UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

A life of worry: The cultural politics and phenomenology of anxiety in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

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The Dissertation of Allen L. Tran is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A life of worry: The cultural politics and phenomenology of anxiety in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Based on two years of ethnographic research on the transformation of people's emotional lives in clinical and non-clinical settings, this dissertation examines the emerging sources, forms, and subjects of anxiety in post-reform Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Since Vietnam's neoliberal reforms were initiated in 1986, many Ho Chi Minh City residents have benefited from a vastly increased standard of living yet reported worrying more now than ever before. This stands in marked contrast to a past when, according to many, extreme suffering stunted people's spirits as much as their bodies. Anxiety has become emblematic of neoliberalism's opportunities and risks in people's public and private lives, yet to worry is a key means through which individuals enact forms of personhood based on care, compassion, and filial obligation. Against claims that

increased rates of anxiety and anxiety disorders are the products of modernization and the subsequent erosion of social institutions, I conceptualize worry as a cultural practice through which people can both transform themselves into neoliberal subjects and define themselves in terms of sentiment and emotional relatedness that are considered to be traditionally Vietnamese. I analyze how anxiety is articulated by cultural discourses, and vice versa, across a wide range of domains associated with the neoliberal era, including biomedical psychiatry, romance, and leisure.

Recent scholarship on neoliberal modes of modernity has called attention to affective practices and relationships of sentiment as a medium linking structural transformations and subject formation. However, such studies rarely examine how the experience of these practices and relationships come to be understood as specifically emotional themselves, a process that is crucial to subject formation in Vietnam's transition to a market-oriented economy. Bringing together phenomenological and political theories of anxiety that frame it alternatively as an existential condition of humankind or the inevitable fallout of modernity's freedoms and choices, I examine the meanings and experiences of normative and pathological anxiety and the cultural forms that are marshaled to deal with potential threats—threats that may be more pressing than what has already transpired—in a society increasingly suffused with market imperatives.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Anxiety as an anthropological problem

To say that anxiety is part of being human might skip over a more basic point of its being fundamental to being alive. It provides the grist for our roiling inner life and is the fallout from the instability of our social one. Anxiety is a register of human existence that invokes questions of meaning and deadlines, headaches and being-in-the-world. It can compromise a person's ability to function in their everyday life, override their ability to cope with difficulties, or drown out their other emotions. Yet those same feelings can be responsible for the marshaling of one's resources and the coalescing of the self. Its vicissitudes transform people over the short and long-term, yet anxiety itself gets acted upon—resisted, enabled, negotiated, etc.—by the same parts of ourselves that it changes. While psychologists and philosophers have addressed anxiety and its relation to psychic interiority, its significance to human sociality remains undertheorized within anthropology. Perhaps this is because people so often ignore, consciously or not, anxious experiences in everyday life, such is the result and enfolding of anxiety and the instability, unpredictability, and ultimate unknowability of social life.

Every historical moment is its own age of anxiety. Indeed, what people fear and how they express and act upon that fear is as constitutive, let alone indicative, of who they are as much as what they value, respect, or hope for. Societies vary in their orientations to fear, and different objects of fear can be used to define an era. However, as scholars have noted (Massumi 1993, 2005; Furedi 2006 Salecl 2003), what is increasingly distinctive about a number of societies today is that people are not quite sure what exactly they are afraid of. Anxiety has become a normal, everyday condition "with

more and more people living in a state of constant anxiety: a 'time of fears' which threatens our bodies, the social order, and our very survival as a species" (Jackson and Everts 2010). Thus, for many, it is its pervasiveness as a social condition that has made anxiety emblematic and sometimes symptomatic of contemporary life.

However, measuring the increases or decreases of anxiety in a society is difficult since the meaning of anxiety itself is constantly changing. Thus, to document the range of anxieties in any given society is insufficient to understanding its implications. Because our current conceptions of fear and anxiety are so distinct from others, it is important to emphasize their quality and meaning, not just their quantity, in order to better comprehend its sociopolitical underpinnings. Situated in theories of psychological subjectivity and political subjection, this dissertation addresses the emerging sources, forms, vicissitudes, and subjects of anxiety. I examine the cultural and personal patterning of normative and pathological as well as mundane and extraordinary anxiety and how local systems of knowledge, relationships, and practice inform and are informed by anxiety. While anxieties are certainly experienced at a personal level, considerations of the broader historical and social dimensions of worry—including how they are articulated, mediated, and institutionalized—are due.

I take up these issues across a broad range of people and situations in post-reform Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. A vegetable seller struggles to find the money to pay her child's tuition. A student crams for finals; her classmate is more concerned that he has not felt the urge to study all semester. A woman switches wide-awake just before falling asleep when she feels for a moment she is back in the post-war lean years again. A patient at a psychiatric hospital worries about going crazy. A lot of

people's worries take on a life of their own. These cases of anxiety are rooted in sources that are by no means unfamiliar to many, if not most, people outside of Vietnam. What may be distinct, therefore, about anxiety's outlines in Ho Chi Minh City is how it has been transformed and to some extent been re-defined as an explicit problem in several domains of present-day Vietnamese society.

In 1986, a series of policy reforms known as *đổi mới* (renovation) were initiated to liberalize Vietnam's state-run economy, producing a "market economy with socialist orientations" (*kinh tế thị trường với hướng dẫn chủ nghĩa xã hội*). After decades of war and deprivation, Vietnam had ample room for rapid economic development. Initiated in small increments, by the end of the 1980s *đổi mới* policies dismantled the unpopular rationing system of the immediate post-war subsidy period (*thời kỳ bao cấp*) and established an "open door" (*mở cửa*) policy towards foreign direct investment (FDI) and further engagements with the global economy. During the 1990s, the effects of *đổi mới* became much more pronounced. While state-owned enterprises laid off most of their employees, opportunities for work in the informal sector became plentiful. Over the past 30 years, only China has seen higher and more consistent growth. In many ways, Ho Chi Minh City has been the principal recipient of the benefits of *đổi mới*. Fed by the steady rhythms of the Mekong River Delta, Saigon has enjoyed a long reputation in Vietnam for being a place of indolent leisure. As the former capital of French Indochina and the home to the country's largest Chinese (entrepreneurial) community, Ho Chi Minh City was primed to re-enter the global capitalist economy and for many has come to symbolize Vietnam's bright future.

However, such rapid economic development has not come without growing pains. Alongside the high rises and the luxury items flashed throughout the city to demonstrate one's financial success (or at least ambitions), Ho Chi Minh City residents must contend with a huge influx of rural migrants, urban decay, environmental pollutants, and traffic congestion (see chapter 6). Growth has not been evenly distributed, and the alarming rates of growing economic disparity undermine the ideals and rationale of the country's pre-*đổi mới* ethos of collectivization and, thus, the legitimacy of the Communist Party. Rapid social change has taken an emotional toll too. For example, rapidly rising rates of divorce that threaten the stability of the family and household structure that has become a primary social unit in *đổi mới* are often attributed to intense social transformations (see chapter 5). Despite vastly improved standards of living, many people reported worrying (*lo lắng*) more now than ever before. In many ways that I will explore in this dissertation, anxiety (*lo âu*) has come to define the subjective experience of these global and national-level processes. And in becoming an issue worthy of definition, clarification, and treatment, anxiety is also a conceptual arena through which people can figure out what it means to be modern and Vietnamese, which to many of them seemed like an impossible contradiction not too long ago.

It should be noted that throughout the dissertation that I refer to "modernity" in an ethnographic and emic sense, i.e. what my informants considered modern (*hiện đại*). Vietnam has been the site of several modernizing projects, including what in Vietnam is called the "American War" and the post-reunification collectivization projects. When Ho Chi Minh City residents talk about modernity today, they are in many ways also describing what I refer to, in an analytic and etic sense, as neoliberalism. I conceptualize

"neoliberalism" not just as a set of policies associated with the privatization and marketization of society but also as a historical moment and a social, political, and economic trend affecting most of Southeast Asia.

In Ho Chi Minh City, this moment and trend has meant more risks along with more opportunities as well as new institutions and venues for intimacy along with increased personal isolation. These contradictions illuminate the evolving status of anxiety in Vietnam. On the one hand, anxiety is emblematic of the *đổi mới* era's ruptures in people's public and private lives. It trails not far behind the new excitements of rapid social transformations. Vietnamese notions of anxiety (*lo âu*) frame the experience as profoundly private and often beyond one's own capacities to understand or articulate it. On the other hand, to worry (*lo lắng*) is an integral component to "traditional" Vietnamese selfhood. A good person worries because they care about others, and a smart person knows better than to trust the outside world. Clearly articulating one's worries is a key means to express one's sentiment (*tình cảm*) and affection (*tình thương*) for others. At once modern and traditional, anxiety and worry have become lightning rods for how people find meaning (or at least try to) in social transformations that have questioned the very foundation of those meanings themselves.

* * *

W.H. Auden described the American mid-20th century as a time when "necessity is associated with horror and freedom with boredom" (1947, 3). In this light, the notion that Vietnam's current historical moment is an "age of anxiety" reflects not so much a quantitative change in anxiety but instead its redefinition as it gets linked to new forms of

insecurity. Ideas about and attitudes towards anxiety and its disorders are being reassessed as Vietnam continues to embrace a market-based economy. Furthermore, anxiety itself is implicated in the neoliberalization of Vietnam as it gets taken up in new self-making projects. In examining how various forms of worry are being re-coded, I argue that anxiety is embedded in neoliberal forms of modernity as part of a dialectical relationship between the self and the larger political economy. Thus, this dissertation is not so concerned with anxiety in spite of well-being but instead with the anxiety of well-being.

Marking anxiety as the "dizziness of freedom" in *The concept of dread* (later re-titled *The concept of anxiety*), Søren Kierkegaard (1981) posited that the awareness of possibility is fundamental to human existence. For example, standing at the edge of a cliff, a person may have a focused fear of falling. However, there is also an unfocused anxiety because the person becomes aware of the possibility that he or she can choose whether to jump off the cliff. While it is not within the purview of this dissertation to delve into these existential conundrums, Kierkegaard's ideas about the relation between anxiety, freedom, and possibility do have implications to my concerns. In the context of rapid social change, many of the cultural institutions that provided a foundation for people's beliefs and identities seem all the more arbitrary in the midst of so many alternatives.

McGrath's (2008) observation that China's post-socialist era is distinct in its relatively recent plethora of choice, consumer and otherwise, can be extended to Vietnam. The everyday imperative to choose confronts people with the fact that their choices change the future. "Responsibility and the unconditional quality of the freedom

of the contingent individual generates anxiety as one carries the widespread and unforeseeable implications of one's decision upon one's shoulders" (Wicks 2009, 211; cf. Martin 2006). Thus, this dissertation advances an understanding of the variety of ways people in Vietnam experience, enable, and submit to the new choices and freedoms associated with neoliberal forms of modernity. In contrast to the majority of studies of Vietnam's political economy, it takes as its project describing "alternative" modernities as a means to explore the "self and discursive configurations that are changing how stories about the self are being told" (Liu 2002).

One of the key paradoxes of anxiety is that something that has not happened can be more pressing, even more real, than what is already over and done with. The problem of what could come next is an open question, and its ultimate extent is undefined. Even if a threat materializes, the threat lingers, perhaps just on the fringes of perception. Things can always get worse. For this reason, Brian Massumi writes that "uncertainty of the potential next is never consumed in any given event. There is always a remainder of uncertainty, an unconsummated surplus of danger" (2010, 53). The task at hand, then, is to examine the cultural forms that are produced to deal with this situation. What resources are available in a society for its members to alleviate anxiety? And given its affective surplus, what gets created, transformed, or displaced in its stead? What happens to fear, anger, boredom, frustration, pain, and the "mass of hardly articulated feelings and moods that saturate our social, sexual, political, and private lives?" (Highmore 2001, 122).

Towards an anthropology of anxiety

In this section, I develop a conceptualization of anxiety in relation to worry and fear that is conducive to ethnographic analysis. Rollo May defines anxiety as the "apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality" (1950, 205). The threat may be posed to one's physical survival, psychological safety, or some value that is identified with one's existence. While the reasons for anxiety are contingent on different values, what remains constant is that the threats are to values that a person considers essential to their existence and to their security as a self. Thus, if the experience of fear is mediated by a security pattern a person has developed, in anxiety the security pattern itself is threatened.

Moreover, anxiety is distinct from other emotions because it lacks a specific object. Whereas fear has an object, anxiety is characterized by vague apprehension. In many instances, people cannot identify what they fear. Thus, as an object of anxiety recedes from recognition, the felt experience of anxiety may increase. Someone who is afraid is aware of the self and the object and therefore is able to orient him or herself to the fear object and mobilize for an appropriate fight-or-flight response. The apprehension decreases once the object of fear is removed through such action. Conversely, lacking an identifiable object, extreme anxiety threatens the self from multiple directions. There is nothing to fight and nowhere to flee from, and one is afraid but unsure what he or she is afraid of. In this sense, anxiety can be a cosmic experience, and the diffuse apprehension associated with anxiety does not only refer to its generalized physical sensations. (Indeed, other emotions are capable of saturating the body.) Anxiety's undifferentiated character

refers to the foundational level of a person—their self-esteem of the experience of the self as a person—that is threatened.

Since anxiety threatens fundamental aspects of the self, in extreme cases individuals are unable to objectify threats. As a result, the proper ways to confront them are unclear. Thus, the experience of anxiety has the potential to penetrate entire subjective universes. People cannot separate the object of anxiety from themselves because the means to do so have been compromised by anxiety. In cases of severe anxiety, the boundaries between objective and subjective worlds break down, and anxiety may be experienced as the self's own dissolution. In portraying this breakdown of the self's boundaries as one of anxiety's most troubling manifestations, theorists such as May (1950) and Fromm (1941) assume that a bounded self is ideal. However, a number of psychological anthropologists have argued that not only is the bounded self a product of Western rationality the unbounded self may be actively cultivated (Cf. Shweder and Bourne 1984).

The search for a resolution to one's anxieties initiates coping responses that are both individual and collective. One of the most common of these responses is worry. Although commonsense understandings of worry frame it as a negatively valenced emotional experience, theorists have argued that it is instead (often harmful) cognitive response to overwhelming anxiety (Barlow 1988, Borkovec and Inz 1990, Tuma and Maser 1985). This is especially the case in attempts to resolve difficult circumstances that ultimately have no resolution. According to this conceptualization, worry gives individuals the illusion that they are in control because they are actively attending to a potential threat and increasing levels of vigilance for danger (Mathews 1990). However,

chronic worry can drain people of psychic and physical resources that could otherwise be utilized with more benefit. In some instances, worrying about something can be a way to avoid thinking about an even more anxiety-inducing topic.

However, this dissertation is not so quick to dismiss worry as a futile cognitive activity for three primary reasons. First, I do not take it within my purview to determine whether a person's sense of control is "false" or not. Moreover, subjecting feelings of control are critical to people's agency, and describing worry as a negative coping response risks pathologizing attempts to attain or maintain people's agency. Second, framing worry as cognitive activity relies on a dichotomization of thought and feeling that itself is rooted in Cartesian mind-body dualisms. These distinctions also correlate with distinctions between individual/private and social/public made in the Western ethnopsychology of emotion (Lutz 1988). Third, this conceptualization of worry ignores its social functions. Worrying not only creates cognitive and emotional states (that may or may not lead to a resolution of difficulties) but also socially sanctioned or prohibited forms of selfhood. How members of a community respond to another person's worries can have an ultimately supportive effect for individual worriers.

This liminality of anxiety provides a productive space to examine how individual engage the world through the emotions. Emotional experiences confound simple dichotomies between subjective and objective because they are an act of our own doing yet also something that feels enacted upon us (Katz 1999, Seigworth and Greg 2010). Emotions are not opposed to thought but instead are self-reflective acts and experiences. This self-reflection takes a bodily, not just discursive, form. "Through our emotions, we reach back sensually to grasp the tacit, embodied foundations of ourselves" (Katz 1999,

7). Communicating a stance towards an object (Cf. Levy 1984, Nussbaum 2003), emotions indicate an ongoing engagement, positive and negative, with the the world—what Seigworth and Gregg describe as "the body's ongoing and relatively amorphous inventory-taking of coming into contact and interacting with the world" (2010, 3).

The anthropology of emotion

Before I delve further into a conceptualization of anxiety, I situate my research within the anthropology of emotion, reviewing a number of theoretical developments and influences that will become germane below. Stemming from the anthropological challenge of the assumption of a psychobiological universality of emotions, the cross-cultural study of emotion and mental disorders has highlighted both fundamental human processes and the seemingly infinite permutations of emotions and related domains (see Jenkins 1994, Good 1992, Kleinman and Good 1985, Kleinman 1988, Rosaldo 1983, Levy 1992). These studies resulted from a frustration with previous psychological characterizations and broad comparisons of cultures that tried to isolate pure psychological categories. Abandoning these psychologisms, anthropologists of self and feeling developed constructs that framed the emotional emphases in a society as intimately related to cultural values, worldview, overt behavior, and other features of social organizations. By replacing pure psychological categories with idiographic characterizing concepts, anthropologists can return to more sophisticated analyses for purposes of generalizing and comparing (Levy 1983).

