

I

Transnationalizing Viet Nam

A middle-aged Vietnamese American lawyer and self-proclaimed “low techie” composes an important e-mail from his home in Virginia. He feverishly details the reasons that overseas Vietnamese should be given citizenship in communist-controlled Viet Nam. He is aware that once he presses Send his message will reach the approximately three thousand readers of his moderated newsgroup.¹ The newsgroup’s subscribers include overseas Vietnamese professionals and members of the intelligentsia as well as non-Vietnamese members interested in Viet Nam-related issues. The e-mail writer is slightly nervous, because he knows that among the subscribers is a strong contingent of Vietnamese American anticommunists who vigilantly monitor seemingly pro-Vietnamese government postings. This group is a significant segment of Vietnamese in diaspora, and they continue to be vocal about their politics. Still, this politically savvy lawyer will send the message, because he believes it can speed change in Viet Nam’s development and ultimately foster positive relations with its diaspora. He is confident of this outcome because on the distribution list are government officials in Viet Nam who read every note with interest. He sends the e-mail and waits as it rapidly disseminates across the United States, Viet Nam, and the world.² (Field notes 2002; see also Hoanh Tran 2002)

The event described in the passage above, observed in 2002, illustrates how technology, culture, and capital move in the era of globalization (Clifford 1994; R. Cohen 1997). It also highlights the convoluted and often contentious history involving Viet Nam, the United States, and the Vietnamese diasporic community. The term *diaspora* tends to evoke a sense of positive connections to a homeland, but sometimes a country and parts of its overseas

population do not have good relations; they are instead ideologically hostile to one another. Sometimes precarious relationships and negative attitudes exist between the diasporic groups and the host country, and such divisions may also form within the diasporic community itself. Such is the case with Viet Nam and its diaspora. Still, Vietnamese in Viet Nam and in diaspora maintain deep connections and lasting influence over each other as they participate in transnational acts that transgress geographic distance, restrictive nation-state legislation, international agreements, and even ethnic community pressures.

This book explores transnational connections between Viet Nam and its overseas population in the United States from 1975 to 2012 in four areas of activity: (1) exchanges and interchanges of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American popular music; (2) sociopolitical transformations in information and communication developments in Viet Nam from an influential transnational virtual community, Vietnam Forum (VNForum); (3) (re)negotiations of political and cultural identities of overseas Vietnamese communities through ethnic news media, looking at the controversial art works of Vietnamese American artist Chau Huynh as a focal point for this debate; and (4) an overseas Vietnamese battle over defining community and representation as seen through a business-district-naming controversy involving the first Vietnamese city councilwoman in the United States, the city of San Jose's vice-mayor, Madison Nguyen.

This examination reveals (1) extensive transnational connections spanning more than thirty-five years, beginning with the first departure of Vietnamese from Viet Nam after the second Indochina war (known as the Viet Nam War in the United States) in 1975 and continuing to 2012; (2) a dramatic shift during this time, in a world in which globalization is central and information, communication, and transportation technologies are the catalyst for global interdependency and connectedness; (3) a vast cross-section of people from diverse backgrounds, classes, generations, and genders participating in transnational processes; and (4) an immense influence of the native and diasporic communities on each other in politics, culture, community, generations, gender relations, technology, news media, and the arts. These transnational processes and influences have been expressed sometimes tumultuously: through the creation of transnational music even when it was illegal, the formation of transnational virtual communities with historical enemies, community control through political assassination, and multiyear protests of news media for their publication choices.

The extensive changes seen from the Cold War to the present global condition compel this work. The speed of development in Viet Nam and the creation of new diasporas abroad call for investigations into the lives of people affected by these changes. *Transnationalizing Viet Nam* is based on two decades of a longitudinal, multisite, ethnographic investigation into the lives of Vietnamese Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California and of Vietnamese in Sai Gon (Ho Chi Minh City) and Ha Noi.³ While twenty years is an enormous investment for a researcher, I could have not done it any other

way. Events had to slowly play themselves out. Actors in the dramatic moments, particularly, needed time to grasp the situation and trust in me enough to share their experiences—all this took time. I conducted interviews with over 250 Vietnamese, overseas Vietnamese, and experts on Vietnamese and Vietnamese American issues. Having the unique opportunity to interview people at the center of important events and moments in history from both sides of the Pacific and in various political positions gave me interesting and diverse perspectives. Interviewees ranged from video store owners to high-ranking officials in Viet Nam and from leaders of anticommunist groups to ethnic newspaper editors in the United States. Their thoughts, voices, and experiences form the core of this book.⁴

