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CHAPTER 1

Legacies and Diasporic Connectivity: Dialogues and Directions for the Future of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American Studies

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{A} Introduction

In October 2020, Vietnamese Americans in support of the re-election of President Donald J. Trump organized "Trump Journey MAGA 2020" to travel from Southern California to Washington DC. During this October "caravan," Vietnamese Americans came out en masse. Arriving on the 14th, some 1,500 Vietnamese American Trump supporters marched alongside the capitol's greens, bearing "Trump 2020" signs and slogans supporting conservative causes. As the "caravan" of Vietnamese American Trump supporters made its way across the country, "meet-and-greet" rallies were held at key Vietnamese American centers along the way. At these rallies, consistent were chants that rang: "Who defeated the Chinese Communists?" "Who defeated socialism?"—"Donald Trump!" It is as if the political mantle once bequeathed upon revered Vietnamese anticommunist leaders has been transferred to an orange-tanned, white man with blonde hair. While these rallies entailed the flag waving and sloganeering of a typical Trump rally, activities that traditionally characterizes a Vietnamese American communal gathering were also evident (e.g., the singing of the South Vietnamese national anthem, salute to the South Vietnamese flag, and karaoke of popular South Vietnamese songs). The flurries of flags mixed American, South Vietnamese, and Trump symbols into a sea of red and yellow, blue and white upon which divergent histories converged.[1]

While such an event undoubtedly demonstrated the broad and organized Vietnamese American support for Trumpian politics and the Republican Party, Vietnamese American mobilization surrounding the 2020 Presidential election also highlighted how the community's wartime and refugee past have been reconfigured within the contemporary American social landscape. Since flight from the homeland in 1975, Vietnamese refugees in the United States have consistently reutilized the symbols of their fallen nation to mobilize, organize, and represent an anticommunist Vietnamese community overseas. Most indicative of this reproduction is the widespread recognition of former Republic of Vietnam flag by Vietnamese Americans as the official symbol of their community. Similarly, the former South Vietnamese anthem, "Call to the Citizens/*Tiếng Gọi Công Dân*" is regularly sung in Vietnamese American social and political gatherings; men dressed in full military garb bearing South Vietnamese military insignias are often seen standing in attendance at Vietnamese American cultural and political events (Nguyen V. T. 2012: 911-942; Hoang T. 2021);[2] and political narratives and terminologies originating from South Vietnam are found replicated in contemporary Vietnamese American community discourse (Nguyen Y. T. 2021: 397-457). As these examples demonstrate, Vietnamese America was formed through the reconstituting of political ideas and practices which derive from the South Vietnamese past.

While the formation of a Vietnamese American community is historically complex and experiences can differ greatly from one locale to the next, in this essay, I hope to highlight an important relationship thus far underexplored in the contemporary scholarship on Vietnamese Americans: the connectivity between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America. Here, I mean not only the historical influences of the South Vietnamese past upon the Vietnamese present, but also the theoretical relationship between processes of *national formation* in South Vietnam and

community formation of the Vietnamese diaspora overseas. Scholastically, the former has been under the purview of historians of modern Vietnam, while the latter is an inquiry taken up by scholars in Ethnic studies and Asian American studies. In part a result of disciplinary divisions in contemporary academia, scholars of these two fields rarely engage with one another, are inspired by different sets of questions, and informed by different perspectives. Yet, the temporal, cultural, and political entwinements between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America (and consequently between processes of national formation and community formation) provide ample grounds for interdisciplinary dialogues which may contribute to the theoretical and empirical expansion of both fields of study.

While much of this essay will be theoretical, I draw upon my own research into "Republican anticommunism" to empirically illustrate the relationship between "national formation" and "community formation" as it pertains to the study of South Vietnam and Vietnamese America. For the purposes of this essay, I define "Republican anticommunism" as a hegemonic and dynamic nationalist ideology that had been shaped and reshaped by South Vietnamese and Vietnamese American actors across history. It is a sociopolitical construct that was produced and promulgated by the Republican state; became "consolidated" through efforts by state and non-state actors; existed as the predominant form of politics and framework of interpretation for actors in South Vietnam; and was eventually transported along with the Vietnamese refugees to construct their communities abroad. Far from an automatic or natural consequence of collective or personal trauma due to war and refugee flight, anticommunism became socially prevalent through the activities of South Vietnamese and Vietnamese American political actors to build, promote, and institutionalize the anticommunist ideas and practices. I use the descriptor "Republican" to highlight both the original historical context under which this

particular ideology was conceived and actualized, as well as the ideal to which the ideology harkens—that is, the establishment of a modern republic.

As Tuan Hoang (chapter 4 in this volume) will argue, anticommunism in Vietnam predates the formation of the Republic of Vietnam. However, in this essay, I place emphasis on the state-derived anticommunism of the Republican era because it was during this period that existing social forms of anticommunist beliefs were codified and formalized into an official doctrine that was reinforced by the coercive capability of a nation-state. States, as Itzigsohn and vom Hau argue, are important for the creation and dissemination of ideas and identities (Itzigsohn and vom Hau 2006: 193-212). During the Republican era, previous forms of anticommunist beliefs and activities became centralized in the Republican state. The state appropriated the existing "free-floating" forms of anticommunism within the Vietnamese society and deployed those ideas for its own use and legitimacy (Mann 1984: 185-213).[3] However, in doing so, the Republican state also popularized these ideas, transforming anticommunism into something standard, familiar, and hegemonic.[4]

In this essay, I hope to propose a theoretical scaffold upon which the relationship between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America can be examined and studied. The following sections will, first, briefly review the scholarship on the Vietnam War and how the Republic of Vietnam have been historically represented. The essay argues that despite advances in the field to take seriously the Republic of Vietnam as a historical "actor" and its role in the war and national formation in South Vietnam, the field lacks a diasporic perspective and fail to examine the legacies of the war and nation-building efforts upon the communities of refugees in the wake of Saigon's collapse. Second, while historical scholarship on South Vietnam fail to consider the legacies of this fallen nation, the scholarship on Vietnamese America (despite its concerns with

memory and the wartime past) lack retrospective examination of how aspects of contemporary Vietnamese America are reconfigurations of ideas, institutions, and discourse originating from the nation-building process in South Vietnam. The essay concludes with comments on possible future research agendas which takes seriously historical connectivity between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America.