This approach excluded studying the phenomenological basis of the emotions, perhaps what makes them so compelling to people (including anthropologists) in the first

place. Local constructions of emotions and the self provide indigenous understandings of the object of study to minimize the impact of imposing Western scientific categories on them. These may include the constitution of the self (Desjarlais 1992), ethnotheories of emotions (Lutz 1988), professional theories of emotions (Solomon 1984), the prevalence of particular emotions within societies (Levy 1973), the interaction of various emotions (Schieffelin 1976), identification of context or stimuli that precipitate emotions (Rosaldo 1980), the role of emotions in social relationships and interaction (Potter 1988, Parish 1994) and in mental health and illness (Jenkins 1991a, 1994; Jenkins and Valiente 1994), and accounts of bodily experience (Csordas 1994). Ethnopsychology mediates the experience and expression of emotion, assuming the existence of an actively functioning psyche engaged with the social world. This does not necessarily negate the core premises of interpretivism but does rethink the dichotomy between the private and public aspects of culture. However, these constructs do not illuminate aspects of actors' emotional lives that are not explicitly thematized, such as a version of history that differs from their invented one (e.g. Cole 2001, Garro 2001) or global political processes (Scheper-Hughes 1981, 1993).

While much of interpretivism's denial of a private, internal domain of culture seems antithetical to psychological anthropology, much work has been done using it to illuminate various phenomena typically associated within psychological anthropology's domains (e.g. self, emotion, person, etc.). While symbolic approaches often interpret symbolic forms by relating them to other systems (including psychological dispositions), psychological approaches tend to focus on these psychological dispositions so that any other phenomena can be interpreted by relating them to these dispositions (Peacock

1984). Increasingly both interpretivists and psychoanalytic anthropologists began to incorporate each other's theories by bringing in symbols and/or meanings to replace drives but still playing the same function in the theory as an explanatory tool.

After the initial wave of interpretive work, some anthropologists self-reflexively returned to psychology and moved away from the anthropological tendency to reject psychological theory, from structural-functional theories that studied objective social structures and practices and ignored meaning and from cognitivist or symbolic approaches that focused on meaning but did not bother with the variety of apparently personal experiences that were seen as irrelevant to their interests in culture (Chodorow 1999). These anthropologists argued that analyses of culture with no consideration of the relationships among emotion, self, and person were incomplete since they differ across cultures (Lutz 1986). Emotion and self to them are not just constructed through culture but are also products of discourse.

Anthropologists of self and feeling, as they came to be known, argued no psychological life exists outside of publicly consensual and linguistically labeled cultural categories that describe that life. Taken to its logical extreme, this position conflates psychological theories with ethnopsychology. Indeed, Lutz's approach, though not intended to be cross-culturally applicable, seems to be little more than a description of Ifaluk ideas about the psyche. In an attempt to avoid privileging Western knowledge, she overprivileges Ifaluk knowledge, removing the etic perspective that has made anthropology distinctive from other disciplines that focus on human phenomenon (e.g. philosophy). Many also see the power relations embedded in cultural meanings, an influence of postmodernism. The concepts of culture, self, and person rely on a certain

semiotic of reference and classification to order bits of data into a coherent theme. However, by the 1980s, the concept of "culture" appeared too abstract and ahistorical; "person" and "self" too nonagentive and disinterested. If anthropology were to remedy this with a more concrete, processual, and interested approach, it would requires a new semiotic. In the concept of discourse, these concepts have become reconfigured with a concrete manifestation of culture that is not timeless, disembodied, or abstract from everyday practices.

Ethnopsychology has been used to study the public system of affect, based on the assumption that the meaning of feelings is to be found in the proverbial marketplace. It is often associated with studies of people's perspective on the aspects of individuals that more or less corresponds to the Western concept of personality, although its potential has a far greater reach than that. Note that Western concepts are still privileged because "personality" drives what is focused on to map onto the structure of a Western concept. Thus, ethnopsychological studies often unintentionally distorted local realities in an effort to avoid doing so. The best example of work in this early tradition was by Edward Schieffelin (1976), who argued that emotions were not just a "natural" expression but had a communicative function that could be publicly manipulated in everyday and ritual Kaluli life. Perhaps the most important interpretive studies of the emotions are Michelle Rosaldo's (1984) account of the Ilongots and Catherine Lutz's (1988) of the Ifaluk, both of which have advanced and complicated Schieffelin's work. These studies stress the cultural specificity and situatedness of emotion and do not use what corresponds to personality as a standard. Emotions are not contained in individuals but in the interactional discourse of sociopolitical space (Lutz 1986). In her examination of

emotion terms on Ifaluk, she problematized Western understandings of affect by deconstructing how the concept of emotion has been used (e.g. as irrational, uncontrollable, dangerous, natural, feminine, etc.) to construct differences and similarities between the West and other cultures. Emotion, then, becomes primarily concerned with explicit and implicit communication, a sentiment echoed by Abu-Lughod's (1986) study of poetry among Bedouin women. By using a strictly cultural conception of emotion, Lutz broadens the concept of emotion to include a social field, not just psychological definitions as individual responses to stimuli. By eliminating the internal, private, and embodied aspects of emotion, Lutz only makes emotion just another form of discourse, devoid of lived experience.

Nussbaum (2001) uses a neo-Platonic approach that draws on a cognitive and evaluative view of the emotions to examine how social forces influence people's emotional repertory. This eudaimonistic characterization of the emotions implies that emotional content is itself part of a person's pursuit of flourishing. Since people deliberate in ethical ways about how to live, it implies that emotions are integral to ethical deliberation. Beliefs about what is important and valuable play a critical role in the emotions. Therefore, how those beliefs are shaped by social norms and individual history are readily seen. Moreover, the effects of changing social norms on emotional life are apparent in the beliefs. Nussbaum, however, is careful not to conflate the social construction of the emotions with cultures as being emotion systems. More complex conceptions of culture within anthropology that focus on plurality, conflict, and porous boundaries have made more nuanced accounts of the emotional range of a society.

By going beyond purely cultural accounts of the emotions, Lyon (1995) addressed the problematic relationship between private meaning and public symbol to argue that the cultural construction of emotions is inadequate because emotion is more than a domain of mere cultural construction and cannot conceived as parallel to other constructions (e.g. self and person) in the sense that they are used in most of anthropology. Self and person actually function as mediating concepts to mystify the relationships that they were originally intended to encompass. Because emotions are not discussed in and of themselves in interpretivism, emotions become subsumed to the concept of person; the concepts are used to define each other, ignoring other possible contributing factors (Lyon 1999). "The defining of one subject in terms of others within the same cultural context does not simply risk circularity; it restricts the ability to ask more fundamental questions about the subjects of concern… Wholly constructionist approaches can obscure the view of the phenomenon of emotion in the larger sense, that is, the understanding of the importance of emotion not only in culturally produced and mediated experience, but in social agency as conceived in terms of its foundation in social structures" (Lyon 1995: 247-248). That is, while an emphasis on meaning is important, it often fails to capture the position of the actors because it places them in an impenetrable web of symbols. Constructionist perspectives are adept at illuminating what things mean but not how it means or what the goals of that meaning are.

Building upon previous work to bridge interpretivism and phenomenology in the context of religious healing (Csordas 1988), Desjarlais's (1992) study of Yolmo shamanism and illness brought the body into studies of emotion and self. He goes beyond delineating various cultural categories of emotions and self and examines how they shape

bodily experience in a way that does not deny the internal and subjective advancements of psychological anthropology, while focusing on the language and discourse of cultural categories that Lutz pioneered in a metaphor of cultural grammar specific to Yolmo experience. Using implications from cognitive science (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) that bodily orientations provide basic orientations to the world rather than objective categories of logic, Desjarlais laid out the basic schemas that construct cultural experience.[1] For Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Hallowell (1955), embodied schemata stemming from physical experience may even transcend cultural categories. By focusing on the body as a cultural as well as physical phenomenon, Desjarlais examined various types of body (e.g. corporate) and bodily components (e.g. the heartmind or *sems*) to produce a phenomenology of everyday practices and meanings of the body, self, and emotion. He describes an aesthetics of experience, which he defines as the tacit cultural practices, forms, values, and sensibilities that characterize Yolmo life and illness with specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences. Desjarlais argued that the debate over conceptions of selfhood and its cross-cultural applications miss the mark and ignore more relevant concerns of how ethnotheories of experience shape behavior, allowing him to go beyond a sole emphasis on meaning but also getting to value and aesthetics.

Theoretical approaches to anxiety

[1] Similarly promoting a notion of cross-cultural comparisons based on emotional experience, Wierzbicka (1996) proposed a metalanguage for cultural analysis to clarify generalizations about cultural scripts using assumptions about the nature between culture and psyche from cultural psychology.

I turn my attention now to a brief review of the schools of thought on anxiety of most relevance to the framework I am developing. Most crucial to this are those approaches that provide a cross-cultural framework for studying emotional experience. Until recently, "experience" has been ignored, or at least taken for granted, in anthropological accounts. However, phenomenologically-inclined investigations into experience have fruitfully elucidated the historical and social structures that shape subjectivity (Cf. Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007; Das et al. 2000, Jackson 2011). Attending to lived experience in all its ambivalence and ambiguousness sheds light on a "spectrum of articulations that range from the most formulated and explicit to the more inaccessible and vague" (Throop 2010, 3). Analysis of the cultural meanings of experience is best served by an exploration of the fullest range of experience, including those that "reside on the fringes of our abilities to articulate, verbalize, and interpret" (8). Cultural scripts of anxiety reveal the underlying rules about anxiety and what it means. Individuals interpret and internalize these scripts in various ways according to their situation and life history, but this process never escapes such rules. The intensity, type, or structure of anxiety does not depend solely on individual nature. Instead, they owe much to the history and nature of relations to other people.

The cross-cultural analysis of anxiety has historically languished in comparison to both psychoanalytic approaches to anxiety and anthropological analyses of other emotions such as sadness and anger. Initial forays into the cultural analysis of anxiety typically framed the problem psychoanalytically and emphasized anxieties that were rooted in unconscious psychic conflicts and their collective manifestations. Early attempts to explicitly theorize anxiety as a cultural phenomenon typically focused on how

those threats that cue anxiety in any given person are shaped by social norms and values. The most richly theorized schools of thought on anxiety as they relate to the relationship between the individual and society are psychoanalysis and phenomenology. Psychoanalytic theorizations of anxiety and its relation to society applied observations of the psyche to social collectives. Conversely, phenomenological insights into anxiety are rarely considered in relation to social contexts within phenomenology itself. Instead, political theorists have done the work in extending its conceptual tools to forms of cultural analysis.

Psychoanalytic approaches to anxiety

Psychoanalytic theories are easily the most well known approaches to the problem of anxiety, and the debates about it are too numerous to summarize for present purposes. Thus, I provide only a brief overview of how some of the more significant schools of thought have conceptualized anxiety and influenced its subsequent theorizing beyond psychoanalysis, especially with regard to cultural analysis. Although psychoanalysis has splintered into several divergent schools of thought, I focus on fairly strict interpretations of Freud's theories because those have explored the links between anxiety and social structure more thoroughly.

According to Freud, anxiety is "the fundamental phenomenon and the central problem of neurosis" (1936, 85). While fear focuses on the object, anxiety refers to the individual's own condition, disregarding the object. However, Freud is not so much concerned with distinguishing between fear and anxiety. Instead, he focuses on the difference between normal/objective and neurotic forms of anxiety. Normal anxiety is a

reaction to external threats and is natural, rational, and practical as a manifestation of the instinct towards self-preservation. “Anxious readiness” is an expedient way to protect people from being surprised and overwhelmed by sudden threats that are unprepared for. However, anxiety that goes beyond the initial prompting to monitor danger and best prepare for a flight response impairs constructive action (Freud 1936). On the other hand, neurotic anxiety’s province is when anxiety develops out of proportion to the actual danger, sometimes in situations with no ostensible external or objective danger. In Freud’s earlier analyses of anxiety, libidinal impulses threaten the ego and become subsequently repressed. These impulses are then converted into anxiety (or any number of symptoms that are taking its place).

The growing prominence of Freudian theory and knowledge about other cultures led to comparative efforts and increasing theoretical sophistication of culture’s psychoanalytic foundations (Kardiner et al. 1945). Freud’s method of using his understandings of neurotic symptoms to interpret cultural institutions is based on an analogy that religion is to society as neurosis is to the individual. For example, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1950) argues that both the self-imposed obsessional prohibitions of the neurotic and the social prohibitions of the “savage” derive from the emotional ambivalence towards figures associated with the Oedipus complex. The hypothetical (and unfounded) “primal horde” was dominated by a male who monopolized the female members, driving away his maturing sons. Eventually, the envious and fearful sons killed and cannibalized their father, completing the horde’s identification with him. According to Freud, all social institutions, from religion to art, essentially boil down to this conflict as people repress their Oedipal desires in order to maintain the cohesion of the group.

This process was described more extensively in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1964), which argued that socialization practices subvert the psyche in order to maintain a functioning society. Thus, an increase in anxiety was a response to the development of civilization through the sublimation of instinct.

In *The psychological frontiers of society*, Abram Kardiner examines a village in the American Midwest that he dubs Plainville and describes the personality growth pattern out of which anxiety arises, suggesting how this pattern are manifested in the historical development of the Western character structure (Kardiner et al. 1945). According to him, the pattern of individual growth in the West is dominated by a strong emotional relationship with the mother. Specifically, a configuration of maternal care, affective satisfaction, and protection of the infant leads to the child's high self-valuation. This sets the groundwork for the development of a strong ego and strong superego. However, the introduction of taboos through parental discipline related mostly to sex and toilet training in turn dampens the psychic growth that had begun so strongly. As a result, the child begins to doubt the continuation of parental care and love as well as the satisfaction of its emotional needs.

As pleasure patterns are blocked, hostility is often directed towards the parents but then gets repressed in proportion to the intensity of that hostility. Moreover, because the satisfaction of affective needs is so focused on the parents, anxieties stemming from frustrated pleasure patterns are highly tied to the mother and, to a lesser extent, the father, and the concept of obedience becomes extraordinarily important. Obedience alleviates anxiety, and disobedience causes considerable guilt. This basic growth pattern sets the foundation for Plainville residents' valorization of success. Kardiner makes the bold

statement that "as long as the individual can pretend to some goal of success or security, he can claim some self-esteem" (1945, 411-412). The validation of self-esteem through success is concomitant with several experiences that frustrate self-esteem. Instances of anxiety thus occasion renewed efforts to attain success in order to re-establish self-esteem.

The sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd's longitudinal study of Middletown (the pseudonym for Muncie, IN) was notable for tracing the development of a newly formed consciousness of "insecurity in the face of a complicated world" (1937, 315). This insecurity was not only related to the Great Depression but also a confusion over social roles in flux. People were faced with conflicting social patterns and faced new social demands but lacked the cultural resources to meet them. Most notably, in order to keep up with rapid social changes, people were required to constantly negotiate multiple social roles and obligations with little sense of belonging to a wider, inclusive entity or even themselves.

Phenomenological approaches to emotion and anxiety

Cartesian dualisms between the mind and the body has led to a preoccupation with rational, mechanical phenomena at the expense of the so-called "irrational." Since anxieties can so often be irrational, there has been a tendency within the social sciences to repress experience. Since fears are experienced as relatively specific, definite, and concrete, theorists have been able to study them by logical means. Conversely, the profound sense of irrationality that so often characterizes extreme anxiety makes it rich conceptual terrain for phenomenological approaches. Moreover, an emphasis on

immediate experiences highlights how subjectivity and objectivity are not dichotomous but instead are rooted in each other. This focuses attention on the individual as a living being in process that counters the increasing compartmentalization of much of contemporary life.

Traditionally focused on describing human existence and the lifeworld, phenomenology emphasizes awareness of the taken-for-granted, including habits, practices, and moods. Emotions are viewed not just as internal perceptions but also engagements with the world. According to Robert Solomon, a phenomenology of emotion requires an "investigation of the essential structures of emotional experience" (2006, 299). The neo-Stoic approach to the emotions that conceptualize them as judgments themselves (Cf. Nussbaum 2001) is, according to a phenomenological formulation, not a describable aspect of experience. Though they are certainly structured and influenced by judgments and concepts, the presumption that the experience of emotion is nothing more than the sensations that accompany relevant bodily changes (e.g. the James-Lange theory of emotion) misses much of the richness of emotional experience. "To insist that emotions have a structure, and to insist that the most important structure of emotions is (something like) intentionality, is to insist that an emotional experience is primarily an experience of the world" (Solomon 2006, 300). A phenomenological approach to the emotions is an examination of the distinctive engagements that mark the various emotions, which differ in their particularity and scope (Han-Pile 2006). Insofar as an emotion and object define each other, it is important to recognize that general descriptions of emotion that can be applied to all emotions require

different case studies of different emotions. The phenomenology of particular emotions such as anxiety contributes to such an overarching project.

Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger were concerned how anxiety reveals the relativity of meaning to people and how people will to be themselves in spite of social and personal constraints to their individual freedoms. Both took anxiety to be an internal condition of human being, not an intruding experience from the outside for the individual. It is through anxiety that people begin to recognize their position in the world and to distinguish themselves from their surrounding environs. This heightens the alarming possibility of freedom and the arbitrariness and ultimate meaningless of social conventions. Because experiences of the world are always mediated by others' interpretations, people realize that meanings are relative instead of absolute and that they themselves create those meanings.

People try to avoid anxiety by avoiding consciousness of the self, which is achieved through a desire to be a conventionalized self. Heidegger (1978) in particular saw this as a condition of modernity in which people conformed to everyday routines in order to avoid confrontations with choice (Cf. Videla 1994, Jackson and Everts 2010). As a result, people take the world for granted, leading inauthentic lives that are governed by social norms. Thus, a fully realized self depends on the individuals' ability to confront and transcend anxiety (Martin 2006, Han-Pile 2006). Anxiety is a condition through which people relate to themselves as they negotiate competing pressures from social constraints and imperatives towards self-fulfillment (Salecl 2004).

Political theories of anxiety

Among the founders of social theory, anxiety only appears in the periphery. For example, Marx wrote of alienation, Durkheim of anomie, and Weber of disenchantment. Only with the influence of Freud did anxiety become of interest as a psychological and social phenomenon. With regards to cultural theory, anxiety is often examined in relation to specific issues but rarely considered as a political problem in its own right. For example, the expanding literature on risk is indicative of the undertheorization of fear and anxiety in the social sciences (Cf. Boholm 2003, Field 2003, Mairal 2008, Beck 2000). Although it is often used synonymously with risk, anxiety is generally an afterthought in political theories of risk, uncertainty, and insecurity (Furedi 2005). Too often, political theorists have treated anxiety as a taken-for-granted concept and a self-evident emotion that require little elaboration. Elias (1984) argued that fear is among the most influential mechanisms through which social structures are relayed to individual psychologies. Echoing Freud's argument in *Civilization and its discontents*, civility is created from the internalization of collective and individual fears.

Since Weber's *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (2002), anxiety has been theoretically linked to the industrial revolution and the origins of capitalism. The demise of production collectives created space for the intensive individual competition that have since become hallmarks of modern capitalism. According to such a view, the power of the free individual is of central importance to the conditions of this emerging mode of production. Modern capitalism's rationale was made possible through an emphasis on the "right" of the individual to amass wealth such that individual self-interest and a supposed instinct for aggrandizement became naturalized economic motivation. As a result, people rejected authoritative social values and functions that were

viewed as superior to individual reason. This argument assumes that the pursuit of individual self-interest automatically leads to economic harmony in society—a premise that allayed anxieties stemming from the isolation and hostility of economic competition.

Influenced by Freud and Marx, Erich Fromm's *Escape from freedom* (1941) is perhaps one of the most influential interpretations of anxiety as a social phenomenon. His project focuses on the psychic isolation that is closely tied to the concept of "freedom" across the economic developments of modernity. His framework identifies the factors in the modern industrial system, in particular monopolistic capitalism, that create a personality that is powerless, lonely, anxious, and insecure. Although people in these types of societies develop and mature in an intensely social environment, being able to relate him or herself to the interpersonal world is not a given, echoing Kierkegaard's attributions of individuality, freedom, and isolation as the underlying causes of anxiety.

Fromm's dialectical conceptualization of freedom focuses on the freedom from authority's restraints as well as whether or not freedom can be used in the service of new forms of relatedness. For example, in the West children's individuation leads to less dependence on and more freedom from their parents. However, this accompanies a progressive fracturing of the primary ties children may have with their parents as they become separate entities that are capable of being alone. "As long as one was an integral part of that world, unaware of the possibilities and responsibilities of individual action, one did not need to be afraid of it" (Fromm 1941, 29). Individual freedom involves decisions about whether to develop strong relationships (that lead to new dependencies) or sacrifice freedom in order to avoid isolation; individuals are free to be alone.

Renata Salecl (2003) examines the implications of phenomenological perspectives of anxiety on everyday life under global capitalism. Since anxiety is linked to possibility and freedom, indeterminacy creates anxiety in the subjects of freedom. Although Kierkegaard and Heidegger's ideas about anxiety may seem far flung from global economic processes, popular discourses about anxiety in the context of choice, especially the "tyranny of choice," are clearly related to contemporary consumerist culture. For Salecl, therefore, the presence of anxiety is neither good nor bad but necessary since "the very fact that the subject experiences anxiety should not be taken as something that prevents the subject's well-being, but rather as a sign that the subject is struggling in a particular way with the lack that marks the individual and the antagonisms that mark the social" (2003, 147). Within the context of the intense individualism often associated with capitalism, subjects identify less with communal values and are increasingly viewed as the arbiter of their own identities. As tangible threats to physical health and existence have decreased, more nebulous anxiety states seem to have taken their place (Bourke 2006). The privatization of the self has served to exacerbate its arbitrary and fluid subjective qualities (Furedi 2005).

Methodological orientation

I conducted two years of ethnographic fieldwork in and around Ho Chi Minh City and applied a number of methods, relying mostly on unstructured and semi-structured interviews and participant observation. For the first 10 months of my fieldwork, I lived in an apartment by myself in large complex in Chợ Lớn, the city's historic Chinese enclave. For the remainder of the duration, I rented a bedroom in a large house in district 3, close

to downtown, from a family that had moved from Hanoi during the 1980s. The family consisted of a widowed matriarch, her unmarried eldest son, her youngest son, his wife, and their eight year old son. They also had three dogs: a Phú Quốc Island dog named Ni (short for "Money"), a miniature pinscher named Mimi, and a $300 teacup miniature pinscher that was not named before it died (see chapter 3). My initial research design was quickly thrown into disarray upon my arrival in Vietnam as a result of both unforeseen obstacles and opportunities and the always evolving topics and foci of the research. In this section, I reflect on some of the methodological tools, principles, and challenges that shaped this study.

Conducting ethnographic research in urban settings presents a unique set of problems that were magnified by not having a delimited population or specific location that encapsulated my interests in emotional life. The study's sample partly consisted of a clinical population at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital and the Central Psychiatric Hospital II in neighboring Đồng Nai province. However, most of the data that I analyze in this dissertation comes from countless conversations and interactions with people that were not associated with either hospital, and their observations of and insights into daily life in Ho Chi Minh City became just as foundational, if not more so, to the project as the interviews with psychiatrists, patients and their families, counselors, nurses, and educators. I was introduced to the majority of people in the non-clinical sample through their own social networks of relatives, friends, and friends of friends.

Early attempts to establish a random sample in specific municipal wards were stymied by administrators from district-level departments of culture, who only took me and a research assistant to homes that they regarded as morally and politically

upstanding. These administrators likely focused our efforts on households who regularly sent representatives to neighborhood meetings about various bureaucratic matters that people often found tedious. Moreover, because they accompanied my research assistant and I, potential informants often seemed to feel compelled to participate, despite many of their hesitations.

Participant observation

Participant observation allowed me to observe moments of discord between what people said and what people did, many of which went unnoticed by themselves. Moreover, because most of my interlocuters were more comfortable commenting on externally observable behaviors than on subjective experiences (including their own), I directed much of the "deep hanging out" I did towards having people comment on others' behavior. This could entail "people watching," certainly a common pastime anyways (see chapter 6), as well as relaying events that I had observed or had heard about to ascertain their own interpretations. Furthermore, dropping in on people's homes to visit or spending time with my de-facto host family allowed me to get a sense of the rhythms and mundane conflicts of everyday life. While the interactions I had with people at their homes or the interactions of people with each other were not recorded, I did make quick note of them to expand on them later after I returned to my apartment. Extensive fieldnotes were taken throughout the research period, and this dissertation draws from them as much as the interview transcripts.

Ho Chi Minh City's rapidly burgeoning urban middle class and "youth culture" not only provided fodder for research but also the venues for it as well. If participant

observation is indeed "deep hanging out," then new and old spaces of leisure were conducive sites for research. Much of hanging out in Vietnam entails "going to play" (*đi chơi*, see chapter 6) and often takes place at cafes and bars that are increasingly important places for everyday sociality. They also provided anonymity and opportunities to express difficulties and have "heart to hearts" (*tâm sự*) not always possible in private homes that people shared with others. Moreover, when meeting groups of people the Vietnamese version of the expression "in vino veritas"—*rượu vô, lời ra* ("wine in, words out")—typically rang true. Again, such exchanges were not recorded, but I was usually able to include them in my fieldnotes.

As a methodology, participant observation's greatest strengths and pitfalls lie in how deeply knitted ethnographers can become in the lives of their research subjects. In *From anxiety to method in the behavioral sciences* (1967), the psychoanalyst and anthropologist of Vietnam[2] George Devereaux argued that ethnographers should be aware of counter-transference, which refers to researchers' unconscious reactions, often involving anxiety, that can influence their relationship with their subjects and how they interpret them. Instead of building defenses around painful and unconscious anxieties with "objective" methodologies, researchers can use their informants' emotional reactions as an integral source of data and rely on their own emotions as a means of data collection by empathizing with their interlocuters instead of remaining emotionally detached. Certainly investigating the anxieties of other people provoked anxieties of my own, and while I do not present an analysis of my own subjectivity here, throughout the

[2] Devereaux conducted research among the Sedang Moi (*Xơ Đăng*), a Mon-Khmer speaking ethnic group mostly in Kon Tum Province.

dissertation I allude to experiences of unease during fieldwork that illuminate the source of both my informants and my own anxieties.

Person-centered ethnography

Person-centered ethnography is the cross-cultural attempt to describe, understand, and analyze social practice, subjective experience, and psychic processes in an experience-near way (LeVine 1982, Parish 1994, Hollan 2001). Its focus tends to be on individuals and how their psychologies shape and are shaped by social and cultural forces. It stands in contrast to standard forms of ethnographic research and writing insofar as it describes and represents human practice and subjectivity from the perspective of the individual and examines the personal saliency of cultural symbols and discourses. In his classic essay "The self and its behavioral environment," A.I. Hallowell noted that the "traditional approach of cultural anthropology has not been directly concerned with the behavior of individuals. It has been culture-centered, rather than behavior-centered" (1955, 88).

Person-centered interviews, then, produce verbal accounts of subjective experience as interviewees are asked to reflect and offer opinion and commentary on their own life experiences. Language does not unproblematically provide direct access to such things as the subjective experience of anxiety, but it does valuable insight into how people communicate such experiences to each other and to themselves as well as how they can at least begin to frame and approach inchoate phenomena. The relation between experience and their verbalized articulations (or sometimes disarticulations) is affected by narrative conventions, the social context of speaker and interlocutor, and the difficulty of

expressing certain qualities of experience within the linear structure of verbal language (Cf. Csordas 1994, Good 1994, Lutz 1992, Briggs 1986). Regardless, language is not necessarily a medium that masks subjective experience but can also disclose its immediacy (Heidegger 1962).

Furthermore, person-centered interviews allow ethnographers to explore the mutual influence of subjective experience and the social, cultural, and political-economic contexts from which it is embedded in and emerges from. Elliot Mishler (1986) argues that interviews should be viewed as unique speech events that shape the nature of interviewees' responses. Thus, ethnographers should be attuned to the joint construction of meaning by both interviewer and respondent. As speech events, interviews should recognize "how interviewers reformulate questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding as meanings emerge during the course of an interview" (1986, 52).

Many of my respondents approached the interview as an oral examination. For example, oftentimes answers to the kinds of general questions about Vietnamese culture and society that I typically used at the beginning of an interview with someone I had not interviewed previously to orient them to the project began with a general statement. Then respondents would enumerate their supporting claims before concluding with another general statement, which often was a rephrasing of the original question. Such responses bore a striking resemblance to a verbal essay question. One of my key informants developed a habit of consulting Wikipedia after the interview if he sensed that I was not satisfied with his answer.

The format of these interview responses reflect the strong legacy of Confucianism and its elaboration and valorization of bureaucratic social structures. Indeed, in much of everyday conversation and in relatively informal print media such as newspapers (which are highly read), language often seems more than vaguely social scientific. In many instances, my attempts to de-formalize my interview questions for respondents were less successful than questions that might be phrased to fellow researchers. For example, "How would you describe worry?" would often be more fruitfully phrased as "What is the framework (*khai niệm*) of worry?" It should also be noted that I was surprised (though perhaps should not have been) by how readily people in Vietnam intuited the nature of an ethnographic research project and what is involved. This is in contrast to the United States, where I find myself frequently explaining what my research entailed. However, while I was in Vietnam, as a shorthand I sometimes introduced myself as a student researcher (*nghiên cúu sinh*) in sociology (*xã hội học*) because (1) I was hosted by the Center for Sociology at the Southern Institute of the Social Sciences[3] (*Viện Khoa Học Xã Hội Vùng Nam Bộ*) and (2) anthropology (*nhân học*) retains its association with the study of race and, as in much of East Asia, is principally concerned with the study and analysis of folklore.

While these factors were conducive to general understandings of Vietnamese society and produced lengthy accounts of commonly shared knowledge, they are prohibitive of the kinds of exchanges typically sought after in person-centered ethnographic interviews for a number of reasons. First, they tend foreclose possibilities

[3] It has since been renamed the Southern Institute for Sustainable Development (*Viện Phát Triển Bền Vững Vùng Nam Bộ*).

for further probing and exploration of a given topic. Instead, the oral examination-style answers are intended to be definitive. Because of Vietnam's age hierarchies, it would often be impertinent to for me to continue a line of questioning that an interviewee older than me considered to be properly clarified. Moreover, because older people are considered repositories of knowledge, it was expected of me to accept their answers as conclusive or to at least pretend to do so if it was not the case.

Because my interviews focused on emotional experience and their personal significance, interviews with older respondents tended to be rather brief and produced mostly normative information instead of the idiosyncratic data that is a primary goal of person-centered research. As a result, I gravitated towards people close to my age or younger than me because they are often more open to dialogue and challenges. Most of my younger interviewees obliged my requests for clarifications as a matter of deference. In general, they were more ready to admit to not knowing the answer, a fertile leaping point for exploring the taken-for-granted elements of people's lives that often form a bedrock for their understandings of how the world operates. Furthermore, for reasons I will discuss in chapter 2, younger people tend to be attuned to their emotional experiences in ways that perhaps are more readily verbalized. Because the interviews and informal conversations focused so much on interviewees' emotional lives, a topic that is often fraught with social and moral judgment in conversations with their family and friends, I suspect a small number of my regular interviewees found the interviews to be somewhat therapeutic. This was especially the case when they felt they should understand something about their emotions but actually did not and looked to me to explain themselves. This inverse of the psychiatrist who must take on the role of a

participant observer during the psychiatric interview, as described by Harry Stack Sullivan (1955), reflects the overlap between person-centered ethnographic and psychiatric interviews.

It should be noted that the interviews were conducted without a translator a research assistant. Although many of my questions were awkwardly phrased, often to the point of unintelligibility, interviewees for the most part were patient with me and able to tease out my intended meaning. Indeed, the communication difficulties in many instances highlighted the joint construction of meaning of the interview and the sense that the interviews were a shared project between myself and my interlocuters. Person-centered interviews were conducted primarily at cafes, where interviewees and I could meet somewhat as equals in a location that "belonged" to neither of us. The anonymity of cafes were conducive to a general sense of privacy. This was especially critical to being able to interview women, as it would be considered inappropriate for a woman to meet me without a research assistant in a private setting.

Select interviews were transcribed by sociology master's students at the Ho Chi Minh City University of the Social Sciences and Humanities (*Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội Nhân Văn*). Selection was based on length of the interview and its difficulty for me to transcribe. I re-listened to untranscribed interviews and took further fieldnotes.

Explanatory Model Interview Catalogue (EMIC) interviews

In addition to relatively informal means of data collection, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with patients at two psychiatric hospitals in southern Vietnam. In particular, I administered the Explanatory Model Interview

Catalogue (EMIC) interview (Weiss 1997). Explanatory models are the "notions about an episode of sickness and its treatment that are employed by all those engaged in the clinical process" (Kleinman 1980: 105). They draw from beliefs about an illness' causes and implications to guide decisions about treatment. These interviews were conducted with various in-patients with a wide range of psychiatric diagnoses, including alcoholism (*nghiện rượu*), schizophrenia (*rối loạn phần liệt*), and bipolar disorder (*hưng trầm cảm*), at the Central Psychiatric Hospital II in Biên Hoà. Because this dissertation focuses on anxiety and anxiety disorders, many of the interviews from the Central Psychiatric Hospital II have been temporarily excluded, unless otherwise noted, from this study.

