

POSTCOLONIAL
DISORDERS

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POSTCOLONIALITY AS
THE AFTERMATH OF TERROR
AMONG VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

Janis H. Jenkins and Michael Hollifield

In this chapter we examine the problem of subjectivity as a transformation of lived experience in the wake of civil warfare and formation of the postcolonial nation-state. The specific terms of subjective alteration—collectively imprinted as a clash of political ethos¹ and personally imprinted as a shattering of identity and sentiment—are considered in relation to a culturally produced anguish in the aftermath of a conflict. Our ethnographic illustration of this process is the well-known case of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.² Prior to this political formation in 1975, multiparty warfare was waged throughout a fractured nation, as anticommunist armies comprising “South” Vietnamese, Americans, and holdover loyalists to French colonialists collided with anticolonial and communist armies of “North” Vietnamese, the Viet Minh or Viet Cong. The suffering wrought by the defeat of South Vietnamese forces provides the primary reference point for this chapter.

This defeat of South Vietnam was, from the perspective of North Vietnam, a defeat of colonial intruders under the banner of authentic Vietnamese nationalism in the aftermath of renewed French colonial incursions in 1859 that only apparently ended following occupation at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. This in turn led to a further and different invasion of U.S. military advisors and troops through 1973. The eventual expulsion of a great many decades of colonial forces by the Viet Cong produced as much disintegration as resolution, however, and the aftermath of these successive conflicts produced a multilayered shattering of economy, community, and family in postcolonial Vietnam.

In his discussions of hermeneutics and narrative analysis, Paul Ricoeur has observed that both the telling and the hearing of a story require that one be able to “extract a configuration from a succession” (1981: 278). In what follows we extract a configuration of cultural and personal meaning from narratives of often traumatic, disjointed successions of events experienced by refugees who fled the violence of war and detention in Vietnam during the late 1980s and ‘90s, ending up in the culturally alien and ambiguously welcoming urban environment of Albuquerque, New Mexico.³ Our intention is to show how experiential themes of alterity, trauma, and memory are wedged in the political divides that make up the longstanding colonial and postcolonial conflict within Vietnam.

Broadly speaking, we are pressed to understand the effects of warfare in postcolonial settings as a matter of global public health and human rights. While pathbreaking work has been undertaken on the state production of dysphoric affect, mental disorder, and social suffering (Good, Good, and Moradi 1985; Kleinman 1986, 1995), the human and medical sciences have yet to flesh out fully the particular dimensions of such experience as the occasion for bodily and psychic marring, on the one hand, and remarkable resilience, on the other (Jenkins 1991). This chapter is an effort to extend contemporary thinking on these transformations of lived experience as reciprocally produced within the nation-state and body-self.

POSTCOLONIAL REGIMES AND BODY-SELVES

Understanding the direct parallels between a postcolonial regime and the body-self productively shifts the discourse from the political and economic impacts of postcolonial transformations to the experiential impact of these developments. Shelley Wright advances this issue with her argument that “(1) colonialism involves the deep cultural and psychological penetration of both colonizers and colonized as well as profound economic, political and legal changes; and (2) decolonization must therefore go well beyond the creation of new nation-states or even the reformation of neo-colonial economic structures. It must also involve the decolonization of our minds and bodies” (2001: 58).

Thinking about “the violence within” in reference to Kay Warren’s (1993) phrase for violence within a national political entity would then come to incorporate the notion of what we can consider an intrapsychic and intrasomatic violence. The question becomes how to conceive at once the collective incorporation of public violence and the tormented inner conflict of a fragmented self. The mode of analysis we invoke plays on this kind of dual sensibility wherein the meaning of violence is ambiguously constituted, but with quite

specific consequences in defining the lives of people and the emotional atmosphere they inhabit.

CONUNDRUMS OF SUBJECTIVITY: ALTERITY, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY

In a recent volume by Janis Jenkins and Robert Barrett (2004), the rise of anthropological thinking about subjective experience is traced in relation to current ideas in culture theory, which include (1) the primacy of lived experience over analytic categories imposed by anthropological theory; (2) the active engagement of subjects in processes of cultural construction; and (3) the irrepressibility of subjectivity as embedded in intersubjectively created realms of meaning and significance. The authors argue that the notion of intersubjectivity provides an important bridge to a more precise understanding of the interactions among cultural representations, collective processes, and subjectivity.

Below we explore the specific ambiguities that guide our analysis of political culture and subjectivity in Vietnamese exile narratives, developed in part on the basis of previous anthropological and psychiatric work on political violence (Jenkins 1996; Hollifield et al. 2002). Three much contested domains of subjectivity are identified as central to an analysis of the lived experience of warfare and political violence: alterity, trauma, and memory. In this chapter, we can only briefly sketch the ways in which attention to the interpenetration of these subjective domains helps to illumine transformations of lived experience produced reciprocally by and within political and personal bodies.

