DIVERGENT VOICES:
REFLECTIONS ON VIETNAMESE WOMEN’S WARTIME AND POSTWAR STORIES

by

Thu Vu

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ABSTRACT

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by Thu Vu

Using a multi-disciplinary approach of Anthropology and History, this thesis examines changes in Vietnamese gender roles from the French colonial administration period through the Indochina war, the Vietnam war, and the post-war period of economic reform of doi moi. I argue that to understand changes in Vietnamese gender roles we need to focus on the connections between gender roles and the ideology of motherhood and how gender roles and expectations shift over time. I also argue that whereas the ideology of motherhood has not changed, gender roles and gender expectations associated with motherhood have. During the war years, the Vietnamese Communist Party used the symbol of motherhood as a way to motivate women to participate in the wars, promote national unity, and create gender expectations. I show the range of gender roles played by women during the war years. The State has excluded voices of women who are not politically affiliated with them. Finally, I argue that to understand the effects of Vietnam’s economic policy of doi moi on women’s lives, we need to focus our attention on the connection between neoliberalism and gender.
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Project Objectives

This thesis examines changes in Vietnamese gender roles from the time of French colonial administration (late 1880s-1945) through the Indochina war (1945-1954), the Vietnam war (1954-1975), and into the postwar period of economic reform known as doi moi in the late 1980s. The combatants in the three decade long period of hostilities changed over time. From 1945 to 1954, the Vietnamese Communist Party conducted an anti-colonial war against the French. After the French left in 1954, the Vietnamese Communist Party, by then the government of North Vietnam, conducted what they saw as a war of reunification against the illegitimate government of South Vietnam, which lasted until shortly after the US withdrew in 1975. The earlier period of the anti-colonial war against the French, from 1945-54, is generally known as the Indochina war. There are various terms used by scholars to refer to the second period of warfare from 1954-1975. It has been known as the American war, the Vietnam war, and the Vietnamese civil war. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use the term Vietnam war to refer to the second period of warfare. I also explore the effects of State economic reform policy doi moi on women’s lives in the postwar period. I also examine my dual roles of a western student researcher and an overseas Vietnamese woman and how these roles shape my relationship to this project and its participants.
The actual stories told in this thesis originate from perspectives specific to living Vietnamese women. The knowledge I gained through participant observation and interviews with Vietnamese women in Ho Chi Minh city and Dong Thap province are used to analyze changes in women’s roles in Vietnam during and after the two wars. Additional information from a wide range of primary sources, including personal memoirs, and museum wartime photographs and artifacts, as well as secondary sources, such as scholarly books, journals and monographs, helps to fill in the details of the picture provided by my fieldwork.

This thesis focuses on four main questions:

- How have gender roles changed in Vietnam, from pre-colonial times (43AD-1880s) through the French colonial administration, the Indochina war (1945-1954), the Vietnam war (1954-1975), and into the post-war period of economic reform known as doi moi in the late 1980s? Why did the gender roles change and how have they affected the lives of women?

- How do the motivations of women who chose to participate in the hostilities differ from those women who decided to remain with their families? Do women still live with the consequences of their decisions made many years ago?

- What affect has the Vietnamese Communist Party’s imposition of the economic policy of doi moi had upon women’s lives? Has the Party rhetoric idealizing the role of mother in Vietnamese society had much impact upon the lives of women? Why have these changes occurred?

- Lastly, in reference to research methodology, what is the best way to define my position within this project? How do I, an overseas Vietnamese woman, educated in
Canada and thoroughly imbued with Canadian social values for many years, negotiate between the dual roles of student researcher and insider? What advantages and limitations do these roles place upon me?

In this chapter, I discuss my connection with the project. I explore my dual roles as a western educated female student researcher and an overseas Vietnamese in relation to this project and its participants. I also explain the advantages and limitations entailed in these roles. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the research approaches used in this thesis. This research uses an interdisciplinary approach drawing from the disciplines of both anthropology and history, which allows me to diversify theory and methodology.

Recognizing that I am an overseas Vietnamese female student researcher, I have kept four goals in mind when conveying the experiences and stories of the Vietnamese women during and after the period of post-colonial conflict in Vietnam. My first goal is to situate my own place and identity relative to both the project and the participants. The second goal is to highlight the changes in Vietnamese gender roles and gender expectations and continuity in the ideology of motherhood from the French colonial period through the Indochina war, the subsequent Vietnam war, and the postwar or doi moi period. My third and final goal is to illustrate the range of voices and motivations of those women who participated directly in the hostilities and those who opted to remain with their families during the conflict. Lastly I aim to demonstrate the various effects of postwar economic reform policy of doi moi on women’s lives.
In keeping with the research questions, I have three interrelated arguments. I argue that to understand changes in Vietnamese gender roles from the pre-colonial through the postwar years, we need to develop a systematic approach that focuses on the connections between the ideology of motherhood, gender roles, and gender expectations and how these shift over time. In Vietnam, one cannot talk about gender without making reference to motherhood, as mothers are highly respected in Vietnamese society. As such, we need to examine how the State uses motherhood as a symbol to construct gender and national rhetoric. By situating the analysis within a temporal context, we can begin to understand how the State uses motherhood as a way to promote national loyalties and to exclude certain groups of women (i.e. those who are not politically affiliated with the Vietnamese Communist Party) by imposing gender expectations. Additionally, we will gain better understanding of the politics and tensions involved in the construction of Vietnamese gender and how the ideology of motherhood has been used by the State to shape gender roles and gender expectations.

Research carried out by historians, anthropologists, and feminist scholars demonstrates that the construction of national symbols has always been framed within the contexts of gender and family (Smith 2003: 55; Yuval-Davis 1996: 22; Amireh 2003: 728; Herr 2003: 137; Kim-Puri 2005: 141). Within the national family, mothers have responsibility for maintaining cultural values including educating their children in the properly gendered behaviour (Yuval-Davis 1996: 22-23; Blom 2000: 8; 30; Kim-Puri 2005: 141; Amireh 2003: 748). The concept of ‘national mothers’ has been used in both western and non-western societies to promote bonding between
individual and national loyalties as well as highlighted national differences and boundaries (Bracewell 1996: 25; Yuval-Davis 1996: 1920; Ryan 2000: 75; Kim-Puri 2005: 142; Wenk 2000: 63; Dombrowski 1999: 18; Thompson 1999: 282; Peteet 1997: 108). As such, motherhood is not universal but rather a contested political construct. While some women have used the ideology of motherhood to participate in war and assert their claim to political legitimacy in the new nation, others have used motherhood as a way to subvert and challenge the dominant discourse during conflicts (Dombrowski 1999: 18-19; Thompson 1999: 282-283; Peteet 1997: 108-109). Using the ideology of motherhood, women were able to embrace, transmute, and transform motherhood in a variety of ways to suit their personal and political interests (Dombrowski 1990: 17-18; Mangaliso 2000: 69; Thompson 1999: 282; Peteet 1997: 108).

What I found was that while the ideology of motherhood did not change from pre-war to the postwar period, the expectations and meanings of motherhood have altered. From the pre-war and into the postwar period, the idea that all women should be mothers remains the same. In the pre-war period, motherhood was equated with household work while during the war years, motherhood was linked to ideas of nationalism with women being expected to combine the roles of mothers and defenders of the nation. The Vietnamese Communist Party sought to combine the Confucius ideology of motherhood and communism to motivate women to participate in the wars and promote national unity. The southern government also used the Confucius ideology of motherhood to recruit, win the support of women, and promote solidarity of women across the country. In essence, both the Party and the southern
government used the ideology of motherhood to attract women to advance their political interests. I show the different motivations of women who opted to participate in the conflict and those women who chose to remain with their families.

Although the dominant pre-war Confucian model of the nurturing mother and obedient wife was not prominent during the war years, there was a resurgence of this model in the postwar period. However, this was not as strict as the former model, as there are more variations in the gender roles available to women. The absence of men and the resulting shortage of labour during the war years provided women with opportunities to assume a wider range of roles such as guerilla soldiers and the head of household. As men returned from the war women were expected to resign their wartime roles. Postwar State rhetoric continue to stress women’s role as mothers and seeks to link motherhood and work both within and outside the household.

Citizen’s rights in the nation state were perceived as contingent upon the individual’s performance of certain duties to the State. Defending the national territory has been seen as the most important duty of the individuals to the nation state (Aretxaga 2006: 92; Nagel 2001: 18; Herr 2003: 138; Wenk 2000: 65; Blom 2009: 9). Within the military discourse, men are often linked with national projects such as war. While men are associated with qualities of strength and courage, women are deemed as weak and fearful and thereby in need of male protection (Encloe 1987: 529-530; Blom 2000: 15; Herr 2003: 140). However, feminist scholars have shown that wars between nations are not strictly a masculine phenomenon. Women have been shown to be active participants in national conflicts (Encloe 1987: 529; Ward 2000: 230; Herr 2003: 141).
My analysis shows women were influenced by the ideology of motherhood adopted by both the Vietnamese Communist Party and the southern government to participate directly in the war or to remain with their families. I found that personal vengeance or patriotism motivated some women to participate directly in the two wars. The connection between motherhood and communist ideology provided some women justification for leaving their children at home and assuming the role of guerilla soldiers. Alternatively, economic necessities and family obligations motivated other women to remain with their families during the war years. For these women, this decision was influenced by the ideology of motherhood and the Confucius family model that idealized women’s roles as obedient daughters and nurturing mothers. Their labour was important to the survival of their families and the war effort. However, the Party did not consider this form of labour as valuable as these women were not Party’s agents. Although the decision to participate in the conflict or to remain at home speaks to women’s agency, they perceived their wartime roles as important to the survival of their communities, families, and the nation. Conversations with the interviewees revealed that they felt empowered and did not regret the decision they made at the time, or with the consequences of that decision, which they still live with today.

While gender and motherhood play an important role in constructing national symbols and loyalties, it has also been used by the State to include or exclude individuals from rights in the nation state (Yuval-Davis 1996: 17-18; Blom 2000:9; Amireh 2003: 758). I found that the portrayal of wartime motherhood in Party narrative and representation privileged the experience of mothers whose children
served the Party during the war years; those mothers who served the Southern government, were excluded from the Party narrative and representation.

Lastly, I argue that to understand the effects of Vietnam’s postwar economic reform policy of *doi moi* on women’s lives, we need to focus attention on the connections between neoliberalism and gender. This approach will allow us gain insight on the effects of *doi moi* and the different responses of women to the reform in Vietnam. It is important to stress that while the Party promoted the roles of women as entrepreneurs and workers, it also continued to stress women’s role as mothers. The emphasis on motherhood must be viewed as a continuation of the earlier Confucius patriarchal family model where women’s position within the household is subordinate to men.

There is no single and succinct definition of neoliberalism as there are a variety of views of its meanings and origins among scholars. Despite the disagreement, most scholars use the term neoliberalism to refer to: “an economic and political doctrine marked by commitments to policies of free trade, privatization, deregulation, and welfare state retrenchment” (Harvey 1990: 123; Ward and England 2007: 3; Isaksen 2007: 44; Bezanson 2006: 9; Gledhill 2004: 333). For the purpose of this thesis, I will use the term neoliberalism within this context. The impact of neoliberalism is expressed through rising unemployment, the informalization of work, widespread poverty, cut backs in state funding to social services such as childcare and education, and rising income inequality among people on the national and global scales (Ward and England 2007: 8; Harvey 1990: 123-124; Isaken 2007: 44-45; Bezanson 2006: 3-4).
The effects of neoliberalism on women’s status have been widely debated among scholars. Supporters of neoliberalism contend that neoliberalism has benefited women (Bieler et al. 2008: 5; Cohen and Brodie 2007: 4; Bhagwati 2004: 74-75) in that it generates employment and reduces poverty rates in developing countries. It is also argued that the competitive nature of neoliberalism would pressure employers to pay higher wages to women because the competitive market would eliminate discrimination (Bieler et al. 2008: 5; Cohen and Brodie 2007: 4). Alternatively, opponents of neoliberalism argue that neoliberalism actually places women at a greater disadvantage than men (Harvey 1990: 153; Harvey 2005: 148; Broomhill and Sharp 2007: 87; Chant 2005: 242; Collins 2005: 252; Bezanson 2006: 9; Gledhill 2004: 340; Pillay 2008:50-51). As women enter the workforce, the price and demand for childcare services increases. These increases may amplify women’s work burden. While women are encouraged to work, their wages are often lower than men with limited opportunities for advancement. Further, activities associated with caring are increasingly globalized with the advent of neoliberalism (Broomhill and Sharp 2007: 88-89; Chant 2005: 242-243; Collins 2005: 252; Bezanson 2006: 9-10; Gledhill 2004: 340-342). By understanding the nature of neoliberalism, we can gain insights into the challenges and possibilities created by the economic reform policy of doi moi on women’s lives in postwar Vietnam.

My findings show doi moi had mixed effects on women’s lives. While the reform benefitted those with capital or who were politically affiliated with the Party, the reform did not benefit, and was likely a hindrance to, those who lacked capital, education, or were laid off during State cutbacks. I also found there was an inherent
contradiction embedded in the Party’s postwar gender rhetoric. While the State encouraged women to take on the roles of worker and entrepreneur in the postwar _doi moi_ period, funding cutbacks and privatization of social services, such as education and childcare, curtailed the economic activities of mothers outside the household. The decline in support of these services diverted women from the labour market to households where they were expected to take over the tasks of caring and educating their children.

Through problematizing my identity and location in relation to Vietnam and the interviewees, I will be able to question my biases and the appropriateness of my actions in the field. Despite the ethnic and cultural affiliation I have with southern Vietnamese culture and people, the western academic training I received in Canada made me an outsider. This mode of self-reflexive thinking will aid me to understand and negotiate my multiple identities in diverse ways.

**My Connection with the Project**

My own interest in the experiences of Vietnamese women during and after the three decades of war that divided Vietnam began as a child listening to wartime stories told by my mother. These stories often focused upon the struggles of my family and revealed the coping strategies that the women of my family developed to deal with the destruction and instability that was prevalent during the Vietnam war. Similar to the majority of Vietnamese people, my mother saw her childhood and education disrupted by the war. My mother quit school at an early age to work in a factory in order to contribute to the family income. In 1972, at the age of seventeen,
my mother married my father; she gave birth to their first son one year later. Recalling the challenges she experienced during her early years of marriage, my mother recounted how the lack of household training, especially cooking skills, during her childhood affected her performance as a wife, daughter-in-law and as a sister-in-law in her husband’s family. My mother recalled with pride the persistence and endurance needed to juggle the often difficult and demanding pre-war Vietnamese feminine roles of wife, mother, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law during wartime.

I learned as a child that the war, especially the period of the Vietnam war subsequent to the French withdrawal, was a popular but uneasy topic of discussion for men. Many of the men in my family, including my father and several uncles, served during the Vietnam war. Although not all served on the same side, all were affected by the war. Differences in political ideologies and loyalties to different regimes were often the main source of tensions among my family members, particularly among the men. While some of my uncles were not directly involved with the war, the others-- from both sides of family-- served on opposite sides: my father and some of my uncles served in Vietnam’s Southern Army; where my great uncle and other uncles joined the Vietnamese Communist Party at an early age and participated in the Vietnam war on the opposite side as their relatives. Because of their different political ideologies and loyalties, my father and uncles did not speak to each other throughout the conflict. Together, these stories that I heard and reheard throughout my life provide me with the privilege of accessing information about the Vietnam war that is not often mentioned in scholarly works; one that is personal and intimate.
The defeat of the southern Vietnamese government subsequent to the withdrawal of American troops and the ensuing reunification of Vietnam in 1975 altered the lives of Vietnamese people. My father and several of my uncles were among 200,000 former South Vietnamese military officers and government officials who were sent to re-education camps constructed by the Vietnamese Communist Party\(^1\) for periods that ranged anywhere from a few months to several years (De Fronzo 2007: 172). While many former southern Vietnamese military officers and officials like my father often perceived these camps as prisons, Party intentions were to convert these men from the opposing side to the Vietnamese Communist’s ideologies. In the case of my father, he spent approximately one year in one of these re-education camps due to the fact that he had served as a non-commissioned officer in the military of the southern government during the Vietnam war. Some of my uncles who served as commissioned officers under the southern government also spent anywhere from a few months to two years in the camps. Unlike many Vietnamese men who opted for emigration soon after their release from the re-education camps, my father and uncles returned home to Sa Dec town in Dong Thap province. The experience of re-education camps shaped my father’s views about his roles in the war and the Party. My father rarely discusses his experiences in the re-education camps with me, however when he does, he tends to recall with bitterness the poor camp conditions, such as inadequate sanitation and overcrowding, and the harshness of the schooling forced upon him while living in camps. My father perceives the education he received as an attempt by the Party to brainwash him into

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\(^1\) From now on when I say the Party I am referring to the Vietnamese Communist Party.
effectively hating himself. He was also forced to pledge his allegiance to the Party.

These postwar experiences placed an indelible stamp of bitterness upon my father’s perceptions of the Party and its ideologies.

While he was being re-educated, the absence of my father from home life during his stay in the camp became a source of stress for my family, especially for my mother. The separation from her husband proved to be extremely difficult at times. During the period of his absence, my mother helped to run her in-law’s family business of selling housewares. She also made frequent trips, accompanied by her mother-in-law, to visit my father in the re-education camp. Despite her lack of formal professional training, my mother’s work of selling housewares ‘fits’ with the practice of trading which historically associated with Vietnamese womanhood. The relationship between women and trade has a long history and is deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture. Despite its visibility, trading in the market is often seen as an unsophisticated informal entrepreneurial activity that has been and continues to be associated with women (Fahey 1998: 232). Further, activities such as bargaining and/or haggling in trade are also associated with Vietnamese womanhood. Stephanie Fahey (1998) suggests that trade conducted by women in Vietnam played an important role in preventing widespread poverty soon after national independence (Fahey 1998: 223). Interestingly, the idea of skillful businesswomen stands in striking contrast to the wartime images of Vietnamese women as courageous warriors. My mother is very proud of her accomplishments, particularly her ability to provide for the family in the absence of her husband. I am very proud of my mother because of her achievements and the strengths she has in coping with the challenges.
she experienced during the early years of her marriage. To this day, my mother continues to be a major source of inspiration in my life.

Like many children who came of age during the postwar period in southern Vietnam, I was brought up during a period of political censorship, inflation, the US trade embargo, and widespread poverty. Despite the economic reforms initiated by the Party in the late 1980s, including the new policy of doi moi that was introduced in 1986, the living conditions of my family and many Vietnamese families that I know showed little improvement. I witnessed incidents of widows and young children begging on the streets and in the markets as a child.

Growing up in Vietnam, I was fascinated by how postwar popular media portrayed women’s various wartime roles, such as heroic mothers, guerilla fighters and productive workers. I was greatly influenced by the Party’s ideology through socialization and formal education. In contrast, my parents’ generation obtained their education under the previous southern government. This generational difference in education background played an important role in shaping our postwar experiences. After my formal education began, I was taught that women’s participation in struggles against foreign invaders has a long history in Vietnam. The courage that women displayed in contemporary battle is proudly recounted in Vietnamese proverbs and legends.

Some legends came with the particular approval of the authorities. For example, we were taught about the lives of such early Vietnamese legendary heroines as the Trung sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, who led an army against Chinese invaders and eventually committed suicide in order to avoid capture by Chinese forces in 43
AD. I remember my feelings of pride and awe as my class studied these women’s lives. In particular, the leadership and military skills that they displayed in battle strongly impressed me and influenced my early perceptions of Vietnamese womanhood.

In addition to these early heroines, we also studied the involvement of later Vietnamese women in the Vietnam war. Featured prominently in our history textbooks were images and stories of the hardships experienced by the women who worked along the Ho Chi Minh trail. All war materials sent from northern Vietnam into the south had to be transported along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, overland through Cambodia in order to circumvent the heavily guarded border that divided Vietnam into northern and southern zones. Because of frequent bombing raids by American and southern Vietnamese planes, the bulk of the war materials were carried at night by porters, a task most often left to women (Turner and Phan 1998: 4). Through these stories and images, it became clear to me that all the different roles women played during the war years, such as mothers, fighters, and workers, were important to the political victory of the Party.

From the patriotic songs that we learned in school, I was taught to love my country, the Vietnamese Communist Party and its leader, Ho Chi Minh or cu (uncle) Ho. The daily school rituals of singing and professing allegiance to the Party, the country and its people implanted a particular view of what it meant to be Vietnamese in the postwar period. At the time, I thought that in order to be a good Vietnamese citizen one must adhere to the Party doctrine of loving our country, its people and actively hating all foreign invaders, particularly the French and Americans.
Postwar Vietnamese popular media, most notably war movies and soap operas or *cai luong*, which are controlled by the Party, prominently featured women performing a variety of wartime roles. These roles commonly included espionage, Party recruiters, workers, guerilla fighters, loving and enduring wives and mothers. This postwar portrayal of women playing multiple roles reflects the state’s desire to merge: “[women’s] dual roles as a marker to revolutionary progress and a vessel of timeless tradition situated at the core of the Party’s struggle to forge a uniquely national path to socialist modernity….“ (Pettus 2002: 28).

I remember watching movies and documentaries highlighting women in wartime roles as a child in Vietnam. The portrayal of Vietnamese women in multiple roles made a strong impression on me as a young girl. In particular, I remember the feeling of pride as I realized that I came from a culture that emphasizes feminine strength and courage. In retrospect, the school lessons, family stories and popular media that I was exposed to as a child all played an important role in shaping my views and knowledge about Vietnamese women’s experiences during the war years.

Although the lessons revealed valuable contributions made by women to the political success of the Party, stories of those women, like my mother, whose remained with their families and their husbands served under the southern Vietnamese government during the Vietnam war were largely ignored. While the economic contributions made by these women were critical to their families survival, their labour was not recognized by the Party because these women were not consider as an acting agent as defined by the Party. Subsequently, as a student in Vietnam, I felt a growing sense of disappointment as I came to realize that the lives of the
Vietnamese women who did not serve the ruling Party were largely absent from the state national historical narrative. The feeling that something was missing contributed to my growing awareness and interest in learning about the differences of women’s wartime experiences.

