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Introduction by Edwin Martini, Western Michigan University

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Introduction by Edwin Martini, Western Michigan University

In his recent book *Vietnam At War*, historian Mark Bradley writes that despite the persistence of official memorial practices for the war dead, the Vietnamese state “has increasingly lost the ability to control the memory of war.”¹ Bradley used popular Vietnamese films and novels to make his case. In her new book, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*, Christina Schwenkel offers the first true, book-length case study of how battles over the public memory of the American war are playing out on the ground in Vietnam, tracing “what happens when contrasting knowledge and images from separate spheres of memory converge in joint spaces” (5). The state is indeed losing its grasp on official memory, but it is the multifaceted ways in which that memory is being contested, negotiated and, in some cases, displaced—the messy work of cultural memory—that forms the basis of Schwenkel’s approach.

The result is a fascinating exploration of a variety of transnational cultural practices, from tourism to public art to everyday memorialization rituals, all of which reveal the ambivalent, always unfinished work of memory. As several of the reviewers point out, Schwenkel’s book is poised to take its place alongside other important recent works in the field by Bradley, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, and Heonik Kwon.² Something often called for but rarely attempted (let alone accomplished so successfully) Schwenkel’s work is a major contribution to the literature of several fields and a model for future interdisciplinary, transnational studies of culture and memory.

Like the work they explore, the reviews by Tuan Hoang, Heonik Kwon, Scott Laderman, and Ken MacLean are themselves so rich and full of nuance that it is somewhat reductive to summarize concisely their primary points. Still, there appear to be a few overlapping points of both praise and concern:

1. The reviewers praise Schwenkel’s ambitious transnational approach, particularly her attention to the role played by global market forces in shaping the transformation Vietnamese memorial practices. There is some debate, however, about the primacy Schwenkel bestows on global capitalism in her analysis. Laderman and MacLean find persuasive Schwenkel’s description of the role of global markets in commodifying Vietnamese cultural practices and in making possible the transnational spaces of museums and other tourist-related activities. Hoang, on the other hand, asks whether the author understates the role played by the failures of socialism, which, he argues, “carried important and lasting repercussions about how Vietnamese, independent of the rhetoric of

¹ Mark Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184.

² Bradley, *Vietnam at War* and *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation at in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Kwon, *Ghosts of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the state, thought of the war from which they suffered so much.” (10)

2. The reviewers raise a few minor yet significant concerns about Schwenkel’s theoretical approach. Although MacLean calls the work “theoretically sophisticated yet accessible,” Laderman wonders if the “theoretical complexity” may limit the book’s audience, particularly for undergraduate courses. (3) Both agree, however, that the book deserves a wide audience outside the academy. Hoang and MacLean both ask whether Schwenkel could not have developed her concept of “recombinant history,” appropriated from David Starks’ “recombinant property,” a bit more. Hoang writes that the concept is “theoretically tantalizing” but “not pursued in depth.” (8) Similarly, MacLean would have liked to see Schwenkel more fully engage the implications of equating memory with property, particularly given the complex dynamics of global capitalism and state-based socialism that run through Schwenkel’s narrative. (4)

3. Finally, all four reviewers praise Schwenkel’s commitment to representing a diversity of voices in her work, particularly her attention to everyday Vietnamese. Growing out of her method of “polymorphous engagement,” her efforts to include a broad array of subjects and objects successfully demonstrates the diversity of Vietnamese views on the American war and its legacies. By decentering the state and its role as protector and defender of the official memory of the war, Schwenkel finds multiple, conflicting, even ambivalent memory work filling the void. Still, Kwon wonders if Schwenkel has adequately grappled with the legacies of the bipolar American Cold War and Vietnamese postcolonial frameworks and what these might continue to mean for those still dealing with “the lived realities of these wars.” (3) Hoang also asks why, given her otherwise expansive, transnational approach, Schwenkel did not attempt to incorporate other voices into her study, such as the street vendors selling objects of memory to tourists and, particularly, the voices of diasporic Vietnamese whom, he writes, would seem to be “uniquely transnational” subjects for this type of project. (9)

For years, American presidents, diplomats, and veterans have been trying to write “the final chapter” in their nation’s war against Vietnam; they have sought to bring “closure” to a war that, for many, has no end. Christina’s Schwenkel’s book reminds us both that such efforts were always premature without a more fundamental reckoning of the true impact of the war on the Vietnamese nation and people, and that, given the complex workings of historical memory, such efforts may in fact always be artificial or, at best, incomplete. If the type of “knowledge frictions” she traces are always already in a state of contestation within nation-based frameworks, they are necessarily more so in the complex, transnational spaces she describes. For those who wish to continue to follow this complex, fascinating process, however, Schwenkel has provided an invaluable initial roadmap.

Participants:

Christina Schwenkel (PhD, University of California at Irvine 2004) is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of California Riverside. She is the author of *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (2009), and has published articles on social suffering and the politics of memory in Vietnamese museums, war photography exhibits, and sites of trauma tourism in journals including *Cultural Anthropology* (2006), *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (2008), and *American Anthropologist* (2009). She is currently living in Vinh City, Vietnam, conducting historical and ethnographic research on socialist urbanization and East German postwar reconstruction of the city, supported by ACLS, Fulbright-Hays, and UC Pacific Rim Research Program. An article based on this research, entitled "Civilizing the City: Socialist Ruins and Urban Renewal in Central Vietnam" is forthcoming in *positions: east asia cultures critique*.

Tuan Hoang is a PhD candidate in the Department of History, University of Notre Dame. His article "The Early South Vietnamese Critique of Communism" appears in Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat, eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Heonik Kwon received PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge, UK, and teaches anthropology at the London School of Economics. He is the author of the prizewinning *After the Massacre in Ha My and My Lai* (2006) and *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (2008). His new book, *The Decomposition of the Cold War*, will be published in 2010 by Columbia University Press. He is conducting a British Academy research project on contemporary history of the Korean War and preparing an international collaborative research network project that brings together the social and international studies of the Korean War. He is also writing a book on the Korean War commemorations and one on North Korean political culture.

Scott Laderman, an assistant professor of history at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, is the author of *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* (Duke University Press, 2009). He received his Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, in 2005. He is currently co-editing a collection of essays on the United States and Vietnam since 1975 for Duke University Press, and is also at work on a new book on the history of global surf culture.

Ken MacLean is an Assistant Professor of International Development and Social Change at Clark University. His most recent publications on Vietnam include: "The Collected Works of the Communist Party: The Possibilities and Limits of Official Representations of Actually Existing Government," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2010): 195-207; "In Search of Kilometer Zero: Digital Archives, Technological Revisionism, and the Sino-Vietnamese Border," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 50, No. 4 (2008): 862-894; "The Rehabilitation of an Uncomfortable Past: Remembering the Everyday in Vietnam during the Subsidy Period (1975-1986)," *History and Anthropology* Vol. 19, No. 3 (2008): 281-303.

Edwin Martini is Associate Chair and Associate Professor of History at Western Michigan University. He received his Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland in 2004. His first book, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*, was published by the University of Massachusetts Press in 2007. He is currently finishing work on a book project entitled "Agent Orange: A History," (under contract with the University of Massachusetts), which explores the global histories and legacies of the use of chemical agents by the United States during the Vietnam War.

I confess to initial hesitancy when invited to contribute to this roundtable.¹ It was not because I was hired to spell-check Vietnamese words and phrases in the final draft of this book: a technical matter. Rather, I asked whether someone trained in history like myself could do justice reviewing a work in anthropology. Historians are not especially known for theory, and there is a good deal of theory in this book. There is also the matter of grasping terminologies from the social sciences and cultural studies that, let's face it, could be heavy-going at times for at least some in the historical discipline.

But I agreed to participate because I think there is a lot about the Vietnam Conflict and especially its aftermath that historians could learn from their anthropological counterparts. This merits an explanation before I get to the book. Between the Second Indochina War and the end of the Cold War, the number of English-language ethnographers on Vietnam was tiny in comparison to political and other social scientists. Still, several pioneering works came out, particularly from the indefatigable Gerald Hickey, that help to explain (at least in hindsight) some of the problems encountered or perpetuated by the U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) as they built a noncommunist state.² Then in the last two decades, the field saw a dramatic regeneration as Vietnamese and international conditions allowed for greater access to the country. The transition to this rebirth overlapped somewhat with an important shift within anthropology that saw ethnographers move from a concept of culture as unity and coherence to one that takes culture as process. Although ethnography was never devoid of history, the more pluralistic conception has led to greater inclusion of history in the discipline in addition to historical research from anthropologists themselves.³

The combination of theoretical redirection and access to fieldwork has yielded many excellent works, including several from long-time practitioners who invariably addressed

¹ I would like to thank Thomas Maddux for the invitation to the roundtable, and Nu-Anh Tran and Wynn Wilcox for their comments on an earlier draft of the review.

² Anthropological literature between the 1960s and the 1980s include Marilyn W. Hoskins and Eleanor M. Shepherd, *Life in a Vietnamese Urban Quarter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Center for Vietnamese Studies, 1965); A. Terry Rambo, *A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Center for Vietnamese Studies, 1973); Gerald Hickey, *Village in Vietnam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); idem., *Sons of Mountain: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); idem., *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands, 1954-1976* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

³ See Susan Kellogg, "Histories for Anthropology: Ten Years of Historical Research and Writing by Anthropologists, 1980-1990," *Social Sciences History* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 417-455. Kellogg dates the start of the shift to the late 1970s and identifies three influences from outside: Marxist scholarship, literary studies, and social history (419). For an overview of the relationship between the two disciplines up until the late 1970s, see Bernard S. Cohn, "History and Anthropology: The State of Play," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (April 1980): 198-221.

the war in depth.⁴ The bulk of scholarship, however, came from the postwar generation of anthropologists. A few examples will suffice. Hy Van Luong has illuminated much about village life in the north, especially its complicated intersections with noncommunist then communist revolutionaries during late colonialism and subsequent warfare. On the postwar period, Shawn Malarney and Heonik Kwon have studied how villagers in northern and central Vietnam remember and commemorate the war dead. In Hanoi, Susan Bayly interviewed intellectuals and their families about their lives during late- and postcolonial periods. Focusing on southern Vietnam, Philip Taylor has contributed to the perspective-shifting argument that the history of the region, including that of the RVN, has produced different notions about modernity than those advocated by the Vietnamese communists.⁵

To be sure, this scholarship is varied. But when read together, it illuminates many of the complexities about the Vietnamese that are not apparent in historical accounts about the war, which are geared heavily towards diplomatic and military subjects. Moreover, the preoccupation of this scholarship with overarching themes of modernity, revolution, post-colonialism, and commemoration echoes those from historians of wartime and postwar periods. This is not a one-way street either, as ethnographers of Vietnam have used the historiography of the war in varying degrees for their own scholarship. On occasions, as in the works of Neil Jamieson and Ken MacLean, anthropology looks nearly indistinguishable from history, thanks to similarities in thematic treatment and extensive reliance on archival or published sources.⁶

⁴ Gerald Hickey, *Shattered World: Adaptation and Survival among Vietnam's Highland Peoples During the Vietnam War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); A. Terry Rambo, *Searching for Vietnam: Selected Writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2005); David W. Haines, *The Limits of Kinship: South Vietnamese Households 1954-1975* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, Southeast Asian Publications, 2006). See also Hickey's memoir, *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002).