Situating *Transnationalizing Viet Nam*

I situate the study of Viet Nam–Vietnamese diasporic relations in the interdisciplinary fields of Asian, or area, studies and Asian American, or ethnic, studies, two disciplines historically at odds with each other. Area studies views ethnic studies as not academically rigorous and not related to affairs in Asia, and Asian American studies, coming from grassroots origins and hence having to fight off departmental shutdowns by universities over the decades, distrusts area studies, with its governmental and university support and history of Orientalist writings (Reid 2003). But debates between the interdisciplines often concern their encroachment and survival, with little attention paid to frameworks, paradigms, or shared topics of interest that could make the union beneficial for both Vietnamese and Vietnamese American studies (Wong 1995). As transnational ties strengthen, it becomes more difficult to ignore both how Viet Nam directly and indirectly helps shape the lives of its diasporic population and how this population affects the development and identity of those in the home country. Thus, the pairing of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American studies is essential, and transnational studies helps make this connection.

In recent years Asian and Asian American studies scholars have taken notice of transnational processes of overseas Vietnamese, such as music production and consumption (Carruthers 2001; P. Taylor 2000; Valverde 2003).⁵ A few Asian studies and culture studies journals have published articles about the Vietnamese diaspora or devoted a special issue to this group.⁶ Asian American studies scholars, in particular, have written about the Vietnamese American connection to Viet Nam. In a special issue of *Amerasia Journal*, guest editor Linda Võ's (2003) introduction was titled "Shaping Transnationalism." Several studies of Vietnamese in diaspora in the special issue fell under this heading: Trần Ngọc Angie's comparative study on Vietnamese American electronic workers and Vietnamese garment workers, my research on transnational music production and consumption in Viet Nam and its diasporic communities, and Hung Cam Thai's discussion of international marriages between overseas Vietnamese men and Vietnamese women.

Veteran Asian American studies and sociology scholar Yen Le Espiritu made special note of this transnational studies trend in a state-of-the-field article for Vietnamese American studies, “Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in U.S. Scholarship,” published in the premier issue of *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Espiritu 2006a). Espiritu bemoans that most scholarship on Vietnamese Americans portrays them as passive, pathetic victims of larger, more powerful forces. She urges scholars to take a new approach that she calls “critical refugee studies,” which she believes could best be “refashioned in the fields of Vietnamese Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Studies, not around the benign narratives of American exceptionalism, immigration, or even transnationalism, but around the crucial issues of war, race, and violence” (Espiritu 2006a, 426).

I propose a restudy of Vietnamese American communities using methods and materials from both Asian and Asian American studies because, as Jonathan Okamura points out, it is important to “retain a primary concern with the community by situating it transnationally in the larger context of global economic and political forces and processes” (2003, 172). Consider, then, three related and major influences affecting and continuing to affect the lives of Vietnamese in Viet Nam and in diaspora: (1) the U.S. government and society, (2) the Vietnamese government and society, and (3) anticommunist segments within the Vietnamese American community. Central to my analysis is a consideration of how these three sources work separately or in combination to influence or dominate one another. I reveal how individuals and groups react against or cope with these forces.⁷

For this research, I consider Ling-Chi Wang’s theory of “structural dual domination.” Wang discusses how Chinese Americans experienced dual domination, from racial oppression and exclusion in the United States (by the U.S. state and population) and from extraterritorial nationalist forces from China (Guomindang). Using his paradigm, racial exclusion or oppression and extraterritorial domination converge and interact in the Chinese American community, establishing a permanent structure of dual domination and creating its own internal dynamics and unique institutions (Wang 1995). Certain diasporas require local, national, and international considerations before a researcher can fully comprehend their experiences.

One of the earliest writings on this concept is in Don Nakanishi’s 1975 seminal work “In Search of a New Paradigm: Minorities in the Context of International Politics.” Nakanishi pointed out that international politics heavily factored into movement of refugees and immigrants and eventual development of ethnic groups in the United States. Furthermore, international politics may very well affect these groups’ livelihood in the United States and vice versa. He proposed that we look at minority groups in terms of not only international politics but also transnationalism and race relations (see also Valverde 1994). In a later work he explicitly explored Asian American subjects when he suggested

that “by conceptualizing Asian American politics in terms of both domestic and non-domestic dimensions, our research agenda differs from what is usually undertaken under the rubric of minority politics” (Nakanishi 1985, 5). The works of Wang and Nakanishi in particular have allowed me to question the forces, from the micro to the macro level, that influenced the experiences of Vietnamese in the United States and elsewhere. I add to this work the incorporation of the personal—the inner workings of individuals and groups as they relate to each other, from the level of state structures to the extremely inward-looking personal motivations of their actions.