At the outpatient ward of the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital, I focused more closely on patients who met the diagnostic criteria for either depressive (*trầm cảm*) and/or anxiety (*rối loạn lo âu*) disorders. The age range of the 57 interviewees was from the early 20s to the late 50s. Class was difficult to ascertain since it would not have been considered appropriate for me to ask about income. Instead, in Vietnam education level is often used as a proxy for socioeconomic status, so about ⅓ of the patients I interviewed had a secondary degree. The remaining had either finished or almost finished high school. Patients were often interviewed in the presence of a family member who had accompanied them to the clinic. I was seated at one of a row of tables along the wall of the 20 meter long in-take room, with psychiatrists occupying the surrounding tables. Space was at a premium, and privacy concerns likely played a significant factor in a number of my interviews. However, the general drone of conversation in the room was high enough to prevent much eavesdropping. As many people in Vietnam can be quite open when it comes to personal health matters, most of my interviewees readily produced

a long list of symptoms. However, they became much more guarded when I probed for the symptoms' accompanying affective states.

Việt Kiều

Finally, my own identity as a Vietnamese American undoubtedly shaped my interactions with a significant proportion of the people that I knew. Due to any combination of my physical appearance and far-from-fluent language skills, I was rarely mistaken as having been born and bred in Vietnam, and most people assumed that I was either South Korean or Taiwanese (the two most common nationalities of expatriates in Vietnam) when they first met me. When I told people that I was Vietnamese American (*người Mỹ gốc Việt*) or overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều*), many people assumed that I had a white father on account of my height and "long face."

However, once it was established that I am indeed Vietnamese American, there were still miscommunications and tensions. Certainly the privileged social and economic status of being an Vietnamese American in Vietnam has its benefits. For example, I was told by a few individuals that they trusted me more because I had a Vietnamese background. Moreover, being seen as having a more Vietnamese mentality (*cái suy nghĩ*) than some of my counterparts, whether it was true or not, made me a possibly more empathic figure. I was also sought after because people were very curious about what life was like in the United States and because people were greatly interested in practicing their English with someone who could also speak Vietnamese. (Of course, these benefits are predicated on others' knowledge that I was not a South Korean businessman.) However, navigating the social landscape was also an exercise in being betwixt-and-

between, as many overseas Vietnamese find themselves in situations wherein they are expected both to know and act in accordance with numerous social conventions (that might be explained more carefully and patiently to a foreigner without any Vietnamese background) and to bring in the cachet and prestige of being a foreigner.

In several instances, many of my questions were not just indicative of a general lacuna in knowledge of Vietnamese culture and society but also that I had "lost my roots" (*mất gốc*). Interviews and conversations about aspects of people's emotional lives that they took for granted often led to comments of my perceived rootlessness, perhaps in large part because my interview questions disabused them of their assumptions about my shared "mentality" with them. My rootlessness also implied that my own sense of morality was different than theirs. I most often told of my rootlessness when people, curious as to how stilted my language skills sometimes were, asked me what language I spoke growing up. One of the most important arenas of Vietnamese morality (*đạo đức*) is properly addressing (*xưng hô*) others (see chapter 3). In the Vietnamese language, kinship terms replace the pronouns "I," "you," "he," and "she." How one refers to oneself and others depends on one's age and gender in relation to others. For example, an adult male would call himself *con* (child) or *cháu* (nephew) when speaking to a woman 10 years his senior, whom he would refer to as *cô* (junior aunt). Parents warrant the most respect, and using "I" and "you" to speak with them suggested a hierarchical equalizing that many people found hard to imagine. Thus, a linguistically and socially relational self is conveyed and enacted through even the most basic of speech acts.

While I was often considered as having lost my roots, I was able to earn some prestige as someone who was interested in Vietnamese culture and thus interested in

planting my roots, as it were. My landlady often told me of her previous tenant, a Vietnamese German who was asked to find housing elsewhere because he was inconsiderate of the household's hours. Stereotypes of overseas Vietnamese focus on their flashy and gaudy displays of wealth upon returning to their homeland (*quê hương*). That most overseas Vietnamese living in Vietnam often work for internationally owned businesses perhaps contributes to the conception of them as materialistic. I received a few comments that I was good (*giỏi*) for being interested in how Vietnamese people lived and in the anthropology of Vietnam instead of in making a lot of money.

Plan of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three complementary sections. In Part I, I introduce readers to a theoretical and ethnographic orientation to anxiety in contemporary Vietnam. After this chapter's theoretical introduction, chapter 2 describes the landscape of affect, sentiment, and selfhood amidst the implications of Vietnam's neoliberal reforms. In particular, I examine the increasingly popular use of *cảm xúc* (emotion), once a largely academic term, as a conceptual category to psychologize both the self and everyday life in contemporary Ho Chi Minh City. I contrast this to the related notion of *tình cảm* (sentiment) and its attendant modes of personhood that highlight shifting relations among the self, society, and state. The objectification of discrete feeling states such as "sadness," "jealousy," or "happiness" under a general rubric of "emotion" has become associated with an awareness of the self that is charged with the contradictory values of being a modern Vietnamese subject.

Part II focuses on how anxiety and worry are articulated by and in relation to various cultural forms, including discourses of the self, morality, and modernity. In chapter 3, I describe the cultural model of worry and relate it to various discourses of personhood. Vietnamese conceptualizations of worry as a moral sentiment emphasize the relations of sentiment between individuals and the object of their worry, becoming a matter of *worrying-for* as well as *worrying-about*. Within a cosmology of everyday life as a series of tasks that must be attended to and perhaps overcome, worry imbues banal sources of anxiety with moral importance. Thus, to worry is also to demonstrate how much a person cares (*quan tâm*) for others—a burden that is often to be accepted and endured as a matter of social obligation. Chapter 4 traces two forms of the medicalization of worry in an outpatient psychiatric clinic in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Using internationally recognized diagnostic standards, psychiatrists understood their patients' complaints as manifestations of the excessive worry associated with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). They invited patients to reflect on dysthymia in terms of their personal emotions in order to address the meaning of conditions in their lives that lead to chronic feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, patients rejected attempts to psychologize their experience and tended to either identify more closely with their symptoms than a single unifying diagnosis or maintain neurasthenia (*suy nhược thần kinh*) as their primary illness, not GAD. I argue that the extreme medicalization of distress implied in neurasthenia and its exclusion of emotion from the clinical encounter support patients' efforts to maintain a sense of self-worth during a time of crisis.

Part III, on the other hand, examines how anxiety articulates other cultural forms. Chapter 5 explores what Ho Chi Minh City residents worry about as they fall in and out

of love. I present two case studies to examine how love and anxiety are redefined and co-produced by the changing discourses of romance and powers of the self that have emerged out of the *đổi mới* reforms. More specifically, I follow how the ways that the objects of their affections are empathically imagined and how the two individuals' assessments of their own situations change over time. The shifting perspectives on themselves and others reflect an ongoing experimentation with different versions of the self and how it should engage with the world. Finally, chapter 6 examines some of the strategies that people rely on to alleviate, if not resolve, their chronic and everyday anxieties. In particular, using a sociophenomenological framework, I examine the practice of motorbike cruising at night, or *đi chơi* (to go play), as a collective coping response to individual worries. While living in Ho Chi Minh City poses a unique set of challenges to residents, their anxieties are not wholly subsumed by the city, instead creating new urban forms.

Chapter 2

Emotion and emotionality: The cultural politics of ethnopsychology

"Emotion" (*cảm xúc*) has recently enjoyed a high profile throughout Ho Chi Minh City. For example, "cảm xúc" appears in prominent advertisements for tour packages to Singapore, apparently a land of "sublime emotions" (*cảm xúc thăng hoa*), and there is also a trendy boutique on Hai Bà Trưng Street called "Feelings." Christina Schwenkel (2012) observed that the English word "emotion" was used in advertising campaigns for Vespas. A prominent colonial-era villa in district 3 was converted into the lush Café Cảm Xúc, prompting a number of imitation "emotion cafés." Unlike the Highlands Coffee chain with its cozier, more intimate lounging areas modeled after coffee shops like Starbucks, the emotion cafes tended to be more novel in an attempt to out-do their competitors. They boasted wide spaces and featured an over-the-top mishmash of decor, including waterfalls, fountains, bridges, and statues, for maximum spectacle. The emotions of these emotion cafes were to be experienced and displayed out in the open in conjunction with the scores of fellow patrons who roved from cafe to cafe in search of the newest, most fashionable nightspots. Moreover, among the city's crowded homes and packed neighborhoods, the anonymity of public spaces paradoxically provided some of the few opportunities for privacy available for Saigonese. Unlike the informal sidewalk cafes and their tightly packed chairs facing outwards towards the mayhem of Ho Chi Minh City's streets, the spatial arrangements associated with these cafes, with customers directly facing each other at a table, facilitate an intensely focused emotional exchange between people and a sense of self developed in privatized spaces. According to a Vietnamese anthropologist I spoke with, the newfound popularity of *cảm xúc* (which

once had an academic connotation) came about after one of the country's first extended broadcasts of a foreign TV series, a Korean soap opera whose title was translated as *Cảm Xúc*. However, the rapid emergence of "cảm xúc " is not just limited to trends and buzzwords in consumer culture.[4] Reflecting a broader shift in how affect is being understood and valued, the lure is not a specific feeling state such as joy or excitement but the idea of emotion itself or perhaps of being emotional. More and more, people are experimenting with new ways of cultivating the self and have the relative luxury of taking part in the serious business of personal happiness.

This chapter examines the implications of the rising visibility of the "emotions" on the self in light of neoliberal reforms in Vietnam. I distinguish between the emotions as a set of discrete feeling states that refer to happiness, anger, jealousy, etc. and emotionality as the ethnopsychological context in which those states arise, are interpreted, and are experienced. In interrogating the relationship between emotion as a cultural object and emotion as a self process, I describe the re-organization of the self via the conceptual tool of the emotions—a re-organization that is offered by shifting configurations of the emotions as a category of psychosocial phenomena and evolving models of the emotions as well as their mobilization as a medium of the self. In doing so, I connect two questions. First, what does it mean to apprehend a bodily sensation as an "emotion"? Second, what happens to the state construction of affect (cf. Jenkins 1991b)

[4] However, that "emotion" is associated with consumerism is not insignificant. Vann (2012) notes that "modern" Vietnamese subjects are encouraged to self-fashion through consumption within state-determined parameters. This marks a shift from the immediate post-war subsidy era (1975-1986) when consumerism was antithetical to proper socialist morality. In the current neoliberal era, commercial activity has become increasingly decoupled from the state, which in effect legitimates the authority of the socialist state by depoliticizing both consumption and the self-work involved therein. Thus, the state is heavily invested in the production of subjectivities, not in the context of its own retreat during market liberalization, but through encouraging citizens to remake themselves in ways that promote state/market ideals (Leshkowich 2012).

when the state increasingly withdraws from domains it once dominated yet maintains its strong political authority?

Given its history of successive political and ideological regimes, Vietnam offers a productive case to examine the layering of sentiment and emotion in the context of how political and economic movements influence which aspects of people's experience, behavior, and value become more or less salient to them. Conversely, emotion is an open field where people's lives can be articulated and given meaning, shedding light on how processes such as modernization or neoliberalization become an intimate part of their lives. As the historian David Marr (2000) has noted, at the beginning of the 20th century, neologisms for the individual, society, and democracy, among others, fed into an ongoing engagement in Vietnam with Western forms of personhood and society. Initially, "individual" (*cá nhân*) merely referred to "an irreducible human unit belonging to something else more significant" (769). Thus, individuals were encouraged to participate as responsible members of society more generally or of new political movements more specifically.

Anti-colonial politics at the beginning of the 20th century set the stage for new discourses of civilization and how individuals should relate to society. The failure of Vietnamese resistance to French conquest in the late 1800s was understood as the inadequacy of Confucian principles to withstand incursion from the West. To formulate a new vision of Vietnamese society, reformers began to model themselves after European and American leaders[5] whose appreciation for more competition and more ideas led to

[5] For example, biographies of figures like Abraham Lincoln were written as "blueprints for how individuals could transform themselves and their relationships with society" (Bradley 2004, 77).

the political, commercial, and educational innovations that were foreclosed by Vietnam's strict adherence to classical Chinese thought (Bradley 2004). By the 1920s, alternative discourses of civilization were then appropriated to reconsider individual behavior and obligations toward society. The ensuing attempts to cultivate self-knowledge and self-realization assumed that national liberation and shifts in the importance and meaning of personhood were inextricable. The eventual turn towards socialism was deigned by its supporters as a dramatic break with past ways of relating to one another as well as to oneself. Many institutions and ideologies associated with traditional Vietnamese culture, bourgeois capitalism and colonialism, and anything else considered either backwards or foreign were demonized as antithetical to the goal of a new socialist modernity (Tai 1992, Taylor 2001).

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, an engagement with Western discourses of civilization and selfhood is still occurring, though conversations about the social philosophy of Locke, Rousseau, and Marx and Engels have been replaced by the psychological and behavioral sciences (which decades before had been brushed aside in favor of more politically-minded disciplines). The fate of the "individual" in Vietnam's discourse of society has gone from the denigration of selfishness during the various stages of collectivizing reforms starting in 1954 in the (northern) Democratic Republic of Vietnam and in 1975 in the (southern) Republic of Vietnam to the celebration of individual ingenuity after the transition to a market-oriented economy in 1986 (Maclean 2008). Although colonialism, socialism, and neoliberalism have very much focused on establishing a Vietnamese form of modernity (Brook and Luong 1997, Leshkowich 2006, Marr 2003, McHale 2004, Turley and Seldon 1993), it is primarily projects associated

with the colonial and neoliberal eras that have legitimized individualism (and individualized consumption) as a means to become modern (Vann 2012).

Since then, a wide array of choices has characterized self-cultivation and the identities that in part define the self, a marked difference from the previous environment of control and collectivization. This stands in marked contrast to the past when, according to many of the people I talked to, extreme suffering (*khổ*) stunted people's souls as much as their bodies. At the same time, there is a great deal of hand wringing over the soullessness of contemporary modern life (Truong 2009), especially in Ho Chi Minh City, traditionally Vietnam's economic hub.[6] After years of isolation from the rest of the world, many are eager to learn about life in the West as they participate in Vietnam's most recent form of modernization. And after years of warfare and extreme poverty, many people in Ho Chi Minh City have access to and are participating in a culture of consumerism and self-interest that 15 years ago would have been difficult to fathom. One could be forgiven for thinking the oft-heard maxim of Vietnam being "a poor country, but rich in sentiment" (*nước nghèo, giàu tình cảm*) is endangered. Though these overlapping—at times complementary, at times competing—trends are nascent, to be sure, they do allude to possible future directions; it is also important to note that the transition I outline here is very much in process and does not have any teleological endpoint suggested by discourses of modernization as inherently individualizing. By psychologizing the self and understanding their feelings as part of a larger conceptual category, people are objectifying a new form of self-awareness that may orient them to a

[6] Being more intensely colonized by the French and as the capital of the American-backed Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City is also seen as more Westernized than the rest of Vietnam.

rapidly shifting behavioral environment—one with more options than they are accustomed to.

This changing environment is most often attributed to a series of economic reforms enacted in 1986 that allowed for limited economic liberalization known as *đổi mới* (renovation). Many have pointed out the ways these reforms have strengthened the project of socialist nation building through selective market mechanisms and initiated a "market economy with socialist orientations" (Beresford 2008, Beresford and Phong 2000, Nguyễn-võ 2008). Most relevant to this chapter is the relative withdrawal of the state and an accompanying privatization of people's worlds, including their emotional worlds, where feelings are less shared in the collective or channeled through the state. Scholars have also emphasized the contingent encounters and practices that comprise "neoliberalism," typically focusing on how public institutions make use of issues related to the private sphere and intimate life to normalize particular forms of knowledge and thus create self-governing subjects (Rofel 2007, Ong 2006, Kohrman 2004, Illouz 2007, Isin 2004). Doing so captures the logics and practices of self-governance that promote the sense of individual responsibility underlying certain sociopolitical relations increasingly characteristic of neoliberalizing states. For example, Freeman (2011) argues that the "new entrepreneur of the self" requires a self characterized by interiority and flexible self-making. Furthermore, Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang (2008) focus on the development of relationships between market reforms and personal destiny that facilitate an ethos of self-care. In this sense, privatization is a "fundamentally ethical relationship to oneself, in the sense of one's relationship to the self, others, things, and fate" (15).