⁵ Hy Van Luong, *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), expanded as *Tradition, Revolution, and Market Economy in a North Vietnamese Village, 1925-2006* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010); Shawn Malarney, *Culture, Ritual, and Revolution in Vietnam* (Richmond, Surrey: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Susan Bayly, *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age: Vietnam, India and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South* (Crows Nest, Australia and Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawai'i Press, 2000). For more, consult Hy V. Luong, "Structure, Practice, and History: Contemporary Anthropological Research on Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, nos. 1-2 (February/August 2006): 371-409.

⁶ Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Ken MacLean, "Manifest Socialism: The Labor of Representation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1956-1959)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 27-79. Jamieson's book uses published literary and cultural materials in addition to fieldwork done before 1975, and MacLean's article utilizes archival sources in Hanoi. Much of the same could be said about *Tradition, Revolution, and Market Economy* as it utilizes French and Vietnamese archives in addition to extensive fieldwork and oral history.

Summary of the book

Among the latest additions to this anthropological lineage is *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam* by Christina Schwenkel.⁷ Similar to the works of Malarney and Kwon, it addresses memory and commemoration of Vietnamese experiences in the war against the Americans.⁸ But the similarities end there for the most part. In contrast to these and most other works cited thus far, it does not concern a particular village, city, province, or region. It shuttles across the country instead, and in and out of urban and rural localities. The Mekong Delta, it seems, is the only of eight national regions not traversed. No matter, as readers are taken to a northern commune, the valley of Dien Bien Phu, a town not far from the former DMZ, a southern district that was once a stronghold of the National Liberation Front (NLF), and at least half a dozen of major cities. No less dazzling is the amount of objects under analysis. Accompanied by forty photographs, the text considers monuments, memorials, museums, exhibitions, tunnels, peace and theme parks, wartime martyr temples, military cemeteries, the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh – even children’s paintings and Zippo lighters. As either preview or relief to intense gazing at these stationary constructs, the text and notes provide occasional glimpses at parades, restaurants, cafés, and nightclubs in Hanoi and the city that now bears Ho’s name.

Why such energetic crisscrossing? Why so many visual objects? The answer is that Schwenkel practices “polymorphous engagement,” which she describes as “fieldwork that moves away from its dependence on participant observation to engage with a host of sites, diverse groups of people, and interdisciplinary methodologies.” In turn, polymorphous engagement “requires looking at a range of sources, cultural productions, documents, and media representations,” plus “interacting with people in spaces outside designated field sites” (15). The last quotation accounts for the inclusion of the aforesaid urban establishments. It also calls to mind the fact that I have yet to bring up the people that populate the narrative. Similar to most ethnographers, Schwenkel leaves top elites to political scientists and economists and focuses instead on the people lower down. But a large and diverse lot they are that includes, among others, tourists and tour guides; painters and sculptors; architects and performance artists; exhibitors and museum staff; intellectuals and street vendors; American veterans participating in humanitarian and reconciliatory projects; and Vietnamese veterans of the NLF, the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN), and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Some had overlapping roles. Some of the tourists were also U.S. veterans, some of the tour guides had been ARVN soldiers, and at least one exhibitor was a PAVN veteran.

⁷ Recent monographs include Mai Lan Gustafsson, *War and Shadows: The Haunting of Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Heonik Kwon, *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008).

⁸ See also the essays from historians and other Vietnam Studies scholars in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

Nonetheless, it is not people or location but object matters that determine the structure of this study. Bookended by an introduction and a short conclusion, the book is organized in three main sections, each further divided into two chapters. The first section concerns reconciliatory projects between American and NLF-PAVN veterans. Chapter One discusses differences on perceptions of reconciliation and healing from Vietnamese and Americans, the latter primarily veterans. Chapter Two zooms in on the exhibit “Requiem” that featured wartime photographs from mostly Americans and NLF-PAVN photographers. The second section is about different memorial landscapes: Chapter Three focuses on Vietnamese commodification of war sites and war relics; the next chapter, on constructions and meanings of monuments commemorating the Vietnamese experiences of the war. The final section again takes on the contested terrain of interpreting the war between, again, Americans and Vietnamese. Chapter Five discusses museums and various reactions to them; and the last chapter takes us to the Iraqi War and addresses interrelated issues of POW torture, human rights, and what the author calls “neoliberal politics of historical unaccountability” on the part of the U.S.

This summary barely conveys the breadth and ambitiousness of the study. Then there is analysis. As indicated by the subtitle, the book makes the argument that Vietnamese memory and representation of the war have been a transnational confluence and process rather than simply a nationalist construction. Most important to this confluence are the global market and the formalization of Vietnamese-American relations. The author emphasizes this point by starting the book with Bill Clinton’s visit to Hanoi in 2000. It was the first visit of a U.S. president since the end of the war, and Schwenkel considers the episode indicative of “the ambivalence, anxiety, and cautious optimism that underline postwar reconciliation processes and Vietnam’s graduated reintegration into a global capitalism” (4). She attributes these undercurrents to divergent expectations from Americans and Vietnamese. On the one hand are American “pressures to adopt and institute more broadly US free market capitalism and its attendant moral ideologies of freedom, rights, and democracy”; on the other hand is “Vietnam’s determination to negotiate and delimit the extent of liberalization and to maintain its hard-won economic and political sovereignty” (ibid.) This tension is not limited to economic and diplomatic arenas but extends to that of Vietnamese commemoration of the war. There is also tension created by differences along generational and historical lines among Vietnamese themselves. The tension led to what Schwenkel calls “the commingling, and at times the clash, between disparate transnational memories of war in Vietnamese public spaces of history” (5). Though not always easy to spot, the terrain of memory and representation in contemporary Vietnam is hardly monolithic but has been contested by many actors and in different ways.

A major contribution on several fronts

The challenges are many in attending to so many sites, gathering data on so many subjects, and sorting them out for various analyses. Schwenkel meets a number of these challenges and generates numerous insights. There are enough of them that I believe scholars of postwar Vietnam and U.S.-Vietnamese relations will be indebted to her book for some time to come.

In my view, Schwenkel is most successful at challenging binaries about Vietnamese representation of the war against the U.S. According to one such binary, there are two realms of postwar commemoration of the war dead. On the one hand is the state-sanctioned, public, and secular realm. It is most apparent in official sites such as monuments and cemeteries; and it assigns categories of “heroes” and “martyrs” to the military dead but leaves out others such as civilian victims. On the other hand is the unofficial and private realm that addresses the neglected dead through spiritual or religious rituals at temples, pagodas, and home altars. Schwenkel finds this binary schematic and ultimately inadequate because it “risks reifying cultural practices as fixed, timeless, ‘of the people’ and somehow outside the zone of national politics and memory” (122). She stresses instead the “mutual constitution” of these realms and offers two examples: the practice of placing small shrines of (public) martyrs in (private) temples and pagodas, and the construction of “martyr temples” throughout the country.

Another binary has to do with “traditional” and “foreign” modes of representation that are popularly held among Vietnamese. Backed up by choice statements from informants, Schwenkel observes that “Vietnamese aesthetic imaginaries are largely articulated through binary oppositions that inadvertently reinscribe essentialist discourse of difference: us/them; eastern/western; traditional/modern; harmonious/discordant” (140). But as her examination of several monumental objects demonstrates, Vietnamese architecture has adapted different trends and gradually moved towards a new “aesthetics of peace” that seeks to demilitarize much of recent representation of the Vietnam Conflict. It affects even the portrayal of Tran Hung Dao, an ancient anti-Mongol general and national hero, now depicted as a man of culture and morality rather than military prowess.

Schwenkel’s deconstruction of these binaries is incisive, and her conclusions are persuasively drawn from close evaluations of museums and monuments, memorial temples and stellae, obelisks and graves. They contribute to a larger point, which is that global capitalism has continually affected how Vietnamese commemorate and represent their war experiences. Most apparent are the influences of tourism. Although the number of American visitors has been lower than expected, enough have come from the U.S, Canada, Australia, and Europe to the southern region to have prompted a commodification of war artifacts sold on the street and in stores. Even former PAVN photographers have published their war photographs into booklets and postcards for commercial ends. Moreover, tourism has “inspired the selective re-Americanization of the postwar landscapes” on the part of Vietnamese officials (83). They responded, for instance, to complaints from Western visitors that there was not a lot to see at certain former war sites by placing visual artifacts (such as weapons and military vehicles) and providing more tourist-friendly access (such as enlarging underground tunnels). Tourists could even participate in virtual guerilla warfare – and not the video-game sorts – by renting Soviet AK-47s and buying rounds of ammunition to shoot into open fields.

Even museum displays and exhibits reflect the effects of international tourism. A photograph or a word in the caption, for instance, might be removed so not to offend the sensibilities of foreign visitors. In the words of a museum director, such removal is

justified because Vietnamese “need to respect history and also not forget the past” but “at the same time we are concerned with our nation’s economic development” (162). Though not the first to examine the assembly of historical artifacts for sightseeing, Schwenkel goes further than other scholars.⁹ She also looks into domestic tourism, and the book offers a fascinating contrast of two tourist sites at the Củ Chi Tunnel Historical Remains: one aimed at international visitors with war-themed exhibits; the other at domestic consumers with “hugs cafés” and escapist entertainment.

