



From John McCain to Abu Ghraib: Tortured Bodies and Historical Unaccountability of U.S. Empire

ABSTRACT John McCain, once considered a “friend” of Vietnam because of his support for normalized relations with the United States, has since lost his standing. Claims to inhumane treatment and torture while a prisoner in the “Hanoi Hilton” have met with angry denials and calls for more attention to the humanitarian care that McCain and others received. Recent U.S. allegations of human rights abuses in Vietnam following the Abu Ghraib prison scandal have further strained relations, as have charges leveled against Vietnamese small-scale producers of dishonest trade practices. Drawing on these exchanges, I examine competing representations of Vietnamese wartime acts that have permeated the “normalization” process. Neoliberal rhetorics aimed at “saving” the Vietnamese economy and its allegedly blemished human rights record are countered by discourses and images that lay claim to a Vietnamese “tradition” of wartime compassion and humanitarianism that also demands U.S. historical accountability for imperial violence and its aftermaths. [Keywords: neoliberalism, violence, human rights, Vietnam, historical memory]

IN 2006, the popular U.S. television show *Amazing Race* traveled to Vietnam. On arrival in Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi, contestants, who race around the globe in competition for a one million dollar prize, were instructed to find their way to Hoa Lo prison, the now popular tourist attraction formerly and “infamously known as Hanoi Hilton,” the narrator informed viewers as the camera cut to an image of a French guillotine followed by dark and decrepit prison cells (*Amazing Race* 2006). “During the Vietnam War hundreds of American servicemen were held captive in Hoa Lo,” the voice continued as black-and-white footage of captured and handcuffed U.S. pilots played. “One of the most notable prisoners,” viewers were told, “was John McCain.” Next scene: the seven teams have found their way to the prison turned museum and are instructed to locate McCain’s flight suit, on display in one of the exhibits. The prison doors open, and contestants run hurriedly through the grounds in search of the “treasure.” At no point does the narrator allude to the history of Hoa Lo: that it had been built by the French in the late 19th century as part of an extensive colonial prison apparatus that housed Vietnamese communist and anticolonial revolutionaries (Zinoman 2001), a history to which most of the museum is devoted. This marginalization of U.S. memory in a space that commemorates the Vietnamese revolution quickly became apparent to viewers and contestants

who raced through a maze of rooms and hallways, unable to locate the exhibit on U.S. POWs. Eventually McCain’s flight suit and helmet are found hanging in a glass case in a small, inconspicuous space that presumably had housed U.S. POWs during the war. Although most couples ran in, grabbed their next “clue” (assignment) and ran out, with but a passing glance at the exhibit, two teams stopped in front of the McCain display case to bow their heads and take a moment of silence out of respect for McCain and U.S. servicemen who are “still fighting and sacrificing their lives,” one of the team members told the camera, thus linking the historical memory of the Vietnam War to current military intervention in Iraq. What was not shown in *Amazing Race*, however, further complicated this spectacle of U.S. memory: next to McCain’s flight suit were tennis shoes, a bed with mat, photographs of POWs attending mass and playing volleyball in the courtyard, and a book on Vietnam’s humane policy (*chinh sach nhan dao*), thus presenting an image of tolerable if even comfortable living conditions that contradict the sinister depictions of the “Hanoi Hilton” that inform the U.S. historical imagination.

In this article, I address ambiguous memories and competing representations of “humane” and “inhumane” acts carried out against U.S. POWs during the war in Vietnam. I am interested in the reappearance and reexamination of such images and discourses in the current Vietnamese

context of global market reform, and the new meanings and force they obtain when positioned in relation to renewed accusations of POW torture and other human rights violations, as well as in relation to photographs of U.S. abuse of Iraqi prisoners. In triangulating Vietnam, Iraq, and the United States, I am not suggesting the similitude and uniformity of U.S. intervention in differing historical and cultural contexts, although there are striking parallels in the underlying ideologies of U.S. moralism and exceptionalism that have motivated these and other U.S. imperial interventions in Latin America and elsewhere (Stoler and McGranahan 2007:10).

There are, moreover, clear parallels in the escalating tensions between memory and forgetting, and redress and unaccountability, that I will explore in this article. Situated in a postwar era of “normalized” relations, the analysis demonstrates that unlike Vietnam’s reconciliatory gesture toward the United States—a practice colloquially referred to as *khep lai qua khu, huong ve tuong lai* (close the past to face the future)—the reverse has occurred in U.S. policy toward Vietnam: that of recalling the past to shape the present and the future. For years after the war’s end, allegations of systematic human rights violations (particularly on the POW–MIA front) strengthened the proembargo agenda and stalled normalized diplomacy until 1995. Thereafter, as bilateral trade and U.S. foreign investment in Vietnam increased (and met many red-tape difficulties), accusations of wartime torture and violence resurfaced, perhaps not uncoincidentally as the United States strengthened its efforts toward dismantling “market socialism” and expanding economic liberalization through an elaborate Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). What is of particular interest to me are the linkages between discourses of human rights and U.S. practices of “neoliberalism,” which I refer to here as the idea that economic growth and “the elimination of poverty (both domestically and worldwide) can best be secured through free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2005:64–65). As Aihwa Ong has argued, in the wake of the occupation of Iraq, U.S. neoliberalism has come to signify a “radicalized capitalist imperialism that is increasingly tied to lawlessness and military action” (2006:1). As I demonstrate below, U.S. neoliberalism has also come to signify an enduring state of moral unaccountability in Vietnam. Practices of memory that recall, for example, torture and human rights violations in the “Hanoi Hilton” privilege certain narratives of state violence while silencing others, thus fueling a larger condition of historical unaccountability that ultimately allows for U.S. empire to reproduce and reconstitute itself in the present.