* * *

Recent anthropological theorizing on subjectivity has called for new attentions to "hierarchy, violence, and subtle modes of internalized anxieties that link subjection and subjectivity, and an urgent sense of the importance of linking national and global economic and political processes to the most intimate forms of everyday experiences" (Good et al. 2008, 2-3). Here, I take subjectivity to refer to the conditions under which experience occurs and the process of structuring it. Such studies stake out a conceptual terrain separate from those raised by the psychological anthropological conceptualizations of self, personhood, and emotion. Roughly speaking, there are two dominant frameworks to subjectivity within anthropology: Foucauldian notions of subject formation and psychological and medical anthropological approaches to experience and the body. The former is characterized by a version of the subject that is the result of power that is internalized to varying degrees; the latter by an emphasis on micro-analyses of experience from the inside-out.

This chapter is in part a reaction to analyses of the discursive positionings of subjects that minimize lived experience and the mutual construction of psychological and social phenomena. Understandings of individual lives and experiences as constructed via personal meanings are rare in this literature, and the relation of self-processes to collective phenomena remains undertheorized. I posit this is because close readings of subjective experience have tended to focus on explicating them qua the individual such that wider political-economic contexts, concerns, and connections get lost. While I do think this is a fair critique, a phenomenologically-inclined anthropology need not be relegated to the study of personal idiosyncracies and can contribute to analyses of how

culture articulates with the embodied experience of subject formation (cf. Zigon 2009). After all, emotions are not only markers of relations and ideologies of power but have the capacity to act upon individuals (Liu 2004). If social life is indeed mediated and experienced through various individuals in various situations, then an analysis of what is often deemed "psychological subjectivity" can at least begin to describe the interrelationships that constitute sociality and how those interrelationships are personalized in everyday life (Parish 2008). Doing so frames the subject not only as the product of discourse but also as an agent of experience. The frameworks of political subjectivity and psychological subjectivity are not, however, necessarily ideologically or theoretically opposed to one another but can be taken as productive complements to the study of the mutual construction of affective and political processes (Csordas, in progress).

Recent scholarship in Southeast Asia has focused on how various emotional practices give rise to a modern selfhood or facilitate neoliberal transformations, outlining the rational techniques of the self that stem from a neoliberal economic sphere (Lindquist 2008, Hoang 2010). Anthropologists in particular have marked cultural practices as the locus of what might be called "neoliberalism" or "modernity" rather than assume an a priori external structure of neoliberalism or modernity. In their notion of the "economies of affect," Richards and Rudnyckyj (2009) advocate for analyses that examine the role of emotion in those practices through which people transform themselves into modern subjects and how they are experienced and reflected upon in their everyday lives. However, such conceptualizations of the self assume a certain "object-ness" to it. As I am conceptualizing it here, the self is not an already objectified entity but rather "an

indeterminate capacity to engage or become oriented in the world" (Csordas 1994). This approach allows for self awareness and self-reflextivity by linking perceptual processes with cultural meanings. Self-processes serve to thematize various aspects of their lifeworld. If perception and practice are central to the self as a capacity for orientation, the locus of the self can be seen as identical with the locus of perception and practice.

In this light, emotion is a personal and collaborative processes of meaning making through which facets of human experience are fashioned into a discursive and perceptible object. Thus, affect can be seen as a means of subjectification that produces those who enact it and those upon whom it acts (Richards and Rudnyckyj 2009). It is important not only to examine how emotions may facilitate the neoliberal transformation of the self since emotions are already involved in everyday transformations of the self. The context that these emotions take (i.e., their emotionality) can contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the self than has largely been offered in studies of political subjecthood. And in examining how emotions create new forms of subjects and relationships, it is critical to understand the dialectical construction of the self as an object recognizable to the individual and others as well as a subjectivity in the process of defining itself through those emotions (Parish 2008). As a foundation of conduct, they are simultaneously something people produce and experience as something independent of the will.

Some of the difficulties that theorists of neoliberal modernity have been having in their analysis of the emotions is that they do not take into consideration their tacitly reflexive and dialectical nature. The multiple meanings and layers of subjectivity that theorists are going after cannot be elucidated without an understanding of how

psychological phenomena are understood by social actors. Too often theorists stop when they reach a point where an emotion seems obvious and can be labeled as such. However, I would claim that what exactly is emotional about, say, crying is not obvious. For example, crying is not just the manifestation of an emotional expression in the sense of a conveyed meaning but also a strategy of interaction and a way to mobilize bodily resources (Katz 1999). To that end, it is important to look at the context in which emotional experiences occur.

One of the reasons why the various emotions and emotionality itself as objects of inquiry in contemporary Vietnam is especially challenging is that the ethnopsychology—and the cultural politics surrounding it—is also in its own period of transformation. The study of ethnopsychology is by and large concerned with the way people conceptualize, monitor, and discuss psychic processes, practices, and social relations (Lutz 1988). These folk theories are necessitated by the need to anticipate and make sense of others' actions and the need to evaluate interpersonal relationships. And by observing the ongoing negotiation of standards, values, and expressions of the emotions in Vietnam, we can trace the emergence of the new meanings that emotions—in their discursive and experiential forms—take on and, in turn, affect how people understand the self.

The new and often contradictory meanings that emotion takes on in Vietnam become particularly salient in light of the value placed on the individual self under neoliberalism. Martha Nussbaum argues that emotions are judgments of value "that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person's own control great importance for the person's own flourishing" (2001, 22). In effect, they acknowledge neediness and lack of self-sufficiency because they always involve an object and an appraisal of that object's

importance. This evaluation figures into the schemes of goals and projects such that the value perceived in the object of the emotion is intertwined with people's subjective flourishing. Certainly, an increasing amount of attention directed towards one's own emotions accords with a neoliberal ethos of self-care. However, with the attendant recognition of the lack of control over the object of the emotion, the emotions also highlight the impossibility of self-sufficiency. In Vietnam, this impossibility becomes a defining feature of how people understand themselves as neoliberal subjects.

Discussions of the self (*bản thân*), personality (*nhân cách*), individual characteristics (*cá tính*), and other related constructs in Vietnam tend to highlight what theorists have termed the "sociocentric" self (Markus and Kitayama 1991,Kitayama et al. 2000, Shweder and Bourne 1984, Lindholm 1997, Hollan 1992). Most influentially, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that patterns of selfhood common throughout East Asia emphasize interdependence and relatedness to others. The sociocentric self is shaped by others, public, contingent, and adaptive to the demands of its social network. In contrast, Western understandings of the "egocentric" self valorize independence from others via the discovery and expression of its inner characteristics. Clifford Geertz (1984, 126) famously argued that:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is… a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures.

Explicit conceptualizations of selfhood in Vietnam would seem to confirm the dichotomy between the Western egocentric self and the Eastern sociocentric self. In

numerous conversations I had, the Vietnamese self was explicitly distinguished from the Western self by its emphasis on collectivity (*tập thể*), relatedness (*quan hệ*), and a general consideration (*quan tậm*) of others. When describing themselves or their personalities, people often made reference to observations that others had made of themselves. Many qualified their "self reports by others" in mentioning that they themselves did not know if it was accurate or not; a few stated outright that it was for others to make observations about themselves. Self reports that ventured further from comments that respondents had received in the past gravitate towards the performance of social roles (e.g. as a daughter). That social roles informed people's sense of their own selves reflects a pervasive notion in East and Southeast Asia that the self is most meaningful in relation to others, which in Vietnam is often framed within hierarchical Confucian social roles (see chapter 3). Moreover, descriptions of the self frequently involved observable behaviors (e.g. being talkative) rather than psychologically interior dispositions.[7]

However, just as the theoretical continuum between the egocentric and sociocentric self has been criticized for exaggerating and over-simplifying differences between Western and non-Western selves (Cf. Hollan 1992, Spiro 1984), the common assertions about the outwardly-focused nature of the Vietnamese self that my respondents made masks not only its more "egocentric" qualities but also essentializes and homogenizes a wide range of self orientations. To be sure, the interdependence of the self is promoted in several aspects of Vietnamese society, but it is not always attained or even desired. For example, the self (*bản thân*) is considered simultaneously to be more or less

[7] In a mix of proving their virtuousness and denigrating themselves, respondents often reported the former with pride and chose negatively-valued ones for the latter.

"sociocentric" and a deeply internal phenomenon. Many people in Vietnam have a clear sense of themselves apart from their social relations. Moreover, although various personal characteristics that support a sociocentric self are valued and actively cultivated, highly autonomous individuals are also admired for their confidence (*tự tin*, lit. self-belief/trust) and envied for their individual freedom (*tự do*).

Sentiment and/or emotion

I turn my attention now to the multiple ways that the self, neoliberalism, and new ways of thinking about and experiencing emotion are implicated in one another. In order to examine how a new self-making project takes shape through the mutual articulation of Vietnamese understandings of the emotions and modernity, I start off with the problem of definition. While *cảm xúc* is the word that best conveys the meaning of emotion as it is understood in English, it is not the most commonly used one. That word is *tình cảm*, which covers much of the same linguistic space as "emotion" does in English, but primarily refers to sentiment. *Tình cảm*, often glossed as the emotional ties or affective bonds to other people, forms the indexical basis on which people interact with each other and understand themselves and their relationship with the world around them (Gammeltoft 1999, Rydstrøm 2003, Shohet 2010). It acts as a subjective commentary on particular social relationships. As used in everyday speech, it has a variety of context-dependent meanings, from a kind of affection or platonic love, to one's strong feelings for someone else (including feelings of romantic love) or certain concepts (such as the nation or one's education). Indeed, *tình cảm* is a central feature of how Vietnamese understand themselves in relation to others. While Westerners are seen as more

individualistic and realistic/practical (*thực tế*), Vietnamese often described themselves as living in or according to *tình cảm* (see chapter 3).

With *cảm xúc* taking the back seat to *tình cảm*, it is no surprise that *cảm xúc* also connotes a similar meaning as *tình cảm* in much the same way that "feelings" does when a person has *feelings* for someone. This is in fact its more common usage. For example, a 25 year old man, who was in his native Ho Chi Minh City while on holiday from his job in Qatar, defined *cảm xúc* as an unspoken thought. Only when this thought was spoken and supported with words could it become proper *tình cảm*. For him, sentiment had a "large" meaning, while emotion had a "small" or nested meaning within sentiment. By way of contrast, in the United States claiming that one feels "emotional" indicates a welling up of several emotions that identifying would somehow diminish. On the other hand, the equivalent in Vietnamese would mean that one has romantic yearnings for someone else because the English word "feelings" primarily denotes the full range of feeling states and secondarily connotes an attachment to someone, while the opposite is true of Vietnamese.

For the sake of clarity, when I refer to emotion in this chapter, I am primarily speaking of feeling states at a theoretical level and *cảm xúc* at an ethnographic level, and when I refer to sentiment, affective bonds at a theoretical level and *tình cảm* at an ethnographic level. *Tình cảm* and *cảm xúc* share quite of a bit of conceptual overlap, and often times discussions of the emotions revolved around the word *tình cảm*, with the addition of *tâm lý* (as in *tình cảm tâm lý*, or "psychological sentiment") to specify feeling states from broader notions of sentiment/emotion. Professionals such as psychiatrists, counselors, and educators, however, are more apt to use *cảm xúc*.

Thus, for many people in Vietnam, "emotion" as a "spiritual state" (*cái trạng thái tin thần*) or a conceptual category to classify discrete feeling states such as anger, sadness, boredom, etc. is fairly unfamiliar as the distinction between one's affective bonds with other people and how one feels about anything else is not explicit. Conversely, different categories of sentiment were easily elicited: parent-child, husband-wife, etc. such that sentiment is in part a typology of social and emotional relationships. People were aware of the dual meanings of *tình cảm* but, in verbalizing their models of how it worked, did not differentiate them very much. Moreover, because *tình cảm* generally involves a recognition of someone else (*cái cảm nhận của người khác*) it has positive implications since its principal types include compassion (*thương*), love (*yêu*), and cherish (*mến*). Negative feelings towards someone else would not be understood as *tình cảm* but merely as one's thoughts about someone instead.

The "emotion" part of *tình cảm* is difficult to disentangle from the "sentiment" part of *tình cảm*, and neither *tình cảm* nor *cảm xúc* connotes a neutral, standalone category as it does in the US.[8] Instead, *cảm xúc* was alternately conceptualized as a sub-category of sentiment, a weaker, less developed variant of sentiment or a necessary step towards sentiment. From this perspective, there are no such things as "pure feelings" but rather the various feeling states are vehicles for the evaluation of positions from whence an individual is to make moral judgments. One of the primary tenets of academic theories of emotion is that all emotions are about something. Therefore, that notions of *cảm xúc* strongly imply that the object of the emotion is a person suggests its distinctness from

[8] *Nỗi niềm*—with *nỗi* being the classifier for negatively-valued feelings and *niềm* for positively-valued feelings—also connotes the full spectrum of emotions but more often refer to what are colloquially referred to in English as "issues" when used as a noun or as "ruminate" when used as a verb.

Western understandings of emotion as a standalone category of individual feeling states. Throughout my interviews, hypothetical examples of emotions that did not involve another person were extremely rare.[9]

However, this is changing as Western models of emotionality become more influential, though I am not arguing that the Vietnamese ethnopsychology of the emotions is merely becoming "Westernized." Instead, the re-organization of the emotions is being done through the already existing understandings of sentiment that *cảm xúc* is embedded in. At any rate, the practices that arise from encounters with models from the Western psychological sciences are more similar to behaviors with their own logic, norms, and values than a theoretical framework. It is tempting to place sentiment and emotion on a continuum along a scale of tradition and modernity, obligation and desire, collective and individual, external and internal, or what you're supposed to feel and how you actually do feel. However, doing so would imply that emotion/*cảm xúc* is in the process of supplanting sentiment/*tình cảm*. What I am suggesting is that there is a leveling of emotion and sentiment, where they are related but different. I do not mean to privilege emotion as if it were somehow becoming more fundamental and important than sentiment.

Moreover, the idea of the emotions being a neutral category for our feelings is itself rooted in Western thought, most obviously in the advent of the discipline of psychology. The psychologists of the early 19th century painted the emotions as psycho-physiological energies, with consciousness a less and less important component of affect

[9] For the sake of comparison, Julia Cassaniti's work on emotions in Thailand indicates people there often used hypothetical examples involving material goods such as clothing to make their points.

(Nussbaum 2001). This resulted in the view of emotion as essence, playing into dominant ideologies that supported racial, gender, and class hierarchies (Lutz 1998). For present purposes, I focus on the notion of emotion being opposed to rational thought, which is more often than not used to criticize than to praise. Both emotion and thought share certain characteristics within this ethnopsychology: namely that they are internal characteristics and thus features of the individual rather than of situations or relationships. That is, they are constructed as psychological rather than social phenomena. In the West, emotions have become associated with the irrational, the loss of control, the feminine, the body, nature, and subjectivity. Such connotations of the emotions have hierarchical implications. The emotions are constructed as counter to the valorization of rational decision making that is critical to modernist projects characterized by progress, breaking with tradition, and the cyclic re-invention of oneself. The relative denigration of emotion in the West has fed into the view within liberal theory that the subject that emerges is a rational one. However, in the case of Vietnam, the subjectivity that comes out is a profoundly emotional one as well. Indeed, not only is it central to the subjective experience of the transition to a market-oriented economy, the emotions are also the vessels through which economic transformations become instantiated in people's lives.

While the categorization and disciplining of the emotions I describe here have come about in light of modernist reforms, it should be noted that this is not an entirely new phenomenon to Vietnam. A cursory examination of dictionary definitions of *cảm xúc* over time is revealing. In the scholar Đao Duy Anh's *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* (1932), *cảm xúc* was defined by the *thất tình*, or seven emotions: *hỉ* (joy), *ái* (love), *nộ*

(anger), *ố* (hatred), *lạc* (happiness), *bi* (pain), and *ai* (melancholy). Those familiar with Traditional Chinese Medicine may recognize this list as the *qiqing*[10] (seven emotional reactions), though it seems as though there is some variation in the actual items that constitute the seven. However, this list was mostly framed medically, related to the idea of excessive emotion as a pathogen (Ots 1990). Now, most people are unaware of the *thất tình* (they usually think it refers to lovesickness as *thất* refers both to the number 7 in Sino-Vietnamese and "loss" in Vietnamese), and if they do most can only remember the first three or four items. A more current definition of *cảm xúc* reflects the new criteria for the on-the-ground, implicit criteria of the emotions: a vibration in the heart/gut through contact with something (*run động trong lòng do tiếp xúc với sự việc gì*).[11] In the newer version, *cảm xúc* is made less concrete and is more reliant on abstract principles to govern inclusion into the category.