Another transnational aspect comes from attempts at reconciliation between U.S. veterans on the one hand and Vietnamese civilians and NLF-PAVN veterans on the other. Schwenkel conveys sufficiently the complexities associated to these processes on both sides. The concept of healing, for instance, means different things for Americans and Vietnamese. So do collaborative projects of demining, reforestation, and constructions of peace parks initiated by U.S. veterans. The Americans infused the projects with technical expertise and the desire to do good, but not necessarily with repentance. The Vietnamese saw it differently. As a southern Vietnamese put it bluntly, “Peace trees, peace parks, peace forests – it’s all so abstract” for the Vietnamese who “need fruit – not parks” (42). As for reconciliation, in the words of a PAVN veteran, it “implies a compromise, that both sides are wrong” and Vietnamese “used this word when talking about mediating relations between a husband and a wife, not between Vietnamese and U.S. citizens” (43). Divergent too are the American and Vietnamese emphases in their uses of war photographs and photographic exhibits, a point underscored by the exhibit “Requiem”. Photographs taken by Westerners, for instance, tend to emphasize violence and brutalization of the Vietnamese victims. In relative contrast, those taken by PAVN-NLF photographers tend to stress devotion to the country or to the revolution.

It would be simplistic, however, to say that reconciliatory and commemorative projects between Americans and Vietnamese were counter-productive. That is not what the author suggests at all. What she conveys instead is that attempts at reconciliation have been fraught with ambivalence towards each other, and American and Vietnamese veterans thought differently about the war and aftermath. In some ways, the differences came to blows over John McCain’s comments in 2000 about his years as POW in Hanoi and, four years later, the revelation about Abu Ghraib. They continue today over debates about human rights between the U.S. and Vietnam.

Some issues on method and interpretation

I find the book impressive and valuable, but also have several issues with it. For a start, the author sticks close to contemporary times and does not give an adequate account of past developments. True, she makes brief references to the past here and there, and spends several pages on the history of Vietnamese monumentalism (107-114). But they are not enough to offset the absence of background to memory in general, and tourism and

⁹ For instance, Laurel B. Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams, “The Past without the Pain: The Manufacture of Nostalgia in Vietnam’s Tourism Industry,” in Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory*, 135-163.

museums in particular. Lest it sounds that mine is predictably an historian's complaint, a look at major ethnographic monographs about Vietnam would reveal that most devote considerable space to the historical background of their subjects before analyzing them in depth.¹⁰

More problematic are certain aspects about methodology and interpretation. For one, the scope of the book is so ambitious and expansive that I find Schwenkel's analysis uneven in several respects and lacking in at least one other. These shortcomings come largely from having to live up to the ideal of "polymorphous engagement": the ethnographic equivalent of multi-archival, multi-linguistic, and interdisciplinary research for historians. It is a tall order that the author set up for herself, and she acknowledges as much in saying that "multi-sited, transnational research poses significant challenges to conventional ethnographic practice [that] I struggled to maintain a balance between depth and breadth" (15). To quote Hugh Gusterson, a major proponent of polymorphous engagement (whom Schwenkel paraphrases in the Introduction):

Polymorphous engagement means interacting with informants across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities, and sometimes in virtual form; and it means collecting data electrically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways. Polymorphous engagement preserves the pragmatic amateurism that has characterized anthropological research, but displaces it away from a fetishistic obsession with participant observation... However, polymorphous engagement also involved an eclectic mix of other research techniques: formal interviews of the kind often done by journalists and political scientists, extensive reading of newspapers and official documents, and careful attention to popular culture, for example.¹¹

I am not qualified to dissect the merits and debits of polymorphous engagement vis-à-vis participant observation. But to hold the author to her own standards, the book includes few official documents, newspapers, and other kinds of non-official and quasi-official published sources. The chapter on museums, for instance, notes only three newspaper articles and one governmental decree (all Vietnamese); the next chapter, on Vietnamese-American debates about human rights and POW torture, cites one Vietnamese article, one U.S. radio broadcast, and two U.S. Congressional Acts. This is not a lot, and I think greater documentation – especially on the Vietnamese side because less is known about it – would enhance the remarkable breadth of the author's fieldwork. The same is true about sources of communication among the Vietnamese, such as newspapers and Internet forums and

¹⁰ As I was completing this review, a new dissertation came out with two chapters on colonial and post-independence background to contemporary Vietnamese museums: Margaret Barnhill Bodemer, "Museums, Ethnology, and the Politics of Culture in Contemporary Vietnam" (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i, 2010), 31-91.

¹¹ Hugh Gusterson, "Studying Up Revisited," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (1997): 116.

exchanges. There is a methodological reason to use them more extensively. Throughout the book, Schwenkel notes possible limits of interviews and conversations with Vietnamese on the basis of her race and gender. It appears too that she knew most of her informants and interviewees for only a short time. As a result, they might not have been as forthcoming or detailed in their opinions to her as they could be with another Vietnamese or a foreign participant observer well known to them over time. Inclusion of written sources such as the above may help to supplement, clarify, support, or complicate the information gathered from her informants and interlocutors.

In comparison to Schwenkel's fine-grained analysis of official commemorative objects and sites, her take on private and non-official sources of memory, especially in the third chapter, is somewhat truncated. It has an excellent section on ARVN veterans now working as tour guides and, through their interactions with tourists, giving "unofficial historical knowledge." On the other hand, the chapter does not say a whole lot about unofficial commodities such as GI helmets and Zippo lighters sold by vendors on the street. This brings an unevenness in voice: the reader does not hear from any of vendors but, instead, from a Canadian tourist who joked about the Zippo while sitting at the Apocalypse Bar. This is not a large point, but I am curious as to why we do not hear what the vendors might have said about the "GI subjectivities" that they were selling?

At the same nightclub, Schwenkel notes the presence of domestic consumers and identifies them as "certain members of the Vietnamese populace with global social networks, such as artists, gays and lesbians, affluent youth, and employees of international organizations" (87). She suggests too that they were "embodiment of recombinant history," a notion borrowed in part from the concept of "recombinant property." This notion is theoretically tantalizing but is not pursued in depth. More to the point, the voices of the domestic consumers are not heard at the bar or elsewhere, and they are prescribed rather than described. Another example is Vietnamese youths. In Schwenkel's account, they constituted a major group of contestants to the state's representations of a war that officially ended well before they were born. They treated, for instance, the Củ Chi sites as entertainment rather than history (94-97). They were also disposed towards the new aesthetics of peace (137-139) but were uninterested in museum-going (150). The reader, however, rarely hears their voices, instead learning only what older Vietnamese said about them. It is not clear why the author chooses to leave out their voices.

There is another group that is not heard, and a sizable one at that. Schwenkel concentrates on Western tourists and pays scant attention to Asian visitors, including the Chinese who (as she rightly notes) constitute the largest group of international tourists to Vietnam, and whose country has had a most complicated relationship with Vietnam in the last sixty years. This is not a problem in itself, as a monograph does not need to cover every group of people. Other scholars versed in the respective languages can study transnational interactions with and influences from the Chinese, the South Koreans, or another group.

But I am puzzled by the author's decision to leave out the overseas Vietnamese, who are in some ways uniquely transnational for this case. The overseas Vietnamese are diverse in origins, orientations, and places of resettlement. They include refugees and immigrants

primarily from southern Vietnam now living in North America, Western Europe, and Australia; guest workers and students to the former Soviet bloc who stayed on in Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War; and others who came to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and other parts of Asia for work, studies, marriage, or another reason. Again, their backgrounds and orientations cannot be simplified. But as a whole they have exerted strong economic influence over Vietnam through investment and remittances, have maintained close cultural and familial ties to their places of origin, and have engaged in a wide range of humanitarian and philanthropic activities.¹² They visit Vietnam often, and some have re-relocated there for business or retirement. Some of their products – including prints and music videos that found their ways into private and semi-public space (such as cafés and karaoke houses) thanks to the black market and the Internet – offer alternative perspectives and memories about the war. The Vietnamese state might not like these products, but it certainly has cultivated closer ties with overseas Vietnamese through The Committee on Overseas Vietnamese (*Ủy Ban về Người Việt Nam ở Nước Ngoài*) and other official and quasi-official channels. To be sure, the author takes note of the overseas Vietnamese a few times in the book. But her decision not to include them in the analysis makes the book a touch less compelling than it could have been.

My final criticism has to do with Schwenkel's take on neoliberalism and memory. "Although in the past decade," notes Hy Van Luong in a state-of-the-field essay several years ago, "many anthropologists have examined the global rise of neoliberal discourse and its relation to local social formations in many parts of the world, including China, anthropologists working on Vietnam have not done so."¹³ This new book renders the statement true no more. Taking the lead from Aihwa Ong and other anthropologists, Schwenkel has joined scholars in other fields in asserting the power and significance of neoliberalism on contemporary Vietnam.¹⁴ This is a most welcoming achievement, and another reason that scholars will be indebted to this book for some time to come.

I think, however, that author overplays this thesis in one respect. Schwenkel takes

¹² For an example, see "Diaspora Philanthropy" and "Vietnam" at the Asian Philanthropy Forum website: <http://www.asianphilanthropyforum.org/vietnam/index.html> and <http://www.asianphilanthropyforum.org/diaspora-philanthropy.html>. See also Mark Sidel, "Vietnamese Diaspora Philanthropy to Vietnam" (2007), available at http://www.tpi.org/resources/white_papers/vietnamese_american_diaspora_philanthropy.aspx (accessed 25 August, 2010).

¹³ Luong, "Structure, Practice, and History": 391.

¹⁴ Two examples are law and sexuality: John Stanley Gillespie, *Transplanting Commercial Law Reform: Developing a 'Rule of Law' in Vietnam* (Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ, *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neo-Liberal Governance in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). Some ethnographic works have noted the significance of neoliberalism without going into great length about it: e.g., Pamela McElwee, "From the Moral Economy to the World Economy: Revisiting Vietnamese Peasants in a Globalizing Era," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 57-107. For a view of neoliberalism influential to the book under review, see Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutation in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-27.

ambivalence and anxieties and the “new knowledge” vis-à-vis memory and representation among the Vietnamese to be a result of the global market and the uneven power structure inherent to contemporary Vietnam-U.S. relations. While it is difficult to argue against the imbalance of bilateral power held by the U.S. over Vietnam, the extent of this unevenness is not as clear as asserted in the last chapter of the book. More to the point, the book’s insistence on the impact of neoliberal capitalism leaves out an earlier impact that came from the failures of the socialist state. These failures, especially during the first decade after national reunification, carried important and lasting repercussions about how Vietnamese, independent of the rhetoric from the state, thought of the war from which they suffered so much. Schwenkel’s emphasis on the effects of neoliberalism should be held in balance to the effects produced by these failures.

