MESSAGES FROM THE HEART: AGENT ORANGE AND NARRATIVE CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM

by

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ABSTRACT

PHILIP ARTHUR BLATTENBERGER. Messages from the heart: Agent Orange and narrative conflict in contemporary Vietnam. (Under the direction of DR. GREGORY STARRETT)

For six months in 2014 the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam hosted a temporary exhibition on Agent Orange. Entitled "Agent Orange: A Message from the Heart," the exhibit's politically benign narrative tone featured reconciliatory rhetoric and active calls for an altruistic international approach to aiding Vietnamese victims. This exhibit stood in stark contrast to the permanent display on Agent Orange one story above in the same museum, which maintains a decades-old accusatory tone that moralizes resistance, sanctifies victory, and demands penitence from American aggressors. This stark narrative conflict in the War Remnants Museum is a reflection of a broader division in Vietnamese society: between the witnesses to the American War who stake a claim to a particular historical memory of it, and the post-war generations who vocalize increasing apathy toward the war and its relevance to their ideology and national identity. As an institution of knowledge production and the "officialization" of historical memory, the War Remnants Museum leads, reflects, and has become a primary locus of divergent commemorative practices in contemporary Vietnam.

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The process of constructing this topic, forming research questions, carrying out fieldwork, and developing the subsequent ethnographic data into a meaningful conclusion would not have been possible without the rigorous attentions and generous commitment of Drs. Greg Starrett, Janet Levy, Coral Wayland, and Aaron Shapiro, all of whom guided me in some unique way toward the final production of this thesis. I am in their debt.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2014 a new wing of the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, opened to the public. Entitled "Agent Orange: A Message from the Heart," it features a brightly-colored room lined from wall to wall with a collection of fifty portraits, each featuring living victims of Agent Orange who "[overcame] their pain and [dreamed] of a peaceful and blissful world." These photographs, featuring deformed victims of dioxin poisoning acquired in the years following the American War in Vietnam, represent a the response of collective human perseverance: children overcome lack of limbs to paint pictures, swim, and play games, all enabled by the love and sacrifice of nurses, parents, and caregivers, and the broader Vietnamese community. This new narrative of Agent Orange in Vietnam's contemporary history stands in stark contrast to the permanent display a floor above in the same museum. A translucent orange and black room dedicated to exhibiting the consequences of Agent Orange's use presents a grim and terrible account of dioxin poisoning, making use of English-subtitled captions to narrate with thinly disguised hostility.

These narratives stand in opposition to one another. Conflicting voices suggest the presence of multiple stakeholders competing for different versions of the same past. Schwenkel (2009) has argued that in contemporary Vietnam these clashes are a result of *recombinant histories*, which occur when the needs of the present influence the representation of the past, resulting in the shifting of knowledge production and, subsequently, public memory acquired in the spaces where knowledge is displayed.

Throughout the course of this paper I will argue that the new exhibition on Agent Orange diverges from the narrative imposed by the original, and reflects a shift in

contemporary Vietnamese society, both on how the American War should be remembered and how Agent Orange should be appropriated. In order to do this I will draw upon observations culled from on-site fieldwork in three separate visits to Ho Chi Minh City, treating a problem of power and politics already contextualized by various scholars working in Vietnam, identity studies, and museum theory. I have also found it appropriate to include observations made during visits to peripheral battlefields and monuments across the country, where disparate memories come into conflict, both locally and transnationally.

To foreground the analysis of the exhibits' contents, I will begin by presenting a historical background of the Agent Orange's use, ecological impact, human consequences, and international fallout. Following this, I will introduce the exhibits themselves, arguing briefly that they present starkly different narratives about Agent Orange and direct much different appropriations of the conflict and the consequences of biochemical warfare. A third section will be dedicated to a review of the role of museums in regulating knowledge production and the dynamics of power inherent therein; still a fourth will explore violence, imagery, and the transnationality of knowledge production in contemporary Vietnam.

In the final section I will analyze the two exhibits on Agent Orange and argue that they conflict, drawing on, among other sources, extensive photography of the exhibits. Moreover, I will situate this conflict in the divergent cultural milieu of contemporary Vietnam, split visibly between wartime survivors and the post-war generations far more concerned with economic viability and opportunity than "a silly war which nobody remembers anyway," as my accidental informant and local college

student Vuong described it. The War Remnants Museum reflects this unfolding competition between memory stakeholders for institutional endorsement and deepens the case for understanding histories as a recombinant product of the politics of representation.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During a ten-year period from 1961 to 1971, the United States, along with an international coalition that included South Vietnamese forces, engaged in the production and spraying of chemical herbicides in central and South Vietnam. The most infamous of the half-dozen varieties used was a potent combination of dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), a powerful chemical defoliant known commonly as Agent Orange, sprayed heavily over Vietnamese forest and agricultural zones from 1965 to 1971 during the latter stages of Operation Ranch Hand.

Ranch Hand - the U.S. military operation that sprayed more than twenty thousand gallons of herbicides over forest and agricultural zones in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia – was conceived in response to growing problems with North Vietnamese liberation forces (NLF) and the proliferation of supply chains and recruitment zones from rural parts of both North and South Vietnam. The use of chemical defoliants, the Kennedy administration reasoned, would destroy North Vietnamese food supplies as well as force mass migration to urban areas controlled by the South Vietnamese, thereby undercutting Communist recruitment efforts. The operation was launched in spite of significant opposition from the State Department on the grounds that crop destruction would alienate the very people they were trying to win over (Buckingham 1982) and doubts that chemical herbicides could be considered categorically distinct from chemical weapons, despite not being used against “the physical person of the enemy” (1982:83).

Martini argues that the Kennedy and Johnson administrations viewed Vietnamese landscapes as "subjects to be mastered by technology" (2012:46). How, he asks, "could a supposedly ragtag group of guerillas not be intimidated by the weaponization of nature itself" (2012:51)? The subsequent ten-year defoliation program was the manifestation of this approach to controlling terrain, and Operation Ranch Hand's motto – "Only You can Prevent Forests," a play on the U.S. Forest Service and Smokey the Bear – manifested itself in the destruction of more than five million acres of forest and agricultural zones by the time the U.S. Department of Defense suspended its use in 1971, citing negative feedback from scientists on the ecological impact of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Transnational fallout – politically as well as biologically – has occurred in the decades since the end of the defoliation campaigns. The Vietnamese government estimates that upwards of four million Vietnamese citizens were exposed to Agent Orange, with as many as three million sustaining injury as a direct result of contact. In the years immediately following the end of Operation Ranch Hand, dioxin levels in the breast milk of mothers in spray zones were noted to be exceptionally high, as was the case of the blood of U.S. service personnel stationed in Vietnam; birth defects appeared in children born with prenatal exposure to Agent Orange, with cleft palates, extra and fused digits, and hernias being among the most common.

A class-action suit against the chemical companies and U.S. government for the manufacture and spread of Agent Orange – initially a Vietnamese campaign rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court until an increasing number of American military personnel showed signs of dioxin poisoning – described American veterans as

victims, along with "all those others so unfortunate as to have been and now similarly be situated at risk" (Young 1979:1). Those Vietnamese unfortunates, exposed to dioxin or born with deformations to exposed parents, have become symbols of the legacy of chemical war: their crippled bodies serve as "contested evidence" of the political and ethical ramifications of herbicidal warfare (Martini 2012:197).[1]

[1] In 2005 a separate lawsuit was filed against dioxin-producing chemical companies in the United States on behalf of Vietnamese victims, but the case was dismissed on the grounds that supplying Agent Orange was not itself a criminal or negligent act. Dow Chemical, among others, insists that no causal link exists between Agent Orange and the injured, a positioned officially maintained to this day.