The geopolitical and global historical politics that underpin allegations of human rights violations, and the contested claims to truth that ensue, figure prominently in this article. I am concerned here not with the debates over universalism and cultural relativism that have occupied the focus of much academic inquiry but, rather, with human rights as a “global moral project” (Asad 2000:15) that regu-

lates, disciplines, and above all exercises the power to determine “whether the values of ‘civilization’ are being upheld” (Speed and Collier 2000:880). This is not to deny state violence or refute people’s claims in Vietnam and elsewhere that their rights have been violated. Rather, following the lead of Jacques Derrida, I call attention to global hierarchies of power that undergird the deployment of human rights discourses and accusations of “crimes against humanity,” “torture,” and “terrorism.” As Derrida reminds us, “it is often in the name of human rights, and to punish or prevent crimes against humanity that we come to limit or at least imagine limiting the sovereignty of certain Nation-states” (2001:52). Such limitations, he cautions, are “only imposed where it is ‘possible’ (physically, militarily, economically), that is to say always imposed on small, relatively weak States by powerful States” (Derrida 2001:52). In what follows, I draw on Derrida’s insights to demonstrate how U.S. empire has necessitated its economic intervention in Vietnam under the pretext of human rights and neoliberal salvation. As David Harvey (2005) and others have argued, the neoliberal state enacts a language of rights to position itself as a guarantor of individual freedoms, such as freedom of choice, property rights, free market, and the right to prosperity. In the context of socialist Vietnam, proponents of U.S. neoliberalism imagine it as a tool to save the Vietnamese nation and to help it evolve from socialist repression, privation, and suffering into capitalist freedom and plentitude. Free market practices are thus held to be the logical, rational, and, indeed, inevitable solution to communist moral and economic inadequacies (Gibson-Graham 1996). This logic, I argue, informs and indeed disrupts ongoing “normalization” processes between Vietnam and the United States, as a moralizing discourse of rights (and violations thereof) is mobilized in a concerted effort to rescue and reform Vietnam through management and discipline of “proper” global market practices.

There is a long historical relationship between U.S. human rights discourses and challenges to Vietnam’s sovereignty, as Derrida’s observation foretells. Representations of “savage” communist Others with no value for human life nor respect for freedom justified military intervention and attempts to “save” the country from communism. General Westmoreland’s now infamous quote—that the “Oriental doesn’t put the same high price on life as does a Westerner” (Davis 1974) further substantiated rumors and reports during the war that parents had used their children as human bombs, shields, and detonators of mines, signifying the ultimate violation of human trust, innocence, and rights. I explore here the lingering legacies of dehumanizing discourses over 30 years after the end of the war, and ongoing struggles in Vietnam to rehumanize the nation and its history in the face of U.S. unaccountability and challenges to its memory. Despite recent accounts that praise the “good relations” that have unfolded between Vietnam and the United States over a decade since diplomatic relations were restored, postwar encounters remain

contentious and fraught with suspicions and recurring accusations. In what follows, I analyze representations of Vietnam's "inhumanity" in U.S. congressional documents and U.S. memory, including POW narratives, and Vietnamese efforts to counter such claims by professing an enduring tradition of humanitarianism in both ideology and practice. The bulk of the material I present below draws from fieldwork conducted on transnational practices of memory in Hanoi between 1999 and 2001 and in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi in 2004 and 2005. The tensions between valuation and devaluation of Vietnamese wartime acts raise critical questions about subject position, power, agency, and suffering: What constitutes torture and its ambiguous relationship to compassion? How is the naming of torture itself an act of symbolic violence that silences the suffering of others? What do accusations of torture and human rights violations "do" in the context of emerging neoliberalism in Vietnam?

VICTIM OR VICTIMIZER: ABU GHRAIB AND MEMORY IN VIETNAM

On April 30, 2004, I returned to Ho Chi Minh City from the United States on the 29th anniversary of the end of the war. Within days of my arrival, news of torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib prison broke out in the international press. Almost immediately, images began to circulate in cybercafés in various locations in the city. The scandal was covered in the Vietnamese media in abridged reports from foreign press sources, such as Reuters or the BBC, found on the back page of newspapers in the "International" section accompanied by one or two small photographs. Vietnamese friends, some of whom had sent notes of condolence after September 11, 2001, were silent on the matter in my presence, not wanting to somehow offend my presumed "American sensitivities." The presence of a tragic and now repeated past was palpable in the air.

One week later, on May 11, a commentary by Pham Hong Phuoc entitled "Connections and Anguished Comparisons" appeared in the popular *Cong An Thanh Pho* (Ho Chi Minh City Police) daily newspaper. At the bottom of the article were two graphic photographs placed alongside one another to illustrate his cases of comparison: the murder of 504 civilians in Son My village (My Lai) and the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. Drawing parallels between the My Lai massacre and the Abu Ghraib scandal, the author lambasted the recurring misconduct and crimes of U.S. soldiers during wartime and suggested that their actions reflect a dehumanizing ideology that "puts little worth on the lives of people who are not American citizens" (Pham 2004:13). His exposure of the racialized global inequalities that underpin the differential valuation of lives, what Didier Fassin (2007) has referred to as a "politics of life," concluded with a rhetorical question: "Wherever U.S. soldiers are at war, will they engage in acts that violate the human rights of others?" (Pham 2004:13).¹

Critiques such as Pham Hong Phuoc's, which used images of past violence to mobilize memory and to suggest a visual trajectory of inhumane U.S. imperial acts caught on film, did not go unnoticed by U.S. officials.² Two weeks later, on May 29, 2004, Voice of America (VOA), the international broadcasting service of the U.S. government, aired a story in Vietnam entitled "Prisoners of War" that effectively shifted the subject position of victim from tortured Iraqis to tortured Americans who themselves have suffered a long history of mistreatment at the hands of their enemies in wartime. This action was perhaps unsurprising given that the U.S. government had been quick to dissociate the scandal from allegations of torture. Rules were broken, prisoners had been abused, but torture had not necessarily taken place, Rumsfeld claimed (Sontag 2007:129), thus setting off intense political debates over the meaning and use of the word *torture* by democratic governments as a "state of exception" to maintain national and international security (McCoy 2006:151–152; Rejali 2007:46).

