The Ghosts of the American War in Vietnam

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Abstract: The spiritual remains of the unknown war dead take on a vital presence in popular Vietnamese religious culture and their everyday ritual life. They are also a powerful means of historical narration and reflection in contemporary Vietnam. This article introduces some of their vigorous actions and claims for social justice, and explores how we can make sense of their existence in the terms of sociology of religion.

The Vietnamese call what the outside world refers to as the Vietnam War "the American War," and many of them believe that the ghosts of those who died tragic deaths in this war abound in their living environment. While a generation has passed since the war ended in 1975, stories of apparitions and other assertive actions by these ghosts of war are common in rural communities. The places associated with a history of fierce battle or large-scale civilian killing are believed to harbor a mass of grievous and hungry ghosts; the rumors of spirit possession generate intense curiosity in the community about the spirit's identity and the meaning of the event. Consider one of the commonplace stories of an apparition from a rural area in the coastal central region.

A man saw his late wife and children in the early morning on his way to the paddy. This was in the spring of 1993, and by this time some villagers had begun to remove the remains of their relatives from improper shallow wartime graves to newly prepared family graveyards. The apparition was at the site of the man's old house. The house was burned down during the tragic incident of a village massacre in early 1968, which destroyed his family. His wife, seated on a stone, greeted him somewhat scornfully. The three children were hidden behind her back, afraid that their parents might start quarreling.

The meaning of the apparition was immediately clear to the man: he must rebury the remains of his lost family without delay. If he had no means to do so, according to the local interpretation of the apparition, the spirits would help him find a way. The man decided to spend the small sum of money that he had saved in the past years from selling coconuts and negotiated to obtain a loan from a neighbor. At that moment, a wealthy businesswoman and a relative of his wife arrived from a distant city and offered to share the cost of reburial. On the day of the reburial, the woman told the visitors how the family of spirits had appeared to her in a dream and urged her to pay a visit to their home.

Whereas these spectral identities and their vigorous actions are common in villages and towns of Vietnam, their stories have rarely appeared in the public media. Like any modern nation-state, the state apparatus of Vietnam has looked down upon them as remnants of old superstitions and a sign of backwardness. John Law, the mid-nineteenth century English writer, compiled a large number of stories of haunted houses that were then popular in European cities and set out to debunk them one by one. He hoped to prove through this exercise that the stories resulted from the delusion of the uneducated mind, and he

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proposed that the law and the government exercise their power to eradicate this "madness of crowds."[1] The postcolonial Vietnamese state has made enormous administrative and political efforts to pursue this militant enlightenment way of thinking to battle against the traditional ritual customs and religious imaginations, first in the north after the independence of 1945 and then in the southern and central regions after the unification of the country in 1975.

The political campaigns focused on substituting the commemoration of heroic war dead for the traditional cult of ancestors. The memorabilia of war martyrs and revolutionary leaders replaced the ancestral tablets in the domestic space; the communal ancestral temples and other religious sites were closed down and these gave way to the people's assembly hall. In the latter, ordinary citizens and their administrative leaders discussed community affairs and production quotas surrounded by the vestiges of the American War, in a structurally similar way to how peasants and village notables earlier talked about rents and the ritual calendar in the village's communal house surrounded by the relics of the village's founding ancestors.

The campaigns also strongly rejected any ideas and practices associated with ghosts. Until recently, making offerings to ghosts in public space and trading votive objects were considered criminal and were sometimes punished. Even in recent years when the earlier punitive policy has been moderated, some ghost stories still infuriate state officials. Whereas other ghost stories are allowed in print, literary works that introduce the ghosts of the American War are severely censored.[2] A journalist working for an official newspaper of a central province recently set out to investigate a rumor of spirit possession. His superiors quickly reprimanded him. There was nothing extraordinary about the rumor, which was about a man encountering the ghost of his brother; such incidents can be widely heard across Vietnamese villages and towns. In this particular incident, the man was an acting official in the provincial Communist Party and the ghost happened to be of his elder brother, who was killed in action as a soldier of the former South Vietnamese forces.
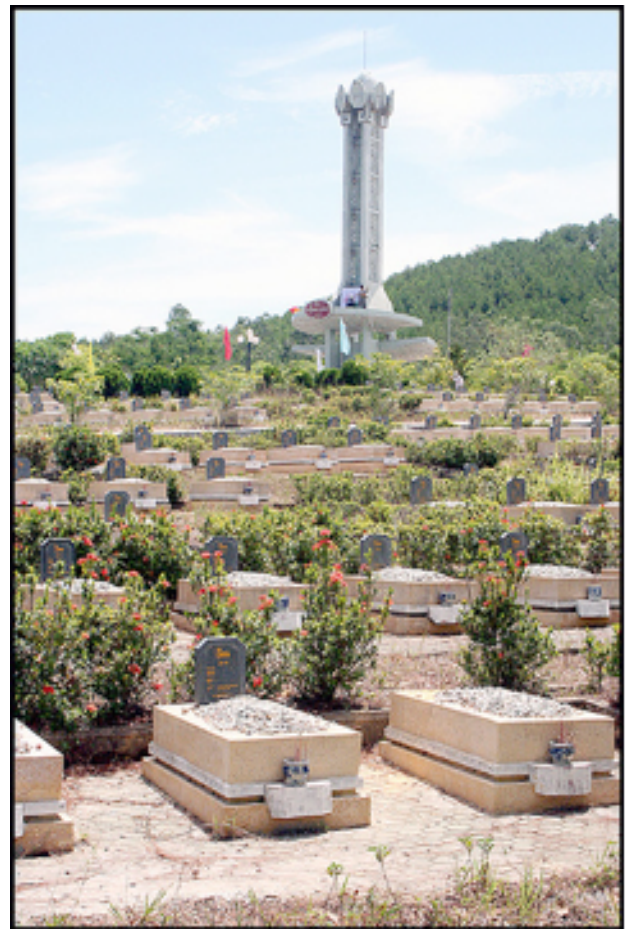
Patriotic Memorial in War Martyrs' Cemetery

Several observers have highlighted the conceptual relationship between heroes and ancestors in discussing Vietnam's recent political history. The state hierarchy put great emphasis on controlling commemorative practices and propagated a genealogy of heroic resistance wars, situating deaths in the American War within a line of descent from the earlier armed struggle against the French colonial power and in further genealogical depth leading to the legendary heroes of