The postcolonial problem of alterity—marking the threshold of “otherness”—is the crossroads or site wherein subjectivities are transacted in relation to geography, religion, and political affiliation. Personal and collective trauma is embedded within these deeply disputed sites, particularly with respect to the expulsion of “foreigners” and “invaders.” While issues of alterity have long been central in psychoanalytic studies, their anthropological integration into postcolonial studies of subjective processes have been cautious in relation to misgivings surrounding the traditionally narrow social scope of this line of thinking. Nevertheless, Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (1996) underscore the anthropological value of Freud’s formulation of trauma and memory as inexorably linked to repetitive, patterned productions of the self embedded within a social field.

In a treatment of subjectivity and alterity in postcolonial settings, Leela Gandhi (1998) argues that narratives of the aftermath of warfare and violence often reveal an ambivalent and symbiotic relationship between colonizer and colonized. Thus “the battles between native and invader are also replicated within native and invader. . . . The crisis produced by this self-division is at least as psychologically

significant as those which attend the more visible contestations of the colonizer and the colonized” (1998: 11–12). Gandhi (1998: 11) invokes Albert Memmi’s classic text (1968) to argue that the “perverse mutuality between oppressor and oppressed” is nothing less than an attempt (successful or otherwise) to shed light on why subaltern groups revisit rather than flee entirely the scene of oppression.

A sense of self in relation to traumatic memory entered European thinking at a time when doubts about colonial projects (for colonizers and colonized alike) had come to the foreground. With the 1889 publication of *Psychological Automatism*, Pierre Janet helped to specify how traumas produce their disintegrating effects in proportion to their intensity, duration, and repetition. The initial response combines what he termed “vehement emotion” and a cognitive interpretation resulting in dissociation of memory or identity processes and attachment to the trauma such that the person has difficulty proceeding with her life (see Jenkins 1991).

Summarizing models for the analysis of memory and trauma, Ruth Leys (2000: 8–9) argues for the theoretical value of hypnotic imitation or identification (mimesis) as opposed to neurobiological models that otherwise dispose of what she calls “narrative or implicit memory” in favor of neurological imprinting in response to external trauma that leads to plastic changes in neural pathways of the brain. This view of trauma, as deployed in contemporary psychiatry, radically removes the role of agency and moral meanings (Young 1995; Freyd 1996). Drawing on Janet’s work, trauma can be better understood within an analytic tradition summarized by Leys as “imitation, identification, or mimesis” (2000: 8). Clearly this locates subjective experience within the realm of historical and social processes.

Thus the study of remembering and forgetting of the colonial past in the postcolonial present hinges largely on formulations of ways in which the mind extends beyond the individual while at the same time collective experience informs individual consciousness. Jennifer Cole’s *Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar* (2001) is an ethnographic account of this process that approaches the question through a focus on “the social and cultural practices through which individual and social memory are woven together” that “affords a way out of the dichotomy that sees memory as either locked inside people’s heads or available only in collective representations and embodied practices and ritual” (2). She implicitly identifies the existential common ground of this reciprocity between individual and social memory by acknowledging that “many traces of the past may be incorporated into the sociocultural environment so that they are not consciously remembered” (2).

A more explicit political formulation of social processes of trauma and memory in relation to alterity is found in the work of Ignació Martín-Baró (1988,

1989), who maintained that individualized accounts of trauma and illness are insufficient in the context of warfare. Although the trauma and suffering are manifest in personal psychic suffering, it is more useful to think in terms of psychosocial trauma or “the traumatic crystallization in persons and groups of inhuman social relations” (1988: 138). Trauma and suffering become manifest in psychic suffering, dysphoric affects, and a variety of forms of psychopathology. This psychosocial crystallization of trauma is particularly evident in the collective experience of anxiety, terror, and, above all, denial of reality. Moreover, this process affects all members of a society, either directly or indirectly. No one remains untouched, or unchanged, by civil warfare and its aftermath.

THE CONTEXT: WHAT POSTCOLONIAL PERIOD?