{A} Republican Vietnam and National Formation

In large part, historical scholarship on the Vietnam War has focused on questions related to American interventionism and the rise (and ultimate success) of the communist movement in Vietnam. Depicted as a war in which a peasant guerrilla force was able the defeat the most powerful and modernized armed force in the world, the Vietnam War has captured the imagination of peace activists, political and military historians, and scholars of empire alike. For many Americans, the Vietnam War signified a period of deep national division, the emergence of an antiwar movement, and growing public mistrust of the government due to the deliberate deceptions by the military over the conduct of the war. As depicted through much historical works on the Vietnam War, victory of the communist guerrillas spelled not only American imperialist follies abroad, but also probed questions of morality, justice, and problematized the American claim to be champions of democracy and freedom (McMahon 2002: 159-184; Nguyen 2013: 144-163; Herring 1991: 104-119; Ryan and Fitzgerald 2009: 621-653; Small 2010: 543-553; Campbell 2007; Langguth 2012).[5] Within this literature, the communist side represents those who had championed the cause of Vietnam nationalism, fighting for Vietnamese self-determination and independence from French colonial and American imperial rule. Their victory in 1975 not only reinforces the notion that the communists were on the "right side" of history; it

also narrates the indominable capability of an indigenous people to stand against an imperialist force (Duiker 1990: 2; Harrison 1989).

Compelling as this historiography may be, the historical narrative generally deployed by historians of the war omits any serious discussion of the anticommunist Vietnamese nation that had come into being south of the 17th parallel. In the general historiography of the conflict, South Vietnam and its anticommunist ambitions are often treated as "aberrant," uncomfortable historical anomalies that are best avoided, ignored, or explained away (Tran 2013: 3-9; Miller and Vu 2009: 1-16).[6] When the Republic does have a role in the historiographic retelling, it is treated as a corrupt entity or an American puppet to be juxtaposed against the nationalist credentials of the Vietnamese communist movement (Kolko 2001; Tran 2013: 1-15).[7] The treatment of the Republic as a historical anomaly—rather than a competing nationalist force—has allowed much of the existing scholarship to disregard its political history, its role in the Vietnam War conflict, and its idealistic strivings for an independent, modernized, and prosperous nation—an idealism that was similar to much of the emerging nations within the postcolonial world. Ironically, while the literature tends to equate "national liberation" with the communist movement in Vietnam, it was the Saigon government rather than the communist insurgency that really deployed nationalism in the battle over the "hearts and minds" (Race 1972: 179-81; Vu 2007: 175-230).

The omission of the Republic of Vietnam in historical scholarship on the Vietnam War has spurred a wave of new studies examining the intellectual, diplomatic, political, and social dimensions of South Vietnam. Focusing on the nation-building during the First Republic, Phillip Catton demonstrates that Ngô Đình Diệm's efforts, although flawed, was a well-intentioned endeavor towards a particular vision of Vietnamese modernity (Catton 2003). Edward Miller

contests earlier portrayals of Diệm as an American puppet by highlighting the unique Personalist philosophy of First Republican President, his broad—at least initially—base of political support, and the conflicts between American foreign policy and South Vietnamese nation-building efforts (Miller 2013). Similarly, Geoffrey Stewart's study of the "Special Commissariat for Civic Action" recasts the national project of the Republic through the eyes of its state agents and state-builders. His work centers on the First Republic's endeavor for modernization through the cultivation of a new citizenry and establishment of a unique framework for a nation (Stewart 2017). Aside from these political histories of the Republic, Olga Dror examined the production of youths in South Vietnam through a social history of schoolbooks and pedagogical texts (Dror 2018).

Despite the growth of studies on the Republic of Vietnam and the much appreciated turn towards historical "agency," a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the national project in South Vietnam is lacking. These recent studies have prioritized the First Republican period at the cost of foregoing comprehensive examination of how South Vietnam politically and socially changed during its existence. While the Diệm administration was consequential in establishing the political and ideological foundations of the Republic, the period that followed is significant in transforming, contesting, redefining certain values laid out under Diệm. The defining works of the field, thus, have been limited by their periodization, often focusing on the early temporal slice of Republican history rather than examining the entirety of the era (Goscha 2016; Taylor 2013).[8] This limitation has prevented the scholarship from systematically examining the continuities of ideas, institutions, and forms of politics, and has precluded exploration of how such continuity was possible within a context of coups, regime changes, political instability, and civil war.

Certain nation-building initiatives of the First Republic, for example, were continued (albeit significantly reconfigured) by subsequent regimes despite fall of Diệm regime in 1963. The Strategic Hamlet program stands as a case in point. Originally conceived as a Personalist project for Vietnamese modernization under the Diệm administration, the program officially was supposed to had ended with the death of Diệm in 1963.[9] However, concepts central the Strategic Hamlet initiative such as the modernization of the countryside through the erection of fortified communities continued to be applied in counterinsurgency and nation-building projects of subsequent administrations. Reconfiguration of the fortified village concept for counterinsurgency and rural modernization are evident in the "New Life Hamlet" [*Ấp Đời Mới*/*Ấp Tân Sinh*] Program during the Directorate and the "Self-Defending—Self-Developing Communities" [*Cộng Đồng Tự Vệ—Cộng Đồng Phát Triển*] initiative of the Second Republic.[10]

In my own research, I demonstrate how an ideological education program enacted by the Republican was able to persist despite the regime changes and political turmoil of the Republican era. I point to how certain goals, practices, and norms became associated with ideological work during the Republican era, how these ideational aspects became institutionalized, and the manner through which later regimes drew upon, mimicked, and expanded upon the experiences of those that predate them to reconfigure and revamp preexisting ideological activities. (Nguyen 2021).