The devaluation of Iraqi bodies at Abu Ghraib and the disavowal of their suffering in U.S. government discourse demonstrates what Judith Butler has called a "differential allocation of grievability"; that is, a system that "operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human" (2004:xiv–xv). Such a system differentiates between lives that are liveable and grievable and lives that are not, between lives that, in Fassin's terms, are sacred and those that are sacrificable (2007:508). The VOA report, broadcast in Vietnamese although adopted from U.S. media sources such as the *Washington Post*, was also quick to dismiss the grievability of the tortured and humiliated Iraqi prisoners by conferring the moral status of suffering on U.S. servicemen only:

The recent abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, denounced in international public opinion, has disturbed and sickened every American citizen. In reality, very few people remember that American POWs also had to endure shame and manifold suffering in past wars, including the war in Vietnam. [VOA 2004]

The broadcast proceeded to detail the violence inflicted on U.S. soldiers, agents of international betterment, at the hands of their "uncivilized" enemies: they were blindfolded and tortured in the Gulf War, buried alive by the Japanese during WWII, and unjustly executed in Korea. The remainder of the report concerned a highly sensitive and controversial topic in Vietnam: that of alleged abuse of U.S. prisoners and one Republic of Vietnam spy during the war, all of whom, the article reported, were kept in a state of perpetual hunger and regularly beaten in the "Hanoi Hilton." VOA implicated not only prison guards in the cruel treatment of U.S. POWs but also the residents of Hanoi. Its description of the infamous "Hanoi March" in 1966, when captured U.S. pilots were paraded through the streets in front of angry residents, stressed the intimidation and ridicule to which the soldiers were subjected as irate Hanoians reportedly threw

excrement, stones, water, and bricks at the prisoners in a deliberate attempt to humiliate them.³

This attempt by VOA to position U.S. soldiers as victims rather than perpetrators of inhumane wartime acts and, conversely, Vietnamese as victimizers instead of victims of U.S. bombing attacks was not well received in the Vietnamese press. Journalists responded by calling attention to Vietnam's good deeds carried out during the war, invoking dominant discourses on official policies and practices of humanitarianism similar to those found in the POW exhibit at Hoa Lo prison. Only days after the broadcast, the website for Voice of Vietnam radio posted a response that accused VOA of fabricating a story that misrepresented Vietnam's "tradition of generosity and tolerance" [*truyen thong bao dung nhan ai*] with the intent to divert international attention away from U.S. troops and their cruelty toward Iraqi prisoners (Voice of Vietnam 2004).

A few weeks later, the popular and widely circulated tabloid *An Ninh The Gioi* [World Security] published a two-part report by journalist Dang Vuong Hung entitled "American Prisoners at Hoa Lo: A Story Told Just Now." Like the Voice of Vietnam report, Dang also accused VOA of attempting to mollify and deceive public opinion concerning the abuse of Abu Ghraib prisoners by broadcasting a commentary on the torture of U.S. pilots over 30 years ago in Hoa Lo prison. Dang meticulously examined—and rejected—accusations of cruel treatment leveled by VOA. What did the U.S. pilots eat? he asked his readers. Quoting a general from the People's Army of Vietnam, Dang reported that POWs received "good care and special meals"; they were fed three times a day and provided with rare foodstuffs such as meat, fruit, bread, and other provisions for a Western diet. An accompanying photograph showed pilots in dark prison uniforms washing vegetables together in preparation of a meal. The article further documented holiday and other leisure activities that presumably took place in the prisons, claims that are also documented in the Hoa Lo museum with photographs of inmates playing sports or attending Christmas mass. The author pondered: Why did U.S. prisoners receive such good treatment despite their war crimes, and why did they eat better than the average Vietnamese person who went hungry during the war? Because on the foreign relations front, he concluded, the prisoners were "special guests" and "precious capital" whose lives were valued and given meaning despite their disregard for the lives of the Vietnamese people they had bombed (Dang 2004:29). Contrary to representations of inhumane acts conducted by Vietnamese in the VOA broadcast, the treatment of U.S. POWs in Hoa Lo prison, the journalist argued, was representative of the humane policy of the Party, the people, and the state: "There is probably no country in the world that would have treated U.S. prisoners as well as Vietnam. This is because of a thousand year tradition of leniency and humanitarianism as practiced by our people" (Dang 2004:29), a view similarly expressed

in the Voice of Vietnam report and in the Hoa Lo prison exhibit.

The purpose of my extensive citations here is neither to refute the substantive content of the VOA broadcast nor to deny individual claims of abuse. The hunger, illness, beatings, and other suffering endured by POWs in Hanoi prisons have been well documented in postwar memoirs.⁴ Yet even in these accounts one finds ambiguity concerning intent: McCain, for instance, is unclear if the lack of proper medical treatment for his injuries was because of a scarcity of resources or cruel and deliberate punishment (McCain with Salter 1999:192). In an interview in Hanoi, a former POW who "has the wounds to prove torture" recalled the constant hunger that subsumed him during his five years of imprisonment, although he also surmised that POWs conceivably received more food to eat than the local population, particularly after 1970 when prison care suddenly improved. The inaccuracy of memory has also engendered ambiguity and uncertainty about torture, as Darius Rejali demonstrates in the case of a legendary helicopter interrogation technique that was presumably practiced by the U.S. military (throw one captive out to make the other one talk) but has yet to be verified by witnesses (2007:178). Such social imaginaries of torture, particularly communist torture, continue to shape ideas about Vietnam as a "land of terror" (Rejali 2007:189), also evidenced in the still popular scene of Russian and Vietnamese officers electrocuting Rambo in *First Blood Part II* (Cosmatos 1985), now an oft-watched YouTube clip, as well as the attraction of *Amazing Race* to the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." But again my concern lies with neither affirming nor denying the veracity of torture claims but, instead, in the ambiguities that surface in competing memories and representations of cruelty and compassion. Following Talal Asad (2000), my intention is to explore what it means to enact a moralizing discourse of human rights and their violation in the context of postwar relations and neoliberalization.

VIETNAM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND U.S. HISTORICAL UNACCOUNTABILITY

Human rights have long been linked to U.S. international policy and criteria for the allocation of foreign aid. As Michael Ignatieff has argued, "Across the political spectrum since 1945, American presidents have articulated a strongly messianic vision of the American role in promoting rights abroad" (2005:13), an assumed position as global protector that has allowed the United States to justify military action as humanitarian intervention. Human rights, Asad also suggests, have been "integral to the universalizing moral project of the American nation-state—the project of humanizing the world—and an important part of the way many Americans see themselves in contrast to their 'evil' opponents" (1993:147). The construction of the uncivilized and barbaric communist Other, in particular, reinscribes essentialist binaries that celebrate the humanitarian

and economic achievements of “modern” capitalist societies while berating the presumed moral failures and deficiencies of noncapitalist ones, as Namhee Lee (2002:44) similarly argues in the case of current anticommunism in South Korea. Such constructions were instrumental to prolonging U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, and they continued to shape postwar relations as the United States strove to economically discipline Vietnam for its allegedly poor human rights practices. Not unlike the VOA broadcast, an insistence on Hanoi’s accountability for U.S. POWs and MIAs allowed U.S. government officials to elide critical discussion of its own moral failures and economic responsibilities toward Vietnam.