After emigrating from Vietnam and settling in Canada during the early 1990s, my siblings and I enrolled in the Canadian public school system. The history lessons covering the Vietnam war during my high school years in Canada were much different from my history classes in Vietnam. While these lessons provided insights into American activities in Vietnam during the Vietnam war, I remember my feeling of strong disappointment as I realized that this time the stories and voices of all Vietnamese people were excluded from these narratives.

Throughout my undergraduate years at the University of Northern British Columbia, I enrolled in various anthropology and history classes. Within these classes, I was able to learn, to share ideas, and to write about women’s participation and various roles in nationalist struggles around the world. I also gained knowledge of the different structures, such as families and labour markets that create possibilities and constraints on women’s lives in postwar contexts. The knowledge I acquired in these classes helped me to realize that despite its postwar rhetoric, Vietnam is still very much a patriarchal society. I also credit these classes with my late-blooming interest in feminism. Influenced by the work of feminist anthropologists and historians, I gained even more respect for the strength of Vietnamese women like my mother.
Although it was interesting to study about the trials and tribulations of women in other societies, the researchers of these studies often lacked the personal connection one gets from researching their own history. My reaction to the lack of personal connection of most researchers, combined with my desire to learn more about the lives of Vietnamese women during and after the decades of conflict that divided Vietnam, motivated me to embark upon my intellectual quest. This led to the pursuit of my Master's degree and provided me with the opportunity to examine Vietnamese women’s wartime and postwar experiences in the greater depth they deserved. I chose field sites in southern Vietnam because I am familiar with the culture and the people who live in this part of the country.

Historical differences between the various regions of Vietnam are important in understanding the diverse experiences of Vietnamese women from different parts of the country during and after the Indochina war and Vietnam war (Pelly 2001: 6). This thesis is limited to a study of women in southern Vietnam. While I recognize that the experiences of both women and men from the northern and central regions will differ from those in the south, I chose to focus on this group of people because of the ethnic affiliation and cultural familiarity. Because my close linguistic and kinship bond is with this particular group of people, they have the closest connection to my own situated space. For the purpose of this research, the fieldwork that I carried out took place in the following districts and town of southern Vietnam: Go Vap and Cho Lon districts in Ho Chi Minh City and Sa Dec town in Dong Thap province.
Doing Research at ‘Home’

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country, which is divided into three separate regions: North, Central and South, with its capital at Hanoi, in the northern region. Vietnam’s territory covers 331,150.4 square km and its boundaries include: Laos and Cambodia to the west and China to the north (The Europa World Year Book 2005: 4674). The southern part of the country lies between the Cambodian border to the west and the South China Sea to the east (The Europa World Year Book 2005: 4674). In 2009, the total population in the country was estimated at 86 million people (General Statistic Office of Vietnam 2010). The national language of Vietnam is Vietnamese or tiếng Việt. Similar to other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation-state (The Europa World Year Book 2005: 4674).

I was born and raised in the southern town of Sa Dec, Dong Thap province. As a child, I often accompanied my mother on the annual visits she made to her parents in Ho Chi Minh City. In the early 1990s, my family and I emigrated from Vietnam because of a lack of employment opportunities for my father. I was a young southern Vietnamese girl when I left the country. When I returned to Vietnam in 2007 my status had shifted from a Vietnamese working-class young girl to an overseas Vietnamese or Việt kiều, western-educated, heterosexual, unmarried woman, and student researcher. Despite the occasions of being called an overseas Vietnamese, because of my connections to Dong Thap province and Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam, I continue to identify these places as my homes.
Ideas about fieldwork and the different roles ethnographers play within the field have been explored by anthropologists. Disciplinary changes within the field of anthropology over the years encourage anthropologists to rethink both ethnographic fieldwork and the role of ethnographers (Brewer 2000: 12). In particular, increased globalization and transnational migration has raised new questions about locality in ethnographic fieldwork. Recent conceptualization of transnational space encourages anthropologists to view the ‘field’ as inseparable from everyday life. Accordingly: “the field is…a constructed entity that does not have identifiable borders” (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 4). Fieldwork is increasingly seen as: “… transnational in scope and the field is a site in which [ethnographers’] personal and professional roles and relationships converge” (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 4). In my case, the locations in which I chose to conduct my fieldwork are informed and shaped by the personal relations I have with southern Vietnamese people and culture. In deciding upon southern Vietnam as the location of my fieldwork, I was aware of the dilemma that many anthropologists and other researchers experience in doing research within their communities where they are required to move: “between private and research personas” in various settings (Chacko 2004: 54). For me, the different and often conflicting roles of insider and outsider left me at times with the feeling of being adrift and awkward in different settings.

In discussing the connection between people and places, Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005) suggests that: “the sites of our belonging constitutes how we see the world, what we value, who we are becoming. The meanings of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection” (Rowe
2005: 16). She further explains the relations we have toward those: “who we love, the communities in which we live in, who we expand our emotional energies building ties with- these connections are all functions of power” (Rowe 2005: 16).

Expressions of belonging often involve integrating: “identities…into motion and the terms and the effects of inclusion/exclusion come into sharper focus” (Rowe 2005: 28). Rowe’s argument is important in drawing attention to the context, power and politics involved in the construction of identity and belonging to specific place(s) and communities. In my case, my identity as an overseas Vietnamese allowed me to anchor my belonging simultaneously in multiple communities. At the same time, this designation takes into account my current condition of dislocation. While the language I use for professional purposes and socializing with some of my friends is English, Vietnamese is the language I speak and feel comfortable speaking with my family.

Many Vietnamese refugees and immigrants who dislocated from Vietnam for economic, political and social reasons found that the experience reshaped not only their own identities, but also their relations to their country of origin and to other Vietnamese people, no matter where those other people resided (Chen 2004; Yuh 2005; Gao 2006). This is certainly true in my own case. The experience of dislocating from my “home” in Vietnam at the age of twelve, immigrating to Canada, and then living and working here for over twenty years, has not only rendered my relations to Vietnam and Vietnamese people as often ambiguous and contradictory, but has also enabled me to establish links with the wider global community of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants and confirmed my sense of belonging to that
community. This sense of belonging is reinforced by my continued communication with my kin members in Vietnam, which is enhanced by my privilege of accessing the internet on a daily basis, and provides me with opportunities to maintain my connections with Vietnam and the Vietnamese people.

My selected research population is composed of ethnic Vietnamese people or the Kinh, with whom I identify culturally and ethnically. Despite this familiarity, I do not claim to be a ‘native’ researcher who has ‘infinite knowledge’ of Vietnamese culture (Chacko 2004: 56). Questions have been raised by feminist anthropologists and ethnographers about whether there can be such a thing as a ‘native’ ethnographer, and issues have been debated concerning the effects of a theoretical ‘border position’ between ethnographer and informants (John 1996: 245-250; Chacko 2004: 57). Feminist anthropologists and ethnographers contend that the ‘border position’ between ethnographers and subjects can be an advantage for ethnographers seeking to explore alternative possibilities of seeing and being (John 1996: 260-265; Bulbeck 1999: 15-22). Issues concerning a border position between researchers and participants play important roles in shaping the construction of knowledge and identities in the field (Chacko 2004: 57). In my case, the border position between myself and the Vietnamese female subjects, included age and language, gave me the opportunity to retell the stories of women with whom I share a similar history of patriarchal/colonial forms of domination. At the same time, my education and training in the west has created class and cultural differences that complicated my roles and made them unstable.
These multiple identities emerged throughout the process of my fieldwork and thereby shaped the occasionally awkward relationships between myself and the participants in different settings. The familiarity that I have with the southern Vietnamese culture and people allowed me to gain invaluable 'insider knowledge' in various settings that are often not accessible to outsider researchers (Reed-Hanahay 2002: 422-423; Buzard 2003: 63-68; Philaretou and Allen 2006: 67-69). However, the western academic training I received raised my awareness about the inequalities existing between me, as an overseas Vietnamese student researcher, and the participants in the field. This aspect of my identity made me feel uncomfortable throughout the fieldwork process because I often associate this label with privilege and power. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I discovered that age, political affiliation and class were significant categories of difference used by local people for self-identification. More importantly, age, political affiliation, and class have profound implications in shaping women's wartime and postwar experiences.

Being in the field provided me with the opportunities to examine different and significant areas of my life: my ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexuality, age and educational background and how these aspects of my identity shape my relations to others in the field. Such self-reflexive thinking led to substantive questions about my biases, the appropriateness of my actions and helped me to understand and negotiate my multiple identities in diverse ways. As I met more women and came to know more about their lives, my involvement in some women's lives increased, and the lines between student researcher and friend became increasingly blurred.
During my fieldwork in southern Vietnam, I sought to contribute to the communities in which my research involved. I attended weddings, funerals, *dam do* or the annual feast for remembering the dead, taught English, helped in the preparation of food and provided needed services, such as childcare. Often, it was only when I brought up my post-secondary education and training in the west that questions about my life in Canada came up during the conversations with participants. Some were proud that a member of the overseas Vietnamese postwar generation is interested in their personal history. As a student of anthropology, I am too aware that researchers’ voices often overshadow the voices of those whom researchers consult and collaborate with for research projects. Consequently, I realize that my very position as an overseas Vietnamese female student researcher living and educated in Canada means that I am in a position of privilege. This awareness motivated me to take steps to ensure that my training and current living location did not get in the way of my learning and interacting with people.

As a feminist student researcher, I am also aware of the dilemma that anthropologists struggle with in representing and writing about the ‘others’. The relationship I have with the interviewees also means that I must take the necessary steps to ensure that I do not overexpose their private lives. I have changed names and situations in cases where the participants could be harmed by the information given to me, although I tried to retain the integrity of the voices and memories of all those who I had the privilege to talk with (Philaretou and Allen 2006: 72; Reed-Danhay 2002: 422-423; Buzard 2003: 73-75).
Working on this research provided me with rare and satisfying experiences. Not only was I given the opportunity to experience my ‘homes’ in Dong Thap province and Ho Chi Minh City in a different and unfamiliar way and conduct first hand research in these places, I had multiple opportunities to reunite, meet, speak with and listen to many remarkable Vietnamese women. The women I interviewed for this research welcomed me into their homes, took time to meet and share food with me and were willing to speak with me about their wartime and postwar experiences. During some interviews, I felt extremely nervous and self-conscious. However, these feelings were soon replaced with a sense of appreciation and accomplishment. I came to admire and have great respect for the experience each individual possessed. Without the willingness of these people to discuss their experiences, this research would have not been possible.

Throughout the research process, I made a conscious effort to ensure the women who participated in the project were involved in the translating and writing process. By explaining the research project’s goals to the informants, I was able to maintain honest relationships with the interviewees throughout the process. This honest and cooperative relationship aided in minimizing some of the suspicions surrounding my identity and intentions as well as power differences between myself and participants.

**Historical Anthropology: The Meeting of Anthropology, History, and Feminist Theories**

My project uses historical anthropology as a research approach to explore changes in Vietnamese gender roles within a twentieth century, postcolonial context. The relationship between history and anthropology is often seen as: “a reciprocal lack of
recognition, if not outright antagonism” (Giordano 2005: 53). This can be explained by “a clear division of labor between history as a science du passé and [anthropology] as [a] science du présent” (Giordano 2005: 53). Further, differences between history, anthropology and other social sciences “did not consist merely in a different relationship to time; it was also based on a profound methodological distinction” (Giordano 2005: 53). After WWII, significant changes occurred in historical anthropology that ultimately redefined the boundaries between anthropology and history (Kretch 1991: 360-378; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 14-17; Des Chene 1997: 67; Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 180). Within history, French historians Henri Berr, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febre, and Fernand Braudel contended that:

...history was scientific not intuitive, comparative and not particularistic; it was about society writ large not politics, about all people not just great men, history involved long-term geographic and climatological structures and shorter-term economic and demographic changes as well as blink-of-an-eye political regimes or wars; it was analytical not narrative, and theoretical not theory-less (Kretch 1991: 349).

The arguments proposed by the historians in France represented a critical turn in historiography and attracted attention from scholars across disciplines including anthropology. Within anthropology, works by prominent anthropologists such as Robert Danton, Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, Natalie Davis, and many others stressed the importance of history in the studying and writing of peoples and cultures (Kretch 1991: 350). These changes aided in fostering interdisciplinary conversations between anthropologists and historians.
Over the recent years, anthropology and history have influenced each other. As Shepard Kretch (1991: 349) explains: “much recent historiography reflects the sway of social sciences and much recent anthropology shows the influence of a historical dimension for comprehension of culture”. Consequently, previous ideas of: “all history is atheoretical, particularistic, idiographic, and moralistic and that all anthropology is theoretical, generalizing, nomothetic, and value free is no longer tenable” (Kretch 1991: 350).

Increased interest in the study of western urban centers and the history of peoples whose cultures and societies were previously excluded from anthropologists’ studies encouraged anthropologists to reexamine the roles and impacts of the individual as history maker (Ohnuki-Tierny 2005: 181; Des Chene 1997: 74-75). This decisive turn raises important questions about identity, subjectivity and representation (Ohnuki-Tierny 2005: 181).

The rise of postmodernism posed challenges to anthropologists and historians alike and motivated a fundamental rethinking of the impacts and implications of modernism upon the development of a broad spectrum of local, regional, national and global phenomena (Kretch 1991: 363-364; Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 183). Within anthropology, historical anthropologists are reminded that the west has long been engaged in historical processes with non-western societies. As such, researchers need to explain historical processes within local, national and global contexts (Des Chene 1997: 70-76). In historical anthropology, the main focus is:

to record insiders’ views and perceptions and to carry out analyses in the insiders’ own sociocultural terms...the concern is with what people know and remember about their past,
how and why, how people make sense of the past and relate to the present, and how people’s perceptions and understandings of their past are a retrospective product of their present. Often, this form of historical is lined to a reflexive approach, with the anthropologist’s experiences woven into the narrative to become an intrinsic part of the published ethnography (Silverman and Gulliver 2005: 153).

This focus provides anthropologists with opportunities to explore the process of articulating the past of a group of people, showing how they link it to their current cultural perceptions and social structures. Seen in this light, history is transformative and it is this focus that: “attracts the anthropologist of history” (Silverman and Gulliver 2005: 153).

Postmodernism also posed new challenges in studying and writing about identity and representation in the disciplines of both anthropology and history. Since postmodernism challenges notions of a fixed single identity and the resulting narrow representation, postmodernism encourages anthropologists and historians to seek out the various multiplicities and diverse processes involved in the construction of identities and representations (Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 182-185; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 27-31). Historians are increasingly interested in the complex cultural processes revealed by anthropologists’ analyses (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 37-40; Ohnuki-Tierney 1991: 16-18). The concern with ‘partial narratives’ or microhistories provided new opportunities for anthropologists and historians to link local phenomena, such as revolutionary movements, to major themes in world history (Ohnuki-Tierney 1991: 6-12; Des Chene 1997: 73-75). Subsequently, this new approach enabled scholars to situate: “the local itself and local linkage pattern at
large, [which] are important vehicles in bringing prevailing as well as subaltern and possible landscapes about” (Kalb and Tak 2005: 17). Emphasis on locality-based research has been and continues to be an important feature within anthropology as it: “encourages contextualization; and contextualization gives validity to anthropological understanding” (Silverman and Gulliver 2005: 156). By examining the interconnection between local and global histories, anthropologists and historians are able to examine both particular and general processes (Ohnuki-Tierney 1991: 13; Des Chene 1997: 77). This approach further encourages anthropologists and historians to demystify and to remove the element of ‘exoticism’ in studying and writing about non-western societies (Ohnuki-Tierney 1991: 12; Des Chene 1997: 75-76).

Emerging postcolonial and postcolonial feminist studies encourage anthropologists and historians to reexamine theories and methods of theorizing and writing about identity and representation of the “others” in the past (Mohanty 2003: 47-50). In particular, criticisms were raised by some feminist scholars against western feminist anthropologists for their tendency to privilege white upper-middle class women and homogenize the experiences of women in non-western societies (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995: 137; John 1996: 15-17; Mohanty 2003: 50-52). Works by feminist anthropologists since the 1970s contributed significantly to the studies of rituals and sexual politics (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995: 138-140). Also, these studies aided in addressing questions surrounding issues of women’s multiple identities and women’s political interests (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995: 140-143). One of my research questions, when viewed through the analytical framework of differences in motivations among Vietnamese women, fits into this latter
development of historical anthropology because it relates to how differences in women’s backgrounds, in other words aspects of their identities, influenced the rationale used to justify their decision whether to directly participate in the war or to remain with their families. Additionally, the emphasis of historical anthropology upon women’s multiple identities aided with addressing my research question concerning the effects of the Party economic reform policy of doi moi and its accompanying rhetoric on women’s lives in the postwar period.

Recognizing that historical records in and of themselves are social products of the power to allocate meaning, anthropologists suggest that the interpretation of any form of historical representation must take into account the complex relationship between subjects and the role of memory (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 37-38; Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 182). Further, feminist historical anthropologists perceive that individuals’ actions create meanings, which enable them to shift their focus from major events (e.g. war) to the processes of domination, representation and resistance (Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 183). Seen in this light, history: “must be continually reexamined and adapted to new situations. In this sense, actualized history is always situational history” (Giordano 2005: 58). Following this line of thinking, my research project paid particular attention to the coping and survival strategies used by Vietnamese women of different backgrounds that were revealed in their narratives of wartime experiences. In doing so, I was able to address one of my research questions concerning the rationales used by women to justify their decisions about participating directly in the war or remaining with their families.
Works produced by Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf during the 1980s raised important questions about the historical role of political and cultural power, and revealed the extent of power inequality within both global and local contexts (Ohunuki-Tierny 2005: 181). Emphases on transnationalism, borderlessness and global culture rejected previous anthropological views of culture as a distinct and bounded unit within the territory of a nation or a society (Ohunuki-Tierny 2005: 183; Kretch 1991: 365). With this in mind, my research discusses the limitations and advantages of being an overseas Vietnamese woman and western student researcher as well as raises the question of how I should negotiate these dual roles. My ethnic and cultural affiliation with the interviewees provides me with the opportunity to access invaluable insider knowledge and to understand various cultural cues, such as body language and puns that are not necessarily available to outsider researchers. At the same time, my position and role as a western student researcher made me aware of my privileges and the unequal power relations between myself and the interviewees. Together, these advantages and limitations influence the outcome of the roles that I take on in this project and thus help to shape the stories that I seek to tell about women’s wartime and postwar stories in Vietnam. The stories narrated by Vietnamese women from diverse backgrounds (i.e. age, political affiliation, and class) about their wartime and postwar experiences provide insights into various coping strategies used by them to confront the instabilities and changes brought about by wartime conditions and postwar economic reform. The diverse roles reflect and help to illuminate the negotiation process between women, family, community, and the nation.
Postcolonial Feminist Studies

In addition to historical anthropology, my research uses feminist postcolonial studies to examine how the interaction between local, national and global processes impacted individual Vietnamese women’s experiences during and after the Indochina war and the Vietnam war. Postcolonial feminist theories proved to be beneficial in critiquing western and Vietnamese official representations of Vietnamese gender. Critiques informed by postcolonial feminist theories provide the means to explore the relationships between class, race, gender and sexuality and thus provide insights into how these various relationships shape and influence Vietnamese individual location(s) and identities within the multiple contexts of twentieth century colonialism, imperialism and nationalism. As such, this focus enables me to reexamine and rethink the experiences, the struggles and the multiple forms of resistance inherent in the formation of Vietnamese female subject’s identities within colonial and postcolonial discourses.

The terms ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘postcolonial’ did not appear in literature until after WWII; these terms refer to the processes of struggle against colonialism and its effects on former colonial societies in local, regional, national and global contexts (Quayson 1998: 2). As Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani argued the term ‘postcolonial’ should be understood “in context of a rigorous politics of location, of a rigorous conjuncturalism.” (Frankenberg and Mani 2001: 490). As such, the term ‘post’ served as a reminder that colonialism is not over, rather the impacts of colonialism continue to exist (Frankenberg and Mani 2001: 490). The focus of postcolonialism as processes suggested that postcolonialism is dynamic and ongoing
dialogues between empire and former colonies. As such, postcolonial theory contributes significantly to the processes of critiquing the production of western and nationalists’ knowledge and the representation of the “other” as well as challenges scholars to recognize the complexities that exist in the interaction and transaction between western and non-western people and cultures within multiple systems of power and locations.

Since the late 1970s, postcolonial feminist theories have focused upon the impacts and implications of colonialism, imperialism and globalization upon feminism (Bulbeck 1999: 14-15; Mohanty 2003: 2-3; Nagy-Zekmi 2003: 172; Mack-Canty 2004: 156). Increasingly, postcolonial theorists sought to analyze contested notions of home, nation and nationalism between and among individuals as well as explore the construction between a subject’s position/location and identities within local, national and global contexts (Rajan and Mohanram 1995: 2). The emphasis on the subject’s multiple sites is often used in feminist postcolonial studies when referring to the multiple positions/locations of researchers and participants (John 1997: 20-25). The recognition of an existing relationship between individual experiences and the politics of locations enables postcolonial feminist scholars to challenge essentialist categories and highlight the fluidity and complexities involved in the construction of individual identities (John 1997: 27). In doing so, postcolonial feminist studies contributed significantly to the process of reexamining and rewriting the relationships between the subject’s politics of location, and politics of representation within the context of postcolonialism, transnationalism and globalization (Bulbeck 1999: 16-20; Mohanty 2003: 6-7; Nagy-Zekmi 2003: 172-175; Mack-Canty 2004: 156).
As Colleen Mack-Canty explains: “postcolonial feminism today...operates more extensively across geographical and intellectual borders...theoretically, postcolonial feminism works to extend the analysis of the intersection of sexism and multi-cultural identity formation” (Mack-Canty 2004: 164). This view poses new challenges to western hegemonic gender and cultural essentialist representations of ‘third world’ cultures and people. Further, postcolonial feminist studies demonstrate how any form of knowledge is socially and culturally constructed and situated from a particular or partial perspective (Ong 2001: 108-110). This approach aids in recovering and elevating the importance of marginalized voices that have been ignored or silenced by dominant groups.