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ancient victories.[3] Every local administrative unit in Vietnam has a war martyrs' cemetery built at the center of the community's public space. In each, "The Ancestral Land Remembers Your Sacrifice," is inscribed on the gothic memorial located at the center of the place. Pelley notes that this construction of national memory shifted the focus of commemoration from the traditional social units of family and village toward the state.[4]

Graves of war martyrs

According to Malarney, the process was equally about bringing the state into the living space of the family and the community, ensuring that people felt and experienced the national memory within their most intimate domains of life.[5] For these scholars, the contemporary situation reverses the earlier trend in that the focus of commemoration is now shifting from the state back to traditional local social units. Malarney observes that ancestral rites, having been a locus for state action in revolutionary Vietnam, became a principal site for a contest of power between the state and the family after 1989.[6] For Luong, the demise of the centrally-controlled socialist economy resulted in the revival of ancestral rituals as a way of strengthening the moral basis of the family—the principal unit in the new economic environment of privatization and market competition.[7]

These observations commonly draw upon examples from the northern region in discussing Vietnam's ritual politics. In southern and central Vietnam (the former South Vietnam), the revival of ancestor worship has added complexity compared to the equivalent process in the north, and this relates to a variance between the two regions in the historical experience of the recent war. The idea of a "national experience of war" is a myth, as Mosse writes with reference to the European experience of the World Wars, particularly for a civil war.[8] The war from 1960 to 1975 was clearly a legitimate war for national liberation from the viewpoint of northern Vietnam, which regarded it in continuum with the earlier anti-colonial struggle against France, whereas communities in southern Vietnam were not entirely united on this stated objective of the American War and they were driven to fight against it as well as in support of it.[9]

Against this background of a bipolar conflict waged in the form of a vicious civil war with heavy foreign interventions, I will argue that changes in the ritual politics involving family and state cannot be adequately assessed if we limit our analytical attention to the domain of ancestor worship. The postwar institution of heroic war death relegated a significant part of genealogical memory to a politically engendered status of ghosts in the southern regions,[10] one excluded from the new political community of the nation-state and, by extension, alienated from the family and community-based commemorations that were engulfed by the politics of national memory. The memories of the war dead, which were excluded from the postwar institutions of commemoration, were not merely those of fallen soldiers on the wrong side of the war, such as the party official's brother. As I discuss elsewhere, the huge civilian sacrifice to the war also faced many difficulties in the hero-centered postwar politics of memory.[11]

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It is therefore necessary to consider the revival of ancestral worship in this region within a relational framework with ritual actions for ghosts rather than merely in connection with the dominant institution of hero worship.

New private graveyard

This article argues that the political transition from hero worship to ancestor worship should be assessed within the relational moral symbolic structure of ancestors and ghosts, of which ancestor worship is only a part. To this end, it critically reviews a theory of ancestral worship that relegates ghosts to a socially marginal and analytically irrelevant category. If the ritual attention to ghosts partly defines how the practice of ancestor worship becomes truly distinctive from the institution of hero worship, the vitality of ghosts has profound implications for communities in southern and central Vietnam when it concerns the ghosts of the American War.

Burning votive money for wandering spirits

The American War

The Vietnamese call the Vietnam-America conflict the American War (1960–1975), partly to distinguish it from the preceding French War,[12] in a similar way that the Vietnam War (1965–1975) is referenced to the war before it in Korea (1950–1953) in the history of the Cold War. Americans, Young observes, remember the Vietnam War mainly as conflicts among Americans: "The Vietnam war, in short, was a civil war, but—and this may puzzle Vietnamese, who are currently discovering the extent to which it was a civil war for them—it was an American civil war."[13] The radical division of the nation as to the objective and the conduct of the war has a lot to do with how American memory of this war came to take on the metaphor of "Vietnam ghost," which is perceived to "continue to haunt American culture" and to return to the public consciousness in the wake of a new international conflict.[14] Young writes, "More divisive than any conflict Americans have engaged in since the Civil War, the Vietnam War raised questions about the nation's very identity. These questions have not been settled. The battle over interpreting the Vietnam War is a battle over interpreting America and it continues to the present day."[15] The historian is absolutely right also to raise the point that the Vietnamese, a generation after the war

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formally ended, are discovering the hitherto unpublicized domestic dimensions of what they were taught to be a clear, united self-defense against foreign aggressors.

Young adds that death in Vietnam, for Americans, meant mainly the death of an American soldier. For Vietnamese, on the contrary, war death meant the death of everyone: young and old, male and female, communist or anticommunist, partisan or non-partisan, combatant or non-combatant, Vietnamese or foreigner. This was particularly the case in the southern and central region of Vietnam where the frontiers of the battlefield were unclear. The war experienced in this region, unlike that in the northern half, was not a war against a single enemy or with a clear border. The frontier was not somewhere out there, a place to which young volunteer soldiers were sent and their bodies brought back from, but practically within the sphere of everyday life. The community shifted between the hands of opposite political and military forces as often as day changed to night, and survival in this highly mobile battlefield meant being able to relate to both sides of the conflict. Xoi dau is the Vietnamese ceremonial food made of sticky rice and black beans, and people use this black-and-white delicacy as a metaphor for the harsh condition of the war in the village. When you eat this sweet, you are obliged to swallow both the white and the black parts; you cannot separate the two. Living in a war zone that, from the perspective of one side, is pacified, and, from the perspective of the other, is liberated, you are forced to acknowledge both realities.

The war against America, in the official history of Vietnam, was a "people's war." This peculiar war united soldiers in combat uniforms with fighters without uniform, and again with the families of non-uniformed local fighters, who fed and supported the soldiers.[16] The guerrilla fighters were fish, according to a powerful metaphor, and the people were the water necessary to keep the fish alive.[17] In many villages of southern and central Vietnam, the relationship between the water and the fish was far more complex and turbulent than the idyllic image of the landscaped pond in a middle-class Vietnamese town house.[18] As the conflict escalated, "the water" was systematically pumped out to expose "the fish." Often no fish were found at the bottom of the pond, and this frequently led to tragic incidents of civilian killing.[19] The dislocated water of people, abandoned or concentrated in strategic hamlets, could not survive without its homeland and was also pushed back to its place of origin to harbor the fish. The agit-prop propaganda activity to encourage war refugees to return to their unsettled homeland was intense throughout the refugee camps in southern and central Vietnam. As a Highlands tribal leader said, "We were between hammer and anvil. The Communists tried to resettle us ... The Americans wanted to get free fire zones with the Montagnards."[20]

Moving hazardously between the homeland and the refugee camp, those engaged in the people's war left numerous traces and trails of sorrow. Makeshift shallow graves and collective burial sites remain in the villages—in the sand dunes, along the footpaths, in the gardens, and even beneath the mud floor of the houses.