I place emphasis on viewing the Republican era in its entirety because of what a comprehensive vantage signifies for the examination of national formation in South Vietnam. Far from something exclusive to the First Republic, nation-building was a perpetual, systematic, and state-directed effort across the 20-odd years of the South Vietnam's existence. Although these efforts varied significantly across the Republican era, the project to create a viable, anticommunist, and independent Vietnamese Republic was one that was enduring and taken up

not only by the Diệm administration but also the regimes that followed it. Subsequently, the ideas, practices, and politics of the Republican era through efforts to construct and develop an anticommunist nation would travel with Vietnamese refugees (who were essentially former citizens of the Republic) to new communities overseas.

In my view, the Republican national project laid legacies upon the people it affected. States, as other scholars have shown, are important for the construction, promotion, and perpetuation of ideas, institutions, and norms (Skocpol 1985: 3-38; Weber 1976; Fagen 1969). On the one hand, states are necessary for the creation and maintenance of discourses, laws, and structures of governance within a polity (Huntington 1968). On the other hand, while states are important for the "institutionalization" of a polity, they are also important for creating space for citizen's civic engagement and political participation. Here, how citizens respond to the values, programs, and agendas imposed by a state matter. The discourses and norms deriving from the state can become "consolidated," variable to how it is received and engaged with by society as a whole. Citizens' participation in state projects can provide opportunities through which the goals and aims of the state are contested, evaluated, and modified by the populace. This political participation can also be a mode through which ordinary people encounter state ideas and institutions, acquiring and becoming familiarized to state discourses and ideas (Selbin 1999: 19-29, 32-33).[11]

For South Vietnam, national formation was inextricably tied to the project of creating an anticommunist society. As oft-repeated across the Republican era, the task to "build the nation" *dựng nước* must go hand-in-hand with the mission to "save the nation" *cứu nước* from communism.[12] The various regimes across the Republican era instituted anticommunist laws directed at suppressing communist ideologies and organizations.[13] Individuals engaging in

communist or communist-sympathetic activities could face lengthy prison sentences or, at times, execution. Republican administrations also instituted holidays and commemorations to generate a broad anticommunist political culture. The "Day of National Resentment" *Ngày Quốc Hận* (instituted under the Premiership of Nguyễn Khánh in 1964), for example, entailed annual state-directed activities, including military marches, public speeches by government officials, and government-sponsored exhibits documenting "communist atrocities." Citizens, however, were encouraged to enthusiastically participate in these state sponsored events, such as attending rallies and demonstrations, engage in "political study" of state-produced texts, contribute arts and poems in state-sponsored cultural production, and engage in collective commemoration.[14] Similar encouragement of societal participation occurred during the Communist Denunciation Campaign of the First Republic or the drive to form fortified villages during the Second Republic. As such, while the creation of an anticommunist nation in South Vietnam entailed state-led institutionalization, this process of national formation also necessarily included the political integration of non-state actors in the national affairs of the Republic.

Across the Republican period, efforts to form an anticommunist nation transformed anticommunism from a state-doctrine into hegemonic "cultural script" widely deployed by state and non-state actors alike. Republican anticommunist ideas, terminologies, and narratives are found reflected in newspapers, novels, poetry, music, and theatre. As others have argued, while the Republican state did not compelled writers to produce anticommunist texts, the Republican state did encourage and, at times, sponsored anticommunist cultural production (Tran 2013: 16-17; Hoang 2013: 99-167).[15] Reinforcing the anticommunist discursive production were coercive efforts of the Republican states to eliminate communist influences. Republican regimes enacted laws and decrees to criminalize communist literature, organizations, activities, and even

thoughts. The Republican state, furthermore, implemented comprehensive, systematic, and violent counterinsurgent campaigns, seeking to not only "exterminate" guerrillas in the jungles, but also those "communist sympathizers" within the civilian population.[16] Thus, state projects and programs promoting anticommunist nationalism existed in tandem with laws and coercive methods meant to eliminate communist and communist-sympathetic activities in South Vietnam. This dual aspect of Republican ideological work allowed a national, anticommunist political culture to flourish and become consolidated across the Republican society.

Given this history of persistent and, at times, intense nation-building in South Vietnam, one cannot assume that the social, ideological, and cultural effects of these efforts simply ceased following the collapse of the Republic. While the Republican state proper no longer existed following 1975, the narratives, ideas, and practices that had become familiar, hegemonic, and widespread throughout the Republican era continued. These are the products of the 20-odd years of Republican national formation during which citizens acquired anticommunist political, ideological, and culture repertoires that had informed their lives in South Vietnam. In their flight from the homeland, these refugees brought with them the ideals, loyalties, and discourses of their former nation. Rather than disappearing into the historical abyss, Republican anticommunism was drawn upon by Vietnamese refugees to construct their diasporic communities overseas. As those in South Vietnam utilized existing anticommunist repertoires to interpret their experiences during war, those who fled the country following 1975 drew upon the narratives transported over to frame their experiences as refugees. Succinctly, the social, political, and cultural byproducts of what was *national formation* in South Vietnam laid the foundation for *community formation* in Vietnamese America. In this light, scholars who study South Vietnam and the Vietnam War can valuably contribute to the examination of how past institutions, culture,

politics, and discourses inform the creation of a Vietnamese refugee community in the United States.

This is not to say that reproduction from South Vietnam to Vietnamese America was "natural" or automatic. Rather, this reproduction (as with any other social process in history) is shaped through conflicts, struggles, and contestations. Debates over how an aspect of South Vietnam should be reproduce (or even whether this aspect should be reproduced) are to be expected. Even the reusage of the South Vietnamese flag—a symbol so evidently central to Vietnamese American identity—was at one point questioned and challenged.[17] The history of how and why certain aspects are retained while others are erased remains to be written. Furthermore, certain ideas, practices, and institutions may become marginalized at one point in history, but only to reappear and become dominant at later point. Here, the reputation and memory of Ngô Đình Diệm stands as a quintessential case. Demonized following his death in 1963, Diệm was eventually rehabilitated by his supporters during the Second Republic (Nguyen Y. T. 2021: 242-310).[18] This rehabilitation process continued into the post-1975 era within Vietnamese refugee communities, where Diệm is now remembered as a patriot whose death was an avoidable but catastrophic tragedy for the Republic. Fruitful examination can emerge from examining the historical continuities, as well as the discontinuities, between the South Vietnamese past and the Vietnamese American present.