In *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) argued that the universal model of “non-western woman” represented within western feminism is distorted because it assumes that women in non-western societies are a coherent group who share the same oppression as women in the west. Subsequently, western feminists ignored ethnic, racial, religious and sexuality differences and inequalities that exist between individual and groups of women (Mohanty 2003: 34-39). Mohanty advocates for viewing women and non-western feminism within the context of particular or specific political, historical, economic, social and cultural location(s) (Mohanty 2003: 46-48). To this end, Mohanty’s argument effectively challenged me as an overseas Vietnamese feminist to recognize the differences and similarities between myself and other overseas Vietnamese feminists, non-western feminists and western feminists. Mohanty’s argument also encouraged me to seek out the distortions and power
imbalance within the production of knowledge and representations of Vietnamese gender roles. This focus proved to be instrumental in the process of critiquing the dominance of western and Vietnamese representational narratives of gender, which enabled me to situate my discussion about Vietnamese gender roles within the national and global context. Recognizing my own locations also meant acknowledging my own privileged western, educated background in relation to other feminists and other Vietnamese women within and outside Vietnam. As such, positioning myself as an overseas Vietnamese female student researcher clarified my opportunities to deconstruct meanings and representations of Vietnamese gender within both postcolonial and global contexts.

In this introduction I have provided an overview of this research project and explored the meanings, challenges and possibilities of doing research at home. I discussed the theoretical framework in situating this research and sought to problematize my identities and locations in relation to the participants in the field. I emphasized the importance of incorporating diverse Vietnamese women’s interpretation and viewpoints into studying and writing about the three decades of warfare that engulfed Vietnam after 1945. The need to incorporate this full diversity continues into the postwar period and is essential both for ethical reasons and for its beneficial effect upon the quality of the research. For this reason, I would like to further stress the need for the development of narratives in recognition of Vietnamese women’s diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the geographical settings of my fieldwork. I then provide a brief history of how social organization and gender relations were
influenced by ideology in Vietnam from the pre-colonial period through the period of postwar economic reform known as *doi moi*. In Chapter Three, I discuss the ethnographic research methods that I applied in this project. The analyses of primary sources include published personal accounts, interviews, museum photographs and displayed cultural materials are described in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I explain the representations of Vietnamese wartime womanhood within the postwar museum context and examine its implications upon women’s lives. Additionally, I discuss some of the challenges and possibilities that women encountered during and after the war years. This discussion is based on published personal narratives and interviews with women in the districts of Cho Lon and Go Vap, Ho Chi Minh City and Sa Dec town, Dong Thap province. Chapter Five is the concluding chapter where I discuss my learning journey, contributions of my research to existing literature on women’s wartime and postwar experiences in Vietnam. Also, I highlight some potential future directions in my area of research.
Chapter Two

BACKGROUND TO VIETNAMESE CASE STUDY

This chapter begins with a discussion of my fieldwork locations in southern Vietnam and the ethnic Vietnamese population studied in this thesis project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the locations for my fieldwork are the southern communities of Go Vap and Cho Lon districts in Ho Chi Minh City and Sa Dec town in Dong Thap province. I chose these places because of my cultural, ethnic and familial connections with the Vietnamese residents of this region. This chapter also includes a brief overview of Vietnamese social organization, ideology, and gender relations prior to and during the period of French colonization before I examine the changes to gender roles during the Indochina war and Vietnam war. Following this, I discuss changes to women’s status after the political victory of the Communist Party and the economic policy of doi moi introduced by the Party several years after they assumed political control of southern Vietnam. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate changes of women’s roles and status in Vietnam from the pre-colonial period through the late twentieth century postwar economic reform. In discussing the social organization, ideology, and gender relations in the region under examination from the period prior to French colonization through the postwar doi moi period, my main goal for this chapter is to provide sufficient information to better contextualize the analysis that I later undertake during the discussion of women’s wartime and postwar experiences in southern Vietnam.
In this chapter, I argue that to understand changes in Vietnamese gender roles from the pre-colonial through the postwar years, we need to develop a systematic approach that focuses on the connections between the ideology of motherhood, gender roles, and gender expectations and how these shift over time. In Vietnam, one cannot talk about gender without making reference to motherhood. As such, we need to examine how the State uses motherhood as a symbol to construct gender and national rhetoric.

By situating the analysis within a temporal context, we can begin to understand how the State uses motherhood as a way to promote national loyalties and to exclude certain groups of women (i.e. those who are not politically affiliated with the Vietnamese Communist Party) and impose gender expectations in different time periods. Additionally, we can gain insight into the politics, tensions, and negotiations involved in the construction of Vietnamese gender and how the ideology of motherhood has been used by the State to shape gender roles and gender expectations. In this chapter I show the changes to Vietnamese gender roles over time. I illustrate these changes through the following time periods: (1) the pre-colonial time (43 AD-1880s); (2) the French colonial administration (1880s-1945); (3) the Indochina war (1945-1954), followed by; (4) the Vietnam war (1954-1975) and (5) finally the postwar economic reform period of doi moi (1980s). The changes were thus brought about by a series of colonizing events, first by the Chinese followed by the French, then by decades of war, and finally by postwar economic reform. The initial adoption by early Vietnamese rulers of the patriarchal Confucius gender ideologies from China promoted male dominance and female submission within the household and society.
shaped the organization of family and political structures in Vietnam that can still be seen today. The timeline below shows Vietnamese gender ideology and the changes in gender roles in the periods of pre-colonial, French colonial, Indochina war, Vietnam war, postwar doi moi.

As outlined in the chart above, patriarchal Confucian ideas about women as nurturing mothers and obedient wives/daughters constrained female gender roles during the pre-colonial French colonial administration periods. While motherhood continued to define women during the Indochina war and Vietnam war circumstances allowed them to assume a larger variety of roles (e.g. soldier, worker, and head of household). These changes were short lived, and when the men returned women were often forced to give up their wartime roles. While the Vietnamese government gives the impression of supporting women’s economic achievement and work outside the home, cutbacks to daycare, education services and women’s jobs required many women to assume these additional responsibilities within the home. Finally, financial support programs such as pensions for women specifically target those who are politically affiliated with the Party.
Geographical Settings

Go Vap and Cho Lon Districts, Ho Chi Minh City

Some of my interviews took place in the districts of Go Vap and Cho Lon in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, is the largest city in southern Vietnam with the total population estimated at approximately 7.1 million in 2009 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam 2010). The majority of the city population is comprised of the dominant Vietnamese ethnic group, but other minority, ethnic groups found in Ho Chi Minh City also includes: Khmer, Nung, Cham, and Hoa (Jamieson 1993: 7; Tran et al. 1999: 28). The ethnic Vietnamese majority are relative newcomers to the area.

Prior to the spread of Vietnamese settlement to Ho Chi Minh City in the seventeenth century, the City served as a trading port of the Khmer empire (Jamieson 1993: 3; SarDesai 1992: 7; Tran et al. 1999: 157). Conquest of southern Vietnam by the Nguyen leaders in early seventeenth century led to the displacement of the local
Khmer population in Ho Chi Minh City. At the same time, the conquest encouraged many Vietnamese immigrants and refugees from the north to establish new settlement in the city. By the 1780s, Ho Chi Minh City transformed into the new headquarters of the Vietnamese leader Nguyen Anh (Tran et al. 1999: 157). The city remained under control of the Nguyen leaders until the invasion of French forces in the late 1850s (Tran et al. 1999: 157). French colonial forces invaded Ho Chi Minh City in 1859 (SarDesai 1997: 8; Tran et al. 1999: 158). In 1862, under the Treaty of Saigon, Vietnamese emperor Tu Duc agreed to surrender his control of the city to the French, and thereafter it became a colony of France (Tran et al. 1999: 158).

Ho Chi Minh City continued to serve as a major trading port during the French regime (Tran et al. 1999: 158; Jamieson 1993: 359; SarDesai 1992: 92). Over the next ninety years, French colonialism transformed the city landscape by constructing villas and cathedrals that are still visible today. During World War Two, the Vichy French government had little choice but to surrender the control of the City over to the Japanese military forces. By late 1945, however, French colonialists resumed their control, and the city remained under French administration until 1954 (Tran et al. 1999: 162; McLeod and Nguyen 2001: 26).

During the Vietnam war from 1954 to 1975, Ho Chi Minh City served as the capital of the southern State of Vietnam and as the centre of US military operations. The 1960s saw an American bombing campaign targeted at the rural and mountainous areas of southern Vietnam, which exacerbated the rise of unemployment in the countryside thus forcing many Vietnamese to flee from their homes and communities (Tran et al. 1999: 170; Hy 2003: 4). Most of these refugees chose to migrate to Ho
Chi Minh City in search of jobs and security. One study estimated that the population of the city increased from about 2.3 million in 1958 to 3.5 million in 1971 (Hy 2003: 4). By contrast, in northern Vietnam, heavy American bombing from 1965 onward focused on limiting industrial production and led to a significant decrease in the urban population of the Hanoi city, from 2.1 million in 1965 to 1.8 million in 1970 (Hy 2003: 4).

At the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, Vietnam went through a period of economic turmoil that hit Ho Chi Minh City particularly hard (Hy 2003: 8; Thai 1996: 76; Tran et al. 1999: 180). Much of the crisis resulted from the Party decision to embark upon a series of economic policies such as increasing government employees’ salaries and the money supply, as well as enacting price reforms. These changes led to a significant increase in the inflation rate (Hy 2003: 9-10). In addition to the high inflation rate, the trade embargo imposed by the United States after 1975 and the subsequent decline in foreign aid had devastating effects on people’s living conditions in the City (Hy 2003: 10). For the majority of rural and intra-province migrants who moved to Ho Chi Minh City after 1975, living conditions were poor, especially in comparison to wealthy urban residents. While wealthy Vietnamese lived in large and luxurious villas, recent poor migrants resided in squalid slums scattered throughout the city. One study estimated 1.5 million people lived in slums throughout Ho Chi Minh City in 1975 (Hy 2003: 83). The economic situation in the City did not begin to improve until after the introduction of doi moi.

Soon after the establishment of the new economic policy of doi moi in 1986, there was an expansion of private and foreign businesses in the City. The economic
development also attracted many workers to the City, particularly women from rural areas and nearby provinces. A study estimated between 900,000 and 1,000,000 migrant workers moved to the city since the late 1990s. Of this number, about 49% consisted of women (Ha and Ha 2001: 61-62).

Other social ramifications came along with the increased economic activity under doi moi. In her research on patterns of divorce among couples in Ho Chi Minh City since 1975, Thai Thi Ngoc Du found an overall increase in the divorce rate within the city and also noted that most divorce cases were filed by young couples with less than two children (Thai 1996: 77). Further, she found that poverty and domestic abuse were common reasons cited by women for petitioning the court (Thi 1996: 79). Thai’s findings both provide insights into some of the effects of the Party’s new economic policy upon women’s postwar experiences in Ho Chi Minh City.

*Sa Dec town, Dong Thap province*

Source: [http://www.xes.cx/pics-misc/map-hochiminhecity.JPG](http://www.xes.cx/pics-misc/map-hochiminhecity.JPG)
The second location of my fieldwork was the southern town of Sa Dec in Dong Thap province. The total population of Dong Thap province is estimated at 1.7 million in 2009 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam 2010). The distance between Sa Dec and Ho Chi Minh City was about an hour and a half of bus ride. Prior to the Vietnamese settlement in the 17th century, Sa Dec served as a trade market under the Khmer empire (Truong et al. 2002: 119).

Soon after the conquest of Ho Chi Minh City in 1862, the French seized Sa Dec and the town was placed under colonial administrative control until August 1945 when the Japanese forces captured and imprisoned French colonial administration and military personnel (Truong et al. 2002: 124). With the withdrawal of the Japanese troops in August and the military assistance from Britain in October 1945, the French recaptured the town. During the years of continued conflict subsequent to the French withdrawal, the town was considered a politically strategic town by all major combatants, including the southern State of Vietnam, the US and the Communist Party (Truong et al. 2002: 139). The town came under the control of the Party after 1975, and former local officials were replaced with Party cadres. Similar to Ho Chi Minh City, Sa Dec underwent a period of economic crisis from 1975 to mid 1980s. The situation improved, however, after the introduction of the new economic policy of doi moi in 1986 (Truong et al. 2002: 142). The economic development resulted from the new policy encourage many people from nearby towns and villages to move to Sa Dec in search of employment and a better life (Truong et al. 2002: 142). Today, the majority of the town population consists of ethnic Vietnamese and, like Ho Chi
Minh City, there is a minority of other ethnic groups such as Hoa, Khmer, and Cham (Truong et al. 2002: 150).

As we have seen so far, the migration and settlement of ethnic Vietnamese into southern Vietnam and into the cities and towns of the region, such as Ho Chi Minh City and Sa Dec is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, effects of the migration of the Vietnamese and their subsequent colonization by the French have been felt outside the realm of politics and the economy. The settlement of the ethnic Vietnamese, the subsequent spread of Confucianism, and the onset of French colonialism transformed gender roles and gender relations in the southern part of the country.

A Brief History of Sociopolitical Organization, Ideology, and Gender Relations in Vietnam

Inter-Ethnic Conflict and Vietnam’s Prior Colonial Period (43 A.D-1880s)

As previously mentioned, the study population for this research consists of ethnic Vietnamese people or Việt/Kinh. The settlement of ethnic Vietnamese in southern Vietnam began during the seventeenth century and the region was only heavily populated by them during the nineteenth century (Tran et al. 1999: 159). Prior to the settlement of the Vietnamese, southern Vietnam was the scene of conflict and tension between the Champa and Khmer kingdoms (Tran et al. 1999: 160; Jamieson 1993: 6). The arrival of the Vietnamese settlers from the north undoubtedly added to the tension. Because of this dynamic past, Vietnamese culture and language are full of this fusion (Jamieson 1993: 6). The inter-ethnic tensions undoubtedly extend prior to French colonization, and Vietnam had a colonial period long before
the French arrived on the scene. A colonial period which continues to have a profound effect on gender roles today.

In 111 BC, Vietnam was colonized by China under the Han dynasty (Marr 1981: 18). Tensions eventually developed between the colony and the homeland, and the dynamic Trung sisters (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi) led a successful rebellion against the Chinese in 39 AD. After their military success, Trung Trac declared herself as the new ruler of Vietnam (Duiker 1992: 17). The newly independent regime only lasted a few years and Trac’s leadership came to a violent end in 43 AD after Chinese forces recaptured Vietnam.

Prior to the second Chinese colonization, the political system of Vietnam was typified as local self-government. Vietnamese gender relations were often characterized as egalitarian, and women shared many rights with men (Duiker 1992: 167; Tran et al. 1999: 356). Women were entitled to land ownership and possessed legal rights within the family (Jaywardena 1986: 198; Tran et al. 1999: 357). Within the family, women: “were protected from abuse, abduction or sale by members or servants of powerful families. Women were also given the rights to divorce for neglect and abandonment by the husband” (Jaywardena 1986: 198). Additionally, the Chinese practice of foot binding was not imposed upon Vietnamese women (O’Harrow 1995: 167-168; Taylor 1999: 12; Lijestrom 1991: 20-22; Le 1999: 39; Hy 2003: 202; Jaywardena 1986: 198). Within the indigenous local culture, Vietnamese women played prominent roles in trade and diplomacy (Reid 1988: 635). In Vietnamese folklore and popular songs, women were often portrayed as having skills of bargaining, sharp, and cunning (Le 1999: 33; Tran et al. 1999: 357). For these
reasons, the position of Vietnamese women is perceived by some scholars as somewhat better than Chinese women (Jaywardena 1986: 197-198; Tran et al. 1999: 357; Le 1999: 33). The status of women in Vietnam altered after the integration of Confucianism and the reinstallation of Chinese colonialism in 43 AD.

Following the Chinese second conquest, the Vietnamese population in the northern Red River delta and the neighboring coastal plain underwent an intense process of Sinicization where Chinese politics, administration, culture and language were forcibly integrated into Vietnamese society (Duiker 1992: 18; SarDesai 1992: 10). The Chinese male dominated Confucian kinship system and writing system were imposed upon Vietnamese society (SarDesai 1992: 10-11). From the 1400s onward, Confucianism became the official State gender ideology and it was widely practice among the ruling elites in Vietnam (O’Harrow 1995: 168). Despite its influence, Confucianism was not prominent in local peasants’ culture. Unlike elite women, peasant women were seen as equal, not helpers to men in agricultural work (O’Harrow 1995: 169; Ngo 1974: 7). In addition to working alongside with men in the rice fields, women participated in all kinds of manufacturing and handicraft activities (O’Harrow 1995: 170; Ngo 1974: 7). As such, there was a greater emphasis on gender equality, and the position of peasant women within their families was perceived to be higher than that of elite women (Ngo 1974: 7-8). Within Confucianism, the family, gender roles, and gender expectations were well defined.

According to the tenets of Confucianism, the ‘family’ consists of multiple generations of members headed by the eldest male member or the patriarch (Le 1999: 36). The male dominance aspect of Confucianism further reflected in the practice of

Within the family, the patriarch has power over all family members’ affairs, including education, marriage and property rights (Woodside 1989: 149; McLeod and Nguyen 2001: 136). The characteristics of the patriarchal family are also evident in the practice of ancestor worship where the responsibility for perpetuating the male line falls upon the oldest male child in the family (McCleod and Nguyen 2001: 137). The focus on the continuity of the male line is further evident in the marriage practice of polygyny where the continuum of patrilineal descent is ensured, and female labour is required for families’ economic prosperity (Hy 1989: 753). Within polygynous households, wives and concubines occupy different positions. Children who were born to concubines did not possess the same rights (e.g. inheritance) as children of the first wife (Hy 1989: 753-754). Together, practices of polygyny and ancestor worship reinforce the notion of women as primarily cultural reproducers, legitimize and normalize men’s control over women’s reproductive work, and undermine Vietnam’s long-established local culture.

While masculinity and manhood were associated with the perpetuation of the family and the role of the head of the household, femininity and womanhood were defined and measured by women’s morality, fidelity to their husbands, and their performance in their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law (Marr 1981: 198; Ngo 2004: 47; O’Harrow 1995: 162). Morality, self-sacrifice, frugality, endurance, loyalty, gentleness, and delicacy were considered essential qualities for Vietnamese womanhood (Jamieson 1993: 27; Hy 1989: 742; Ngo 2004: 47). Vietnamese women were also expected to adhere to tam tong or three submissions, in which a woman
must obey her father, husband and eldest son throughout her life (Marr 1981: 197). In addition to \textit{tam tong}, women were also required to follow \textit{tu duc} or four virtues, which included: \textit{cong} (labour), \textit{dung} (physical appearance), \textit{ngon} (appropriate speech), and \textit{hanh} (proper behaviour) (Marr 1981: 192).

Within the Confucius gender model, Vietnamese masculinity and manhood was defined and measured upon male abilities as protector, material and moral provider, and dominance over women, or other men who were deemed “effeminate” and/or inferior (Marr 1981: 197). According to the tenets of Confucianism, husbands were permitted to ‘correct’ or chastise, physically and verbally, their wives in cases where women undermined or challenged their husbands’ power, did not produce a son, or committed adultery (Marr 1981: 197; McLeod and Nguyen 2001: 139). These forms of ‘corrections’ ranged up to: “scold[ing], beat[ing] and even driv[ing] [the wife] away from home” (Marr 1981: 197). However, intervention from family members, neighbors and village elders in domestic disputes often reminded: “the husband [that] he was not totally free to do as he pleased with his wife...” (McLeod and Nguyen 2001: 139). Although divorce was legal, many women chose not to exercise this right as it often brought scandals to themselves and their families (McLeod and Nguyen 2001: 140).

Despite the strong presence of Chinese cultural and political influence in Vietnam, certain local Vietnamese cultural elements continued to persist. For example, under the leadership of Le Thanh Tong, the Code of Hong-Duc in 1483 was introduced in Vietnam. The Code provided rights to women to own land and to perform certain rituals within the family (Duiker 1992: 168). The mixture of Chinese
Confucianism with Vietnamese culture and gender ideologies lasted for hundreds of years and only began to see radical change after the interaction with French religious culture intensified during the early 1800s followed by direct colonization by the French in the mid 19th century.

Interaction with the French (early 1800s)

In 1802, Nguyen Anh, the son of the previous Nguyen emperor, consolidated his power in Vietnam with the aid of a French missionary, Pigneau de Behaine (SarDesai 1992: 34). Under his leadership, the country was reorganized into three separate territories, north, central, and south, and twenty-six provinces (SarDesai 1992: 169).

Aside from reorganizing the territories and permitting the French missionaries to propagate Christianity in Vietnam, the emperor Nguyen Anh reinstated the Chinese imperial government model and declared Confucianism as the official State ideology (Duiker 1995: 169). He also reestablished the civil service examination and introduced a new code of laws, the Gia Long Code. Under the new Code, women’s rights, such as landownership and their rights within the family, were reduced (Duiker 1992: 169-170). Tensions with the French soon began to increase, however. Nguyen Anh’s successor, Ming Mang, concerned with the effects of European ideas on Vietnamese culture and the spread of Christian missionaries, issued an edict forbading the propagation of Christianity and instituting persecution of the missionaries and their converts (SarDesai 1992: 34). Violent incidents resulting from this edict further escalated the tension between France and Vietnam, which subsequently led to the colonization of Vietnam.
French Colonization of Vietnam (1880s-1945)

Increased Vietnamese persecution of French missionaries intersected with growing French interest in the economic exploitation of Vietnam during the mid-nineteenth century and motivated the French to take a more aggressive approach toward Vietnam. In 1857, the French deployed an imperial fleet to capture the southern Vietnamese port of Da Nang and pressured the Vietnamese emperor to protect French missionaries and their Vietnamese converts (SarDesai 1992: 34). However, their demands were rejected by the Vietnamese emperor Minh Mang. When the resulting French attack against the Vietnamese imperial army failed in the north, the French redirected their attention to the south.