During the war, emotionally charged reports of abused POWs served as proof of the inhumanity and callousness of the enemy communist regime. Accusations of cruel treatment that violated the Geneva Conventions, including “physical torture, psychological terror, public display, insufficient medical care and treatment, neglect of health, dietary, and sanitary necessities” (U.S. House of Representatives 1969:3, 10) not only served to rally support for the war but also justified its expansion (Gruner 1993:19). Allegations that the “air pirates,” as U.S. pilots were called in Vietnam, would be tried for their war crimes against humanity and perhaps even executed (as reported in the Soviet press) were met with threats of retaliation by U.S. military advisers, who called for a rapid and intense escalation of bombing and mining campaigns in northern areas.

As the war drew to a close for the United States in 1973 and POWs returned home, preoccupation with U.S. troops believed to remain in captivity intensified and eventually came to dominate public policy toward Vietnam, including the continuation of economic sanctions and a trade embargo in the postwar years (Stern 2005:9; Martini 2007:21–24). The POW–MIA issue served to further displace war responsibility from the United States to Vietnam, as Washington pressured Hanoi to provide a full accounting of missing U.S. troops. In congressional documents, Hanoi is frequently accused of uncooperative behavior such as withholding strategic information and hiding POWs and MIA remains for use as bargaining chips to secure pledged aid (U.S. House of Representatives 1982:19, 27; U.S. Senate 1977:18–19).⁵ Postwar reports of “live sightings” and images of enslaved U.S. bodies in captivity, further entrenched in U.S. social imagination with films such as *Deer Hunter* (Cimino 1978) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Cosmatos 1985), fueled conflict between Vietnam and the United States, who used the POW–MIA issue to stall diplomatic and economic normalization and to deny reconstruction aid.⁶

The question of war reparations, in particular, brought to the fore issues of moral and historical accountability that further exacerbated postwar tensions. As Richard A. Wilson (2001:22) argues in the context of postapartheid South Africa, monetary compensation is key to reconciliation pro-

cesses, though, as John Borneman points out, it is “not in itself sufficient for settling accounts” but also requires moral accountability and acknowledgement of wrongdoing (1997:103). It was precisely the entanglements of moral and financial culpability that became a grave concern for U.S. officials, who opted to discuss the payment not of reparations but of reconstruction aid, a more neutral term that avoided any implicit moral confession of guilt and positioned the United States as a provider of humanitarian assistance alongside the aid initiatives of other nation-states. Under Article 21 of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, the U.S. government had initially agreed to contribute to Vietnam’s postwar reconstruction. An amount of \$3.25 billion was suggested by Nixon in an unofficial letter, contingent on congressional approval, but was later reneged as the POW–MIA issue intensified around allegations that U.S. personnel remained in captivity (Martini 2007:29–30). The obscure line between aid and restitution, with its moral connotations of wrongdoing and liability, was further cause for its rejection by the U.S. administration (Young 1991:303).

Throughout the normalization process—initiated in 1977 and formally established in 1995—“progress” on the POW–MIA front remained a key precondition for normalizing relations and for ending the U.S. trade embargo (Stern 2005:27). Hanoi’s cooperation was to be rewarded with U.S. diplomatic recognition and capitalist economic integration, signaling to the world Vietnam’s “full admission to the community of civilized nations” (U.S. House of Representatives 1995:1). Vietnamese preoccupations with locating the remains of an estimated 300 thousand of their own MIAs (on the side of the revolution) remained largely unacknowledged in these discussions, as a concern for 1,500 U.S. bodies trumped one-third million Vietnamese. Responsibility for “imperial debris” such as Agent Orange (Stoler 2008:206–207) was also shirked, as the U.S. government diverted attention to Hanoi by accusing the Vietnamese government of using lethal chemical weapons against the Hmong in Laos and Vietnam (U.S. House of Representatives 1979).⁷ So effective and profound was the displacement of U.S. moral and financial responsibility that Vietnam, having received no war reparations or U.S. assistance with postwar reconstruction (largely funded by Eastern Bloc countries and Cuba), was required to pay \$145 million—the debt incurred during the war by the Republic of (south) Vietnam—and other financial claims to the United States government as part of normalization agreements (Martini 2007:202).

In the postnormalization years, allegations of deceitful practices and human rights violations have continued to inform U.S. policy. In congressional hearings in 1995 and 1997, for example, the Vietnamese administration was again accused of withholding records and POW remains, presumably for ransom or revenge.⁸ The Vietnamese state was also referred to as “totalitarian,” “uncivilized,” a “dictatorial regime,” and in several instances even compared to Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia (U.S.

House of Representatives 1995, 1997). References were repeatedly made to political and religious repression, to the absence of democratic freedoms and other “core values” of the United States, and to the “terrible suffering” inflicted by the Vietnamese government on countless numbers of people (U.S. House of Representatives 2005:2–3, 41).⁹ My point is not to refute these accusations. Clearly state violence and repression are present in Vietnam, through the extent of human rights abuses is debated both inside and outside the country. Rather, I am interested in what such portrayals of Vietnam do, and the responses they engender from a population that often sees the United States as meddling in the internal affairs of other less powerful sovereign states.

Representations of Vietnam in U.S. congressional discourse not only suggest a naturalized connection between communism and human rights violations but also resurrect the myth of Oriental despotic power, an earlier Orientalist rendition of the clash of civilizations in which “the West” is founded on humane liberal and democratic models of governance, whereas governmentality in “the East” is rooted in repressive regimes of power that wield total control over the masses (see Wittfogel 1957). There is a long history of debate concerning whether or not “Asian values” and human rights are fundamentally different, if not wholly incompatible. From Burmese militarism and Singaporean authoritarianism to Vietnamese communism, Southeast Asia is consistently thought to be not quite civilized. Self-declarations of an “Asian way,” as a response to Western global hegemony (Ong 1999:81), risk further reaffirming Western conceptions of Asia as morally inferior—not yet modern and not yet humanized. Although Vietnam has not argued for the particularity of an “Asian” approach to human rights (unlike Singapore or Malaysia), its positioning by the United States as a communist Asian country devoid of rights and freedoms works to deny its populace the status of global and moral “citizens of humanity” (Malkki 1994).