In these regards, historians of the Republican era must play the important role of examining the origins and historical transformation of cultural, social, and political aspects that had been reproduced from South Vietnam. They can fruitfully answer questions about why certain aspects of South Vietnam are reproduced, and why others are not. Reproduction, furthermore, does not necessarily mean linear or static continuity from the Republican era and

into Vietnamese America. The nuances that historians of Vietnam can provide will move contemporary scholarship towards a richer, complex, and empirically-grounded understanding of both communities, and speak to the historical and diasporic connectiveness between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America.

{A} Vietnamese Americans and Community Formation

If Republican anticommunism was an important aspect of politics in South Vietnamese past, its importance continues into Vietnamese American present. While early studies of Vietnamese refugees almost exclusively focused on their cultural and economic adjustment to American life, recent examination of the community has charted an interdisciplinary agenda that brings together diverse disciplines. Of particular importance, this scholarship has recently turned towards collective memory to explore how the community negotiates with its anticommunist, war-ridden and refugee past. Thuy Vo Dang highlights how anticommunism operates as a "cultural praxis— a mode for engaging in memory and meaning-making practices" (Vo Dang 2008: xii). For Vo Dang, Vietnamese American anticommunism and its usage in commemoration and collective memory allow Vietnamese refugees to "discuss the complexity of post-war grappling with death, loss, exile, survival for those on the ground" (Vo Dang 2008: xii). Similarly, Aguilar San-Juan, discusses how Vietnamese Americans engage in "strategic memory projects," mobilizing symbols and representations of their history of war and refugeeism to build the cultural, economic, and political infrastructure of the community (Aguilar-San Juan 2009). Phuong Tran Nguyen's recent *Becoming Refugee Americans* highlights how nostalgia, "pain of exile," and the political desire to differentiate the overseas community from communist Vietnam were melded into the formation of Vietnamese America. He argues, "although thinking about the past rekindled traumas of war and exile, most emigres did not have the luxury of forgetting about

Vietnam" (Nguyen P. T. 2017: 61). Indeed, shaped by traumas of war and refugee flight, Vietnamese American music, arts, and literature reflected a nostalgic longing for the South Vietnamese homeland while vilifying the communist regime that had taken power.

Despite the intellectual concern by these scholars towards the refugee's South Vietnamese past, exploration of that past relies less on actual examination of South Vietnamese history and society than the post-war renditions of that society captured in cultural productions, oral histories, and commemorative practices of refugeed Vietnamese Americans. In part, the problem of how South Vietnam factors into the study of Vietnamese Americans is a consequence of how the Vietnam War and the post-war refugee migration are approached by this emerging scholarship. For one, when it comes to the historical bearings that South Vietnam has on Vietnamese America, this scholarship relies on the orthodox historical narrative of the Vietnam War literature which views the conflict as primarily an imperialist intervention by the United States. Here too, the political, ideological, social, and institutional dimensions of the Republic are ignored, and, when provided a historical role, treated as a corrupt, "aberrant," or a puppet of America's imperial mission. The anticommunist political culture of the Southern Republic, as conceptualized in these studies, is less a product of ideological work or indigenous nation-building by the Republican state, than it is an imitation of American foreign policy or a psychological response to the horrors of communist violence and forced migration (Le C. N. 2009; Valverde 2012; Vo N. M. 2004; Nguyen Y. T. 2018: 65-433).[19]

To arrive at a more nuanced and historically grounded understanding of how South Vietnam and Vietnamese America are related, the scholarship must first reconfigure its understanding of Vietnamese America's past, its perception of the Vietnam War and the historical implications of that war. In the recent literature reviewed above, the treatment of the Vietnam War

and its relationship to Vietnamese America largely conform to the "Critical Refugee Studies" approach outlined by Yen Le Espiritu in 2006. Her call for a redirection of the study of Vietnamese refugees (and refugee at large) rests on a critique of how the Vietnamese refugee have been historically represented and subjectified in American discourse. For Espiritu, traditional scholarship has represented the Vietnamese as the "good refugee," conjoining depictions of refugees as passive and pathetic victims in dire need of American "rescue," with caricatures of Vietnamese Americans as part of the successful and assimilated Asian American "model minority. Such a depiction, on the one hand, reinforces orientalizing narratives that "naturalizes Vietnam's neediness and America's riches." On the other, it shifts the conversation away from the imperialistic dimensions of American foreign policy and allows the US to retrieve international legitimacy following its defeat in the Vietnam War. Writing in the context of another American war unfolding in Iraq and Afghanistan, Espiritu argues that the field must take the Vietnamese refugees as a site of critique, understanding their history and formation as "subjects of US war and imperialism" (Espiritu 2006: 410-433).

Although Espiritu provides an eloquent, critical, and important redirecting from the assimilation-centered frameworks of earlier studies, Critical Refugee Studies is an inadequate framework for addressing the full ideological, historical and political scope of the Vietnamese refugee experience. There are two main issues with such a framing. The first of which is the treatment of "Vietnamese subjectivity" as primarily a product of American involvement in Vietnam. Anticommunism, as such, is understood as a something that results not from the South Vietnamese history of national formation, but seemingly a strategic response to the racial, political and social landscape of the United States. While one can agree that post-war American memory work has sought to repaint the Vietnam War as a "good war," and that these efforts have

led to the excision of the South Vietnamese side of the story, Vietnamese American subjectivities cannot be reduced to something simply "asserted" by Vietnamese Americans because their history is excluded from American discourse. Nor are Vietnamese American political beliefs and ideologies merely something "adopted" by Vietnamese Americans to make themselves visible and understood (Espiritu 2006: 410-433). Such a depiction implies the primacy of the United States in the making of political subjectivities in the South Vietnamese and Vietnamese American context. It avoids discussions of how the Vietnamese themselves are primarily responsible for the historical crafting, development, dissemination, and, ultimately, transplantation anticommunist beliefs and practices.