Under the leadership of Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly, the French took control of Saigon in 1858 (SarDesai 1992: 35-36). Immediately after the French capture of Saigon, a revolt against the Emperor broke out in northern Vietnam. Fighting two enemies on two separate fronts was not seen as a viable option for the Vietnamese imperial forces, so the emperor Minh Mang signed a peace treaty with the French in 1862 (Duiker 1992: 32). Under the terms of the treaty, the Vietnamese emperor agreed to release to the French his control of three southern provinces in Vietnam and the island of Poulo Condore (Duiker 1992: 33). Gaining control of three southern provinces and Poulo Condore Island provided the French with further incentives to conquer the rest of Vietnam. By 1867, the French had turned the rest of the south into a French colony, but the conquest of Vietnam was not complete until the late 1880s (Jamieson 1993: 48). After military dominance of the region was achieved, the French divided Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos into five separate
territories: Tonkin (Northern Vietnam); Annam (Central Vietnam); Cochin China (Southern Vietnam), Laos, and Cambodia. Then in 1887, these territories were consolidated into a colonial entity known as the Indochinese Union. With the exception of Cochin China, which remained as a colony, Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia and Laos were made into protectorates under the French colonial rule (SarDesai 1992: 40). The history of French colonization of southern Vietnam made the colonial experience in this region different from that in the other parts of the country.

**Vietnamese Gender and Sexuality under French Colonial Rule**

French perceptions of the conquest of Vietnam and its role as colonial master of the country were frequently expressed in gendered and sexualized language. While Vietnamese men were often portrayed as effeminate, emasculated, “primitive”, uncontrollable lust, Vietnamese women were frequently represented as submissive, lustful, exotic, and revolting (Stoler 1989: 641; Proschan 2002: 438). By representing Vietnamese men and women this way, French colonialists could justify their conquest and domination over the colonized subjects (Stoler 1989: 641; Proschan 2002: 459).

As with other European colonial ideology, French colonial ideology viewed the colony as: “an erotic playground, a virgin bride to be ravished and penetrated by white [French] male” (Stoler 1989: 637; Cooper 2000: 751). By portraying Vietnam as the ‘virgin bride’ and France as the dominant male, French colonialists were able to justify the unequal power relationship between the Vietnamese and the French. In their effort to downplay the violence resulting from the conquest of Vietnam, the French used the rhetoric of marriage. One suggestion of this is the use of term Indochinese Union to refer to the colonized territories (Cooper 2000: 752). As the
scholar Frank Proschan poignantly suggests, these images reflected French perceptions and understanding of sexuality and gender in their own society as well as downplayed the power of the Vietnamese people, thus effectively disempowering the colonized (Proschan 2002: 459). In such an atmosphere it is not at all surprising that gender relations in Vietnam altered under French colonial rule.

Research has shown that French colonialism contributed to an increase in gender inequality within Vietnam (Ngo 1974: 35; Stoler 1989: 638; Le 1999: 29; Proshcan 2002: 459; Cooper 2000: 751). The economic and political changes under French colonialism destroyed most of the traditional craft industries, and other industries employed and operated by women (Ngo 1974: 35). The rise in poverty, loss of peasant land to wealthy landlords and French colonialists, and an increased rate of women’s unemployment in the countryside forced many women to move away from their homes and communities in search of employment (Ngo 1974: 35-37). Most found jobs working on French rubber plantations or factories in the cities where, in either case, they often found themselves working in poor and exploitative conditions (Ngo 1974: 36-37). Although the practice of concubinage existed in Vietnam prior to French colonization, it became widespread under the colonial period (Ngo 1974: 36-37). One of the main reasons for the extensive practice was an increased level of poverty experienced by the majority of peasant women and men in the countryside (Ngo 1974: 37; Turner 1998: 38). Vietnamese men who worked for colonial officials in urban centers became an important economic provider for the family. Under these conditions, women’s economic dependency on men further increased under French

Most Vietnamese perceived French conquest as a fundamental flaw in Confucian ideas about the order of society and thus represented a need to reexamine Vietnamese notions of social hierarchies, gender roles and gender relations (Tetreault 2000: 46). Consequently, Confucian ideas about social hierarchies and gender roles and gender relations began to come under more frequent challenges.

Anti-colonialism, Nationalism, Communism, and the Women’s Question in Early Twentieth Century Vietnam

Since the early twentieth century, questions concerning women’s rights within the family and society were raised by both Vietnamese radicals and conservatives. Since French colonial censorship prevented any direct political discussions about the negative effects of French colonial rule in Vietnam, gender was frequently used by both the conservatives and radicals as an indirect approach to challenge colonial rule (Lessard 2003: 138). Both conservatives and radicals used women and their position within the family in their discussions. Conservatives argued that colonialism was the root cause of unwanted social change, including corruption, and as a curative proposed a return to Confucianism, with its emphasis upon the family as the core of society and its corollary doctrine of female submission as the foundation of the family (Marr 1981: 209; Lessard 2003: 138). Alternatively, radicals suggested that women were just one of many oppressed groups in Vietnamese society and proposed that revolution was the only way to liberate them all (Marr 1981: 209; Lessard 2003: 138). By equating women’s oppression to class and racial inequality, Vietnamese radicals
were able appeal directly to women to participate in the anti-colonial struggle (Marr 1981: 209; Lessard 2003: 138). As we will see later in chapter four, some Vietnamese women were inspired by these revolutionary ideas to participate directly in the war against the French and the later war against the Americans and the southern Vietnamese regime.

Under the leadership of the last emperor in the early 1900s, Bao Dai, women’s education was promoted. By 1930, there was approximately 40,752 girls in Vietnam received instruction in quoc ngu or romanized script in colonial schools (Turner 2000: 206). Because women were previously excluded from obtaining formal education, the enrollment of young girls and women in French colonial schools during this period was considered an important shift in Vietnam’s history. Since education was costly, the majority of early female students enrolled in the colonial education system came from upper-middle class families. In addition to reading and writing skills, young women also learn cooking, hygiene, child-rearing, and sewing; all of which were intended to socialize these girls for their future roles as wives and mothers (Marr 1981: 206; Lessard 2002: 148).

Alongside with the expansion of education for young girls and women, there was an expansion of literature written for women. One of Vietnam early women’s weekly newspapers, Nu Gioi Chung, began its publication on February 02, 1918. However, the low number of literate women in 1918 in conjunction with the lack of financial commitment from subscribers led to the end of Nu Gioi Chung after one year of publication (Marr 1981: 209-210). Another popular southern women’s newspaper, Phu Nu Tan Van, began publication on May 08, 1929, with Nguyen Duc Nhuan and
Dao Trinh Nhuc as editors. The newspaper published fourteen editions prior to being shut down in 1932. During its short publication period, the editors of *Phu Nu Tan Van* invited a number of Vietnamese male and female intellectuals to write upon issues concerning women and their rights in society (Marr 1981: 210). By 1932, *Phu Nu Tan Van* published a series of articles aimed at encouraging women to participate in sports, “cook simple meals” for those unemployed, and take part in women’s organizations (Marr 1981: 211-12). Together these intellectual developments effectively raised the level of political consciousness among women and in the process created a new image and meaning of Vietnamese womanhood.

Phan Boi Chau, a philosopher, nationalist, historian and anti-colonial organizer, was considered one of early twentieth century Vietnam’s most important intellectuals. Like other French educated scholars of his generation, Chau was exposed to Western history, philosophy, and political theory at school (Marr 1981: 257). This exposure enabled Chau to question and challenge Vietnamese history and culture and in the process allowed him to rewrite national history so that it highlighted individual patriotism. He used women’s dependent roles within the family, stemming from the entrenched Confucianism reinforced by French colonialism, as cultural and national symbols in his writings, most often as a metaphor for Vietnamese “backwardness”, cultural “weakness” and “feudal” character (Turner 2000: 188).

Following Chau, Ho Chi Minh, the Party’s leader for whom Saigon was renamed, linked women’s oppression to the persistence of French colonialism and class inequality, and suggested that armed revolution was the only way for women to achieve their independence (White 1989: 178; Tetrault 2000: 48; Turner and Phan
By equating class liberation with women’s liberation, the Party succeeded in mobilizing many women from different classes and various regions to participate in the struggle for national independence (Tetreault 2000: 48). As Karen Turner and Mary Tetreault suggest, women’s issues played but a small part in the larger debates of French colonialism, economic exploitation, and imperialism (Turner 2000: 188; Tetreault 2000: 51).

Although the Party acknowledged that the movement for women’s emancipation began prior to the Party’s founding in 1930, they maintained that the early movement was led by Vietnamese intellectuals influenced by the bourgeois ‘westernized’ model (White 1989: 175-76). Therefore, from the Party’s perspective, many of the early arguments made by intellectuals advocating women’s rights were consistent with the emerging decadent, capitalist life-style of the city. By referring to those who led the emancipation movement in the early twentieth century as ‘westernized’, the Party was able to impose their agenda on the women’s rights movement in Vietnam (Tetreult 2000: 49). While advocating for greater women’s participation in politics, the Party emphasized women’s domestic roles as mothers and wives (White 1989: 179; Tetreult 2000: 49). This position is not as contradictory as it initially appears because it reflected the Party effort to harmonize women’s domestic roles as defined by Confucian moral codes and their new political roles.

**Women and the Indochina War (1945-54)**

The Indochina war started in a somewhat roundabout fashion. As stated earlier in this chapter, when imperial Japanese military forces occupied Vietnam in 1940, a
few months after France had surrendered to Germany, the Japanese permitted French colonial administrators to continue administering the country. In March 1945, some months after the allied liberation of France from German occupation, this arrangement came to an abrupt end when the Japanese forces imprisoned the French colonial administrators and the few French military personnel in Vietnam (DeFronzo 2007: 158). In August 1945, after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, the Japanese surrendered their control of Vietnam directly to the Communist Party (SarDesai 1992: 56). After the Party seized control of the country, emperor Bao Dai abdicated and a week following his abdication Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Party, declared the creation of the new state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2nd, 1945 (SarDesai 1992: 57). That same month, with the aid of British forces, the French recaptured southern Vietnam from the Party, and thus the stage was set for the Indochina war (DeFronzo 2007: 160).

With the declaration of the newly created state in 1945, the Party publicly announced gender equality as its official policy and established a series of laws aimed at improving women’s position in society. That same year, the first female guerilla unit was established under the leadership of Ha Thi Que who later became the leader of the Vietnam Women’s Union, and a member of the Party’s central committee (Taylor 1999: 28). Under the newly created constitution in 1946, the northern government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) ensured women would have: “the same political, economic, cultural, social and family rights as men” (Pettus 2002: 27). For the first time, women were able to vote and some were elected to the Chambers of Deputies (Pettus 2002: 27). Access to education for women
significantly increased soon after the Party took control and for the first time, women were encouraged to participate in the political arena at local and state level (Le 1999: 69). Women’s economic status improved under the new political regime. In 1948 the Party increased maternity leave to 60 days for women who worked for the State (Tran and Le 1997: 233).

In an attempt to regain control in northern Vietnam, French colonial authorities engaged officials from the newly formed communist government in a series of negotiations. The Party rejected the French demand to surrender and give up their arms, so the French responded with a bombing campaign over the northern city of Hai Phong on November 23rd, 1946 killing over 6,000 civilians (Sar DeSai 1992: 59). The incident led to an open war, known as the Indochina war (Sar Desai 1992: 59).

Women’s roles in Vietnam changed during the Indochina war. As the conflict escalated, Vietnamese women from different classes and age groups became militarized (Turner 2000: 188). One study estimated that while the French still occupied the country in 1952, there were approximately 140,000 female guerillas operating in southern Vietnam and about 840,000 in the north (Turner 2000: 48). In addition to participating in guerilla warfare, women also took part in industrial production, land reform programs, protecting villages from the enemy, and carried out civil administration (Werner 1981: 175). The instability of wartime conditions and the increased demand for women’s labour created new opportunities for women to receive military and ideological training (Jayawardena 1986: 207-208). The Party facilitated this process. The land reform and collectivization campaigns carried out
by the Party during the 1950s and the establishment of universal childcare in northern Vietnam were all intended to improve women’s economic position and relieve them from certain household responsibilities, such as childcare (Hy 2003: 204). Also during this period, many women assumed most of the decision-making roles within their households (Tetreault 2000: 49). These new roles provided an opportunity for many women to challenge the entrenched sexism within Vietnamese culture and redefine their roles within their families and communities.

The Indochina war ended in 1954 with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Importantly, the defeat of the French marked an end to French colonial rule and the beginning of the postcolonial era in northern Vietnam. The same cannot be said in the south. The State of Vietnam (SOV) in the south was created by the French in March 1949 following the escalation of hostilities in northern Vietnam. The French appointed the former emperor, Bao Dai, as head of the State and installed Tran Van Huu as the president (Asselin 2007: 97). The State of Vietnam gained what legitimacy it had through a vote by the French National Assembly to give up its control over Indochina in April 1949 (Asselin 2007: 97). Under this agreement, the State of Vietnam was given almost complete autonomy, including complete control over its army and domestic affairs, but only some, limited control in international matters (Asselin 2007: 97). Southern Vietnam was thus maintained in a dependent State until the French withdrawal from the region when things began to change.
The End of Indochina war, the Geneva Agreement, and US involvement (1954-75)

The Indochina war ended at Dien Bien Phu on March 13, 1954. On April 26, at the request of the Soviet Union, a Four Power Conference was convened in Geneva to discuss the situations in Korea and Vietnam. Present at the entire conference were representatives of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR, as well representatives from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Hoopes 1970: 605). The other participants of the conference varied according to the subject under discussion. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN), the State of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were present when Indochina was discussed (Hoopes 1970: 605). On April 27th the conference issued a declaration supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Indochina, thus effectively affirming the region’s independence from the French. The discussion about the future of Indochina lasted for several weeks. By July 20th, 1954 three separate agreements for each of the Indochina states were reached at the Geneva Conference (Short 1989: 163). In the case of Vietnam, the Agreement of Cessation of Hostilities was signed between the governments of France and the DRVN (Short 1989: 163; Lomperis 1996: 97; Asselin 2007: 98). Under the terms of the Agreement, the governments of France and the DRVN agreed to cease hostilities and also to:

...the independence of Vietnam, the temporary division of the nation into two zones separated by a demilitarized zones at the seventeenth parallel, a mandatory relocation of all forces loyal to France or the SOVN south of that line and forces loyal to the DRVN north of it within 300 days, and a voluntary relocations of individual of individual Vietnamese along the same lines (Asselin 2007: 98).
Other terms agreed to by all the signatories of the international agreement designed to keep the Cold War from boiling over into Vietnam that came out of this extremely important conference were that:

1) the introduction into Viet Nam of foreign troops and military personnel as well as of all kinds of arms and munitions; 2) that no military base at the disposition of a foreign state may be established in the regrouping zones of the two parties; 3) general elections shall be held in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the member states of the International Supervisory Commission referred to in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities (The Department of State Bulletin 1954).

It should be noted here that neither the US nor the SOV agreed to sign these agreements out of reluctance to be bound in the future by the declaration, particularly the provision forbidding foreign troops from occupying Indochina (Short 1987:164). The ominous implications of this position began to come clear rather quickly. In February 1955, the US Senate ratified the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization which formalized US commitment to ensure southern Vietnam as a free communist area (Lomperis 1996: 103; Asselin 2007: 102).

Women’s status and roles in both northern and southern Vietnam shifted after the partition. In the north, the Party made other changes aimed at improving women’s status in marriage. For example, the new Marriage and Family Law introduced by the Party in 1959 banned the practices of child marriage and forced marriage in northern Vietnam (Winsensale 2000: 80; Pettus 2002: 32; Hy 1989: 742). This new law also declared gender equality within marriage and forbade domestic violence (Thai 1996:}
As the conflict intensified in the 1960s, the Party reoriented its strategies toward the war effort.

**Women and the Last Phase of the Vietnam War**

In March of 1965, the US Air Force started a campaign of heavy bombing on northern Vietnam in an effort to halt the Party’s support of southern Communist forces. Also in March 1965, the US government began to rapidly deploy large numbers of ground combat troops to Vietnam. Additionally, direct US military aid to the southern government was also substantially increased at this time (Werner 1981: 175; Tetreault 2000: 51). The daily bombing attacks carried out by the US Air Force significantly disrupted the reconstruction of the newly created socialist state and negatively impacted people’s daily lives in northern Vietnam. For women throughout the country, the escalation of the conflict prolonged the separation from their husbands and children who fought on the front. As men left their homes, farms, and factories to join the army, women were expected to take over wartime production and care for their children by themselves (Turner and Phan 1998: 55-56).

In southern Vietnam, women were urged by the Party to engage in the struggle against the Diem government (Tetreault 2000: 50). To counter the Party’s appeal to women in the south, Diem’s sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, established a number of women’s movements such as the Women’s Solidarity Movement and the Paramilitary Girls in the mid 1950s (Tetreault 2000: 50). However, these movements were unable to attract women from the rural areas as the Diem government was: “too Catholic and too brutal in its suppression of its domestic opponents to appeal to peasants in the countryside” (Tetreault 2000: 50). The position of women in the south also altered
during the 1960s as more southern Vietnamese men were actively choosing sides by enlisting into either the Party or the southern government army (Werner 1981: 175).

As the Vietnam war began to escalate in the early 1960s, the Party continued to encourage women to take up arms to defend the nation and also initiated a series of campaigns asking women to assume responsibilities in other arenas, including political, economic, and social. Beginning in 1961, the Party initiated the “Five Goods” campaign in northern Vietnam. The campaign urged women to: “1. Fulfill the goals of production and economize well. 2. Follow all state policies and laws. 3. Participate in management. 4. Advance in their studies. 5. Raise their families and educate their children” (Pettus 2002: 41-42). Four years after the “Five Goods” campaign, simultaneous with the dramatic escalation of direct US involvement in the war, the Party embarked on the “Three Responsibilities” campaign in northern Vietnam. “Three Responsibilities” campaign encouraged women to: “1) take over agricultural and industrial production; 2) support revolutionaries by providing food, medical aid, and shelter; and 3) motivate husbands, sons, and brothers to join the Party and participate in the revolutionary struggle” (Le 1999: 13-14). Both these campaigns represented a radical shift from the earlier Party model of Confucianism in which women were portrayed as submissive wives to supporters and participants in the anti-colonial struggle.

Under the new wartime Confucian model presented by the Party, women were portrayed as hard-working, selfless, and patriotic mothers, and leaders in agricultural production and politics. These new images of “Vietnamese womanhood” were constructed alongside the contrasting images of women as unpatriotic and self-
serving merchants (Turner 2000: 58). The practices of trading and selling of goods for personal gains engaged in by independent businesswomen was strongly discouraged by the Party during the war years. From the mid to late 1960s, a series of propaganda campaigns enacted by the Party criticized small-scale businesswomen for “their apparent indifference to the collective concerns of a nation at war” (Pettus 2002: 50). Despite the Party’s discouragement, many women continued to engage in the practice in private selling throughout the war years (Pettus 2002: 50). As we have seen in chapter one and will see later in chapter four, the practice of selling goods for personal gain was deemed necessary by some women to ensure the survival of their families.

*An End to Thirty Years of War*

The Vietnam war ended in 1975 with the withdrawal of American troops, the collapse of the southern Vietnamese government, the political victory of the Communist Party in southern Vietnam and the subsequent reunification of northern and southern Vietnam. With the war ended, thousands of men from the front returned to their homes. Upon returning, these men reassumed the leadership positions occupied by women during the war within the household and community (Endres 1999: 160). Around the same time, the Party initiated a campaign known as the “new culture family”. Under the new campaign, the role of motherhood was celebrated (Werner 2006: 115). Some scholars note that the Party’s focus on women’s role as mothers in the postwar period contributed to the unequal household division of labour between men and women, with women performing the majority of household responsibilities such as caring for children (Werner 2006: 116; Korinek 2004: 797;
The link between postwar womanhood and motherhood had important implications on women’s involvement in politics.

Researchers noticed a general decline in women’s political participation since the conflict ended (Goodkind 1995: 346; Fahey 1998: 236). One study in northern Vietnam found the number of women in leadership positions on village committees fell from 3,000 in 1974 to 800 in 1979 (Goodkind 1995: 346). As we will see below, the decline in women’s political involvement continues well after the introduction of the new economic reform policy of doi moi.

**Women and Doi Moi (late 1980s)**

In an attempt to improve the economic situation in the late 1980s, the Communist Party introduced a new economic policy of *doi moi*, which represents a shift from a planned or centralized economy to a market driven economy (Thai 1996: 77). The policy was launched in 1986 following the Party’s Sixth Congress (Hy 2003: 10). Under the new economic reform, drastic cuts were made to State employment and funding of public services such as childcare and education as these services were privatized (Thai 1996: 77; Hy 2003: 10-11). This change facilitated an expansion of private businesses and brought in a significant amount of investment from both overseas Vietnamese and foreign business firms (Hy 2003: 85).

Along with *doi moi*, new Party discourse sought to replace images of women as guerilla fighters and heroic workers with images of women as caring mothers and entrepreneurs (Fahey 1998: 239). Interestingly enough, the practice of selling goods for personal gain engaged by women during the war years deemed as ‘unpatriotic and
selfish’ by the Party is now encouraged by the State under the new postwar economic reform. Also at this time, the Party revised the Law on Marriage and Family to further enhance women’s position within the household. The new legislation stipulated that: “the husband has a duty to create conditions for the wife to properly fulfill the role of mother” (Tran and Le 1997: 233). In 1988, the Party made changes to the population policies that require a maximum of two children per couple with the gap of three to five years between them (Endres 1999: 165). Violations of the regulations in theory are resulted in fines and salary deduction or expulsion for Party members (Endres 1999: 166). Contraceptives are offered free to women. Around this time, the Party enacted a series of propaganda campaigns in both rural and urban areas to raise public awareness of the changes. In all of these campaigns, women were portrayed as having responsibilities for the welfare and happiness of their families and ultimately the welfare of the nation (Endres 1999: 166; Pettus 2002: 175-76).