The ghosts of war

As a result of the violent polarization of society, the genealogical identity and kinship memory in southern and central Vietnam rarely constitutes a politically harmonious entity. Their genealogical unity is crowded with the history of profound political disunity, relating to the bifurcated mobilization for both the revolutionary American War against the foreign aggressors and the US-backed war in South Vietnam against the communist aggressors associated with North Vietnam. The former heritage was highly encouraged to continue in postwar life; the latter was a stigmatized memory, excluded from public mention and concealed in the domestic space.

The sorrow remains

Some of these improperly buried dead belonged to the revolutionary side, others to their foes, and many more to both-and-neither sides. Some of them were soldiers, but these are greatly outnumbered by the remains of the dead who had no war-related professional backgrounds. It is against this historical background of generalized destruction and displacement of human lives that people perceive ghosts of war in their environment today.[21]

Noi buon

The state-sanctified postwar politics of heroic death relegated a large proportion of the war dead in the southern region to a status of ghosts. The bodies of fallen revolutionary soldiers and prominent party activists were brought home and buried at the state cemetery built at the centre of the village; their Hero Death Certificates replaced the ancestral tablets at private homes. At the same time, the mass graves of ordinary villagers and the graves of enemy soldiers were removed to the bamboo forest, the sand dune, or elsewhere away from the village. These tragic or politically impure deaths were also alienated from the domestic ritual space, which turned, after the war, into a political shrine meant exclusively for the memory of war heroes and national revolutionary leaders. The spiritual remains of the non-heroic dead were displaced not only because of this political exclusion from an existing home (where they are remembered in appropriate rites), but also because of the loss of home. This last point relates to the mass civilian killings during the war, which terminated many family lines, causing the destruction of the social foundation of commemoration. The vital existence of war ghosts in today's Vietnamese communities should be considered against the background

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of a catastrophic destruction of human lives and a representational crisis in social memory.

Ghosts are called by various terms (*ma, hon, hon ma, bong ma, linh hon, oan hon, or bach linh or con ma*) in Vietnamese, translated in literature typically as "lost souls" or "wandering souls,"[22] but in popular ritual idiom of the central region, with the interpersonal referential terms of *co bac* (meaning literally "aunt and uncle"). The latter is conceptualized in distinction to *ong ba* (grandfather and grandmother), referring to the ancestors or deities who are placed in the household altar, community temple or elsewhere. The "aunts and uncles" are dead, but not really dead in the sense of being settled in the world of am, the world of the dead; they are not alive, but have not yet left the living world, *duong*. These beings are neither really there in *am* nor here in *duong*, and, at once, are in both. The idea of "wandering" in terms of wandering souls of the dead points to the imagined situation that these spirits are obliged to move between the periphery of this world and the fringe of another world. In short, ghosts are ontological refugees who are uprooted from home, which is a place where their memory can be settled.

Someone's real-life encounter with these placeless identities did not raise a question of credulity in the community but instead generated intense curiosity about the specific identity of the ghost and the practical implications of the apparition. It was believed that ghosts had wishes and purposes of their own and that they partook of community life. They desire, in the mind of the living, the goods and facilities that the living require for their living: money, clothing, hat and shoes, food, and sometimes, a bicycle, a Honda, and a house. Sharing wealth and worldly pleasures was a primary relationship between ghosts and humans in popular conceptions. The exchange of goods and services between the dead and the living, in turn, contributed to making

wandering spirits appear more familiar and human-like.

Ghosts were also very much public figures in a Vietnamese village. Most private encounters with an apparition typically developed into varying forms of public commemoration. The story of the apparition and its further historical background traveled widely in the area to become public knowledge. No one, except an outsider, walked carelessly in such a place. Placing incense sticks on the site of the apparition was itself a demonstratively public gesture, which transformed the place to a site of consolation. This could last a few months, or a few years, until the story was resigned to oblivion and the site reverted to being just another ditch. The acknowledgement varied from incense burning to food and money offering, to a full-scale spirit-consolation ritual. In proportion to the intensity of acknowledgement, the spirit became an integral part of local history.

The above should not be taken to mean that ghost beliefs in Vietnam represent some kind of pre-conceptual magical thought, such as that imagined by Lévy-Bruhl, dominated by the fear of death and unaware of the differences between the real and the imaginary.[23] On the contrary, the Vietnamese discourses about war ghosts abound with critical historical meanings, and they gain currency precisely because they relate to pressing moral and political issues in contemporary life. The apparition of the party official's brother acted upon the absence of his memory in the domain of kinship, and this relates to the legacy of a civil war/international war, concealed and unaccounted-for in the official paradigm of a unified people's war against a common, foreign enemy. The episode of the family of spirits was mainly a family affair, but it is also inseparable from the wider social issues relating to the difficulties in domestic and communal life caused by the hero-centered institution of commemoration. In these contexts, the individual apparitions of the

dead are reflections on the predicaments in the collective memory of the living. If the living respond to the apparitions and improve their social and ritual space, moreover, the fantastic actions of spectral identities become interwoven with the transformation of the material world. The stories about them are then no longer "just stories" but part of the social action with the capacity to structure the patterns of social life.[24]

In order to imagine how ghosts and humans become partners in social and political action, however, we need to come to terms with the conceptual structure that separates the two. Ghosts in a Vietnamese village are supposed to be attentive to the social affairs among their living neighbors, just as the latter are fond of telling stories about their phenomenal existence. This relationship of reciprocal attention assumes not only an existential proximity between the two groups of beings but also a certain formal distance between their habitats. In this scheme, ghosts and humans are interested in each other because they are unlike (as well as like) each other.[25]

The bipolarity of death

In the dual conceptual scheme of ong ba versus co bac, the beings belonging to the latter category are considered to be near and remote at once. They are physically close but distant in relationship. If the spirits of the dead are close to the living in both physical and relational terms, they are not ghosts but ancestors.