My transnational study stands on the shoulders of other Vietnamese American scholars. Scholars of Vietnamese Americans’ experiences shortly after 1975 focused heavily on the resettlement and assimilation of refugees in the United States. Some gravitated toward the educational and economic mobility of the first and second waves of immigrants (1975–1982), with special interest in first- and second-generation youth. Beginning in the mid-1980s, these writings tended to highlight the adversity later arrivals faced and focused on juvenile crime and welfare dependency.⁸ Within the first ten years of resettlement, initial research emerged on Vietnamese Americans’ community-building efforts in their respective localities. Though informative, these early texts focused almost entirely on resettlement patterns using assimilationist models that did not fully reflect the complexities of the early Vietnamese American refugee population (Montero 1979; Zhou and Bankston 1998).⁹ Although all these authors highlight the initial difficulties experienced by Vietnamese refugees, including a downward occupational mobility with respect to positions they had held in Viet Nam, they conclude that over time Vietnamese Americans will successfully integrate into American society (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy 1989; Rutledge 1992).¹⁰

From these writings Vietnamese American scholarship expanded to include oral history and ethnographic projects offering more complex understandings of the Vietnamese American experience by focusing on community studies. Their topics included internal community strife, gender relations, economic marginalization, creation of ethnic places, political participation, and individual connections to Viet Nam (Aguilar-San Juan 2000, 2009; Chan 2006; Collet 2000; Freeman 1989, 1995; Gold 1992; Kibria 1993; Lieu 1998; Smith and Tarallo 1995; Vō 2009). Many of these scholars were actively involved with the groups they studied and developed long-term relationships with the Vietnamese American community. Using a multidisciplinary approach and knowledge of the local, national, and international forces that shape individual lives, they successfully presented a slice of the Vietnamese American experience and the subtle nuances of community life. For example, whereas mainstream opinion and earlier research suggested that Vietnamese youths were either valedictorians or gangsters, the writers in this group explained the complexities involved in social and individual choices.

The studies and scholars mentioned here have been invaluable in understanding Vietnamese diasporic history and have provided a foundation for my colleagues and me to reach across the oceans to examine connections between the diasporic community and Viet Nam. Memoirs tell of leaving Viet Nam, adjusting to the host country, and some returns to the home country (Hayslip and Wurts 1990; T.D.T. Lê 2003; Q. D. Nguyen 1994; K. Nguyen 2001; A. Pham 1999). The growing production of diverse Vietnamese and Vietnamese American art forms in the last decade allowed film and literature criticism (Beevi 1997; Duong 2005; V. T. Nguyen 2006; Pelaud 2005). Other works looked at the effect of the overseas population on Vietnamese social structures and culture productions (Carruthers 2002; Leshkovich 2003; Thai 2008; Valverde 2003).¹¹ These works represent an evolution leading up to ideas that I advance about the new ways the Vietnamese diaspora engages in transnational processes that shape their experiences in the United States while affecting events in Viet Nam.

Vietnamese in Diaspora

Centering diaspora as an analytic framework within Vietnamese American and Viet Nam studies scholarship is essential to an examination of the experiences of Vietnamese overseas populations and their relationships with Viet Nam and its inhabitants. As Adam McKeown states in his work with the Chinese diaspora, “A diasporic perspective would complement and expand upon nation-based perspectives by drawing attention to global connections, networks, activities, and consciousnesses that bridge these more localized anchors of reference” (1999, 307). I discuss here the formation of this diverse group, what constitutes a diaspora in the (post)modern age, and the importance of centering Vietnamese overseas experiences within a diasporic framework to incorporate a larger picture of local and international forces.

Traditionally, people in diaspora are seen as exiles scattered throughout the world and dreaming of a homeland to return to, as in the case of Jewish diasporas (R. Cohen 1997). Alternatively, some assume they will eventually assimilate into host country cultures and disappear into local cultural fabric. Diaspora is now studied with many more forms of movements and nuanced connections. Extrapolating from the ideas of diaspora scholars Robert Cohen (1997), James Clifford (1994), Paul Gilroy (1991), Wannii Anderson and Robert G. Lee (2005), Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu (2007), and Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003), I have developed a working definition of *diaspora*. Diaspora groups and individuals are displaced and living away from their homeland, have both connections to and alienation from their homeland and adopted country, experience ambivalence toward both their homeland and their adopted country, have connections with others in diaspora, and create new, shared hybrid cultures.

