

Recombinant History: Transnational Practices of Memory and Knowledge Production in Contemporary Vietnam

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In the early dawn hours of April 30, 2000, I quickly made my way through the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, still commonly known and referred to as Saigon. The city was beginning to stir as street vendors heated large pots of *pho* broth and residents slowly jogged through the nearly empty streets. I hurried past the neighborhood park, already filled with badminton players, on my way to the official commemoration about to take place at the Reunification Palace, formerly the Presidential Palace during the Saigon regime. This is also the site where tanks from the People's Army of Vietnam came crashing through the gates on April 30, 1975, signaling the liberation or, as many would have it, the fall of Saigon. The roads were barricaded, but I managed to convince a policeman to let me through to join the various onlookers gathering outside the palace. At 7 a.m., the gates opened and the parade began. Although thousands of participants had been bussed in from neighboring provinces and outlying city districts, there were only about 200 bystanders in attendance—mostly journalists, photographers, and curious tourists who had come to Vietnam for the 25th anniversary of the end of the war.

The armed forces led the procession, with men and women segregated into different military units. Army troops first marched past in unison, followed by the air force, the navy, and then a women's militia unit dressed in conventional "guerilla" uniforms of loose-fitting black garments, checkered scarves, and wide-rimmed, floppy green hats. A group of young male cadets carrying the flag of the National Liberation Front of Southern Vietnam (NLF) followed in step.¹ After this display of the nation's military might, the parade moved into a more jovial "civil society" phase represented by members of various organizations, such as the Fatherland Front. The Farmer's Association, the Women's Union, youth pioneers, gymnasts, postal workers, Buddhist and Catholic organizations, and even children dressed as bumblebees marched past waving and smiling to the crowd. Marchers

representing the ethnic minorities from the central highlands region elicited excited reactions from the crowd when they appeared on stilts dressed in “traditional” garb. The festivities culminated in the dance of the unicorn accompanied by the loud, rhythmic beating of drums and the clashing of cymbals.

Finally, a convoy of floats began to emerge through the palace gates, the primary function of which was to carry advertising. This capitalist addition to a celebration symbolizing 25 years of liberation, reunification, and socialist transformation is emblematic of current reform policies to develop a “market economy with socialist orientation” [Kinh te thi truong voi dinh huong xa hoi chu nghia]. Several of the floats were advertisements for Vietnam’s nascent tourism industry, including one for Ho Chi Minh City Tourism, driven by young men dressed to resemble NLF guerrillas. Another float promoting a popular theme park adopted a similar motif and designed its vehicle in the shape of an armored tank. Young women sporting rubber “Ho Chi Minh” sandals and checkered scarves associated with the NLF rode on its sides waving yellow flowers at the spectators. These presentations exemplified a symbolic and visual mode of commemorating a momentous occasion in Vietnam’s history and also clearly indicated the expanding role tourism has assumed in Vietnamese society since economic reforms began in the late 1980s. Moreover, the appropriation of war-era signs and symbols for present-day tourist displays signified an important trend to be explored in this article: the commodification, representation, and consumption of war at public sites of memory in contemporary Vietnam.²

Transnationalizing History and Memory

Like many nations involved in the practices and processes of modernization, Vietnam has adopted tourism as a prime development strategy to produce economic growth. Yet travel to Vietnam is not only about romantic encounters with “natives” or nostalgic colonial fantasies.³ The icons of war found on the parade floats demonstrate a marketing awareness that Vietnam has more than just the image of the culturally exotic to offer. It has, in addition, the “American War,” as it is called in Vietnam.⁴ This recognition has spurred a genre of travel that sells memory, history, tragedy, and entertainment bundled into compelling package tours to visit former battlegrounds. Unlike the traveler who seeks the peace, tranquility, and imagined authenticity of a premodern world (MacCannell 1999), the battlefield tourist is driven by the desire to see, experience, and understand mass destruction and violence in the modern era. For people who feel a need to reconcile with a painful and formative past, journeys to former war sites can be a cathartic experience that involves fluctuating and performative engagements with memory (Kugelmass 1996).

As Vietnam undergoes extensive economic reforms and reestablishes a position in the global market, questions of when to evoke the past and how to remember the war take on renewed significance. In contrast to a perceived U.S. obsession with

the war, Vietnamese citizens and their government regularly assert that Vietnam “has closed the past and looks to the future” [Khep lai qua khu, huong ve tuong lai].⁵ Yet, as Renan (1990) has suggested, the forces of memory and forgetting that constitute a nation’s history also shape and secure its collective visions of the future.

This article examines one specific interrelationship between “the past” and “the future” in Vietnam, when icons of the war are recycled and reproduced in a transnational economy of memory for the sake of prosperity and development. Looking at touristic consumption and practices of memory at former battlefields and other social spaces that invoke history, I argue that the commodification of sites, objects, and imaginaries associated with the war has prompted certain rearticulations of the past in the public sphere, as the terrain of memory making becomes increasingly transnational and infused with capitalist values. Socioeconomic reforms and intensified global movements of people, knowledge, and capital have engendered particular social spaces for transnational actors to engage in practices of memory that diversify and transnationalize history in new and distinct ways. This is not to argue for a previous condition of state monolithic control over a fixed and uniform narrative of Vietnamese history. As scholars have shown, Vietnamese historical memory has undergone transformation and renarration as a result of conflicts within the Vietnamese Communist Party (Giebel 2004) and tensions between official and public memory (Tai 2001). Discourses of history have constantly shifted in Vietnam, but to understand changes taking place at this historical juncture, it is also imperative to look at the realm of “globalization” and identify the various transnational forces involved in the diversification of knowledge and meaning.

Scholars have identified contradictions and tensions between remembrance and forgetfulness when public memorials and commemorative projects are transformed into historical sites for tourists and other audiences who put such space to alternative social uses (Gillis 1994; Handler and Gable 1997; Linenthal 1991; Yoneyama 1999; Young 1993). This scholarship is part of a larger body of literature that addresses conflicting meanings and competing claims to ownership of history and memory between individuals as well as between individuals and the state (Bodnar 1992; Cohen 1994; Herzfeld 1991; Lüdtke 1997; Sturken 1997; Verdery 1991; Watson 1994). Although much of this research addresses struggles over historical truths and practices that take place within bounded local or national spaces, far fewer studies have examined transnational contestations and negotiations.⁶ A recognition that projects of history are also transnational processes compels a more nuanced understanding of the global entanglements involved in the production of historical knowledge. In this article, I refer to such entangled scripts as *recombinant history*, a term that suggests the interweaving of diverse transnational memories, knowledge formations, and logics of representation. I borrow from David Stark’s (1996) work on postsocialist Hungary and his use of *recombinant property* to identify newly diversified and redefined property relations that blur the lines between

“capitalist” and “noncapitalist” economic practices and modes of organization to challenge the narrative of capitalist triumph over Eastern Europe (Verdery 1996). When applied to the context of war sites in Vietnam, Stark’s idea of recombinant property is useful for thinking through the complexities involved in the transnationalization of historical memory and the role of “intertwined histories” (Said 1993) that complicates viewing them as only “national” memories.