The global reach of modern emotion

If "emotion" and "emotionality" have changed in Vietnam, then the neoliberal transformation of the self can be seen in the remaking of stories through which human nature "discovers" itself. Here, I move from the level of ethnopsychology to people's interpretations of the effects of modernization on emotional experience as viewed through the prism of two common interrelated explanations for the sudden popularity of "emotion" that set up how modernity is negotiated and naturalized. I gloss them as the "globalization account" and the "modernization account." In taking up these two

[10] They are: joy (xì,喜); anger (nù, 怒); worry (si, 思); melancholy (you, 憂); grief (bei, 悲); fear (kong, 恐); fright (jing, 驚).
[11] *Từ điển Tiếng Việt Phổ thông*, Viện Ngôn ngữ học (2002)

concurrent discourses, people offer differing implications for how they understand the self and its trajectories.

First, the new status of "emotion" was often viewed as a natural outcome of global encounters. Psychologists, counselors, and laypersons alike dated the introduction of concepts related to a number of psychological phenomena (e.g. "stress" or "depression") to after 1986 when the country ended its isolation from the West. According to them, newer understandings of the emotions were due to people learning about them from translations of Western media, such as advice columns or self-help books. This was made especially apparent in a discussion I had with a retired professor of geography about the *thất tình*, or seven emotions. According to him, people's concepts of the emotions in antiquity were very general, but scientific findings have made people's mentalities about the emotions, and perhaps their mentalities in general, much more complex. Indeed, he estimated there are now 500 different emotional expressions. He went on to say that people used to think that the emotions were in the gut (*lòng*) but now people knew it was in the heart (*tim*/*tâm*). After telling me what an emotion meant to her (i.e., as a reaction to something that vibrated/resonated in her), a woman in her 30s who proudly described herself (in English) as a "modern woman" and a "sensitive woman" with a lot of emotions stopped to clarify herself: "If explained according to science, then the emotions are what enters your eyes, and then has an effect in the brain, and then in your heart so in your body there's some substance (*một chất nào đó*) that pushes in the body and makes you have an emotion in your heart (*tim*)."[12]

[12] Her use of the word substance is interesting insofar as it coincides with something I overheard at a party once. A woman defined emotion as *khí trong lòng* (*qi* or life force in the heart/gut), something that a number of people I asked afterwards laughed off as old-fashioned, maudlin, or overly romantic.

This idea that people set aside either "traditional" beliefs or socialism to better understand their true nature and psychic potential naturalizes both neoliberal forms of modernity and its transformation of affect. It is simultaneously rooted in yet elides a long process of re-defining the self in relation to the West. Debates about societal reform during the colonial era often revolved around how much Confucian norms or new ideas about Western civilization should shape the "inner spirit" of the individual or the outer or secondary aspects of modern Vietnamese society (Bradley 2004). In *A World Transformed*, Kim Ninh (2002: 24) provides a quote from Hoài Thanh (1988 [1942]), a literary critic writing in the 1930s and 1940s, that still speaks to the issues at hand:

> In general, the entire spirit of ancient times... and the present time... may be summed up in two words: "I" and "we."... Our lives now lie within the sphere of "I." Having lost breadth, we seek depth. But the deeper we go, the colder it gets... Along with our sense of superiority, we have lost even the peace of mind of previous times. In the old time, even a victim of injustice... could still rely on something permanent... The West has returned our spirit to us."

Hoài Thanh wrote this in reference to the influence of French romantic poetry on a new generation of Vietnamese poets. In incorporating new literary conventions, poets such as Xuân Diệu experimented with new social forms and ways of relating to one another and to oneself as a means to break away from East Asian tradition and locate the authentic Vietnamese self. Not coincidentally, it has been argued that the introduction and incubation of new ways of thinking about the individual in early 20th century Vietnamese poetry was critical to the popularity of socialism in northern Vietnam. What I want to highlight here is that in this provocative claim that the West has returned to

Vietnam its spirit is the usage of a Western lens to view themselves that can be by turns implicit, explicit, or—in this particular context—ironic.

Hoài Thanh's pointed critique of the so-called "New Poetry" movement and, by extension, colonial-era Hanoian revolutionary culture still resonates with what is going on in decidedly post-war Ho Chi Minh City. A supposedly unmoored sense of self, the side-by-side emergence of a new political culture and a culture of self-interest, and rapid social change were certainly common touchstones in discussions about the nature—let alone fate—of the Vietnamese soul in the 21st century that I had during my ethnographic fieldwork. I am arguing, however, that inner selves are not merely accessed by these global encounters but take on new life by changing how people understand the self.

Meanwhile, the "modernization account" highlights the diversity of options in post-reform Vietnam. With access to more choices and greater control over their lives, "modern" people had richer emotional lives because they were not tied to "tradition." This idea, for the Saigonese especially, at once naturalizes and historicizes the progress of neoliberal modernity. Socialism was seen as an interruption to their lives and their identity, and the *đổi mới* policies were seen as a means towards re-normalization (*bình thường lại)*. This places *đổi mới* at the start of the late socialist period and thereby connotes the failures of the socialist state and the triumphs of the market, a rhetorical move used by many Western observers of Vietnam's economy. As a means to actualize their true selves, modern people supposedly pay more attention to their emotions.

For many, the prior dearth of attention to one's emotional life was attributed to a combination of Confucianism and fallout from political violence that constantly suppressed older generations who were unable to cultivate their affective potential. First,

Linh, a 46 year old woman with a master's degree in psychology, criticized many parents for failing to understand their children and expecting them to live up to their own demands and expectations. Implicit in this view is that modernity offers people a way to combat a perceived estrangement from their own individual selves:

> Few families educate/teach (*giáo dục*) their children in a respectful (*tôn trọng*) way. A family with respectful styles of teaching will have children that grow up to have good personalities (*nhân cách*) develop, but there are few of those in Vietnam. Here, there's the influence of Confucian and Mencian thought (*tư tưởng Khổng-Mạnh*)… This thinking is transmitted from one generation to the next. It forms an ideology (ý thức hệ) and a really heavy social conscience (*ý thức xã hội*)… So fathers and mothers often say, "I'm your father. When I speak, you have to listen because I'm right and because I have experience." (*Tao*[13] *là cha mày nè, tao nói là mày phải nghe bởi vì cha nói là đúng, bởi vì cha đã có kinh nghiệm.*) But the father's experience can't teach the child in [every] instance. For example, a really simple one, in the old days, the grandfather spoke, and the father bowed his head (*cúi đầu*) when listening to him. But these days, when the father speaks, the child doesn't bow at all because there are many things a child knows that a father doesn't since he or she can just get on the internet and read it for him or herself.
>
> Linh, 46

Second, many people attributed the main psychic differences between younger and older generations to the latter's coming of age with the difficulties of the war and subsidy eras. For example, a 24 year old woman who gave herself the nickname "Nikki" described the generational gap as one of differences in the definitions of happiness. According to her, people of her grandparents' generation grew up being principally concerned with their safety. As a result, their version of happiness still focuses on stability. Parents want their children to be happy, but what makes both parents and children happy is not the same thing. At her university, Vic organized a seminar on the

[13] The use of *tao* ("I") and *mày* ("you") is an indication of a speaker's disrespect and aggression towards the listener. People may switch to these pronouns during arguments. A notable exception is its use among close age mates, where *tao* and *mày* can be used to express intimacy.

theme of whether to live for one's parents or for oneself. The turnout was expected at 45 people, but over 150 students registered to attend the event. Linh echoed the notion that people's emotional lives have deepened in recent years:

> Vietnam is now on a path of development after how many years of living with hunger and sickness, in war, in scarcity. People only worried about food and clothing, meaning they only ate enough to feel full and only wore enough to feel warm. Now society, culture, and economics is developing and becoming wealthier. Things are modern (*hiện đại*) and civilized (*văn minh*). Material needs (*nhu cầu vật chất)* have limits, but spiritual needs (*nhu cầu tinh thần*) are very big. No one's cared about spiritual needs from then until now. From here on out people will care more them because as civilization rises people will be forced to face spiritual crises (*chuyện khủng hoảng tinh thần*), "stress," crises in the family, the collapse of values (*sự đổ vỡ các giá trị*), and then changes in society's value systems and the family's value systems.
>
> Linh, 46

Conversely, some people expressed the notion that people's emotional lives had become drained as the country modernized. Implicit in the way "emotion" is being deployed in these critiques of modernization is imbrication of emotion and sentiment. For example, a 20 year old woman pointed to the large numbers of beggars who get ignored in the bustle of Ho Chi Minh City. According to her, people who give them money have good emotions (*cảm xúc tốt*) and have a heart (*có tâm)*. Modernity encourages people to make money and worry (*lo*) only about themselves, sacrificing compassion (*nhân ái*) instead. Many argued that people should have rich emotional lives in order to be closer to one another. These characterizations of modernity and tradition were also applied to the increasing rural-urban divide:

> Urbanites seldom care for each other so they share (*chia sẻ*) with each other less. They live indifferently (*sống thờ ơ*), even to victims of traffic accidents or fights. Very few people in the city will do anything because they are afraid of getting involved (*sợ bị liên lụy*), only looking on. There

> are a lot of people who really want to help but don't dare do so. And in the countryside, there'll be two neighboring houses that are really close with each other. After coming home from work, they'll go over to each other's houses to drink tea and talk to each other. In general, village contexts are very close (*gần gũi*). The head of the neighborhood clearly knows about everyone in the sub-hamlet (*xóm*) (the smallest administrative unit in a village). Rural neighbors are (*thân*) and always care for one another.
>
> Thiên, 24, male

The material comforts and cultures of self-interest increasingly associated with modernity do not just allow for certain people to "get in touch with their feelings" as if they were waiting to be activated. It is certainly not the case that people in Vietnam did not feel their emotions as internally before *đổi mới*. For many, various passions that were idealized or motivated for political ends during the country's colonial, war, or subsidy era were certainly deeply felt, but the new subjectivity—psychological, political, class, or otherwise—that is offered by neoliberal reforms and the immense potential it has are connected with different affective and material desires that have become central to what it means to be Vietnamese (cf. Rofel 2007, Thayer 2009). As a self-making project, the rise of emotion is tied to self-discovery. I often asked my younger respondents to reflect on the experiences of their parents during the nation's more difficult periods. In discussing the different ways that people in their own and in their parents' generations began to understand (*hiểu mình*) or consider/contemplate (*xem mình*) themselves, many imagined that their parents only managed to do so in their actions—almost by accident it sometimes seemed.[14] This was done without any intimations of the actions of their parents being responsible for creating the self as much as understanding it, which reflects their own psychologization of social life as part of a self-making project.

[14] If it was not by accident, then it was indeed secondary to the task at hand, i.e. survival.

In the United States, self-discovery is often associated with a voyage of introspection where people closely scrutinize their own emotions. However, in Vietnam I often heard introspection (*sống nội tâm*, literally "living in the contents of the mind"), being described in a somewhat negative light. This is because there is a high premium on knowing other people and what they are thinking and feeling--especially on knowing what they are thinking about other people. The value of emotion, thus, is not connected to introspection but to the social significance and validation of the individual in society. Yet while the precept of "know thyself" is not as elaborated as it is in the US, it does come out. When I asked people about understanding themselves, many would say they did. Pressed for more concrete details, they volunteered examples of knowing what they like, what their hobbies are, how they like their coffee, etc. So some people expressed self-knowledge by referring to something that Americans might call "preference" or "style" or simply "likes and dislikes" (as if this was somehow less indicative of an interior self). This has implications for what is considered self and not the self and points to the role of emotion in changing that boundary. Self-knowledge can be gained through externalized behaviors, not just moments of reflection and revelation. That younger people are relying more on their emotions to know themselves is not necessarily an indication that doing so is completely new. After all, the use of behavior, reflected upon or not, to understand the self does contain a kernel of emotion insofar as the emotions are suffused throughout our actions. In this light, an emotion can be viewed as a form of self-consciousness of the tacit embodiment and evaluation of conduct from which self-awareness arises. Conceptualizing that emotions as a gradient of behavior allows for an

analysis into the ways that emotion, value, and behavior invoke each other (Cf. Katz 1999, 2012).

An impossible balance

To examine the how discourses of emotion, modernity, and globalization play out on the self, I turn to a final pair of contrasts: one that diffuses emotion in everyday life and one that strives to find a balance between emotion and sentiment in interpersonal relationships. First, the articulation of emotion and modernity are intertwined. In disentangling people's emotional states from the crowded space of their social lives, the new model of emotionality I have sketched thus far emphasizes the individual insofar as it is presupposed on a monadic subject. As mentioned earlier, a Western model of the emotions assumes a sense of the person as split into the realm of thinking and feeling, which is private and set apart from others. This distinction between private and public (as well as mind and body), along with the view of the person as a sovereign individual, structures the concept of emotion and indeed organizes emotional experience. In contrast to the more context-dependent notions of sentiment, emotions can cover a wide range, attaching to other people as well as objects, practices, ideas, etc. This horizontal effect enforces a sense of the individual cogito as the source of those feelings, especially when they are made explicit through attentional processes of the body.

The new ideas of the emotions and of emotionality itself construct individuals in terms of vivid interior lives. However, this is not to imply that interiority itself is an

artifact of Westernization or to deny pre-neoliberal Vietnam of interiority.[15] Rather, emotionality in *đổi mới*-era Vietnam features specific to the powers of the self taken up by neoliberalism with aims towards modern goals of individual achievement, which is often assumed to be accompanied by rationalization. This focus on the self as a cogito submerged in the demands of everyday life encourages individuated subjectivities of modernity. The subsumption of emotional life in the quotidian highlights the apolitical at the expense of the heroically socialist and nationalist (Cf. McGrath 2008, Tang 2000). However, this process of rationalization via individuation brings with it an attendant emotionalization of the subject. In terms of people's everyday lives, an emphasis on how an individual feels about something is a shifting away from both Confucian and socialist forms of social organization that valorize communality and hierarchy. The breakdown of such institutions is frequently portrayed as opening new spaces for alternative sources of meaningful content in people's lives. Charles Taylor (1989) argued that modernity features the affirmation of ordinary life as a key feature of humanity as a result of its fragmentation and compartmentalization of social life.

Changing concepts of emotion also alter people's relationships to the objects of those emotions. In re-casting social experience within a rubric of emotion, individuals are not only paying greater attention to the emotions but changing the concept of emotion itself. The criteria for what is considered an "emotion" change. Categorizing and coding discrete feeling states, especially the focal ones, as "emotion" means each of those states inhabit an equal amount of conceptual terrain as each other. That is, anger and happiness and sadness are equal to each other in the extent of their "emotion-ness." In contrast,

[15] See Pandian (2010) for an analysis of interior topography of selfhood in South India.

sentiment is a more hierarchically-organized social field in which certain cases of sentiment are more important than others and considered more exemplary of sentiment. The parent-child relationship is the gold standard of a sentimental relationship, while friendships between peers, though important, are not imbued with the same level of import.[16]

Furthermore, while individuals saw themselves as having "rights" to feel a particular way, recourses to a discourse of rights in terms of sentiment are more constrained by *xã hội* (society).[17] The increased importance of emotion, which is also understood as tied to the diversity of choice and the relative luxury of "finding oneself," has become important to providing people with conceptual tools that may cross-cut social fields of sentiment as well as assess an individual's life and personal state of well-being. This in turn is associated with new ways of understanding the self that assess and measure the quality of one's life against an abstracted norm. And because sentiment often has less flexibility than emotion in a number of domains, thinking through experiences of anger or jealousy specifically as emotional experiences may help people understand themselves as being able to exercise power over their own selves and thus negotiate their own position in the world. Broadly put, if sentiments remind the individual of their place within a social hierarchy, emphasizing emotion over sentiment would place the individual in a horizontal relationship with the world. However, it is not the case that emotion is

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[16] For example, a book entitled *Nếp sống Tình cảm Người Việt* (*The Sentimental Way of Life of the Vietnamese*) begins with a detailed description of the preparations and stages involved in the funeral of one's parents because it was thought to be the ultimate manifestation of *tình cảm*. When I bought the book at a popular bookstore in Ho Chi Minh City's district 1, another customer approached me to practice his English and, looking a bit perplexed at my selection, commented that I must be interested in learning more about Vietnamese culture.

[17] This echoes the shift from responsibilities to rights that Yan (2011) describes in contemporary China.

supplanting sentiment or that an inner world of individually-constituted goals and thoughts has replaced an orientation to other people. In their analysis of the focus on self-cultivation as a situated form of neoliberalism, Ong and Zhang (2008) note that the valorization of the powers of the self and the individual do not negate pre-existing sociopolitical values and patterns. Instead, it can extend their reach and give them new cultural significance. Indeed, maintaining ties to and becoming embedded in numerous social networks is essential to being a good person (*người tốt*) in Vietnam (cf. Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012).