Since 1975 Viet Nam’s overseas population has increased tremendously. Overseas Vietnamese stood at over three million in 2010; twenty-six countries have more than ten thousand Vietnamese immigrants and their immediate

descendants in residence, with the majority residing in the United States. Before 1975 only several thousand Vietnamese lived in the United States, many of whom were war brides or more transient individuals such as students, soldiers in training, and diplomats. The fall of Sai Gon in 1975 and the subsequent mass movement of refugees boosted the Vietnamese population in the United States to 245,025 by 1980. This number more than doubled by 1990 to 593,213 and doubled again by 2000 to 1,122,528. Between 2000 and 2010 the population increased 38 percent, to reach 1,548,449 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002, 2010b; "Portrait of Vietnamese Americans" 2011).

At 581,946 in 2010, California's population of Vietnamese Americans is the largest in the United States. The city of San Jose has the most Vietnamese of any city outside Viet Nam: 112,030, or 10.6 percent of San Jose's total population. Well over 200,000 Vietnamese Americans live in a cluster of cities in Southern California. Westminster, in Southern California and home of the most visible Vietnamese ethnic enclave, Little Saigon, is often referred to as the capital of the Vietnamese diaspora (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010b). The making of the Vietnamese diaspora spans three decades and continues to evolve.

Movement and Meaning

Though sometimes perceived as a monolithic group, Vietnamese Americans have diverse backgrounds, including socioeconomic status and time and method of arrival in the United States (Lowe 1991). Their settlement and adaptation in the United States and how they reestablish relations with one another also factor into their diasporic experiences. The physical movement of Vietnamese entering the United States really began with the fall of Sai Gon in 1975, when South Viet Nam was left in a state of chaos. The South Vietnamese had learned of the brutal, mass evacuation of Cambodians in Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge and anticipated similar actions in Sai Gon. Fearing the worst, people felt the urgency to leave Viet Nam (Rutledge 1992). On March 18, 1975, President Gerald Ford authorized the U.S. attorney general to use his parole power to admit 130,000 Southeast Asian refugees into the United States. He also created the Interagency Task Force with representatives from various federal agencies to oversee their resettlement (Chan 1991). Thus began the formation of the Vietnamese diaspora in many Western countries. It also meant that relations between the United States and its former ally would change, because the United States was now relating to the South Vietnamese as a refugee group entering the country.

Those without connections or resources to leave with the last of the Americans still found ways to flee Viet Nam during Sai Gon's final days. They left by many different routes and by any means necessary: U.S. military aircraft, U.S. Navy ships, small boats, and on foot (Rutledge 1992). People in this first wave left because they believed their or a family member's involvement with the U.S. government would result in persecution by the new communist government.

Leaving Viet Nam was essential to their survival, and many had preorganized departure plans.¹²

This first group of Vietnamese received little resistance from the U.S. government. At the Ninety-Fourth Congress, first session, May 5, 1975, Sen. James O. Eastland made an emotional plea for the United States to open its doors to the refugees:

What this country should be doing now is soliciting all the funds that can be raised for Vietnam refugee relief, working to relocate these people, get them settled, try to find jobs for them, and offer them help and encouragement in every way we can. These people are largely the middle class of Vietnam. While they may have their bad citizens as well as their good, I believe that the vast majority of these people are those who voted with their feet. Hundreds of thousands of them voted that way in escaping from North Vietnam originally. They are doing it again. They are shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, trade unionists, journalists. They are a cross section of the same kind of people who have been making up America ever since the first immigrants came over here and met with the Indians. (Eastland 1975)

Subsequently, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act of 1975 financed the resettlement process for these refugees.¹³

Commonly referred to as the 75ers by Vietnamese American themselves, many first-wave immigrants had a high level of education, had middle- to upper-class standing in Viet Nam, lived in urban centers, learned English or at least had a working familiarity with it, had been educated within the foreign educational system, or had been high-ranking soldiers or professionals who had worked with American personnel or companies in Viet Nam (Rutledge 1992). Many 75ers left with the belief that they could and would return to a recaptured South Viet Nam. As time passed, however, this hope diminished and the harsh reality of being nationless set in. Permanent resettlement in the United States meant 75ers set up the first ethnic enclaves and developed ethnic businesses and institutions such as news media and social, political, and cultural organizations. This population consisted of people who took leadership positions during the early years of resettlement and continued to maintain their power base as subsequent waves arrived.