In what follows, I examine the commodification of two historical constructs: the “Vietnam War,” portrayed in U.S. history as a battle against communism, and the “American War,” represented as a struggle against imperialism in official Vietnamese history. Tracing the topography of memory constructed in recent years by state tourism officials, I outline the attraction that the war has for many international visitors who endeavor to make the past “real” through embodied tourist encounters. I then examine the appropriation of U.S. popular culture by private vendors and entrepreneurs who have transnationalized history and commercialized the war through the marketing of images and objects linked to American G.I. memories and subjectivities. The last section is an extensive case study that compares modes of consumption of history at a state-run war site, the Cu Chi Tunnels. The complex memory and antimemory work engaged in by diversely situated actors at Cu Chi (e.g., state tourism officials, tour guides, international tourists, and domestic consumers) attests to the plurality of meanings that people bring to the site and those they take away from it. This plurality of meanings demonstrates further how such spaces are implicated in larger networks of “transnational memory-making” (White 1995).

Fashioning War as a Commodity in the State Sector

In the United States, the Vietnam War has long been a commodity consumed by the U.S. public. Thirty years after U.S. troops left peninsular Southeast Asia, reflections on the past and reinterpretations of the conflict continue to drive the publication of memoirs, anthologies, and novels as well as the production of Hollywood blockbuster films and other popular culture trends such as comic books, cartoons, action figures, computer games, and music.⁷ These cultural productions sell particular memories and ideological perspectives of the war that are largely devoid of any substantive examination or representation of Vietnamese people, culture, or history and are often steeped in Orientalist and anticommunist imagery.⁸ Although there are some exceptions to this, the underlying American ideologies of democracy, freedom, individualism, and moral goodness often remain unchallenged.⁹ Moreover, these commodities construct the war primarily as a tragedy for U.S. veterans, families, and society and overlook its devastating and long-term consequences for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Rowe and Berg 1991:2).

With the reestablishment of a market economy in Vietnam, images and artifacts of the American War have become increasingly commodified for public consumption, but with considerably less capitalist vigor than in the United States.

State-produced films and plays about the resistance wars against France and the United States are common on television and in theaters. CDs and karaoke videos with “red music” from the revolution are bought and sold throughout much of the country, and Vietnamese memoirs of war, a more recent publishing trend, are in high demand by domestic consumers. In the arts, wartime posters and socialist realist paintings of Ho Chi Minh are on display and available for purchase in certain galleries. Whereas the cultural production and marketing of the war in the United States often reproduce tenacious cold war rhetoric (such as killing “VC” in video games), in Vietnam such commodities typically communicate revolutionary values of heroic resistance and sacrifice. Yet, as in the United States, the relationship between these commodities and dominant ideologies is ambiguous at best, and Vietnamese cultural producers, such as filmmakers (Bradley 2001) and novelists (Lockhart 1992), are often actively engaged in subverting authoritative historical memory and producing counterrepresentations of the past.

In the early 1990s, state tourism officials in southern Vietnam began to develop a market around the discursive construct of the “Vietnam War”; in other words, they began to use expressions, artifacts, knowledge, and spaces primarily linked to wartime experiences of U.S. forces that have little meaning to the average Vietnamese person. Although the cultural production and commodification of the American War generally targets a domestic audience, the Vietnam War is predominantly sold to U.S. visitors and other international tourists. As diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam warmed, expectations that U.S. citizens, particularly veterans, would return to Vietnam in large numbers inspired the selective re-Americanization of the Vietnamese landscape of war. Officials constructed tours around events and sites significant in U.S. histories of the war (i.e., the Khe Sanh marine base) and revived military vernacular such as *China Beach* and *DMZ* to attract U.S. tourists familiar with these locations (Gluckman 1997; Tai 1994).¹⁰ Tour guides further diversified the historical knowledge communicated to visitors by integrating the recollections of U.S. veterans into their presentations.

Marketing the Vietnam War in Vietnam requires that tourist officials and employees have knowledge of the conflict as it has been represented in U.S. history and popular culture. It also assumes that visitors will possess a certain level of media, historical, and visual literacy to understand tourist spaces and spectacles. Despite this effort, however, the number of tourists from the United States has remained comparatively low. In the perception of many Americans, Vietnam remains a dangerous and war-torn country rather than a potential travel destination. The primary consumers of these tourist productions have been, therefore, international tourists from countries other than the United States who know about the war primarily through travel guidebooks (Laderman 2002), popular culture, or live media coverage. In the words of a Canadian man touring the sites of former battlefields:

I may be Canadian but the war was a big part of my life. I saw it all on TV. That’s why I’m here now. It’s amazing to finally visit those places I’m already familiar with—My

Lai, China Beach, Cu Chi, Saigon, and the DMZ. This evening I'm going to the Rex Hotel where journalists sat the last night before the liberation troops arrived, and then I'll go to the Apocalypse Now [nightclub]. Do you know if the original U.S. embassy is still there? [personal communication, February 28, 2000]

His bond with the past, a common theme that emerged with many of my interviewees, suggests that the war is not only significant in the sociohistorical consciousness of the United States, Vietnam, or other nations directly involved in the conflict, but it has assumed a unique status in global historical memory. Moreover, such comments reveal that "touristic phantasms" of Vietnam as a war-torn place drives its exoticization by international tourists who actively and eagerly seek to discover and experience its tragic history (Alneng 2002).

Foreigners who came to Vietnam searching for physical traces and remnants of the war were often surprised by the "lack" of visual reminders, and they frequently expressed disappointment that there was "not much left to see," especially at former U.S. military bases. Interviewees contrasted this perceived absence of signs in Vietnam with Cambodia, where many felt the war was more discernible. Winding up a monthlong tour of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, an older man from the United States discussed the country that had most overwhelmed him with the visual evidence of war:

I was completely shocked by the number of amputees in Cambodia. They were everywhere—people without hands, arms, and legs. I couldn't believe it. It was very disturbing. I was expecting to find that in Vietnam and was surprised how few [amputees] there were. You know there weren't too many signs of the war. I thought there would be more. [personal communication, March 6, 2000]

This comparison between Vietnam and Cambodia reflects the tendency to evaluate and contrast war sites turned into tourist attractions on the basis of their "realness," with travelers discussing the best places to visit where they could encounter more directly the tumultuous past. War was more tangible in Cambodia, I was told, with the infamous skulls at the Choeung Ek "killing fields." It was more "real" at Phnom Penh's Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes (formerly a Khmer Rouge prison) with stained blood on the floorboards and thousands of prisoner photographs on the walls.¹¹ Jane C. Desmond (1999) has argued that tourist practices are less about site-*seeing* than about embodied sensation and imagination.¹² The "sensing" of Cambodia's history through embodied acts of presence, of "being there" so that tourists might witness the traces of violence, (e.g., in the places where prisoners were tortured and executed) imbues such sites with an aura of realness and the power to evoke the past in the present (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:20).