AGENT ORANGE IN THE WAR REMNANTS MUSEUM

The effects of Agent Orange, and the military operations that utilized it, are prominently and famously displayed on the second floor of the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City. The museum itself was founded in 1975, immediately following the final evacuation of American military and diplomatic personnel, as the Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Crimes. Schwenkel notes that path leading to reestablishment of diplomatic relations in came with pressure to change the name to something less politically corrosive; it was shortened to "Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression" in 1990 and then, finally to the current "War Remnants Museum" with diplomatic normalization in 1995 (Schwenkel 2009:164).[2] The museum is now among the most prominent tourist destinations in Vietnam, drawing half a million visitors annually; it is a featured space of public memory and commemoration of Vietnamese total victory.

Situated on the second floor of the museum, across from a massive photographic display entitled "historic truths" and immediately following a path through exhibitions of global solidarity for the Vietnamese resistance movements, the Agent Orange exhibit is dominated by a photographic montage that highlights American wartime use of the chemical defoliant against Vietnam. The display culminates

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[2] There is some discrepancy on both the timeline and the specifics of the name. Schwenkel and others claim the above-cited titles, while the museum's website claims the original name was the "Gallery of American Crime" and then "War Crimes of Aggression Gallery" before becoming the current War Remnants Museum. historiographical evidence supporting the argument I have laid out; I am not yet willing to commit one way or the other.

Vietnam's narrative of the war, capping a documentation of foreign aggression with the grim legacy of biochemical warfare.

In stark contrast to the sterile eggshell white and powder blue walls of the rest of the museum's interior, bright orange paint dominates the third floor: fluorescent, visually harsh, demanding attention. Large photographs, several feet in length and width, span the breadth of the room across three long, multi-faceted walls. The exhibition begins with a series of black-and-white photos of Agent Orange's initial use. Placards describe Operation Ranch Hand's strategic crop destruction as an attempt to undermine Communist food and recruitment sources; rows of ravaged fields stand at rapt attention in shades of gray, ashen-faced farmers captured among the gnarled twist of dying fruit trees and poisoned rice paddies.

"[Toxic gas has] been used against the South Vietnam population," begins an engraved plaque, a statement from the chairman of the World Peace Council and a preface of the ghastly images occupying the second wall. "The peoples of the world note with repugnance the U.S. government's violation of all principles of international law . . . They demand that an end be put to all these barbarous acts." Civilians and former soldiers, both dead and alive, stare without expression into the camera, bodies mutilated, covered in chemical sores and bubbling inflammations. The third and final wall features children birthed by parents who came into contact with Agent Orange dioxin. Black and Orange paint leers around dozens of sobering photographs of young children – nearly all of them born decades after the violence ended – grotesquely deformed, limbs missing at birth, faces contorted, spinal columns twisted, and several dead.

A final informational poster in the Agent Orange display features a photograph of Robert McNamara, U.S. Secretary of Defense during the war, sitting alone in an empty room, apparently deep in thought. “Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong,” it quotes him, “and we owe it to future generations to explain why.” While the War Remnants Museum has long lost its pointed name and many of its accusatory expressions, some of its contents, as evident by the Agent Orange display, remain as potent as ever. The exhibit, and the disturbing images which comprise it and lend it its confrontational force, is central to the museum’s documentation of Vietnam’s fight against American forces and a national narrative of perseverance through national solidarity.

The new exhibit, *Agent Orange - A Message from the Heart*, opened to the public on 8 August 2014 and was scheduled to remain until 30 October of the same year (by the second week of December 2014, when I arrived to do preliminary research on the topic, it was still open and receiving visitors.) An introductory poster at the entrance, flanked by a few photographs consistent with the display inside, states that 4.8 million Vietnamese people were exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin, that its biological effects can last for generations, and that the display is held on the occasion of the “Day for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam” in cooperation with Vietnamese artist and photographer Thu An. The collection, states the museum, “is a message from heart to heart, bringing people closer together to sympathize and share with these victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam.”

The broad banner in front of the room, beginning on one end with a bright orange background, slowly fades to a soothing, peaceful blue, a schematic adopted for all the

exhibit's posters and messages. The interior is simple: four walls of equal length, each painted in subtle pastels and rich brown woven textile swaths to which the fifty photographs are affixed. The museum designates no starting point for viewing the pictures, and there is no visible narrative groupings or linear progression in the arrangement itself.

Photographs include a mother bathing a teenager with no arms, an armless girl feeding an immobilized sibling with a spoon clenched between her toes, wheelchair-bound adults exploring a beach, and a trio of deformed children learning gymnastics maneuvers that cater to their specific abilities. The subjects collectively exhibit the strength of the human spirit, persevering in the face of trials. "I was immersed in happiness," wrote photographer Thu An, on a large blue heart-shaped placard in the corner of the room, "when taking the picture of a couple of which the bride was paralyzed the groom was about to have a surgery. On that day, the War Remnants Museum was their wedding venue that was full of happiness, laughter, and hopes for the future."

Hope for the future is a theme that permeates the exhibit. Thu An captures joy in human moments throughout the montage; victims (like an young girl born without arms grinning and bowing a shoulder as a dove alights upon it) and caretakers (like a nurse smiling and shaking the hand of a middle-aged man with deformed extremities) alike are featured as caught up in the same dream: "to win the battle against [Agent Orange], to help one another overcome difficulties, play and love one another under one roof." The victims, Thu An continues, are like the owners of a future world "who

left behind the pain caused by wars to reach for a Peace Dream, as a message from hearts to hearts bring people closer together to be sympathized and listened [sic].”

MUSEUMS, POWER, AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Having examined briefly the War Remnants Museum's tonally differing narrative displays on Agent Orange, we will turn here to an analysis of the museum – non-specifically, as a general institution – as an arbitrator of public history. The historical memory it endorses is a *produced* knowledge, one often validated by structures of power.

Historical Knowledge

George Stocking, arguing against the rise of "Whiggish" history, decried presentism as "the historian's pathetic fallacy": the notion that organizing historical study by direct reference to present concerns can also be a wholly objective form of historical narrative. The presentist historian, he adds, "reduces the mediating process by which the totality of an historical past produces the totality of its consequent future to a search for the origins of certain present phenomena" (1965:212). Concurrently with Stocking's work, however, the entire notion of objectivity in the human and social sciences came under attack; indeed Hayden White, at the crest of the postmodernist movement in history and anthropology, argued that a formal coherency is imposed upon seemingly arbitrary sets of facts, rendering them a narrative in the form of a story. This so-called "proper history" is *narrativized*: it "makes the real desirable, makes the real into an object of desire, and does so by imposing the formal coherency of stories upon events that are represented as real" (White 1980:24).

It is this understanding of history as a *production* that necessarily delineates it as invariably bound in dynamics of power, and subject to the specific needs of the author or patron, whether consciously or not. Observing this, Walter Benjamin (1969) described history as the product of a" structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of now [Jetztzeit.]" The past is necessarily a construction of the present, an intentional fusing and ordering of fragments of "fact" from history (White 1978:125).

Historical memory is a product of power structures, and embodied in the social public. Maurice Halbwachs, treating collective memory as "a current of continuous thought" living in public consciousness, argued that memory was a "profoundly social process produced and maintained by social groups . . . and shaped by shifting spatial and temporal contexts" (Halbwachs 1992). Indeed Trouillot, understanding historical knowledge to be continually produced and reproduced in relation to shifting power dynamics and new truths, demonstrated that interests of the present could shape the body of beliefs about a past, helping, in Bodnar's words, a public or society "to understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future" (1992:15).

By embracing historical knowledge as the product of structures of power, mediating it through institutions and validating it through authority, often governmental – the door is left open for the manner in which institutions mediate this knowledge to be analyzed. Museums, and the directors that construct their narratives, act as cultural brokers that legitimize knowledge in public spaces of history and memory. These spaces often become contested sites, forums for the clash of historical narrative and forces of memory competing to be sanctified as *the way things were*.