This connection has been made in regard to other issues. To quote at length from Luong’s essay:

In the Vietnamese case, globalization has heightened the concern in some circles about cultural identities and traditions, but a power-laden dialogue between the socialist state and local populations on those issues had started in the 1980s, before global capitalism became a powerful force in the space under the control of the Vietnamese Marxist state. In the same way that local actors’ foot dragging, fence breaking, and other forms of everyday resistance led to a change in the state’s economic policy in the 1980s, their similar behavior played a role in the shift in the state’s governing discourse on culture and rituals in Vietnam in the past two decades. I would suggest that our understanding of the shift in the dominant discourse, no matter whether it is on rituals, gender, ethnicity, class, or culture, would be enhanced by in-depth historical and comparative ethnographic research in a number of localities on the interplay of state, global, and local voices, with close attention to the larger political economic framework¹⁵

Extending this argument to the realm of memory of the war, I think that postwar economic and diplomatic problems shook the confidence of even the most ardent supporters of high socialism and, ultimately, contributed to the uncertainty and ambivalence among Vietnamese towards the state. Furthermore, the failures of the socialist state during the first decade after reunification affected the imaginaries, recollections, and reassessment of the war among Vietnamese. Recent works from political scientists, historians, and anthropologists indicate that the DRV and SRV encountered serious problems with citizens and even cadres as soon as they embarked on central planning and socialist policies. The Vietnamese have also questioned the costs of the revolution and war prosecution under the leadership of the Communist Party.¹⁶ For these reasons, it is difficult to think that

¹⁵ Luong, “Structure, Practice, and History”: 393.

¹⁶ Examples from political scientists are Benedict Tria J. Kiervliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Trung Dinh Dang, “Post-1975 Collective Farming in Southern Vietnam: How Local Politics Contributed to the Failure of and the

Vietnamese had not reconfigured memory of the war in some important ways well *before* the arrival of neoliberal economics and full diplomatic normalization with the U.S.

In this respect, it is worth returning to the Vietnamese youths at the Củ Chi sites one more time. Schwenkel makes a strong case that they were drawn to the sites by neoliberalism embodied in escapist entertainment. But this is not incompatible with the likelihood that they (and older Vietnamese) have questioned the official interpretation of the war, the ideological diet of Party-led nationalism, and, more recently, the promotion of “Ho Chi Minh Thought” in schools, other state-run institutions, and society at large. An examination of memory of the war from this angle would enhance transnational and neoliberal aspects that the book uncovers very well.

Final thoughts

In the U.S., the memory of the Vietnam War has been a subject for sociologists, literary and film scholars, and cultural historians. But that has changed, enough that a dozen of years after a president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) recommended better research into U.S.-RVN relations, another SHAFR president addressed the subject of memory of the war and alerted his fellow diplomatic historians that “the topic is far too important to leave to cultural historians” alone.¹⁷ The address foreshadowed a modest but growing scholarship from diplomatically oriented historians about memory and other legacies of the war in the last half decade, of which Robert Schulzinger’s history of the period is the most comprehensive in coverage and Michael Allen’s monograph on the POW/MIA lobby the deepest in research and most powerful in interpretation.¹⁸

Shift in National Agrarian Policy,” *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 8, no. 2 (2009): 299-331; Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State: North Vietnam’s State-Labor Relations, 1945-1970,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 329-356. Among works from historians are Balazs Szalontai, “Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005), 395-426; and François Guillemot, “Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950–1975),” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 17-60. Two examples from anthropologists are Pamela McElwee, “‘There is Nothing that is Difficult’: History and Hardship on and after the Ho Chi Minh Trail in North Vietnam,” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (December 2005): 197-214; and Taylor, *Fragments of the Present*, 56-88.

¹⁷ George C. Herring, “‘Peoples Quite Apart’: Americans, South Vietnamese, and the War in Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 14 (Winter 1990): 1-23; and Robert J. McMahon, “Contested Memory: The Vietnam War and American Society, 1975-2001,” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 163.

¹⁸ Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Other recent monographs include Thomas Hawley, *The Remains of War: Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006); Edwin A. Martini, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Scott Laderman, *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of*

The fact that Christina Schwenkel's book is not history should not obscure its originality and significance to historians. Indeed, it is its daring originality that has prompted much of my criticism. I'd like to end this review, however, with an appreciation for its achievements. The breadth of its methodology, the richness of its conceptualization, and the values of its findings will lead hopefully to further local or globally oriented ethnographic studies and, perhaps later, historical studies. More immediately, it provides historians of the Vietnam War and its legacies a fascinating look at how "the other side" has remembered and represented the long and destructive conflict.

Healing (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). A valuable but overlooked study of diplomatic history – Allen's alone among the titles above cites it – is Célile Menétrey-Monchau, *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy After the Capture of Saigon, 1975-1979* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006).

S*oi dau* is a familiar expression for people of the war generation in the southern and central regions of Vietnam. It refers to a ceremonial Vietnamese delicacy made of white rice flour and black beans. Used also as a metaphor, the term conveys how people of these regions experienced the Vietnam War. In this latter context, *soi dau* refers to the turbulent conditions of communal life during the war, when the rural inhabitants were confronted with successive occupations by conflicting political and military forces: at night the village was under the control of the revolutionary forces, and in daytime the opposing forces took control. Life in these villages oscillated between two different political worlds governed by the two hostile military forces. The people had to cope with their separate yet absolute demands of loyalty, and with the world changing politically from day to night, over many days and nights, to the extent that sometimes this anomalous world almost appeared to be normal. *Soi dau* conveys the simple truth that when you eat this sweet, you must swallow both the white and black parts. This is how *soi dau* is supposed to be eaten, and this is what it was like living a tumultuous life seized by the brutal dynamic reality of Vietnam's civil and international war.

Residents in a rural hamlet south of Danang endured the precarious life of *soi dau* for a number of years: both during the last years of the French War and throughout the ensuing American War. One family's experience of this era is particularly revealing. The family's grandfather is a former labor-soldier of the French colonial army and remembers a few words of French, in particular, "Je suis avec toi." From 1937-1938, the French colonial authority in Indochina conscripted numerous laborers from the central region of Vietnam and shipped them to the great Mediterranean city of Marseilles. There, two thousand Vietnamese were brought to the notorious *poudrerie*—the powdery of Marseilles. The conscripts manufactured gunpowder for the French army and, under the Vichy regime, for the German army. A number of these Vietnamese labor-soldiers objected to their situation and joined the French Resistance, whereas others continued to endure the appalling working conditions in the powdery. Returning home in 1948 after sharing with French citizens the humiliating experience of the German occupation, these foreign conscripts found themselves in a highly precarious situation: the cadres in the Vietnamese revolutionary movement distrusted them; indeed, they looked upon them as collaborators with the colonial regime. The French took no interest in their past service to the French national economy or in their contribution to the resistance movement against the German occupiers. Many of these returnees perished in the ensuing chaos of war, and many of their children joined the revolutionary resistance war against America in the following era. The grandfather was one of these returnees and has an extraordinary story of survival to tell: how he twice rescued his family from the imminent threat of summary execution—first, in 1953, by pleading to French soldiers in their language, and again in 1967, thanks to the presence of an American officer in the pacification team who understood a few words of French. The man's youngest brother died unmarried and without a descendent, and so the man's eldest son now performs periodic death-anniversary rites on behalf of the deceased. His brother was killed in action during the Vietnam War as a soldier of the South Vietnamese army, and his eldest son is a decorated former partisan fighter belonging to the

National Liberation Front. The man's grandmother died in a tragic incident in 1948, locked up in her home by a French pacification team who then set the house on fire. In the following era, the spirit of this woman came to assert her vitality through various apparitions, which eventually led the villagers to erect a small shrine in her memory on the site of her destroyed home. Throughout the chaos of the Vietnam War, her humble shrine attracted steady visits by local women who came to pray to the old woman for their family's safety. Today, the old woman's shrine continues to attract prayers for other aspirations and desires.

These stories of struggle for survival are hardly uncommon to Vietnamese villagers, but they remain unfamiliar to the existing histories of the Vietnam-American war, which have primarily focused on the international, diplomatic dimension of the war's historical reality. On the front of social history, existing accounts are strongly biased in favor of the Vietnam War as American history. Stories of unhealed wounds and enduring pains from the Vietnam War abound on the shelves of bookstores; yet, these stories are predominantly about the sufferings of American participants in the conflict and the troubling memories of this failed war that are felt in American society. Recently, however, there have been some notable public and scholarly efforts to change this situation and to look at the Vietnam War experience from Vietnamese perspectives, through their historical knowledge and experiences.

Christina Schwenkel's *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam* is an important and encouraging new contribution to the growing trend of paying both attention and respect to the other side of the Vietnam conflict. Schwenkel's rich ethnography of contemporary Vietnamese war commemoration and monumental arts follows the canonic ethos of modern anthropological research, which may be called the commitment to represent the native's point of view. The author is rightly critical of how in the previous era, this viewpoint was ignored, simplified and distorted. She also shows how distorted understandings of the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation and for a politically independent, unified postcolonial national community unfortunately persist today. Those who harbor these distorted views appear in her book with diverse identities, including U.S. lawmakers and American tourists to Vietnam. However, the main target of Schwenkel's critical commentary is the broad realm of public discourses about the meanings of the Vietnam War in contemporary American society. According to the author, even many years after Vietnam and the United States opened diplomatic relations, these two countries, which fought one of the longest armed conflicts in the modern world, have not yet found a point of mutual recognition about its origins and characters through which a meaningful closure of the past may become possible. For the United States, its efforts to come to terms with the Vietnamese side of the war fall far short of efforts to bring Vietnam into the global market economy; for Vietnam, its justified cause of keeping alive the legacy of its collective heroic struggle against a foreign power now must confront the market-driven propensity to drop the value of past history in order to make room for the value of future prosperity. Schwenkel courageously confronts these dynamic and turbulent changes taking place regarding the meanings of the Vietnam War both in national and transnational contexts. She describes these changes in diverse settings and through the voices of diverse groups of

actors, both Vietnamese and American, who not only observe and experience the changes but are also involved in making them.