In Vietnam, a longstanding ambiguity of national identity was only intensified by the French takeover in 1882–83 in the wake of political and civil unrest between the north and the south. In response to this internal crisis, the “Vietnamese” ruling elite sought to incorporate some elements of the “other,” considering parts of the West equal or superior to Sino-Vietnamese civilization (Duiker 1995: 29; McLeod 1991). They considered hybridization of identities as an avenue to other goals, including political, educational, and economic development. William Duiker (1995: 29) frames this desire for national survival as a concern on the part of many Vietnamese intellectuals that the fate of their nation hinged on a willingness to articulate with and even incorporate elements of European political and cultural organization. Over the course of the next thirty-five years, the imagined advantage of such alterations did little to improve the lot of Vietnamese peoples. Further, the internal structure of what had been “Vietnam” was being as much dis-integrated as identified. Chinese characters were replaced in official circles with the Roman alphabet (a process begun in the seventeenth century under French missionary incursion). Older leaders could no longer lead because their Confucian teachings and literacy were now at odds with the (French colonial) administrative culture. Land and economic wealth were not distributed as well as hoped, and only a minority of children (about 10 percent) received European-based education, leaving the majority at cultural odds with their own political structure (Duiker 1995: 29–33).

This colonial failure, and the building perception by the Vietnamese that the French could not and would not help with their collective toil, led to new construction and resistance against the colonial “other.” Ironically, it was in part from the new Franco-Vietnamese group that grew the resistance movements that worked toward expulsion of the French colonial invaders. Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1935, led the move-

ment that culminated in the military defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in April 1954. However, in efforts to recruit young Vietnamese to the struggle, Minh placed rhetorical emphasis on nationalism. The notion of nationalism was itself ambiguously layered, with many Catholic and Buddhist Vietnamese secretly fighting with the French and against the antireligious ICP (McLeod 1991; SarDesai 1992).

This period was followed by years of political struggle (involvement in World War II, Japanese occupation of Vietnam from 1941 to the end of the war in 1945, and the long postponement of independence following a well-planned revolution by the IPC in August 1945). Following World War II, independence was narrowly defeated by forces of resistance from other national and external anticommunist interests. This postponement again served to create internal strife and disagreement about what was self and what was other, and about what was vital to and for Vietnam. While the termination of nineteenth-century French colonial rule of Vietnam formally took place in 1945 with Ho Chi Minh’s declaration of independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), a nine-year guerilla war ensued between communist Viet Minh and the French and the Viet Minh’s antireligious allies (Marr 1995). Following this perpetuation of colonial conflict, a 1954 Geneva agreement provided for a temporary north-south division of Vietnam until elections could bring the two provisional territories into a united government.

The Geneva Convention of 1954 only formalized what had been going on for decades, even centuries, providing for two zones, splitting north and south at the Ben Hai River on the seventeenth parallel, with the north dominated by the Viet Minh and the south dominated by the Bao Dai puppet government of the French. General elections were to be held in both zones by July 1956 to ascertain the future will of the Vietnamese. The fact that this did not happen only underscored the ongoing crisis in national identity for the Vietnamese. Indeed, 1954 was not the first time the “Vietnamese” garnered their independence from a foreign invader.⁴ This second retaking was an issue of “nationalism.” The South Vietnamese refusal to accept this arrangement resulted in their counterdeclaration in 1955 as the Republic of Vietnam.

The suffering that arose from this ongoing crisis was fueled by persistent confusion about the parameters of identity. In the north resided ethnically diverse Vietnamese, whose leaders were intellectuals not necessarily aligned with religious groups. In time, the DRV became increasingly less tolerant of religious practice generally. Hundreds of thousands of people of traditional Confucian, Buddhist, and Catholic persuasion fled to the south to join the burgeoning group of ethnic Vietnamese mixed with French who at once tolerated and advocated religion. Both the north and the south attempted to tolerate and

to incorporate the ethnic Chinese, who over time became a focus of contempt. Non-Vietnamese ethnic groups who resided in the western and central mountains were provided cultural autonomy but were controlled politically by the DRV, who saw the central highlands as the route to final control of the cities in the south. Thus entering this postcolonial period, it remained uncertain what the Vietnamese "self" was constructed of, what the "other" consisted of, who were distinctly "we," and who were unambiguously "they." This confusion was carried into the next period and through the second Indochinese war, that of the Viet Cong against the South Vietnamese and the United States.

Subsequent American invasion by military advisors and regular troops (escalating to 534,000 by 1969) to support the noncommunist southern forces failed in its effort to overthrow Viet Cong and the northern forces. While there was a withdrawal of U.S. troops following the Paris Accords of 1973, other military personnel remained through 1975. Following reunification of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (north) and the former Republic of Vietnam (south) in 1975, hundreds of thousands of former South Vietnamese government and military officials, as well as intellectuals and private citizens suspected as anticommunists, were subjected to the newly victorious governmental campaign of retribution through systematic imprisonment, toil, and torture within now-infamous socialist "reeducation" camps. While it is unknown how many perished (through torture, starvation, overwork, or suicide) in these camps, several thousand survived and were ultimately released to return (under surveillance and drastically reduced circumstances) to the community. After their release from prison, many (some over the course of a decade) managed to borrow or save the approximately \$150 necessary to process their application for emigration to the United States. The particular vantage point for this chapter is the subjective experience of South Vietnamese who survived and ultimately fled following long-term imprisonment and torture subsequent to the fall of Saigon.

