



VIETNAMESE AMERICAN ART AND COMMUNITY POLITICS

An Engaged Feminist Perspective

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WHAT IS OUR ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY to our own ethnic community? This is the question we posed ourselves when we became embroiled in political controversies concerning Vietnamese Americans, anticommunism, and the arts. Lan Duong was a co-curator for a 2009 art exhibit called *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks* [Nghệ Thuật Lên Tiếng] in Santa Ana, California, a showing that drew hundreds of protestors because of the exhibit's display of communist symbols within some of the artwork. As co-president of the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN), Isabelle Thuy Pelaud made the difficult decision of not being involved in the *F.O.B. II* controversy for fear of community reprisal. In spite of these divergent experiences, we collaborate on this article to explore what a progressive politics belonging to Vietnamese Americans would look like, given the exigencies of the past that bind young and older Vietnamese Americans to Việt Nam and the United States today. This past includes the traumatic legacies of war and the deep scars of displacement that Vietnamese Americans still carry more than thirty-five years since the American War ended. We come together as feminist academics and arts organizers to emphasize the similarities between our respective positions rather than our differences. We are troubled by how many community organizations have self-destructed over the years and continue to do so due to issues related to homeland politics. Consequently, we hope that the dialogue resulting from this collaboration will contribute to a feminist

reworking of what it means for Vietnamese Americanists to work in the community.

Our inquiries are guided by the concerns that we—as female Vietnamese American scholars—are caught in a triple bind. On the one hand, we intimately understand the enormous losses of war and country experienced by our parents and the community. On the other, as educators and intellectuals trained in identifying and critiquing power structures, we do not want to be silenced by excesses of power, regardless of its origins. In our scholarship and community work, we counter mainstream misrepresentations of Việt Nam and, by extension, of Vietnamese Americans. Hence, as we resist former antiwar protestors' blind spots about Vietnamese American experiences and histories, we must also negotiate with Vietnamese American anticommunist activists who misinterpret our intentions and denigrate what we do. Ironically, combating dominant representations of Asian Americans is the easiest to undertake, since countering stereotypes fits well within the parameters of our academic discipline. Arts funding is also more favorable toward community organizations that propose debunking stereotypes. But issues concerning Vietnamese American politics are more delicate. For Vietnamese American activists and academics, there are not enough theoretical *and* practical tools to interrogate the vexed concerns underlying our community engagements and research about Vietnamese Americans.

In this article, we foreground the issues of doing activist community work within and beyond the academy. We question the politics of “the community,” especially when they marginalize women and other subjects who test the bounds of an “imagined community.”¹ At the same time, we decenter the logic of a white liberalism that would champion what is perceived as our leftist, procommunist stance or critique of an older generation, who are unable to let go of the past.² Reflecting on our roles as educators, moreover, we address the difficulties of teaching Vietnamese American studies courses, particularly because our own students now embody a variety of experiences and lead diverse political lives. Devising a rough guideline for organizations, we formulate partial answers in dealing with politicized art and the threat of anticommunist protests. Ultimately we ask that the field of Asian American studies be more conscious of

our challenges when we try to turn theory into practice, a move that is at times adamantly opposed by the very community with which we wish to collaborate. We call for more analyses in the field about Vietnamese American refugees, analyses paired with a critical understanding of this community's profound losses and rigorous attention to issues of power and domination that mark its formation.

We begin with our experiences of being positioned at the intersections of Vietnamese American art and community politics, explaining these experiences with an eye to the ways they are conditioned by questions of history, class, and various layers of privilege. Lan Duong first details how an art exhibit was protested against by anticommunists in Orange County, home to the largest population of Vietnamese outside of Việt Nam. Isabelle Thuy Pelaud follows with a discussion of the complexities of applying theory to practice when organizing and teaching. Although we have different organizational experiences and work in distinct locations, we have experienced the same set of political and social expectations whenever working with the community. With each art-related event, we must consider the same questions about how the works may be interpreted and the problems of accountability for the community we come from and study.³ In our analysis of these moments, we ask the following questions: Who is protesting, why do they protest, and what are the implications of protest for the Vietnamese American community? How is an analysis of gender and sexuality deeply relevant to the study of anticommunism within the community? And, finally, what does it mean to analyze the politics of a refugee community in Asian American studies?

F.O.B. II PROTESTS: FAMILIAL POLITICS AND THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY

In January 2009, I organized an art exhibit called *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks* [Nghệ Thuật Lên Tiếng] in Santa Ana, California, with fellow arts activist Trâm Lê. The exhibit, scheduled for January 9 to 18, was sponsored by the arts organization Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association (VAALA).⁴ Showcasing the work of over fifty visual and performance artists, *F.O.B. II* illuminated the diversity of political and aesthetic perspectives in the Vietnamese and diasporic artistic communities. The artworks dealt with sexuality, identity, refugee histories, and contemporary political issues like

Obama's presidency and Proposition 8 in California. But on the second day of the exhibit's opening, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about the exhibit that focused mainly on the polarities of communism and anticommunism that the exhibit supposedly depicted. Further emphasizing this notion was the accompanying photograph of a work by Vietnamese American artist Brian Đoàn that was part of the exhibit, a diptych that included images of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam's flag and a bust of Hồ Chí Minh.⁵

Soon after the article was disseminated, mainly through the Internet, we were besieged by criticism, obscene phone calls, and threats of a protest by members of the Vietnamese American community. As the days passed, the art exhibit galvanized many groups from around the world to demonstrate against our art show (there were as many as eighty signatories on one Internet discussion forum).⁶ The most vocal group was Thanh Niên Cờ Vàng (Youths for the Yellow Flag) who rallied many of the protestors online and through town hall meetings.⁷ Our event was discussed in numerous national and international forums, and provoked a demonstration with hundreds of people at the site of the exhibit, even after our exhibit had already been forced to shut down because of community politics and the actions of local politicians.

A closer look at Brian Đoàn's provocative work and the way that some protestors criticized it will help illuminate the politics of gender, sexuality, and collaboration that fueled the controversy.⁸ One half of his diptych, called *Avon, MA 2006*, features a young man, eyes closed, as he holds an empty birdcage in the middle of a green forest. The other, more controversial, half of the diptych, called *Thủ Đức, Việt Nam 2008*, centers on a young girl sitting at a table, which displays a bust of Hồ Chí Minh. She is wearing a red tank top decorated with a yellow star, a design that explicitly refers to the current flag of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam: a yellow star on a red field (Figure 1). For many in the diaspora, this flag is a symbol of communist repression and totalitarianism. As a result, overseas communities choose to display the flag of the Republic of Việt Nam, or South Việt Nam, a yellow field with three red stripes. This flag represents the sense of exile that community members feel about their homeland, the former RVN. In its display of Việt Nam's current flag, Đoàn's work evoked an event that had occurred ten years earlier in 1999, colloquially



Figure 1. Avon, MA 2006 and Thủ Đức, Việt Nam 2008. Photo courtesy of Brian Đoàn.

known as the Hi-Tek Incident. In this incident, Orange County merchant Trần Trường's posting of a picture of Hồ Chí Minh in the window of Hi-Tek, his video store, drew thousands of protestors over the course of several weeks.⁹ More than three decades after the fall or the liberation of Sài Gòn, potent symbols of northern Vietnamese nationalism and communist ideology, like the red flag and the image of Hồ Chí Minh, remain highly controversial and contested.