Scholars have mixed opinions about women’s living conditions in Vietnam after doi moi. Some have suggested that women’s lives were improved by the new economic policy (Tran and Le 1997: 84; Le and Do 1997: 68; Ha and Ha 2001: 25-26); others have argued that women are worse off than they were during the war years (Goodkind 1995: 345; Tetreault 2000: 51; White 1989: 56; Wisensale 2000: 84; Phinney 2008: 346-347). Those who saw improvement pointed to the greater mobility and new employment opportunities available to women after the economic reform (Tran and Le 1997: 84; Le 1999: 121; Ha and Ha 2001: 26). One study estimated that 52% of the labour force in 1994 consisted of women workers (Tran and
Le 1997: 85). A decade after economic reform, the majority of women’s employment was found to be in the sectors of agriculture, trading, education, and health care (Tran and Le 1997: 85). Researchers who perceived a decline in the position of women argued that the loss of many government jobs formerly filled by women, the decline in women’s political participation and the elimination or reduction of many public services, such as childcare and healthcare, led to a significant decline in the quality of life for many women (Goodkind 1995: 345; White 1989: 59; Fahey 1998: 224; Nguyen 1999: 49; Tetreault 2000: 51). One study estimated that about two-thirds of women’s jobs have been lost following doi moi (Nguyen 1999: 48). For women, the loss of state employment meant loss of income and benefits such as maternity benefits (White 1989: 60; Nguyen 1999: 48). As the government withdrew its support for social services such as childcare, women had to take over the care responsibilities for their children. Under these circumstances, many women were forced to abandon the labour force (Fahey 1998: 240). Along with these changes, women’s involvement in politics continues to decline.

A study estimated the number of women representatives in the National Assembly significantly decreased from 32% in 1971 to 18% in 1987 and 1992 (Goodkind 1995: 346). In southern Vietnam, membership in the Women’s Union suffered a decline since the 1990s (Endres 1999: 162). Kristen W. Endres explains how the decline can be explained by the lack of incentives perceived by local women (Endres 1999: 162). Interestingly enough, the decline took place despite the commitment made by the Party after the war to increase women’s participation in all
public spheres of life, including: "political, cultural, scientific, technical and professional" (Goodkind 1995: 347).

In this chapter, I discussed my fieldwork locations in southern Vietnam and the ethnic Vietnamese population studied in this project. I provided background information on Vietnamese social organization, ideology, and gender relations prior to and during the period of French colonization before examining the changes to gender roles during the Indochina war and Vietnam war. Within this, I explained that while the ideology of motherhood did not change through pre-war, wartime and into the postwar period, the expectations and meanings of motherhood did change. The idea that all women should be mothers remained constant throughout the pre-war and postwar periods. Prior to the war, motherhood was equated with work within the household. During the war years, however, motherhood was linked to ideas of nationalism. Both the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Southern government used the ideology of motherhood to recruit women and promote national unity. Postwar State rhetoric continued to stress women's role as mothers and seeks to link motherhood and work both within and outside the household.

Although there was a revival of the dominant Confucian gender model in the postwar period, it was more flexible in that allowed women to participate in a large number of roles than previously felt to be appropriate. While women were expected to give up their wartime roles as head of household and the State stressed the importance of women's roles as mothers, the State also encouraged women to take part in entrepreneurial work. The following chapter discusses the ethnographic methods used for this thesis project. I also explain the data sources such as published
personal accounts, interviews, museum photographs, cultural displays, and participant observation that were used for this project.
Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODS

Part of my research involved ethnographic fieldwork where I took on the dual roles of a participant and an observer in Go Vap and Cho Lon districts in Ho Chi Minh City and Sa Dec town in Dong Thap province over the summer of 2007. Aside from participant observation, I also carried out life history interviews with some of the women in these communities about their experiences during the Vietnam war and thereafter during the postwar economic reform period. It is the dynamic interaction between these stories that ground my research methods which I explain in this chapter.

This chapter begins with a discussion of materials displayed at the war museums in southern Vietnam. These displays showcase wartime photographs and personal belongings of women who participated in either the Indochina war or the Vietnam war, as well as officially selected representational materials such as statutes. Also included in the discussion in this chapter are published personal accounts written by Vietnamese women. After discussing what I seek to learn from these various representations of women’s wartime experiences, I proceed to describe the stages of my ethnographic fieldwork, which consists of two sections. To answer my last research question, I explain the possibilities and challenges of performing the dual roles of insider and researcher, as well as exploring the process through which I negotiated these roles in the field. In chapter one there is a brief discussion of these dual aspects of my roles, but I expound on these issues in significantly greater detail in this chapter. The second section describes my life history interviews and explains
the process of interviewing Vietnamese women about their wartime and postwar experiences in their communities.

**Museum Photographs and Cultural Materials**

The use of photographs has long been a prominent feature in ethnographic research. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, photographs were used by anthropologists to represent a certain ‘reality’ or ‘objective’ truth (O’Reilly 2004: 164; Crang and Cook 2007: 105). This view has been criticized by ethnographers and anthropologists over the years. Since the 1960s, questions have been raised about the value of photographs as objective or representative of reality (O’Reilly 2004: 164; Crang and Cook 2007: 106). The shift during the late 1980s toward critical and reflexive writing about people and cultures previously considered as ‘exotic’ renewed interests in the use of photographs among anthropologists and ethnographers (Crang and Cook 2007: 107). These changes forced anthropologists to pay particular attention to the contexts of the production and consumption of photographs (O’Reilly 2004: 164; Crang and Cook 2007: 107).

During my fieldwork I made several trips to the War Remnants Museum and Southern Women’s Museum in Ho Chi Minh City where I selected and recorded a series of photographs of Vietnamese women performing various wartime roles such as guerilla soldiers and mothers. I took photographs of these sources as well as other cultural materials like statutes and personal belongings of women displayed at the museums. These photographs proved to be beneficial in the data analysis stage of the research process. As data sources, museum photographs and other cultural materials
on display are useful in: “support[ing] written data and mak[ing] the argument more forcefully or more profoundly” (O’Reilley 2004: 161). The analyses of these photographs in conjunction with the displayed cultural materials show how the roles of mothers and guerilla soldiers were idealized by the Party’s postwar representation of war heroines.

The photographs displayed in public places such as war museums can tell us about both the subjects of the photographs and the perspectives of those who put the display together (O’Reilly 2004: 162-165; Edwards 2001: 185-187; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 170-172; Angrosino 2005: 57-58). Since the process of selection, production, consumption, and interpretation of these images is subjective and culturally defined (Edwards 2001: 3-6), I did not solely rely on these images to tell me about the diverse experiences of Vietnamese women during the two wars, but rather utilized them to “fill out” the picture of women’s wartime experiences more completely (Edwards 2001: 9).

Published Personal Documents

In addition to these museum sources, I surveyed published personal accounts by Vietnamese women of different ages and political backgrounds who participated directly in the Indochina war or the subsequent Vietnam war. These published wartime personal accounts were important in grounding this research as they lend a personal voice to the research. Particularly, these sources allowed me to examine the differing motivations of women who chose to participate directly in the Indochina war and the Vietnam war. Since the authors of the accounts lived through the
Indochina war and/or the Vietnam war but may no longer be alive to interview, surveying these published personal accounts allowed me to gain important insights into the diverse and distinctive ways in which Vietnamese women responded to the changes brought on by the conflicts. Prior to my fieldwork, I consulted some of these primary sources. By doing so, I was able to enter the field with a more informed mind.

Published personal accounts or autobiographies are a valuable source of information for anthropologists and historians as they provide details of the everyday life of individuals from various backgrounds in different times and places. This is especially important in cases where there is little ‘official’ recorded history such as minority groups and women’s history. Prior to the 1970s, historians were apprehensive about the use of published personal accounts. This is because published personal accounts were viewed as being:

- individual stories, not collective enterprises,
- and they are based at least in part on evidence that is not available to examination by anyone except their author—namely, personal memory.
- Historians traditionally asserted their discipline’s superiority over autobiography by classifying these texts as sources, and not very respectable sources at that (Popkin 2003: 50).

Developments in literary theory from the 1970s onward altered historians’ view of published personal accounts. These accounts came to be seen as important historical sources that contain certain truths about the past, including women’s autobiographies.

Historically, the writing and publication of autobiographies were largely undertaken by elite men. Accordingly, this autobiographical genre was written in: “...chronologically ordered details of a life whose public significance lends the
autobiography its significance” (Jay 1987: 50). Alternatively, women’s autobiographies were written in the forms of memoirs, letters and diaries and in private settings. By situating the writing and production of autobiography within the historical context, we can begin to ask questions about our current understanding of the power and the differences in the genres of autobiography written by women and men.

Published personal wartime accounts such as memoirs and diaries are often written or published with a particular audience in mind and the events elaborated upon and issues raised reflect the authors’ specific interest and perspectives (O’Reilly 2005: 162-165; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 160). I am aware of the biases existing in these sources as each account is crafted to suit the teller’s positions and interests and therefore I do not privilege the voices from the published personal accounts over other voices such as the interviewees. In reading and analyzing these accounts, I compared and checked these accounts for discrepancies against other primary sources which include: interviews, museum wartime photographs and displayed cultural materials. This method is known as triangulation which: “involves confirming or cross-checking the accuracy of data obtained from one source with data collected from other, different sources” (LeCompte and Schensul 1999: 131). The use of multiple sources is considered to be beneficial in ethnographic research because:

…it ensures that information elicited from each key informant is corroborated by information from others - preferably people who have different perspectives on the subject or who occupy different positions in the project from initial informants… Another reason for using multiple sources of data is to make sure that if
one data set or sources proves to be unreliable or incomplete, others will suffice to provide information needed to answer each research question posed (leCompte and Schensul 1999: 131).

With this in mind, I used the published personal accounts as a supplemental source to augment other data sources such as museum wartime photographs, displayed cultural materials, and interviews that I gathered during my fieldwork.

**Ethnography**

This project involved doing ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography is widely understood by anthropologists as both a finished product and a research process (Fetterman 1998: 1). As a research method, ethnography is a process wherein the ethnographer or researcher immerses herself/himself within the field or everyday "natural setting" of the participants. Within this setting, the researcher employs various approaches such as participant observation, field-note writing, interviews, document analysis, and photography to collect data (Brewer 2000: 26). Through the course of my fieldwork, I encountered varying perceptions of Vietnamese gender roles as expressed by women of different class and political backgrounds. The research took these differences into consideration in the analysis and writing stages. In so doing, I was able to highlight the divergence between the voices of women who participated directly in the two wars and the voices of those remained on the home front during the Indochina war and Vietnam war.

During my fieldwork, I stayed with my relatives in the districts of Go Vap and Cho Lon, Ho Chi Minh city and Sa Dec town, Dong Thap province. This experience
made me realize that my status as an unmarried, overseas Vietnamese, female student researcher can pose challenges to gaining access to certain places in the field at times. On several occasions, the women of my host families insisted that a chaperone accompany me to places I wanted to visit. I found being chaperoned sometimes limited my access to certain places, such as local bars. Additionally, the expectation of participating in family daily chores posed an additional challenge for me in finding time to work. I will elaborate on this further in the section below.

*Participant Observation*

As a research method of data collection, participant observation requires the researcher to be directly involved in and record daily activities of the participants in the field (leCompte and Schensul1999: 91). During my fieldwork over the course of two and a half months in the summer of 2007, I was often invited to attend *dam gio* or the day of the dead, weddings, and other social events. At these events, I was often asked by the women of the families to help with the cooking, shopping, and child minding. Aside from these activities, I also helped out with the daily chores such as washing dishes and babysitting in my host families. I always willingly took on these tasks, recognizing the importance of the connections I made this way with individuals in the communities involved in the activities. Due to gender expectations, I believe my experience would have been different if I was an overseas Vietnamese male researcher. In particular, I would not be asked to participate in certain activities such as doing household chores as shopping, babysitting, and cooking as these activities are associated with women. The limited involvement with this part of women’s daily lives would undoubtedly affect the level of access to female participants and thereby
influence the relationship I form with them. Also, if I was a male researcher, I would not require a male chaperon to accompany me to places such as the local bar that are deemed inappropriate for women.

Throughout my fieldwork, I had opportunities to observe the different patterns of women’s daily social interactions and activities such as shopping, recreational activities and gossip. From these observations, I came to realize that there is no single definition of Vietnamese gender roles as each individual frequently negotiated her roles and positions within families and communities to suit her specific needs. This realization further committed me to one of my goals of demonstrating the range of voices of those women who chose to participate directly in the two wars and those who opted to remain at home during the wars.

To record the social events and the conversations I had with participants in the field, I chose the ethnographic method of field-note writing. There are several advantages and disadvantages associated with this method of recording. The advantages include: "ease of use, minimal expense, and unobtrusiveness" (Fetterman 1998: 63). However, the drawbacks of this approach are that: "the fieldworker cannot record every word and nuance in a social situation, has difficulty maintaining eye contact with other participants while writing, and must expend a great deal of effort to record data that are legible and organized" (Fetterman 1998: 63-64). While field-note writing can be difficult at the time, particularly during conversations with participants, I found the method was beneficial overall as it enabled me to record the observations I made in various social settings and conversations I had with participants in an unobtrusive manner. These notes aided me tremendously in
reflecting upon these experiences at the end of each day and in the analytical stage after leaving the field.

The ethnic and cultural affiliation I had with the informants allowed me to understand certain cultural cues such as body language and puns in ways that are not necessarily accessible to outsider researchers. At the same time, my education and training in the west created class and cultural differences that need to be recognized as problematic and taken into account. Particularly, my training and education made me an outsider as well as created an unequal balance of power between myself, the student researcher, and the interviewees.

My ethnic and cultural affiliation with the interviewees may also have posed some additional challenges. Being an insider, I was expected to be familiar with the unspoken cultural expectations and local customs (e.g. formal terms used in based on gender/age). At times I found myself struggling to remember certain aspects of local customs and social rules. This unfamiliarity produced discomfort for me at times and allowed me the opportunity to reexamine and reflect on the relationships between myself and the participants. Researchers without a cultural connection to the participants may find that they are not held to such high levels of scrutiny.

Being an insider had the possibility of limiting the types of information the interviewees would reveal to me. Having a close relationship with some of the interviewees may have prevented them from telling me stories that would portray them in a negative light. Consequently, they may have been reluctant to share stories that they would not want other family members to hear. As such, the interviewees would select the types of stories they chose to tell me. While the act of selecting and
telling me stories speaks to the agency of the interviewees, the close relationship between myself and the interviewees serves as a constraint to the types of information that I was able to gain access to. Families are close knit in Vietnam. Therefore some interviewees might have feared a breach of confidentiality if they told me something that they considered scandalous. The dual roles I played in the field aided in raising my awareness of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the research process.

*Interview with Women in Southern Vietnam*

To explore women’s diverse experiences in southern Vietnam during what basically amounts to a three decade long period of warfare and thereafter during the reconstruction postwar period, I chose the method of life history interviews. During my fieldwork, I interviewed five Vietnamese women, two from Go Vap, one from Cho Lon district in Ho Chi Minh City and two from the area of Sa Dec town in Dong Thap province. The women’s ages ranged from mid 40s to late 60s. All of the interviewees were literate and consisted of both married and unmarried women. While two defined themselves as working-class, the other three perceived themselves as middle-class. Out of the five interviewees, three affiliated themselves with the Communist Party. Together, the differences in age, political affiliation, and class backgrounds among the informants allowed me to explore a range of perspectives about Vietnamese wartime and postwar gender roles.

It is important to clarify here that of the five interviewees, two were my female relatives. The fact that two of the interviewees are members of my family presented both opportunities and challenges for me as a researcher and a community member.
My ethnic and cultural affiliation with the interviewees allowed me to gain invaluable ‘insider knowledge’ that is often not accessible through the formal interview research methods where subjects may be unwilling to disclose sensitive personal information to outsider researchers (Reed-Hanahay 2002: 422-423; Buzard 2003: 63-68; Philaretou and Allen 2006: 67-69). At the same time the close relationships I have with the interviewees made me aware that I must take necessary steps to ensure that I do not overexpose the private lives of the subjects. I chose to use the research method of self-censorship: assigning pseudonyms, rewording and rephrasing some of the information obtained from the interviews (Philaretou and Allen 2006: 72; Reed-Danhay 2002: 422-423; Buzard 2003: 73-75).

**Arranging and Conducting Interviews**

Prior to obtaining permission from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Northern British Columbia to carry out the fieldwork portion of this thesis project, I contacted and requested interviews with three potential participants. Through a series of telephone calls I received an oral agreement from each woman to participate in the study. After these initial preliminary contacts, I applied for permission from the University Research Ethics Board. Upon receiving the board’s permission in early June 2007 (See Appendix A) I began the interviews.

Upon entering the field in the summer of 2007 I contacted and arranged pre-interview meetings with three respondents. During these meetings I readdressed the goals of my research project and provided each participant with an information sheet (See Appendix B). The sheet contained details on the purpose and goals of my research project as well as the purpose of requesting the informants’ participation. It
also outlined conditions of the interview, such as the length of time, informants’ right
to withdraw from the interviews at any time they chose, their anonymity, and only I
and the University of Northern British Columbia would have access to the
information the interviewees revealed. After translation I went over the information
document in detail with each informant. I also took the opportunity during the pre-
interview meetings to ask the informants about other potential interviewees. This
research method is often recognized by anthropologists and historians as the
“snowball” technique. I will elaborate more on this method in the section below.
Through the use of the “snowball” method a list of potential respondents’ names was
given to me by one of the respondents. After receiving the list of potential
respondents I selected and requested pre-interview meetings with three of the women.
Soon after hearing the purpose of my study, the women were willing to participate.
Following successful pre-interview meetings I requested a follow-up interview with
each respondent.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is loosely defined as “the study, representation, or knowledge of
a culture by one or more of its members” (Buzard 2003: 61). In this method,
respondents are contacted through: “network samplings, in which respondents list
their contacts, and all or a random sample of contacts are interviewed to find out
about their relationships with the respondents and with others” (leCompte and
Schensul 1999: 55). In my case networking enabled me to ask the same research
questions to women who shared similar historical events such as the Vietnam war and
and *doi moi* but not necessarily similar experiences based on their different age, class, and political backgrounds.

Since the 1970s, autoethnography has been used by researchers across social science disciplines as a way to challenge the “Truth” or “Objective” knowledge and seek to create alternative narratives and representations of peoples and cultures who have previously been ignored and marginalized in ethnographic text (i.e. women and the poor) (Buzard 2003: 70-72; Reed-Danahay 2002: 421). Autoethnography has been criticized by some researchers for its inability to predict or control human beliefs/behaviors (Reed-Danahay 2002: 423; Buzard 2003: 73). However, these views are challenged by feminist researchers who point out that no knowledge of human beliefs or behaviour can be considered ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ and suggest that these limitations should be considered as an advantage rather than limitation in writing and researching about women (Reed-Danahay 2002: 423; Philaretou and Allen 2006: 74-75; Buzard 2003: 67-72). Andrea Philaretou and Katherine Allen (2006) explain that:

> by controlling or predicting human beliefs or behaviors… mainstream qualitative and quantitative methods also introduce considerable biases in research endeavors. The issue of having a subjective researcher trying to do objective scientific research is especially problematic with the autoethnographic mode of inquiry, which by definition relies on the subjectivity of personal accounts (74-75).

Philaretou and Allen’s statement is important in questioning the process of knowledge construction and highlighting the complex relationships between the researcher and the informant.
An advantage of using the autoethographic method in ethnographic writing is that it highlights the identity and the relationship that the ethnographer shares with the subjects (Buzard 2003: 72; Reed-Danahay 2002: 422). In my case, autoethnography allowed me to question my self-identity and status in relation to the research participants and the thesis project. To gain informed consent from the interviewees each participant was given a consent form (See Appendix C) and an interview protocols document (See Appendix D). The interview protocols outline the purpose of the study and interview questions. Although these forms were written in English I orally translated the forms into Vietnamese for each participant. After I addressed questions such as anonymity from participants all five women agreed to sign the consent form.

In each interview, I assured the participant that she could withdraw at any time during the conversation and that her personal identity would be protected. I assured the interviewees that their personal information would not be released to anyone else outside the University of Northern British Columbia. Further, I assured the participants that I would be the only one to transcribe and translate the interview transcripts and that the interviews would always remain completely confidential. I also guaranteed the interviewees that the interview data will be kept in a locked drawer at the University and that the data will be destroyed after two years. Because all interviewees chose to remain anonymous, their personal identities do not appear in this project.

All of the interviews took place in the homes of the participants. As an expression of my appreciation for those, I brought a gift of appreciation for each
informant. The interviews were tape-recorded after I received permission from the participants. This method of data collection enabled me to re-hear what women were saying about their wartime and postwar experiences. In addition to the recorded interviews, I also asked permission from each participant for me to take notes during our discussion. Examples of questions asked during the formal interviews include: What sort of challenges, whether economic, social or political, have you experienced in your life since the reunification of Vietnam in 1975? How have you coped with these new challenges? What changes have you noticed in your life, whether positive or negative, since the introduction of Vietnam 1980s’ economic policy of doi moi? These questions were designed to be broad enough to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to position themselves and their stories within specific time and event pertaining to the question.

Individual participants had the opportunity to request copies of the transcripts and drafts of the thesis. I informed each of the participants on the ways to get in touch with me in Canada and how they could receive a copy of the transcripts or a copy of the thesis draft. To date, none of the participants have made this request.

I chose semi-structured interviews for this research project. An advantage of using semi-structured interviews in life history interviews is that it allows for: “the flexibility of unstructured responses” (leCompte and Schensul 1999: 85). Initially, I came to each interview with a set of questions that I hoped would be answered. However, since I perceived my role as facilitating Vietnamese women to discuss their wartime and postwar experiences, I was determined not to lead the interviews in any specific direction. I soon discovered that the answers to my questions tended to
appear spontaneously in conversations with the women. Therefore, I adopted the role of active listener, which provided the interviewees the opportunity to direct the flow of the conversation. Through active listening, I came to discover and appreciate the art of storytelling among Vietnamese women and gained insight into the range of personal motivations of women who chose to participate directly in the Vietnam war and of women who opted to remain at home during the war. In addition, these stories allowed me to hear the women’s thoughts and experiences in response to the Vietnamese Communist Party’s economic reform policy of doi moi. By privileging research subjects’ voices in the project, I recognize that Vietnamese women are actively constructing meanings of gender through their practice of story-telling.