Being expelled from one's country was followed by a long and frequently dangerous migration often coupled with a randomness of relocation site. Attempts at reidentification of self took place in this subjectively chaotic context. Refugees left Vietnam in three main waves: a mass exodus with the Americans in 1975, escape during the years 1975 to 1989, and the joint government-sponsored Orderly Departure Program beginning in 1989.

A former U.S. Air Force officer residing in Albuquerque sought to locate friends he had fought with in Vietnam and to that end traveled to each of the four refugee camps established in the United States to process the mass exodus in 1975. This he did in tandem with helping to establish the first Vietnamese

refugee resettlement program in New Mexico. By the end of 1975, this program included over three thousand in population. Over the years there has been much secondary migration. In 2000, approximately five thousand Vietnamese resided in Albuquerque, 80 percent of whom were Catholic while most of the rest were Buddhist. Until 1990, the majority lived in the southeast heights area, where the majority of earlier established Vietnamese shops still exist. Currently, social and economic mobility within the population has led to a diffused expansion of Vietnamese who now work in a variety of jobs and utilize the health care systems widely.

CASE STUDIES

The narratives of the Vietnamese refugees with whom we worked are distinguished by experiential themes of alterity, trauma, and memory located in the political cleavages of colonial and postcolonial conflict. We bring into play four principal signifiers in terms of which these themes are narratively grounded: (1) contestations of regional borderlands; (2) religious and godless combatants; (3) political party affiliations; and (4) human compassion and cruelty. Grafted into our psychopolitical analysis of the Vietnamese case is the substantial confusion in identifying who constitutes self and who constitutes other. This experiential conundrum is central to the genesis of trauma, repetition compulsion seeking out the oppressor, and creative strategies for the formation of temporally fluid selves, at once articulating with the social past and present.

We draw from two case studies to shed light on the transformation of subjectivity under conditions of civil warfare and formation of the postcolonial nation-state. The cases selected from the larger study sample of Vietnamese refugees are those of elder males. While obviously each individual is distinct, we consider that the two cases selected for presentation are representative of a certain segment of politically active and militarily involved men who bore the brunt of reprisals following the defeat of the south. Both men held relatively prominent positions within the South Vietnamese military forces prior to their detention in "reeducation" camps in 1975. Thus the narratives are gender-specific insofar as the particular terms of analysis apply to men whose political commitment to their version of the nation-state was forged in opposition to the antireligious, communist north. Women's experience in the south following the fall of Saigon was generally different, with many left to care for their families under drastically reduced economic and sociopolitical circumstances.

Informed consent and Institutional Review Board approvals for the use of these narratives were obtained from each person and through the University of New Mexico as part of the New Mexico Refugee Project. In addition, the cases

discussed here have some detail alteration to assure anonymity. However, both men were nevertheless clear about their willingness and even desire to have their identity known, which, from the authors' viewpoint, appeared to indicate a desire to tell their story as part of personal projects to re-create self-experience intersubjectively.

Mr. H: "It was the biggest and most terrible shock in my life"

Mr. H. was born in Nihn Thuan Province in December 1936 and was raised in a Catholic village with strong anticommunist sentiment. He joined the secret police as an undercover agent in 1954, following the activities of the Viet Cong. In 1957, at the age of twenty-one, he was offered better training and better pay and over the next decade worked in various locales. In 1969 he was promoted to the chief of police back in his home province, where he remained until 1975. In a battle with communist forces, he was captured and imprisoned on March 18, 1975, for what was to be a period of seven weeks as a prisoner—"reeducation detainee." Mr. H remained in the camp until 1983, conducting hard and mostly useless labor.

After having severe back pain over a period of eighteen months, he was provided medical attention, and it was determined that he needed surgery to repair a herniated disc. He was returned to prison for three months after the surgery, only to be released when it was determined that he could no longer perform hard labor. Back at home, he was forced to report to the police station and write reports on his activities every week. Along with his wife, he remained under near-constant watch of the communist authorities. Reporting to this police station operated by young Viet Cong with virtually no police training or education—from the site where he had once supervised the entire province—was no small source of anger and humiliation. In addition, Mr. H suffered from medical inattention to the aftereffects of his back injury: chronic bowel and urination problems, erectile dysfunction, and constant pain. In 1984 the authorities allowed him to travel out of town to work for six-month periods, during which, in spite of his back injury, he worked on road construction and cultivated rice on the 0.15 acre of the 2 acres of family land that the government returned to him after having confiscated it. He continued doing this until 1995 in order to feed himself and his family, all the while his back becoming progressively worse. Ten years passed before he was able to save \$150 to pay the requisite fees to come to the United States.