Well aware of this difficult history, fellow curator Trâm Lê and I sought to deal carefully with these sensitive issues in Vietnamese American community politics and prepared for the potential backlash. We wanted to make the exhibit as collaborative as possible among the curators, the artists, and the community. For example, we organized a collaborative effort where directors and interviewers made short films with anticommunist Vietnamese Americans, who relayed their personal stories on film; this project was intended to humanize the protestors, often caricatured as relics of the Cold War in the dominant media. These short films would have played at the exhibit had it not been for various legal complications with the newspaper and other activist protestors.¹⁰

Moreover, through a bilingual catalogue and panels staged in conjunction with the artwork, we tried to promote conversations about the intertwining of art and politics and its role in Vietnamese history. Mostly we looked to address both community and national publics in speaking to the lasting impacts of war, including the ways in which the American War in Việt Nam was being referenced in discussions of the current U.S. wars. Because of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was imperative for

us, as members of the diasporic community, to “think through the politics of why we [were] here and to think carefully about which America we want[ed] to identify with,” as Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan has argued about the Indian diaspora in the United States.¹¹ Putting the exhibit up was a means for us to ask that community members look critically at the ways in which many parties engaged in censorship, including the United States, the diasporic community, and Việt Nam itself. For instance, we featured various installations that spoke to the banning of literary and artistic works throughout the twentieth century as a pointed critique of the Vietnamese state’s history of censorship of art and literature.¹²

Despite our emphasis on historical context, however, the discourse about the exhibit was dominated by the imagery of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam flag and Hồ Chí Minh’s bust. The terms of the discourse were set in the ways that these images supposedly bespoke our betrayal of the community and our loyalty to communist Việt Nam. Various Vietnamese language media outlets admonished us, with Vietnamese American writers calling us arrogant children going against our elders, simply because we had been able to “learn a few English words.”¹³ Figured as a generation that had lost its roots,¹⁴ we were called unfilial (*bất hiếu*)¹⁵ and disrespectful (*hỗn láo*)¹⁶ and were told we had to apologize to a community whose members saw themselves as our family.¹⁷

On the day we were forced to shut down, the protests and the epithets continued. During a press conference in front of protestors, police officers, and journalists, Lê, myself, and others who were central in planning the exhibit (all of whom are Vietnamese American women) sought to explain why our art exhibit, *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks*, was closing early.¹⁸ The city of Santa Ana was shutting down *F.O.B. II* because we were not permitted to have an art exhibit in the new offices of VAALA. In fact, the permitting issue was only an excuse, with the real reason being political maneuvering on the part of local politicians like assemblymen Jose Solorio and Trần Thái Văn, who wanted to appease their conservative Vietnamese American constituencies.¹⁹ The city of Santa Ana also wanted to avoid the policing nightmare that the Hi-Tek Incident demonstrations had posed for the nearby city of Westminster ten years earlier. The city feared that an unruly demonstration of thousands of people would undoubtedly cost too much to police.²⁰

The protests and the posturing by local politicians were characterized not simply by nationalism and anticommunism, however. The semiotics of the protest were also steeped in patriarchal rhetoric and sexist imagery aimed at disciplining the curators and organizers as women. The young and old, female and male Vietnamese demonstrators who confronted us brought their own artwork: a photoshopped picture of a young woman with a red star on the seat of her bikini and, next to her, a bust of Hồ Chí Minh's in the toilet. An older woman in an *aó dài*, her fingernails painted in the design of the southern Vietnamese flag, called us "whores" for daring to put up *Super Fab Beauty Queen* by Long Bui, an image of a woman holding a can featuring the word "Viagra" next to what looks like the southern flag. Sometime during the protest, the anticommunist activist Lý Tống, well-known in the Vietnamese community and revered by some as a hero,²¹ taped a pair of red panties and a sanitary napkin on Brian Đoàn's picture, *Thủ Đức, Việt Nam 2008*.²²

Because of our gender, we were assaulted in terms of our (hetero) sexuality, particularly when we were called "đĩ" (whores) or "thương nữ bất tri vong quốc hận," a phrase that roughly translates as "businesswomen who are unaware of the people's resentment that the nation has been lost." In using this phrase to denigrate our art exhibit, the author—writer and former soldier Hải Triều—offered a telling analogy that figures women as conduits for commerce. He compared us, the new intellectual class of today, to the destitute prostitutes of yesteryear, declaring both are interested only in selling themselves and in selling out their country during its most difficult times. Indeed, we were worse than prostitutes because of our class and intellectual capital.²³ Hải Triều and the community of protestors found our youth, lack of experiential knowledge about the war and life under a communist regime, and most particularly our gender ready grounds for dismissal. While male artists like Đoàn and shopkeepers like Trần Trường of the Hi-Tek demonstrations were also vociferously demonstrated against and labeled traitors, the condemnations against our collaboration pivoted on our symbolic roles as dutiful daughters of the community.

As women, we had betrayed the ideal of Vietnamese diasporic womanhood, our loyalties tainted by our collaboration with Vietnamese American artists whose work was deemed offensive to an anticommunist community. As organizers of the exhibit, we had also allegedly collaborated with the

communist government to propagate its ideals. From this point of view, we were seemingly indifferent to a certain construction of Vietnamese refugee history dominant within the Vietnamese American public. As part of the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese Americans, we had to be re-schooled in order to better understand refugee (*tị nạn*) history.²⁴ In retaliation for the “dirty” pictures we put up, community protestors counterdisplayed abject images of women in red bikinis, of Hồ Chí Minh busts in toilets, and of women’s “feminine” products, public gestures meant to shame us *as* women and put us in our place. These symbols of sex, dirt, and abjection—most particularly the toilet and the menstrual pad—emblemize the binaristic notion that women serve either as pure symbols of the nation or as pollutants that corrupt a nation’s integrity. In Lý Tống’s act of vandalism,²⁵ the emphasis is, of course, placed upon the latter part of this equation, whereby women are both defilers and the defiled. That women are inside and outside, simultaneously defender of and offender to nationhood, is the dialectic turn upon which the patriarchal imagining of community and nation operates. Such is the “style” with which nationalist collectives imagine themselves and their parameters.²⁶ As Mary Douglas proposes, what is viewed as dangerous fosters a sense of bonding within a social body, which responds to danger by seeing it as dirty and expelling it.²⁷