Problems are to be resolved, not dwelled upon, in Ho Chi Minh City's actions-speak-louder-than-words spirit. Thus, advice from many family and friends often focuses on the correct course of action based on whatever relationship of sentiment is involved, such that the affective and role correctives are fused. The increasing focus on the individuals' emotions, however, emphasize one's own desires and motivations that are *allowed* to be in conflict from the role expectations of a spouse, parent, or child, etc. as newly modern subjects. And while the identification of various emotions may not mobilize a conscious program to resolve existential problems, they at least mobilize a search for orientation to such problems. For example, a 42 year old man who had formerly worked at a psychological counseling center emphasized the value of self-understanding: "When a person 'understanding'[18] [the self] then it's easier for them to 'control'[19] it." In this situation, individuals do not only strategize ways to deal with others but also ways to handle themselves, a project at the heart of defining and directing the

[18] Spoken in English.
[19] Spoken in English.

self. Thematizing the self as explicitly emotional is charged with the contradictory values of being modern. It connotes an advancement and freedom over the "feudal" perspectives of Confucianism as well as individualistic selfishness, often contrasted from a recent past when people still knew how to "endure." Here, modernity has become charged with emotions, and vice versa.

* * *

This chapter has examined people's emotional reactions to events as well as the responses to their own reactions, a process implicated in orienting the self to existing concerns. It examined the limits of *đổi mới*'s reach in which the emotions emerge in a liminal space where many find themselves torn in the affective life of the neoliberalism between a self governed by individual choice and being an individual competes with ties of sentiment—what could be called the emotional fallout of neoliberalism. Emotionality can become unhinged to its "traditional" moorings as well as the models of emotion being introduced through modernization. It develops in ways that are only partially conditioned by the market. The emergence of "*cảm xúc*" (emotion) as a category to think with or to think through provides a different style of thinking about the experience of both everyday life and one's larger life of significance--an endeavor that Charles Taylor (1989) highlighted as a defining feature of (Western) modernity. Many of the people I talked to had difficulty articulating their emotional reactions to events when I asked them how they felt about something that happened to them. When pressed further, some would just repeat the critical turning point in their story; such descriptions of their feelings were more literally of "the feeling of what happens." Moreover, emotions are often discussed

as impossible to control and *direct* reflections of a person's *tâm/lòng* (heart/mind/gut), which might allude to the lack of a language to frame new forms of emotionality.

The formation of the subject through the articulation of emotion does not merely signify a shifting balance of somatic modes of attention; emotions are never just "felt" from pre-objective bodily resources (as Levy [1984] argued). Rather, what I am arguing is that psychologistic conceptualizations of the self begin to direct a person's frame of reference from the social field of sentiment to the psychological field of emotion (though there is considerable overlap). Doing so does not give individuals access to their true, inner selves. Instead, it maps interiority and makes it increasingly legible to themselves and others. The elaboration of emotionality in Vietnam re-structures the self in a psychologistic idiom that is increasingly seen as a more accurate mode of self-understanding than prior notions of selfhood. This was particularly true of the psychological professionals (e.g., psychiatrists, educators, and counselors) that I spoke with, though the fact that many laypersons admitted in a blithe manner, perhaps to disguise their embarrassment, that "we Vietnamese" traditionally do not dwell on such matters attests to the newfound and contested status of emotionality in the popular imagination. Although some people may indeed spend little time pondering their emotionality, many in present-day Ho Chi Minh City are invested in *doing* emotionality, a topic I will further explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Worry as Moral Sentiment and Social Practice

The phrase I used most often during my fieldwork was "không sao." I spoke and heard it constantly. Its literal translation is "no stars," but it basically means "no problems" or "no worries." (The origins of this expression are unclear, and the translation of "sao" as star is likely a recent invention.) I said it often in response to a hypothetical, potential, or actual inconvenience or infraction, e.g. if someone apologized for being late. In addition, saying "không sao" is also an appropriately informal way to refuse someone's offer of help. As a foreigner, I was seen as incompetent and especially vulnerable to shady and manipulative practices. For example, people often expressed surprised and praise I was willing and able to carry out what to me were minor tasks, such as buying fruit at a "traditional" marketplace instead of a "modern" and more expensive supermarket with fixed prices. However, I did have to exaggerate my bargaining skills to avoid lectures on how much I was overcharged and to avoid having to turn down their offers to buy fruit for me. Such offers to help were certainly gracious and were meant to be seen as indications of their concern for me, but they were also designed to extend or deepen a relationship through concrete social and economic practices.

People seemed perplexed or disappointed by some of my refusals of their assistance. For example, I was always asked if I wanted anyone to receive (*đón*) me at Ho Chi Minh City's Tân Sơn Nhất Airport upon my return from the occasional trips I took to Hà Nội to attend conferences or visit my extended family. While I felt that I was more than capable to finding a taxi from a reputable company on my own and did not want to deal with the additional social interaction after a tiring trip, some of my friends wanted to

demonstrate their concern for me. They also wanted me to know that they were willing to sacrifice their time and energy on my behalf for a minor event. When I expressed my bemusement as to how Vietnamese people so often had people meet them at airports to my friend Minh-Thảo, she responded that it was good that I was independent and that she herself did not always want people to help her. She trailed off before simply saying that at other times she did want their help. To all of these situations, I fell back on "không sao." However, the frequency with which I told people "no worries" only highlighted the tacit but intractable presence of worry.

One of the things that repeatedly struck me during my time in Vietnam was how observant people were of one another. This intense social gaze was partly directed so that one could anticipate the needs or desires of the other and demonstrate their due consideration (*quan tâm*). I could scarcely stifle a yawn at a friend's home before a bed would be prepared for me so I could take a nap. If my stomach growled, inevitably a plate of snacks or fruit would appear (with varying degrees of fanfare) before me. After a while, among certain friends, I got into the habit of not directly asking for things like napkins at a restaurant but instead looking around for them even if I knew they were not there so that someone would give me them. I found this observant attentiveness to be simultaneously touching and tiresome, and I suspect this ambivalence is what Minh-Thảo was partly referencing when she said she both did and did not want others to help her. The experience of caring for and worrying about others and, conversely, of being cared for and worried about are defining features of everyday life in Vietnam and of what it means to be Vietnamese in rapidly modernizing, globalizing, and urbanizing Ho Chi Minh City.

In order to develop a more culturally sensitive theorization of anxiety, it is essential to explore local understandings of self and sociality and their relation to emotion categories and modes of emotional exchanges. Academic psychology's tendency to theorize anxiety apart from its social contexts has led to a focus on experiences of anxiety as singular instances primarily occurring within the individual at the expense of understanding it as an emotional exchange between individuals. Furthermore, the dichotomy between individual experience and social interaction impedes an understanding of anxiety and worry as intersubjective phenomena.

Some theorists ignore the role of society altogether, a common enough position in evolutionary psychology, emphasizing the putatively universal features of facial expressions. Evolutionary explanations of anxiety root it in an instinct for physical survival. It warned of the threat to life and was instrumental in the development of our capacity to think. This biological survival mechanism is found in blood pooled in the torso, rapid breathing, increased blood circulation, dilated pupils, acute hearing, suspended digestive activity, and pressure to urinate, defecate, or even vomit. Those without the fight or flight capacity, an ancient alarm system, so to speak, could be easily overwhelmed by the threats to the species at its inception. However, in our present state, we still rely on the same mechanisms in dealing with threats to our psychological and spiritual existence. In this line of thought, the form of anxiety has changed from saber-toothed tigers to decreased self-esteem, while the experience remains the same.

However, anxiety should not be understood only as a response to the threat of pain or discomfort. It needs to be placed in its cultural and historical nexus and to be related to the distinctly human problems of social responsibility and ethics. Within

academic psychology, the subjective aspects of anxiety have traditionally been deemed as unsuitable for scientific inquiry. Therefore, more psychological approaches to anxiety have emphasized their cognitive, behavioral, and biological components, though integrative efforts have more recently emerged (cf. Ekman and Davidson 1994). From a behavioral perspective, the underlying premise is that emotions are innate patterns of reaction and responding that have evolved because of their functional significance. The primary adaptive value of emotional behavior includes preparation for action and communication with conspecifics. In this approach, fear is considered a basic, discrete emotion across cultures. However, despite the clarity that fear is often understood as an individual emotion, "anxiety" has been considered different from discrete emotions yet simultaneously very vague and imprecise.

Emotions are too often viewed as devoid of any kind of conceptual content. However, emotional experience is accompanied by an understanding of that experience. Acting on one's emotions involves both the basis of feeling but also the basis of that understanding (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Cultural models[20] of the emotions have traditionally been examined as linguistic models (e.g. Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). However, the phenomenological or interpersonal aspects of the emotions have not received systemic analysis with regards to cultural models (Shore 1996).

Like all emotions, anxiety reflects a unique cluster of cultural assumptions and scripts for social interaction that can be readily verbalized or are more tacitly embodied. Cultural models of anxiety can be used to reason with by mentally manipulating the

[20] Following Holland and Quinn (1987), I take cultural models to be "presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it."

model to plan a course of action. The commonsense ways that people conceptualize and interpret their worries help them order their lives. Thus, the process by which anxiety becomes meaningful to individuals is an intrinsically social one. In this chapter, I examine how worry and related emotional states and qualities are configured in relation to ethical modes of being. I do so by posing three questions that build an understanding of worry as a moral sentiment and a social practice. First, what is worry? Second, who does it? Third, what does it do? In particular, I focus on how notions of worry are situated within moral assessments of sentiment and gender and analyze instances of "worrying-about" and "worrying-for" as means to forge and strengthen emotional relations to others vis-a-vis notions of care/consideration (*quan tâm*, lit. important to the heart).

Despite the often contradictory ideas and values held about it, worry reflects a coherent cognitive model. However, this model does not follow a strictly linear path, insofar as one might expect a temporal and conceptual flow from an emotion's cause, process, manifestation, and outcome. (Contrast this to, for example, the hydraulic model of anger in the United States [Lakoff and Johnson 1980].) Instead, the Vietnamese theory of worry emphasizes an interpersonally intentional orientation. Thus, it is often difficult to distinguish between the object of worry and the process of worry itself. Since a generic model of worry is by necessity a much simplified and depersonalized version of how it works in everyday life, the models in action as people sort through them involve models of selfhood and personhood as well. Instead of an elaboration of its mentalistic mechanisms, the internal logic of this cultural model of worry is based on understandings of personhood. Mediating the construction of moral personhood, cultural models of worry help people understand themselves as good children, parents, and friends, etc.

Although I found explicit discussions of morality (*đạo đức*) in Ho Chi Minh City to be rare,[21] it is often implicit in people's conversations about and assessments of each other. A good (*tốt bụng*, lit. good stomach; *tốt đẹp*, lit. good and beautiful) person in Vietnam features many of the personal traits that are common among good people in many other parts of the world, such as honesty, diligence, loyalty, humility, and compassion, among others. Rydstrøm (2003) identifies the central components of Vietnamese morality to be behaving oneself appropriately, having and displaying proper sentiment, and demonstrating respect (*kính trọng*) to one's superiors and self-denial (*nhường*) for one's inferiors. Perhaps one of most distinguishing traits of moral personhood in Vietnam is how closely tied it is to the performance of one's social roles. Indeed, at a broad discursive level, the failure to accept (*chấp nhận*) or bear (*chịu đựng*) one's responsibilities (*trách nhiệm*) as a filial son, caring wife, or providing father are roundly criticized. Although someone can be broadly characterized as a bad/ugly person (*người xấu*) based on defective personality traits, most people's moral standing is generally understood within the context of an individual's specific situation or relations to others. Furthermore, in everyday conversation, people also complain less dramatically of individuals whose lack of social politesse put them in awkward positions, also a matter of being a good or bad person. An acute sensitivity to social situations is instilled at a very young age as a matter of displaying proper sentiment (*tình cảm*) (Shohet 2010).

What is worry?

[21] After a particular interview about morality, my interviewee took me to a nearby bookstore to show me a book that would give me the answers he was unable to give: a 10th grade civics reader.

A consideration of some key terms related to worry is needed before delving further into its conceptualization. Worry (*lo*, *lo lắng*) connotes both a cognitive activity and an affective state. (In contrast, in English these two phenomena are often separated as "I worry" and "I am worried," respectively.) I will return to the cognitivist orientation of worry below, but let me address its emotional side here. In daily conversation, *lo lắng* more commonly emphasizes its cognitive connotations, partly as a result of a relative dearth of overt discussion of people's own feelings. However, when worry is explicitly invoked as an affective state, it can be linked to other emotion words. For example, *buồn lo* (sad-worried) and *lo sợ* (fear-worry) are meant to qualify distinctly different emotions. Anxiety (*lo âu*) also implies cognitive activity, but because it is conceived as a deeper and more internal and intense form of worry it implies a more intense and ruminative emotional quality. Regardless, worry (*lo*, *lo lắng*) is used in everyday speech much more often than these other permutations.

Explicit conceptualizations of worry highlight negatively charged mental activity that requires the allocation of cognitive resources towards the preparation of some task or the defense against a potentially unpleasant experience. This can be further broken down into two separate components: the cognitive activity and what that activity is about, i.e. mental process and mental content. This distinction is made difficult due to the emotional contours of worry. Is the anxious rumination over vexing topics indicative of a particular style of thinking or just an idea that gives rise to otherwise ordinary thought processes? Despite the pitfalls of making distinctions between mental processes and mental contents, it is instructive in examining the process and content of worry in turn for present purposes. In the Western behavioral sciences, worry is considered a primarily cognitive

phenomena with anxiety and/or fear as its affective counterpart. In Western folk models, however, worry is frequently used to describe an emotional state, as in "I'm worried."

Leopold Cadiere (1957) argued that the Vietnamese do not distinguish between emotion and cognition. Helle Rydstrom and Tine Gammeltoft, working in northern Vietnam in the 1990s, agreed with Cadiere's claim to argue against Western rationalist claims about the dichotomy between thinking and feeling. For example, when people talk to each other about a sad or disturbing event, they are more likely to ask "Do you think a lot?" rather than "How do you feel?" Expressions of having to think all the time communicate emotional distress (see chapter 4). According to Gammeltoft (1999), this suggests that negative emotions are expressed in a cognitivist idiom of thought.

Although my research was conducted in southern Vietnam from 2007-2008, I would argue that Vietnamese do indeed distinguish between cognitive and emotional phenomena. The claim that feeling and thought are considered to be "basically the same" (Gammeltoft 1999, 206) perhaps reacts too strongly against the Western dichotomy between rationality/logic and passion/emotion.[22] (After all, English is replete with expressions that imply both cognitive and affective activity.) Indeed, Vietnamese strongly differentiate between the passions and rationality, albeit in ways that do not overlap in the exact same ways as Western dualisms. Descriptions of psychic states may combine worry with other states to produce an effect that decreases the distance between cognitive and affective activity but they remain distinct. For example, *buồn lo* (sad and worried) features worry as a cognitive anchor, and *lo nghĩ* (worried thinking) features it as an

[22] Gammeltoft reinforces the Western dichotomy between rational thought and emotion by juxtaposing the lack of a rich discourse on emotion in Vietnam with a "strikingly well-developed and highly elaborate moral discourse on mental and intellectual capacities" (1999, 210-211).

affective descriptor. It is perhaps this "imprecise" way of expressing psychic activity that led Cadiere to conclude that Vietnamese cannot distinguish thought and emotion.

Causes

As a component of a cultural model, causes of worry shared a paradoxical pattern of diversity. That is, most people reported that whether or not any given person would worry about any given thing depended on both the individual and the situation. Even though they expect conformity in terms of outward behavior, Vietnamese recognize that all people may have their own unique emotional reactions to things. Most were reluctant to offer a principle that united the disparate conditions that might cause a person to worry, instead insisting that each individual had his or her own reasons or that each situation was different. Thus, in theory anything could be a cause of worry, and it is up to each individual whether or not to worry/be worried about it and to what extent they would worry. Some identified a person's evaluation of something as the trigger to an onset of worry. Others emphasized personal character or disposition as a significant culprit behind worry. Still others indicated that certain situations or events were inherently worrying. The most commonly used examples of causes of worry focused on an event that had a potentially negative effect that would require significant mental effort to address. For example, cases included financial insecurity (e.g. calculating bills, figuring out how to pay for a child's school fees, etc.), family conflicts (e.g. tense relationships with one's spouse, parents, or parents-in-law), work or school difficulties (e.g. taking a test), and health (of oneself and of others).