Shortly after the first refugees entered the United States, a second wave began to arrive, and this wave continued until 1981. For these former South Vietnamese, the new communist government set forth punitive measures. It targeted individuals and family members of those involved with the United States, South Vietnamese military, landowners, and Chinese Vietnamese.¹⁴ Punishment included confiscation of property or land, discrimination in the workforce and education, detainment, incarceration, and expulsion to desolate lands known as New Economic Zones. To escape persecution, hundreds of

thousands of Vietnamese risked their lives at sea, hoping to settle in a country like the United States.

Boat escapes often took months to plan and meant cutting off all social ties while pulling the last resources together to pay escape fees. Many former South Vietnamese citizens chose this path even knowing capture would mean jail or worse. Once on the move, they risked getting shot by Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (SRV) guards, death by drowning, and starvation. Moreover, Thai pirate attacks severely brutalized or killed men, women, and children. Pirates who raped and kidnapped young girls and women made boat escapes all the more arduous and traumatizing. Some estimate that as many as half of the boat escapees died en route (Chan 2006; Freeman 1989; Nhat, Duong, and Vu 1981). Since most from this second wave escaped Viet Nam by sea, the images conveyed to the West were of thousands of Vietnamese refugees escaping on rickety boats: the “boat people.”

Members of the second wave came from socioeconomic backgrounds much more varied than their predecessors⁷. Although they had lived in villages and coastal towns and were from all walks of life, the majority of the second wave were nevertheless well educated and had lived in Sai Gon (Rutledge 1992). They waited in the first asylum camps for a longer period than those in the first wave—nine months on average (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy 1989). However, the United States still accepted Vietnamese refugees from the countries of first asylum.¹⁵ Their adaptation was less cohesive than that of the first wave, having lost more years living under an oppressive communist regime, staying longer in refugee camps, and starting over in a less welcoming political and socioeconomic environment in the United States than their predecessors. But the business skills and informal networks of many proved invaluable in building commercial ethnic islands in resettlement areas and eventually lifting their economic status (Chan 1991; Kibria 1993). They came during a U.S. recession, but most managed to carve out a living, partly because of Vietnamese communities already in place by the time the second wave arrived. They also received refugee status with relative ease and some resettlement help along with the support of Vietnamese family and friends in the United States.

With the creation of distinctive waves, some Vietnamese Americans developed terms to distinguish the old-timers from the newcomers. Many young 75ers derogatorily referred to the second wave as FOB—“fresh off the boat.” The distinction between the first-wave 75ers and the second-wave FOB newcomers led to an intraethnic class hierarchy based on time of and, in part, means of arrival. Intrinsically, this class bias relates to the impression that 75ers came from the establishment of Viet Nam before the fall and that those who immigrated later came from more modest backgrounds. It also means that earlier arrival in the United States allotted the 75ers more time to resettle in and assimilate to the new land.¹⁶

By 1979, when it became clear that Vietnamese continued to flee and that thousands were dying at sea during their escape, the United Nations and the

United States sought to regulate the flow of the boat people (Valverde 1992). On May 31, 1979, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the SRV created the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) (Rutledge 1992). At the time of the ODP's inception, the UNHCR negotiated resettlement arrangements with more than twenty countries. The Vietnamese nationals who immigrated to the United States through the ODP were processed as refugees under the Refugee Act of 1980 or as holders of immigrant visas under the Immigration and Nationality Act (Kumin 1988). ODP ended September 30, 1999, twenty years after it started. During ODP operations, 467,113 Vietnamese were admitted to the United States, including over 165,718 who had gone through Viet Nam's forced reeducation programs, 89,467 through Amerasian programs, and 211,928 from other immigration programs (Daniels 2000).

This third wave, or ODP group, was even more diverse than the previous wave. Its members had also lived under the communist system and were often victims of poor central planning and a weakening economy but for an even longer time than previous waves. Some came alone; many more came with their families or were reunited with their kin in the United States. ODP encompasses programs in family reunification but also programs that processed Amerasians and then later South Vietnamese internees. With the creation of the ODP, the number of refugees escaping through dangerous channels diminished.