This process of knowledge production is inextricable from the structures of power that produce it (Kuhn 1962)(Feyerabend 1975), and this knowledge, Foucault (1961) argues famously, is regulated by institutions that perpetuate the status quo: hospitals, prisons, schools, and the museum. It is the museum institution to which we now turn our attention.

Power and the Museum

Hooper-Greenhill differentiates between the "modernist museum" and the "post-museum" as delineating two types of historical representation, the former referencing the museum as a site of authority and the latter as a "site of mutuality" (2000:xi). The modernist museum rose in form largely as a product of Enlightenment thought (Alexander and Alexander 2007). Walsh's (1995) definition of modernism as "a set of discourses concerned with the possibilities of representing reality and defining eternal truths" (1995:8) reflects modernity's popular essence as progress, a narrative tied into Enlightenment ideals of rationality as advancing agent of perpetually-improving human society. Walsh argues that these ideas about progress were formative shapers of the modern world, particularly in processes of industrialization.

The modernist museum, thus, reflected monolithic narratives about the direction of social progress and took authoritarian, moralized positions on a historical past presented as necessarily and innately good. In England, heritage was traditionally defined by a committee delegated by parliament, using what Walsh describes as a "centralized process" which "placed in the hands of an unelected body, results in the

creation and maintenance of a heritage which, by its very nature, is constituted anti-democratically, and thus represents the past of a favoured fragment of society" (1995:79). Indeed, nationhood in the United Kingdom was, throughout the rise of the museum's prevalence as a social institution in the 19th century, seen as an inseparable component of an unbroken line of history.

Linear, monolithic narratives can serve the needs of the state that endorses the museum. Foucault, famously noting that "the gaze works according to the epistemology which directs it" (1973:23) spoke to the need for a cultural competence to be imported into the museum by the public in order to understand events which supposedly "speak for themselves." But with the same observation, Foucault provided the ideological clout of the post-museum movement: if differing epistemologies provide different frames of reference, and thus different narratives of the same past, then the official, state-sanctioned narrative must be considered a product of a particular epistemology sanctioned as the common-sense truth by a structure of power.

Postmodern anthropology, proposing to take up the cause of defending society's subaltern, has assisted in the production of the post-museum model, a particular mutuality of narrative and overall democratization of the process of knowledge construction. Cultural resource managers encourage multi-vocality in the selection and appropriation of museum displays and monuments, understanding, as Hooper-Greenhill notes, that representation "does not reflect reality, but grants meaning and confers value" (2000:138).

Museums project meaning and value through exhibitions, as venues utilized by societies for self-definition and public presentation. Indeed, Porter and Salazar (2005) observe that cultural heritage is important for national identity and that it can cause tension between the involved stakeholders. This tension, and its various subjects and products, is often at the core of studies on heritage tourism, as asymmetrical relationships of power and struggle for narrative voice have long characterized scholarly analysis of the field. Indeed, epistemology, power, and pedagogical concerns construct the dilemma of the modern museum curator, monumental architect, or historical preservationist; they have proven problematic for the post-museum in the modern era.

Steven Dubin (1999) observes that the modern-era museum has become a center of conflict principally due to its involvement in community empowerment during the social upheavals during the 1960s. Its role as activist during civil rights movements and the Vietnam War – Neil Harris (1995:1108) describes it as "a responsibility to challenge foreign policy and social injustice" – combined with a shift in historical analysis away from "big man" history and towards new social histories, led to the museum evolving into a forum rather than a temple (Cameron 1971), and thus, often, a battleground. A number of prominent cases have surfaced since then – primarily over the past three decades - that illustrate the internal and external strain woven throughout questions of historical representation.

The furious debate over representation of the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum is a commonly-cited example. The museum's decision to display parts of the B-29 surrounded by a ground zero montage – replete with photographs of

victims and artifacts like burnt lunchboxes and rosaries fused by the glass – was met with unforeseen fury. The exhibit's attempt to foster introspection and dissection of a hotly-contested decision was derided as unpatriotic and antithetical to the values of American culture and society, placing question marks upon a decision which was "unquestionably good" (Linthenal 1996:34).

Several years prior on the same National Mall, narratives and ideals of representation of the past clashed over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, perpendicular slabs of black stone fashioned into the slope of a small hill. It was infamously derided as a "black gash of shame" and the design was lit upon by angry veterans who felt their sacrifice was being nationally recognized as an embarrassment unworthy of proud, above-ground monumentation speaking to American triumphalism and values (eventually an American flag and two statues featuring heroic soldiers were added as a method of appeasement.)

Around this same time period the Smithsonian American Art Museum featured an exhibit entitled "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier 1820-1920" that reappropriated period art as lenses into the justification of expansionist policy. In a dynamic reminiscent of the *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition controversy three decades prior (Dubin 1999), organizers' attempts to provoke critical thought about images and Western mythology instead provoked a massive national outcry on interplaying political and cultural fronts.

These three episodes, all occurring within a decade of each another, are foundational and oft-cited examples of the problems embodied in representation of any kind of past: there are conflicting versions of every history, each represented by

various stakeholders, and the selection of narrative as the common-sense, manifest truth – endorsed by the state and other institutions of pedagogy – is a proxy silencing (or delegitimizing) of the others. Here we are forced to confront the role of power in representation; for whatever we think of jingoism – which in these cases opposes the nationally-approved version of representation, ironically – it has become the mission of the 21st century cultural resource manager and historical preservationist to democratize the past, allowing multiple voices to contribute to an increasingly discursive style of representation (or process leading up to it.) To select a single narrative is to wield power, to flex pedagogical muscles, to make a narrative subaltern.

Power shifts are the source of nearly all outbreaks of conflict in museums, as seen in the examples of the Enola Gay the reinterpretation of the American West, the latter of which rode the tide of post-nationalist cultural sentiment central to the cultural wars of that period. Indeed Dubin (1999) argues that the loss, gain, and exercise of - and the resistance to - power are foundational in the process of museums directing their narratives. Since the 1960s, however, displays of power are no longer one-sided; power often comes in the form of responses provoked by museum exhibits. Thus, Dubin notes, power embodies both action *and* reaction in the museum (1999:5). In contemporary museums, reaction has a newfound power; accountable now to varying constituencies, institutions find themselves vulnerable to public backlash in ways unthinkable several decades ago (Harris 1995).

As the democratization of the representative process has been widely accepted as a general answer to the problem of power and the existence of multiple narratives – for

instance, the ubiquitous use of visitor impressions books in museums all across Vietnam – epistemological concerns take center stage, particularly in an increasingly globalized world where histories are often recombined and transnational products.

ANALYSIS

The War Remnants Museum's history is an embodiment of transnational knowledge production. A state-sponsored exhibition, it features the country's victory over American forces during the America War. As a space of public commemoration, it is both institutional (sponsored by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam) and a producer of knowledge to be consumed by the visitor. Since its foundation in 1975, mere months after Vietnam's unification, the museum has undergone dramatic changes in narrative and tone, both in name (it was originally the Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Crimes) and in content (certain politically incendiary displays were removed following diplomatic normalization with the United States in 1995).

Schwenkel (2009) has argued that the War Remnants Museum's shifting expression of Vietnam's historical past is due in large part to transnational production of memory: political and economic pressures to move forward and soften the past's blow to enemies-turned-lucrative-trading-partners have led to a kind of democratization of the museum. American voices are increasingly present as the museum moves more towards an "objective" position on the event, a position caught between traditional commemoration of the Vietnamese victory and the emerging attitudes of younger generations for whom engagement with Western economic structures and education takes precedence over historical stake-holding.

Aihwa Ong argues that one of the conditions of transnationality is a "cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space – which has been intensified under late capitalism" (Ong 1994:4). The glut of visitors Vietnam is receiving – the fastest

growing in Southeast Asia, and 500,000 annually at the War Remnants Museum alone – is largely comprised of tourists from China, Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Heavy international presence has caused common types of adaptation by the museum to its guests, but it is specifically the presence of the American visitor – particularly the returning war veteran – that has been so widely felt in Vietnam's representation of its past.