Analysis

The fifty pages of transcriptions from the interviews in conjunction with museum wartime photographs, cultural displays and the published personal accounts generated a significant amount of information. For the purpose of organizing and utilizing the primary sources, I organized these sources in a chronological manner (See Appendix E). The chronology consists of different time periods: French colonial, Indochina war, Vietnam war, and postwar doi moi. By organizing the sources this way, I was able to situate women’s stories within specific time framework and address my research questions concerning the motivations of those women who participated directly in the two wars and those women who opted to remain at home during the wars as well as discuss the effects of State economic policy of doi moi on
women’s lives in the postwar period. Discussions on the dynamics of this chronology are discussed in chapter four.

To interpret the data, I looked for common themes, threads, or ideas that reoccur from multiple sources, while contrasting the lives of two different groups of women: those who participated directly in the two wars and those who remained at home. For example, I first noticed the theme of motherhood emerge from the survey of women’s published personal accounts. I then searched out the similar theme from museum photographs, cultural displays and the interviews. Another example of a common theme surfacing from the data is the theme of female guerillas. I first noticed this theme while reading and analyzing the published personal accounts. I then reviewed the other data sources for this theme starting with the museum photographs and cultural displays. This theme reemerged during my analysis of the interviews. This pattern of emerging themes leading to a review of other data sources continues throughout my analysis stage.

In this thesis, I want to examine changes in Vietnamese gender roles from French colonial administration period through, the Indochina war (1945-1954), the Vietnam war (1954-1975), and the postwar period of economic reform of doi moi. The sources that I relied on to explore the changes are interviews with Vietnamese women, published personal accounts, as well as museum photographs and cultural displays. I continued with this outlook in the interpretation stage even though I relied on secondary sources for background information.
In the following chapter, I discuss the analysis of museums' photographs and cultural displays, published personal documents, and interviews with Vietnamese women. I also provide personal accounts of my learning journey in the field.
Chapter Four

NARRATING FROM THE MARGINS:
ANALYSIS OF DATA SET

In this thesis, one of my main goals has been to illustrate the gradual changes in Vietnamese gender roles from the period of French colonization, through the three decades of conflict around the decolonization of Vietnam, into the postwar or doi moi period. My other goals include highlighting diverse voices and motivations of the women who chose to participate directly in the conflict and those who opted to remain at home during the protracted hostilities. Finally, I want to show the impact of gendered rhetoric of the Vietnamese Communist Party and their economic policy of doi moi upon women’s lives in the postwar period.

My priority has been to situate Vietnamese women’s personal wartime and postwar stories at the center of Vietnam’s national and postcolonial narratives. By privileging the personal stories, I succeeded in highlighting multiple voices of women from different locales in Vietnam. I also demonstrated that Vietnamese women are actively constructing meanings of gender through their practice of story-telling and thereby we can fully appreciate research subjects as knowers, rather than just passive informants.

The main argument in this chapter is that to understand the effects of Vietnam’s postwar economic reform policy of doi moi on women’s lives, we need to focus our attention on the connections between neoliberalism and gender and power. This approach will allow us gain insight on the effects of doi moi and the different responses of women to the reform in Vietnam.
During the pre-colonial French colonial administration periods, female gender roles were constrained by patriarchal Confucian values where women held little domestic power and no public power though they were valued only as nurturing mothers, obedient wives, and daughters. During the Indochina war and Vietnam war women were still valued primarily as mothers which was now associated with being defenders of the nation. Under these circumstances, women assumed a larger variety of roles such as soldier, nurse, worker, and head of household and assumed therefore were in more positions of public power. However these roles were still subsumed within the patriarchal model of Confucian motherhood ideology supported by the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Southern government.

The return of men forced many women to relinquish many of their wartime roles such as head of household. As a result, women experienced a loss of power within the household. In addition, there has been a reassertion of Confucian patriarchy gender model by the Vietnamese Communist Party in the postwar economic reform period. The recurrence of patriarchy, reflected through State cutback in social services such as childcare and education and the emphasis on the role of mother, demonstrated the Party’s failure to fulfill its earlier promise of gender equality and indicated its interests on restricting women to the household, thereby limiting their full participation in the labour market.

From June to August 2007, I conducted fieldwork that included participant observation and interviews. In this chapter, I present my field observations, the analysis of wartime photographs at two war museums, cultural displays, published personal accounts, and the interviews that I gathered during my fieldwork. For me,
this chapter is a journey of learning about changes in women’s experiences prior, during, and after the three decades of warfare in Vietnam. Through the practice of story-telling, Vietnamese women are able to interrupt and decenter Western knowledge and in the process create new and alternative narratives and representations of Vietnamese gender.

Appendix E is a table of primary sources used in this thesis project. The sources include war museums materials (i.e. photographs, statutes, and personal belongings), women’s published personal documents, field work photographs, and interviews. Each of the sources is organized in chronological order and grouped in the time periods of French colonial, Indochina war, Vietnam war, and post doi moi. In addition to identifying and organizing the primary sources in a chronologically manner, I provided full description for each source. By organizing the sources in this manner, I was able to describe as much of the details as possible of each of the sources within the specific time framework.

Prior to analyzing my primary data that included published personal accounts, museum photographs, cultural displays and interviews, I expected to find that the justifications used by women who participated directly in the conflict would be different from those who chose to remain at home. I also expected the changes to women’s roles during wartime would continue well into the post doi moi period. However, after I analyzed the data, I found only some of my preconceptions were met. For example, I found some of the reasons of the women who chose to participate directly in the conflict included personal vengeance and patriotism. Alternatively, those women who opted to remain at home perceived their decision as
Women’s Lives under French Colonial Rule

Personal war narratives and memoirs are cultural texts, and they act as mechanisms for remembering women’s memories (Taylor 1999: 16). They sometimes serve to redefine specific cultural values and expectations, but also provide valuable insight into individuals’ experiences. Individuals constantly recreate memories of the past and assign multiple meanings to those memories (Garcia 1999: 469). An individual’s memory of a specific event, such as a war, may be distorted and shaped to suit personal and political aims. As such, remembering can also involve anxieties, contested ideologies and the negotiation of an individual’s identities. Rafael F. Narváez (2006) explains that in times of conflict:

individuals and [social] groups can call [upon] things such as masculinity and femininity to contest the given order of things, to enact or reassert group identities, traditions and social scales...[remembering] helps individuals and groups apprehend not only the past and present—but also the possible (65).

Suffering and loss can be memorialized to transform the ‘enemy’ into foreign aggressors, thus validating the individual’s suffering and loss, and incorporating their
experience into the national political discourses (Narvaez 2006: 66-69). Through constructing personal narratives as acts of remembering, women are actively engaged in the process of self-defining and thereby contributing to the shaping of collective memories.

In recalling wartime memories, the themes of separation from family, loss, suffering, patriotism, and hardship emerged from women’s published personal accounts as well as from the conversations I had with the interviewees. The differences in age and political affiliation among the interviewees are useful in analyzing these women’s diverse wartime experiences. In addition to risking their lives, women who participated directly in the war were forced to separate from their families. Those who chose to remain with their families faced the challenge of taking on multiple roles to ensure that the requirements necessary for the survival of children and/or parents were met in the absence of the male head of household. While these women did not participate directly in the conflict, they faced similar challenges and reversal of roles as those who fought as combat personnel. Together, these personal stories reflect the divergent experiences and voices of women in Vietnam.

As mentioned in chapter two, Vietnamese women’s lives were constrained by the dominant Confucian moral code during the French colonial period. From an early age, women were socialized into the idealized roles of dutiful wives and daughter-in-laws, as well as nurturing mothers. Women were expected to put the needs of their families ahead of their own. These qualities were the measure of Vietnamese womanhood during the colonial period. This is evident in my analysis of the published personal accounts of women about this period.
In her memoir “When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman’s Journey from War to Peace”, Le Ly Hayslip revealed how her mother socialized her into the roles of wife, daughter-in-law, and mother from an early age. Since Hayslip’s mother grew up in the early twentieth century, her values and ideas about gender roles were heavily influenced by the Confucian moral code. These values were orally transmitted to Hayslip. In discussing the subject of marriage, her mother told her:

When you are marry, your mother-in-law will become your mother - your boss. If you can satisfy her as a maid, she’ll think you are a suitable wife for her son. Remember, your husband comes first - is served first at the table-then the children, and then you...You will not interrupt your husband when he is speaking, even when he is wrong. When you have passed probation, you will earn more privileges and respect do you think those things are free? (Hayslip 2003: 12).

While Hayslip’s mother’s statement highlights the unequal relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, as well as husband and wife, it also reinforces the powerful role of the mother-in-law and reveals how women can only achieve their power through their reproductive role and age. Viewed within this context, women play important roles in perpetuating the unequal gender power hierarchy. Although Hayslip’s mother’s generation supported Confucian gender ideologies, an emergent generation of young women began to raise questions about women’s status and gender relations within the family. This should be viewed within the context of early twentieth century ideas about women’s rights raised by Vietnamese intellectual and the Vietnamese Communist Party.
Since the early 1930s, women actively engaged in the Party’s anti-colonial struggle against the French. Many of these women entered their political career at an early age. One of those early notable women was Nguyen Thi Minh Khai. Khai began her political career at the age of fifteen when she separated from her family. During the early 1930s, she accompanied the Party’s leader, Ho Chi Minh to Hong Kong for training in revolutionary activities (Nguyen 2005: 89-95). Throughout her political career, Khai served as an organizer of strikes, demonstrations, espionage, sabotage, and mobilized women in southern Vietnam. In the 1930s, she married the head of the Party’s Oversea Leadership Bureau, Le Hong Phong and soon after gave birth to their daughter (Nguyen 2005: 100-102).

Khai’s anti-colonial activities eventually led to her arrest by French secret police in Saigon in 1940 (Nguyen 2005: 164-67). Khai was put on trial by French colonial authorities and found guilty of revolutionary activities. She was sentenced to death by firing squad on February 28, 1941. While waiting for the sentence to be carried out, Khai continued to be tortured as the secret police who wanted to extract information from her that she was unwilling to reveal (Nguyen 2005: 179-180). Khai’s silence became a powerful resisting force against the “enemy” and proved her loyalty to the Party. She was not a warrior in the sense of taking up arms and defending the nation. Rather, the decision to remain silent and her steadfast refusal to give up information made her into a warrior in her own right.

Even today, school children continue to learn about Khai’s death and her contributions to the revolution. As commemoration of Khai’s role in the revolutionary struggle, her picture is hung on a wall of the War Remnant Museum (Figure 1).
Interestingly enough, Khai was the only female among these prominent members of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The arrangement of the museum photographs reinforced her prominent status within the Party.

Figure 1. Picture of Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, third from left, bottom

Khai’s silence is a testament of her belief and loyalty to the Party and the Vietnamese struggle for freedom demonstrates Khai’s agency and transformed her into a revolutionary martyr.

Other women such as Nguyen Thi Dinh were also inspired by the Party’s gender ideology to participate in the anti-colonial struggle at an early age. Dinh is considered as one of the most famous southern Vietnamese female military leaders and war heroines. She was born into a peasant family in 1920 in the southern province of Ben Tre (Nguyen 1975: 1); an area historically known for its resistance against oppressors, and its close ties to the Communists in the north (Taylor 2000: 47). Her memoir reveals how separation from their families was the only way for some women to resist family pressure to marry and thus maintain the necessary space to continue to carry out their anti-colonial activities. Upon finding out that her family would force her into an arranged marriage if she remained at home, Dinh asked Tu Phat, a Vietnamese Communist Party member, if she could join him in the anti-
colonial struggle: “You and other brothers must allow me to leave and join the revolution, if I stay my parents will give me away in marriage to someone” (Nguyen 1975: 29). The decision to leave home and engage in revolutionary activities signaled Dinh’s transition from adolescence to womanhood and reflected the growing influences of the Party’s political ideology on women’s decisions to engage in anti-colonial struggle. Dinh’s story highlights the limited options available to women who refused to conform to their families’ demands during the French colonial period. Viewed from this perspective, we can see why the Vietnamese Communist Party’s rhetoric on gender equality attracted women who wanted to escape from the constraints of their families.

Soon after she joined the Vietnamese Communist Party, Dinh married a comrade and gave birth to a son after their marriage. Shortly after the birth of their child, Dinh’s husband was accused by the French colonial authorities of being a Communist Party member, and was subsequently imprisoned at Con Son prison (Nguyen 1975:34-35). It was not long before Dinh received news of her husband’s death, which for her generated an overwhelming sense of grief that was soon replaced with an implacable hatred toward the enemy and a new-found sense of self-empowerment. As she explains:

I felt miserable that sometimes I had the crazy idea of becoming a Buddhist nun or killing myself. But when I looked at my son, when I thought of my husband’s death, when I remembered the brothers and sisters in the revolution, when I recalled the days of suffering and hardships in the prison camp, I felt my resolve return and told myself: ‘I must live to bring up my son and avenge my husband and
Here Dinh reveals the consequences paid for their involvement in the anti-colonial struggle by some married couples who served the Party. At the same time, this passage demonstrates how the death of Dinh’s husband further strengthened her commitment to the anti-colonial struggle. To a certain extent, her husband’s death allowed Dinh to redefine her roles and political identities from a Vietnamese Communist Party widow to an anti-colonial agent. Recalling the death of her husband allowed Dinh to simultaneously validate her suffering and enabled her to integrate her experience into Vietnam political discourse of anti-colonialism and nationalism. Her statement further suggests that during the anti-colonial struggle Vietnamese women were individuals who possessed their own power to make changes to the future of the nation.

**The Indochina War and Women**

During the Indochina war, women assumed political roles at the village and community level (Taylor 1999: 105). In 1946, Dinh was instructed by the Vietnamese Communist Party’s leaders in the north to organize a network of southern Vietnamese women at the district and village levels (Nguyen 1975: 28). In the same year, she was elected to a position on the Executive Committee of the Women’s Association in Ben Tre province. Dinh was then elected as a member of the southern delegation that reported to Ho Chi Minh about the weapon supplies situation in the south (Nguyen 1975: 32-36). For Dinh, this opportunity enabled her to affirm her political status and
to extend her connection with people in the north. As she recalled her feelings being in northern Vietnam at the time: “I felt lost in everyday, but one thing which immediately made me feel at home was the warm feeling and familial love of the people in the North, and this made me extremely happy” (Nguyen 1975: 37). During her visit to the north, Dinh had the opportunity to meet with Ho Chi Minh. Following these meetings, Dinh’s outlook of the war altered:

From then on, I constantly pictured in my mind the largest rally [in the history of] Saigon to welcome Uncle Ho to the South when the resistance achieved victory. That day would be the happiest day for the people in the South, the common joy of victory of the whole country (Nguyen 1975: 58).

Dinh’s statement reflects the hopes and optimism about the future of Vietnam shared by women who directly participated in the Indochina war. After returning from the north in the 1950s, Dinh resumed her military activities in southern Vietnam. The defeat of the French colonial forces in 1954 and the increased involvement of American troops thereafter signaled a new shift in women’s roles in Vietnam.

The Effects of Increased American Involvement upon Vietnamese Women

After Ngo Dinh Diem consolidated his power in 1955, the southern communist forces regrouped and resumed their activities against the Diem government (Tetreault 2000: 52). Women’s activities during this period were critical to the eventual success of the Party in southern Vietnam (Turner 2000: 190).

The memoir of Le Ly Hayslip shows her recruitment by the Party as a spy and saboteur during the 1960s while she was a teenager. During the early phase of her
political training, Hayslip recounted her indoctrination by the Party to hate French colonialists, Americans, and the southern government. Additionally, she was taught that sacrificing her life would earn her a place in the national history:

If we were killed, we were told that our name would live on in history. We learned that, like the French, men of another race called Americans wanted to enslave us... We learned that cheating, stealing from, and lying to [southern government] soldiers and their allies were not crimes, and that failing to do these things, if the situation demanded it, was treason of the highest sort. Girls were shown the pattern of the [Party] flag... and told to sew as many as they could for use in demonstrations or whenever one was asked for by a fighter (Hayslip 2003: 42).

Hayslip’s account reveals how, because of their youth, young women were ideal candidates for ideological and military training by the Party. Hayslip’s readiness to invert her moral underpinnings and view lying and cheating as heroic if directed at the enemy clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of that training. Her statement also shows some of the traditional feminine activities, such as sewing, undertaken by young women for the benefit of the Party during the conflict.

Like Hayslip, Le Thi Rieng, joined the Party at an early age. Rieng’s memoir reveals how she was pressured by her family into a marriage with a son of a wealthy landowner in her town. Although she rejected the proposal, Rieng pondered over her decision. In a conversation Rieng has with her former teacher, she revealed her indecision about the marriage proposal:

If I agree to become the daughter-in-law in that family, become a wife to a person who is irresponsible and has no compassion toward the
poor, what would be of my life? I can endure various forms of hardship, however I cannot jeopardize my dignity. If I am opposed to this marriage arrangement, how can my uncle’s family live out the rest of their lives in peace. I really don’t know what to do... (in Han (ed)1998: 71).

Rieng’s statement reflects the conflict between her individual needs and her family’s expectations. Her account reveals how ideas about the individual, a foreign concept that became popular in Vietnam only in the early twentieth century, shaped Vietnamese women’s perceptions about their roles in society (Marr 2000: 774). The value Rieng places on her ability to fulfill her family obligations is evident, and she understands that she is expected to enter the arranged marriage. However, she challenges Vietnamese gender norms and adds a nuanced view to the meaning of Vietnamese womanhood by placing herself on a higher ethical level than her potential marriage partner. Her statement also illustrates the growing influence of Party rhetoric on liberating women from family constraints.

Soon after the conversation with her former teacher, Rieng made her choice. She separated from her family, joined the Party, and participated in the war as an information gatherer, propagandist and guerilla soldier (in Han (ed) 1998: 385-98). In 1961, Rieng received the news that her husband, Hong, had been killed by American troops while on a mission. Although Rieng was saddened by the news, she was determined to seek vengeance for his death. As she told herself:

I must do something to make the enemy pay for what they have done. This is the only way that I can pay my husband back with all the support and guidance he given me over the years...The enemy is still there, they are like aggressive

Rieng’s statement clearly indicates how Hong’s death strengthened her desire to seek vengeance. The war represents a site where Rieng is able to negotiate her gender roles and reintegrate her experience within the national struggle for independence. The idea that women have to fight to avenge the death of those in the family and/or community came to be a justification for Rieng and others who chose to participate directly in the conflict. While personal vengeance influenced some women’s decision to become directly involved in the war, others were motivated by a desire to defend their community, family, and nation. These motivations should be seen within the Party wartime discourse that encouraged women to take up arms to defend their family, community and nation against foreign aggressors.

Rieng’s political career came to an end when she was arrested, trialed and sentenced to death by the southern government in 1968. Her sacrifice to the Party’s political success made Rieng into a war heroine and her contribution continues to live on into the postwar period. This is evident in the current display of Rieng’s personal belongings at the War Remnant museum. I will elaborate more on this later in this chapter.

After Party leaders instructed the southern insurgents to resume their armed struggle in the south in 1960, Nguyen Thi Dinh organized an uprising in the southern province of Ben Tre (Nguyen 1975: 45). The women who participated in the Ben Tre uprising later came to known as ‘the long hair army’ (Tuner and Phan 1998: 97). Following the success of the uprising, various local and regional groups opposed to
the southern Vietnamese government joined together and formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) in 1960 (Tetreult 2000: 53). Dinh was named as the co-founder of the NFL (Tetreault 2000: 53).

Hoa, one of my interviewees in Sa Dec town, attributed her decision to participate in the Vietnam war to the desire to protect her family and community. When she was seventeen, Hoa chose to separate from her family, joined the Party, and participated in the war. Throughout the conflict, Hoa served both as a nurse to the wounded cadres and as a guerilla soldier. Commenting on her decision to participate in the war, Hoa stated:

> Although I was young, I knew it was my duty to defend my family from the enemy. I made up my mind to join the Party and contribute my part to the war effort. There were many young women who shared similar stories with me (Interview June 20th, 2007).

By situating her wartime experience with other young female Vietnamese Communist Party members who fought for similar reasons, Hoa was able to confirm her status within the collective. The commonalities in gender, age and the desire to defend their family and community shared by Hoa and other women of her generation strengthened their comradeship. Her decision to join the Party and participate in the Vietnam war at an early age reflects the Party’s increased demand for women’s wartime labour and demonstrates the greater range of gender roles available to young women because of the instability created by wartime conditions.

Another one of my interviewees, Mai, joined the Party and was assigned to a platoon of guerillas in Sa Dec town, Dong Thap province, when she was seventeen
years old. Since she was required to move constantly with her troops, she decided to separate from her family. While the decision to detach herself from her family was difficult at the time, Mai found it was a necessary step in order to defend her family and community. As she stated: “It was hard for me at a young age to be separated from my family. I remembered feeling sad the day I left my house. . . . I realized after a while how mature I had become without my family” (Interview July 21st, 2007).

When asked about her experience with the Party and the Vietnam war, Mai revealed that:

I owe my life to the Party and its guidance. . . . During the war most of my family members were either killed or jailed by the enemy. . . . Inside of me, I always have this hatred toward the enemy. This hatred stems not only from my own experience but is also connected to the oppression of our people. . . . I did not participate in the war because I wanted to be a heroine. I fought because I could no longer stand by and see my family members and our people being killed or jailed by the enemy (Interview July 21st, 2007).

