển lãm VAALA."

"core" of Vietnamese traditional values.[130] Yet, many FOB II artists do not see the "enemy" as the protestors, many of whom are our family members and friends, but the larger political history of war that pits Vietnamese people against each other. Both the FOB II and the protestors were cast in a controversial light (by Vietnamese local news media and U.S. news media respectively) that did not allow us to fully see the imbrications of how many Vietnamese Americans share a similar problem of self-representation and raise issues that we care too deeply about that disallow us to be simply silent and invisible. While many artists involved in FOB II, subscribed to progressive ideas of politics and freedom, desiring a more productive community dialogue outside the strictures of anticommunism. In trying to create the "art of many Vietnams" as Nora Taylor describes it (2009), the question of South Vietnam specifically remains elusive or difficult to grapple with the issue of where we are going" based on where we have come from and "where we have been" (Duong 2009).[131]

The FOB II show illustrates how the politics of symbolic artistic representation is tied to the politics of community representation. Most artists who participated in the show were not simply self-fashioning their own sense of the nation and Vietnamese identity but worked from a multi-generational attempt and impulse to rearticulate a community identity out of the shadows of war and its postwar 'Vietnamized' burdens of anti-communist politics. This project entails not just a rearticulation and *re*-representation of an entire ethnic identity but a specific negotiation with a postwar identity that is never settled. Vietnamese desires for collective dialogue are born out of a

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[130]Ibid.
[131] Duong, Lan. "Vietnamese Americans and the United States of War." Official F.O.B. II: Art Speaks Catalogue.

need to achieve peace and freedom, a process that is continuous and never-ending. The politicized clash over the artistic pieces featured in the show and their unsettled meanings provided a site of analysis for examining the ever expanding definition of postwar South Vietnamese identity. The controversial artistic productions that provoked the most negative reaction were about the visual representation (and cultural reproduction) of the nation that uncovered underlying gendered ideas of women as carriers of cultural capital, reproducers and bearers of the nation in exile.

In Vietnamese refugee communities like those in Orange County that are undergoing rapid demographic and social changes, cultural and political boundaries are becoming more fluid and expansive—pushing some to redefine Vietnamese cultural identity beyond the war and anti-communism as the foundational texts and primary narrative of the exiled South Vietnamese nation. This discursive and temporal shift suggests that the historical development of South Vietnamese diasporic nationalism as historically waged in the name of battling communism now must deal with the fact that there are others wanting to break out of this militaristic masculinist ideological mode of being "Vietnamese." Taking community art and cultural production from a celebratory nationalist context, VAALA artists and protesters see the Vietnamese nation as never a fully authentic or controllable space but a liminal, contested space of cultural meaning and image-making. For these cultural authors, art is objectionable in its presentation of communist symbols. However, art has the ability to open up unsettling ideas about the community that makes it so powerful and dangerous. As they and the protestors painfully revealed, when art "speaks" so does the community.

CONCLUSION

Throughout my life, I would hear family members speak about South Vietnam but found it difficult to mentally situate this place. Born only a few years after the end of the Vietnam War, I grew up in Reagan America, I recognized South Vietnam as a powerful historical point of reference and symbolic referent for understanding the geopolitical origins of the many refugees that fled their homes after the war. In Little Saigon community gatherings, I would hear bromides about how "we" Vietnamese Americans must *remember* the memory of the fallen South Vietnam. I curiously watched my uncle who served in the war effort for many years parade around the house in the maroon beret he wore as a soldier for the south, muttering about the need to honor the sacrifices of those who fought on the "right side" of the war against the evil North Vietnamese communists. This sense of dedication and regional nationalism to a place that no longer exists for me created the feeling that the Vietnam War never ended and that "we" on the right side of the war and history had to rectify the historical absence and geopolitical loss that South Vietnam represents, especially in postwar tendencies to forget that war. On a map, I could never find Saigon or South Vietnam which confused my sense of cultural memory and identity. For this reason, I seek to ask this question, where is the South Vietnam today? How is it still alive today? How do these questions help us to think about present-day topographies of memory, history and culture?