Exemplified in acts of shaming that center on women’s sex and sexuality, these actions by anticommunist Vietnamese Americans show how the community’s borders are managed by way of punitive and public displays of anger. Positioned in between U.S and Vietnamese nationalistic narratives of the war, of how it was lost and won, this community lacks cultural power within a national or international context, but it nonetheless maintains a symbolic order from which members can be cast out, particularly if they are seen as collaborating with the enemy or with outsiders. In their acts of defacement with spittle, scratches, and spray paint and, most especially, in Lý Tống’s use of women’s underwear, these protestors put into effect “the exchange value of shame . . . the basic capital that circulates in the symbolic economics of nationalism,” as Elaine Kim and Chungmoo Choi observe in another context.²⁸ As the protests surrounding the art exhibit show, a symbolic economics of nationalism underlies the protestors’ rhetoric and their model of the community as family. This ideal of the community is highly problematic since it assumes that the spaces of the family and com-

munity are always safe and that members need to prove their filiality to the communal family. As a result of these dynamics, a “paternal hierarchy” of power,²⁹ in which gender inequalities are reproduced, becomes sanctioned and normalized within community politics. Those who do not conform to being a filial son or daughter are charged as traitors to that community.³⁰ The accusation of treason bears out in the *F.O.B. II* protests. On the signage of several protestors, my cohort and I were labeled “commie collaborators” and puppets for the communist regime who propagandized about the benevolence of Vietnamese communism (Figure 2).

As Như-Ngọc Ông and David Meyer write, when Vietnamese Americans protest against other Vietnamese Americans, a process of metonymy takes place whereby the protestors believe that the protested are proxies for the Vietnamese government and the Communist Party.³¹ A number of these protests have taken place outside of the *F.O.B. II* and Hi-Tek incidents, including the controversies surrounding Madison Nguyen’s renaming of a shopping center in San Jose, California, from Little Saigon to Saigon Business District. As Ông and Meyer observe, when anticommunists protest against art, the protests center upon a one-way exchange wherein the art in question is perceived as presenting only one (positive) view of the Vietnamese government and Communist Party.³² This view explains why the protestors came armed with works that reversed what they believed was foul about communist propaganda: artwork deemed offensive was met with equally offensive images of gendered abjection.

Even so, such acts do not merely signal that anticommunists want to take Việt Nam back and return to a nostalgic pre-1975 space and time. Contrary to popular belief, the divides between community members are not simply marked by age and experience. The protestors who demonstrated against us were intergenerational, as they were during the Hi-Tek Incident. Rather, the divisions are related to how various classes of the diaspora formulate the terms for a meaningful present and future. For anticommunists who engage in acts of protest, their work is intended to be pedagogical: they protest against a forgetting of the past in the present moment, reminding future generations of the existent abuses of power by the Vietnamese government. The reasons for this way of thinking encompass the geopolitical dimensions of what it means to be a part of the Vietnamese diaspora today. Within the Vietnamese American community,



Figure 2. Photo courtesy of the blogger muoisau.

an anxiety about the porosity of borders between the United States and Việt Nam and the flow of goods, funds, and people that increasingly cross such borders is pronounced, particularly after the United States lifted the trade embargo against Việt Nam in 1994 and the political rapprochement between the countries that has solidified since then. Moreover, in the face of Việt Nam's opening to capitalism in 1987 and its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2007, the diaspora recognizes the economic stronghold that Việt Nam has become in recent years and wants to remain ever resistant against the growing power of the Vietnamese government.

Another reason why a younger generation of Vietnamese Americans is exhorted to remember their history and heritage is because, put simply, others will not. As Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ argues, Vietnamese Americans are “self-mourners because no one else mourns us.”³³ “Mourning the dead” allows Vietnamese Americans to “accuse the living” and critique both U.S. and Vietnamese historical amnesias.³⁴ The Vietnamese American community's complex efforts to memorialize the past counter an erasure of its history, gesturing toward the U.S. betrayal of its former allies as well as the failure of Vietnamese communism.³⁵ Understood in this way, anticommunism is a purposive force that the Vietnamese American community

deploys to construct an identity and place for itself in the United States. Tying memory projects to a sense of place, Karin Aguilar-San Juan argues that “strategic memory projects” are crucial for Vietnamese Americans and their desire to form a collective identity and to build communities, particularly because such projects defend against U.S. racist tendencies to misrecognize the Other.³⁶ Moreover, Thúy Võ Đặng argues that anticomunism, as a multivalent and evolving cultural discourse, functions to “carv[e] a space in the US and [bear] witness to a history that cannot be erased by mainstream America.”³⁷

Vietnamese American acts of protest are not only tactical but also conditioned by historical forces. Nhi Lieu contends that U.S. involvement in Việt Nam has always operated at many different levels (political, economic, and cultural) in the country as well as in refugee camps. In turn, these influences structure the ways in which Vietnamese refugees formulate an identity in the United States, a construction that draws from the potent narratives of anticomunism and the American Dream. Lieu argues that scholars must “reexamin[e] this tangled history of racial formation, especially before migration took place, [to expose] the racial politics embroiled in the conflict.”³⁸ In the same vein, Yen Le Espiritu contends that it is only within a discourse of anticomunism that Vietnamese Americans, “as objects of United States rescue fantasies,” even register as subjects within U.S. national culture following the end of the Cold War.³⁹ As these scholars underline, any project to understand Vietnamese American anticomunism must be bound to the “racial logics of US imperialism” that operated during and after wartime.⁴⁰ As Espiritu importantly adds, Vietnamese Americans and their dominant narratives of success and assimilation comply with notions of American exceptionalism.⁴¹

Espiritu’s arguments about Vietnamese American narratives open the way for a necessary analysis of the community and its practices of exclusion. While U.S. empire and Việt Nam’s human rights abuses should be critiqued, scholars also need to be critical of the Vietnamese diasporic community’s efforts to construct a monolithic discourse about citizenship and cultural membership, one that complies with the disciplinary logic of being “with” or “against” one’s community. Indeed, such narratives about the community as one’s family circulate within a smaller public

but nonetheless work to prohibit other kinds of narratives—for example, narratives dealing with sexual abuse, domestic violence, and corruption, which attack the sanctity of the family and its hierarchical nature. Looking at the normalizing effects of this discourse, Kim Nguyen asserts how “Vietnamese American anticommunist protest rhetoric attempts to control and police the ways in which Vietnamese American identity can be forged in relation to the Vietnam War at the level of the subject as well as at the level of the family unit.”⁴² As the *F.O.B. II* protests showed, based on acts of defining certain groups of people as (political, gendered, sexed, and raced) Others to the community, this culturally nationalistic discourse works, above all, to regulate the behaviors of the community and instruct youths on the proper ways of inhabiting a Vietnamese American identity.⁴³ My discussion about the demonstrations against *F.O.B. II* and other events like it calls attention to the ways that this formation of identity is a form of disciplining that too often occurs within the community.