To attract visitors to war sites in Vietnam, tourist officials incorporate "real" traces of history into staged multisensory environments that appear to dismantle historical distance and detachment for close-up viewing and interaction.¹³ Visitors join group tours to battlefields and massacre sites, some of which have been

partially reconstructed; they inspect and at times climb onto military vehicles; they crawl through enlarged underground tunnels, shoot war-era weapons, sample “guerilla” food, and explore the interiors of unreconstructed memorials, such as a bombed church left standing as silent testimony to a violent past. Mingling visual landscapes with smell, sound, touch, and sometimes taste to produce simulated spectacles in which signs and representations of the war are consumed, these sensorial and embodied journeys forge an “implied” experience that “operates in the realm of the imaginary” (Desmond 1999:253).

There is often an ironic reversal of desire in the consumption of war and suffering, however, when embodiment loses its “implied-ness” and becomes too visceral and uncomfortable. If history is not adequately aestheticized or if the suffering of others is inadvertently transferred to tourists, visitors might have an unpleasant or even embittered experience. In 2000, a tour operator informed me that the stopover at Xeo Quyt, an NLF revolutionary base deep inside the forest, was removed from the itinerary of a Mekong Delta tour after foreigners complained that the snakes and insects encountered there made it too “dangerous.” The dilemma for tourism officials is how to represent the war as a multisensory experience without making it “too real.”

Selling American G.I. Subjectivities in the Private Sector

While tourist authorities in southern Vietnam fashioned an industry around the consumption of diverse historical memories of the war, private vendors and entrepreneurs followed suit, expanding the market beyond government-regulated sites. Commodities in the private sector largely draw from U.S. wartime imaginaries, especially American G.I. subjectivities, produced in U.S. popular culture. References to representations of the war in popular culture often surface in tour guide discourse: in the names of hotels, restaurants, bars, and signature cocktails and in souvenirs from the war and other tourist memorabilia. Yet such co-optation is rarely without negotiation and resignification. *Good Morning Vietnam* t-shirts, adopted from the title of a Vietnam War film starring Robin Williams (Levinson 1987), are widely sold by street and market vendors in downtown Ho Chi Minh City. The film’s poster image of Williams set against the patriotic backdrop of the stars and stripes has been replaced, however, with an elderly Vietnamese woman in a conical hat next to a Vietnamese flag, signifying the nation’s cultural strength and historical resilience.

The Apocalypse Now nightclub is perhaps the most well-known appropriation of U.S. popular culture in Vietnam. Privately owned with branches in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, this trendy dance club attracts a domestic and international clientele with its dark, smoky rooms and 1970s disco music. The extensive use of the war motif invokes the embodied subjectivities of U.S. soldiers engaging in the “corrupt” cultural practices of Western music, drugs, and prostitution—“neocolonial poisons” once targeted for elimination by the postreunification socialist

government (Taylor 2000, 2001:23–55). In the Hanoi club, the disc jockey pumps out a loud rhythmic beat from a helicopter cockpit with red strobe headlights flashing through the misty fog on the dance floor. The whirling blades of the ceiling fans, propellers of “hueys” painted on the ceiling, give the illusion and breezy sensation of hovering helicopters. American G.I. helmets sheathe the dim hanging lamps over pool tables and red “blood” trickles over the bulbs of light fixtures on the walls. Sex workers dressed in the latest Vietnamese fashion sidle up to foreign men sitting at a bar designed to resemble a thatched village hut. “I hope a vet doesn’t have a flashback in here and take a lighter to this,” joked a middle-aged customer from the United States next to me at the bar one night, conjuring media images of soldiers burning village huts with Zippo lighters on search and destroy missions. He continued: “Just look at this place! It’s killing and whores, just like the war!” Both of these “attractions” (sex and violence) are closely linked to the social imagination of the life of a U.S. soldier as well as to the construction of the exoticized and sexualized Vietnamese woman, one of the persistent legacies of the war.¹⁴

However, foreigners are not the only consumers of this spectacle. The Apocalypse Now nightclub is also a gathering place for certain members of the Vietnamese populace with global social networks, such as artists, gays and lesbians, affluent youth, and employees of international organizations, signifying a Vietnamese cosmopolitan space of conspicuous pleasure and consumption (see Drummond and Thomas 2003). These domestic consumers—dancing, fraternizing, and reveling in spaces that reinvoke the era and culture of U.S. occupation—are the embodiment of recombinant history; their embrace of alternative wartime perspectives and practices transgresses dominant historical models and resists current social discourses and campaigns to stamp out “social evils.”

A fundamental aspect of the union of war, tourism, and capitalist consumer culture in southern Vietnam is the war relic or “souvenir of death” (Stewart 1993:140).¹⁵ With its multiple social lives and shifting modes of signification (Appadurai 1986), the souvenir of death represents a unique turn in history as domestic vendors, particularly in the underground economy, profit from the U.S. war machine by recirculating artifacts and everyday objects that U.S. soldiers discarded or unintentionally left behind, such as dog tags, medals, compasses, patches, cooking utensils, razors, and clothing. Embodying memory and sacredness through its alleged connection to a tragic past, the souvenir of death is an object of fetishized tourist desire that is valued and collected and at times disdainfully rejected for its mystique—the unknown but implied fate of the soldier who possessed it (Stewart 1993:149).¹⁶

The most iconic and sought-after relic from the war is the Zippo lighter (see cover photo). In Ho Chi Minh City, itinerant street vendors, generally children and young adults from the countryside who peddle their wares in the low-budget tourist area, along with upscale tourist shops in the downtown area, offer a diverse assortment of silver polished Zippo reproductions and tarnished “originals” with

engraved messages such as: “We are the unwilling led by the unqualified doing the unnecessary for the ungrateful.” Sometimes cynical, at other times patriotic, and often sexist and racist, the inscriptions provide discerning insights into the subjectivities and ideological positionings of U.S. soldiers during the war. Tracing the history and social lives of Zippo lighters in Vietnam, Ian Walters points to the paradox of their commodification. What was once used as a tool in the destruction of the country (in setting homes and villages on fire) is now used to contribute to its economic development (1999:275). Walters situates Zippo lighters in relation to a burgeoning market economy, but also significant is the role such cultural artifacts play in transnationalizing historical memory in Vietnam.¹⁷ Just as with customers frequenting the Apocalypse Now nightclub, consumers of Zippo lighters reenact particular sociohistorical imaginaries and subjectivities of the war that are largely informed by images circulated in U.S. popular culture. Moreover, as a symbolic souvenir of death that is more often imitative than “authentic,” the Zippo lighter is valued for its mimetic and insinuated connection to the past (an implied vehicle of memory) rather than a verifiable “cultural biography” (Kopytoff 1986).