The ODP group brought into the United States former South Vietnamese soldiers and officials who had been imprisoned in internment camps after 1975 and who influenced the Vietnamese American political landscape. Applicants who had served in the South Vietnamese government and had been imprisoned for more than five years were eligible to immigrate to the United States. Under President George H. W. Bush, the Humanitarian Operation (HO) Program began accepting internees in 1990. In 1994 an estimated 450,000 to 550,000 internees, including family members, were living in Viet Nam. By 2000 most were resettled in the United States (Daniels 2000).¹⁷

Members of the HO Program are considered well educated and previously held positions of power and leadership. However, because they are older and harbor deep-rooted memories of loss from the level of family to the nation, adjusting to a foreign country and culture proved particularly difficult. Many had been important members of society in Viet Nam but now had to rely on family and friends and government assistance.¹⁸ To make up for the lost years and possibly to regain some semblance of authority among their ethnic peers, many from these groups joined and became leaders of staunch anticommunist groups and essentially revitalized sentiments of animosity toward the SRV.¹⁹ Yet others from this same group had no intention of perpetuating a long-standing feud with communist Viet Nam. Having endured a war, separation from family, and incarceration, they looked forward to a time of peace for themselves and their families in the United States.

Ethnic integration seemed pivotal for their adjustment in the United States. But the desire to integrate into the greater U.S. society also loomed large,

especially for the younger population, who called it home. Although the U.S. government created a variety of Vietnamese refugee-immigration programs, American society has not completely accepted this new group. As the national myth goes, the United States is the land of the free and a great exponent of democracy. Its people come from all parts of the world, but once in the United States its melting pot ultimately assimilates them into American culture (Sowell 1981).²⁰ However, racism inherent in U.S. society surfaced for Vietnamese Americans in the form of verbal and physical racially motivated attacks. These factors contributed to the insecurity of these refugee-immigrants and their need to appear more assimilated, even at the risk of ostracizing members of their own ethnic communities. In Texas, for example, several Vietnamese-owned shrimp boats were intentionally torched in the Galveston Bay area between 1979 and 1981, most likely a result of competition for fishing grounds (Chin 2002). Violence of a different nature reached extreme heights on January 29, 1996, when former University of California, Los Angeles, honor student and Vietnamese Student Association president Thien Minh Ly was killed while rollerblading at a high school near his home. His killer became the first person Orange County sent to San Quentin State Prison's death row under California's hate-crime statute (Moxley 2008).

Besides experiencing overt racial discrimination, youths growing up in the United States were also going through difficult issues of acculturation. Many developed self-esteem and identity issues commonly experienced by people of color in the predominantly white, Eurocentric U.S. society. These conditions ultimately caused many members of the community to question their place in the United States and (re)consider their connections to the ethnic community there, while others (re)considered their connections to Viet Nam.

Some from the younger generation, beholden to their families' history of loss, continue to harbor sorrow for a perceived injustice and take on their parents' political agenda to right it. Some even internalize their parents' trauma, seeing it as their own in "postmemory," and use that history as inspiration for artistic expression and cultural production (Hirsch 2008). The proliferation of independent films, art works, and memoirs of men and women in their twenties and thirties discussing these same issues speaks to the plight of some young people and how they relate to the older generation while growing up in the United States (Timothy Bui 2001; Tony Bui 1999; T.D.T. Lê 2003; Q. D. Nguyen 1994; K. Nguyen 2001; L. Pham 2005; A. Pham 1999; H. Tran 2006).

Though characteristics vary, feelings of displacement from the home country and alienation in the adopted one are strong for all three waves and include generations that grew up or were born in the United States. To 75ers, for instance, this displacement meant losing a nation, South Viet Nam, with no hope of returning. For the boat refugees, they carry with them years of discrimination in Viet Nam, trauma from the escape and camp experience, and further struggles to make a new home in the United States. For HO members, memories of incarceration and other forms of oppression remain strong in the

United States. Younger generations experience internal struggles that can include the legacy of their parents' loss and discrimination in a racist new home. Since the sense of displacement and alienation is experienced by so many in the Vietnamese diaspora, there should not be a monopoly on pain, suffering, and loss. Yet some consider their personal or collective experience as the most real or legitimate and as best representing the Vietnamese overseas population. In particular, they continue with national rituals (such as pledging to the flag of the former South Viet Nam) while perpetuating an anticommunist political philosophy. They deem those who do not follow the practices and beliefs to be communists and, in extreme cases, they practice red-baiting.