The question of South Vietnamese people, complicated by the transnational turns and geopolitical reconfigurations of the late 20th century and 21st century, has become more obfuscated. In 1992, the U.S. normalized diplomatic relations with Vietnam, the latter recovering from decades of economic hardships from sanctions and embargo

imposed by the superpower after the war. In his speech rationalizing this liberalizing move, Clinton's call for more economic freedom and mobility for the Vietnamese resonates as a more neoliberal version of Nixon's Vietnamization policy but this time including Vietnamese Americans in the U.S. who are seen as successful model minorities. For Clinton, Vietnam is now "emerging from years of conflict and uncertainty to shape a bright future."[132] This trade agreement he said is

> A *form of declaration of interdependence*, a clear, unequivocal statement that prosperity in the 21st century depends upon a nation's economic engagement in the rest of the world. This new openness is a great opportunity for you…*Your future should be in your hands, the hands of the Vietnamese people*…We believe the Vietnamese people have the talent to succeed in this *new global age* as they have in the past…We have seen the talent and ingenuity of the Vietnamese who have *come to settle in America* [italics my emphasis].[133]

Using the neoliberal language of development, meritocracy and constitutionality, Clinton gestures toward a better future placed in the *hands* of the Vietnamese people with the economic aid of the U.S, a gesture of goodwill that seems to make-up for the fact that the U.S. blocked Vietnam from becoming an autonomous nation over half a century earlier, refusing to honor the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Vietnam's Declaration of Independence of 1945.[134] He goes on to cite the successes of

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[132]Bill Clinton was facing pressure from businesses wanting to business in Vietnam but also demands for finding the many MIA/POW's still thought to be imprisoned or missing in Vietnam. US President Bill Clinton's speech in Vietnam November 17, 2000.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Vietnam won its independence in 1945 with Ho Chi Minh defeating the French in the First and reading the Declaration of Independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Viet Minh or Vietnamese Independence League ended the Vietnamese monarchy and tried re-established Vietnam as an independent nation but the U.S. did not honor the treaty of Geneva Accords of 1956 which gave plans national elections by enabling and supporting another regime, the Republic of South Vietnam, based in Saigon to resist the Viet Minh.

Vietnamese Americans who previously settled in the U.S. as refugees now seen as "model minorities" as an example of Vietnamese people's general ability to succeed and assimilate into global modernity. In collapsing all Vietnamese cultural identities, Clinton does not see the political contradictions of using South Vietnamese Americans who fled the communist regime of Vietnam as the models of success for socialist Vietnam's growing attempt to develop market capitalism. Clinton speaking in Vietnam in 2010, almost two decades after he signed a trade agreement to normalize U.S. relations with Vietnam, said this new diplomatic relationship "marked a healing of old wounds and because it revealed great possibilities to the entire world about what the 21st century could be." [135] For Clinton, such possibilities for the future are based on "your freedom from those [war] memories is the legacy of the last 15 years…in building that future, you, and only you now, can redeem the sacrifice of those who were lost on both sides in a terrible war."[136] Again, Clinton speaks about the "freedom" of the younger generations in Vietnam from the not bearing the traumatic memory of the war, a historical amnesia that helps to power national economy but also the reconciliation of communist Vietnam and the U.S. and redeem the sacrifices of those killed in the war. Missing from the discussion are South Vietnamese who exist in a liminal forgotten state between the diplomatic relations between two sovereign nations.

Beyond the popular assumption that the Vietnam War simply ended with the Fall of Saigon in 1975, I analyze the reappearance of the disappeared nation and phantom of South Vietnam in the current moment, one shaped by the absent presence of Vietnamese

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[135] http://finance.ftu.edu.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=194:bill-clintons-speech-at-foreign-trade-university-during-his-visit-to-the-university&catid=129:news-and-events&Itemid=160 12/13/2010

[136] Ibid.

voices in the U.S.-dominated cultural discourses about the war.[137] Viet Nguyen (2001) says most Vietnamese are denied a proper place in American-dominated memorialization and recollections of the Vietnam War. Nguyen follows postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak who theorizes, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", that certain subjects of intellectual knowledge-production are precluded from the position of self-speaking subjects due to the challenges of representing the political and ethical dilemmas involved in writing from their particular subject-position. The subaltern denotes those groups of people who have been elided in public discourse as a result of domination and colonialism. In the case of Vietnamese, the source of domination comes from the U.S. As Nguyen elaborates:

> In the American historical record of the war, the Vietnamese, in particular those who were actively Communist or sympathetic with the cause, were subalterns. Even the majority of the South Vietnamese, however, could be considered subaltern if the defining criterion is that Americans chose not to hear them. The creation of the Vietnamese as a subaltern in American history served the interests of the United States during the war. The facelessness of the enemy and their lack of voice— as well as the lack of voice of America's South Vietnamese allies— created a void for American discourse to dominate (111).[138]

