

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Rethinking, Returning, Repossessing

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9n88n2mq>

Journal

Amerasia Journal, 46(2)

ISSN

0044-7471

Author

Bui, Long T

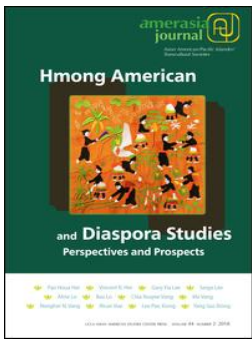
Publication Date

2020-05-03

DOI

10.1080/00447471.2020.1865096

Peer reviewed



Rethinking, Returning, Repossessing

Long T. Bui

To cite this article: Long T. Bui (2021): Rethinking, Returning, Repossessing, Amerasia Journal, DOI: [10.1080/00447471.2020.1865096](https://doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2020.1865096)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2020.1865096>



Published online: 11 Jan 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Rethinking, Returning, Repossessing

Long T. Bui

Department of Global & International Studies, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

Exhuming the legacy of a state that exists only in apparition and in the flesh, I study the footprints of diasporic youth migrating back to Vietnam, intergenerational hostility among kin, soldiers battling the demons of “future Vietnams,” and feminists and queers fighting for sanctuary within “Little Saigon.” I rethink how heteropatriarchy and patriotic hypermasculinity produced the gendered sexual violence that recurs in the name of community.

KEYWORDS

Vietnam; war; memory

My parents came from South Vietnam. Like ghosts from a ghost country, I do not know when or how they came *or* even where they are now. Gone missing and not disappeared from this world. These ghouls birthed children on the ash heap of history, consigning them to a wounded zombified future. Abandoned with umbilical cords that cannot be discarded or dismembered. Shadows to the past flit by like eye floaters, raising the entombed memories of incest, rape, and abuse within a broken family, which could not hold itself together. In *Returns of War*, I traced the carnal desires, wants, and hopes of belonging to a militarized nation, one created as a conjugal ally during the Vietnam War. Nixon’s policy to “Vietnamize” an Americanized war allowed the United States to divorce its Cold War partner. Under this exit strategy, the Republic of Vietnam collapsed yet never vanished. Wondering the same of my absentee parents, I question where South Vietnam (and the U.S. empire) is today. Exhuming the legacy of a state that exists only in apparition and in the flesh, I studied the footprints of diasporic youth migrating back to Vietnam, intergenerational hostility among kin, soldiers battling the demons of “future Vietnams,” and feminists and queers fighting for sanctuary within “Little Saigon.” Through these cases, I rethink how heteropatriarchy and patriotic hypermasculinity produced the gendered sexual violence that recurs in the name of community. Their namesakes (Iraq, Vietnam, Afghanistan, etc.) constitute the wrecked phantasmagoria of serialized conquest and endless conflict.

Beyond the reproductive conjuring of warring spirits, I ask who and where are the people that claim active membership in the body politic. How do overt political claims to territory and heritage squelch (or fan) the flames of personal sovereignty and the right to self? Tragic echoes of war resound in the loud clamor of anticommunist protests, even as they too reside in the small whispers of intimate voices. Amid searching for the paranormal activity and evidence of South Vietnamese cultural citizenship, I fell into a communal geography with no fixed coordinates – the markings of empire. My editor and readers did not understand at

first why I was trying to look everywhere, yet how do you hunt down a spook? In one chapter, I made the journey to the largest Vietnam War archives in the country, which happened to be my birthplace, which I did not know. In this place of multiple “south-ernness,” I had to contend with buried collective memories and wandering secrets. Bloody stories found in old photos, interviews, and personal items haunt those who visit archives and the colonized lands they are found on. A poltergeist always wants what it wants, but what if the thing you crave is to repossess the spectral menace itself? What is the unseen toll for the enduring presence of death, whether from ancestors or governments? Does postwar come after partition? While some pay more of the cost of separation than others, all refugees pay dearly, and that is the lesson of South Vietnam.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Long T. Bui is an associate professor in the Department of Global & International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Research areas include popular media culture, refugees, global political economy, and race, gender and sexuality. He is the author of *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (NYU Press, 2018).