The next section, by Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, further explores issues of identity that play out not only in the community but also inside the classroom. Like I have done, Pelaud underlines the challenges of staging cultural events within Vietnamese American communities. Whereas I have opened a space for a critique of community politics, Pelaud outlines more concretely how arts organizations can work together to prepare for controversial events such as *F.O.B. II*. Importantly, she also discusses the pedagogical issues she confronts in teaching Vietnamese American studies to Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic students at a state university in California.

COMMUNITY AND HOMELAND POLITICS: ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

It needs to be better understood that each time we organize an event in the Vietnamese American community, we are faced with the threat of an anticommunist protest. For instance, when we invite a writer or an artist from Việt Nam to visit our universities, we must think about whether or not we will be protested. As professors and community organizers, we deliberate carefully, deciding on distant, safe locations where protestors may not be able to come, or estimating the size and nature of potential

protests to gauge whether or not a film, art work, poetry reading, or other showcase warrants an invitation. As Vietnamese Americanists, we are apprehensive about losing the support of those we aim to work alongside if we are labeled communists. In my twenty years of studying and promoting Vietnamese American literature and cultural productions in general, I have remained extremely vigilant and sensitive about homeland politics. In light of what happened with VAALA and *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks*, however, I can no longer remain part of the silent majority.⁴⁴

Three years ago, I started a community organization called the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN), whose mission is to promote the works of Vietnamese artists in the diaspora with a special focus on writers, visual artists, and filmmakers.⁴⁵ DVAN works on a global scale because the Vietnamese people were scattered across various countries at the end of the Việt Nam War. Our organization is premised on the idea that the Vietnamese diaspora share similar stories of nostalgia, invisibility, and racism. We highlight different Vietnamese diasporic perspectives through our blog (diacritics.org), public events, and publications. The organization's goal is to bring Vietnamese diasporic culture from the margin to the center, an objective that falls within the parameters of Asian American studies. In accordance with this field, DVAN strives to address issues of social justice, deconstruct stereotypes, advocate for community empowerment and demarginalization, and bring generations together for the purposes of building coalitions and healing. We are similar to many other Asian American community art organizations, and yet we encounter very unique challenges. In addition to the labor it takes to organize, the difficulties of fund-raising for projects that are not necessarily nation-bound, and academic constraints that favor research over community service, we are consistently reminded of the impacts of the Việt Nam War.

In the first year of DVAN's existence, our core members became deeply divided over the protests against VAALA's art exhibit, *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks*. The question seemed simple: should we get involved or not? Some in the group wanted to publicly support the organization against protestors because they believed "it was the right thing to do" to stand in solidarity with VAALA. Others refused to become involved because they did not know enough about the controversy and feared harming their reputation and their ability to engage in community work. Conversations

were heated and the structure of the group itself was threatened. After listening to all sides, I ultimately felt that the new organization was not ready to take a stand and that we needed to find clarity among ourselves and gain strength as a group. There were both individual and collective costs to this decision. We avoided attacks from community members, but our relationship with certain community organizations and individuals was affected. Our bonds to one another were also tested.

Being labeled “communists” is not our only concern. We are also weary of liberals and former antiwar protestors who do not understand the deep losses and struggles of our community and insist on calling us “Vietnamese.” A few months after the VAALA controversy, we organized the second San Francisco Vietnamese American Poetry Festival. A San Francisco poet laureate, a Leninist and former Việt Nam antiwar protester, was asked two days before the event to open the program. He said he wanted to bring photographs of “the beautiful Vietnamese people” but would not share what he intended to address and which beautiful Vietnamese people he was referring to. We declined his offer because we suspected his “love” for the Vietnamese people was directed toward the North Vietnamese and would thus clash with the way the artists saw themselves and how they wanted to be introduced. Although DVAN refused his offer respectfully, this poet still complained to sponsors. As it stands, we no longer receive funding for the poetry event, although it has been very successful and has drawn hundreds of people to each event.⁴⁶ Obviously, this has been a huge loss of resources for a small arts organization such as DVAN.

Theoretical formulations about power and community must work to inform one another. To gain strength in handling the legacy of the Việt Nam War, leaders of community-based art and culture organizations need to delineate clear guidelines on how to promote Vietnamese American cultural productions. One way to move away from the binary of “us versus them,” in neither giving in to community pressures to censor artwork nor becoming a platform for the search to resolve the Việt Nam War, is to adopt an artist-centered approach. Because curatorial and programming choices can have important implications for the artists, they must be informed ahead of time of decisions that concern them, particularly on such aspects as programming, framing, sponsorship, and location. If a

controversy is expected, artists need to know. Organizations that promote Vietnamese American cultural productions also have to collaborate with other organizations and build relationships with them. In times of difficulty, we need to be open to supporting one another. Mutual support will have been facilitated if a past of collaborative efforts had already existed, and when all parties follow an artist-centered approach. In addition, we need to reach out to community members with a proficiency of language when possible and a high degree of empathy and compassion at all times.

In the cultural events we organize, we aim to create spaces for those who, in Andrew Lam's words, refuse "to let rage and thirst for vengeance dominate their hearts" and where "constructive discussion and dialogue" that "spur new political thoughts" can take place.⁴⁷ In the spring of 2011, DVAN staged its first-ever Vietnamese Film Festival of the Diaspora in San Francisco, California. We collaborated with VAALA, and Lan Duong curated the program, which included a range of contemporary Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic films.⁴⁸ Among the thirteen films we showed, a film called *Hanoi Eclipse: The Music of Dai Lam Linh* (2010) focused on a Vietnamese musician and dissident named Linh, who had fought on the North Việt Nam side during the war. An older Vietnamese American man in the audience, whose daughter served as an organizer of the festival, was disturbed and visibly uncomfortable. He loved the Vietnamese music featured in the film and the fact that the narrator was critical of Vietnamese censorship, but he had never before heard the perspective of a former communist soldier articulated. In the film, the dissident artist declares he had fought in the war as a youth to save people in the south from what he believed were the horrors of U.S. occupation. After reflection, the father turned to his daughter, who was fearful of being scolded for participating in this program. He told her—with a smile—that she was doing "good." The young community organizer later described that moment as "amazing and healing."