Throughout narration of these trials, he notes that his mood is better now that he has been in the United States for a few years and that he has received treatment for his multiple medical problems. He is also concerned, however, that at some point he might not have access to medical care and that American

doctors give him medicines for pain relief but not cure. As a means of preventing anxiety, he notes that he tries to think of happy things, although while saying this his mind wanders to another time and he comments, "I have no doubt in my mind that I would have killed myself [in prison] if I were not a Catholic." He saddens, developing halting almost dissociative speech, recalling coprisoners and friends who killed themselves while in prison; he is certain that at least two hundred of the some eighteen hundred detainees in his camp committed suicide. Telling this, tears stream and he literally chokes them back, spewing out a few words, holding his chest, asking to stop for a few minutes. Five minutes later, he wants to continue:

At first, individual guards would say, "I would kill all of you but the government won't let us." They made camp such that people wanted to kill themselves. This reminded me of friends who would kill themselves by hanging by their own clothing, and the communists began to not let us wear any clothes—we were so cold. Then, others would kill themselves by biting their tongue off and bleeding to death, or by hitting their head on the wall, or by running into the wall with their tongue in between their teeth. We were made to bury our own fellows, and were made to promise to never speak about it.

In his narrative of rebellion against the Viet Minh, Mr. H provides the cultural rationale that undergirded the construction of the enemy as alien other against whom he and his comrades must fight:

From the beginning, since we were colonized by the French, they [the French] would protect the villages that had a lot of religion. The French protected the Catholics although they would also protect the Buddhists. Therefore Catholics and even Buddhists would be the more likely to follow the French because they would get protection. It doesn't mean they wanted the French, or that they followed them politically, but it was the best option for many people, for the Catholics and Buddhists.

His opposition includes both explicitly and implicitly the four narrative signifiers we have identified as central to issues of alterity: north-south regionalism; religious orientation; political affiliation; and human cruelty:

There were three reasons we were so much against the communists. The first was because of their involvement with the countries of China and Russia so we knew who their leaders were. The second thing is that they were against any religion in the world. Anybody with religion, it didn't matter whether

they were Catholic or Buddhist, they would kill them and they didn't believe in religion. The third thing was that they were very cruel. If others did not follow them or believe them, they would be willing to kill them. They would often kill people by burying them alive, by cutting their necks, and other horrible means. It's really kind of simple: the communists were very much against human nature. We learned to forgive many people and many things that happened, but not the communists because they were so much against human beings and human nature.

This apparently clear-cut schema for constructing the enemy other was inadequate, however, to the everyday flow of one's assumptive social world. Sorting religious and political groups was a source of considerable anxiety and proved shadowy at best:

There were so many doubts and mistrusts among people, even between Buddhists and most Catholics and Buddhists. . . . You could no longer automatically trust some of your older Buddhist friends. I became more distrustful of even long-time friends [whether] they were with the communists or not. Everybody seemed to divide by religion. Even in my job, I couldn't tell whether my bosses or my commanders were followers or if they were kind of followers and not leaders.

The confusion over leadership turned to insufferable grief and rage with the assassination of President Diem in 1963. Mr. H specifies the type of postcolonial problem with alterity this posed as a kind of sociologically failed autoimmunological response to recognize the self:

I was very shocked and it was the biggest and most terrible shock in my life. I had followed him since I was young. I had a good position in his cabinet and so it was a big shock to me. [Choked up, crying:] I was so certain that Diem would fight to win and beat the communists, but then the conflict with the religion rose and made everybody distrustful of each other and that was part of the problem with the fall of Diem. To me, the assassination of President Diem was very brutal and unforgivable. The way I looked at him is he was just like our family.

Mr. H continued his narration by saying that not only was he angry at the time at what transpired: a group of generals, with General Minh as ringleader, assassinated President Diem in what he and his associates considered a coup d'état. Still, today, he finds this event to be unbearably painful and indeed became tearful and choked up at the time of this narrative (March 2003). He

explained the pain in the following way. Despite alternating assistance and interference on the part of the American government, this was fundamentally a Vietnamese problem and a Vietnamese betrayal. Following the assassination of President Diem, he says that he sent his family away for their safety but also because he simply wanted to be alone and that he became "very mentally isolated," angry, anxious, had nightmares, headaches, poor concentration, and near anorexia. During the course of the interview, Mr. H. became so "choked up" while holding his chest at times that the interviewer (Michael Hollifield) was concerned about his immediate health.

Mr. H stated that what he felt most angry about was that the future of the country was in peril:

We could never beat the communists with the current leaders. And besides, we now had no one really who was competent to follow or trust. I started having constant headaches at that time and it was hard for me to focus on conversations. I was very distractible and could not concentrate well. And I also could not eat very well because I would choke up easily. After 1965 I knew for sure we would lose Vietnam.