In the next section, I return to the controversial issue of POW torture and examine the ways in which Hanoians debated and disputed such accusations by pointing to an essentialized history of timeless benevolence, compassion, and forgiveness toward enemy invaders and moral transgressors.

FROM FRIEND TO FOE: MCCAIN AND THE (UN)NAMING OF VIOLENCE

In April of 2000, during the 25th anniversary celebration of the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. Senator John McCain returned to Vietnam for his seventh visit. Because McCain had been a strong proponent of normalized relations between the two countries, he had long been identified in Vietnamese public discourse as a “friend of Vietnam.” McCain had visited several times Truc Bach lake in central Hanoi where his plane had been shot down on October 26, 1967, reportedly during his 23rd bombing mission. Both the Vietnamese and international press had extensively

covered McCain’s return visits, especially his reunions with the now-deceased Mai Van On, who allegedly saved McCain’s life by pulling him from the water and protecting him from angry villagers who attempted to beat him for dropping bombs on their homes.¹⁰ On became somewhat of a celebrity in Hanoi for his actions, and photographs often showed him and McCain embracing in a jovial pose for the cameras. Research respondents referred to these images as demonstrative of Vietnam’s “tradition of making friends out of enemies” (also exemplified, some told me, in the cooperative efforts of villagers to help excavate the remains of U.S. servicemen, despite its disruption to agricultural production). On Thanh Nien (Youth) Street, a stone monument with an engraved image of McCain ejecting from his exploding aircraft commemorates the site at which the People’s Defense Forces shot down the A-4 Skyhawk (see Figure 1). Young couples, drawn to the site on account of its sweeping views of the lake, sit on park benches adjacent to the monument seemingly oblivious to its presence, holding hands or touching tenderly, demonstrating how sites historically associated with violence and war have been reinvented as spaces of love, romance, and pleasure by postwar generations (Schwenkel 2006:18).

In April 2000, however, McCain was not welcomed back. As anniversary celebrations and collaborative, transnational memorial events were staged in different areas of the country (see Schwenkel 2008), McCain’s visit was met with anger by many residents of Hanoi after the U.S. media released an interview in which McCain employed the racial epithet “gooks” to refer to prison guards he claimed had tortured him during his incarceration at Hoa Lo. Hanoians were disturbed by his racist remarks and his slanderous portrayal of their nation. In everyday conversations residents reminded me that only a few years back, in 1994, McCain had publicly thanked the government and the people of Vietnam for their benevolent treatment and kindness. In the press and in interviews, they pondered how McCain could employ dehumanizing and racist characterizations to refer to people who had valued and respected his life enough to rescue him from death. Moreover, how could their good deeds and compassionate wartime acts now be revalued and reinscribed as inhumane?

McCain’s reference to torture, in particular, incensed my research respondents, who angrily called attention to the everyday violence experienced by the general population during the war, violence rendered mute in the narratives of POWs. Voicing their own histories of suffering, they pointed to the manifold hardships and sacrifices endured to keep U.S. servicemen alive. Food, in particular, played a central role in these narratives as demonstrated in the following interview excerpt with a museum employee from Hanoi:

We have no hatred for Americans. We always knew that it wasn’t the American people who were behind the war, but their government. But that McCain—I don’t understand him. When he first came to Vietnam he thanked



FIGURE 1. The monument reads (translated from Vietnamese by author): “On October 26, 1967, at Truc Bach Lake, the People’s Defense Forces of Hanoi capital captured alive John Sidney McCain, American Air Force Major whose A-4 airplane was shot down over Yen Phu electric plant, one of ten planes shot down that day.” (Photograph by Christina Schwenkel)

the people for saving his life. Now he returns to say bad things about us. I was born in 1965 and I remember the war. I remember the bombs and having to wear a straw hat to protect my head from the shrapnel. McCain doesn’t understand how angry people were after their families and children were killed by his bombs. He doesn’t understand how people suffered from hunger during the war. This is why I am upset with McCain for what he said. People couldn’t eat because of him. First they saved his life and then they had to feed him! American prisoners could not eat rice soup like us; they had to have potatoes. They had food to eat when we went hungry. People sacrificed a lot for those prisoners. [interview, May 3, 2000]

Memories of chronic wartime and postwar hunger across generations frequently surfaced during my research. For example, younger Vietnamese born during or after the war who lived in or had migrated to Hanoi for university and other purposes consistently referred to hunger and poverty as prevalent childhood memories: “I don’t remember the war because I was born in 1974, but I remember growing up hungry. People were extremely poor and often didn’t have enough to eat” (personal communication, July 14, 1998). In the eyes of my respondents, providing food to U.S. prisoners that famished civilians could have eaten was a humane gesture that exemplified Vietnam’s venerable tradition of compassion and forgiveness, rather than revenge and retribution as POW discourses of torture would have it. Yet hunger also figured prominently in POW narratives. “In the beginning we had little food,” one former POW turned government official recollected to me in an interview. “I dropped to one hundred pounds. I was so hungry all the time that I couldn’t sleep. That’s what I re-

member” (interview, June 2, 2000). McCain’s memoirs also recall similar conditions (see McCain with Salter 1999:194, 205). That POWs do not mention meals with potatoes and other Western foods is irrelevant (they usually recall rice porridge or noodle soup). The symbolic association that surfaced between POWs and less common foodstuffs such as potatoes, bread, and especially meat—as a highly valued food item that represented lost nourishment to local residents and as a metaphor for strong and nourished U.S. military bodies—informed daily linguistic practices. At a time when meat was rarely eaten, northern Vietnamese began to refer to their meatless *pho* (noodle soup) as *pho khong nguoi lai*—that is, *pho* without the driver—in reference to U.S. reconnaissance aircraft flown without pilots. This expression, the use of which continued through the impoverished postwar subsidy period, surfaced in conversations during my research in several northern cities such as Vinh, Hai Phong, and Hanoi, where residents laughed and reflected on its now outdated use (because meat is more plentiful in these locations) when I ordered “vegetarian” *pho*.