Conflicting memories of the war – the clash of the dominant American narrative versus the narrative of the Vietnamese, and the eager accommodation of veteran groups by Vietnam's tourist industry – have together constructed what Schwenkel describes as *recombinant histories*, the "interweaving of diverse and frequently discrepant transnational memories, knowledge formations, and logics of representation" (2009:12). Anthropologist Geoff White (1995), analyzing Solomon Island commemorative ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of WWII, argues similarly that public spaces of memory become forums for memory to be contested; conflicting narratives and disjunctive memories are distinctly transnational in nature, and produce recombinant histories. Asymmetrical relations of power – America as powerful and Vietnam as economically subservient, in this case – can sway which memories are given endorsement by sources of authority.

At the source of much of Vietnam's recombinant history is the use of images of suffering to convey meaning. Photojournalism wields the power to transmit knowledge of war and suffering (Taylor 1998), to cement historical veracity (Benjamin 1969), and to mobilize social consciousness and political subjectivities (Starrett 2003). Significant portions of the War Remnants Museum's displays are

dominated by wartime photography of victims. While Boltanski (1999) argues that repeated exposure to images of suffering can lead to indifference, and Sontag (1990) that repeated exposure can depoliticize the subject, such images are nevertheless central to Vietnam's moralizing accounts of its own struggle for freedom. For Barthes (1985) the presence of these images sanctifies the narrative reality imposed upon them, an "analogical perfection" (1985:5).

The variable nature of meaning in photographs makes their representation in Vietnam politically complex, and analysis of additions and subtractions in the War Remnants Museum a difficult task. Images can be reappropriated under new conditions and in new contexts, and as has been observed in the famous photograph of the napalm-burned body of Phan Thị Kim Phúc, which has surfaced and resurfaced globally to carry anti-war or political clout not directly related to its origins in Vietnam. Cultural representations of war, argue Hariman and Lucaites, are "subject to a range of appropriations that comprise a continuing negotiation of American public culture" and a "continuing struggle over the meaning of the Vietnam War" (2007:200).

Existing social, political, and historical frameworks, and their constituent backers, often appropriate images in manners conducive to the perpetuation of those frameworks or narratives. "Human groups [collectively mobilize] to craft objects of memory" argues Starrett (2003:399), and in the context of the War Remnants Museum, and in particular the displays on Agent Orange, wall-to-wall photographs of war victims craft a historical memory of Vietnamese as victims of American imperialistic ventures and industries of war. Directors at the War Remnants Museum

appropriate images of violence as moralizing the struggle against American aggressors, but the introduction of new photographs in new contexts has raised recent complexities in the process of memory-making in contemporary Vietnam. As will be discussed at length in the following analysis, new images of Agent Orange victims are framed in new lights: positive rather than negative, and textured with an impetus towards international solidarity and friendship rather than of national struggle and righteous anger.

At this point, I have set the stage for a conflict: museums are important arbiters of culture and validators of historical narrative, and Vietnam, socially divided on the topic of memory and appropriation of the war, is reflected by the contents of War Remnants Museum, where two clashing voices on Agent Orange come into conflict. Here we will examine them both, analyzing their photographic content and the accompanying captions and exhibition context. The first narrative is the original Agent Orange exhibit, featured on the second floor of the War Remnants Museum, and the second narrative is the differing story told in the exhibit downstairs, in *Agent Orange: A Message from the Heart.*

Historic Truths: Agent Orange

The original exhibit on Agent Orange has been in place since the early 1990s. Although the museum's accusatory tone has generally faded since diplomatic normalization with the United States (Schwenkel 2009:78) the narrative of Agent Orange has not lost its moralizing edge. The headline over the entrance to the room

foregrounds the content as "historic truths," presenting the imagery's meaning as nonnegotiable.

That narrative here is unambiguous. "The U.S. war in Vietnam was an illegal war of aggression," reads an informational poster featured prominently near the beginning of the exhibit. "The massive spraying of Agent Orange . . . violated the U.N. Charter mandate . . . [this] illegal use of weapons has caused so much pain, suffering, and anguish to at least 3 to 4 million Vietnamese and their families."[3] Quoting these excerpts from an international tribunal on Agent Orange held in Paris in 2009, the museum instills a transnational conscience and condemnation upon both the U.S. government's use of chemical warfare and the chemical companies complicit in the "ecocide" of Vietnam's environment.

For the War Remnants Museum, moralization demands action and recompense, as seen on an adjacent information display. "…We think that the USA should acknowledge the consequences caused by Agent Orange to the Vietnamese people, and should implement their responsibilities . . . to Vietnamese victims in the same way as they have done to the American veterans [sic] victims." The distribution of U.S. government benefits to international victims has been unequal, bestowing the settlement of a class-action lawsuit on American veterans, but denying it to Vietnamese victims: "No excuse can justify that those who sat on the planes and spread toxics have been considered as catching or contracting disease, while those who have been spread toxics on their heads or had to use the food and water mixed

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[3] These estimates are widely estimated to be heavily inflated, due largely to the expense and general lack of available testing equipment as well as the Vietnamese government's propensity for lumping similar cases regardless of cause (Martini 2009:191)

with toxics have not been recognized." This asymmetry in compensation reflects the dynamics of power present in the meting out of benefits: bombers successfully assuming the role of victim. This is, demands the president of the Dioxin Agent Orange Victims Association, "an extremely severe violation of human rights."

While the many informational posters – I have only cited two – provide a textual base for the exhibit's production of history, they are ancillary to the visual effect the images have on visitors. The spacious room (fig. 1) is covered wall-to-wall with pictures of Agent Orange victims. Juxtaposed against black-and-white images of mangled crops, the twisted bodies of the victims themselves are the museum's most visceral, a consensus overwhelmingly confirmed in the museum's impressions books and in online reviews of the site. Here the violence of mechanical and chemical warfare is manifest in cleft plates, limbs missing from birth, and a myriad of physical deformities (fig. 2, 3, 4, 5.)

Figure 1: Second floor exhibition, Historic Truths: Agent Orange.

Figure 2: Photograph of Agent Orange victim.