The result is one of the first book-length studies of public memories about the war in Vietnam, a study that is sure to become essential, highly useful material for courses on the Vietnam War and modern American history. Particularly commendable are the moving accounts of the return to Vietnam by American Vietnam War veterans (chapter 1), for whom the return is often a vital experience of reconciling with themselves as well as with the past. As Schwenkel notes, referring to the powerful Vietnamese ritual idiom of *chia buồn* (sharing and distributing sadness), the burden of sorrowful memories becomes easier to shoulder when these vexing memories are brought out of the confines of privacy and shared in the public sphere, in a broad circle of people who care to listen to and embrace these recollections. Also notable are the accounts of the changing landscape of war commemoration and the changing shapes of Vietnamese war monumental art (chapter 4). The author writes about the ongoing soul-searching debates among Vietnamese artists and intellectuals regarding the forms of war monument appropriate for the era of *doi moi*, including the debates about the thin and elusive line between traditional Vietnamese art and imported foreign cultures of commemoration. These debates concern memorial forms that are, in substance, opposite to the practice of *chia buồn*. They are mainly about epitaphs, war hero statues and other similar permanent material objects that abound in the postwar Vietnamese landscape, unlike the ephemeral experience of sharing sorrows. These objects also intend to concentrate and regulate public memories, and therefore they sit uneasily with the principle of distribution, which constitutes the aesthetics and ethics of *chia buồn*. Schwenkel shows how the two different forces—the dynamic to share and distribute memories as well as its opposite, renewed efforts to monumentalize and centralize memories—are both vibrant in contemporary Vietnamese society, colluding and colliding with each other in myriad ways.

This commendable project to look at the legacies of war from the native point of view starts with the categorical distinction between the American War (for Vietnam) and the Vietnam War (for America) in terms of a national liberation war versus a Cold War episode—the dual postcolonial / bipolar scheme that is familiar to the existing literature of the Vietnam War. The problem is, however, that the actual American experience of the Vietnam War cannot be relegated to the Cold War paradigm only. The Vietnam War is remembered in American society as being akin to the crisis of a civil war, albeit primarily as an *American* civil war. This means that the interpretative conflicts over whether the Vietnam War was a victorious postcolonial struggle or a sorry episode of the Cold War are not outside American public history but, rather, embedded in the latter. Otherwise, the very notion of Vietnam syndrome, which is still talked about today, would not make much sense.

The same applies to the history of the American War. Contrary to what Schwenkel claims, I do not believe that the bipolar political historical paradigm is alien to the entirety of Vietnamese society. True, the externalization of this paradigm from national memory is fundamental to Vietnam's official war memorial art and to the state's postwar efforts to integrate the confused southern and central regions into a unified national community based on a single, homogenous national narrative of war. This does not mean, however,

that diverse Vietnamese regions and societies experienced the American War in the same way and in the same spirit. We must not confuse the native's point of view with the state-instituted "national" point of view, especially against the background of a civil and international war that involved the extreme polarization of communal life as part of an enduring postcolonial struggle. This last situation is what the metaphor *soi dau* tries to convey. The meaning of this idiom, although clearly not the same as the meaning of the "Cold" War, nevertheless becomes intelligible when we question all received wisdoms about the meanings of the American War as well as those about the Vietnam War and start focusing more closely on the lived realities of these wars. If we do so, we come to see how the histories and meanings of these two kinds of war were actually intertwined in human experience, as was the family history of the former labor soldier south of Danang. And I believe the same is true in the spiritual history of many American veterans who take on the difficult return journey to Vietnam with the hope of doing good to Vietnam.

The author introduces the famous adage of Vietnam's official approach to the memory of the Vietnam-American war in the post-reform era: "Keep the past, but look to the future." I, too, have heard this dictum many times. Each time I hear it, I can't help feeling that the horizon of a bright future, whether it is a future of Vietnam-American friendship or a future of Vietnam or that of America, will appear closer if we do the opposite, namely, "Keep the faith in the future, but look more closely and attentively to the past."

THE NUANCES OF MEMORY

It is not unusual for Americans who have been to Vietnam in recent years to be asked by other Americans whether they experienced any anger or bitterness from Vietnamese during their travels. After all, it was not too long ago that the United States devastated Vietnam, and, well, the visitors are Americans. People assume a hostile response. But the typical answer to that question – quick and easy, and almost always accurate – is no. “They love Americans!” many of these travelers add. Yet as Christina Schwenkel demonstrates in her excellent new book, things are a bit more complicated than they may seem. To be sure, the Americans who attest to a warm reception are not being dishonest. Only in the rarest of circumstances will a tourist in the twenty-first century find him- or herself the object of Vietnamese animus. But this is not to say that Vietnamese have forgotten the feelings of the past. And it is certainly not to say, as many writers would have it, that they have rolled over and embraced all things American. There is a misplaced smugness in triumphalist assertions about the United States ultimately “winning the war” that overlooks the subtle nuances of Vietnamese memory. In *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*, Schwenkel carefully – and brilliantly – dissects these nuances.

Take, for instance, American combat veterans who have returned to Vietnam seeking “reconciliation” and/or “healing.” For many of these veterans, simply seeing the place of their wartime service in the absence of deafening explosions and whizzing bullets has, they attest, proved invaluable, allowing them to replace old memories of pain with new memories of joy. Some have built peace parks. Others have undertaken “humanitarian” projects. Yet, as Schwenkel shows, the actions of many of these U.S. veterans have been packed with moralistic assumptions about the past and at times paternalistic understandings of the present. The simple act of “reconciliation,” for instance, is a notion rejected by most Vietnamese. “It implies a compromise, that both sides are wrong,” one PAVN veteran told Schwenkel. “We use this word when talking about mediating relations between a husband and wife, not between Vietnamese and U.S. citizens” (p. 43).

For many Americans “reconciliation” seems unproblematic. After all, they insist, the war may have been a “mistake,” and the Americans may have been responsible for numerous outrages, but the United States fought in Vietnam to oppose Communist tyranny. Amongst Vietnamese, however, the idea that the revolutionaries should be seeking forgiveness from the United States strikes them as positively absurd. The objectives of the onetime enemies in these transnational reconciliation projects are thus divergent. Americans, Schwenkel notes, seek to heal from a “specifically U.S. *historical* tragedy” so that they may close those chapters of their pasts (p. 47). But for Vietnamese the war is not a mere psychological malady. Its physical (and psychological) legacies remain, whether they be Agent Orange and unexploded ordnance or the years of underdevelopment that followed reunification. There is, in other words, “an *ongoing* legacy ... that continues to inflict new wounds” (p. 47) and for which “reconciliation,” it is hoped by Vietnamese, might bring material benefits that promise a more prosperous future.

The post-*doi moi* priorities of the Vietnamese authorities, moreover, have not always coincided with those of the war's thousands of revolutionary veterans. The state, as Schwenkel shows in a fascinating chapter on the "aesthetics of memory," has often, as many critics charge, invested considerable resources into memorializing the war at the expense of more pressing social and economic needs. Every *dong* that goes into remembrance statuary is a *dong* that cannot be used for widow benefits, health care, or educational expenses. The party's legitimacy may rely on ensuring that the postwar generations of Vietnamese youth appreciate its role in the struggle against the United States, but, in expending so many resources into perpetuating this narrative, it risks alienating those same youths it is attempting to convince.

Schwenkel's work is most valuable, however, not for its attention to purely domestic concerns – though her analysis in this area is tremendously rich – but for the ways it draws out the transnational influences evident in Vietnamese memorial practices. This comes through, for instance, in the same chapter on memory's aesthetics. Many of the structures built by the state, she notes, have been criticized by Vietnamese as foreign-influenced and "incompatible with 'traditional' Vietnamese architecture" (p. 122). At the same time, other Vietnamese worry, "cultural producers" seeking to "rediscover 'Vietnamese' tradition and cultural identity unpolluted by foreign influence" – at least to the extent that "the reevaluation of culture ... has engendered its commodification and its consumption by *foreign* tourists," as it so often has – "play right back into the hands of global capitalist forces" (p. 140). There is, as Schwenkel concludes, a "certain irony" in a process in which "tradition" must be commodified for foreign consumption in order to be asserted, maintained, or preserved.

She is equally astute in teasing out the nuances of Vietnamese public history. In arguing that the modifications to museum exhibits "provide critical insights into the complex ways historical knowledge production shapes and is shaped by the ebbs and flows of international relations and changing configurations of global power" (p. 146), Schwenkel offers a wonderful demonstration of how museums are not merely domestic repositories of national memory but fluid transnational spaces in which memory is posited, contested, reconfigured, and challenged once again. Her attention to the post-reunification conflicts with China and Cambodia, for which she could locate only two small exhibits in "military museums that draw few international and domestic visitors" (p. 161), certainly bears this out. Perhaps most revealing, however, is the changed narrative concerning the war with the United States. The Ho Chi Minh Museum in Hanoi offers an excellent illustration. Schwenkel reveals how its director described "a careful mediation of historical knowledge in relation to deepening integration in a U.S.-dominated global capitalist economy" (p. 162). The director told her:

There were many crimes committed by the United States during the war and we called them American imperialists [*de quoc My*] and enemies [*giac My*]. Today we call them friends [*ban*]. In general the language used today in museums and newspapers is softer. Words like 'crimes' [*toi ac*] are too strong for the exhibits and not suitable for foreign

relations. We have a tradition of forgiving past enemy offenses in order to make friends for the future. We need to respect history and also not forget the past. But at the same time we are also concerned with our nation's economic development (p. 162).

The concern, in other words, is not only for diplomatic niceties. There is a broader sense that Vietnam's self-presentation through its public history has consequences for its "economic development." How its history is told matters.