In addition to food provisions, respondents also pointed to the benevolent care and protection that McCain and other pilots received, often from women, after they ejected from their planes into lakes and rice fields. Such gendered acts were at times recorded on film and exhibited in museums, such as the Air Defense–Air Force Museum in Hanoi that displays a photograph of a young woman tending to the head wounds of a captured POW with the caption, “Kindness.” Although official policy prohibited villagers from subjecting the downed servicemen to violence, POW narratives recount callous beatings and taunts, in addition to acts of compassion, again blurring the

lines between humane and inhumane treatment (see, e.g., McCain with Salter 1999:190). It was hard to contain the anger of the crowds who had witnessed death and devastation from the bombs, I was told by Vietnamese respondents. The renowned photographer Van Bao himself captured an image of one POW taunted by a farmer who pulled the injured U.S. soldier's hair as he was transported past the agitated crowd on an oxcart. "The villagers did not hurt him, despite raised emotions," the photo caption at the Air Defense–Air Force Museum reads.

Although respondents contemplated and debated whether or not pilots had been treated harshly by some furious villagers before police arrived (or before one person stepped in to defend the pilots), and whether or not abuse had taken place in prisons behind closed doors, there was less ambiguity regarding the issue of torture: it did not happen. When it came to the matter of POW abuse, lines were unambiguously drawn between probable misconduct by individuals in positions of power (i.e., guards) and an official policy of humane treatment that prohibited torture, a term more clearly associated in my respondents' minds with French colonial and U.S.-backed Saigon penal practices, as documented in official histories (i.e., in museum exhibits) and published memoirs by Vietnamese revolutionaries. What constitutes torture?, I was asked by a female journalist from Hanoi who also acknowledged the probability of POW mistreatment but challenged the intentionality of cruelty:

I think that torture is too strong a word for what happened. During the war years, life was very hard for us. We never had enough food while the Americans had a certain lifestyle they were used to, so they were sometimes given meat and potatoes. For them torture was having little food, even though we had even less to eat—just some rice and no meat. Or if we had meat it was very old with insects inside. They don't know that we didn't have shoes to wear, so they think that when they must go barefoot then it is torture. It isn't a problem if I walk across the street with no shoes. But for you, you are not used to it, so you think it is torture. Or sleeping on a board. That's all we had, but because Americans weren't used to it and were sore in the morning, they thought it was torture. [interview, July 1, 2000]

These debates reveal tremendous stakes in the naming of violence—such as use of the word *torture*—for, as Veena Das has argued, "the struggle over naming reflects serious political and legal struggles" in both national and, in this case, transnational contexts (2006:206). There are equally significant consequences when violence remains unnamed as pain and suffering are silenced, denied, naturalized, and made invisible (Scarry 1985). In the differential allocation of suffering, the violence of everyday life for Vietnamese during the war—hungry stomachs, bare feet, bomb shrapnel, and so forth—escapes the naming of violence, as their bodies were reduced to "bare life" (Agamben 1998), devalued and dehumanized, no longer seen as livable lives, to invoke Butler's (2004) model of grievability. Although Butler's analysis speaks explicitly to the dehumanization of

tortured Iraqi bodies, the parallels are notable: the silencing in POW narratives of the everyday violence enacted on Vietnamese bodies is not unlike the dismissal in the VOA broadcast of violence against Iraqi prisoners. In both cases, "at stake here are no longer processes of memorialization or forgetfulness but rather the normalization of the Other's dehumanization and the creation of a moral complicity that destabilizes public discussion" (Biehl et al. 2007: 4–5).

The reluctance of my Vietnamese respondents to name torture should not be seen as a total disavowal of violence experienced by POWs nor an uncritical adherence to state discourses and claims to humanitarianism. As mentioned, some respondents surmised that despite a public commitment to a humane policy (*chinh sach nhan dao*) certain individuals most likely did violate official regulations. Rather, their refusal to identify torture should be read as a claim to what Achille Mbembe has called "the status of suffering in history—the various ways in which historical forces inflict psychic harm on collective bodies and the ways in which violence shapes subjectivity" (Das 2006:212–213; see also Morris 1997:40). Ethnography, in particular, has shown subjectivity to be "the ground on which a long series of historical changes and moral apparatuses coalesce" (Biehl et al. 2007:3). By refusing to name torture, my respondents strove to humanize their devalued wartime acts and to express their subjectivity as shaped by specific social and historical contexts of suffering and sacrifice. In so doing, they recast the self as both victim of violence and moral agent of compassion (Asad 2003:79), subject positions denied in U.S. historical memory and in current normalization and reconciliation processes. In asserting dynamic and shifting subjectivities, they strove to recuperate their humanity and their own historical memory, thus engaging a "politics of global recognition" that calls attention to unacknowledged and unaccounted for "historical wounds" (Chakrabarty 2007:84).

NEOLIBERAL SALVATION AND SUSPICIONS

There are high geopolitical and global economic stakes in the naming and unaming of violence for both Vietnam and the United States as struggles over memory and history shape and are shaped by uneasy and ambivalent postwar economic relations. U.S. accusations of torture and human rights violations take on new meaning and purpose when reinvoked in the context of Vietnam's emerging neoliberal economy. McCain's multiple trips to Vietnam, it should be noted, were made firstly out of concern for U.S. business interests and desires to acquire a strong economic foothold in Vietnam's rapidly expanding market. Moreover, his comments on torture came at the threshold of signing the much debated BTA, seen by many in Hanoi as a challenge to the country's economic sovereignty and its commitment to "market socialism."¹¹ Vietnamese responses to accusations of torture—grappling with the possibility of cruelty, yet ultimately professing a "thousand year tradition

of leniency and humanitarianism" (Dang 2004:29)—reflect larger anxieties and suspicions toward U.S. desires to "fix" Vietnamese society and its economy through further privatization and liberalization, as stipulated in the BTA. Fears about U.S. economic domination surfaced as respondents weighed the advantages of economic "progress" ("we must allow Americans to come back if we want our economy to develop" [personal communication, October 30, 1999]) against a perceived threat to its autonomy and growth ("The BTA benefits the United States, not Vietnam. It would force us to become dependent on the United States. Why do strong countries always try to dominate the weak?" [personal communication, June 26, 2000]). The BTA thus naturalized the hegemony of global neoliberal capitalism as a necessary and inevitable course away from lingering "unfree" noncapitalist practices presumed to have inhibited the growth of the market and U.S. investment.