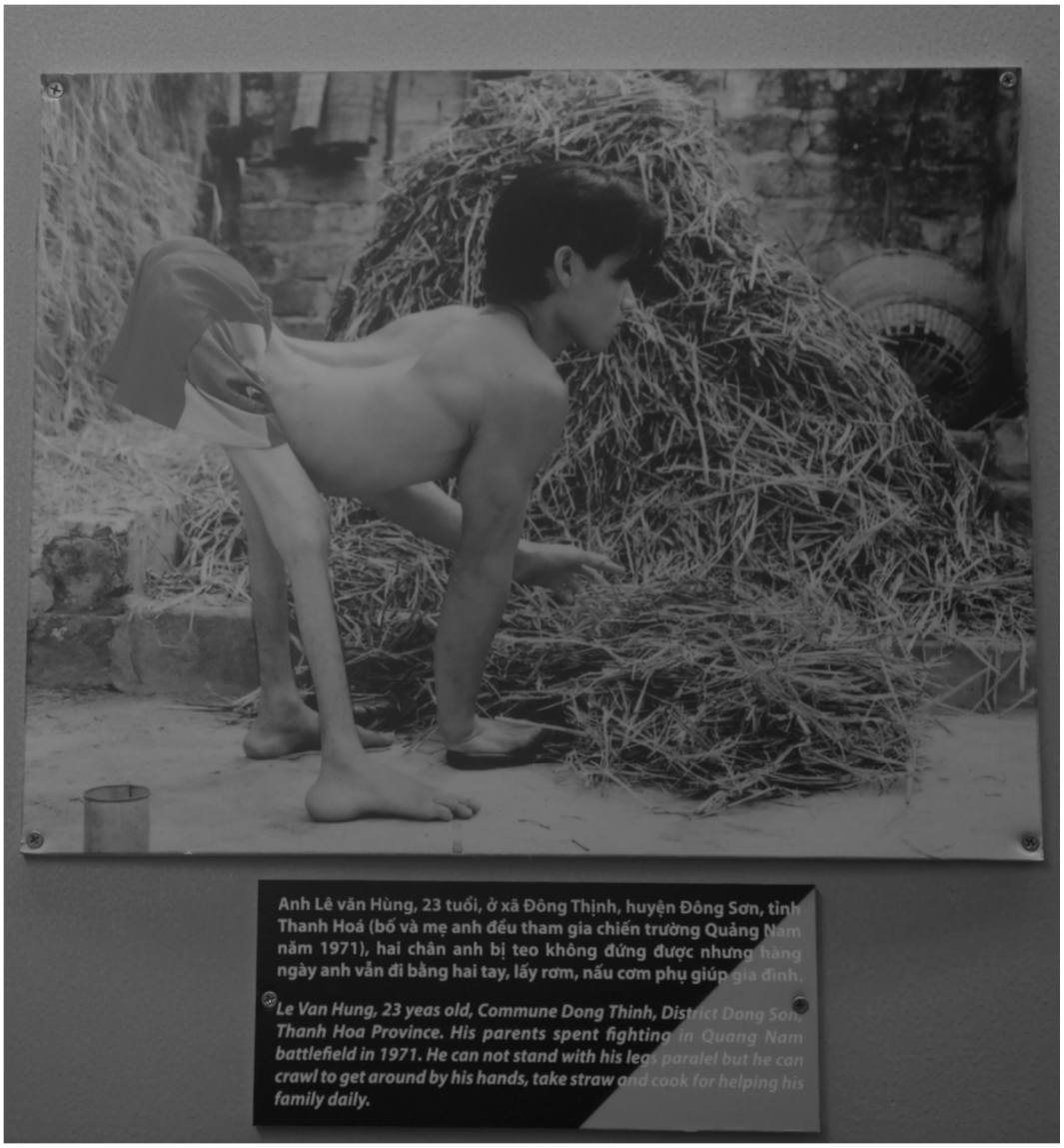

Figure 3: Photograph of Agent Orange victim.

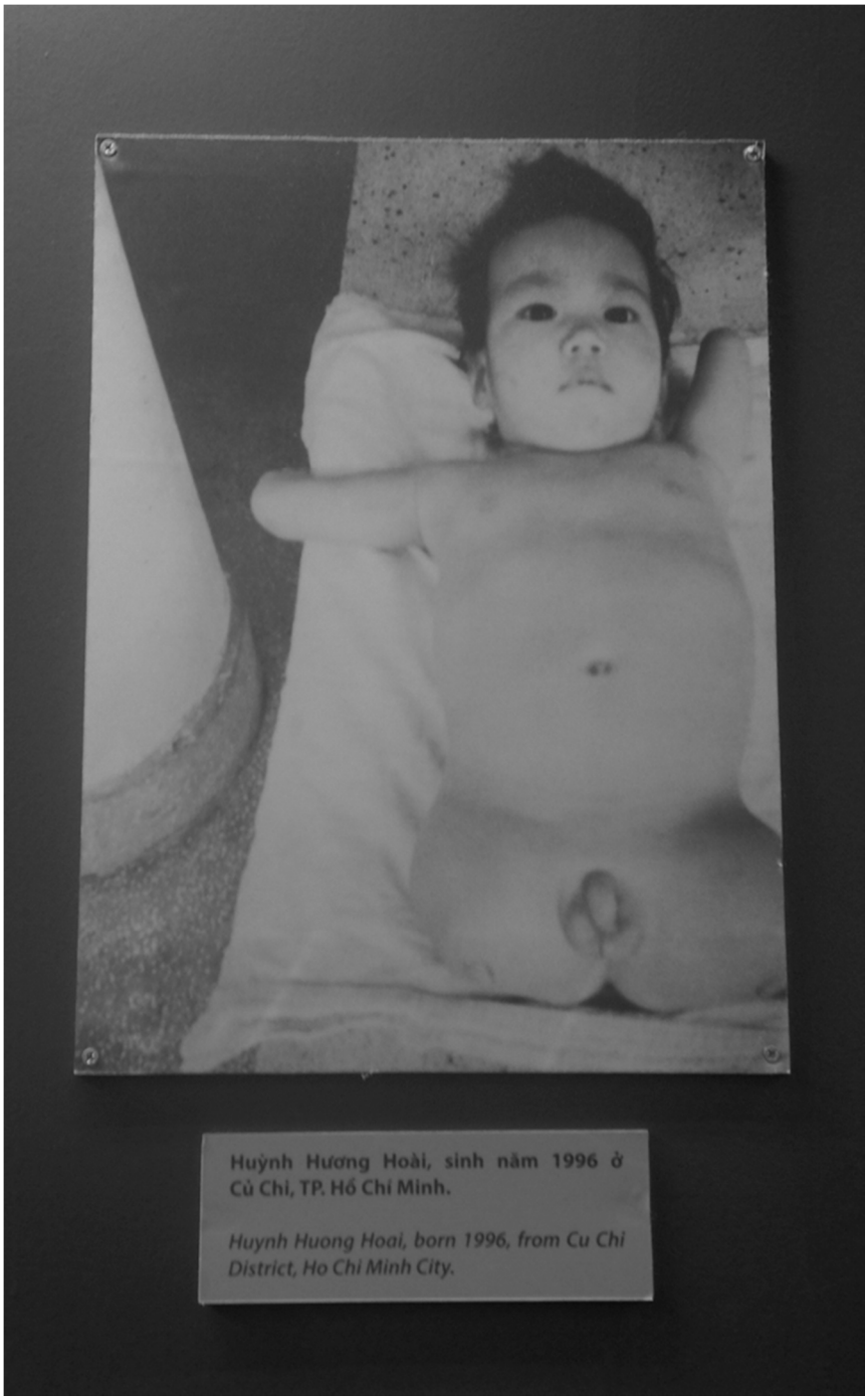

Figure 4: Photograph of Agent Orange victim.

Figure 5: Photographs of Agent Orange victims.

At least a hundred such photographs populate the exhibit on Agent Orange. Many are presented with clinical austerity: faces on a wall with a name, place, and date of birth. However, it is the captions accompanying the less anonymous of the victims

that provide yet another level of narrative indignance at the circumstances and origins of the victims' plight. A photograph of Nguyen Thi Men describes her as a twenty-one-year-old girl from the heavily-bombed Thai Binh district whose dioxin-induced mental retardation has forced her to live in a cage-like enclosure for her entire life: "All day long, Men attempts to chew and swallow anything within her grasp. Suddenly, as she recognizes her father, she extends her hand through her enclosure, reaching for him. Her father, Nguyen Van Hang, spent fighting in the Truong Son Mountains, he was contaminated by Agent Orange [sic]." (fig. 6)

Figure 6: Photograph of Agent Orange victim.

Another photograph, entitled "Nguyen Hoai Thuong wants to touch a flower," features a maimed toddler. "She was born in 2008 . . . [living in the Cu Chi District of Ho Chi Minh City, and] is armless and legless. How will she enter life?" (Fig. 7).[4]

Figure 7: Photograph of Agent Orange victim.

[4] The inclusion of this recent photograph in the exhibit is a reminder Agent Orange is a contemporary, trans-generational problem in Vietnam, and moreover that the exhibition content is subject to additions or subtractions. The exhibition's variability complicates analysis – we don't know when it went up, or what it replaced – but its inclusion suggests the careful maintenance of a deliberate narrative, rather than an untended relic.