Narrating these times was particularly difficult for Mr. H, who noted that he really has a hard time ever thinking about this time in the past because it hurts his head so much. He says he knows that even now most Vietnamese in the country are still miserable and poor. He is convinced that this was the result of all the corruption and lack of leadership.

It is clear that Mr. H's lengthy imprisonment hardened his categorical distinctions between those social groups with whom he identified and those whom he reviled. In prison, he was placed in a special unit because "to them I am very, very bad. I was in a special group that they took revenge on. They always made me write and rewrite things in the past that I did and if anything happened in the outside [political or social events] they would interrogate me about my knowledge about what that was or what was happening." He noted that prior to prison, communists could be friends and were primarily simply Vietnamese with "different mindsets," but certainly not people he hated. However, the prison experience "made me see that they were different and they were my enemy. We knew the communists would maybe keep us until we were old or until we died so I didn't have any feeling of belonging or being possessed by anything or anyone." Even after his release from prison, he noted that his experience was quite similar in that he was still required to write reports and could not talk or go freely: "It really didn't matter when I was in prison versus when I was not in prison, I was still miserable, and I was not free and I

was having the anxiety and the nightmares and all those other symptoms. The feelings of belonging when I came to the United States were much different than the time in prison or out of prison in Vietnam.”

Mr. T: “There was political confusion and I felt confused”

Mr. T was born December 1921 in the central highland town of Qui Nhon. He was educated through college and later in the army commander general staff college in Kansas in 1959–60. He worked on his family farm for much of his adolescence and joined the military (mandatory) in 1940 at the age of nineteen, on active combat duty, but soon after fought as a company guerilla commander in a “revolution to fight French domination.” But by the end of 1945 the French “took us back and we collapsed.” Following French return, he was arrested and imprisoned as a Viet Minh guerilla commander. Since he was Catholic and fluent in French, he was recruited to collaborate and in fact became a double agent working in clandestine relation with Viet Minh. At that time, he reports feeling quite torn, since he remained loyal to the Viet Minh cause of nationalism and was willing to subvert the French goals to this end. Things became entirely disorienting for him by 1950 when the Viet Minh became increasingly intolerant of Catholicism and oriented more toward communist discourse from the Soviet Union. This was experienced as a betrayal and was so threatening that he defected at the time under Emperor Bao Dai and went to the Da Lat military academy, graduating as a first lieutenant. Thus his nationalist loyalties remained intact although the reference group for pursuing those goals had shifted dramatically. Even so, no dramatic affect appeared to accompany this changeover, which he reported as “just business.” The dividing line for him was “religious versus antireligious,” which he reported as likewise affecting Buddhists within the country.

In the mid- and late 1950s, Mr. T was director of military instruction for the reserve officers school, in charge of demonstrating American training for the Vietnamese military. It was during this time that he traveled to the United States for advanced military training. He later joined the South Vietnamese military and, following the assassination of President Diem, was transferred in 1964 to the police force in Saigon. He recalled that “at that time there was political confusion and at that time I felt confused about the situation . . . and I can say exactly, it [the assassination] was by rebel generals, it was Minh, and now everybody knows that this general organized this coup d’état . . . supported by Americans.” He reported feeling very confused and sad, yet he came to feel that Americans did not understand what Vietnam needed, citing (Robert) McNamara in recognizing with him that “America was wrong . . . very wrong for doing so.”

Following the death of President Diem, Mr. T decided to quit the army and to stay home. However, a colleague from the U.S. embassy came to his home and asked him to collaborate on a rural development program, which he did for three months. He then determined to quit all things he associated with the state and politics due to increasing personal conflict about what causes were morally worthy. Mr. T and a group of friends began to privately invest to construct an amusement park for children, which Mr. T was relieved to undertake since he was “tired with government and these political matters, with everything, so we went to spend time with the children.” He had lost his interest and will to continue to try to build Vietnam along the lines he had previously pursued and was sickened by the corruption of the new administration. He worked toward this new project (actually constructed in 1970) with a sense of relief and pleasure.

When Saigon fell in 1975, he remained near Saigon, but soon after was captured and put into a reeducation camp, where he stayed for five years, six months, and twenty-four days. The Viet Cong (VC) ordered him to write about his life and family and to confess to being an enemy of the state. He reported that the VC would look for inconsistencies in the writing, which they could then take to mean that the prisoner was lying, which would bring beatings, torture, and perhaps death. People who resisted or who even talked back were tortured. Mr. T knows approximately thirty people who were killed while he was a prisoner, sometimes for inconsistencies of story, but most often for trying to escape. Multiple disappearances occurred, perhaps fifteen to twenty-five people. He reported humiliation insofar as “we were made to be totally dependent on having to be a certain way for food and for life.” His survival strategy was to “stay indifferent” and to not take actions against the guards, waiting for the “orderly departure program” under negotiation with the new government and American intervention.