Following Spivak's contention that subaltern subjects still leave a record or trace of their "voice" in discourse even when they are denied a place as speakers,[139] Nguyen

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[137] More critical scholarly works that analyze the aftermath the Vietnam War tend to highlight the immediate after-effects of the war and as they emerge within the affective and political economies that develop after the devastation of war. These studies boldface the ways Vietnamese and other war-torn groups are being repositioned in a globalizing post-modern future that does not privilege their voices in modern liberal discourses that aim to "capture" or disclose these voices in transparent ways. In dialogue with such works, I see the current cultural moment not as strictly bound to the historicity and violence of the past but one that is shaped centrally by the ethical demands and emergent conflicts of an uncertain global-historical future—a time when Vietnamese have entered the cultural dominant but remain minoritarian subaltern subjects whose voices are not fully heard or recognized. I believe the post-Vietnam War era is not a new moment of freedom for Vietnamese people and other colonial subjects, absent of historicity and ideological struggles but one defined by always burgeoning struggles over who can speak from a position of power and privilege.

[138] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2001. *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press.

recognizes that Vietnamese are able to "speak" or reveal their agency in the ruptures and fissures of cultural memory and public consciousness. Thus, the "inclusion" of South Vietnamese in the growing scholarly efforts to study the Vietnamese War history does not mean assimilating the memories and experiences of South Vietnamese but revisiting the dominant assumptions about what it means to be "free." Vietnamization as I conceive in this dissertation usefully discloses the historical-symbolic terms through which Vietnamese people have been brought into modern discourse, where their entry in modernity and representation conceals the seamless workings of hegemonic power and imperialism. Vietnamization is not a denial of a pure Vietnamese "essence" or authentic voice but presents a dilemma around the re-presentation and how they become speaking and (self)representing political subjects able to express their desires in intelligible representational form. How does the making of these former postwar/colonial peoples work through modern regimes of signification that rely on a type of symbolic erasure or "epistemic violence" as Gayatri Spivak (1993) describe it that occludes their desire/power within the fold of modern representation and discourse. Speaking about Vietnamization as an ongoing process shows what Spivak calls the pluralizing "subject-effects" produced from the illusion that the non-Western foreigner is now a sovereign empowered modern subject of world history. Vietnamization is a masking trick that forces us to be vigilant to "the relations between desire, power and subjectivity" (68) at all times to expose the workings of ideology and unequal power relations in "advanced

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[139] Spivak warns against First World (or Third World intellectuals') invocations of Third World voices and agency through the call for representative voices. Suggesting that the Third World peasant subject now has a voice ignores the oppressive discursive conditions of speech and struggle through which that subject must be represented and interpellated.

capitalist neocolonialism" (69)[140] As an ethnic studies scholar, I understand that social subjects do not simply exist and "are" but are produced through overlapping networks of power, historical relations and technologies of representation. The "cultural" and historical particularity of a people is always related to the larger historic-symbolic forces that produce them as specific subjects of power-knowledge.

This dissertation calls attention to the zones of indistinction and simultaneity of multiple cartographies of power created and produced from the war. The Vietnamization of the Vietnam War—which was in essence a distortion of the political situation in Vietnam—demands grappling with the South Vietnamese postwar condition in new radical ways at a time when "the most natural thing in the world is that the world appears to be politically united, that the market is global, and that power is organized through this universality" (Negri and Hardt 2000: 354). As a term specific to the history of Vietnam and Southeast Asia but a concept that opens up larger questions about empire, race and discourse, Vietnamization dispels the unrealized consequences of war that affected South Vietnamese and other groups such as Cambodians, Laotian and Central Vietnamese that suffered U.S. bombing after implementation of Vietnamization. Beyond the idea of South Vietnamese as an "imagined" community" or bounded nation (Anderson 1991)[141]

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[140] In her important essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak says that "subaltern"—those oppressed and classes denied a dominant speaking position within society—are spoken for by Westerners as well as Third World intellectuals who replicate Western power. Working against postcolonial intellectuals who write about subaltern peasantry in the colony, Spivak argues that these intellectuals, who are often not these subjects "become transparent in the relay race [to study the subaltern], for they merely report on the nonrepresented subject and analyze (without analyzing) the workings of the (unnamed Subject irreducibly presupposed by) power and desire. The produced 'transparency' marks the place of 'interest'' it is maintained by vehement denegration," 74-75. See Spivak (1993).