Healing is a key component of my pedagogy. In my teaching, I address the role literature plays in individual and collective healing, but healing moments can occur in the classroom itself as well. In order to move away from a communist versus anticommunist framework, I begin my Vietnamese American literature class with a two-week session on Việt

Nam's history that includes the Chinese presence, French colonization, the 1954 Geneva Conference, Agent Orange, the Cold War, Việt Nam's civil war, refugee policies, human rights violations, and Việt Nam's wars after 1975. The class examines issues of colonization, civil war, immigration, and empire while simultaneously analyzing the role of external *and* internal racism, sexism, and homophobia in shaping identities. Teaching Vietnamese American literature to the ethnically diverse student body at San Francisco State University, I stress student empowerment and community work. However, I have to be careful with the accepted correlation between the retrieval and validation of one's experience, culture, and history and the "recovery of wholeness."⁴⁹ Like Sucheng Chan, I contend that

[c]hildren who grow up under the specter of racism suffer from a loss of self-esteem. Some find it difficult to become whole persons who can contribute productively to the progress of our communities. Adults who had repressed or oppressed childhoods tend to eschew the risks of self-expression lest the guts we place onstage for public scrutiny get thrown back at our face to taunt us.⁵⁰

The empowerment of students through the study of *de jure* and *de facto* racism, as well as *vis-à-vis* the analysis of their own experiences in America, is crucial. But as a teacher of Vietnamese American literature, I find that the idea of ethnic empowerment is not enough when working with a student population whose parents have experienced civil war.⁵¹ This is exacerbated by the fact that I have more international students from Việt Nam with each passing year. In the same class are students whose parents were imprisoned after the war and yet other students who were born and raised in postwar Việt Nam and are more ambivalent about communism. In extreme cases, students have physically attacked one another as a result of their differing political ideologies. Once a Vietnamese student referred to the book *South Wind Changing* by Jade Ngoc Huynh as propaganda, to which a student sitting next to him responded that his father was in a reeducation camp and still suffers from horrible nightmares. With other Vietnamese American books I teach, like *le thi diem thuy's The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, Andrew Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*, and Lac Su's *I Love Yous Are for White People*, I explain that what happened in Việt Nam prior to immigration and the domestic violence that occurs in the United States against women and children, for example, are closely

intertwined. To facilitate understanding across generations, I often invite a former reeducation camp prisoner to share his story. As the semester progresses, we talk about the impact of domestic violence on children. Participation usually peaks during these times. I then ask students to create and enact skits inspired by the books and to write poems from a diversity of perspectives (Figure 3). In these creative works, issues related to home politics and gender always surface. The weight some of these students carry is enormous. Through them, I recognize the need for Vietnamese American studies scholars to continue pushing the boundaries of inquiry in community work and within academia.

As a mentor, I remain acutely aware of community political and gender dynamics when promoting empowerment and encouraging Vietnamese American students to take public stances on local issues linked to Việt Nam. One must indeed be conscious that Vietnamese American students run the risk of being blacklisted in the community they sincerely want to serve as a result of their community organizing. Students are often taught that understanding their culture and heritage will help them be more “whole,” but following through on this assumption can have disastrous consequences. For example, in an effort to experience their culture more directly, Vietnamese American students have gone to Việt Nam to volunteer for humanitarian organizations, only to discover when they return that they were now seen and treated as traitors by their community.⁵² A few years ago one of my students supported her professor in bringing the current socialist Vietnamese flag to a community college, and her family asked her to move out immediately. They told her that she was no longer their daughter. Based on this experience and many others, I have learned that one of my tasks is to assist students in making sense of the emotions that may have surrounded them as they grew up. These emotions are rooted in a deep sense of hatred fostered by *our* people against *our* people and manifested in forms of violence that continue to take place in the diaspora.

ENGAGING COMMUNITY POLITICS: PRACTICES OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND HEALING

Given the changing demographics of our students in the classroom and the charged atmosphere that often accompanies the discourse around Việt Nam and anticommunism in the community, both of us posit a kind of



Figure 3. A 2009 campus event at San Francisco State University called “VALE: Vietnamese American Literary Expression.” “VALE” included dance performances, poetry readings, skits and video interviews with Vietnamese American artists. Photo courtesy of Isabelle Thuy Pelaud.

politics that refuses the polarities of communism and anticommunism. In so doing, we point toward a critical, transnational analysis about Việt Nam for the Vietnamese and Vietnamese diaspora that foregrounds the ever present problems of imperialism, war, and displacement. This critical stance centralizes the ways that U.S. empire, expansionism, and war making were the main coordinates of the Việt Nam War and now power the U.S. wars in the Middle East. This positioning requires that we simultaneously recognize that Vietnamese state politics is also governed by imperialist designs, particularly in relation to how the government presently treats its religious, political, and ethnic minorities. Globalization and transnational migrations blur the definitional boundaries of Vietnamese-ness in the United States today; such a turn has only sharpened the moral imperative for ideological and political conformity in the Vietnamese American community.

In the face of these urgent issues, we are far from advocating that the first generation of Vietnamese Americans disregard their history. In

a recent article on Vietnamese American scholarship, Long Le describes how mostly Vietnamese American women scholars have poorly defined anticommunism, understanding it only as a negative charge. As Le notes, “Because scholars view anticommunism as a divisive factor within a period of time or within the construction of symbolic meaning, their unit of analysis is of individuals who are persistent about their identity but who should let go of their identity.”⁵³ Quite the opposite, our views are rooted in the idea that the past profoundly informs our present and that multiple temporalities are at work in the making of Vietnamese American identities and experiences. In short, we do not call for more forgetting in the face of already so much forgetting. We ask that there be *accountability* within the community in respect to the *F.O.B. II* protests and other acts of violence that have been committed in the name of “the community.”⁵⁴ We also seek to create spaces for *healing* from war and postwar traumas in Việt Nam and the diaspora. To achieve accountability and healing, community members must acknowledge that there is political, ethnic, and class diversity among us. Following this recognition, we would like to see communal spaces of transformation that do not reproduce hierarchical familial power structures. These spaces cannot be heterosexist, sexist, classist, or racist in their constitution and must be critical of power in their mobilization for social justice at home or abroad, in Việt Nam or the diaspora.

Delimiting the contours of a Vietnamese American progressive politics, we speak especially to activist Vietnamese Americans, young and old, who want to challenge pervasive structures of racism, heterosexism, and imperialism entrenched in U.S. society and foreign policy. This call for a transnational feminist perspective arises from a recent history wherein Vietnamese Americans not only have been defined as part of the Cold War but also have been a part of major world events that have redefined what being an American means. We have witnessed Obama’s presidency in a so-called postracial era as well as the horrors of Abu Ghraib and the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. As subjects within U.S. national culture, Vietnamese American progressives must make the integral connections between the “militarized currents” that crisscross Việt Nam and other, ongoing U.S. military incursions in many parts of the world.⁵⁵ In this, how we mobilize must be transnational, and the ways in which we critique must be fixed on issues of power in whatever form they manifest. Our form of politics

speaks to these Vietnamese Americans who are radicalized by our conservative times. Like Asian American feminists, who fought to create ethnic studies alongside their male counterparts forty years ago and continually refused to privilege race over gender, we ask difficult questions. Such an impetus underlies our training as feminist Asian Americanists. However, as we describe below, our disciplinary formations are also the sources for many contradictions.