As we have seen, the idea of joining the Party and participating directly in the war to seek personal vengeance has been echoed by other women’s wartime accounts. It is evident in Mai’s statement that the deaths and imprisonment of some members of her family strengthened her hatred toward the enemy. In this sense, the decision to take up arms enabled Mai to redefine her status from a war victim to an agent of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

While the stories of Dinh, Rieng, Mai, and Hoa echo other women’s wartime accounts, the stories of those who chose not to participate in the Vietnam war have
remained largely hidden. One such account was that of Nhan, another of my interviewees, who lives in Cho Lon district of Ho Chi Minh City with her husband and three children. Unlike the husbands of the women who served the Party, Nhan’s husband worked in the military for the southern government during the war. Because her husband’s earnings were not enough to provide for the family, Nhan was forced to find alternative means to contribute to the family income. She started her own home business of selling fruit and raising pigs during the war. As mentioned in chapter two, trading in Vietnam has long been associated with women. During the Vietnam war, trading became one of the survival strategies used by women like Nhan who stayed with their families. She recalled to me the difficulties of caring for her children in the absence of her husband: “I don’t know how I did it during the time my husband was away but I did it. It was one of the most difficult times in my life...To ensure my children were fed and healthy, I had to sell fruit and raised pigs at home” (Interview June 21st, 2007). Nhan’s statement reveals the struggle in balancing the various roles of mother, businesswoman, and head of the household. Her business allowed her to provide for her children and thereby enhanced her power in the household decision-making process. Although Nhan did not join the Party or fight in the Vietnam war, she is convinced her contributions to the household were equivalent to those who served as combatants. Nhan’s story illustrates the range of roles that were made available to those women who remained with their families during the Vietnam war.

Huyen and Phuong, two other women I interviewed, did not join the Party or participate in the Vietnam war. Unlike the other women I interviewed, Huyen and
Phuong were single and living with their parents during the war. Huyen lost her father at an early age in an accident. The loss of her father forced Huyen’s mother to assume the role of head of household. The instabilities created by wartime conditions forced Huyen and Phuong to quit school and work in order to help their families. Huyen worked for a private soy sauce company. Phuong was employed at a private weaving factory. When asked about her experience during the Vietnam war, Phuong stated:

I worked throughout the war to help out my family. Some of my siblings served in the army for the southern government during the war. Because I was young, I was expected by my parents to work and help out with the daily chores around the house. Looking back, my life wasn’t as bad as others I know. The only thing I wish I had but did not was a social life (Interview August 05th, 2007).

Here Phuong reflects the effects of the war have had upon her childhood and her family. For Phuong, the decision to remain at home and work during the war was mainly influenced by her parents. Her statement demonstrates the importance of her income to family survival during the war years. By portraying herself as a dutiful daughter, Phuong succeeded in positioning herself within the traditional Confucian family model where obedience prevails. Through performing her role as dutiful daughter, Phuong was able to reaffirm her status within Confucian model family.

In contrast to Phuong, Huyen talked about the exploitive working conditions she experienced during the Vietnam war. In recalling the experience, Huyen stated how her:

...boss was a wealthy Chinese woman. She was very cheap. She would yell at me on the days I happened to break [soy sauce] bottles. She would say things like “do you think this is your
grandfather’s wealth that you wasted?” At the time of national independence in 1975, I experienced some difficulties when the factory where I worked shut down and my boss left the country. The factory was taken over by the State and I was out of my job... During my youth, I didn’t know what happiness meant as poverty plagued my family and myself. I often did not have enough to eat or clothes to wear. As such the main concern I had as a young girl was to have two meals a day and earn enough money to help with my family income (Interview August 03rd, 2007).

Huyen’s comment echoes the economic hardship thousands of Vietnamese women experienced during the war. While other women decided to take up arms to defend their families and communities, Huyen perceived her decision to obtain employment as necessary to ensure her family’s survival. Unlike the postwar generation of women who grew up in a stable postwar environment, Huyen’s youth was marked with instability, poverty and exploitive working conditions.

Together, these wartime stories reveal how women transcended their roles during the war in Vietnam. The absence of men and the resulting shortage of labour during the war years provided women with opportunities to assume a wider range of roles than before including guerilla soldiers, political leaders, business owners, and head of household. Whether they participated directly in the war, took on the role of head of the household, or participated in the labour force, women’s views about their roles are mediated by their wartime experiences. We also see diverse justifications used by women who participated directly in the conflict and those who chose instead to remain at the home front. While personal vengeance and patriotism motivated some women to take up arms and participate in the war, others justified their decision to
stay at home by their desire to earn income and care for their family members. Regardless of their choices of participating in the war or remaining at home, these women’s stories demonstrate that they were active agents in their own right.

**Museums and Postwar doi moi Wartime Memories**

Since the achievement of national independence in 1975, the Communist Party continues to exert significant influence over ideas and representations of womanhood in postwar southern Vietnam. This is evident in the display of wartime photographs and cultural displays at the Southern Women’s Museum (Figure 2) and the War Remnant Museum (Figure 7). The Southern Women’s Museum officially opened in 1990. By contrast, the War Remnant Museum opened shortly after the Party took control of southern Vietnam in 1975 (Field notes July 2007). The postwar economic changes in Vietnam brought about by the policy of doi moi in the late 1980s attract an increasing number of foreign tourists. The Southern Women’s Museum and the War Remnant Museum are ideal visiting sites for tourists interested in learning about the two wars and the roles women played within them. There are questions about memory and how the past is currently represented in Vietnam’s war museums. Since people’s experiences of the decades of war vary among both women and men throughout the country, both the memory and representations of the wars are highly contested.

Although the museums’ photographs and cultural displays were intended to portray wartime experiences of women in southern Vietnam, not all experiences of women in the region have the endorsement of the Party. Those who did not join the
Party, including those who chose to remain at home and work to support their families, remain invisible. For these women, earning an income and caring for their families were more important than taking up arms and defending the nation. Since they prioritized their families’ wellbeing over the future of the nation, the contributions they made toward their families during the war are largely unrecognized by the State and thereby their roles and achievements remain invisible in state postwar discourse. This invisibility reflects the power and politics involved in the construction of the memory and history of women’s roles in the Indochina war and the Vietnam war. Within the context of the Southern Women’s Museum and the War Remnant Museum, the images of women and cultural displays function to reflect the gendered power and politics involved in the representation of wartime and current state ideology of Vietnamese womanhood.

In exploring the relationships between memory and representation within the postwar context, the scholar Hue-Tam Ho Tai reminds us that: “memory is not just a matter of who does the remembering, it is also about the types of images that are available for doing so” (Hue-Tam 2001: 167). In the Southern Women’s Museum and War Remnant Museum, photographs and cultural displays of women performing the different roles such as combatant, mother, and transporter during the Indochina war and the Vietnam war were displayed on the walls. Together, these images and cultural displays serve as a reminder to visitors of women’s contributions to the struggle for national independence.
In analyzing wartime photographs within the southern Vietnamese postwar context, one must consider the issues of remembering, forgetting, and power involved in constructing and maintaining individual and collective memory. As some scholars suggest, remembering and forgetting are considered as social and political activities engaged in by both individuals and groups (Boyarin 1994: 2; Radstone 2000: 3; Hue-Tam 2001: 177; Prus 2007: 379). The construction of collective memory is complex and is about power. As the scholar Hue-Tam Ho Tai states: “Memory is an important aspect of cultural production, a production that the state is eager to control” (Hue-Tam 2001: 177).

Three prominent themes associated with womanhood emerge from examining the wartime photographs at the Southern Women’s Museum. These include: motherhood, combatant women, and women in nation building. These themes are linked to earlier wartime ideologies of womanhood promoted by the Vietnamese Communist Party. The stress on the roles of combatant, mother, and nation builder enabled the Party to connect women’s roles during the two wars to those thereafter.
during the postwar period. Together, these roles highlight women as active agents rather than passive victims of the conflicts. Of these three themes, the most prominent was motherhood.

At the entrance of the Southern Women’s Museum, there is a stone statue of a young mother and her children (Figure 3). The young mother has a protecting arm around a child who looks up to her with an admiring gaze while she is holding another child in her other arm. On her back, she carries a rifle. Beside the statue, there is a caption that reads Giắc đền nhà dân bà cung đánh or “when the enemy comes close to home women must fight.” Placing the statue at the entrance of the museum demonstrates the important symbolic role of the mothers of the nation in Vietnam’s postwar cultural landscape. Together, the image and the statement speak to the multiplicity of women’s roles in conflict where the boundaries between the battlefield and the home front are blurred.

![Figure 3](image-url) The statue of a woman with children at the Southern Women's Museum

In addition to the statue, the theme of motherhood was also apparent in the display of political speeches. In one of the public speeches given by President Ho Chi
Minh on October 20th, 1966, he stated: “Our people are grateful to the mothers, both North and South, who have given birth to and raised all the generations of heroes of our country”. This speech was reprinted and enlarged (Figure 4). While the statement acknowledged the sacrifices and the valuable contributions made by mothers with children who served the Party, it devalued the contributions made by mothers with children who served the southern government or remained at home during the war.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4** Ho’s speech to northern and southern Vietnam mothers on October 20th, 1966 at the Southern Women’s Museum

The theme of motherhood is also visible in a series of photographs displayed under the category of Bà Mẹ Anh Hùng or Heroic Mothers (Figure 5). These mothers were depicted as old, simple, stoic, protective, and fragile. These images were situated in contrast to young female guerrilla soldiers who were represented as young and energetic (Figure 6). The differences in the representations reflect the roles and status that the women hold within the Party. Since they were younger in age, these female soldiers were less fearful and more willing to fight than the old and fragile mothers who are more fearful of death. In this sense, the combination of youth, willingness to fight and fearlessness of death made younger women ideal candidates...
for combatant role. Alternatively, the old age and fragility of the mothers allow them to take on the role of caring for the troops. These contrasting roles reflect the diverse roles assumed by women who chose to participate in the war.

Figure 5 Top from left to right: Heroic Mothers Nguyen Thi Ranh and Doan Thi Nghiep, who lost all of their children and grandchildren to the war.

Although Confucian tradition places a heavy emphasis on the continuation of patrilineage, Vietnamese often invoke the image of the mother to recall their childhood memories and to connect with the past (Hue-Tam 2001: 172). There are countless odes, songs and stories that stress the importance of a mother’s love and
sacrifice. As children grow up, they come to know these songs and stories by heart and never query them.

In 1994, the Vietnamese government awarded medals to mothers who lost their children to the Vietnam war (Le and Do 1997: 11; Turner and Phan 1998: 22). Since the early 1990s, approximately 20,000 mothers have been awarded the title of Heroic Mothers (Le and Do 1997: 11). Although women who had fewer than three children but lost them all were honored, the majority of women who received medals lost more than three children (Turner and Phan 1998: 22). Mothers whose children served in the opposing southern army are not recognized as having contributed to the liberation, and therefore they have been excluded from both the larger national discourse and the postwar collective memory. In this sense, motherhood came to be politicized and represents a site where women struggle for legitimacy.

Looking at these images in the museum, I noticed the absence of images of women like my grandmothers who were not Party members and who did not directly participate in the war, but were nonetheless affected by it. For these women, their decision to remain at home during the war was shaped by the immediate needs of their families, but, ultimately, their failure to get Party recognition is due to the activities of their children. The economic contribution that these women made during the war was important to their family’s survival, but because of what side their children took in the conflict, their contributions remain absent from state discourse. In this sense, not all women’s wartime experiences in Vietnam are equally represented in state discourse.
I also visited the War Remnants Museum located in Ho Chi Minh City, which opened in 1975 (Figure 7). Formerly known as the “Chinese and American War Crimes Museum”, the War Remnants Museum attracts a larger number of foreign tourists than the Southern Women’s Museum. At the time of my visit, I noticed a large crowd of foreign and domestic tourists at the museum (Field notes July 2007). The museum covered mainly the period of the US involvement in Vietnam. Unlike the Women’s Southern Museum, there are armoured vehicles, artillery pieces, bombs, a tank, a fighter jet, and infantry weapons used by the US troops during the war displayed in front of the War Remnants Museum (Field notes July 2007).

![Figure 7. Picture of the entrance of the War Remnants Museum](image)

In addition to these wartime objects, the museum displays personal belongings of female war heroines like that of Le Thi Rieng whom I discussed earlier in this chapter. These personal belongings consisted of a purse, a pair of shoes, and a white scarf (Figure 8). According to a museum guide, these items wore by Rieng at the time of her arrest in Saigon (currently known as Ho Chi Minh City) in the 1960s. Along with the belongings was the caption that I translated as: “Belongings of the
cadre Le Thi Rieng, member of Saigon Committee-Gia Dinh, sacrificed on September 1, 1968”.

Figure 8. Personal belongings of Le Thi Rieng at the War Remnant Museum

While the caption reminds us that Rieng was a revolutionary warrior, her personal belongings affirm her femininity. The blending of warrior and woman status enabled the Party to fashion a wartime image of Vietnamese womanhood within the postwar context.

Postwar doi moi Vietnam and Women: Personal Accounts

During my fieldwork in Ho Chi Minh City, I saw a large number of panhandlers, mostly women and children, on the streets and in the markets. One of my relatives told me that the Vietnamese government initiated an aggressive campaign a few months earlier against panhandlers, especially in tourist designated districts. I was told that this is an attempt by the government to “clean up” the street. The effort that went into this campaign was to ensure that foreign tourists are not bothered by panhandlers during their visits and reflects the Party’s desire to disguise the social problems that come with urbanization and economic growth while creating an image of a new and modern city.
While some of the women that I interviewed acknowledged that in general their lives improved after the introduction of economic *doi moi* policy, others revealed their lives have not been better after the economic reform. In the case of Mai, when asked about the changes she noticed in her life after *doi moi*, she commented that: “My life has been better since *doi moi*. Since my husband passed away a few years ago I am in charge of making decisions in the house... I feel lonely at times when I think of my husband” (Interview July 21st, 2007). As we talked Mai revealed she received a monthly pension from Party since 1989 for her wartime contribution. With the financial assistance, Mai was able to set up her own business selling household products and to fund the education of her two daughters. While the passing of her husband at the end of the war created a source of stress in Mai’s life, the new postwar role she assumed as head of the household transformed her roles from a wife and Communist Party agent during the war to a widow, head of the household and business owner after *doi moi*.

Hoa, another of my interviewees, expressed content with her current living condition. As she stated:

I’m quite happy with my life right now. The monthly pension that I received since the late 1980s from the government has helped me with some of the expenses around the house. Given the current state of our country, I can’t ask for more. I recognize that the government is trying its best to ensure the citizens are wealthy and our nation is strong. Because of this, I can’t ask for more. Throughout my life, I have led a simple life. The monthly income I received from the government has helped me with some of the expenses around the house (Interview June 20th, 2007).
While listening to Hoa, I could not help but think about the lives of those women who chose to remain at home during the Vietnam war. Since they opted to remain at home to care for their families during the war, the contributions they made toward their families remain unrecognized by the State. This lack of recognition effectively denies them access to certain government programs, such as the monthly pensions made available to those women who served the Party during the war. In this sense, differences in political affiliation among Vietnamese women affect their chances of accessing State incentive programs in the post doi moi context.

Nhan, another interviewee, managed to save enough money to open up her own business selling household products in the early 1990s. Commenting about her life after doi moi, Nhan stated that: “Our lives have improved since the introduction of doi moi. Thanks to the business I have, my living standard is fairly good... I’m very proud of my accomplishment... I know of other women who experience financial difficulties after doi moi because they were laid off or their husbands were unable to find work” (Interview June 21st, 2007). While Nhan’s statement reveals how some women, particularly those who remained with their families during the war and have access to capital, benefited from the new economic policy, those who do not have capital or who were unable to find employment struggle to provide for themselves and their families.

Of the six women I interviewed, Phuong is the only one who remained single throughout her life. Her status as a single woman set her apart from other interviewees and offers us another example of possible gender roles. When asked about her decision to remain single, Phuong explained that she has no desire to get
married. As she told me: “I don’t want to get married. I’m too old for that stuff. I’m happy being a single woman. Men can cause problems. I saw how my sisters were mistreated by their husbands at times. Why would I want that kind of lifestyle” (Interview August 05th, 2007).

Later in our conversation, Phuong revealed that she was once engaged to a man; however, the engagement later fell apart when he changed his mind. This experience made Phuong reluctant to enter into another relationship. Since she is an unmarried woman and her parents have passed away, her older brother was obligated to take her into his house. While the living arrangement helped to alleviate the problem of loneliness, Phuong told me that the tensions between herself and her sister-in-law proved to be difficult at times. As Danielle Belanger and Khuat Thu Hong (2002) suggest: “single women living with a brother have an unclear role and, therefore, a vulnerable status” (106). Although I asked Phuong for more details about this tension, she refused to divulge further information. When questioned about her life after doi moi, Phuong explains that she has been unemployed for over seven years after the State run weaving factory she worked for closed. The layoff proved to be difficult for Phuong, who has been working at low paying jobs such as childcare in her community. Phuong’s story shows that not all women benefited from economic reform. The decline in State employment forced many women like Phuong to search for alternative means of earning incomes. The loss of employment that had negatively affects women’s living conditions, especially for women like Phuong who possessed limited skills and capital. These women often took on low wage jobs as a mean of survival.
Phuong’s currently low income status spotlights a glaring weakness in the Party goal of improving the living conditions of Vietnamese women through economic reform and raises significant questions about the effects of *doi moi* upon women’s lives. Phuong’s unemployment increased her reliance upon her brother and sister-in-law for economic support and thereby reduced her power in the decision making within the household.

Huyen, another interviewee who was single and worked to help out with her family during the Vietnam war, married a co-worker at her new work place in 1990 and now has a son. Commenting on the changes in her life after *doi moi*, Huyen stated that:

> Currently, my wage is quite low. My husband does not earn that much money. As a matter fact, I earn more money than him. I have a son whom I have a hard time of funding for his schooling. I’m worry about this all the time... I can’t afford many things. I tried to save as much money as I can so my son can have a decent education (Interview August 03\textsuperscript{rd}, 2007).

Huyen’s statement demonstrates the contradiction between the State rhetoric of *doi moi* and the reality of women’s lives. Although the new economic policy was intended to improve Vietnamese people’s living condition, low wages prove to be a challenge for many women, especially those with low income and children like Huyen. As the cost for education steadily increases in Vietnam, the fear of not being able to provide for her son’s education is a great source of distress for her. By portraying herself as the caring mother who concerns about the future of her son’s education, Huyen succeeded in situating herself within the dominant Confucian moralities of motherhood. Simultaneously, highlighting the wage discrepancy
between Huyen and her husband allowed her to leverage her roles as a wife and an income earner within the household.

In this chapter, I have presented an analysis of the data I collected during my fieldwork in Vietnam. I identified various motivations of those women who fought in the Indochina war and Vietnam war and of those women who remained on the home front. I also explored the strategies women used to cope with wartime conditions and to define themselves in relation to the State and families.

The reunification of northern and southern Vietnam relieved the pressures of war but brought significant social, economic and political changes throughout the country. The shift from State control to market oriented economy signaled by the new economic policy of doi moi in the late 1980s provided incentives for women to take on new economic opportunities. However, State rhetoric of motherhood in the postwar period reinforced a gendered division of labour, normalized women’s roles as nurturing mothers and in so doing devalued their economic values and reinforced their subordinate status within the household.

In the following concluding chapter, I discuss the contributions of my research to the existing literature about women’s wartime and postwar experiences in Vietnam. I also explore the potential future directions in my area of research.
Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS: DIVERGENT VOICES

Throughout this thesis, I examined changes in Vietnamese gender roles during the French colonial period, the Indochina war, the Vietnam war, and the period of postwar economic reform. I have explored differences in the justifications used by women who participated in the two wars and those women who opted to remain with their families during the war years. I examined the impact of the postwar economic reform policy of doi moi and state rhetoric concerning motherhood on women’s lives. I discussed the challenges that exist in my dual roles of a western, female, and student researcher and an overseas Vietnamese woman. Through the analyses of primary sources, which include published interviews, personal accounts, war museum photographs and museum displays of cultural materials, and secondary sources include scholarly books and articles, I have succeeded in addressing these issues.

When discussing these issues, I have kept four main goals in mind. First, I want to illuminate the circumstances that led to the changes of Vietnamese gender roles from the French colonial period through the long years of conflict into the subsequent postwar economic reform or doi moi period. Second, I want to illustrate the influences of State rhetoric of motherhood on shaping gender expectations and gender roles within wartime and postwar contexts. Third, I want to highlight different voices and motivations of those women who participated in the wars and those who chose to remained on the home front during the years of hostilities. Finally, I want situate my own location and identity in relation to the project and the participants.
In this final chapter, I discuss my learning path during this project. Subsequently, I explore the contributions of my research to the understanding of women’s lives in French colonial period through wartime and postwar Vietnam. I then discuss potential future directions for my research before concluding this chapter with a discussion on the importance attending to the divergent voices of women from various backgrounds in the studying and writing upon the hostilities and subsequent economic reform in Vietnam.

My Learning Path

From the outset of this research project, I assumed that the discussion about wartime sexual violence during the war years would be applicable in explaining wartime women’s experiences in Vietnam. However, through the processes of organizing and analyzing primary sources, it became clear that I could not integrate a discussion of sexual violence into my thesis since my rather lengthy discussion of the changes in Vietnamese gender roles in different time periods did not leave room enough for a substantive discussion of sexual violence.

It also became very clear that the history lessons I absorbed as a child in Vietnam influenced my understanding of women’s roles in the Indochina war and Vietnam war. More importantly, I came to understand that these history lessons were written and taught in support of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s ideology. While these lessons taught me the valuable contributions made by women in Indochina war and Vietnam war, stories of those women whose husbands served under the southern Vietnamese government, like my mother, were absent in these history lessons. The
feeling of disappointment contributed to my growing awareness and interest in learning about the experiences of women who remained with their families during the two wars.

Other steps along my learning path concerned the politics involved in the construction of motherhood. State representation of motherhood valued the experience the mothers whose children served the Party during the conflict. This can be seen through the display images of “Heroic Mothers” and the statute of the mother with her children carrying a gun at the Southern Women Museum. By privileging the experience of mothers who allied themselves with the Party during the war, the State effectively excludes the experiences of those mothers whose children served the opposing southern government during the wars. The exclusion has important implications for women accessing postwar State financial incentive programs such as pension. Women with children who served on the opposition sides of the Party do not have access to these programs.