[141] Benedict Anderson articulate nations as "imagined communities" in his famous book of the same name, which has been expanded to all nations (largely due to Anderson's generalizations base on his specialized knowledge of Southeast Asia). Yet, the question of the uniqueness and particularity of Southeast Asia and its peoples within the larger historical schema of things is not often explored, especially in postcolonial or

tied to a foreclosed chapter in history, I tried to bring the specific arrested histories of South Vietnamese into a conversation about what it means to be South Vietnamese now in the U.S., Vietnam America or modern-day Vietnam. According to Negri and Hardt (2000), the chaotic conclusion of the Vietnam War created a new discursive schema and regimes of power where South Vietnamese as former colonial subjects of the U.S. were thrown into a new world of empire. As the postmodern Marxist theorists observe: "The Vietnam War was the final episode of the United States' ambiguous inheritance of the old [European] imperialism…after the Vietnam War the new world market was organized: a market that destroyed the fixed boundaries and hierarchical procedures of European imperialism" (243). Negri and Hardt describe the historical moment after the Vietnam War as establishing a new postmodern global empire in which the ghosts of the past are buried but also rehashed again in distended form by the disorientating changes of the present historical moment. Bringing back the Vietnam War to speak about the war in the early 21st century therefore ruptures the historical amnesia and social hierarchies of the post-Vietnam War era by touching upon a group of people—the South Vietnamese—whose material presence in the world seems outside this "post-Vietnam" neoliberal order.

Though they are the living permanent reminders of one of the most famous events in world history, South Vietnamese are often denied a part in narrating their own historical experience and political struggles in the postwar period. This erasure can be

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area studies which have used Anderson's observations in abstract terms. Anderson observes that Southeast Asia offers "comparative historical interests special advantages, since it includes territories colonized by almost all the 'white' imperial powers—British, France, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, and the United States—as well as uncolonized Siam." Thus, while postcolonial studies has tended to emerge from territories and populations conquered by old colonial powers in Africa, Latin America and South Asia, Southeast Asia remains discursively framed in terms of war rather than colonialism perhaps owing to the more recent history of wars there. See Anderson (1991), p. 164.

attributed to the representational strategies and homogenizing discourses produced during and after the Vietnam War that depicted Americans as leaders of the Free World and saviors of the South Vietnamese, the latter seen as the dependent, passive victims of U.S. Cold War struggles…the lost nation. Where North Vietnamese communist forces were rendered the faceless "enemy," the South Vietnamese constituted another kind of facelessness in not only the American but global cultural imaginary (Nguyen 2006, Espiritu 2006).[142] As Viet Le (2005) observes, "American depictions of the Vietnam War effaces Vietnamese agency; Vietnamese native and diasporic communities continue to grapple with this representational void" (23). This representational void continues to expand, especially at a time when the U.S. government is facing a type of "Vietnam Syndrome due to various conflagrations and wars in the Middle-East engendered by a "new, economically pragmatic emergent ideology that needs the Other" (Polan 1996: 274).

In developing a critique of the cultural representations of South Vietnamese today through the analytic of Vietnamization, my goal is to conceptualize the cultural sphere as a site of politics and representational struggles. As Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) writes in *The Global Idea of Race*, since the late twentieth century "the cultural seems to have displaced the nation and the racial to become the governing political signifier. Prior to this, the racial and the nation guided constructions of the foremost modern political subject, namely, the nation-state, and both were appropriated worldwide by subaltern subjects in transnational and transcontinental alliances against colonialism

[142] The Vietnam War is one of the most studied and significant events in modern history but the understanding of the Vietnamese and their representation is often ignored or peripheral. By this manner, the Vietnamese come to represent both the hyper-visible *and* invisible subjects of a major historical, political and cultural event that has almost become their symbolic namesake.

and imperialism" (xxxii). Silva believes that rather than recuperating and "locating the place of emergence of racial subaltern subjects in a temporal slot by deploying a good version of historicity, which would include their 'submerged histories" (168), we need to chart the field of modern representation in its various dimensions and critique the discursive strategies that seek to enable and write these so called "others of Europe" into being as subjects of modern power-knowledge.[143] Following Silva's observations, I see the necessity of reading South Vietnamese as the subaltern beings, absent but also never fully absent from social consciousness.[144] The project of uncovering their struggles is not a historical recovery of the past, centering a South Vietnamese cultural history or identity, but entails a critical engagement with the conditions of historical representation that emplot them on "particular sociohistorical trajectories as subaltern travelers on the road to transparency" (ibid).[145] My task in this project thus involves deconstructing South Vietnamese *as* a proper authentic subjects of history within a new historical moment in the 21st century that "demand the recognition (inclusion) of the cultural