Mr. T recalls that following his internment in 1975 at the age of fifty-four, he rapidly developed episodes where his mind would go away, where he would not even notice the present, and that the duration of these periods could be short or last a long time. He developed nightmares and daytime flashbacks of some of his war experiences and prison experiences. As he had more intrusions about the past and present, he developed more fear about the future. Panic attacks and worry in the context of these fears developed, and he began to “live like a machine,” going through the motions of the reeducation camp without any interest in life. He was always “on guard,” not knowing what might happen. Over the years, he felt more and more “like an automaton,” and the experience of depression and trauma remained with him after his release. Following his release, he noted his sense that although he was home, he was not at home. Two

children had been killed and his wife was dead. There was no work, and the authorities had taken all of his possessions. He was watched by police, and his movements were monitored. For thirteen more years his life was spent in this way: moving motionless, thinking thoughtless, and being nothing.

This way of being in the world began to change after moving to the United States as a refugee. Mr. T was granted refugee status and arrived in the United States with a surviving daughter in December 1995. He worked in the Southwest in a factory and was able to engage in routine daily activities, though persistent jaw pain—from a physical attack while in prison—prevents him from doing heavy work for lengthy periods. Even so, he had never wanted to leave Vietnam: “I wanted to stay. Because I was an old man, I wanted to stay and die in my country. But I was always disturbed by the police, they would always come to me and ask me why you didn’t leave the country, start the paperwork with the ODP program. . . . If I stay, maybe I have some clandestine project against them.” He claims to have become inured to the harassment and to always being an “outsider.”

An author of poetry and songs, Mr. T anticipated having a book completed within a few months, entitled *Gone with the Waves*. His national identity is not that of a “United States person” but instead “always Vietnamese . . . mentally I am Vietnamese. Now, I can only dream of patriotic change in Vietnam. The best I can do now is to leave knowledge to the young people.”

AFTERMATH

As narrative elements, the themes of region, religion, political affiliation, and human cruelty signify not only categories of social organization and action, but also domains of subjectivity. The fragmentation and realignment of the nation by north and south has its parallel in the psychogeographical sense of displacement and forced migration in the context of flight from warfare: Where is my home? Where is my ‘north?’ Similar points can be made about the layered religious terrain with successive strata of Confucianism, later Hinduism and Buddhism, and later still Islam and Catholicism, and the political terrain marked by colonialist and communist identifications.

We suggest that it is this displacement that links the three subjective themes of alterity, trauma, and memory with which we have been concerned and places them in relation to the social and collective. The subjective displacement in this instance is not only the psychoanalytic transference of emotion from one object to another, but a psychic diaspora that began long before the physical diaspora that made refugees of these Vietnamese. The displacement of trauma is to be found in the enduring residue of chronic pain.⁵ The displace-

ment of memory is that of constricted temporal horizons. And the displacement of alterity is that of experiencing oneself as automaton, as well as that of no longer being able to distinguish self and nonself with respect to who is on one’s side and to be trusted—the Buddhists but then no longer, the communists who once could be friends but then no longer. Alterity as an otherizing tendency is quite literally present in the discourse of Vietnamese, with reference to the source of evil, danger, or violence as the others. During the war, violent acts were simply attributed to others or “them,” both because one feared to identify attackers and because one never knew for sure whether the perpetrators belonged to the government or to the Viet Cong.

Yet if the displacement we are discussing is not primarily that of psychoanalysis, it might be said that the South Vietnamese engaged in repetition-compulsion insofar as the past trauma of politicoreligious tension was played out by those, many of them Catholic, who fled the communist north asking yet another paternal authority—the United States rather than France—to take on the role of the “good father.” Not only were the South Vietnamese primed for this paternally complex relationship (by the previous one with the French), but the United States was primed for the role of “guilty father” out of its abject fear of failure in the self-perceived (and psychopolitically distorted) obligation of “taking care” of the world. With the burgeoning fear of communism in Russia and China, the United States became the willing, then abusive, father, but because its motive was pathologized by guilt it could not live up to the goal of “freeing” the Vietnamese.