Anticommunism within Vietnamese American Communities

Myriad immigration experiences create diverse populations. But I argue that the anticommunism embedded in the early culture production of Vietnamese living in the United States has been their overarching ideology and has most influenced their perceptions (T. N. Tran 2007; T. V. Dang 2005; Valverde 2003). The ideology includes preserving the culture that existed before 1975 and symbols that represented South Viet Nam.²¹ For them, all individuals, groups, and institutions either have a strong anticommunist stance or they are communist. But because no legitimate unifying leader exists and there is no unitary law enacted, monitoring the behavior of overseas Vietnamese for communist tendencies is an uncontrolled and unregulated act, with punitive measures against the "communists" varying greatly in style and intensity. Dozens of organizations have arisen for the sole purpose of advancing anticommunist ideology and have come to dominate overseas Vietnamese communities. Expressions of anticommunist sentiments from these groups and individuals have resulted in assassinations, protests, and social exclusion.

In many ways, however, it is unclear what anticommunism means for these individuals and groups. It may entail a rejection of Hồ Chí Minh-style communism born from colonial influences and nationalist revolutionary ideals or disdain for a series of communist endeavors to equalize classes through draconian methods of land reforms and purges. Perhaps it means disliking Hồ Chí Minh's imperialist intentions of creating an Indochinese communist state incorporating Laos and Cambodia. Or the word *communist* has taken the place of "North Viet Nam," the victors who defeated South Viet Nam. There seem to be many wildly different permutations of these ideas among members of anticommunist groups. By *staunch anticommunists*, I mean the people who actively and aggressively push an agenda centered on nationalist loyalties to the former South Viet Nam and completely reject a reunified Viet Nam.

Shortly after resettlement, exiled Vietnamese refugees organized with the hope of taking back Viet Nam by force. A prime example is the National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (NUFLVN), the largest of the anticommunist resistance movements. Formed by Hoang Co Minh, former vice admiral

of the Sai Gon Navy, and Pham Van Lieu, former chief of the Sai Gon National Police Force, this group supposedly trained fighters on the border of Thailand with the intention of taking back Viet Nam by force. However, by 1984, internal strife divided the group when Lieu accused Minh of using contributions to the Front to open a chain of Vietnamese restaurants and buy a fishing boat (McLaughlin 1990). Even with these early problems, over time, groups like NUFLVN evolve to keep up with political fluctuations. Such was the case in 2004 when the group changed its name to Việt Nam Canh Tân Cách Mạng Đảng (Việt Tân for short), or the Vietnam Reform Party. Seeing the futility of military action against Viet Nam, this new group instead “holds that the Vietnamese people must solve the problems of Vietnam. Democratic change must come through the power of the people in the way of grassroots, peaceful means” (Viet Tan 2009). A longtime member of the group, Dan The Hoang (2009), notes that the “struggle to change Viet Nam is by getting to the hearts and minds of the people so they can stand up and speak up for human rights and freedom and multi-party system.”

With this new focus, Viet Tan has adopted a two-pronged approach to establish change in Viet Nam: (1) spread democratic ideas and a multiparty system and (2) lobby for U.S. policy for human rights in Viet Nam.²² Viet Tan continues to defend its actions abroad and in Viet Nam. It spreads its viewpoints through the Internet and a daily radio broadcast inside the home country: New Horizon Radio. As of 2012, the group is an active anticommunist force.

Groups like NUFLVN remain popular primarily because they speak to a people who have collectively experienced an immense amount of loss. Because of strong sentiments about their lost nation, anticommunist groups believe that working toward shaping Viet Nam’s future in line with their values is well worth a continued fight. Of course, the manner of this fight varies greatly, from silent protest to more active engagement in political change. Extreme measures to influence and control usually get the most attention and incite the most fear in the general Vietnamese American population.

Anticommunist groups and individuals have strengthened their influence on diasporic communities even through physical attacks on suspected dissidents. On July 21, 1981, in San Francisco, Duong Trong Lam was the first Vietnamese assassination victim. An antiwar activist and community organizer, he had been in the United States since 1971, originally as a student. A group calling itself the Anti-Communist Viets Organization (ACVO) took responsibility for the killing. They claimed that Duong was assassinated because he was a communist agent who edited *Cai Dinh Lang* (*Village Temple*) newspaper to “bolster the image of the hated Vietnamese communist regime” (Coburn 1983, 19). This act effectively signaled the beginning of terrorism in the community. Lam’s assassination, along with the slaying of four other journalists by purported death squads in the United States since 1981, remains unsolved (Brody 1994; Kleinknecht 1999).