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[143] She believes that existing fields such as postcolonial studies and its critical interventions are often limited often they fail to "write against the limits of (their critique of) historicity, which relies on the modern construction of distance as a temporal metaphor to circumscribe the place of the emergence of the colonized as a transparent I" (ibid).

[144]Denise da Silva elaborates by saying that the European colonial conquest over the rest of the world ushered in and instituted a modern ontoepistemological context that produced "globality as a configuration unevenly divided between bodies and regions of affectability and bodies and regions of transparence" where non-Europeans are "placed outside history and reason [or]…fixed in an earlier time or altogether outside time" (166). Following Silva, I recognize that culture a basic analytic fails to reconfigure the original European sociological and anthropological sense of "culture" as a means of making a ontological distinction among groups of people (from a Eurocentric perspective) that "incarcerates" non-Europeans peoples and subjects in their spatio-temporal particularities and positionalities as the "Others of Europe" lacking moral reason and liberal rational consciousness—distinctions drawn from colonial divisions in post-Enlightenment thought. See Silva**,** Denise Ferreira da. *Toward a Global Idea of Race.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[145]If we think and assume that everyone today has "culture" and produce their own culture based on timeless primordial essentialized qualities, we fail to demonstrate how certain social subjects are inscribed as subjects of modern knowledge and power.

difference" of those who have been erased from the trajectory of late modernity (Silva 2007: 166).

The term "Vietnamization" provides both a tool and historical point of departure for understanding the burdens of self-representation that are imposed upon Vietnamese people in the afterlife of the Vietnam War. Vietnamization, I believe, applies not only to a particular American military strategy during the Vietnam War but also to the historical burdens and signifying processes that write Vietnamese as not-yet modern liberal subjects unable to actualize their own moment of freedom.[146] It is a manifestation of a larger imperial agenda of reforming and incorporating the "others of Europe" into Western modernity but only under the conditions placed by former imperial powers. So while the United States seems to have moved on from its humiliating defeat in Vietnam (though repeating its mistakes again in places like Afghanistan), those most affected by Vietnamization—the South Vietnamese—continue to deal with the ravages of this unforgettable war, circumscribed by conditions of the past while dealing with new forms of becoming in the present.

My immediate interests are not concerned with the legacy and effects of the post-war history (how it is remembered or dealt with in actual material terms). Usually the South Vietnamese are studied in relation to the Vietnam War from a linear perspective, defined in official terms (pre and post-1975), but I see the war primarily as a moment to

[146] The U.S. military policy of Vietnamization enabled the U.S. government (and U.S. Americans) to avoid complicity in their role in the war, putting sole blame on the Vietnamese for the military conflict and its consequences. Seen as a military failure produced by the South Vietnamese to fight and win the war themselves, the Vietnamization of the Vietnam War is construed as a problem of Vietnamese peoples to attain political freedom. Yet, it is through the violent social and material conditions of war that certain non-European peoples become part of the world of modern politics and representation, the conditions through which they must still work through in the aftermath of war.

study how the South Vietnamese are still re-represented under the militarized conditions of war, forced to bear the burden of winning/losing the war and the social and cultural invisibility that comes from those conditions. Cultural production provides the discursive/material terrain through which Vietnamese are figured and enfigured, where cultural production is not simply about creative forms of play but reveal the "circuits of desire" and technologies of power through which ideas about Vietnamese cultural identity and subjectivity are routed, transmitted and communicated across space and time (Duong 2009). Following cultural critic Jodi Kim (2010), I recognize that the Vietnam War created a "war-surplus" of cultural memory and meaning that cannot be easily wiped out in the postwar period. Recognizing this reveals that there is no end to military violence and conflict but rather such violence is endlessly reprocessed through new socio-historical conditions. Kim asks how "Vietnam" and "the Vietnamese" get produced through the militarized discourse of war as well as its protracted afterlife (196). The Vietnam War's hegemonic construction as a geopolitical Cold War-based conflict obscures its salience as a site of de-colonial struggle against the U.S. In her book *Ends of Empire*, Kim argues that the United States failed to wrap up the loose "ends of empire" it created during its multiple imperial wars in Asia, which now must stage a dialogical recurring encounter with its "imperialist gendered racial political unconscious" (8).[147] The loose "ends of empire" and "political unconscious" of the Cold War as Kim puts, denies the historical past in the amnesiac imaginings of present and future relations have