Still, even the "softer" treatment the American war has received in recent years is enough to displease countless tourists who object to any narrative of the war that fails to place American suffering at its center. This battle over an appropriate narrative has been waged at various Vietnamese institutions, most notably the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City. It has also played out in stories of American POWs. Schwenkel's careful and nuanced analysis of this contest over memory is important. Vietnamese, she argues, have proudly embraced a narrative in which they treated American wartime prisoners according to a "humane policy." "[C]ertain individuals" may have violated state regulations, some of her respondents concede, but this should not overshadow the manner in which "victim[s] of violence" nevertheless acted as "moral agent[s] of compassion" – both being "subject positions denied in U.S. historical memory and in current reconciliation processes" (p. 189). Many Americans, conversely, have sought to emphasize the violence visited upon American POWs. The reasons often have to do with political expediency. On the one hand, tales of American suffering have sought to deflect attention away from recent events in which Americans emerged as perpetrators of torture against Iraqis (and others). On the other hand, memories of abuse have grounded charges of human rights violations against Vietnam by American foreign policy actors. This is significant, Schwenkel maintains, because the "U.S. empire has necessitated its global economic intervention in Vietnam under the pretext of human rights and 'neoliberal salvation'" (p. 178). American actions, that is, can once more be framed as selfless; they become, as they so often have throughout history, evidence of Washington's benevolence.

The American War in Contemporary Vietnam is full of such insights. In the depth of its research, the originality of its arguments, and the lucidity of its prose, Christina Schwenkel's engaging new book makes an outstanding contribution to the recent literature on transnational remembrance, whether in Vietnam or elsewhere. Its theoretical complexity may make for slow reading among some undergraduates, but this is a work that deserves a wide readership within and outside of the academy.

President Bill Clinton, the first U.S. Head of State to visit the Socialist Republic of Vietnam since the war ended, gave a short speech before a large audience the day after he arrived in Hanoi in mid November of 2000. In it, he outlined how the bilateral trade agreements he was there to sign would directly benefit Vietnam. But he also used the speech to reflect upon the immense cost of conflict, which he referred to at one point as the “American War,” the short version of its official name in Vietnam: the “War against the Americans to Save the Nation” (*Cuộc chiến tranh chống Mỹ cứu nước*). The English phrase, once translated back into Vietnamese, evoked an immediate response from my neighbors in Hanoi, whose house I was visiting to watch the event on state-run television. The phrase drew nods of appreciation from several of those in the room. Yet, the phrase gave several others pause since it effaced the existence of a very different nation that a quarter of a million “South” Vietnamese gave their lives to defend—several of my neighbor’s extended family members by marriage among them. A pointed comment to this effect followed and a heated argument ensued, which drowned out a significant portion of Clinton’s speech. Then it ended, as family disputes often do, suddenly and without clear resolution, leaving the question of what (if anything) his decision to use the phrase signaled for the future of U.S.-Vietnam relations lingering unanswered in the room.¹

Christina Schwenkel vividly captures moments, much like the one I witnessed, in her new book, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*, but with an important difference. Her ethnographically informed study situates these moments within the historical arc of U.S.-Vietnam relations. In doing so, she highlights the broader political and economic significance of how the war is remembered and commemorated in the country today, more than three decades after the armed conflict ended. Towards this end, the book is divided into three separate (though thematically overlapping) parts consisting of two related chapters each. These chapters feature various “reconciliatory projects,” “memorial landscapes,” and “incommensurable pasts,” which range widely in subject matter—from humanitarian programs that enable returning veterans to “give something back” to the country, to state-sponsored artistic competitions to redesign war martyr cemeteries, and the recent controversy over whether the corporeal punishment Senator John McCain and other U.S. prisoners of war experienced during the war qualified as torture. While the chapters can be read as stand-alone case-studies, they form a cohesive whole due to their common focus: public spaces (rather than private ones) where transnational memories of the war commingle and sometimes clash (p. 5). These spaces, about which I will say more shortly, reveal why efforts to “normalize” bilateral relations and thus transform former

¹ For a succinct overview, see Mark Manyin, “The Vietnam-U.S. Normalization Process,” (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 2005), available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IB98033.pdf>. For background on events prior to this point, see Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Fredrik Logevall, “Bringing in the ‘Other Side’: New Scholarship on the Vietnam Wars,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2007): 78, fn. 2.

“enemies” into “friends” have from the start been marked by a peculiar combination of “ambivalence, anxiety, and cautious optimism” according to Schwenkel (p. 4).

These tensions were readily apparent during Clinton’s visit, a vignette Schwenkel uses to introduce the main arguments of her book. The stated purpose of the trip was to mark the end of one chapter in U.S.-Vietnam relations and to begin a new one; but, as she explains, drawing upon the coverage the event received in the press, such hopes were premature. Dramatically different memories of this shared past continue to affect bilateral relations in the present, in part because they shape how the future is perceived as well. Remarks made by President Clinton and other members of the U.S. delegation, for example, repeatedly implied that the trade agreements were a “gift” for Vietnam’s cooperation on post-war issues important to the United States, such as the joint effort over the past eight years to locate the remains of American soldiers listed as “missing in action.” Yet, this purported “gift” did little to lessen widespread concerns that further liberalization might also, by accelerating Vietnam’s reintegration into the global capitalist economy, threaten the country’s hard-won political and economic sovereignty (p. 3).

Appearances to the contrary, these conflicting interpretations are not reducible to ideological differences, though as Schwenkel points out, Cold War-era binaries continue to exert a powerful, if often unrecognized, influence on how people think about and portray the war today. Nor do these interpretations neatly map onto national identities, as Vietnamese citizens, like their American counterparts, hold diverse views on political as well as economic matters. Instead, she argues, these conflicting interpretations reflect unresolved disagreements regarding how the war should be “properly” remembered and thus represented in history (pp. 4-8).

Schwenkel, like many cultural anthropologists, is less interested in determining whose account of the war is factually “correct” than how such claims are constructed in the first place out of competing and often contradictory memories, images, historical documents, cultural scripts, and so on. To get at these differences, Schwenkel strategically situates her research in “transnational spaces” where two or more representations of the war and its aftermath were clearly in evidence. The spaces examined include museums, martyr cemeteries, art and photography exhibitions, and former military bases and battle zones since transformed into tourist attractions. Schwenkel visited these spaces on a regular basis over the course of a decade (1997-2007), documenting what people said and did in those spaces, in addition to interviewing the Vietnamese who managed and/or produced their content. These details provide the ethnographic context for the book’s signature focus: cross-cultural exchanges where visitors (most often U.S. citizens, returning veterans among them) encountered culturally-specific representations of the conflict and definitions of reconciliation that were very different from their own (p. 9). In some instances, the exchanges that occurred reaffirmed existing views on the war. In others, it led to their reappraisal. But what remained common to both, regardless of the actual outcome, was the spectre of global market capitalism. Without this, Schwenkel rightly points out, these transnational spaces would not exist; nor, for that matter, would the memories, forms of knowledge, and representational practices found in them be accorded different “values” (p. 5).

These “knowledge frictions,” as Schwenkel refers to points of continued contestation, shed interpretive light on a number of important issues. Perhaps most obviously, the frictions help foreground the complexity of Vietnamese views on the war and the diversity of the commemorative practices that have since emerged as well as their change over time.² The frictions also help “dislodge” U.S. perspectives, including those of Vietnamese-Americans, by privileging the memories and representational practices of the Vietnamese museum curators, photographers, tour guides, and so on she encountered during the course of her research. Schwenkel, a fluent speaker of Vietnamese, provides a nuanced explication of the emic categories her informants themselves use to convey both, which permits the general reader to understand how these narrations of the past converge with officially approved histories of the war in some instances and diverge from it in others. The result is a double-edged form of cultural critique that “provincializes” not only U.S.-centric accounts of the war, but party-state sponsored ones as well.³ This highlights other ways of remembering the war as it also shows how they intersect with dominant accounts of the conflict already familiar to many of us. Though the question of whether such interactions will contribute to meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding across the differences that still inhibit genuine reconciliation from taking place remains very much an open one—especially in Vietnam, as many aspects of the conflict, such as the fact that it was also a civil war, continue to be officially shrouded in silence.

In sum, the book should be of considerable interest to a wide audience. It is a theoretically sophisticated yet accessible exploration of a topic that has, until now, received surprisingly little attention. Readers who wish to learn more about the politics of memory and historical production as they specifically relate to Vietnam may also wish to read several recent works, which explore this topic, albeit from very different disciplinary perspectives.⁴ Schwenkel’s work also speaks to intellectual projects that seek to de-center the state in order to better understand how different “national” histories are co-produced through memories of transnational encounters.⁵ Readers interested in the study of transnational

² There are, of course, some well-known exceptions. However, nearly all of them are memoirs of one kind or another. See, e.g.: Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (New York: Wiley, 1999); Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage, 1986); Dang Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008); Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996).

³ The term is drawn from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s influential book, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴ These works include: Mark Bradley’s *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Post-Colonial Vietnam 1919-1950* (2000); Hue-Tam Ho-Tai’s *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (2001); and Heonik Kwon’s *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (2006).

⁵ See, for example, Geoff White, “Remembering Guadalcanal: National Identity and Transnational Memory-Making,” *Public Culture* Vol. 7, No. 3 (1995):529-555. On “methodological nationalism” and

histories and the co-production of memory more generally would do well to read Schwenkel's other publications in conjunction with the book. Her articles expand upon the material presented in it and, although directed at specialists in other interdisciplinary fields, provide a useful introduction to debates on this topic in visual anthropology, cultural studies, and global journalism.⁶

As Schwenkel herself notes, this book marks the start of a conversation rather than its end. With that in mind, I touch upon two areas where more might be said in the future. The first concerns the author's use of the concept of "recombinant history," which has its origins in a quite different time and place: post-socialist Hungary during the early 1990s. David Stark, a well-known sociologist at Columbia University who studied the country's "transition" from state socialism to something else, found that many economic managers had diversified their assets but centralized their liabilities as a way to manage risk during a moment in which one property regime was being rapidly phased out and another instituted in its place. To do so, the economic managers increased rather than decreased the ambiguity of the assets by redefining and recombining different forms of public and private property in novel ways, as this made it more difficult for others to gain access to the resources they managed.⁷ Stark dubbed this process "recombinant property," which Schwenkel modified to "recombinant history" to describe the diversification of memory that has occurred in Vietnam during the country's slow "transition" from state socialism to a "socialist-oriented market economy" (pp. 9-10). While the concept aptly conveys how others recombine various genres of memory (public/private, official/unofficial, collective/individual, etc.) to fashion different historical narratives, it nonetheless begs the question: in what ways is "memory" a form of "property," i.e. something that a person or group of persons can claim the legitimate right to use, to benefit from financially, and/or to exclude others from the same? And what are the limits of this analogy? More sustained engagement with the broader literature on this topic may provide further insights into another recombinant form, the "socialist-oriented market economy" and its relationship to the processes described in this book.