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STUDIES AND THE FIGURES OF HISTORY

As scholars in Asian American studies, we have been encouraged by Lisa Lowe's call to "rethink the notion of racialized ethnic identity in terms of difference of national origin, class, gender, and sexuality rather than presuming similarities and making the erasure of particularity the basis of unity."⁵⁶ In this spirit, we look at both the similarities with other Asian American groups and the uniqueness and difference that characterize Vietnamese American experiences and identities. Throughout this article, we have stressed, however, that emphasizing the diversity and complexity of the Vietnamese American community is not always welcomed, as some members of this community maintain a singular focus on opposition to the current regime in Việt Nam in light of the country's abandonment by U.S. forces near the end of the war. This betrayal by the United States continues to be devastating to many Vietnamese Americans who came to the United States in 1975 and who have more recently emigrated as former reeducated prisoners.

Overwhelmingly, memories of Việt Nam for those who now live in the United States are framed by issues of life and death, of defeat in the war, and of the loss of nation. Their stories rarely figure in the U.S. mainstream, although they are sometimes appropriated to rationalize military intervention abroad.⁵⁷ Those who were incarcerated in reeducation camps, like our uncles and family friends, cannot possibly forget what they endured there, nor can they forgive those who imprisoned them. During this time prisoners were routinely subjected to "forced confessions, exhaustive physical labor, psychological manipulation, and cruelty, poor living and health conditions, and political propaganda, as well as physical punishment, beatings and torture."⁵⁸ After their release, approximately eighty-five thousand

former prisoners of those camps, many of whom were incarcerated for long periods of time and suffered from poor nutrition and other health complications, came to the United States in the mid-1990s.⁵⁹

Former prisoners can often be found at organized anticommunist protests in California and elsewhere. They encountered the violence of the communist state in Việt Nam, and thus their identities have been carved out of their experiences during and after the war. Reminders of those traumatic years, including references to the current regime in Việt Nam or to communism in general, can awaken painful memories that produce profound stress and a sense of endangerment. When displayed in the Vietnamese American community, communist symbols are seen by community members as dangerously expressing support of a regime to which home, clan, and nation were lost. Because reeducation and imprisonment were experienced firsthand, demonstrators who protest against communist symbols privilege their memories over a normative history in which they are absent. According to Walter Benjamin, “[T]o articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the way it really was . . . [but] to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”⁶⁰ Benjamin’s words address the ways that some members of the Vietnamese American community apprehend their history in relation to what has become a sacred figure of history to them: the reeducated prisoner.

Based on the affective solidarities that take place around this male figure, it must be argued synecdochically that large segments of a diverse Vietnamese American population—those who were reeducated in the camps, those who are ambivalent about communism, those who just recently emigrated due to marriage and other arrangements, those men and women who protest in the name of homeland politics—cannot be easily defined and included within Asian American studies or other disciplinary fields. These ellipses cause a particular problem for Vietnamese Americanists, who must negotiate with the multiple absences that Vietnamese refugees figure in academic scholarship. As scholars with ties to the past and the community, we are further caught in between the “conservative” politics of the community and “liberal” politics of the academy and society. On the dynamic of betrayal that underwrites the problem of speaking for others to others, Nguyễn-Võ writes, “As an academic, I could not find a way to speak that would be intelligible to a broader community that also

would not be an act of betrayal to my own. Both Left and Right have constructed Vietnamese immigrants as needing tutelage in this country” or as “puppets of United States imperialism.”⁶¹ She cautions against the appropriation and pathologization of Vietnamese American subjectivities in academic discourse.

Going one step further, Viet Thanh Nguyen reveals how the idealism inherent in Asian American studies and its formation are in conflict with the ideological complexities of Southeast Asian American subjects and their histories. Nguyen looks at the blind spots that Southeast Asian Americans represent for Asian American studies and states: “On the one hand, Southeast Asians and Southeast Asian Americans are the kind of subjugated and voiceless people that have inspired Asian American studies and for whom it has always advocated. On the other hand, Southeast Asians also give Asian American studies fits, for many of them are not only victims but also victimizers.”⁶² In parsing these contradictions, Nguyen calls for “stud[ies] that, in crossing national boundaries and disciplines, challeng[e] the alignment of nation and discipline,”⁶³ and thus work to reorient the figure of the Southeast Asian refugee as a subject of inquiry across multiple disciplines. Along the same lines, Yen Le Espiritu argues that the term *refugee* must be politicized and imbued “with social and political critiques that critically call into question the relationship between war, race, and violence, then and now.”⁶⁴

In a similar vein, we argue that studying Vietnamese American refugee politics takes seriously the Vietnamese American refugee as a historical subject. It is an engaged Vietnamese American scholarship that simultaneously analyzes U.S. society, where Vietnamese Americans are located near the bottom of a racial hierarchy and have their stories appropriated for geopolitical aims, and adopts a transnational, feminist perspective, denouncing the deployment of power within the confines of both community and nation. We will not separate the refugee experience from issues of immigration, class, and race, as is often undertaken by the media, nor will we celebrate Vietnamese American material successes, as is often the case in Vietnamese American communities. The goal of this scholarship is to explore the many facets of being a part of a transnational Vietnamese cultural and political life, one that has been marked by the enduring

legacies of colonialism and war. Most explicitly, it interrogates the gaps in scholarships around issues of gender, sexuality, and class that too often undergird narratives of the nation and the community.

Our tasks as feminist researchers and arts organizers are multiple. As we point to the gaps between American normative narratives of assimilation, meritocracy, democracy, and progress, we also must look at the diverse range of political acts that underlie Vietnamese Americans and their creative visions of social justice in the homeland and diaspora. We should not turn away when the politics and culture of Việt Nam takes center stage in Vietnamese American cultural productions. Neither should we turn away when Vietnamese American writers, artists, and filmmakers do not adhere to a singular Vietnamese American narrative. We need to continue to counter the cultural invisibility of the Vietnamese American community, while promoting dialogue about differences and combating patriarchy and heterosexism, even at the risk of being labeled “traitorous daughters” of the community. This is not a matter of culture, knowledge, or loyalty, but more a matter of being. For us, to imagine Vietnamese America otherwise in Asian American studies is a lonely and complicated endeavor that requires courage, empathy, imagination, and collaboration. At the same time, to do so is to engage meaningfully in both the past and present of the Vietnamese American community.

Notes

1. We borrow this phrase from Benedict Anderson’s seminal work regarding the formation of communities, based not only on communication but also affect and affiliation. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983). We also draw upon Christian Collet and Hiroko Furuya’s reuse of this term as it relates to the Vietnamese American community of Little Saigon in Westminster, California. In discussing Little Saigon as an “enclave, place, or nation,” they write, “We contend that Little Saigon has evolved beyond the physicality implied in the place concept and is better conceived as an ‘imagined political community’: a label for a nation that is inventing new traditions and building a public culture to achieve recognition from the state.” Collet and Furuya, “Enclave, Place, or Nation? Defining Little Saigon in the Midst of Incorporation, Transnationalism, and Long Distance Activism,” *Amerasia* 36, no. 3 (2010): 1–27, 2. The authors’ understanding of the (electoral and economic) power that undergirds Little Saigon and its public culture allows us to make an argument for the ways in which a community of Vietnamese Americans uses power to regulate its boundaries.