Espiritu is correct to note that Vietnamese American subjectivity "cannot be exclusively defined within the US context." However, it is further the case that these subjectivities did not solely emerge from the "US war in and occupation of Southeast Asia." Republican anticommunism, as it existed in South Vietnam, was not some ideological import that came with "US 'counterinsurgency' actions, anticommunist insurgency, terrorism counteraction, and peacekeeping operations" (Espiritu 2006: 410-433). It is a product of the activities of state-builders in South Vietnam who actively sought to institute anticommunism as their own state ideology—at times, through programs scorned, unratified, or contested by their American advisors. The conceptualization provided by Espiritu, ultimately, lends too great explanatory power to American hegemony, and conflates the anticommunism of South Vietnam and Vietnamese America with the anticommunism that exists in American foreign policy (Latham 1997: 112).[20]

Second, while Espiritu acknowledges that "Vietnam is a country and not a war," she is primarily concerned the production of "American identities and for the shoring up of US

militarism," and thus leaves little room for excavating how Vietnamese subjectivities are historically forged, apart from those explicitly linked to American-related processes (Espiritu 2006). She does not provide a way to understand Vietnam as that "country" and recasts Vietnam—as traditionally done in the historiography of the war—as little more than a background for exploring and critiquing American actions and subjectivities. Here, I am not calling for the examination of some pre-migration, orientalized Vietnamese/Asian "culture" or the (re)discovery of some primordial essence to Vietnamese ethnicity. Rather, my critique lies in the need for proper engagement with processes of national formation in this geographical space we call Vietnam.

A similar approach to South Vietnam is found in Phuong Tran Nguyen's recent book. While Nguyen acknowledges the importance of pre-migration social notables, symbols, music, and culture in the creation of Vietnamese America, his section on the history of South Vietnam stretches little more than 7 pages within the 220-page book (Nguyen P. T. 2017: 23-30). In the narration, he dwelled more so on American "imperialist" intents in Southeast Asia than the activities, goals, and ideals of South Vietnamese political actors. When the South Vietnamese were mentioned, the focus was on the "hand-picked" and "mediocre" leaders and elites who "lacked either the desire or the authorization to share power" (Ibid.: 27, 28). South Vietnam, as argued by Nguyen, constituted "little more than a diverse collection of religious, political, economic, and geographic interest groups"—an argument that reflects the orientalist impressions at least one writer of *The Guardian* during the mid-1960's (Nguyen P. T. 2017: 27; *The Guardian* 1966). In Nguyen's view and that of others, the "anticommunist republic" (Nguyen 2017: 27) was little more than an American political creation. As that "aberrant" historical

anomaly, the Republic of Vietnam is deprived of its political legitimacy, nationalist authenticity, and historical agency through these depictions.

Nguyen's work, furthermore, is not oblivious to the rampant anticommunist ideology within Vietnamese America. His book tackles the issue in depth, interweaving how anticommunism was melded into the identity, collective memory, and cultural politics of Vietnamese exile communities overseas (Nguyen P. T. 2017: 77-96). However, he fails to connect that Vietnamese American anticommunism with the ideological and nation-building activities that has transpired in South Vietnam. Nguyen is correct in pointing out how Vietnamese American anticommunism has been shaped by the experiences of refugees and their interactions with the American (Cold War) political landscape. However, Nguyen fails to historically examine the anticommunism that had animated in South Vietnam, opting to caricaturize this ideology as primarily a product of from American interventionism. In doing so, he presents the post-1975 manifestation of the anticommunist ideology as comprehensible and explainable while the anticommunism that existed prior as artificial, anomalous and negligible for understanding Vietnamese America. He fails to conceive the anticommunism of Vietnamese Americans as an extension or a recalibration of ideas, rhetoric, and narratives once developed in South Vietnam. He, like others in the field, fails to connect South Vietnam and Vietnamese America.

As have been suggested in the previous section, the complexities of anticommunist politics so eloquently articulated in the recent literature on Vietnamese America have deep historical moorings. These moorings have consistently bore themselves (and continues to bear themselves) in Vietnamese America. The diverse "praxis" of anticommunism that Vo Dang identified is not something solely founded in the United States (Vo Dang 2008). Rather, it has

existed in national commemorative practices, celebrations, and cultural productions of South Vietnam. Citizens of the Republic of Vietnam had once mourned soldiers who died for the "just cause" *chính nghĩa* of anticommunism, celebrated mythological heroes and heroines, and annually observed state-instituted holidays.[21] "Black April"—the annual commemorative holiday that marks the Fall of Saigon in 1975—is otherwise known as "Ngày Quốc Hận" ("Day of National Resentment") (Vo Dang 2008: 105).[22] While Vietnamese Americans annually date this commemoration to the 30th of April, this holiday was originally dated the 20th of July to signify the signing of the Geneva Accords; and, similar to its transmogrification into the Vietnamese American context, South Vietnamese commemoration of the Day of National Resentment involved anticommunist mass demonstrations, public speeches, and social remembrance.[23]

We find in early Vietnamese America political movements that drew upon the anticommunist discourse, norms, and politics of the former Republic. These movements were important for not only the articulation of a Vietnamese refugee identity; they were also crucial for the formation of community, belonging, and solidarity amongst the exiles overseas. Early Vietnamese refugees were enmeshed in what I have elsewhere called the "Homeland Restoration" movement. Essentially a paramilitary movement, the goal was to "restore" the lost nation of South Vietnam—whether through the specific reconstruction of the Republic of Vietnam or, at the very broadest, a "non-communist" Vietnamese state. The conceived reconstruction of the homeland was violent in nature, entailing the forcible overthrow of Vietnamese communism through popular insurrection and guerrilla war. In mobilizing for this movement, Vietnamese refugees drew upon familiar Republican anticommunist terminologies, rhetoric, and discourse to articulate their vision for the possibility of successful communist

overthrow. The movement also aided in reviving anticommunist political violence against suspected communists and communist sympathizers, reconstituted political legitimacy for former South Vietnamese military officers and servicemen, and reinstituted political forms and discourses which glorifies anticommunist nationalism and the Republic of Vietnam (Nguyen Y. T. 2018; Nguyen Y. T. 2021: 414-423).