The following section shifts to an ethnographic examination and tour of the Cu Chi Tunnels, a travel destination that remains an important site for transnational memory work, despite its being often described by visitors as a Disney-like theme park (see also Alneng 2002:472–475; Tai 1994). After introducing the state-managed tourist site, I track variously situated actors (i.e., international tourists, domestic visitors, and tour guides) and their diverse transnational engagements with the past.

Embodied Memory and Reconfigured Meaning at the Cu Chi Tunnels

The Cu Chi Tunnel Historical Remains, Vietnam’s most popular war attraction, lies 60 kilometers northwest of Ho Chi Minh City. In recent years, the notorious Cu Chi battlefields have been transformed into a commercialized transnational public space for the consumption of a multisensory “Vietcong” experience.¹⁸ Wartime secrets are divulged and the invisible enemy revealed as young men dressed as guerrillas escort visitors through a day in the life of a typical fighter living underground. Local tourist officials, tour guides, domestic visitors, and international tourists, in turning spaces of violence and death into spaces of entertainment and pleasure, transform the authoritative meanings and memories communicated at Cu Chi. Through embodied, interactive, and choreographed tourist practices, the lines between “the authentic” and “the fake” collapse, and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between a lingering sense of history and a purely imitative hyperreality (Eco 1983, see also Baudrillard 1994). However, this is not just a tale of commodification leading to dehistoricization or even trivialization (Adorno 1991). Rather, as in the case of the Zippo lighters, underneath the veneer of “inauthenticity” are complicated practices of memory at work that set apart social and historical actors and their divergent relationships to the past.

During the war, Cu Chi district was a free-fire zone of intractable underground warfare, aggressive U.S. military operations, and persistent chemical weapon assaults on largely imperceptible guerilla forces. A U.S. navy veteran, who was stationed in the port of Saigon, returned to Vietnam for the 25th anniversary celebration described above and recalled the formidable reputation of Cu Chi as we toured the tunnel complex together in April 2000: "I had always heard of this place during the war. This was the worst area to be stationed—the worst. Some bad battles occurred here. Those tunnel rats [U.S. soldiers sent underground] came back screwed up." Yet the very reasons that make Cu Chi infamous to many U.S. veterans (and therefore an appropriate place for this navy veteran to work through his trauma) also make it function as a symbol of courage and heroism to the Vietnamese nation. Built during the resistance wars against France and the United States, the 200-kilometer underground tunnel network has come to signify the Vietnamese people's resolute perseverance and clever ingenuity. As described in an English language brochure: "The Cu Chi Tunnels represent the will, intelligence and pride of the people of Cu Chi and symbolize the revolutionary heroism of Vietnam."¹⁹

After the war, most of the tunnels were abandoned and left to decay, although some underground passages and chambers were preserved as a memorial (Mangold and Pennycate 1985:268). This commemorative site drew government officials, schoolchildren, and gradually, foreign visitors. According to a Cu Chi tunnel employee, in the early 1990s, in anticipation of an increase in the number of international tourists, tourism officials modified the tunnels to accommodate "larger" bodies. The extremely narrow tunnel system was originally designed to favor the generally smaller stature of Vietnamese guerrillas. Although Cu Chi combatants slipped through tight entrances, most U.S. soldiers could not fit on account of their broader and often bulkier physiques. Today, few of the original underground passages remain and most of what tourists see today are reconstructions. However one "original" entry has been preserved; this site marks a pivotal moment in the visit to Cu Chi, where displays of bodily difference serve to authenticate history as well as the tourist experience. As part of the entertaining spectacle, a male guide locates a concealed and indiscernible underground entrance that is camouflaged by forest debris. Viewers gasp and camera shutters click as he descends through the exceptionally narrow opening (25 × 37 cm) and disappears into the constricted space below, resealing the cover above him (see Figure 1). After climbing out, he invites another person to try. Most adult European and North American tourists decline, and volunteers who rise to the challenge often cannot make it past their hips or shoulders.

Desmond has argued that international tourism is often contingent on a "visual and kinesthetic basis of codifying 'difference' " (1999:xiii). At Cu Chi, while tourists consume difference as presented and typologized in such spectacles, their participation in the performance further accentuates what are believed to be fundamental dissimilarities between Vietnamese bodies and those of U.S. soldiers.



Figure 1
Cu Chi tunnel demonstration. Ben Dinh.

In conversations with Vietnamese respondents, physical difference was frequently used to explain the success and fortitude of Cu Chi combatants. Traits such as small stature, according to one person, bestowed the ability to effortlessly maneuver through the tunnels and to live underground for long periods of time, while another respondent surmised that round “Western” eyes hindered vision in the bright tropical sun and ultimately contributed to the defeat of U.S. (and French) troops. Moreover, victory was at times explicitly linked to the idea of a unique Vietnamese “character” that has the propensity to endure immense suffering as a result of sociohistorical adaptation to recurring and protracted periods of war. According to an intellectual from Hanoi: “We won the war because of our character of

high perseverance. For over two thousand years we have had a tradition of fighting the enemy.”²⁰ Such discourses of difference reflect a national consciousness that, in linking military success to essentialist notions of “race” and “character,” crafts the Vietnamese nation as historically and racially distinct (cf. Malkki 1995).

International Visitors and Embodied Experiences

The Cu Chi Tunnel Historical Remains encompasses 830,000 square meters and is divided into two areas: Ben Dinh and Ben Duoc. Each area maintains a separate section of the tunnels for tourists to explore, and both underground systems are managed by the central tourist administration in Cu Chi District (an outlying district of Ho Chi Minh City). Although the tunnels at Ben Dinh and Ben Duoc have been restored and renovated in one way or another, international tourist discourse differentiates between Ben Dinh as the original and thus most “authentic” tunnel complex and Ben Duoc as merely a reconstruction. Low-budget tours from Ho Chi Minh City take mostly European and North American tourists on day trips to the former, whereas the latter predominantly attracts Vietnamese tourists and residents from nearby urban areas. In an interview, one government tour operator summarized the differences between the two destinations: “Ben Dinh has the original tunnels and attracts fewer people. At Ben Duoc one finds many Vietnamese visitors and schoolchildren, and there are more things to do there, like go to cafés or restaurants. Ben Dinh is more natural and does not have these activities, so that is where we take foreigners.” Invoking Bourdieu (1984), I suggest that visitors are separated according to naturalized differences between “foreign” and “Vietnamese” tastes, thus producing two distinctly different tourist experiences: one that promises a “pure” and focused historical journey and another that situates Cu Chi history in a more visibly mediated environment of recreation and retreat.