"methodological territorialism" more generally, see Jan Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

⁶ "'The Camera Was My Weapon': Reporting and Representing War in Socialist Vietnam." In *The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global Perspectives*, ed. E. Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 86-99; "From John McCain to Abu Ghraib: Tortured Bodies and Historical Unaccountability of U.S. Empire," *American Anthropologist* Vol. 111, No. 1 (2009):3-42; "Exhibiting War, Reconciling Pasts: Photographic Representation and Transnational Commemoration in Contemporary Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* Vol. 3, No. 1 (2008):36-77; "Recombinant History: Transnational Practices of Memory and Knowledge Production in Contemporary Vietnam," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 21, No. 1 (2006):3-30.

⁷ David Stark, "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 101, No. 4 (1996):993-1027.

Second, the “Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies,” is now well under way. Indeed, *H-Diplo* featured a Roundtable Review on this topic earlier this year.⁸ Organized by Jessica Chapman, an Assistant Professor of History at Williams College, the roundtable featured a detailed discussion of the relative merits of this approach, which includes what most histories of the conflict exclude—namely, Vietnamese perspectives.⁹ Schwenkel’s book, although it engages a very different literature, again invites questions about what other kinds of sources, narratives, and archives exist, yet remain underutilized due to disparate disciplinary traditions and the “epistemic habits” that inform them.¹⁰ How might sustained conversations across these differences expand what it is possible to know about the war and its aftermaths? What do diplomatic histories of the war stand to gain from greater attention to the quotidian forms of post-conflict person-to-person diplomacy that Schwenkel describes and the cultural turn more generally?¹¹ Where do these perspectives converge with elite ones and, importantly, where do they diverge from them? How would bringing both together within the same analytical frame challenge what we currently assume we know about each? Answers to these questions promise to deepen our understanding of the conflict, which did not end with the cessation of hostilities, and to lay the groundwork for the comparative study of transnational forms of remembrance and representation in post-conflict settings elsewhere.

⁸ An electronic copy of Vol. XI, No. 12 is available at: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-12.pdf>.

⁹ The articles under discussion originally appeared in a 2009 special issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Vol. 4, No. 3), which Ed Miller and Tuong Vu co-edited.

¹⁰ Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009:38-39).

¹¹ See, e.g.: Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, “Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries,” *International Security* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1997):5-21; Stephen Haber, “Brothers Under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations,” *International Security* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1997):34-43; Andrew Rotter, “Saidism without Said: Orientalism and U.S. Diplomatic History,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 105, No. 4 (2000): 1205-1217; David Reynolds, “International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch,” *Cultural and Social History* Vol. 3 (2006):75-91.

A few weeks ago, on my way to visit a friend at the Vietnam – Germany Friendship Hospital in Hanoi, I passed a U.S. army jeep parked on Phủ Doãn Street. The polished and repainted vehicle with a “Jeep Club” sign attached to the rear sat just a few steps away from a dated Russian Ural motorcycle with sidecar. The irony of the juxtaposition was not lost on me alone; the owner approached, pointed to the vehicles and jokingly proclaimed: “Chiến tranh Lạnh!” (Cold War!). I was surprised to hear him use this term; as I point out in the book, the construct of the “Cold War” was not a paradigm that people in my study commonly adopted to reference or contextualize the war, although as Hoenik Kwon rightfully points out in his review, the construct certainly was not “alien to the entirety of Vietnamese society.” Yet the collector’s use of this term reconfirms some of the book’s central tenets about the resignification of historical memory in contemporary, Post-Cold War/market socialist Vietnam. The commodification of U.S. military and Soviet vehicles (by domestic collectors no less); the location of their display: across the street from what was once, until Germany’s reunification, the Vietnam – Democratic Republic of Germany Friendship Hospital; and the owner’s insertion of the vehicles into an historical narrative that has gained more currency in Vietnam in recent years, demonstrate how landscapes of memory and categories of historical knowledge continue to shift in relation to broader socioeconomic, geopolitical and cultural-aesthetic changes.

The American War in Contemporary Vietnam is an ethnography of such transnational memory-making practices. As Tuan Hoang points out in his review, the book is “not history.” Rather, it is a critical examination, through long-term ethnographic and archival research, of the making and unmaking of “history.” As I argue in the introduction, the study of dominant historical truths claims reveals “more about present imaginaries, configurations of power and systems of validated knowledge” than factual representations of the past (p. 6). This in itself is not a new claim. Where the book breaks new ground, however, is in its attempt to decenter the nation as the locus for the production of history and bring attention to global actors and global relations of power that underlie and influence knowledge production in contemporary, post-Đổi mới Vietnam. As Scott Laderman succinctly summarizes, the book demonstrates that *how* this history of the war is told matters internationally.

The book elicited diverse responses from the reviewers, comprised of both historians and anthropologists. In an effort to engage with their comments and address their concerns, I have organized my response around three concepts that are central to understanding the scope, arguments and methodology presented in the study: transnational, global capitalism, and emic perspectives.

Transnational. As Ken MacLean highlights in his review, the book focuses on the production of historical knowledge in public spaces where transnational memories of the “American War” commingle and clash, producing what I call “knowledge frictions.” My methodological approach, as Hoang discusses, reflected a “polymorphous engagement” with the field, a term I adopted from Hugh Gusterson to address the need in certain projects for multi-sited

fieldwork that enables interactions with informants “across a number of dispersed sites,” and facilitates the collection of data “eclectically from a disparate array of sources.”¹ Over the course of ten years – from 1997 through 2007 – I meticulously documented and tracked changes in the images, objects, and narratives used to construct history in particular transnational spaces that are traversed by a range of local and global actors, including art and photography exhibits, battlefield tours, museums, war memorials and war cemeteries, and joint reconciliation projects. My methodological approach was both interdisciplinary and transnational: the project required long-term fieldwork and extensive interviewing (I was in-country for more than a total of three years), as well as extensive use of Vietnamese media sources during and after the war, consumption of Vietnamese popular culture, and collection of archival materials in museums, libraries, and other cultural and/or academic institutions. I also carried out additional archival work, interviews, media and cultural analyses, and participant observation in the United States (for example, at art exhibits and protests in “Little Saigon,” California) and Germany (where film archives from the war are housed).

I thus disagree with Hoang’s claim that the book lacks sufficient documentation, “especially on the Vietnamese side,” given that the book in fact examines Vietnamese representations, cultural productions, understandings of and perspectives on history, as acknowledged by the other reviewers.² The numbers Hoang uses to buttress this claim are inaccurate. For example, in contrast to his document count in Chapter 6 on human rights and claims of POW torture, in the first ten pages alone, the chapter critically analyzes one popular cultural text (*The Amazing Race* in the Hanoi Hilton), two Vietnamese newspaper articles (comparing Abu Ghraib to Mỹ Lai), two radio broadcasts (VOA accusing Vietnam of torturing U.S. soldiers in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, and VOV countering with stories of humane treatment of U.S. POWs), ten U.S. congressional hearings (spanning four decades), in addition to interviews with a former POW, a Vietnamese journalist, and a museum employee. This is before I get to the heart of the chapter to explore media coverage of and local responses to John McCain’s return trips to Vietnam, images and discourses of POWs in national museums, local understandings of POW treatment in the aftermath of U.S. bombing raids, East German representations of U.S. POWs in film, and so on. Even taking into account possible disciplinary discrepancies in what constitutes “proper” documentation, I remain puzzled as to how Hoang could find the entire chapter to include only one newspaper article, one radio broadcast and two congressional documents.

Historically, anthropologists have tended to focus on one primary site of study, in which they would immerse themselves for a period of time spanning 1-2 years. I opted not to do this. Rather than focus on, for example, Củ Chi war tours alone, I chose to compare public sites of transnational memory-making and put them in dialogue with one another ethnographically (in terms of who is producing and consuming memory at these sites) and

¹ Hugh Gusterson, “Studying Up Revisited.” *Polar* (1997) 20(1): 114-119.

² See also the important edited volume, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

historically (for example, drawing parallels between museums and monuments as colonial technologies of memory and knowledge production). As MacLean points out, the chapters can thus be read as “stand-alone case studies,” though he also recognizes that together, they “form a cohesive whole.” Because this range of sites required a different approach to the standard 1-2 years of immersion, I engaged in a practice of repeated return to the field over a prolonged period, which allowed me to get at the deeper nuances of memory, as Laderman suggests, in an attempt to balance breadth and depth. It also allowed me to continue to develop relationships with key informants, or mentors, if you will. I agree with Hoang that in my broad approach I often omitted from the text, or relegated to endnotes, the more detailed comments by or life history details of key informants. I do, however, provide a closer examination of some of their lives in subsequent publications, for example on Vietnamese war photographers and on family and community divisions, not unlike Kwon’s *soi dau* metaphor, experienced by a veteran of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam who worked as a tour guide during my study.³

The populations with whom I worked centered on the producers and consumers of war history – young and old, domestic and foreign alike. While this may seem equally broad, the respondents had one thing in common: they all participated, to differing degrees, in memory-making practices in transnational public spaces and/or transnational reconciliation projects. Foreign nationals, including overseas Vietnamese, travel to Vietnam for a variety of reasons that are not primarily motivated by desires to engage with or reconcile the history of the war (i.e. for business or family reasons). Such people were not included in the study primarily because they were not at the sites in my research. They were not at museums, they did not participate in war tours, they did not attend joint photography exhibits. As I explain in the book, the participants of war tours to the DMZ and Củ Chi in my study were primarily tourists from North America and Europe on account of tour language (English) and style of travel (independent). In Chapter 3 I explain how other nationalities had their own tourist practices; for example, French and Chinese groups traveled in organized tours to very different sites, and Japanese travelers often hired their own guides. As I note in the same chapter, in 2005, the tourist demographics shifted significantly with the visa suspension for ASEAN member countries. During my last visit to Củ Chi in July 2010 the majority of visitors to the “original” tunnels were no longer Europeans, but Malaysians and Filipinos. [The U.S. flight suit, incidentally, is also no longer available for rent at the shooting range.] In addition, in contrast to the early years of my study, more Americans, including Vietnamese-Americans now travel to Vietnam, making this a timely subject of Ph.D. research.⁴

³ Christina Schwenkel, “‘The Camera Was My Weapon’: News Production and Representation of War in Vietnam,” in *The Anthropology of News and Journalism: Global Perspectives*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 86-99; Christina Schwenkel, forthcoming “Un/Settled Pasts in Contemporary Vietnamese Memoryscapes,” in *Vietnam and “Vietnam” Since 1975*, eds. Scott Laderman and Edwin Martini (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

⁴ Ivan Small at Cornell University, for example, has conducted research on diasporic remittances and transnational gifting practices. For a very different population of overseas Vietnamese, namely, export laborers who returned from East Germany following the fall of the Berlin wall, see Christina Schwenkel, “Chuyển dịch trong thế giới Xã hội Chủ nghĩa: Xuất khẩu lao động và những trao đổi xuyên quốc gia giữa Việt

Global capitalism. In addition to its attention to transnationalism (spanning research sites, participants and methods), the book also focuses on the ways in which the “spectre of global market capitalism,” to quote MacLean, has shaped the reevaluation and/or reaffirmation of historical knowledge in the post-economic reform era. This is not to say that memories were *not* in flux before Đổi mới or the normalization of relations with the United States. On the contrary, the book makes a strong argument against this, particularly in Chapter 4 on monumental art and architecture where I demonstrate that historically, memorial forms and scopic regimes under high socialism have been diverse, fluid, and transnational. I also show how they integrated into form and practice particular aspects of colonial technologies of memory, rather than abruptly break with them.