Ubiquitous mentions of caring mothers, persevering families, and communal support of the deformed in the photo captions place the suffering in clear moral opposition of the violence that imposed their situation. The victims are no mere collateral of war, and, more importantly, no collective dead to be interred and mourned: they are living and suffering several generations after the war's political end. They are people whose lifelong struggle is to enter life in a meaningful and productive way, a right robbed of them by American bombs and chemical companies. Of this the museum could not be more clear; even victims featured surpassing their physical limitations to learn everyday tasks, create art, and flourish academically are still juxtaposed against the criminal liability and crippling silence of the culpable parties, whose refusal to pay reparations produces new generations of stoic toe-painters and chess champions who cannot feed themselves.

"The peoples of the world note with repugnance the U.S. government's [use of napalm and toxic gas] in violation of all principles of international law," reads a placard flanking the exit door, quoting J. Bernal, 1965 chairman of the World Peace Council. "They demand that an end be put to these barbarous acts. Such an aggression is threatening South-East Asia as a whole, and peace all over the world." Of this barbarism and repugnant aggression's historical consequence and present effect the museum's Agent Orange display leaves little room for doubt.

Agent Orange: A Message from the Heart

When I made my third sojourn to Vietnam in search of research topics, my goal, having already realized Vietnamese society's internal drift about how the war should be remembered, was to uncover some aspect of change in the representation of the American War in the War Remnants Museum. I wanted to locate some change that would reflect those social divisions over historical memory and provide a lens into studying them. My success was immediate: the first thing I discovered when walking through the broad, open-air front entrance was a formerly vacant wing of the building, brightly bannered and surrounded with plaques, flowers, and what turned out to be an Agent Orange victim accepting donations to a fund for decontaminating land still tainted by dioxin poisoning.

Agent Orange - A Message from the Heart opened to the public on 8 August 2014, and was scheduled to remain on display through the end of October (for unknown reasons fortuitous for my research, it remained there until the end of the year, allowing my early-December visit to catch it before closing.) Having already examined the original exhibit on Agent Orange and explored it scholastically through Schewenkel's monograph, I passed through the doorway expecting a narrative extension of the original display upstairs (I hastily ran up the concrete steps to ensure it was still there; it was) but from the outset the tone was entirely different.

It is tempting to cite the low-key pastels and earth tones dominating the room as a key shift in narrative, away from the domineering fluorescent orange and matte black glaring at visitors to the upstairs exhibit and towards a more reconciliatory visual tone; however, I do not know enough about Vietnamese aesthetics to attribute it as a

purposeful cause, and nor was the attending museum staff willing to answer whether the color scheme was designed with visiting Westerners in mind (or perhaps I did not ask the question correctly.) Either way, the mood of the subject had changed in a dramatic way, a tone set from the first step into the spacious room.

A Message from the Heart is a collection of photographs from Vietnamese artist Thu An: fifty pictures that, according to the exhibit's informational poster, feature Agent Orange victims "sharing, helping, and loving each other" during their struggles with health and habitation. His photographic subjects, claimed the War Remnants Museum, "overcame their pain" and "dreamed of [a] peaceful and blissful world." In heavy contrast to the poisoning victims captured in prostrate agony upstairs, these victims, as advertised, are specters of determination and joy. No hate smolders in their hearts; no bitter seeds of anger taint the lights in their eyes, nor the captions describing their condition. The subjects of *A Message from the Heart* have been transformed from the broken physical state of their bodies to exist on a higher plane, transcending their biological circumstances to live and to thrive (fig. 8).[5]

[5] It should be noted that most of the photographs featured here were only available through the lens of my own camera, and that circumstances dictated my inability to take reproduction-quality pictures. Several of the referenced images are marred by poor angles and reflective light and should not be mistaken for technical fault in Thu An's work.

Figure 8: Photograph of Agent Orange survivor.

Two key themes emerge out of the photographs: communal effort to overcome the physical limitations of their poisoning, and the process of individuals overcoming the social limitations imposed upon them by their deformities. Save for two (and we will discuss them shortly), all of the photographs in the room can be reasonably well organized into these two themes. Nurses feature prominently in the montage, dedicating themselves to the painstaking care and development of victims' wellness

(fig. 9, 10.)[6] But nurses are only one part of a broader community, a support system made up of mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins, friends, caretakers, and empathetic fellow citizens helping to bear the burden of life with dioxin poisoning (fig. 11, 12.)

Figure 9: Photograph of Agent Orange survivor.

[6] Fig. 10's caption *Cô là mẹ* translates literally as "she (the nurse) is a mother," or "they are mothers," thereby projecting consanguinity upon the victims' care.

Figure 10: Photograph of Agent Orange survivors.

Figure 11: Photograph of Agent Orange survivors.

Figure 12: Photograph of Agent Orange survivors.

The other half of the exhibits photographs feature individuals persevering over physical limitations to enter fully and productively into the mainstream social world. Far from being the caged-in, social castaways displayed so horrifyingly upstairs, Thu An's subjects are vibrantly engaging in the minutia of everyday life. In spite of the physical odds weighed against them, they are getting married (fig. 13), having children (fig. 14), self-actualizing (fig. 15, 16), and integrating with society as autonomous individuals (fig. 17).

Figure 13: Photograph of Agent Orange Survivors.

Figure 14: Photograph of Agent Orange Survivors.

Figure 15: Photograph of Agent Orange survivor.

Figure 16: Photograph of Agent Orange survivors.

Figure 17: Photograph of Agent Orange survivor. [7]

Of the fifty photographs comprising Thu An's collection, only two reference the American War. The first (fig. 18) features a pair of white Western women walking by an advertisement for the exhibit, underscored by the caption "War proof." The second photograph (fig. 19) retains the same advertisement banner in the background, but this time is foregrounded by a presumably Vietnamese man in a modified wheelchair,

[7] The Vietnamese word *gạch nối* is the grammatical term for a hyphen, as seen in the caption, but colloquially translates to "a connection" or "a joining" and is probably the intent of the label.

gazing up at the twisted figures of the victims on display, entitled “Bond of sympathy.”

Figure 18: Photograph of tourists looking at Agent Orange banner.

Figure 19: Vietnamese man looking at Agent Orange banner.

Two things are significant about these photographs. One – and perhaps the most glaring – is that in a museum dedicated to the exhibition of a righteous and incredibly costly national struggle for victory over overwhelmingly superior and inhumane Western foe, on the subject that most poignantly keeps the war raging on in the hearts of countless Vietnamese, only two photographs make any mention of American culpability for war crimes, or otherwise juxtapose the injuries against the political violence that caused them. This is at enormous odds with the collective narrative expressed by the museum, particularly in the upstairs exhibit on Agent Orange.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the pairing of the images – two young, white, backpacker-demographic females of Western origin, and a crippled Vietnamese man like born after the war, all looking at the same image – invokes a

sense of internationality of the problem, and persuades an international burden on the solution. The caption on fig. 19 (*đồng cảm*) reads literally as "empathetic." The caption running along the advertisement poster (*Vì nạn nhân chất độc DA CAM – DIOXIN Việt Nam 10/8*) reads "For Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange." Thu An's exhibition was assembled as an art exhibit, but it wields an inherently activist component. Not only did its opening coincide with an international fundraiser for victims of Agent Orange, but its purpose, as stated by the museum on an informational poster, is to "bring people closer together to sympathize and share with these victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam."

The motivation behind using Thu An's artwork becomes quickly obvious when understanding the dearth of reparations and resources available for Vietnamese victims and cleanup of affected environmental areas. In 2012 the U.S. government sent a small team of environmentalists and engineers to begin laying the groundwork for clearing pollutants north of Da Nang, a noteworthy offering given decades of tacit refusal to address culpability. This breach of silence and the flow of money towards Vietnamese victims coincide with the increased emergence of Agent Orange as a transnational issue (Martini 2012), and the War Remnants Museum, with its national prominence and international visibility, can serve as a critical component of securing relief funds. Exhibitions like Thu An's, which deliberately avoid inflammatory language about the war, seeking instead to appeal to a moral and communal sense in the international community, can achieve precisely that.