In sociological literature, the identity that is physically close but relationally distant is called "the stranger" and this has been an important concept in the theory of objectivity. The very development of the fieldwork method in anthropology is in fact inseparable from this particular notion. Ethnographers, too, usually assume the ambiguous position of being physically close to a foreign cultural reality yet relationally far from it, and they claim to offer a

good objective picture of the reality from this particular "bifocal" positioning.[26] It is with Simmel that "the stranger" has taken on full sociological importance. Simmel argues that the main characteristics of "the stranger" are mobility and diversity, and that this demonstrates the constellation of being near and remote at the same time.[27] The social form of the stranger generates positive relations because, according to him, "he is not bound by roots to the particular constituents and partisan dispositions of the group, he confronts all of these with a distinctly "objective" attitude, an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement."[28]

The Vietnamese category of co bac suggests that the identities addressed as such are the social outsiders to the ancestral spirits of ong ba in the world of the dead. They stand as cosmological strangers or outsiders (*nguoi ngoai* in Vietnamese) to the community of the living when the latter demonstrates its affinity and moral unity with the ancestral spirits. They are the products of "bad death"—violent death away from home,[29] which the Vietnamese express as "death in the street" (*chet duong*). These spirits of the dead are imagined to suffer from wandering between the periphery of the other world and the margins of this world without a site to anchor their memory in, just as strangers in this world move from village to village without finding a place to settle. They constitute a composite group of individuals with various backgrounds of historical life, just as the strangers differ from the settlers with their characteristic lack of a homogenous background. These qualities of mobility and diversity distinguish the life of ghosts from that of ancestors, whose memories, after their ritually appropriated "death at home" (*chet nha*), are permanently settled in the social world according to the genealogical and spatial order.

Domestic ancestral shrine

At the center of this concentric conceptual moral order consisting of settled ancestors and placeless ghosts, there is the dexterous body of the ritual actor. The structure of Vietnamese domestic commemorative ritual, in the tradition of the central region, situates the ritual actor in between two separate modes of afterlife and milieus of memory. On the one side lies the household ancestral shrine, or the equivalent in the community ancestral temple, which keeps the vestiges of family ancestors and household deities. The other side is oriented towards what Taussig calls "the open space of death," which is the imagined life-world of the tragic, non-ancestral, unsettled, and unrelated spirits of the dead.[30] The ritual tradition in the central region represents this open space of death in the form of a small external shrine, popularly called *khom* in Quang Ngai and Quang Nam provinces, which is usually placed at the boundary between the domestic garden and the

street. Within this dual concentric spatial organization, the typical ritual action in this region engages with both the interior and exterior milieus of memory through a simple movement of the body. The most habitual act of commemoration consists of kowtowing and offering incense to the house-side ancestors and turning the body to the opposite side to repeat the action towards the street-wandering ghosts. This two-directional act may be accompanied by a single beat of the gong followed by three or four beats of the drum.

External household shrine

Within this system of dual structure and two-way practice, two ways emerge to imagine social solidarity. On the house side, we can say that the ritual action affirms the existing solidary relations between the living and the dead in the way that, in Durkheim's expression, "each individual is the double of an ancestor."[31] Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of Religious Life highlights the power of

rituals to generate the senses and the effervescent sensation of moral unity and mutual belonging among the members of a community. Arguing that collective social consciousness is fundamentally performative, he emphasizes the role of "totemic" or "ancestral" spirits in binding individuals with the sacred space of a social whole. The society is created from within, he explains, through the ritual drama in which the living would act as if they were the double of their totemic ancestors. The act of worshipping the sacred existence of the dead, in this scheme, is that of rendering sacred the profane entity that the former stands for in relation to the living—the genealogical unity. For Durkheim, to build a society is to feel collectively that this society exists, and this affective construction of society is what rituals achieve. This symbolic construction of social unity, according to Durkheim, is focused on what he calls "the true spirits" of the place, which he contrasts to what the ghosts stand for: "A ghost … is not a true spirit. First, its power is usually limited; second, it does not have definite functions. It is a vagabond with no clear-cut responsibility, since the effect of death was to set it outside all the regular structures. In relation to the living, it is demoted, as it were. On the other hand, a spirit always has some sort of power, and indeed it is defined by that power. It has authority over some range of cosmic or social phenomena; it has a more or less precise function to perform in the world scheme."[32]

For Durkheim, the categorical distinction between "the true spirit" and "the ghost" relates to the relative conceptual distance between the soul and the body. He writes, "A soul is not a spirit … it is the body's prisoner. It escapes for good only at death, and even so we have seen with what difficulty that separation is made final."[33] The true spirit is the result of a successful separation of the soul from the prison of the body, whereas a failure in this work of mortal separation results in a ghost. The former develops to a "positive cult"

through which the living associate with the memory of the dead in socially constructive and regenerative ways, whilst the latter falls to a "negative cult" accompanying a system of pollution taboos and abstinences.

This way of dividing death into two separate moral domains and focusing analytical attention on the positive spirit of the society (*genius loci)* has set a dominant trend in the subsequent study of religious symbols. Most notably, Bloch discusses the reburial practices in Madagascar in this light and describes their custom of separating the ancestral bones from the decomposed bodies as a core symbolic gesture in the making of a social order. The bones cleaned from the flesh represent a sacred spirit removed from the profane body and their assembly in the collective ancestral tomb creates "the society of ancestors"—an ideal social form in the collective consciousness of the living.[34] Bloch later changes this idiom of symbolic removal to a stronger language of "symbolic conquest" as he tries to advance a general theory of human religious experience. He argues with reference to male initiation rituals that the logic of these rituals is to have the ancestral spirit conquer the body of novice members of a social group.[35] The initiates obtain the rights for full membership in the society by becoming the double of ancestors and this is achieved through the ritual enactment of renouncing their profane bodily substances in exchange for the reception of the transcendental ancestral spirit. It is important to note that the idiom of symbolic conquest works in two ways. It describes how the soul of the dead transforms to a true spirit on the one hand and how this pure spirit in turn makes new bondage with the living on the other. The idiom postulates that a social order is created on the basis of this war against profane substances imagined to take place on both sides of the cosmological threshold.

Ghosts are an uninvited category to the paradigm of symbolic conquest. In the

language of the rites of passage, they are perpetually liminal beings who are neither entirely separated from the world of mortals nor incorporated into the socially defined world of true spirits.[36] According to Durkheim, they exist outside the social structure and have no clearly defined social functions. With this background, it is not surprising to find that ghosts have played no significant part, contrary to ancestors, in the advancement of social theory.