Emerging in concert with this movement to "restore" the homeland were efforts by Vietnamese exiles for increased protections of refugees fleeing the homeland and to demand human rights in Vietnam. These efforts similarly drew upon existing anticommunist discourses, particularly those narratives emphasizing the brutality of communist rule, religious persecution, cultural destructions, and "crimes" and "atrocities" committed by communists across Vietnamese history. Former Republican anticommunist narratives, on the one hand, aided in generating an image of a struggling, repressive, miserable post-war Vietnam within which compatriots, family, friends, and relatives were desperate to escape or radically change. On the other hand, mobilizers deployed familiar politicized language and discourses to popularize a vision of communist overthrow through guerrilla uprising while simultaneously provide the moral rationale for human rights advocacy. Because these movements were framed through familiar and existing bodies of beliefs, mobilization for Human Rights and Homeland Restoration brought together diverse coalitions of social activists, clergymen, intellectuals, former politicians, cultural producers, and military veterans (Nguyen Y. T. 2021: 410-412, 423-426).

Resultantly, an increasingly vocal, organized, and politicized community was formed through this mobilization—a community whose identity is premised on the refugees' status as victims of communism. Mobilization around common causes placed the disparate Vietnamese communities in dialogue with one another, promoted cultural activities, established shared

holidays, (re)instituted nationalist symbols, and generated an "imagined community" of an anticommunist diaspora overseas. As such, redeployment of Republican anticommunism to address the contemporary challenges and concerns of Vietnamese refugees aided in the formation of Vietnamese America (Ibid.: 398-405). Here, the legacies of nation-building (the past discourses and politics of the Republican era) significantly factor into how the Vietnamese American community was formed and the shape that this community ultimately took.

{A} Charting a Research Agenda

In this essay, I have argued for a historical framework that approaches Vietnamese American anticommunism from its rooting in the nation-building process that transpired in South Vietnam. This approach does not obfuscate the attention to Vietnam as a "war" (as Espiritu fears), nor does it treat Vietnam as just a "country." Rather, it takes South Vietnam as a site to explore the construction of Vietnamese subjectivity, institutions, and practices. Formed in the context of a geopolitically divided world, this process of national formation left lasting legacies which can be found in the identities, beliefs, and politics of contemporary Vietnamese America. This approach does not necessarily discount the interventionist role of the United States in shaping the historical happenings in Vietnam. However, rather than viewing the United States as a hegemonic force that unilaterally determined the beliefs and activities of the South Vietnamese (and subsequently Vietnamese Americans), US foreign policy and military activities are treated as the background upon which Vietnamese actors navigated, both in conformity and opposition. This Vietnam-centered approach, thus, diverges sharply from approaches which call for the centering American subjectivity and actions in Vietnam. Rather than utilizing the conflict in Vietnam and Vietnamese subjects to address the "shaping and articulation of US nationhood"

(Espiritu 2006), it will address the role of the United States only when they factor into how Vietnamese actors shaped and articulated their own Vietnamese nationalism and belonging.

To correct any misconceptions, I do not here call for a scholarship which prioritizes the "South Vietnamese side" of the story, but rather an approach that views South Vietnam and Vietnamese America as dynamic, social constructs, intimately linked through history and people (Anderson 2006; Hobsbawn 1983: 1-14; Giddens 1987, 1990; Gellner 1983). As such, South Vietnamese voices, efforts, and ideals in attempting to construct a nation portrays not some "correct" or "authentic" renditions of the historical past, but rather something political and biased and, thus, should be treated as such. No more "real" than "North Vietnam" or this territorial space we today refer to as "Vietnam," "South Vietnam," like any other nation, is a consequence of political conflicts and the efforts by state and non-state actors to construct and develop an "imagined community" of compatriots. This essay, thus, advocates for a broad and comprehensive research agenda which examines the sociohistorical *construction*, *development*, and *movement* of ideas, practices, and institutions that originated through efforts to build a nation in South Vietnam and have (re)manifested in Vietnamese refugee communities abroad. To engage in such an enterprise, the first step is to examine South Vietnam as a socially-constructed national society—not only in terms of that "imagined community," but all the social and political activities which contributes to the reification of the nation. From there, the task is to trace how and why beliefs and practices formed and developed in South Vietnam migrated, how these beliefs and practices are reconfigured abroad, and the ways in which they contribute to the formation of a Vietnamese diaspora.

While this essay has been focused on the reconstitution of Republican anticommunism, this state-derived ideology constitutes but a slice of the South Vietnamese and Vietnamese

American history. We find in early Vietnamese America the emergence of charitable and social service organizations seeking to provide refugees a voice in the relocation process, advocate for community funding, and expand social and economic opportunities for those within the community (Tran 2007). However, little in the scholarship points to how South Vietnamese civil society may have shaped associational organizations in Vietnamese America. Van Nguyen-Marshall (chapter 2 in this volume) will detail the pluralistic civil society that emerged in South Vietnam. Like with the transmogrification of Republican anticommunism into the diasporic context, one cannot assume that the diverse organizations, associations, and relationships that once constituted civil society in South Vietnam simply disappeared with the collapse of the Republic in 1975. Her work lays the foundations for possible exploration of how and whether contemporary "Mutual Assistance Associations," volunteer agencies, charities, social service organizations, or advocacy groups in Vietnamese America had any roots in, or drew inspiration from, the "associational life" of the South Vietnamese past.