Asad argues that "the historical convergence between human rights and neoliberalism may not be purely accidental" (2003:157). More attention needs to be paid, he maintains, to the "*political and economic practices* by which attempts are made to regulate 'desirable conduct' in the world" (Asad 2003:157). In U.S. public and official discourse, neoliberal capitalism is presented as a "gospel of salvation" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:2), a mode of humanitarian intervention imagined to rescue the Vietnamese nation from economic, social, political, and moral privation. With its humanist promises of freedom, rights, and progress, the message is clear: one needs "free" market capitalism to be fully human. Desires to forge a capitalist moral and economic order in Vietnam that embraces liberal qualities of individuality, choice, freedom, and rights have often surfaced in congressional hearings, such as a 1997 report in which a House committee member proposed free market capitalism, as practiced in the United States, as a solution to political, religious, and social repression: "Increasing U.S. economic and political interaction with Vietnam will encourage market development [and] foster respect for human rights and political liberalization" (U.S. House of Representatives 1997:4).

Such beliefs in U.S. triumphalism have also been expressed in the U.S. press. For example, in a *Los Angeles Times* article on President Bush's trip to Hanoi in 2006 to attend an APEC trade summit, residents of "Little Saigon," California, expressed their hopes that the President could save Vietnam from poverty and instill the importance of democratic rights: "Bush comes from a country that represents freedom and democracy; he needs to remind Vietnam that if they want to benefit from the free market trade then they have to abide by the human rights laws" (Tran 2006). The conflation of free trade and the global market with humanity, morality, democracy, and prosperity serves to then reinforce its inverse: noncapitalist practices as insufficiency, lack (of freedom and rights), scarcity, and antidemocracy (Gibson-Graham 1996:8, 44).

What emerges once again is the bifurcation of the world into good democratic and lawful capitalist nations that support international human rights (including the "right" to have open markets) and unfree, not quite capitalist countries that violate civil and economic rights, including limiting access to the free market. In the years that followed the signing of the BTA in 2000, the United States continued to accuse Vietnam of intent to deceive and, in particular, of engaging in unfair and illegal global trade practices. The controversial Human Rights Act 1587 "To Promote Freedom and Democracy in Vietnam" that passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in July of 2004, only months after the Abu Ghraib scandal became public, coincided with several trade lawsuits aimed at Vietnamese small-scale producers for allegedly dumping shrimp and catfish on the U.S. market, thus further strengthening claims to both "uncivilized" social and economic conduct. These allegations and the subsequent increase in tariffs have had devastating consequences for Vietnamese fishermen and shrimp farmers. Contrary to neoliberal theory, the adoption of free market institutions did not result in economic progress and the elimination of poverty for these novice entrepreneurs who thought they were playing by the global rules. As Vietnam embraced global market practices and assumed a competitive edge, the United States, looking out for its own business interests, revived and redirected its dehumanizing discourses, questioning the economic ethos of farmers, as if citizens of a socialist country could not possibly engage in honest or legitimate forms of capitalism.¹² Once a threat to the "free world," a rapidly globalizing Vietnam, with its unruly yet productive fusion of socialist and capitalist practices, has now emerged as an economic threat to the United States and its neoliberal "free" practices.¹³

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: JOHN MCCAIN AND U.S. EMPIRE OF MEMORY

In an article in *American Ethnologist*, Catherine Lutz argues for an engaged anthropology of U.S. empire that diverges from conventional political economic paradigms to bring more ethnographic nuance to analyses of the "topography of U.S. power—its exercise, effects, negotiation, protest, and limits" (2006:593). Anthropologists, she maintains, are uniquely positioned to bring critical attention to the diverse cultural and material practices that challenge and expose the vulnerabilities of projects of empire. In this article, I have taken up Lutz's call for more ethnographic attention to the workings of U.S. empire by focusing on its operation and negotiation in the entangled and interdependent spheres of historical memory, human rights, and neoliberalism in Vietnam. My analysis has identified Vietnamese responses to the selectivity of U.S. historical memory and the ways in which a focus on violence done to empire (abuse of U.S. POWs during war) has produced

active forgetting of the violence done by empire (U.S. abuse of foreign nationals during war). I have shown how an emphasis in the United States on socialist poverty, repression, and human rights abuse has strengthened the “need” for neoliberalism to, at long last, rescue Vietnam from an “unjust” history of communism. The uncanny repetition of Cold War salvationist ideologies—saving Vietnam from communism (then) and poverty and human rights failures (now)—should not be overlooked, even as the methods have shifted from military to capitalist economic intervention.

If the convergence of human rights and neoliberalism under U.S. empire is not accidental, as Asad suggests, then the question arises: Why the resurrection of McCain’s torture narrative during the last phases of negotiations of the BTA? What do these torture narratives and other allegations of inhumane acts do? Vietnam’s unique approach to a regulated “market economy with socialist orientation” (*kinh te thi truong dinh huong xa hoi chu nghia*) has meant that, like other Southeast Asian tigers, the Vietnamese government is only “partially subordinating [itself] to the demands of major corporations and global regulatory agencies” (Ong 2006:75). For the United States, partial and regulated economic reform also computes to unrealized profit. As evident in congressional hearings, the promise of new markets, not a sense of historical and moral accountability, has motivated political and economic reconciliation with Vietnam. Although Vietnam’s market socialist approach to capitalist globalization has produced higher than expected GDP growth rates (suggesting the possibility of more effective economic models than U.S. neoliberalism), as Aihwa Ong reminds us, “any state that stands up to neoliberal disciplining at the international scale in order to protect its own neoliberal strategy at the regional scale is framed as necessarily anti-human rights” (2006:94).

Unexamined in these orientalist allegations is a more complex historical relationship between the Vietnamese nation and human rights. Claiming a enduring humanitarian tradition to counter accusations of torture was not simply a knee-jerk reaction on the part of my interlocutors nor were they duped by or uncritical of their government. Rather, they attempted to call attention to an historically identified, multifaceted “tradition of respect for human rights” in Vietnam that U.S. law professor Ta Van Tai argues “can be traced back through the precolonial era to the rule of Buddhist emperors” (1988:233). Relying on historical and legal documentation, Ta chronicles an extensive history of rights that he suggests rivals international standards today, challenging the belief that liberal rights emanated out from the capitalist West to other, less civilized corners of the world (1988:233). Critical of its essentializing tendencies, Ong has likewise identified similar pan-Asian claims, in particular that “indigenous humanistic traditions actually inform Asian capitalism” (1999:75), what Vietnamese officials have referred to as capitalism with a (socialist) human face, an idea meant to both criticize and

delimit the hegemonic expansion of U.S. and other global economic powers.