The absence of ghosts in social theory is a product of the theory's preoccupation with functional values and structural order.[37] In addition, the exclusion of ghosts from the symbolic construction of sacred social order relates to a problematic definition of "the sacred." The Latin term *sacer*, as Agamben explains, has double meaning of "sacred" and "accursed," and it incorporates both the holy spirit of moral unity and the spirits excluded and banned from the unity.[38] In Casey's phenomenology of place, the genius loci ("the spirit of the place"; Durkheim's "true spirits") should be distinguished from the anima loci ("the soul of the place") but the two, nevertheless, cannot be considered separately.[39] In this conception of the sacred, the negative cult of ghosts is mutually constitutive of the positive cult of ancestors and we cannot imagine the symbolic values of ancestors without placing them in a wider relational structure with those of ghosts.

Hickey argues with reference to prewar village life in the southern delta region that the Vietnamese ritual association with ghosts is intended to protect home from the errant spirits of the dead and "to avoid their wrath."[40] Cadière proposes the binary scheme of *génies bon* versus *génies mauvais* (beneficiary spirits versus malignant spirits) and argues that the latter take "pleasure in annoying and harming" the living.[41] Following these characterizations, it appears that people would offer food and other votive gifts to ghosts in the way that they would hand over food and valuables to vagabond bandits in the hope of avoiding their menace. However, classical Vietnamese literature gives a very different picture as to the meaning of the gift for ghosts. Nguyen Du, the eminent eighteenth-century mandarin scholar, wrote the following verse, "Calling all wandering souls." This verse is recited widely today as a ritual incantation in many modified and improvised forms:

Those who died beheaded
Those who had many friends and relatives but died lonely
Mandarins
Those who died in the battlefield
Those whose death nobody knew about
Students who died on the way back from exams
Those who were buried hurriedly with no coffin and no clothing
Those who died at sea under thunderstorms
Merchants
Those who died with a shoulder hardened by too many bamboo poles carried on it
Innocent souls who died in prison …
All spirits in the bush, in the stream, in the shadows, beneath a bridge, outside a pagoda, in the market, in an empty rice field, on a sand dune
You are cold and you are fearful
You move together, young ones holding the old
We offer you this rice gruel and fruit nectar
Do not fear
Come and receive our offering
We pray for you, we pray.[42]

Nguyen Du's poetic world shows that sympathetic relations with the displaced, socially excluded spirits of the dead are a core aspect of popular religious morality and the ethics of memory. It introduces a multitude of displaced and wandering spirits of the dead, and these beings appear as close companions to the living in their arduous journey of life rather than a menacing force. Nguyen Du's poetic rendering of this intimacy between humans and ghosts reflected his own life

history as a mandarin official alienated from the court (due to a dynastic change) and the tendency of some classical scholars shifting their philosophical interests from Confucian texts to popular spirit beliefs when they were estranged from the political order, which drew its legitimacy partly from the Confucian ritual order.

We can draw from the last point that the moral identity of ghosts is a variable, relational phenomenon. When people are at home with the memory of their ancestors, ghosts appear as strangers to their perceived order of life. This is a version of the world from a particular vision. In this perspective, the place of ancestors confronts the world of displaced spirits of the dead as its contrasting background, thereby creating the impression of an ordered social existence surrounded by and militating against the anarchy of chaotic relations. Thus, Bloch observes in Madagascar, "there is no worse nightmare than that one's body will be lost … 'Bad' death occurs at the wrong place, away from the ancestral shrines to which the deceased's soul cannot therefore easily return."[43] When people are in exile and become themselves the subject of what Casey calls "dwelling-as-wandering" in contrast to "dwelling-as-residing,"[44] however, the moral imagination about displaced spirits of the dead changes accordingly. In this situation, ghosts are no longer strangers to the order of social life but become a mirror for the worldly existence in displacement. Life in displacement offers a different association with ghosts than life in settlement.

It follows from the last point that social intimacy with ghosts in contemporary Vietnam may have its own historical background. The ritual familiarity with the displaced spirits of the dead may be an expression of the actors' own intimacy with a history of mass displacement. If this is the case, we can argue that ghosts, as a discursive phenomenon, are constitutive of the Vietnamese self-identity just

as ancestors are. The vital existence of ghosts may be another expression of the historical self rather than merely an antithesis of the social self symbolically united with the existence of ancestors.

Liberation from grievance

Hertz writes that the "negative space" of death (the space for bad deaths) is where "death will be eternal, because society will always maintain towards these accursed individuals the attitude of exclusion."[45] However, this space is also, according to Taussig, "preeminently a space of transformation."[46]

Ghosts in Vietnam do not always remain as anonymous strangers to the community. They can transform to heroes, if their bodies are entombed in the cemetery of war martyrs and their identities are properly inscribed in the state-issued death certificates displayed in the homes of their families. They can also transform into family ancestors, if their bodies are brought to the family graveyard and their identities are enshrined in the domestic altar. Among those who are unable to take either of these trajectories, there are many ghosts of war across communities who are now vigorously transforming to *tien* or *than*, powerful guardian spirits or community deities.[47]

When ghosts emerge from anonymity and join the community of the living with the above identities, this process is called *giai oan* or *giai nguc*—meaning "liberation from grievance" or "liberation from incarceration in grievous history." The concept suggests that violent death imprisons the spirit of the dead in the perpetual drama of re-experiencing mortal violence. It also indicates that the living have the ethical responsibility to help free these dead from their traumatic histories. The grievance of the dead is a somatic condition: the souls of the dead are believed to feel the pain of violent death (through the soul's

physical elements called via) and to be cognizant of the unjust circumstances of the death (through its spiritual elements called hon). The grievance is also an inter-subjective phenomenon: it rises not only from the history of violent and unjust death (*chet oan*) but also from the absence of social acknowledgement of the unjust history. Whereas history incarcerates the spirit of the dead in grievous memory, in this scheme, society can exacerbate the spirits' grievances with its indifference to their suffering. In other words, the living may actively augment the grievance of the dead by their inaction.

Likewise, genuine liberation from the incarceration in grievous history should be a collaborative work. It ought to involve not only appropriate intervention from sympathetic outsiders in the form of ritual actions but also the spirit's strong will for freedom from incarceration in a grievous history. The living must ritually help the dead in order to free them from the symbolic state of imprisonment, whereas the dead should show signs that they are trying to overcome the vexing and mortifying memory of experiencing an unjust event. Apparitions and spirit possessions are considered signs of the growth of self-determination for freedom on the part of the prisoners of grievous history.