In another violent incident that took place in 1989, an unknown assailant shot and wounded Doan Van Toai near his Fresno, California, home. Toai

coauthored *The Vietnamese Gulag* and headed a political group called Institute for Democracy in Vietnam (Doan and Chanoff 1986). Sources in the Vietnamese American community claimed he met with Ha Noi officials and advocated United States–Viet Nam dialogue. He admittedly wanted better ties between the two countries, though he also often sharply criticized the Ha Noi government. He was even arrested and jailed in Viet Nam after 1975. Nonetheless, some members of the Vietnamese community thought he was a communist agent and wanted him dead (Associated Press 1989). Protests against suspected communist sympathizers continue today even though the most severe forms of violence, like assassination, have ended.

Culturally motivated protests have had the same intent as political ones: to advance the anticommunist ideological perspective and control the mind-set of members of the diaspora. For example, anticommunist Vietnamese Americans accused Thanh Lan, a famous Vietnamese singer who in 1994 was in the United States on a ninety-day culture visa to perform throughout the country, of being an agent of communist Viet Nam and boycotted her show in San Jose. She denied being a communist or even cooperating with communists, and then she went into hiding. Shortly thereafter, she requested asylum in the United States. Thanh Lan was shocked by the protests and the ferocity of the demonstration against her, including death threats (Jung 1994).

Even though the extreme anticommunist hard line has lightened over the years, a vocal minority still reminds Vietnamese American community members that any person having relations with Viet Nam will be labeled a communist and a traitor to South Viet Nam's legacy. "Relations" may be as personal and benign as sending remittances to or visiting family in Viet Nam. The term may have a more serious meaning, such as participating in cultural and business dealings in Viet Nam. Those who risk such links know they can fall victim to threats, protests, and even arson.

These pressures have created incentives to dissociate from individuals labeled communists within the Vietnamese American community. Even in 2012 the most effective way to silence an opponent is to label him or her a communist. Members of the Vietnamese American community know explicitly and implicitly the importance of overtly maintaining a strong stance against communism in Viet Nam, even if privately they bridge connections to Viet Nam and its citizens. But there is much dissent in the diverse Vietnamese American community. Many Vietnamese visit their families in Viet Nam, work on humanitarian projects operating there, have business dealings there, or consume cultural products from there, such as music. Such strong connections to the home country are common knowledge and practice in the community but are seldom acknowledged publicly. Historical precedent of threats and fear of such threats help explain this self-censorship. But transnational connections show how, even with these anticommunist pressures, Vietnamese Americans can and do cross political divides and national borders to create their own diasporic experiences in the age of globalization.

Globalization as Context

According to the Hansen effect, it takes three generations for an immigrant group to reconnect with its homeland. Arthur Hansen made several related claims based on a study of Japanese Americans: first-generation Asian American immigrants retain their homeland culture, the second generation adapts to the new culture of the host country, and the third generation returns to the homeland culture for identity validation (Hansen 1983).²³ However, Vietnamese Americans seemingly have experienced all three stages in a far shorter period. Technological developments have made communications and transportation far easier, cheaper, and more rapid in recent decades than in the past, when many Japanese Americans first came to the United States. Accounting for the current global conditions is fundamental to understanding the recent history of the Vietnamese diaspora and its connection to Viet Nam.

Following David Harvey (1990) and Arjun Appadurai (1991), I define *globalization* by using today's condition, which is characterized by increasing connectedness of countries and regions, creating new governance; the spread of capitalism, creating new migration patterns; a worldwide interconnectedness, by way of financial networks and dominant-culture productions and distribution; and new technologies in travel and communications.

Beyond the need to escape for safety reasons, Vietnamese left because of perceived lack of opportunities at home and hope for a more prosperous future in a place like the United States. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc articulate the importance of global capitalism as push-pull factors in transnational migration. They argue that currently in the world there is "a global restructuring of capital based on changing forms of capital accumulation [that] has led to deteriorating social and economic conditions in both labor sending and labor receiving countries with no location of a secure terrain of settlement" (1995, 158).

By the late 1980s, global forces like technological advances in travel and communication facilitated rapid movements of people, cultures, and currency across borders and shaped new immigrant relations and experiences (Appadurai 1991; Castells 1996; Harvey 1990).²⁴ These new conditions contributed to dramatic changes in both Viet Nam and its overseas population. Most striking are the ways the people from both sides of the ocean remain connected. This process of connecting and reconnecting defines many overseas Vietnamese while affecting development in Viet Nam. It also allows us to think differently about how diasporas are formed and their impact on the host and home countries even as they transcend traditional nation-state borders to maintain linkages in multiple sites.

Financial Forces

Most journalists and many scholars explain globalization in terms of worldwide capital penetration. However, Robert Cohen reminds us that global processes