Thien-Huong Ninh (chapter 13 in this volume) explores the reconstitution of "holy mothers" in Vietnamese diasporic communities since the Fall of Saigon. For Ninh, the remaking of religious practices and beliefs by Vietnamese refugees "not only re-centralized their fragmented communities…but have also played a pivotal role in popularizing female religious figures." Indeed, as Vietnamese refugees carried with them their political ideas and practices during their flight abroad, they similarly "carried their holy mothers…and transplanted their faith on new soils." Ninh's work is the steppingstone for broad socio-historical examination of how diverse religious organization, beliefs, and practices stemming from the Republican era were transplanted abroad to shape the religious engagement of Vietnamese Americans today.

Similarly, in the realm of music, theatre and arts, *nhạc vàng* and certain cultural and theatrical forms from the Republican era have influenced contemporary Vietnamese American productions (Lieu N. 2011: 79-91; Nguyen Y. T. 2018; Reyes 1999). Scholars of musicology and the theatrical arts can fruitfully examine the transformation of this musical form as it enters new digital spaces, media platforms, and reaches a diasporic audience in the post-1975 era. Vinh Phu Pham has begun this discussion, pointing to how songs like "Chiều Tây Đô" is a "legacy of the [Republic of Vietnam]" and the how the reusage of Republican past is a source of "livelihood" for this musical genre (Pham 2019).[24] In the realm of intellectual culture, Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, in chapter 3 in this volume, will demonstrate the cosmopolitan and modernist nature of South Vietnamese intellectuals. Although his piece is focused on the Republican era, he calls for greater consideration of the "antecedent history" of Vietnamese Americans, particularly with respects to the social, cultural, and intellectual dimensions of South Vietnam. His work is a starting point for examining continuities in political thought and philosophical tenors that had migrated from South Vietnam to Vietnamese America. South Vietnam also boasted a comprehensive and robust educational system influenced by both French and American curricula (Tran V. C. 2014: 4-25; Nguyen, Tran, Nguyen, Tran, and Le 2006). Whether and how pedagogical philosophies and practices from South Vietnam are replicated the educational programs (such as Vietnamese-language classes and textbooks for Vietnamese American children) operating in contemporary Vietnamese America may also be a fruitful site for research.

The scope for new research excavating the historical and transnational relationships between South Vietnam and Vietnamese America is vast. As scholars of these communities, we must begin viewing South Vietnam and Vietnamese American through a lens of historical continuity and connectiveness, and how past efforts to construct a South Vietnamese national

society lends itself to the construction of a Vietnamese diaspora overseas. In doing so, scholars of both Vietnam and Vietnamese America can come closer into dialogue and build on one another's research. It is in my view that such dialogue is necessary for the expansion of both fields, and, resultantly, can generate diverse agendas that are both diasporic and historical.

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[1] "Diễn hành xe ủng hộ Tổng Thống Trump & cảnh sát tại Nam California," *Saigon Broadcasting Television Network* [*SBTN*], October 4, 2020; "Houston chào đón đoàn hành trình từ California đến Washington DC," *SBTN*, October 7, 2020; "New Orleans & Biloxi chào đón đoàn hành trình từ California đến Washington DC, "*SBTN*, October 10, 2020; "Tuần hành ủng hộ TT Trump trong khu trung tâm Thương Mại Eden," *SBTN*, October 12, 2020; "Tuần hành ủng hộ Tổng Thống Donald Trump trước Tòa Bạch Óc," *SBTN*, October 14, 2020.

[2] These come from my own observations of Vietnamese American activities in the Little Saigon of Orange County, CA.

[3] For use of "free-floating," see Michael Mann.

[4] For Republican anticommunism as a "hegemonic ideology," see Nguyen Y. T. (2021).

[5] Questions of morality is particularly notable in recent critique of American ventures into Iraq and Afghanistan like that of Ryan and Fitzgerald (2009), Small (2010), and Campbell (2007). For American deceit, South Vietnamese incompetence, and immorality of the war, see also Langguth (2012).

[6] For a critique of how the Republic of Vietnam is treated in Vietnamese and Vietnam War studies, see Miller and Vu (2009) and Nu-Anh Tran (2013). The latter's review of the Vietnam War scholarship points to how the Republic of Vietnam is often considered "an aberration."

[7] This is most evident in Kolko (2001). See also Tran (2013)'s critique of existing Vietnamese Studies and Vietnam War literature.

[8] Recent generalist histories of the Vietnam that treats the Republic of Vietnam as an actual historical actor in the conflict, like that of Goscha (2016) and Taylor (2013), do not go into depth enough about the ideological, social, political, and institutional dimensions of the Republic to examine notions of continuity and change.

[9] See "Mục Đích Xây Dựng Ấp Chiên Lược," *Chiến Sĩ* 84 (1962), 13-15; "Buổi Nói Chuyện của Ông Bộ Trưởng Nội Vụ Bùi Văn Lương về Ấp Chiến Lược," *Chiến Sĩ* 87 (1962), 11-17. The "Strategic Hamlet" concept was also expanded into other domains to "revolutionize" the totality of the South Vietnamese. On the formation of "Strategic Area" *Khu Chiến Lược* to renovate governmental organs: "Phần Thứ II: Góp Ý về việc thành lập các Khu Chiến Lược," September 5, 1963, and "Khu Chiến Lược Bộ Y Tế: Khu Ước," October 12, 1963, Folder 3031, Phông Bộ Y Tế [BYT], Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II [TTLTQGII]. On "Strategic Cluster" *Khóm Chiến Lược* to modernize and transform urban communities: Running series entitled "Khóm Chiến Lược," *Saigon Mới*, January 2-January 29, 1962.

[10] On New Life Hamlet: "Đường Lối Xây Dựng Nông Thôn Trong Năm 1967," March 29, 1967, Folder 29737, Phông Phủ Thủ Tướng Việt Nam Cộng Hòa [PTTVNCH], TTLTQGII. On Self-Defending—Self-Developing Communities: "Đẩy Mạnh Kế Hoạch Cộng Đồng Tự Vệ-Cộng Đồng Phát Triển Địa Phương Để Kiến Tạo Hòa Bình và Thịnh Vượng," April 27, 1971, Folder 32656, PTTVNCH, TTLTQGII.