As a result of its own trauma, and very much like South Vietnam and its leadership, the United States itself became a “fragmented state,” fraught with internal disagreement about identity and alterity and how to proceed with war and peace. If this analysis has merit, then it leads to the further question of the psychic dynamic of those who are now refugees in “the house of the father,” particularly as postcolonial Catholics surrounded by a patriarchal aura that is both political and theological. The majority, perhaps as much as 85 percent, of the refugees were Catholic. Indeed, some of the refugees expressed elements of retraumatization during our study when a wave of insecurity and xenophobia swept the United States following the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

Over twenty-four centuries ago, Hippocrates taught his students that disease is not only suffering (*pathos*) but also toil (*ponos*) to repair. While there is an invader causing disease and suffering, there is also the fight of the body to restore itself. This *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing force of nature, was imagined to be a resilience that cures from within. Groups of people are analogous to individual persons in this respect: a collection of elements that can either act to

be harmful to the whole or to be healing to the whole. The fight of an individual body or a group to heal itself necessitates that the elements of the body or group first recognize each other as "self." Even when an element is enclosed in the body, that element, when recognized as "other," will be "attacked" by yet other elements, with the hopes of expulsion. Where that element is erroneously recognized as other when it is really an important element of self, damage to the collective body or group occurs. It is this confusion of recognizing self versus other that is the basis for some inflammatory and autoimmune diseases, and it is this same confusion that is responsible for the harm done to individuals and their *ponos*, their attempt via resilience to restore themselves to health. In a group, if an individual continues to be viewed as other, then it will be more difficult for restorative functions to be successful.

Colonialization of societies by foreign invaders, like colonization of individuals by pathogens, demands a response of recognizing self from other and mobilizing forces to expel the other and retain and heal the self. The health of individuals in postcolonial societies parallels the process of identifying self, other, and mechanisms of toil toward health. In Vietnam, invaders and healers had come and gone for over two centuries. The confusion about self and other gave rise to the parallel confusion in bodies, minds, and interrelationships that characterized the role of war and trauma in postcolonial Vietnam.

NOTES

1. The term "political ethos" has been defined by Janis Jenkins as "the culturally standardized organization of feeling and sentiment pertaining to the social domains of power and interest" (1991: 140).
2. The historical complexity of the colonial encounter in Vietnam is beyond the scope of this chapter, but includes forays on the part of the Chinese, French, Japanese, and Americans. In addition, Vietnam has also engineered forays of its own, including in 1471 the Champa Kingdom (now central Vietnam) and more recently Cambodia (1978–89).
3. The ethnographic case materials for the present chapter are taken from a much larger study called the New Mexico Refugee Project. This research studies trauma, torture, and health among Vietnamese and Kurdish refugees relocated in North America. Dr. Michael Hollifield, professor of psychiatry and family and community medicine at the University of New Mexico, is principal investigator for this NIMH-funded study, "Epidemiology of Torture and Trauma in Two Refugee Groups," MH 59574–01. Dr. Janis Jenkins, professor of anthropology and psychiatry at Case Western Reserve University, has served as anthropological consultant to the study.
4. It was the second time that the French were expelled, the first being the removal of French missionaries in the 1700s wherein conflict over religion was salient.

Prior to the 1700s, the Vietnamese had fought other invaders based on notions of "ethnicity" and "geography" (Duiker 1995; SarDesai 1992).

5. See the collected volume of Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good and colleagues (1992) for an ethnographic array of analyses of chronic pain.

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CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHIATRY IN
MEDICAL-LEGAL DOCUMENTATION
OF SUFFERING

*Human Rights Abuses Involving Transnational Corporations
and the Yadana Pipeline Project in Burma*

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- Jenkins, Janis H., and Robert J. Barrett, eds. 2004. *Schizophrenia and Subjectivity: The Edge of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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This chapter describes the suffering and hardship of several villagers from Burma who are now refugees in Thailand. Their life experiences reflect the large population of villagers whose families were forced to leave their homes and villages to make way for the construction of a natural gas pipeline in the Tenasserim region of Burma by US and French transnational oil companies in collaboration with the Burmese military government (*EarthRights News* 1996b). The villagers, mostly ethnic Karen people, were subjected to forced labor, torture, rape, death of family members, and other severe human rights abuses. The consequences of the atrocities committed during the construction of the pipeline continue to have far-reaching effects on the lives of the villagers. They live as “illegal migrants” in rural villages or as “displaced persons” in refugee camps in Thailand. As such, they are not allowed to work legally, which makes it extremely hard to support and feed their families and has resulted in poverty and desperation.

In a precedent-setting human rights legal case, eleven villagers are suing the Unocal Corporation for the damage done to them. The plaintiffs in the suit against Unocal are using the Alien Tort Claims Act to prosecute the corporation for human rights abuses that it allegedly colluded in and/or committed in Burma. The Alien Tort Claims Act states: “The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of any civil action by an alien for a tort only, committed in violation of the law of nations or a treaty of the United States” (Alien Tort Claims Act 2000). The attorneys representing the plaintiffs asked the author to perform psychiatric/psychological evaluations on each plaintiff to help document the