Transnational Remembrance and Representation

A month of doing fieldwork at the War Remnants Museum made it clear: *Agent Orange – A Message from the Heart* presents a narrative of dioxin poisoning and Vietnamese identity that stands in stark relief to the Agent Orange exhibition housed upstairs as invariable historic truth. The original exhibition follows the museum's moralizing and accusatory tone, blaming the Americans, in no uncertain terms, for the plight of the present through the perpetration of past atrocities. By contrast, the new exhibit circumvents politics of blame by focusing instead on the resiliency of Vietnamese community and national character, looking to the future rather than dwelling on the past.

This dual approach to the same subject is inextricable from the politics of power: specifically, America, with a vested interest in saving face in the international community, has the power to make amends for its actions, while Vietnam, relatively powerless, has more to gain by accepting cleanup aid than by publicly wielding old grudges. Thus, argues Schwenkel (2009), the resulting histories of the American War become recombinant, a synthesis of opposed narratives, or the suppression of one in favor of the other as the outcome of a power-driven politics of representation. Through the authoritative power of its public institutions, Vietnam's history in the American War has largely become a *transnational* production of knowledge as Western voices contribute in growing ways to how the war is publicly remembered.

The War Remnants Museum's plurality on Agent Orange can be understood as a transnational production, as can other prominent historical sites in Vietnam. Scholars have argued that sites like museums, battlefield tours, and tourism packages for

returning American veterans are uniquely catered to Western political sensibilities, resulting in a changing interpretation of the past. From the commodification of the war in the form of fake Zippo lighters (Walters 1997) and battlefield sites physically altered to accommodate Western tourist interests, such as the widened Cu Chi tunnels (Schwenkel 2009), the landscape of memory has altered to fit the demands of Vietnam's growing international tourism market. While sites in and immediately surrounding Ho Chi Minh City – especially the War Remnants Museum – are the most prominent and well-known locations of transnational change in representation, commemorative sites farther afield in Vietnam are also rife with conflict and transnationally-induced change.

One such example is the Khe Sanh combat base. Located several kilometers south of the former demilitarized zone (DMZ), the site was home to an American airfield, artillery outposts, and some of the fiercest fighting of the war, particularly during the Tet Offensive in 1968. Today the base has mostly returned to rice paddies and sugarcane fields, but the taxi strip is still visible, a brown swath of dirt ripped into the lush green backcountry. The site is occupied by a handful of war machines – tanks, howitzers, and, most spectacularly, an intact C-130 troop transport - and a small museum where, fifty years later, the war still rages.

Both the War Remnants Museum and the museum at Khe Sanh employ impressions books, a western-style democratization technique allowing visitors to pen thoughts, reactions, gratitude, and criticisms of the institution in any way they wish. They are, in politically-charged museums, sites of conflict. I was unable to record specifics from the books at the War Remnants Museum due to hovering museum staff

who quickly forbade it, but the one in Khe Sahn remained unguarded. Five decades of historical finality on the matter – as well as the museum's authority – vanished as American veterans lambasted the victorious Vietnamese narrative for its perceived inaccuracies.

"We won!" declared an anonymous American veteran from the 4th Infantry Division (fig. 20), defying the museum's proclamation of victory. "WE NEVER LOST A BATTLE IN VIETNAM – EVEN HERE," demanded another, signing his name "USMC." A third added: "The Vietnam vets did a hell of a job to stop the hell in this place – I know, I was here and WE DID WIN."

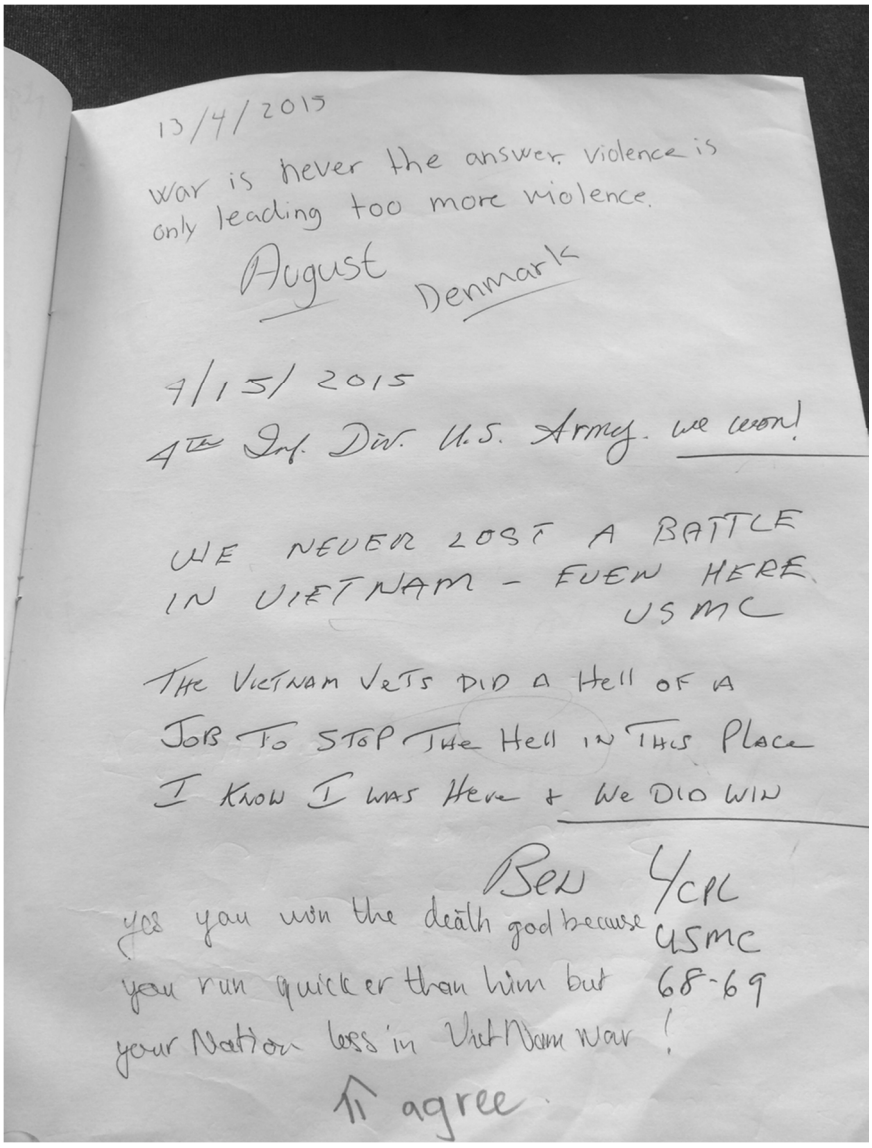

Figure 20: Impressions book in Khe Sanh Airbase Museum.

Here the challenge to the authority of the institution was on permanent display. This assault on the museum's narrative produced new knowledge, infused a national narrative with an opposing international one, and engendered a conflict between different versions of historical truth. It didn't stop there; a commenter criticized the veterans' responses as reflective of personal experience ("outrunning the death god" but hardly indicative of the outcome of the war ("your country [ran slower]"). Yet

another viewer commented "agree" underneath, choosing a side of the narrative rift, but was sandwiched by "not very accurate" from a 101st Air Cavalry veteran.

Thus rages the war in the divergent memories of its participants and the generations following it. The War Remnants Museum, and others like it, controls the authorized production of historical knowledge and mediates historical memory. When localized knowledge comes into conflict with imposed outside knowledge (or with representative decisions influenced by it), as has been the case with narrative softening in the War Remnants Museum, the institution can become a site of conflict and social abrasion. American narratives clash with revolutionary Vietnamese memory, and Vietnamese narratives themselves fragment internally: contemporary Vietnamese society is observed to be basically divided between older generations whose memories of the war and ideologies stemming from is being replaced by younger generations who are increasingly apathetic about holding historical grudges (Schwenkel 2009), even when they involve Agent Orange.