[11] On definition of "consolidation," see Selbin (1999).

[12] The conjoining of *dựng nước* and *cứu nước* manifested as early as 1958 under the First Republic. A study document of Ngô Đình Diệm's 1958 National Day Proclamation, for example, argued that the "task to save the nation and build the nation is a responsibility of all the people" ("Tài Liệu Học Tập Số 7 ngày 28-10-58: Hiệu Triệu của Tổng Thống Nhân Lễ Quốc Khánh Ngày 26-10-1958," Folder 3031, BYT, TTLTQGII).

[13] Ordinance 47 passed in 1956 defined being a communist or aiding communist activities as a capital crime. The infamous Law 10/59 passed under the First Republic, for example, enacted heavy penalties (including execution and forced labor) on "communists" and violent criminals ("Tòa án quân sự đặc biệt đã thành lập," *Saigon Mới* June 1, 1959; "Chapter 5: Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960," in Gravel (1971: 242-269).

[14] "Cuộc Thi Sáng Tác Văn Nghệ do Nha Vô Tuyến Việt Nam Tổ Chức ngày 20-7-1964," June 5, 1964; "Biên Bản Phiên Họp Liên Bộ ngày 19-6-1964 vào hồi 16g tại Phủ Đặc Ủy Thanh Niên và Thể Thao v/v Chuẩn Bị Cho Kế Hoạch Phát Động Chương Trình Công Tác Xã Hội của Thanh Niên Hướng Về Ngày Quốc Hận 20-7"; "Chương

Trình Lễ Quốc Hận 10 Năm Tội Ác Việt Cộng 20-7-1964," July 7, 1964, Folder 1773, Phông Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông, TTLTQGII.

[15] See Nu-Anh Tran (2013) on contributions of northern emigres to the Communist Denunciation Campaign. See also, Hoang T. (2013).

[16] Apart from the infamous draconian Law 59 of the Diệm administration, subsequent regimes also passed laws criminalizing communism. Law 093-SK/CT passed under Nguyễn Khánh, for example, placed heavy penalties on "individuals, parties, organizations, congregations and activities [connected to]…the ideology of communism or communist sympathizing neutralism" ("Lần Đầu Tiên, Chính Phủ Chống Cộng miền Nam VN," *Tự Do*, Febuary 18, 1964). Similarly, the 1965 Charter of the Directorate dictated that primary duty of the military administration was to ensure "the retreat and extermination of the communist infiltrators" ("Ước Pháp ngày 19-6-65 của Việt Nam Cộng Hoà," *Chính Luận,* June 22, 1965). The Constitutions of both the First (Article 7) and Second Republic (Article 4) made explicit that any communist-related activities were federally forbidden ("Nguyên văn bản Hiến pháp Cộng Hòa VN đã được Tổng Thống sữa đổi và Quốc hội chấp thuận," *Saigon Mới* October 26, 1956; "Hiến pháp Việt Nam Cộng Hòa," May 24, 1967, Folder 29738, PTTVNCH, TTLTQGII).

[17] An editorial published in *Trắng Đen* (one of the largest news organs of early Vietnamese America) in 1976 questioned the usage of the Republican flag and the Republican anthem as symbols to represent Vietnamese exiles overseas. This editorial by Nguyễn Nhật Minh suggested the scrapping of the former Republican flag, deeming it a symbol that "the international world now disregards" due to the activities of Thiệu and his administration. Rather than using the former Republican anthem, the author suggested using Phạm Duy's iconic composition "Việt Nam, Việt Nam." This idea, however, was never adopted by Vietnamese exiles, but it did spark debate (if not retort) by readers, as well as a response in support of the Republican flag by the editor of *Trắng Đen* (Nguyễn Nhật Minh, "Quốc Kỳ-Quốc Ca Nào Cho Việt Kiều Lưu Vong," *Trắng Đen* 12, May 31, 1976; "Dư Âm Về Quốc Kỳ, Quốc Ca," *Trắng Đen* 19, July 7, 1976).

[18] Following the First Republic, the death of Diệm was widely celebrated as the "November Revolution" by citizens in South Vietnam. Tribunals were set up by subsequent "revolutionary" military administrations, seeking to dispense justice against those who supported or aided the "corruption" and "nepotism" of the "old regime." For an extended history of the Interregnum Period, see Nguyen Y. T. (2021)

[19] For critique of the literature on Vietnamese America, see Nguyen Y. T. (2018).

[20] My efforts to decenter American power from the analysis of specific regional conflicts in the Cold War are far from novel. While the "U.S. is at the center" of postwar order building, "each state and society shapes the making of order to a varying degree, from local to the global."

[21] Ngày Quân Lực (Armed Forces Day) was annually commemorated on June 19th in South Vietnam. Historically, the date marked the transition from the civilian administration of Phan Huy Quát to the military regime of the Directorate (Ủy Ban Lãnh Đạo Quốc Gia) in 1965. The same date is commemorated annually in Vietnamese refugee communities after 1975. Other state-mandated holidays included National Day which was originally October 26th under the First Republic to mark the founding of the Republic of Vietnam. Following 1963, National Day was on the 1st of November to mark the "November Revolution" which toppled the Diệm administration.

[22] On alternative name of Black April as "Ngày Quốc Hận," see Vo Dang (2008).

[23] "Nhân ngày Quốc Hận 20-7: Đình chỉ ca nhạc và du hí," *Tự Do* July 9, 1964; "Cuộc biểu tình vĩ đại nhất trong 10 năm qua: 1 triệu người biểu tình đòi bắc tiến," *Tự Do,* July 20, 1964.

[24] His presentation has been heavily cited in the Vietnamese-language press (e.g., "Hội thảo: 'Nhạc Vàng,' di sản trường tồn của Việt Nam Cộng Hòa," *Voice of America* (VOA) *Tiếng Việt*, October 31, 2019.