The modern and arguably Western desire for the authentic—for the unmediated “real thing”—has long been linked to commodification and to particular global processes, such as international tourism (MacCannell 1999) and transnational flows of cultural artifacts (Clifford 1988, 1997; Errington 1998). In Vietnam, a country where fakes and reproductions are readily available on the market as works of art (Taylor 1999), pirated DVDs and computer software, designer clothing and accessories, and war kitsch, the quest for authenticity is often bound up with anxiety about imitations and loss of value or meaning. In the case of Cu Chi, the preference of tour agencies for Ben Dinh over Ben Duoc is largely a response to international demands for historical authenticity.²¹ During fieldwork, I regularly encountered foreigners who were concerned that they would be deceived and taken to the “wrong” tunnels. Although there is some variation in the spatial layout and design of Ben Duoc and Ben Dinh, the tours generally mirror one another, with only slight divergences concerning the organization and presentation of exhibits. For instance, the Ben Duoc tunnels are shorter and wider and therefore, from the



Figure 2
“Folding chair” trap, Cu Chi Tunnels, Ben Dinh.

perspective of international visitors, they have less historical value, even though in both locations the lines separating realism from restoration and history from entertainment are ambiguous at best.

As is the case at Ben Duoc, the Ben Dinh tour begins in a small theater where visitors are briefed on the design and construction of the tunnels prior to watching a 20-minute black-and-white film that uses footage from the war to illustrate the everyday lives of Cu Chi combatants. After reconvening with their English-speaking guide who has accompanied them from Ho Chi Minh City, visitors are introduced to a local “guerilla” (always represented by a young man rather than an actual participant in the war), whose role is to activate the exhibits through performance. The trek into the once-defoliated jungle under a canopy of tropical regrowth and young eucalyptus trees begins. The first stop is the Self-Made Weapons Exhibit where guests observe guerilla defense tactics and weaponry adapted from “traditional” hunting techniques, such as the infamous “tiger trap” and the “spiked folding chair,” a device that, when stepped on precisely in the center, flips up to close onto the lower leg, impaling it with metal spikes from both sides (see Figure 2). A mural depicting scenes of bloodied U.S. soldiers caught in the clutches of bamboo traps or falling onto piercing stakes demonstrates the efficacy of the rudimentary yet inventive defense system and signifies a celebratory form of Vietnamese historical memory: the defeat of the United States.

Visitors walk along narrow, dusty trails past several discernible bomb craters, as distant rifle shots and machine-gun fire pierce the quietude of the forest and contribute to a contrived sensation of moving through a former battle zone. Tourists soon arrive at the much-anticipated climax of the tour, where the embodied experience of “guerilla life” culminates with a descent underground to crawl 90 meters through dimly lit and airless tunnels, which are up to three meters beneath the ground surface in some places. There is always some trepidation as well as excitement, although visitors are assured that the tunnels have been sprayed for spiders and snakes and that there are emergency exits every 30 meters for those who choose not to proceed into the deeper and narrower tunnel sections. At this moment, authenticity is no longer the issue as safety and comfort take precedence. “Time now to be a hero!” one guide exclaimed with a tinge of sarcasm as he coaxed a group of foreigners into the widened passageway, which at its narrowest point is still twice the size of the wartime tunnels (and thus not as “authentic”). After emerging, the perspiring and dirt-speckled tourists are invited into the underground kitchen to feast on “guerilla food”: boiled cassava dipped in a mixture of salt and crushed peanuts. As the tour continues, more secrets are revealed: how smoke from the kitchen was dispersed aboveground through a series of small air holes, giving the illusion of lingering jungle mists; and how dead U.S. bombs were sawed open and used for ammunition at a weapons production facility. A brief interlude at a rusting U.S. tank destroyed by Cu Chi fighters then follows. “Go ahead and be Rambo,” one guide joked as visitors climbed onto the tank to have their photographs taken. Such comments and actions reveal the presence of recombinant scripts of Cu Chi history that merge Vietnamese historical memory of the American War with images of the Vietnam War in U.S. popular culture.

The official narrative of history disseminated to foreigners at Ben Dinh tunnels is not a uniform and consistent representation of the past. As with concerns for safety and comfort, economic interests and motivations also tend to override and displace the project of historical authenticity. This is particularly evident at the last stop in the tour—the shooting gallery, a Cu Chi highlight in which discordant historical images, events, and memories coalesce to produce an embodied “journey into hyperreality” (Eco 1983:8). Demands for the “real thing” produce images that imitate images, obscuring the lines between history and illusion.

For some foreign tourists, visiting the shooting range and firing a Soviet AK-47 (or other weapons that the Cu Chi fighters had acquired) is the quintessential virtual guerilla experience. During one tour in February 2000, a Canadian man expressed the “need to shoot a VC gun just once.” Along with other tour participants, he purchased several rounds of M16 automatic rifle ammunition for \$1 apiece. Taking aim at painted animal targets in an open field, he fired them all off in less than two seconds and then shared how it felt to shoot an “actual” firearm from the war: “It was more real than the movies; a powerful, but solemn experience. I just had to do it.”²² In relating his experience to U.S. popular culture, this respondent suggests that remembrance through reenactment is dependent on the conflation and

simulation of multiple transnational imaginaries of the war, in which the availability of “real” guerilla weapons evokes U.S. representations of “VC” in film. This merging of historical imaginaries took a new turn in 2004, when I returned to the shooting range to find a glass case containing the uniform, helmet, and shoes worn by a U.S. pilot during the war with a sign that read: “Whole Set for Rent 8,000 VND / Shoot / 10 minutes.”²³ This (con)fusion of impersonations, in which foreign tourists wield the weapons of “Viet Cong” guerillas while wearing U.S. Air Force uniforms, further demonstrates recombinant and transnational modes of historical representation at the Cu Chi tunnels.