My exposure to postcolonial feminist theory is beneficial in reexamining and rethinking the power and the struggles inherent in the construction of Vietnamese female subject identities within colonial and national discourses. In particular, I learned that the Party discourse of Vietnamese womanhood privileges the experiences of those women who are affiliated with the State. This effectively undermined and devalued the contributions made by women who remained with their families during the war years.

The values inherent in the role of being a listener in the field became very apparent quite quickly. Through active listening, I was able to encourage Vietnamese
women to discuss their wartime and postwar experiences. By adopting this approach, the interviewees were given the opportunity to direct the flow of the conversation. From listening to these women’s stories, I came to appreciate the art of storytelling among Vietnamese women.

**Contributions of My Research**

My thesis adds to the understanding of the changes in Vietnamese gender roles in the French colonial administration times through the Indochina war and Vietnam war and postwar economic reform. During the French colonial period, women were expected to live their lives according to Confucian moral codes as dutiful daughters and obedient wives within the household. The absence of men and the resulting shortage of labour during the war years provided women with opportunities to assume a wider range of roles than before including guerilla soldiers, political leaders, business owners, and heads of households. The return of men, the economic reform, and postwar State rhetoric of motherhood placed constraints on women’s lives as they are expected to assume their previous roles as nurturing mothers and obedient wives within the household.

My research contributes to the understanding of the influences of State rhetoric of motherhood on shaping gender expectations in different time periods. Although the ideology of motherhood did not change in the periods of pre-colonial, French colonial, Indochina war, Vietnam war, and into the postwar period, the expectations and meanings of motherhood have altered. The idea that of all women should be mothers remains consistent throughout the pre-war and postwar periods. Prior to the
war, motherhood was equated with work within the household. During the war years, however, motherhood was linked to ideas of nationalism and women were expected to combine the roles of mothers and defenders of the nation. Consequently, some women saw no conflict in leaving their children on the home front and taking up arms. The portrayal of wartime motherhood in State narrative and representation privileged the experience of mothers whose children served the Party during the wars. Mothers with children serving on the opposing sides were excluded from State narrative and representation. Postwar State rhetoric sought to link motherhood and work and within and outside the household. Motherhood continues to serve as a method of self identification among women.

My research adds to the understanding of the justifications used by women who participated in the two wars and of those women who stayed on the home front during the two wars in Vietnam. Women were motivated by various reasons to participate directly in the war or to remain with their families. Personal vengeance or patriotic goals motivated some women to take up arms. Other women remained at home to care and provide for their families. Whether they chose to participate in the war or to remain at home, women perceived the roles they played during wartime as important to the survival of their families, communities, and the nation. Today, these women do not regret the decision they made at the time and still live with the consequences of their decisions.

My research adds insights into the affect the Vietnamese Communist Party’s postwar economic policy of doi moi had upon women’s lives. Specifically, I demonstrated how there is an inherent contradiction embedded in the Party’s postwar
gender rhetoric. While the State encouraged women to take on the roles of worker and entrepreneur in the postwar *doi moi* period, funding cut backs and privatization of social services, such as childcare and education, curtailed mother’s economic activities outside the household. Since activities related to caring and educating children are associated with motherhood, the decline of State support in these services effectively diverted women’s labour from the labour market to the household where women are expected to take over the tasks of caring and educating their children.

Although the economic reform of *doi moi* was intended to generate employment opportunities for women and men, more women than men who worked for the State lost their jobs under the economic restructuring. The study conducted by Linda J. Yarr (1995) explains how the shift toward cost-effectiveness under the economic reform: “resulted in lay-offs and unemployment among female employees” (114). Another study carried out by Esta Ungar (2000) estimated about 28 percent of women worked in education and 8 percent employed in the health care services from 1965 to 1967 (295). Also, the number of women employed in industry increased from 170,000 in 1965 to 500,000 in 1969 (Ungar 2000: 395). However, between 1990-1991, approximately 60 percent of women state workers were laid off (Ungar 2000: 311). My research demonstrated that the layoffs created unemployment and forced many women to search the private or informal sector for new employment where those with limited skills and education have a difficult time finding new employment.

Finally, my thesis contributes to the understanding of the possibilities and challenges entailed in the dual roles of an insider and researcher. The ethnic and cultural affiliations I have with the participants provided me with the advantages of
understanding certain cultural cues or puns in ways that are not necessarily accessible
to outsider researchers. Also, being an insider enabled me to gain invaluable
knowledge that is often inaccessible in formal interview settings where subjects may
feel reluctance to share sensitive personal information. At the same time, the close
relationship I have with the interviewees made me aware of the unequal power in the
relationship between myself and the interviewees, as well as providing me with
frequent reminders that I must take necessary steps to ensure that I do not overexpose
the private lives of the participants.

Potential Future Directions in this Research Area

The analysis carried out in this thesis can be used in many types of cross
cultural and cross-gender comparisons to look for differences and overall patterns of
change in women’s lives. For example, the information I presented about the effects
of postwar economic reform on women’s lives can be use to compare the experiences
of Vietnamese women with the experiences of women in other societies that have
undergone rapid and extensive economic transition such as post-Soviet Russia and
China in the late twentieth century. The cross-cultural approach provides us with
greater insights into the economic changes on women lives in different cultures.

The comparison of economic reform in China, post-Soviet Russia, and
Vietnam since the 1980s illustrates that reforms have parallel effects upon women’s
lives in these countries. Similarly to Vietnam, not all women in China and post-Soviet
Russia benefited from the economic reform (Veronina 1994: 38-39; Rzhanitsyna
Vietnam, the cases of China and post-Soviet Russia show that while some women benefited from the economic reform through new employment opportunities, most experienced new unemployment and poverty resulting from a decline in State employment and funding for social services (Veronina 1994: 38-39; Rzhanitsyna 2001: 52-53; Racioppi and See 2000: 211-12; Summerfield 1997: 207-208; Zhang et al. 2008: 1533-1534). This is because the reforms in these three countries stress the reduction of direct government intervention in the domestic economy and the liberalization of trade under free market conditions. Along with the economic reform, we also see that the governments in post-Soviet Russia and China sought to portray women predominantly in their role of mothers (Kay 2002: 55-57; Racioppi and See 2000: 212-214; Summerfield 1997: 206-207; Zhang et al. 2008: 1529-1530). This parallels my findings in Vietnam. The focus on motherhood enables governments to naturalize women’s reproductive role and consequently place greater pressure on women to take over the cost of social services previously provided by the State.

My research can also be used to compare and contrast patterns of findings with other ongoing and future research in Vietnam by overseas Vietnamese researchers. The focus on researchers’ identities and locations allowed me to add to the discussion of how field ethnography is conducted. By comparing my fieldwork experiences with those of other overseas Vietnamese researchers, further nuance could be added to our understanding of researchers’ identities and locations as well as how identity and location influence the negotiation process between researchers and participants in the field. Other researchers’ findings of Vietnamese gender roles during the war years and thereafter postwar reform period can be used to further
support or challenge my findings by triangulation. By comparing the findings of my research to others, we can also look for new themes emerging from other studies, either alone or in combination with each other. This will provide further insights and a fuller appreciation of the experience of Vietnamese women within wartime and postwar contexts.

Since my thesis research focuses on both the lives of women who participated in the decades long conflict in Vietnam and of those women who opted to remain on the home front, it can also be used to compare themes with other studies that examine the lives of women during either the Indochina war or the Vietnam war, including even those that adopt an analytical framework that is gender neutral (Kerkvliet 2003; DeFronzo 2007) or those focusing solely upon the women who participated in the wars (Taylor 1999; Turner and Phan 1998; Turner 2000; Tetreult 2000). This approach would be more inclusive as it provides insights into the lives of those women in southern Vietnam who opted to remain on the home front during the conflict and enable various analyses of shifting gender roles as well as facilitating a more inclusive and variant examination of gender roles. Although I tried to be inclusive in this thesis research, I realize that there are other Vietnamese voices, for example ethnic minority women and women in northern and central regions of Vietnam that have not been included. Including these other neglected voices would be a worthwhile avenue for potential future research.

This detailed chronology on the changes of Vietnamese gender roles can serve as template for other researchers with similar interests either within Vietnam or in other postwar societies. By mapping the changes of gender roles in chronological
order, researchers can gain insights into the shift within the specific time framework. A comparison between countries will be useful in looking for cross-cultural patterns and in the development of theory in this area. For example: Have women’s roles become more constricted in the postwar period? Did these changes come about in the same way as in Vietnam? What similarities and differences can be seen and what, if any, pattern does the overall picture provide? How can we use this pattern to inform feminist models or theories concerning gender roles during and after wartime? Would similar patterns be seen in countries currently at war? If the patterns are different, to what can we attribute this difference? The examination of cases that do not follow the general pattern seen elsewhere would also be of particular importance.

**Conclusion: the road less traveled**

When we learn, discuss, and write about French colonialism, Indochina war, Vietnam war, and the economic reform policy of *doi moi* in Vietnam through a gender lens, we shift our focus concerning the importance of these events. The emphasis is no longer exclusively placed on dominant narrative, representation, and/or important figures of these events. Rather, we begin to recognize and be aware of the voices from women of diverse backgrounds, of differing political affiliation, class, and age. This shift in thinking not only places gender at the centre of our analysis and writing about the wars and the subsequent post-war economic transition, thus providing us with new challenges to our understanding, it also enables us to add more nuance to our knowledge of gender identities in Vietnam over the last fifty years.
In Vietnam, the public learns about the Indochina war and Vietnam war through the museums, television programs, and literature produced by the State. The wars however, are ‘lived experiences’ of men and women from diverse backgrounds. By listening and paying close attention to the voices that are excluded from State narrative and representation, we can fully appreciate and gain insights into the complexities and dynamics of Vietnamese gender roles within wartime contexts.

By retelling their wartime roles through the practice of storytelling, women are actively involved in the process of self-definition and thereby contributing to the shaping of Vietnam’s national history and memories. The dual focus in this research upon the personal stories of the women who participated in the two wars and also upon the women who remained with their families during the conflicts brings attention to the divergent experiences and voices of women in Vietnam during the years of conflict.

Doing fieldwork in southern Vietnam allowed me the opportunities to reflect on the different and important aspects of my life: my ethnicity, gender, citizenship, age and education and how these aspects of my identity shape my relationships with participants in the field. Such self-reflexive focus led to questions about my biases, the appropriateness of my actions, and helped me to understand and negotiate my multiple identities in diverse ways.

As a student of anthropology and history, I am well aware researchers’ voices often eclipse the voices of those whom researchers consult and collaborate with in researchers’ projects. Consequently, I came to realize that my very position as an overseas Vietnamese and student researcher means that I occupy a position of power
and privilege. This awareness motivated me to take necessary steps to ensure that my privilege did not obstruct my understanding of Vietnamese women’s wartime experiences, such as taking on the role of an active listener and problematizing my identities and roles in relation to the interviewees.

In writing this thesis, I came to admire and respect the strength and skills of women like my mother and grandmothers who remained at home as necessary means to provide for their families during the years of conflict. Despite the challenges, these women were proud of the contributions they made and did not perceive their roles any less valuable than those women who fought on the battlefront. I also came to respect those who are not politically affiliated with the Party and continue to struggle to survive and provide for their families in the postwar period.
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MEMORANDUM

To: Thu Anh Vu
CC: Angele Smith

From: Henry Harder, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: June 13, 2007

Re: E2007.0515.058
The construction of Vietnamese Gender, Nationalism and Cultural Identities from 1945 to 1990

Thank you for submitting the above-noted research proposal and requested amendments to the Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,
Henry Harder
Appendix B

Information Sheet

Researcher’s name: Thu Anh Vu
Address: 669 Johnson St. Prince George, B.C V2M 2Z8
Phone No: (250) 563-2525 E-mail: vut@unbc.ca

The construction of Vietnamese Gender, Nationalism and Cultural Ideologies and Identities from 1945 to 1990

The focus of this Master’s research project is to look at Vietnamese women’s lives from 1945 to 1990. I want to collect stories about women’s roles and how they may have change since the war (post 1975 period). I am collecting these stories because existing Western scholarship provides limited insight into the diverse women’s experiences of this time in Vietnam, especially the period after 1975. Therefore, this research will contribute to generating new knowledge about the strategies used by Vietnamese women to reinforce and challenge their roles in the postwar period.

You have been chosen to participate in this interview because of your experience of the Vietnam War. In particular, the challenges and possibilities that you encounter during and after the war period will add valuable insights to the diverse strategies use by women to reinforce and challenge Vietnamese dominant gender, nationalist and cultural ideologies.

You will be asked to participate in a forty-five minutes to an hour interview. However, this interview is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point during the interview. If there is any question you do not feel uncomfortable answering during the interview, you have the right to dismiss the question. The interview will be recorded with an audiotape and transcribed. Only the researcher and my academic supervisor will have access to the audiotapes and the transcription.

Your anonymity is ensured; your name and consent form will be kept separately from the interview data. Nothing that could identify you will be published. The researcher will use the research method of self-censorship: assigning pseudonymical characters to your thoughts or behavior, rewording and rephrasing the information obtained from the interviews. The interviews are completely confidential and the interview data will be kept in a locked drawer at UNBC. The information will be stored in this secure place for a year and a half, when the researcher will pull the tapes apart and erase the transcript data.

The potential benefit of this study is that it will contribute to the knowledge base of both Western and Vietnamese scholars about Vietnamese gender issues. There is no remuneration for participation in this study. There are no potential risks from this study or participation in this study.

If any questions arise about the interview for the findings, please email or telephone the researcher. Researcher’s contact information is provided above. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the interview, please check the box on the consent form and provide an address.
For more information about this study, please contact Dr. Angle Smith at (250) 960-6492. If there are complaints about the project, please forward them to the UNBC Office of Research, (250) 960-5820 or by e-mail: officeofresearch@unbc.ca.

You will receive a copy of your consent form.
Appendix C

Consent Form

I understand that I have been asked by Thu Anh Vu who is a graduate student in the Interdisciplinary MA Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, to be interviewed, as part of her Master’s project. The purpose of the interview is to collect information in order to investigate the lived experiences of Vietnamese women during and after the Vietnam War. I have read and received a copy of the attached information sheet. By participating in this study, I understand the benefits and risks. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study with Thu Anh Vu.

This consent is given on the understanding that my identity will be protected. I understand that interviews are completely confidential. The issue of confidentiality has been explained to me by Thu Anh Vu. I understand that my anonymity is ensured; my name and the consent form will be kept separately from the interview data. Nothing that could identify me with will be published in the study. I understand that the information from the interview will be shared with this student’s academic supervisor, Dr. Angele Smith and the University of Northern British Columbia alone. I do this freely and understand that I may end the interview at any point and can withdraw from the research process at any time.

I understand and agree that the information I have given to Thu Anh Vu in our interview(s) of the following date(s), ____________ will be treated in the following manner:

(a) the interview will be audiotape
(b) the interview will be transcribed to make an interview script
(c) this data will be kept in a locked drawer at UNBC
(d) the data will used only by Thu Anh Vu under the guidance of her academic supervisor Dr. Angele Smith, and only for her Master’s thesis project
(e) the researcher will pull the tapes apart and erase the transcript data after one and a half years

I hereby waive any claim against Thu Anh Vu, Dr. Angele Smith, the University of Northern British Columbia, and its Office of Research with respect to the use of the said information, provided it is used in accordance with this agreement.

I understand that if I have any comments or concerns I can contact Thu Anh Vu at (250) 563-2525 or UNBC Office of Research at (250) 960-5820.

NAME: ___________________ SIGNED: _______________

DATE: ___________________

RESEARCHER: _______________ SIGNED: ______________

A copy of this agreement will be retained by all participants in the interview.

[ ] I am interested in receiving a copy of the interview
Appendix D

Interview Protocols

Project: The construction of Vietnamese Gender, Nationalism and Cultural Ideologies and Identities from 1945 to 1990

Time of the Interview:
Date:
Place of the interview:
Interviewer: Thu Anh Vu
Interviewee:

The focus of this Master’s research project is to look at Vietnamese women’s lives from 1945 to 1990. I want to collect stories about women’s roles during the Vietnam War and how they may have changed since the war (post 1975 period). I am collecting these stories because existing Western scholarship provides limited insight into the diverse women’s experiences of this time in Vietnam, especially the period after 1975. Therefore, this research will contribute to generating new knowledge about the strategies used by Vietnamese women to reinforce and challenge their roles in the postwar period.

You have been chosen to participate in this interview because your experience of the Vietnam War. In particular, the challenges and possibilities that you encounter during and after the war period will add valuable insights to the diverse experiences of women in Vietnam.

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Questions

1. What do you know about the Vietnamese Communist Party before and after the Vietnam War? How did it change?
2. What experiences did you have of the Party?
3. Is anyone you know a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party? If so, do you know how old they were when they joined the Party? Do you know why they joined the Party?
4. How would you describe Vietnamese women’s status since the war?
5. What changes have you noticed in your life, whether positive or negative, since the introduction of Vietnam 1980s’ economic policy of Doi Moi?
6. What sort of challenges, whether economic, social or political, have you experienced in your life since the reunification of Vietnam in 1975? How have you coped with these new challenges?
## Appendix E

### Table of Primary Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Women’s Museum</td>
<td>Figure 1- Picture of Nguyen Thi Minh Khai</td>
<td>-Khai with other male Communist Party members</td>
<td>French colonial era</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Published Personal Account      | Memoir of Nguyen Thi Dinh    | -Born in a peasant family
- Separated from her family to escape an arranged marriage in her teen years
-1938-married a Communist Party member
-Husband arrested by the French soon after the birth of their son
-1940-43-imprisoned by the French for her revolutionary activities
-1945-participated in the Indochina war
-After 1945- served as the Executive Committee of the women’s association of Ben Tre
-1960-led an uprising against the southern government of Diem. After, Dinh became the leader of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Ben Tre.
-1964-elected as the Presidium of the NFL Central Committee
1965-elected as the Chairman of the South Vietnam Women’s Liberation Association and was appointed as Deputy Commander of the South Vietnam Liberation Armed Forces | French colonial era/ Indochina war/ Vietnam war |
| Published Personal Account      | Memoir of Le Thi Rieng       | -Orphaned at an early age. Lived with her uncle’s family
- Escaped from arranged marriage and joined the Vietnamese Communist Party
- 1950s-1960s-Participated in the Vietnam War
-Married to a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party
-Shortly after marriage, gave birth to a son
-Husband was killed while on mission in the North
-Rieng served as guerilla soldier, espionage, and | Vietnam war
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| War Remnant Museum            | Personal Belongings of Le Thi Rieng         | - A pair of heels, a purse, and a white scarf  
- Rieng wore these items on the day of her arrest. | Vietnam War                   |
| Published Personal Account    | Memoir of Le Ly Hayslip                     | - 1960s- Joined the Party as a teenager to be a saboteur and spy  
- Accused by the Party as a ‘traitor’ and was tortured and raped by two Party male members  
- Escaped to the south after being rape  
- Worked as a servant for a wealthy family in southern Vietnam  
- Married to an American soldier | Vietnam War                   |
| Southern Women's Museum       | Figure 4- Picture of Ho’s public speech     | - Ho’s speech to northern and southern Vietnam mothers on October 20th, 1966 | Vietnam War                   |
| Southern Women’s Museum       | Figure 5- Photo of heroic mothers           | - Heroic Mothers Nguyen Thi Ranh and Doan Thi Nghiep who lost all of their children and grandchildren during the war. | Vietnam War                   |
| Southern Women’s Museum       | Figure 6- Photo of a platoon of militia women in the southern province of Can Tho | - Young women in peasant style clothes with guns | Vietnam War                   |
| Interview                     | Hoa                                         | - 1960s-early 1970s- Member of Vietnamese Communist Party  
- Motivated to participate in the war in order to seek personal vengeance  
- Married to a Party’s cadre  
- Has two daughters and one son | Vietnam War                   |
| Interview                     | Mai                                         | - 1960s-early 1970s- Member of Vietnamese Communist Party  
- Participated directly in the war out of the desire to protect her family and community  
- Married to a Party’s cadre  
- Has two daughters | Vietnam War                   |
| Interview | Nhan | -1960s-early 1970s-Husband served in the southern government army  
-Remained at home during the war  
-Had her own business selling fruits and raising pigs  
-Became head of the household in the absence of her husband | Vietnam War |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interview | Huyen | -1960s-early 1970s-Remained with her family during the war  
-Single and employed at a private soy sauce company during the Vietnam war  
-Mother became head of the household when Huyen’s father passed away | Vietnam War |
| Interview | Phuong | -1960s-early 1970s- Stayed with her family  
-Single and worked for a weaving factory in order to contribute to family income | Vietnam War |
| Southern Women’s Museum | Figure 2-The Southern Women’s Museum | -Entrance to the museum | Postwar doi moi |
| Southern Women’s Museum | Figure 3-Statute of a mother and children | -Mother carrying a rifle and one child is on her shoulder and the other holding her arm | Postwar doi moi |
| War Remnant Museum | Figure 7-War Remnant Museum | -Entrance to the museum | Postwar doi moi |
| Interview | Mai | -1987-Husband passed away. Took over the role of head of the household  
-1989-Recieved financial aid from the Party. Mai set up a general store in front of her house  
-Suggested her life has been better since doi moi | Postwar doi moi |
| Interview | Hoa | -Since late 1980s- Receives monthly pension from the state which aided with monthly expenses  
-Satisfied with her current living condition | Postwar doi moi |
| Interview | Nhan | -Husband resumed the role head of the household  
-Children moved away  
-Established a business after doi moi | Postwar doi moi |
<p>| Interview | Phuong | -1989- Single and unemployed | Postwar |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Huyen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| -Lives with her brother/sister-in-law  
- Earns money through working odd jobs (i.e. caring for children in the neighborhood) | doi moi |
| -1990-Married and had a son  
-Expressed concern over the rising cost over her son’s education | Postwar doi moi |