MacCannell's (1999 [1976]) suggestion that tourism is a product of desire to escape the mundane may shed some light on the lack of interest in the war among the Vietnamese populace; older generations, having lived through the war itself, find no escapism in touring the Cu Chi tunnels, for example, though they still believe the sites should engender national pride (Trương Như Bá 2000). However, the younger generations – generally, those born after the 1975 unification – are disinterested in the war. Visits to sites are often an exercise in reconfiguration of space; Vietnamese youth tourism's draw to the Cu Chi tunnels isn't the tunnels themselves but rather the surrounding amenities, such as the cafes and arcades. These practices of anti-memory,

Schwenkel argues, reflect Vietnamese youth's "detachment and distance from the nation's traumatic history" (2009:97).

This distancing is not only reflected but also pedagogically led: in 2004, the War Remnants Museum's director stated that future projects would emphasize peace: "…Our goal is to teach the youth about peace, not only war. Down the road I hope to change our name to Museum of Peace, but not yet because there are too many wars in the world right now and the effects of war are still being felt here in Vietnam" (Schwenkel 2009:159). The director's statement reifies the museum's activist and pedagogical role, and it reflects the general disinterest in war museums, which Schwenkel's ethnographic research found repeatedly dismissed by young respondents who emphasized the need for monuments teaching youth about peace, not about past wars (2009:138).

Ambivalence about the American War among Vietnam's youth comes hand-in-hand with new economic opportunities with the same West traditionally excoriated in Vietnam's public of spaces of memory. Youth at museums, Schwenkel found, were more likely to be using the presence of Westerners for a chance to practice speaking English than to view the institution's content.

Vuong, a university student in his early twenties, reflected the attitude held by his peers in spontaneous conversation we had during my fieldwork at the War Remnants Museum. "As Vietnamese, we don't want the Americans to feel guilty about the war," he said, in an unsolicited comment after asking me what I thought of the museum. "What the American soldiers did was bad, but the museum should serve as a historical lesson not to fight wars, and nothing more." He went on to explain that

young Vietnamese didn't want to impede economic partnership or sacrifice political and educational opportunities for the sake of a war they weren't alive for, preferring a peaceful and prosperous friendship between the two nations over grudges. His sentiments reflect the primacy of economic opportunity over remembering the war, a trend bound in Western-dominated dynamics of power that persuades museum directors who are invested in museums' role as arbiters of "moral values and revolutionary tradition" to also "[forgive] past enemy offenses in order to make friends for the future" and thereby maintain a concern "for the nation's economic development" (Schwenkel 2009:150, 162).

As the fifty-year anniversary of the last Agent Orange spray approaches, it seems likely that anger over the war will fade with its Vietnamese participants as they are replaced by opportunistic youth. The changing tone of the Agent Orange issue within the walls of Vietnam's most famous and confrontational museal institution is a reflection of this trend.

CONCLUSION

The case for studying history as a transnational production grows stronger, particularly in a modern, globalized world where public spaces of memory are democratized, and increasingly subject to the voices of international agents, many of whom come from nations whose complex and interplaying political relations with the host make museums and other cultural institutions into a useful power to wield. Museums are, after all, mediating forces upon culture and historical memory. Regarding Agent Orange, the War Remnants Museum has always produced a particular narrative: that its use was inhumane and illegal, that undue suffering had been visited upon the Vietnamese people, and that the Americans who perpetrated acts of violence upon them were responsible for their suffering. Until the arrival of Thu An's photographic exhibition, no other public perspective existed in Vietnam.

Agent Orange – A Message from the Heart changed that. Reflecting political and economic motives, it served as a softening of narrative - a suspension of blame if not a dismissal of it - in the face of new opportunities for reparations and ecological restoration. The museum's juxtaposition of smiling, forward-looking Vietnamese against the anguished victims mired in their past reflects a similar division in society: between those who appropriate the war as a morally incisive exhibition of American inhumanity and criminality, and those who appropriate it as a historical lesson, as Vuong put it, to be pondered by nations for the sake of a more peaceful future.

Photographer Thu An's artist's statement captures this rift – and the dynamics of power involved in its existence – perhaps best of all. Speaking about children maimed by American military enterprise, seeking American funding for reparations and

cleanup, Thu An divorces the victims of Agent Orange from the past the determined their limitations: "They are like owners of a future world who left behind the pain caused by wars to reach for a peace dream, as a message from hearts to hearts, bringing people closer together to be sympathized and listened [sic]." Asymmetries in power create the peace dream; the execution of power through a narrative shift in Vietnamese productions of knowledge will make it come true.

Much work remains to be done on the subject. Attention must be paid to both Vietnam's ever-evolving historical memory of its own wars and the broader implications of histories-in-general as productions of power, particularly in the case of former warring states currently engaging in asymmetrically powerful economic and political relations. Special attention will need to be paid to museum and heritage historiography: how do the political desires of the more powerful country affect what narratives or voices are authoritatively expressed? What voices are silenced as a result of institutions of power endorsing one narrative over another? How is public memory and national self-perception mediated by a dynamic of power that coerces the production of recombinant histories?

Anthropology is concerned with all of these factors, and my own work in Vietnam's museums has demonstrated the recombination of historical facts as influenced by political and economic forces; to the consternation of Vietnam's elderly population and the approval of its postwar generations, representation of the war and of contemporary issues like Agent Orange have been reframed in accordance with a promising diplomatic and profitable economic relationship with the United States. The existence of two narratively contrasting exhibits on Agent Orange – contrasting

both in content and in the histories of their exhibition – reflects the social divide in memories of the war and the appropriation of its lasting consequences. My work has confirmed this much.

But perhaps most significantly, it has raised specific questions, such as: does the War Remnants Museum's deliberate maintenance of content (recall the insertion of a post-2008 photograph in its photographic lineup) signal a future willingness to part with the most incendiary verbiage and components of the exhibit should the museum's power to broker financial support of victims and cleanup of dioxin poisoning be deemed more important than the preservation of the original narrative? How, specifically, do postwar generations who forgive the American War feel about America's use of Agent Orange, when neither forgiveness nor dismissal solve a contemporary effect of its use? As in the case of the museum at Khe Sanh, what power lies in the dissenting voices of returning American veterans to undermine the authority of the museum's battle narrative through highly visible guest impressions books? Does the adoption of Western museum practices like the democratization movement have unintended consequences for the postwar or post-colonized world that finds itself subject to an asymmetrically powerful Western tourist constituency? What roles, if any, have anthropologists in the preservation of the subaltern narrative voice? Is the transnational production of history an invariable and unavoidable product of globalization and the homogenization of (or hegemony over) memory by global powers, or should social scientists assume the role of researcher-advocate in the composure of anthropological knowledge? The possibility of a confident answer

is hinged upon continued anthropological interrogation of power, identity, and historical memory.

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APPENDIX A: FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

War Remnants Museum	5 – 13 December 2014
Hue City	14 – 16 December 2014
War Remnants Museum	18 May – 5 June 2015
Cu Chi Tunnels	29 May 2015
Ho Chi Minh City Museum	30 May 2015
Hue City	6 – 10 June 2015
Hue Citadel Battlefield Site	7 June 2015
Quang Tri	11 June 2015
Dong Ha	11 June 2015
DMZ battlefield sites	11 June 2015
Khe Sanh Firebase/airfield Museum	11 June 2015
Da Nang	13 – 15 June 2015
Hoi An	16 – 17 June 2015
Son My/My Lai Museum	17 June 2015
Hanoi	17 -21 June 2015