2. Both of our experiences with white liberals speak to the problematic of liberal compassion. Antiwar activists tend to romanticize Vietnamese revolutions and dismiss the experiences of the diaspora, while others argue that an older generation of Vietnamese Americans is woefully nonassimilative and does not understand the meaning of free speech and democracy when they protest against art. See Isabelle's discussion of her confrontation with a Leninist poet in this article. See also Dana Parsons in his commentary on the F.O.B. II protestors: "Vietnamese Americans' Hatred of Communism Shouldn't Inhibit Free Speech," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/16/local/me-parsons16>.
3. A special thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this essay for highlighting these similarities.
4. For more on this organization, visit www.vaala.org.
5. See Mỹ-Thuận Trần, "Vietnamese Art Exhibit Puts Politics on Display," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/10/local/me-vietarts10>.
6. See the website, "Việt Vùg Vùnh," on the call to demonstrate against the art exhibit at http://vietvungvinh.net/Portal.asp?goto=VietNam/2009/20090116_01.htm.
7. For more on this group, see Thanh Niên Cờ Vàng (Youths for the Yellow Flag) at <https://www.tncvonline.com/cms/aboutUs.html>.
8. Other works in the exhibit deemed offensive by the protestors were Steven Toly's *By Land, By Air, or By Sea* and his *Untitled*. Huỳnh Châu's works were also the objects of debate. A year before our exhibit, Châu's artwork had already sparked controversy. Her work, which included a footbath and featured a southern Vietnamese flag on the bottom of it, was considered disrespectful. Long Bui's *Super Fab Beauty Queen* caused a lot of consternation as well. These works, in conjunction with Brian Đoàn's photographs, were understood by the protestors to collectively denigrate the southern Vietnamese regime and to propagandize for the communist regime in Việt Nam.
9. For a productive reading of the Hi-Tek Incident, see Cẩm Nhung Vũ and Thúy Võ Đặng. "Competing Images: Anti-Communist Protests in Little Saigon." *30 Years Beyond the War Vietnam, Southeast Asian/American National Conference*. Riverside, California: UC Riverside, 2005.
10. A longtime Vietnamese American newspaper, *Người Việt*, was involved at the time in a lawsuit with several subjects we interviewed. Based on Westminster, California, *Người Việt* demanded to see the collaborative films we made before our exhibit, and when we refused, they threatened to subpoena the films. In short, without legal representation of our own, we chose not to screen the work because we could not comply with the newspaper's demands.
11. Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, "Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora." *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. 119-32.

12. In a dedicated room called The Black Room, we set opposite to Brian Doan's work a slideshow of banned art in Việt Nam. While these images were shown on a large screen, an audio recording played. In this recording, two Vietnamese-language readers, Phi Long Nguyễn and Ysa Lê, collaborated to read excerpts of Vietnamese literature banned throughout the twentieth century.
13. See Minh Tâm, "Chống Triển Lãm F.O.B. Là Đúng" [To oppose the F.O.B. II art exhibit is right], *thtinfor.com*, January 13, 2009. A PDF version of this document can be found online at http://sucmanhcongdong.info/docs/VanNan/2009vaala/Chong_trien_lam_FOB.pdf. All translations are my own.
14. Commentator Chu Tất Tiên writes, "We had forgotten our roots and what is worse, we have decided to speak our minds within the community, where we were born and raised." The writer's rhetoric emphasizes how the community serves as our symbolic parents who sacrificed their lives to bring us, the younger generation, to the "shores of Freedom" (*bến bờ Tự Do*). In closing, he accuses us organizers of being ungrateful (*vô ơn*), without soul (*vô tâm*), and without nation (*vô Tổ Quốc*). See Chu, "Thư gửi Trâm Lê" [Letter to Trâm Lê], *Người Việt Online*, January 29, 2009. This letter can be found at: <http://www.nsvietnam.com/online/binhluan/020109-tramle.html>
15. Writer Nguyễn Hà calls us *các em* (an honorific for those younger than oneself) but also unfilial liars. See Nguyễn, "Chút Tâm Tình Với Các Em Trong Hội VAALA" [Some feelings shared with the young people of VAALA], *Take2Tango.com*, January 22, 2009, http://www.sucmanhcongdong.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173.
16. See the article by Đỗ Văn Phúc, "Sự Phản Bội Đáng Nguyễn Rùa" [Accursed acts of treason], *KBC Hải Ngoại*, March 3, 2009, <http://kbchaingoi.blogspot.com/2009/03/su-phan-boi-ang-nguyen-rua.html>.
17. Chu Tất Tiên uses the familiar addresses of "em" (younger person) and "cháu" (similar to "child" in English) to effect an intimate but patronizing tone. The familial tone continues when the writer speaks to other youth groups who opposed the art exhibit like Thanh Niên Cờ Vàng, as "đứa con cưng của cộng đồng" (2), or "the beloved children of the community." Chu, "Nghệ Thuật Của Sự Hống Xược" [Art of the arrogant], *Take2Tango.com*, http://www.sucmanhcongdong.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173.
18. My cohort consisted chiefly of those women who helped to organize the show and were present on the day of the press conference, the most difficult day of the exhibit's run. They included Trâm Lê (VAALA's then board president), Ysa Lê (executive director), Jenni Trang Lê (VAALA's then board secretary), and Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ (board advisor). Artist and fellow board member Ann Phong could not make it on the day of the press conference, but Ann's help was instrumental in staging the exhibit.
19. On the rise and viability of Vietnamese American politics, see Linda Trinh Vo, "Constructing a Vietnamese American Community: Economic and Political Transformation in Little Saigon, Orange County," *Amerasia* 34, no. 3 (2008):

- 85–109; and Christian Collet, “The Viability of ‘Going It Alone’: Vietnamese in America and the Coalition Experience of a Transnational Community,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1, no. 2 (2008): 279–311.
20. Assemblyman Trần Thái Văn sent VAALA board members a letter requesting that they take down the works in the exhibit that were offensive to the community. This letter can be found on the VAALA website, under “FOB II: Art Speaks” at the following link: <http://www.vaala.org/fob-ii.html>. Assemblyman Jose Solorio wrote a letter to Santa Ana’s mayor, Manuel Pulido, urging him to close the exhibit down. See “Dân Biểu Jose Solorio Đề Nghị Đóng Cửa VAALA” [Assemblyman Jose Solorio proposes to shut down VAALA], *Người Việt Online*, January 17, 2009, <http://www.nguoi-viet.com/absolutenm2/templates/?a=89663&z=3>.