Important historical, literary and anthropological works have addressed the complex and ongoing negotiations of historical memory that have taken place among state and nonstate actors well before or early in the Đổi mới years, prior to the normalization of relations with the United States.⁵ There is therefore nothing about U.S.-Vietnam normalization or neoliberalization that suddenly jump started historical reassessment. However, the types of changes that took place, the actors who initiated them, and the kinds of memories that circulated, commingled, and collided in newly transnational spaces can be considered unique in my view. As Kwon’s vignette makes clear, there are many other stories of the war that have yet to be told. My book highlights some of the spaces in which these memories have been communicated. ARVN veterans did not have the opportunity to tell their stories and circulate their memories as tour guides for returning U.S. veterans and others visitors until international tourism began to develop more rapidly in the 1990s. Younger guides had yet to hear first-hand, and integrate into their discourse, the personal accounts of U.S. veterans. Transnational reconciliation projects, though not wholly absent before 1995, expanded in numbers and scope after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. And shifts in museum narratives about the United States (toning down “crimes” and rewriting “enemies” as “friends”) had certainly yet to take place.

In the book, I propose the term “recombinant history” to identify these entangled and often discrepant scripts, images, and memorial practices, which I argue have prompted certain reorganizations of knowledge and the remaking, and at times even co-production, of history (pp. 12-13). I am careful in the text to point out that this “co-production” is asymmetrical and “bound up in uneven relations of power and competing claims to

Nam và Đông Đức cũ” [Socialist Mobilities: Export Labor and Transnational Exchanges between Vietnam and Former East Germany] in *Hiện đại và động thái của truyền thống ở Việt Nam: Những cách tiếp cận nhân học* [Modernities and Dynamics of Traditions in Vietnam: Anthropological Approaches], Volume 1, ed. Lương Văn Hy (National University of Ho Chi Minh City Press, 2010), pp. 427-438.

⁵ See, for example, Shaun Kingsley Malarney, *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Christoph Giebel, *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Bảo Ninh, *The Sorrow of War* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1993).

historical authority and truth” (*ibid*). At the same time, I do agree with MacLean that I could have pushed this idea of recombination even further, particularly as it relates to (capitalist) notions of property. As Chapter 5 in particular shows, in the section, *Kim Phúc in Vietnam: An Image “Out of Place,”* much of the controversy in Vietnamese American and other communities concerning the display in Vietnamese museums of the well-known photograph had to do with a sense of ownership of the image and the right to control its paths of circulation. In this case, memory was treated as a form of property that “belonged” elsewhere – i.e., not in the possession of the Vietnamese state. Accordingly, the Vietnamese government then possessed no legitimate rights to display the photograph (and attach their own meaning to it). This was not unlike the sentiments of ownership over historical memory expressed by many U.S. visitors at sites that had once “belonged” to the U.S. military. MacLean is absolutely right to question the extent to which one can claim memory as a form of property, but it is also interesting to note that these ownership issues did not commonly surface in Vietnamese memory-making practices, even when confronted with U.S. memory “intrusions” (for example, the English-language captions in the *Requiem* photography exhibit).

Another aspect of recombinant history that I could have emphasized more strongly is the extent to which the reworking of memory in public spaces is not only transnational, but also transgenerational (and in many cases it is both).⁶ As the voices and actions of Vietnamese youth in the text show, their own relationship to historical sites and historical memory was one of ambivalence and disinterest, engaging in what I refer to in Chapter 3 as “anti-memory” practices. It was not, however, one of opposition.⁷ In general, youth did not “question the official interpretation of the war,” as Hoang speculates; they simply ignored it. They had other things to do, they contended – for example, practice English, study Chinese, and read about international finance (p.150). And many were quite proud of what their nation had achieved, as evident in their entries in museum impression books in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (pp. 164-168). Historical apathy did not preclude national pride. Even those youth who tended to be more critical of party narratives and aesthetic trends (see the conversation between young artists on pp. 119-120) still exhibited deep respect toward an older generation of state artists who continue to show much enthusiasm for the past (i.e. in their desire to paint Hồ Chí Minh), even as they saw their own generation as having very different, often commercial, interests and orientations.

Emic perspectives. Critiques of official narratives, of the aesthetic and memorial forms that they take, and of enduring silences are well covered in the text. As Maclean points out, both

⁶ My thanks to Zeynep Gürsel for also suggesting that I further develop this point.

⁷ For a deeper exploration of youth and their relationship to the state, see also Christina Schwenkel, “Youth Culture and Fading Memories of War in Hanoi, Vietnam,” in *Everyday Life in Southeast Asia*, eds. Kathleen M. Adams and Kathleen Gillogly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); and Ann Marie Leshkovich, “Fashioning Appropriate Youth in 1990s Vietnam,” in *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity and Globalization*, eds. Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 92-111.

U.S.-centric and Vietnamese state-sponsored accounts of the war are shown to be provincialized in public sites of memory. But this should not overshadow the fact that for many people these narratives continue to matter, albeit more to some populations than others. “Aesthetic rejection” or the act of attaching new use-values to a site, such as drying and thrashing rice at a martyr cemetery, did not necessarily signify a lack of cultural, historical, and affective meaning (pp. 120-126). On the contrary, the significance of the site was often enhanced. This is where ethnographic methodology is particularly useful as it requires that we abandon our assumptions and categories, listen to people, and see them as meaningful agents in creating and reassessing their history.

As Kwon suggests, the practice of identifying and representing “emic” or insider perspectives is the “canonic ethos of modern anthropological research.” It is not necessary to agree with or even like our respondents and their views, but we do need to hear and accord them value as beliefs or expressions of (situated) knowledge. Through acts of listening we come closer to understanding how people experience and evaluate their lives, worldviews, and histories. There are complex reasons why categories such as “Cold War” and “Civil War” – terms adopted by several reviewers – hold little or very different meaning to certain populations in my book (just as there are complex reasons why such historical paradigms make sense to others). The anecdote at the start of this response shows that these categories of knowledge are always in flux. As an anthropologist I am not interested in whether these emic perspectives on history are “right” or “wrong” (this would risk reaffirming a hierarchy of knowledge that the book endeavors to dismantle). As MacLean points out, the book is concerned not with historical “truth,” but with how such truths are constructed, understood, and debated. It asks what are the stakes in organizing and managing history in particular ways.

The same can be said for the “failures” or the “defeat” of socialism. Again, returning to the idea of emic perspectives and to Laderman’s emphasis on nuance, in the text I call attention to local interpretations and understanding of the economic *recombinations* that have taken place under market socialism (p. 206).⁸ Vietnamese respondents in my study had complex views about postwar and post-Đổi mới economic conditions. More than ineffective state policies alone, people attributed Vietnam’s underdevelopment to a host of factors that also included, but certainly were not limited to, wartime devastation of the country’s infrastructure and a postwar trade embargo – both of which were linked to U.S. policy (pp. 194-198). Lest we fall into easy assumptions that ambivalence toward global capitalism can be mapped onto former wartime divisions, the most ardent critic of the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement in my research was a former employee of the U.S. military, someone who, like in Kwon’s story, suffered greatly from “the extreme polarization of communal life” in postcolonial and also postwar Vietnam.

⁸ For further development of this point, see Christina Schwenkel and Ann Marie Leshkowich, “How is Neoliberalism Good to Think Vietnam? How Is Vietnam Good to Think Neoliberalism?”, Co-Authored Guest Editors’ Introduction to special issue, “Neoliberalism in Vietnam,” forthcoming in *positions: east asia cultures critique*.

Several of the reviewers ended on a hopeful note that meaningful dialogue and “closure” are possible. I agree with the anthropologist John Borneman that cultivating what he calls “practices of listening” is essential to reconciliation.⁹ It is not enough to want to “do good.” People should also want to listen, and should listen closely, even to diverging worldviews. This has also been argued in the cases of South Africa, former Yugoslavia, and other countries struggling to recover from traumatic and violent histories. There have been important, symbolic initiatives in Vietnam toward new understandings and commemorations of the past: colleagues in Hanoi have discussed the need to extend veteran benefits to those who fought for the Republic of Vietnam, and during a recent visit to Khe Sanh, a local guide spoke of a new state project on “Hamburger Hill”: a monument to honor all soldiers killed in the war, including American and RVN troops. This transnational memorial, if indeed it comes to fruition, would truly be an important signifier of, and step towards genuine *chia buồn*, for it both acknowledges and distributes sadness across all sorts of boundaries.

In closing, I would like to thank the reviewers for their thought-provoking comments. Thank you as well to Tom Maddux for choosing this book for review on H-Diplo, and for providing the opportunity to engage in stimulating cross-disciplinary discussion on a topic that never ceases to produce important dialogue and debate.

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⁹ John Borneman, “Reconciliation after Ethnic Cleansing: Listening, Retribution, Affiliation,” *Public Culture* 2002 14(2):281-304.