We may understand the two episodes introduced in the beginning of this essay in the scheme of "liberation from grievance." The apparition of the mother and child spirits spurred the reburial of their remains in a newly established lineage graveyard. After reburial, the relative from the city had a dream in which the spectral family appeared happy and the children were dressed in fresh outfits. When this story was communicated to the village, the locals understood it as a conclusive sign that the spirits had less grievous feelings. The event of the elder brother ghost similarly led to finding his remains in a remote area in the highlands, assisted by a local spirit medium specializing in body finding, and this was followed by his reburial in the family ancestral graveyard. Before the reburial, the brother ghost expressed his grievous feelings in a séance with the medium.

His accusations were furious and pointed to the fact that his younger brother and the party official had been unsympathetic to their mother's wishes. For years after liberation, the official's mother was preoccupied with finding her missing son, and this provoked a series of conflicts within the family. (It is known that the younger brother, preoccupied with postwar economic reconstruction, argued with his mother that the family, like the nation, should look forward rather than backward.) His mother continued her search privately, against the wishes of her children. She also wished to build a family altar so that she could lay the photograph of her dead son on it and clashed with her son, who disapproved of it. (In the house of an acting official of the Communist Party, this wish was unacceptable, particularly so when it concerned a politically impure death.) Against this public accusation from his elder brother, the official had to admit his misdeed in the presence of his younger siblings to whom he had played the role of the eldest son.

These moments, which people called *xac* or *nhap xac* ("the spirit enters the body"), contributed to breaking the social and political obstacles to the memory of the dead. When people experienced what they understood as a face-to-face encounter with the spirit of the missing dead, it was practically impossible to ignore the identity, even if it was an uninvited one. The intrusion of ghosts was typically interpreted as their claim to the right to be remembered. In this situation, people were justified in reorganizing the domestic ritual space, against political convention if necessary, for the initiatives to do so, in shared cultural understanding, were not necessarily their own but originated from the grievous dead.

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An army convoy searching for the remains of a missing war hero

These two episodes are drawn from the area in the central region that the international community has known as My Lai, the site of a large-scale civilian massacre committed in March 1968 by American ground troops. The My Lai area has a memorial and state-run museum for the victims of the 1968 civilian massacre as well as several memorials and large state cemeteries for the revolutionary combatants who came from the local villages. The provincial authority holds a regular official commemorative event for the victims of the tragic killing in the presence of high-ranking party officials and the foreign press. However, it is only in recent years that villagers were allowed to openly hold family-based rites of remembrance and consolation for their dead relatives.[48] Many villages in the vicinity of My Lai suffered similar tragedies of mass killing in 1966-1967. In these places, the establishment of war martyr cemeteries and memorials at the center of the postwar village life coincided with the removal of the mass graves of civilian victims of war to the periphery of the village space. Their memories were relegated to the exterior of the village's ritual life which was, after the war, made to concentrate on the heritage of heroic revolutionary death.[49]

When the villagers of My Lai set out to renovate their domestic ancestral shrines and communal ancestral temples in the mid-1990s,

their efforts to improve the material condition of life among the dead was not limited to these sites of genealogical memory. In this village, as in many other coastal communities of central Vietnam, the recent growth of interest in ancestral worship has seen equivalent development in its structural opposite. The renovation of the household ancestral altar often proceeded in parallel with the construction of a *khom* (external shrine for ghosts); the construction of the family ancestral temple or the village communal house included making a shelter for wandering ghosts on the opposite side of the house of ancestor worship. Villagers also rebuilt many of the isolated ghost shrines which were scattered widely around the village and some of these shrines became increasingly sumptuous in appearance as time passed, demonstrating a collection of various colorful votive objects and other paraphernalia.

Offerings to the victims of a village massacre

At the same time, stories of apparition and spirit possession circulated widely within the village and beyond. Some of them were about the spirits of kinsmen, and others were about those of strangers. The former typically led to the assimilation of the assertive spectral identities to the family's ancestral altar, whereas the latter were often commemorated in an external ghost shrine. The ghosts of war who were transformed to public figures in this way were diverse in origin. The My Lai area had a large number of sites associated with the

spirits of civilian victims of war as well as some identified with patriotic fighters from the French or American times. Some of these ghosts were solitary; others appeared in groups.

Votive object in flames

Several residents of Khe Dong sub-hamlet told me about a group of mother ghosts walking in a line, each holding a dead child in her arms and weeping. A family in the same community used to have trouble with a large three-generation family of ghosts, each time they held an ancestral rite. The ghosts changed in appearance too. Another family living along the dirt road that leads to the seashore told me that they had seen the child ghosts tailing their mother ghosts joyfully, instead of being held lifeless in their arms. They associated the ghosts' change of appearance with the fact that at the time of their apparition, the villagers were preparing an annual death commemoration for the victims of the village massacre. The My Lai villagers regularly burned incense sticks and offered votive gifts to these beings, who should have been someone's ancestors in an ideal world rather than anonymous village ghosts.

Votive money for the dead

These Vietnamese mother and child ghosts shared the village space with foreign ghosts. A few French and Moroccan ghosts used to frequent a footpath leading to the shrimp-breeding farms. Two American GI ghosts chose a village palm tree as their favorite place to be. The wife of a former partisan fighter regularly prayed and laid joss sticks for these GI ghosts, using the empty can of a soft drink that she hung on the tree as a shrine for them. Occasionally she offered money for them too—paper votive money printed in the form of U.S. dollar notes. In a coastal village of Quang Nam province, which was devastated by the pacification activity of South Korean expeditionary forces in the same time of the year as the incident at My Lai, I encountered a place that locals associated with a non-Vietnamese Asian ghost wearing an American-style uniform. This community had several other sites that people associated with the presence of vigorous ghosts of war. They included an old bomb shelter where neighbors regularly heard some young teenage female ghosts lamenting their sorrowful fate of dying so young in the explosion of a hand-held grenade thrown into the shelter. The villagers identified the ghosts of a grandmother and her small grandchildren who were burned to death in a locked-up house. The fact that there were stories about ghosts usually meant that some people were regularly holding a ritual

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commemoration on their behalf. Ritual interactions with ghosts created stories about them, which in turn stimulated the growth of ritual activity in the streets or on the external shrines.

The parallel revival on both the house side of ancestral rites and the street-side rituals for ghosts departed radically in organization from the hero-centered war commemoration. First, the new domestic ancestral altar did not separate the tragic death of civilian victims from the heroic death of revolutionary combatants, nor the latter from the stigmatized genealogical memory of "counter-revolutionary" persons from the opposite side of the bipolar conflict. The worship of heroic war deaths centralized the plurality of kinship memory into a unified ritual community of the nation, whereas the worship of ancestors consolidated the plurality of political heritage back into a unified genealogical community. To relate to the dead according to the genealogical paradigm, in this context, was a way to move beyond the modern political hierarchy of death.