[147] Indeed, the Communist/Capitalist threat of China and U.S. concerns with this rising superpower can be found in China's and the Chinese diasporic presence in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia and the Middle-East.

become part of the globalizing fantasy of a post-colonial, post-racial order where we could forget traumatic events like the Vietnam War.

Rather than demonstrating a clean break from colonial war histories, I believe cultural productions created after the Vietnam War enable us to interrogate the spatialization and subject-formation of Vietnamese within the current imperial moment. Whereas the Vietnam War was not simply a Cold-War related struggle between communism and democracy but a condensation point for articulating political and cultural struggles around the world over issues of nation, colonialism and war (Oropeza 2005),[148] the failure of the South Vietnamese government to become a beacon of "freedom" and "democracy" in Vietnam foregrounds the historical challenges of re-presenting South Vietnam as a viable geopolitical formation. For the South Vietnamese, the memory of the war has not ended,[149] and where the cultural production acts as the "form" of politics as Jodi Kim suggests, I look at the politics of culture as the site of war over what it means to be Vietnamese and South Vietnamese today.[150] To *recognize* a group of people necessitates a politics of representation. In *Bound by Recognition*,[151] Markell exhorts scholars to go beyond the idea that historically disadvantaged groups should be

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[148] Oropeza, Lorena**.** *Raza Sí!, Guerra No! : Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

[149] By focusing on cultural politics, my aim is not to diminish or ignore more "serious" political struggles over missing persons, Agent Orange defoliant compensations, land mines, human rights, sex trafficking and other issues. Rather, cultural politics as based in the struggles over how to define culture, cultural identity, discourse and memory are important I contend in understanding the limits and potential of political "agency" in strict legalistic, juridical terms.

[150] Cultural politics as site of political warfare harkens back to the ideas of the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci who a century earlier crystallized the idea of modern culture as a site of politics and struggle not something that likes outside the political. Gramsci uses the term the "war of maneuver" as opposed to a "war of position" to describe how subject-positions and groups are staged similar to the theater of warfare in modern culture and how "cultural hegemony" and rule is established by ruling classes over subordinate groups. Gramsci's concern with the working and intellectual "classes" and class consciousness does not fully extend to those who come from the European imperial colonies and global peripheries.

[151]Patchen Markell. *Bound by Recognition.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

represented and recognized the way they "are" which freezes those groups in their objective "being" and identity based in some primordial essence. As he puts it, the key to recognition lies not in "the mere fact that recognition occurs in time [but] that recognition links an agent's past and present to the future; and that the politics of recognition involves a distinctive kind of practical relation to these different horizons of temporality" (10). Following Markell, I see a politics of recognition for South Vietnamese operating within multiple dimensions of temporality, historicity and discourse that are embedded one singular social body or identification. Indeed, Markell suggests that we interrogate those "underlying structures of desire that animate systematic relations of inequality, for it suggests that social relations of subordination and the images and representations that accompany them may be supposed in part by the (impossible) aspiration to achieve sovereign agency" (89). The political theorist is focused primarily with the state recognition of minority groups within the juridico-political domain of sovereignty. In contrast, my dissertation focuses on the diffuse struggles over meaning and various temporal frames for recognizing South Vietnamese as subjects of contemporary cultural knowledge-production. Utilizing Vietnamization as a concept to analyze the forms of historical recognition accorded to them in the 21st century, I elucidated the struggle to articulate the postwar condition of South Vietnam as that what 'could be' from the what 'could have been.' In doing so, I put forth the main contention that Vietnamization is not simply a policy of war but a reconfiguration of the idea of Vietnamese people as those who cannot be self-determined, liberal modern subjects. The fact that this term still has relevance today, impacting the racial construction and interpellation of non-Vietnamese peoples such as Afghanis as non-sovereign peoples, suggests that the Vietnamization of

war does not necessarily describe the end of war but the constant struggle with the mutable conditions of war. Such incipient struggle plays out and coagulates through what I have been dealing with as the Vietnamization of history and memory.

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