A short time later, my fellow organizers, Trâm Lê and Ysa Lê, had a meeting with the city planner and were told, in an intimidating manner, that the protests would be too expensive to manage. That same night, we were given notice by a building inspector to cease operations. The next day, January 16, 2009, we held a press conference at which we announced the forced closing of the exhibit.
 21. See the article by Martin Wisckhol, “Ly Tong: Hero, Symbol, Renegade,” *Orange County Register*, March 16, 2006, <http://vietq.wordpress.com/2006/03/16/ly-tong-is-a-hero-symbol-renegade/>.
 22. Prior to vandalizing the works at our exhibit, Lý Tống had also staged a hunger strike to protest Madison Nguyen’s renaming of a shopping district in San Jose, California. More recently, in the same city, he dressed up in drag in order to pepper-spray Vietnamese singer Đàm Vĩnh Hưng in the face because Đàm is understood by many in the community to be a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party.
 23. In this expression, author Hải Triều draws from the work of an ancient Chinese writer, Đỗ Mục, whose words originally referred to how female singers sell their wares to the highest bidder, without much concern for the political state of the country. Thanks to Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương for help with this translation. Hải Triều, “Cờ Máu, Hình Hồ và VAALA tại Nam California [Bloody flag, the picture of Hồ, and VAALA in Southern California],” *Vietnam Daily*, January 15, 2009, 1–2, <http://www.vietnamdaily.com/index.php?c=article&p=49731>.
 24. See Michelle Phương Thảo, “Letter by Phuong Thao (VAC) to Tram Le and VAALA,” *Sức Mạnh Cộng Đồng*, January 21, 2009, http://www.sucmanhcongdong.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173. Thảo’s letter can be found in an online database of archived news reports related to the art exhibit. This database is called *sucmanhcongdong.com* (strength of the community). Commentaries written on *F.O.B. II* can be found on the website of *Sức Mạnh Cộng Đồng*.
 25. Lý Tống, or one of his supporters, put video footage of his acts of vandalism on Youtube. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfjDj9_zol8.

26. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
27. As Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*, “Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience.” Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.
28. Chungmoo Choi and Elaine Kim, “Introduction,” in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Chungmoo Choi and Elaine Kim (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1–8, 5.
29. Tuyet-Lan Pho and Ann Mulvey, “Southeast Asian Women in Lowell: Family Relations, Gender Roles, and Community Concerns,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 24, no. 1 (2003): 101–29, 106.
30. Lan Duong discusses in depth the politics of betrayal and collaboration in her book, *Treacherous Subjects: Gender, Culture and Trans-Vietnamese Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).
31. Như-Ngọc T. Ông and David S. Meyer, “Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese American Protests in Orange County, California, 1975–2001,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 1 (2008): 78–107, 95.
32. *Ibid.*, 96.
33. Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ, “Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?” *Amerasia* 31, no. 2 (2005): 157–75, 170.
34. *Ibid.*, 170.
35. Christian Collet and Hiroko Furuya discuss how a narrative about U.S. betrayal underlies the commemorative acts of the Vietnamese American community. Collet and Furuya, “Enclave, Place, or Nation?” 4.
36. Karin Aguilar-San Juan, *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 64.
37. Thúy Võ Đặng, “The Cultural Work of Anticommunism in the San Diego Vietnamese American Community,” *Amerasia* 31, no. 2 (2005): 65–86, 77.
38. Nhi Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 9.
39. Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome: United States Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the ‘Fall of Saigon,’” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2006): 329–52, 340.
40. Nhi Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese*, 12.
41. Espiritu speaks to this impetus at length: “Reducing multifaceted histories into a single story about communist persecution, Vietnamese Americans unwittingly allow themselves to be used in justifications of empire by those who claim to have fought for [their] freedom.” Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” 340.
42. Kim Nguyen, “‘Without the Luxury of Historical Amnesia’: The Model Postwar Immigrant Remembering the Vietnam War through Anticommunist Protests,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2010): 134–50, 136.

43. Besides the protests that erupted around Hi-Tek, Madison Nguyen, and *F.O.B. II*, other controversial events in the Vietnamese American community stem from sexual discrimination and homophobia. For example, some religious groups wanted to boycott the participation of LGBT Vietnamese Americans in the 2010 New Year's parade in Westminster, California. See Deepa Bharath, "Vietnamese Gays to March in Tet Parade," *Orange County Register*, February 9, 2010, http://articles.ocregister.com/2010-02-09/cities/24650186_1_vietnamese-community-vietnamese-cultural-gay-marriage-issue and Bolsavik, "Gays Marching in Tet Parade Run into Opposition," <http://bolsavik.com/2010/02/gay-marching-in-tet-parade-runs-into-opposition/>.
44. This term is borrowed from Nguyen Qui Duc's article, "Now Is the Time for the Majority to Speak up against the Vocal Clamor for Artistic Censorship at the Bowers Museum," *Los Angeles Times*, Orange County ed., August 8, 1999, B9.
45. For more information about this organization, see dvanonline.com.
46. DVAN was told the cut in funding was related to the economic downturn.
47. Andrew Lam, *East Eats West* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Press, 2010), 66–67.
48. The DVAN Film Festival director was Julie Thi Underhill.
49. Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 33.
50. *Ibid.*, 33.
51. I have also made this argument in my article "Today and Tomorrow," in *At 40: Asian American Studies @ San Francisco State* (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, Asian American Studies Department, 2008), 205–8.
52. See Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, "Win, Lose or Draw Your Community at 3rd VA NGO Conference," *Nha Magazine*, November/December 2007, 96–99.
53. Long Le, "Exploring the Function of Anti-Communist Ideology in the Vietnamese American Diasporic Community," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement* 6 (2011): 1–25, 14.
54. We are inspired by the way in which "accountability" has been used as a strategic term for queer, feminist activists who work against violence. Using the notion of community accountability, they advocate for (1) open dialogue, (2) community involvement that does not include police or other state apparatuses, and (3) practices of healing. Activists and scholars in the collection *The Revolution Starts at Home* speak of making a community accountable to its own members to make way for understanding and change. See the essays by Burk, Chen et al., and De la Cruz and Gomez. Connie Burk, "Think. Re-think: Accountable Communities," 265–79; Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Introduction," xix–xxxvi; and Meiver De la Cruz and Carol Gomez, "Ending Oppression. Building Solidarity. Creating Community Solutions," 25–55, all in *The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities*, ed. Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011).

55. In their cogent introduction to the anthology, *Militarized Currents*, Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho use the metaphor of “militarized currents” to “signal how militarization operates across temporal and spatial boundaries, as contemporary military technologies are informed by past and projected imperialist imperatives.” Shigematsu and Camacho, “Introduction: Militarized Currents, Decolonizing Futures,” in *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv–xlviii, xv.
56. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 83.
57. Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 7.
58. C. N. Le, “‘Better Dead Than Red’: Anti-Communist Politics among Vietnamese Americans,” in *Anti-Communist Minorities in the US: The Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189–210, 192.
59. James M. Freeman, *Changing Identities: Vietnamese Americans: 1975-1995*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 36.
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