Second, the change from hero worship to ancestor worship as the moral center of domestic and communal life also changed the way in which the symbolic power of the center was claimed. A centrality such as that of modern hero worship, according to Lefebvre, "aspires to be total. [It] expels all peripheral elements with a violence that is inherent in space itself. This centrality strives to fulfill its "totalizing" mission with no philosophy to back it up aside from a strategic one."[50] Unlike such a monumental vision of the past that "rules over the other ways of looking at the past,"[51] the centrality of genealogical order and enclosure, in the theatrics of Vietnamese ritual revival, rose in parallel and in interaction with the unbound marginality of unassimilated death. The contemporary ritual landscape in the communities of central Vietnam can be summarized as a transition from the politicized, centralized composition focused on the

heritage of heroic war death to a decentralized, localized composition anchored in the cult of ancestors, which, while contesting the supremacy of heroic memory, nevertheless seeks to coexist with it, partly by assimilating it into elements of local heritage. The last is evident in the structure of some of the new local ancestral communal houses in central Vietnam, which incorporates into the premises of the ancestral house a smaller model of the patriotic tower, such as those found in the state memorials, dedicated to the memory of fallen soldiers of village origin in the American War. In the new composition, moreover, the local genealogical memory can coexist with the non-genealogical, foreign traces of the past, and the latter is given a sovereign status of its own in the horizon of historical memory.

Patriotic memorial at a communal house

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Conclusion

Shifting between the house-side ancestors and the street-side ghosts, the ritual action in the new composition engages with conceptually contrary milieus of memory in a separate, structured way. However, this development rises from the historical background in which the boundary between the milieu of ghosts and the territory of ancestors was violently and coercively blurred.

The category of *co bac* stands in contradiction to that of *ong ba* in the ritual order; yet, this concentric ritual organization has a background in which a large proportion of family ancestors was relegated to the margins of collective memory, thereby becoming partly indistinguishable from anonymous spirits. The social form of ancestors in contemporary life, therefore, has a history of being a political form of ghosts in relation to the nation's heroes. Moreover, we may say that the space of wandering ghosts, for those who engage with it, does not merely constitute an imaginary world of displaced strangers but also invokes the memory of their own life during the war; that is, it invokes the ways in which they were forced into a life of displacement after their homes and villages had been annihilated. As shown in Nguyen Du's poetic world, the narrative or ritual engagement with ghosts is a way of expressing self-identity in painful exile or coerced displacement. When Vietnamese villagers face the shrine for ghosts and pray for their less grievous afterlife, what they have in front of them is not only the imaginary world of the wandering ghosts but also the historical memory of life like that of wandering ghosts. When they face the interior shrine for ancestors, likewise, the act signifies not only that the dead kinsmen are restored to their proper place, but also that they themselves are finally moving away from the historical and social condition of displacement. If the worship of ancestors and the ritual relationship with ghosts are both expressions of historical self-

awareness, we may say that the wider structure within which these take place encompasses the memory of the violent past and the hope for a peaceful, secure future and that it does not privilege one against the other in doing so. Both are equally important elements for the constitution of the historical self.

I argued above that displacement from home is a familiar historical experience both for the living and the dead in a Vietnamese community. If I am right in understanding what Vietnamese villagers do for ancestors and ghosts in this light, it seems that their actions point to a particular vision of society—a society in which both natives and strangers have the right to dwell in the place. For the dead, this means that strangers to the political community of the nation can join the local ritual community of kinship as ancestors. Those who are not entitled to join this ritual unity can still benefit from the sites of consolation prepared in the exterior of the communal unity. For the living, this means that they are no longer obliged to exclude part of their genealogical identity in order to demonstrate loyalty to the political community of the nation-state, or to deny the unrelated, foreign remains of the past their rights to be liberated from the grievous histories of death.

The transition from hero worship to ancestor worship opened the door of the local community to strangers to the national community, and this process began in My Lai when people began to relate to ghosts as attentively and intimately as to ancestors. It is hard to imagine in this context how we can conceptualize ghosts as having no relevance to social order and how we can make sense of changes in the "society of ancestors" without turning our attention to the changes taking place in the world beyond it.

Making offerings in the street

Durkheim's theory of affective social actions continues to be valid for our inquiry of the impact of modern violence on human kinship. His insight that ritualized affective practices between living and dead are central to social construction can apply to understanding the particular ways in which My Lai villagers express the ethics of memory. In order to keep and strengthen our intellectual-genealogical ties with Durkheim, however, I believe that we need to move out of the centrality of totemic ancestors and turn our attention to the conceptually antithetical, ideologically marginal milieu of ghosts, including the fate of their modern counterpart—the political ghosts of the nation-state. It is necessary to attend to what affective relations exist in this field of social lives in order to update his theoretical heritage and to advance it as a useful framework in understanding the political history of the past century and the creative social actions arising today to console the victims of this violent history.

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NOTES

[1] Charles MacKay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (New York: Willey, 1996 [1841]), p. 618.
[2] Bao Ninh's The Sorrow of War (1994) and Duong Thu Huong's Novel Without a Name (1995) are good examples.
[3] Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Monumental Ambiguity: The State Commemoration of Ho Chi Minh," in K. W. Taylor and J. K. Whitmore, eds., Essays into Vietnamese Pasts (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1995), p. 273; David Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 285.
[4] Patricia M. Pelley, Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 168.
[5] Shaun K. Malarney, Culture, Ritual, and Revolution in Vietnam (Surrey: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 108-47.
[6] Ibid., pp. 199-206.
[7] Hy Van Luong, "Economic Reform and the Intensification of Rituals in Two Northern Vietnamese Villages, 1980-90," in Borje Ljunggren, ed., The Challenge of Reform in Indochina (Cambridge: Harvard Institute for International Development, 1993).
[8] George Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[9] James W. Trullinger, Village at War: An Account of Conflict in Vietnam (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 116-25; Heonik Kwon, After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 23-59.
[10] Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Commemoration and Community," in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 228.

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[11] Kwon, After the Massacre.

[12] In official Vietnamese literature, the American War is called chien tranh chong My cuu nuoc ("The War of National Salvation Against America") and the "French War" khang chien chong Phap ("The Resistance War Against France"). Although these two wars are understood as forming a continuum, the official term for the American War conveys the connotation of a full-scale war waged between sovereign states as well as the objective of national unification.