Domestic Visitors and Reconfigured Public Space

In stark contrast to most foreigners, Cu Chi is hardly a novelty for Vietnamese citizens who lived during the war.²⁴ To escape U.S. bombing raids, some villagers lived for extended periods of time in tunnels, such as the one at Vinh Moc in Quang Binh province, now a stop on the “DMZ Tour” in central Vietnam. In Hanoi, those who were not evacuated to the countryside often sought safety underground when B-52 bombers approached. Minh, who had been a student at the College of Foreign Languages in Hanoi when the bombing of northern Vietnam began on August 5, 1964 (a date he vividly remembered), recalled: “When the bombs came we would hide in underground shelters and trenches we had built ourselves. If the alarms sounded, we would move into our trenches to study. It was that way for years.” As we discussed his visit to Cu Chi Ben Duoc, I asked Minh if the tunnels were a popular destination for domestic tourists. He answered no and explained: “Few Vietnamese go to Cu Chi. The young people like it, but for people like myself, it is nothing special. Living in a tunnel is not strange to me because that is how I lived during the war. Older people feel this way and do not have a desire to visit there. I did not go to Cu Chi as a tourist; the government paid for the trip.”

Minh’s comments provide important insights into domestic tourism at Cu Chi. He points to the state functions of Ben Duoc and the role of government-sponsored tours in bringing visitors, especially schoolchildren, to the tunnels. Such groups typically come from state companies, organizations, and educational institutions (as in Minh’s case). The patriotic and pedagogical intentions behind these organized trips are clearly linked to the emotive and historical messages that officials aim to convey, namely, that the site should be able to “move visitors” and “stir their pride,” as well as educate the youth and enhance their understanding of Vietnam’s “tradition of revolution” (Truong 2000:38–39). Historical memory and knowledge of the past are further transferred and sustained through state commemorative rituals (Connerton 1989:40), including public recognition of martyrs. Each year on December 19, local party officials convene at a memorial temple on the grounds of Ben Duoc to light incense at an altar containing a large, gold-plated bust of Ho Chi Minh and pay tribute to the 44,357 men and women from the greater Saigon–Gia Dinh area who fell during the French and U.S. wars (Le 1997:24). As

one temple employee pointed out, the names of the deceased are inscribed in gold on large slabs of granite in a memorial style reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This parallel between monuments suggests traces of transnational aesthetic influences in official memorial projects.

Minh's comments, furthermore, confirmed my observation that in addition to state subsidized tours, Cu Chi Ben Duoc also draws a younger Vietnamese crowd who often come from adjacent city districts. Yet, as a tour guide was quick to point out, the attraction of Ben Duoc for urban Vietnamese youth lies not with the tunnels but with the recreational facilities in the immediate area. Whereas the grounds of Ben Dinh contain little more than souvenir shops and a small stand selling coconuts and cola, Ben Duoc is a commercialized leisure park that offers a respite from urban clamor and pollution. Pool tables, food stands, a mini hotel, and numerous cafés are places where youth gather to talk, relax, and drink strong coffee. When I asked the guide why Vietnamese visitors go only to Ben Duoc, the idea of distinct "tastes" surfaced again: "Because there is entertainment and the Vietnamese like entertainment! They don't care about going through the tunnels. Only foreigners like that. The young people like to go to the cafés, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. I think it's a place for love." This speculation was later corroborated by a female respondent in Ho Chi Minh City who took me to observe one of the latest urban phenomena in Vietnam: *café om* (hug cafés). The popularity of these cafés has grown in response to the increasing demand by young couples for private space. In a country where there are few places lovers can be alone and where public affection is generally discouraged, hug cafés offer the privacy of a little cubicle, and in more peripheral areas such as Cu Chi, open-air cafés provide segregated nooks for lovers under the trees. Spaces associated with violence and death are thus reinvented as spaces of love, desire, and pleasure.

In his work on public memory in the United States, John Bodnar (1992) argues that official agendas for commemorative institutions are often disrupted by vernacular interests. At Cu Chi, consumption practices do not always resonate with intended meanings, and at times they interrupt the ability of tourism officials to manage public space and the narratives of history they produce. Despite government efforts to retain its historical and commemorative significance, Vietnamese youth, in particular, have reinscribed the Cu Chi tunnels into a form of entertainment that is largely detached from the war. In insisting on the irrelevance of the tunnel complex, they are neither engaged in debates over the past nor "reliving" the war and consuming it as spectacle as are foreign visitors to the area. Rather, by turning a historical and pedagogical state site into a public space of pleasure, Vietnamese youth have imbued it with new antimemory functions and meanings.²⁵

Tour Guides and Unofficial Historical Knowledge

The cultural landscape at Cu Chi is also unique to the extent that it represents a transnational public space in which memory and meaning are reconstituted not only

by “local” youth or “global” tourists but also “other transnationals” (Hannerz 1998) whose profession hinges on mobility and interconnectedness, namely, tour guides (Favero 2003). Since the early 1990s, tourism in Ho Chi Minh City has provided new jobs for the marginalized population of veterans of the former Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). These men are able to use their knowledge of the war and their ability to speak English to their economic and social advantage, as well as to the benefit of state and nonstate actors in the tourism industry. As purveyors of specific memories that have been silenced by official history, ARVN veterans have turned their morally suspect experiences, cultural capital, and marginalized knowledge into a marketable commodity.

After reunification in 1975, ARVN soldiers were subjected to discriminatory measures and political reformation to integrate them into the imaginary of a united socialist homeland. Because of state employment policies that gave preferential treatment to citizens who had fought for and supported the revolution, many ARVN veterans had to survive economic and social hardship in the postwar period by working in the underground economy. In recent years, the rapid expansion of international tourism has provided these veterans with new employment prospects and career possibilities in the private sector. Take the case of Trai, a former Officer of Communications in the ARVN. After many arduous years in the countryside, Trai migrated back to Ho Chi Minh City in 1988, where he struggled to make ends meet as a pedicab driver until he found work as a freelance guide for an international tour operator. Trai has been able to use his reestablished global connections as a lucrative financial resource, and he currently runs his own private travel agency that specializes in catering to *tay ba lo* (Western backpackers) and U.S. veterans. In his view, tourism is a viable option for former ARVN soldiers because “foreigners, especially returning U.S. veterans, do not want to hear the party line” but prefer the other side of the story, the side that has survived despite defeat and that he can recall for his audience. During fieldwork, guides were often open about their backgrounds and war-time experiences working with U.S. troops. At the outset of one tour, the guide apologized for his occasional inadvertent use of U.S. military profanity and announced that he was a “South Vietnamese soldier” who would “tell the truth,” a perspective, he alleged, we would never hear from younger state guides who knew nothing about the war. Differing from official historical truth and knowledge, the truth of the ARVN veteran, expressed in his recollections of the past, assumed an exchange value in which rhetoric and memory become commodities and, therefore, much sought-after products for foreigners to consume.