With the 2008 presidential elections approaching (at the time of writing), McCain’s torture and his status as war hero has reoccupied the spotlight. In February of 2008, as Fidel Castro (another perceived threat to U.S. business interests) announced he had stepped down from the Cuban presidency, McCain reported to the press that Cuban advisors to Hanoi had also participated in his torture at Hoa Lo. Weeks later, McCain’s nomination to the republican presidential candidacy was sealed. Yet empire’s historical memory is also not without friction and ambiguity. More recently, McCain’s stories have been challenged by independent media in an effort to obstruct his campaign and question his character. Playing on veteran nationalist sympathies, an article on the website of *Counterpunch* accused McCain of collaborating with Hanoi and of fabricating stories of torture to cover up his traitorous acts (Valentine 2008). In all of these exchanges, the victims of U.S. imperial violence are palpably silent, the status of suffering and grievability not yet conferred on their bodies. Even in left-leaning media, McCain is held morally accountable to the people of the United States, not to Vietnam. Like the TV show *Amazing Race* where contestants mourned the trauma and loss of friends and family in Vietnam, U.S. memory work continues to reinscribe the war as exclusively a U.S. tragedy. Unacknowledged and unaccounted for historical wounds, Borneman (1997) and Wilson (2001) maintain, impede reconciliation and the “settling of accounts.” What is needed, Borneman suggests, is the restoration of dignity—acknowledgment of human worth and value—for those who have been wronged (1997:113). For this to occur, and to prevent the further routinization of imperial violence, U.S. empire must ultimately recognize and be held accountable for the unreconciled historical wounds and legacies of suffering and trauma that it continues to reproduce and inflict on others.

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NOTES

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1. Fassin’s “politics of life” is particularly relevant in contexts of contemporary warfare, especially the U.S. war in Vietnam, where “unequal value [is] accorded to lives on the battlefield: the sacred

life of the Western armies of intervention, in which each life lost is counted and honored, versus the expendable life of not only the enemy troops but also their civilian populations, whose losses are only roughly numbered and whose corpses end up in mass graves" (Fassin 2007:519).

2. At roughly the same time, Susan Sontag published her critical response to Abu Ghraib in the *New York Times Magazine*. Extending this visual history back to the late 19th and early 20th century, she compared the production and circulation of the prison photographs with images of lynchings of African Americans, both of which were celebrated as "souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done" (Sontag 2007:132).

3. The U.S. House of Representatives referred to such treatment in congressional hearings as "public curiosity abuse" (1969:5).

4. The systematic torture of alleged Vietnamese communists in "tiger cages" in southern Vietnam at the hands of the Saigon Regime and U.S. military has also been well documented (see Rejali 2007:172–178), although Saigon, like Hanoi, officially denied that torture of enemy troops in captivity occurred. Not all accounts of captivity revolve around cruelty and abuse, however. For an alternative perspective that discusses the humane actions of Vietnamese captors toward a female journalist, and the metaphorical kin relations that evolved over the course of her month as a prisoner, see Webb (1972).

5. Paradoxically, the bodies and remains of U.S. MIAs became a tool of Washington's manipulation in its effort to manage and discipline Hanoi. In 1995, MIA remains were explicitly referred to in Congress as "the last bargaining chips" for making Hanoi accountable (U.S. House of Representatives 1995:1).

6. An "Analysis of Live Sightings" in the U.S. Senate that presented witness testimony and information on the more than 1,500 live sightings took place as late as 1992, only three years before U.S.–Vietnam relations were normalized (see U.S. Senate 1992).

7. In a congressional hearing entitled "Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia since the Vietnam War," the wartime application of Agent Orange and other defoliants by the United States is dismissed as irrelevant on account of temporal inconsistencies (the hearing examined chemical use after the war) and denial of their capacity to kill or incapacitate (U.S. House of Representatives 1979:11). With no sense of historical irony, the chairman of the subcommittee boldly stated at the outset of the hearing: "It is Vietnam which must bear the issue of responsibility for using lethal chemical agents in Southeast Asia" (U.S. House of Representatives 1979:2).

8. Even when cooperation was noted, it was often accompanied by accusations of deceit and corruption. In 1996, the U.S. press alleged that Vietnam had fraudulently used MIA operations for financial gain by charging high prices for transportation services, compensation packages for affected farmers, and wages to laborers who assisted MIA crews in excavation work (Stern 2005:103). Conversely, in conversations in Vietnam, U.S. MIA personnel discussed the problems they faced spending their daily allowances and other budgeted project funds.

9. Such accusations have propelled numerous human rights legislation "to promote freedom and democracy in Vietnam," such as the House Concurrent Resolution 295 in 2000, HR 1587 in 2004, and more recently HR 3096 in 2007, all of which initially passed in the House of Representatives (the former two died in the Senate, whereas HR 3096, passed on September 18, 2007, is currently awaiting Senate vote).

10. Curiously, in his autobiography, McCain does not mention On nor any specific person as having saved him from drowning (he was unconscious). Contrary to press stories about On protecting McCain from angry villagers, McCain with Salter writes of the protection he received from a woman who rescued him from a brutal beating and then tended to his wounds (1999:190). On also mentioned such details in an interview with Diane Fox (personal communication, July 9, 2008).

11. After the BTA was signed in July 2000, import and export flows between the two countries have increased from \$1.5 billion in 2001 to more than \$11.4 billion in 2007. See Foreign Trade Statistics for the US Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5520.html>.

12. That the quality of Vietnamese seafood products for U.S. consumers was also questioned reveals racialized ideologies that also

underlie such allegations. As reported in the *New York Times*, Congressman Marion Berry even suggested that Vietnamese catfish was "not good enough for American diners because they came from a place contaminated by so much Agent Orange" (*New York Times* 2003:18).

13. As reported in the Vietnamese press, Vietnam has since found new and more lucrative markets for its shrimp and catfish products in Europe and Russia, thus disrupting U.S. attempts at market hegemony in Vietnam.

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