[13] Marilyn Young, "Epilogue: The Vietnam War in American Memory," in M. E. Gettleman, J. Franklin, M. B. Young, and H. B. Franklin, eds., Vietnam and America (New York: Grove, 1995), p. 516.

[14] Of course, "the Vietnam ghost" or "the ghost of the Vietnam War" mentioned in US media is not the same as the ghosts of war discussed here. The latter are not merely an allegorical device for historical analogy, invoked to deliver the meaning of a new historical event against the similar or contrasting background of a familiar old one. Ghosts in Vietnam are primarily of concrete historical identities, whose existence, although belonging to a past era, is believed to continue to the present in an empirical, rather than allegorical, way. Michael Bibby, "The Post-Vietnam Condition," in M. Bibby, ed., The Vietnam War and Postmodernity (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p. 149; Marilyn Young, "In the Combat Zone," Radical History Review 85 (2003), pp. 253-64.

[15] Young, "Epilogue: The Vietnam War in American Memory," p. 516.

[16] Jonathan Schell, The Real War (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 193-204.

[17] Truong Chinh, Primer for Revolt (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 102-17.

[18] The Vietnamese phrase is: "Tinh quan dan nhu ca voi nuoc," meaning "The affectionate relationship between the army and the people is like what fish feel for water." In popular revolutionary slogans, the doctrine took on a more vivid image: "Without water, fish die. Without fish, the water is spoiled."

[19] "Pump out the water and catch the fish" was one of the informal instructions given to foreign troops deployed to Vietnam. Village massacres, such as the incident in My Lai in March 1968, were widespread in the five coastal provinces of central Vietnam in 1966-1969. The South Korean forces as well as US troops were responsible for these atrocities, many of which were the result of rational and systematic military planning (within the moral and structural contradictions of the foreign intervention in Vietnam) rather than of a breakdown in military command and morale. See Heonik Kwon, "An Anatomy of US and South Korean Massacres in the Vietnamese Year of the Monkey," available at Japan Focus.

[20] Georges Condominas, We Have Eaten the Forest: Story of a Montagnard Village in the Central Highlands of Vietnam (New York: Kodansha, 1994), p. xiii.

[21] Lady Borton, After Sorrow: An American among the Vietnamese (New York: Kodansha, 1995), p. 16; Malarney, Culture, Ritual, and Revolution in Vietnam, p. 180; Derek Summerfield, "The Social Experience of War and Some Issues for the Humanitarian Field," in P. J. Bracken and C. Petty, eds., Rethinking the Trauma of War (New York: Free Association Books, 1998), p. 26.

[22] Huu Ngoc, Dictionnaire de la culture traditionnelle du Vietnam (Hanoi: The Gioi, 1997), pp. 147–48; Huynh Sanh Thong, ed., The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 25-30; Nguyen Khac Vien, Nguyen Van Hoan, and Huu Ngoc, eds., Anthologie de la literature vietnamienne, book 2 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 200-6; Phan Ke Binh, Viêt-Nam phong-tuc (Moeurs et coutumes du Vietnam), book 2, trans. by N. Nouis-Hénard (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1980), pp. 134-35.

[23] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, How Natives Think (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926).

[24] Sherry B. Ortner, "The Foundings of Sherpa Religious Institutions," in E. Ohnuki-Tierney, ed., Culture Through Time:

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Anthropological Approaches (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 89.

[25] The Vietnamese conceptualize am and duong as a relation of mimetic alterity. They have many idioms describing the two cosmological spheres as mirroring each other, but there are an equal number of poignant expressions about their being contradictory.

[26] Michael Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," in J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 199.

[27] Georg Simmel, On Individuality and Social Forms (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 143-9.

[28] Ibid., p. 145.

[29] Malarney, Culture, Ritual, and Revolution in Vietnam, p. 179.

[30] Michael Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 7.

[31] Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, trans. K. E. Fields (New York : Free Press, 1995 [1915]), p. 280.

[32] Ibid., p. 277.

[33] Ibid., p. 276.

[34] Maurice Bloch, Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organization in Madagascar (New York: Seminar Press, 1971), pp. 37-72.

[35] Maurice Bloch, Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[36] Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 164-65; also Stephen F. Teiser, The Ghost Festival in Medieval China (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 217-21.

[37] Edmund Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma (London: Bell, 1954), pp. 12-3.

[38] Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 75-9.

[39] Edward S. Casey, Spirit and Soul: Essays in Philosophical Psychology, 2nd ed. (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2004), p. 324.

[40] Gerald C. Hickey, Village in Vietnam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 121.

[41] Léopold Cadière, Croyances et pratiques religieuses des viêtnamiens, vol. 2 (Saigon: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1957), p. 59.

[42] For a complete text of Nguyen Du's "Calling All Wandering Souls" (called Chieu Hon, Chieu Hon Ca, or Van Chieu Hon), see Huynh Sanh Thong, The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry, pp. 25-30. The abbreviated popular version cited above is from Tan Viet, Tap Van Cung Gia Tien (The prayer book for ancestor worship), (Hanoi : Nha suat ban van hoa dan toc, 1994), pp. 71-5.

[43] Cited from Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., Death and the Regeneration of Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 15-16; see also Bloch, Placing the Dead, pp. 164-65.

[44] Edward S. Casey, Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 132, 140-1.

[45] Robert Hertz, Death and the Right Hand (London: Cohen and West, 1960 [1909]), p. 86.

[46] Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man, p. 7.

[47] See Philip Taylor, Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), p. 206; Thien Do, "Unjust-death Deification and Burnt Offering: Towards an Integrative View of Popular Religion in Contemporary Southern Vietnam," in P. Taylor, ed., Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007).

[48] Some readers may wonder whether death in a civilian massacre such as that in My Lai should be considered politically unambiguous death whose meaning is close to the heroic death of revolutionary combatants given the fact that they were killed by enemy troops and also that the state has taken the initiative to commemorate their sacrifice. In local political reality, however, civilian victims take on myriad unsettling politically ambiguous identities. In My Lai as well as in other villages affected by

large-scale killings, some officials hold the view that the mass graves of the victims include both those who supported the revolution and those who did not, and even those who they characterize as phan dong (counter-revolutionary). In the context of an unconventional "people's war" and a violent bipolar conflict waged within the village, there are no politically pure civilian mass graves if purity is defined in the logic of conventional warfare.

[49] This statement does not account for the significant informal practices of death commemoration developed among the villagers during the postwar years. See Kwon, After the Massacre, pp. 115-19.

[50] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 332.

[51] Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, trans. P. Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 17.