Not unlike other individuals who have suffered political persecution and socioeconomic marginalization, guides from the former ARVN were expected to possess a “quasi-sacred power to represent truth” (Coutin 1993:119). During Cu Chi tunnels tours, international tourists were frequently interested in the “testimonies” of the veterans, and many were direct in asking about reeducation camps or personal sentiments toward the Vietnamese Communist Party. Some foreigners,

particularly those who harbored anticommunist suspicions, expressed their concerns about the “propaganda” to which they would be exposed as they traveled through the country. There was the belief that, as witnesses to certain injustices of the socialist regime, these guides would be more objective, truthful, and forthcoming in their recollections than government-trained guides. However, as scholars have pointed out, narrations of trauma are also fluid and mediated constructions of suffering (Antze and Lambek 1996; Douglass and Vogler 2003).

Although some tour guides might voice their support for the present communist leadership, others used their position to speak out and express their bitterness. Standing before a busload of predominantly European tourists, an irate guide instructed me: “Write this down. The government does what it wants. It does not listen to the people. That is the problem here.” After condemning party corruption, he declared to his attentive audience: “Anyone with money is a VC because non-VC have no way to become rich.” In a society in which public political dissent is largely discouraged, such tour guide discourse can be understood as a “hidden transcript” that recirculates anticommunist historical propaganda (“VC”) and expresses socioeconomic and political dissatisfaction without directly confronting or challenging the state (Scott 1990).

The fact that ARVN veterans are now finding jobs as tour guides demonstrates how the value of knowledge changes over time, and it also reveals a critical renegotiation of historical memory in which unofficial knowledges and memories of the past are redirected, reshaped, and revalued to benefit the market and the state as well as the veterans themselves. This shift is significant given postwar efforts to impose historical amnesia on the “losing” side. Even today, there continues to be a lack of public space to commemorate or mourn ARVN war dead as monuments and martyr cemeteries of the Saigon regime were destroyed or forcibly abandoned after 1975 (see Figure 3). Yet it is clear that some measure of public remembering is permitted and no longer perceived as a threat to social stability. The communication to foreigners of ARVN veteran sentiments, references to the popular cultural representations of the war at the tunnels, and the narration of stories about U.S. forces and “South Vietnam,” with a peppering of slang phrases and acronyms, such as “VC” and “DMZ,” attest to the complex entanglements of diversely situated transnational memories and imaginaries that inform and give shape to knowledge produced and consumed at Cu Chi.

Conclusion

As globalization ushers in an era of renewed capitalist projects, reestablished global markets, and “normalized” diplomatic relations in Vietnam, the contours and constraints of historical memory have shifted in new and complex ways. The cases presented here show that the current production of historical memory in Vietnam is, in many respects, a transnational negotiated process that involves variously situated actors and their global engagements with memory to produce



Figure 3

Former Republic of Vietnam martyr cemetery at Bien Hoa. Although most graves have been abandoned (and the remains removed), some are still discreetly cared for. One of the cemetery's former monuments is visible in the background.

recombinant history. When applied to changes occurring at Vietnamese public spaces of memory, the concept of recombinant history provides a framework for addressing the reconstitution of knowledge and memory, based not on displacement (the memories expressed by ARVN veterans as tour guides or embodied in U.S. soldier paraphernalia do not trump Vietnamese official memories) but on processes of encounter and contestation. In signifying the diversification—and oftentimes uneasy coexistence—of transnational knowledge formations and representational practices, recombinant history compels us to decenter the nation and allow a space for historical practices that may exceed the frame of autonomous and bounded “national” histories (Gilroy 1990; Yoneyama 2001).

The examples above further underscore the presence of multifaceted practices of memory at sites where transnational imaginaries of the war are remade into multisensory spectacles. Scholars have launched important and valid critiques of the changing significance of memorial sites traversed by capitalist consumer culture, pointing to risks of depoliticization and historical trivialization (Kugelmass 1996; Linenthal 1991; Tai 1994; Yoneyama 1999; Young 1993). However, memory is not necessarily being erased or defiled in such cases so much as being reconstituted

in spaces, objects, and knowledge formations, which are renarrativized and given new signification (see also Huyssen 1995:13–36). This approach does not deny the absence of certain memories and historical narrations but calls attention to the complex memory work that transpires at war memorial sites. Although some actors may be working through the trauma of defeat, as in the case of the former navy veteran or Trai, the tour guide who retells stories from a difficult past, others are engaged in antimemory activities, such as the young lovers at Cu Chi. Still others are active participants in the re-creation of wartime subjectivities through embodied practices that suggest a reanimation of the past in the present: lighting cigarettes with fake war-era Zippos, dancing till dawn in an apocalyptic ambiance, crawling through tunnels, and firing guerilla weapons in the contrived and hyperreal atmosphere of guerilla warfare. In all these cases, memory is a collection of reconstructed images (Halbwachs 1992). It is constituted and forged through the intertwining of oral narrations, lived experiences, state representations, popular culture, and the global mass media, thus dissolving the boundaries between individual, historically reconstructed, and culturally produced memories (Sturken 1997).

Touristic processes that commodify war and, in the process, instill history and memory with exchange value in Vietnam are indicative of larger global trends in which images and knowledge of social suffering are appropriated and consumed in diverse social fields (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996). Yet, if projects of history and practices of memory signify shifting engagements with power, as Lisa Rofel (1999) has suggested, then these processes also provide insights into a global politics of knowledge production and postcolonial power relations. Assigning value to icons and images from the war reflects historically constituted socioeconomic and geopolitical relations within transnational fields of power. The ambivalence of Vietnamese citizens toward such commodities in contrast with the engaged consumption by international visitors alludes to the symbolic violence that occurs in converting the landscape of Vietnamese suffering into an object of consumption. For the state, the marketing of war for transnational tourism not only brings in much needed foreign capital, but it also contributes to the strengthening of diplomatic relationships to the extent that it denotes a new era of “openness” in the economy and in civil society, with less restricted access to sites, materials, and knowledge about the war. On tours to battlefields and other war sites, the invisible enemy is finally made present and military secrets and guerilla strategies are unveiled and displayed for the visitor. Shifts in both the economy and historical memory thus reflect the Vietnamese state’s precarious global position as it negotiates global hierarchies of power and international (especially U.S.) pressure to further implement neoliberal policies and democratic reforms.

Notes

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1. The NLF and its army, the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), were commonly and pejoratively referred to as *Vietcong* or *VC* by U.S. forces and much of the international mass media during the war. The expression *Vietcong*—generally held to be a truncated form of *Viet Nam Cong San* (Vietnamese communist)—has its roots in the post-1954 Ngo Dinh Diem period, when it was used as an ideological weapon to identify opponents of the southern regime as communists or as communist sympathizers and to justify their incarceration and, at times, their execution. The fact that *Vietcong* and *VC* remain in use by many people in the United States today exemplifies the long-term effects of wartime propaganda and the misrepresentation of the NLF and PLAF as “communist” institutions. On the diverse noncommunist and communist factions, motives, and power struggles within the NLF see Truong (1986).

2. This article is part of a larger project that examines changing modes of historical representation of the war with the United States and is based on two years of fieldwork conducted primarily in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 1999–2000, 2001, and 2004.

3. On colonial imaginaries and tourist representations of the past in Vietnam, see Biles et al. 1999, Kennedy and Williams 2001. See also Norindr 1996:155–158 on the marketing and consumption of phantasmatic memories of French Indochina in Southeast Asian tourism.

4. In official historical discourse, the Anti-American Resistance War for National Salvation (*Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc*) is historically situated within a 30-year period (1945–75) of fighting for independence from French colonialism and U.S. imperialism.

5. After diplomatic relations were “normalized” in 1995, a general sentiment emerged that the United States is still “haunted by the ghosts” of the war, to quote a phrase used in the Vietnamese mass media. This idea inverts classic modernization theory that holds that non-Western (and “nonmodern”) peoples are engrossed in memory and tradition, whereas “modernized” societies—beset by historical acceleration and amnesia—are forward thinking and future focused (see Nora 1989).

6. White (1995) and Yoneyama (2001) are notable examples.

7. The specter of Vietnam is also frequently invoked in political and mass media discourse, particularly in response to recent U.S. military campaigns in the Middle East, as a warning not to become stuck in a war that cannot be won (a “quagmire”). “We don’t want another Vietnam” is often the rallying call.

8. There is a large body of literature on cultural productions and representations of the war in U.S. public discourse and popular culture. See, for example, Dittmar and Michaud 2000, Hellman 1986, Jeffords 1989, Louvre and Walsh 1988, and Rowe and Berg 1991.

9. See, for example, *We Were Soldiers* (Wallace 2002), starring Mel Gibson and Don Duong, one of the few Vietnamese actors to play a leading role in a Hollywood production about the war. The film sparked a controversy and was banned in Vietnam for its representation of the Ia Drang battle as a heroic U.S. victory. Don Duong, who plays a commander in the People's Army of Vietnam, was harshly criticized in the Vietnamese mass media and threatened with disciplinary action from the Association of Cinematography in

Ho Chi Minh City and the Ministry of Culture and Information (*Nguoi Lao Dong* [The Worker], September 5, 2002), thus demonstrating limitations to the extent of diversification of historical knowledge in Vietnam.

10. For the argument that tourism to war sites was created in response to international demands, see Biles et al. 1999:225 and Kennedy and Williams 2001:160. This article aims to demonstrate that both producers and consumers (domestic and international) have played critical roles in shaping this industry.

11. For an analysis of the visual regime of the Khmer Rouge and the “devastated vision” of Tuol Sleng prisoners, see Ly 2003:73–74. Ledgerwood (1997) provides a detailed description of the museum compound and its use of visual evidence to document genocide.

12. Desmond’s performative approach to tourism expands Urry’s notion of the “tourist gaze” to include other sensory stimulation involved in crafting tourist environments and pleasures. See Urry 2002:117 for a response to such critiques.

13. Benjamin has identified the desire to view and possess as characteristic of modernity. The modern subject, he argued, endeavors to “bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly . . . Every day the urge grows stronger to get a hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” (1969:223).

14. See Le 1995, Barry 1996, and Nguyen-vo 1998 on the rapid growth of the sex industry as a consequence of economic reform.

15. Although Susan Stewart uses the term *souvenir of death* to refer to the collection and display of corporeal remains of the dead, my use of the term here encompasses objects that are presumed to have been used in the daily life of fallen soldiers.

16. On the grounds of the former Khe Sanh combat base, souvenirs of death have been sold as unearthed objects by a local vendor since the mid-1990s. Collecting and selling scrap metal from the war is an income-generating resource in the poverty-stricken area of the former demilitarized zone, although such work is not very lucrative and extremely dangerous because of undetonated mines and other explosives that sometimes lie below the ground surface.

17. They also exemplify global capitalist processes. Imitation Zippos are produced in China and then shipped to Vietnam where scripts and images are engraved using original U.S. war-era models before they are sold on the market to international tourists.

18. My use of the term *Vietcong* here draws from advertisements in tour agencies and their brochures in Ho Chi Minh City.

19. One section of the tunnels ran under a U.S. military base giving guerrillas a direct route of infiltration. At night, combatants would ascend from the tunnels into the base to attack U.S. forces, then quickly descend underground before detection (Mangold and Pennycate 1985).

20. See Pelley 2002:142–146 on how the heroic tradition and spirit of resisting foreign aggression figures in postcolonial historical discourses in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

21. MacCannell (1999) has argued that tourist demands for authenticity and attempts to relocate history and truth are consequences of the discontinuities of modernity.

22. It seems plausible that in addition to film, electronic games also contribute to this scene at the firing range. Set in a virtual Vietnamese jungle, popular games like “MIA” and “NAM” simulate the mystique of guerilla warfare, reproducing hegemonic images in the United States of invisible and sly “VC” enemies.

23. At the current exchange rate, one U.S. dollar is equivalent to 15,840 Vietnamese dong (VND).

24. It may also not be exoticized to the same degree for returning U.S. veterans. For the navy veteran mentioned earlier in this article, Cu Chi was a “fascinating” yet “difficult”

experience, not least because of the random rifle shots in the background that made him “jump.” For a more detailed examination of U.S. veterans returning to Vietnam, see Curtis 2003. See Schwenkel 2004:157–183 for a comparison of Vietnamese and U.S. veterans returning to the battlefield.

25. My reference to “antimemory” here differs from Young’s (1993, 2002) usage of “countermemories” and “countermemories” to identify alternative expressions and aesthetic representations of memory that challenge conventional modes of monumentalization. Rather, antimemory in this context implies a lack of attention and the refusal to directly engage with historical memory. It is not about the erasure of memory, but its disregard.

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ABSTRACT *Recent years have seen the diversification of knowledge, memory, and meaning at former battlefields and other social spaces that invoke the history of the “American War” in Vietnam. Popular icons of the war have been recycled, reproduced, and consumed in a rapidly growing international tourism industry. The commodification of sites, objects, and imaginaries associated with the war has engendered certain rearticulations of the past in the public sphere as the terrain of memory making becomes increasingly transnational. Diverse actors—including tourism authorities, returning U.S. veterans, international tourists, domestic visitors, and guides—engage in divergent practices of memory that complicate, expand, and often transcend dominant modes of historical representation in new and distinct ways. [historical knowledge, memory, Vietnam, commodification of war, tourism]*