Reasons for worry may come from anywhere, but they tend to link up to certain things that a person cares about in relation to their social role. People are motivated to worry not because it is something they necessarily want to do but because it makes them who they want to be. The intentional act of worrying is part of being a good person, yet it can also be understood as an innate reaction for someone who has the capacity to worry, i.e. someone who cares for others. When people say that a person does not know how to worry (*không biết lo*) it means that they do not have the capacity—in terms of either cognitive or experiential ability to think through something or compassion. Motivation to worry is more of the case where people want to be a certain kind of person or want something for someone else. It is seen as difficult to control—there is no point at which it is easy to identify where one worries too much. Can one worry too much about something? It depends on the situation: it's hard to tie down a handle where worry becomes excessive or out of proportion to the situation. In the end, however, a generic theory of why people worry is less complex than why people worry about any particular thing. This more specific domain points to the type of person who does worry. What kind of things people worry about defines who they are in part as it indicates the nature of the insecurity of their flourishing.

Process

The Vietnamese model of worry consists of a fairly simple set of propositions about mental processes that have complex implications for personhood. While Vietnamese models of worry contain cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social components, people's explicit definitions of worry focus most explicitly on the relation of

worrying to thinking and cognitive effort even though this component appears to be less culturally elaborated upon than others. That is, it is primarily conceived as an internal, troubled state that requires the allocation of mental resources towards a task, often for the sake of someone else's welfare. Ernest Hilgard (1962, 336) wrote that "Thinking is any behavior that uses ideas, that is, representational or symbolic processes." This could be the basis of the content of worry—that the representations are often unknowable and may have a greater fear effect because of that, creating more anxiety (insofar as not knowing what you don't know).

The Vietnamese model of worry focuses most explicitly on cognitive effort as its primary mechanism. Ways to express worry often invoke cognitive activity, such as thought (*suy nghĩ*) and calculation (*tinh toán*), and implies a busy heart-mind (*bận tâm*). Worry (*lo*) can be divested to emotional content as well, especially in reference to figuring out how to accomplish something. Thus, worry involves a mental geometry of aligning actors and resources—material and otherwise—to minimize or overcome a negative situation or to perform a task well. To either of these ends, worry requires both the devotion of mental and bodily energies and the enactment of concrete action to achieve a goal. Despite the importance of physical energy and concrete action in its cultural model, my informants spoke of it as primarily an internal phenomenon that happens within the body, especially the head and the brain. However, the actual mechanisms by which thinking and calculating operate are not much reflected upon and are mostly revealed in the health effects of chronic worry (see chapter 4).

Vietnamese have an ambivalent relationship to thinking. On the one hand, ideal states are often discussed as ones that do not require much thinking because one can be

relaxed (*thoải mái*) and at leisure. People often describe their closest relationships as ones where they did not have to think about what they were saying, presumably for fear of the other person's judgment or offending the other person. An ease and smooth flow mark ideal social relations and forms of communication. Guests are often told to relax, and if the hosts had to be occupied with something else guests are often given newspapers or a remote control to relax (by distracting oneself with something).

Most strikingly, one of the more common forms of advice is "Don't think." I was told by an itinerant fortune teller that when problems mounted up I should not think (about such problems) but instead should go out to distract myself from them. Thinking, especially about unpleasant topics, is thought to have a draining and tiresome effect on people and is, in contrast to a relaxed state of idleness, a negatively-valenced mental state. Many ideals about life are being at leisure, perhaps with the paragon being a wealthy scholar who can devote time to his interests whenever he wants. One man, upon telling me he had begun indulging in swimming at an upscale pool in the city's downtown area, reported feeling "more alive" because he took the time to do what he wanted to do.

On the other hand, people value the ability to be clever in the face of life's unexpected twists and turns and be able to intuit the best solutions without detailed instruction. For example, parents were praised as particularly good/talented (*giỏi*) if they managed to finagle good deals for themselves and their families or demonstrated a steady pattern of providing for their children in spite of adverse conditions. For example, a mother who managed to send her children to school out of a commitment to their education, even though other parents had stopped paying for their children's tuition after

primary school since they expected their children to grow up to be farmers like them, is a typical example of someone who would be considered *giỏi*. It connotes, among many other things, intellectual acumen and diligence.

Hiền, 24, reported that her father always told her to stop and think when faced with a problem and that there was no problem that was insurmountable. She often recalled this truism when she felt emotionally overwhelmed by her problems, though she confessed to only having moderate success with it. The implication of this piece of advice is that thinking can distance oneself from an emotional experience, in a broad sense paralleling the Western dichotomy between cognition and emotion. If thinking, then, is a way to leave a state of worry, worry is both a feeling and a thought process.

Who worries?

While understandings about the mechanics of worry are implicit in Vietnam, the conceptualization of what kinds of people are more likely to worry is highly elaborated. That is, people are more interested in the social workings of anxiety than in how worry operates within the mind. It is through an analysis of worry's relation to personhood that its moral character becomes apparent. The answer to the question of who worries in Vietnam does not point primarily to a particular type of personality like the neurotic or the "worry wart." Rather, a frequent worrier connotes someone who accepts his or her responsibility to be concerned for others and works to ensure their well-being. Worry is the practical and perhaps unavoidable consequence of someone who cares (*quan tâm*) *for* others. Furthermore, this care should ideally come naturally to a person, who willingly worries on someone's behalf. Thus, the cultural model of worry in Vietnam imbues

anxiety with a moral valence. Chronic worry is not so much a symptom or a negative coping style like it is so often interpreted in Western psychology and psychiatry but instead a burden one bears in accordance to any number of social roles a person occupies at any given time. Before I further examine worrying as it relates to being a good person, a discussion of sentiment (*tình cảm*) is in order.

Tình cảm

Bác Lan, 57, was one of the first people I got to know reasonably well during my fieldwork. She lived on a busy street in downtown Ho Chi Minh City in a cramped but large house that once belonged to her well-to-do father. It had been split into three separate homes after 1975 so that two of them could be sold. I often stopped by to visit in part because I found her kitchen to be so homey, despite the fluorescent lighting and ceramic tile surfaces typical of contemporary Vietnamese houses. The kitchen and dining area turned out to be designed by an architect who had studied in the United States, and I was saddened to learn that after my fieldwork that the kitchen, along with the ground floor of the two adjacent houses, were re-conjoined and renovated to outfit an automobile showroom. The new downstairs tenants paid each of their three landlords 2,000USD per month in rent. Many women near her age who could afford to had already retired, but for the sake of her part-time work for a tourism company that seemed more like a hobby than a job Bác Lan still insisted on improving her English, which—like many people of her generation and upbringing—featured a heavy French accent. The following exchange, in which she was describing a long-ago trip to Belgium to visit her sister, comes from one of our impromptu English lessons:

AT: What do you remember about Europe?
BL: The houses [buildings] are very tall. The streets are very long, very wide. Everything is beautiful and clean.
AT: What about the people?
BL: *Cái suy nghĩ là gì, con?* (How do you say "suy nghĩ"?)
AT: Their thinking. Or mentality.
BL: Ah, *mentalité.* Their *mentalité* is real [pragmatic[23]]. They think about money and work.
AT: What do Vietnamese people think about?
BL: Emotion.
AT: "Emotion" *bằng tiếng Việt là gi?* (What is "emotion" in Vietnamese?)
BL: *Tình cảm.*
AT: *Thế à*? (Is that so?)

Tình cảm, as mentioned in chapter 2, is a core concept through which people in Vietnam organize their lives and their identities. It has been theorized previously as emotion or feelings (Rydstrøm 2003, Gammeltoft 1999), family feelings (Leshkowich), and care and concern (Shohet 2010). Although such conceptualizations certainly overlap, I propose understanding *tình cảm* through the lens of sentiment to explore how emotion and personhood are used to define each other in Vietnam because it emphasizes intersubjectivity. Although *tình cảm* can be used to refer broadly to the emotions, it is primarily described in terms of an emotional attachment to someone. A 47 year old woman explained to me that while the English language only had the word "love," Vietnamese had two separate words: *tình yêu* (romantic love) and *tình cảm* (affection, platonic love). Moreover, in everyday speech, *tình cảm* can be used somewhat synonymously with compassion/affection/pity (*tình thương*).

People often expressed to me the centrality of everyday manners and rituals to Vietnamese as a means to express *tình cảm*. These practices demonstrate that one knows

[23] The word*s* for "real" or "realistic" and "practical" or "pragmatic" are the same in Vietnamese: *thực tế*.

proper decorum across a wide range of situations. Thus, to show *tình cảm* requires an intimate understanding of a range of virtues, including respect (*kính*), self-denial (*nhường*), and knowing how to address (*xưng hô*) others, in order to navigate the melee of social interactions (Shohet 2010, Rydstrøm 2003). These actions are critical to smooth, non-confrontational sociality because they foster a constant attention, accommodation, and adjustment to others. Foregrounding the social and intersubjective quality of *tình cảm*, Rydstrøm argues that villagers in Vietnam's Red River Delta are not concerned with the authenticity of the emotions so long as they are expressed in a contextually-appropriate manner. However, the people I knew in Ho Chi Minh City often questioned the sincerity of someone's *tình cảm*. This may indeed reflect a greater degree of influence from Western preoccupations with personal and emotional authenticity (Cf. Hochschild 1983), but I suspect Rydstrøm's over-emphasis on the social fact of *tình cảm* comes at the expense of its subjectivizing powers.

Tình cảm starts in the family, with children being socialized into feelings of indebtedness and gratitude towards their parents (Rydstrøm 2003, Shohet 2010). To have *tình cảm* for someone puts an individual in a relationship marked by concern for their well-being. This indicates their virtue as someone who is kind (*thực tế*), conscientiousness (*có lương tâm*), and loyal/devoted (*trung thuỷ*) to their family and friends. However, this selflessness can easily be taken advantage of. The paragon of "blind sentiment" (*quảng mù tình cảm*) is a woman who sacrifices endlessly to support her lazy and unscrupulous husband even though he does nothing to contribute to her welfare. This often comes at the expense of her own health and, especially if she resorts to borrowing money from her relatives, her relationships with her kin. People living

according to sentiment (*căn cớ tình cảm*) may well realize they are being manipulated (*lôi kéo*) but feel powerless to stand up for themselves and are willing to sacrifice because of their affection.

Although people valorized *tình cảm* as an abstract (*trừu tượng*) and spiritual (*tinh thần*) phenomenon, it arises perhaps most glaringly in economic matters, especially when people borrow money from each other. For example, a man who had borrowed money from his ex-girlfriend while they were still dating but had not paid her back told her that he owed her money, not *tình cảm*. Although his assertion separated *tình cảm* from money, that he expressed it in an idiom of debt attests to the inescapability from the moral economy of sentiment. A refusal to lend someone money can be read as a lack of affection or respect as well as a lack of *tình cảm* on the lender's part. Thus, many people lend money to their consociates despite reservations that the monetary debt will not be repaid in due time or at all. This requires them to strategically engineer interactions to be paid back without the borrower realizing what they are doing (or at least without the borrower having enough explicit evidence to accuse them of doing so). For example, a common situation arises when a friend who owes money will be implicitly expected to pick up the tab at restaurants as a sign of goodwill that the debt will be paid. While *tình cảm* is certainly valued, having too much of it and thus feeling too much (or not strategically enough) for people is looked down upon, especially for men who need to have an "agile brain" (*đầu ốc nhanh nhẹn*), meaning that they can think "quick on their feet," in the dangerous sphere outside of the domestic home to be the "pillars of the family" (*trụ cột gia đình*). I will return to a discussion of gender and sentiment, but first I examine the self-conscious use of *tình cảm* as an identity construct.

Identifying *tình cảm*

Tình cảm is a core concept through which people structure a number of identities: as Vietnamese, as northerners or southerners, and as human. First, many people reported that it was the most important aspect of Vietnamese culture. Its use in a national identity is evident in Bác Lan's comparison between Westerners and Vietnamese. Whereas people in the West are exoticized as wholly individualistic and independent, most Vietnamese understand themselves to be communally-oriented and dependent on one another. Moreover, many of the Vietnamese researchers I met during my fieldwork were confused that I was conducting a study on *tình cảm* in Ho Chi Minh City and suggested I interview people in rural areas to get the most useful data.

Discourses of the nation portray cosmopolitan, urban, and modern Ho Chi Minh City as somehow less Vietnamese than the traditional countryside or even the much older and more "cultured" cities of Hanoi and Huế (Cf. Harms 2011). This is evident in Bác Lan's descriptions of Western and Vietnamese mentalities as well as in the maxim that Vietnam is "a poor country but rich in spirit" (*nước nghèo, giàu tình cảm*). Others linked the *tình cảm* as a core value of Vietnamese society with its relative lack of economic development and pervasive corruption.

> The Vietnamese are actually a people that live mainly through sentiment so people decide things based on sentiment alone. There aren't any principles (*nguyên tắc*). Principles are principles. If you meet my demands and make me satisfied (*thỏa mãn lòng tôi*), then it's OK. It's just like that. You just have to make the other person happy… Overseas, people are part of a society that has developed over 100 years already… They've gone through stages (*giai đoạn*) like what we [in Vietnam] are going through now. People understand that you have to have principles in life, and that you can't do everything according to sentiment. Vietnam is still not familiar with these principles because we've had this thinking that's been passed

> down from grandfather to father (*ý thức hệ từ đời ông đời cha*). It's like it's in our genes now.
>
> Mai, 40, female

Conversely, many argued that *tình cảm* had the most important role in society because it provided the moral and emotional motivation for people to live cooperatively in the first place. Societies with low levels of *tình cảm* had members prone to loneliness (*cô độc*). Moreover, I was often encouraged (sometimes facetiously but usually not) to marry a Vietnamese woman because their *tình cảm* made them caring and loving wives. According Trâm (who will be discussed at length in chapter 5), that traditional Vietnamese wives were more willing to deny their own interests than their modern American counterparts[24] were, again, an indication of their greater *tình cảm*.[25]

People repeatedly verbalized variations of this dichotomy to me, but this sense of cultural and national identity built around sentiment is also felt in the body. For example, Trâm also told me about a trip she had taken to Nha Trang, a popular coastal tourist destination. She and her friends had struck up a casual conversation at an outdoor ice cream parlor with a group of Canadian tourists, who split the bill among themselves as they left. Trâm wondered as to why people from a wealthy nation like Canada would not simply pay for each other's ice cream, but she was also curious about her visceral reaction merely described as an intense feeling of "dislike" (*không thích*) in her gut upon witnessing it. To her, the calculation required of splitting the bill not only was not worth

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[24] On a few occasions, men told me the three good things a Vietnamese man wants: to live in a French house (villa), to eat Chinese food, and to have a Japanese wife. The Japanese wife references the stereotype of a submissive geisha. I once heard this joke turned on its head with the three bad things: to live in a stilt house (in the central highlands), to eat Vietnamese food, and to have an American wife.

[25] As I discuss in chapter 5, it is only recently that people in Vietnam have come to expect emotional phenomena to be the foundation of marriage. Whereas a wife's submission was once understood in terms of Confucian hierarchical gender roles in the family, it is increasingly being viewed as an expression of a wife's love for her husband and family. Thus, notions of romantic love, which in Vietnam is often conceived of as a modern phenomenon, are being used to reinforce a traditional patriarchy (Soucy 2001).

the effort but came across as a standardized form of selfishness under the guise of individualism (*chủ nghĩa cá nhân*).

Second, variations in *tình cảm* are used to demarcate regional differences within Vietnam. Scholars have long noted the myriad permutations of social structure and family organization across the country's villages and cities. Because *tình cảm* is rooted in the specificities of various relationships, then it manifests differently from locale to locale. These regional distinctions are most marked in discussions of Northern and Southern Vietnamese. The north has traditionally been associated with a strong Chinese influence, and its more rigid and elaborate kinship system stems from a heritage of Confucianism. For example, various institutions such as the patrilineage altar (*nhà thờ họ*) or the communal hall (*đình*) are more common in the north than the south. On the other hand, Vietnam's south is often assumed to bear more classically "Southeast Asian" traits, such as a bilateral/cognatic lineage, and has a looser (albeit still patrilineal) kinship structure (Luong 1984, 1989). Thus, in the south, matrilineal aunts, close friends of mothers, or mothers of close friends are sometimes addressed as "mother" (*mẹ, má*) by children. Moreover, while the northern term for cousin (*anh chị em họ*) translates roughly as "lineage siblings," the southern term (*anh chị em bạn dì*) translates as "siblings who are friends through the maternal aunt," which emphasizes the emotional bonds between the cousins and the continued contact with the mother and her sisters.[26]

Overall, the sentimental bonds between southerners is portrayed by both northerners and southerners as more fluid and ephemeral, while the bonds between

[26] Marriage in the north often, though not always, initiates a greater break in the bride's contact with her natal family than in the country's central and southern regions.

northerners is considered more formal and permanent. For example, the term of endearment *cưng* (the equivalent of "honey" or "sweetie") is reserved for romantic partners in the north but can be applied more widely, especially by older women, in the south. These observations of northerners and southerners feed into their stereotypes of each other. Northerners consider southerners to have too much *tình cảm* to be as diligent and frugal as they fancied themselves. Meanwhile, southerners stereotyped northerner's relative lack of *tình cảm* as reasons for their untrustworthiness and inability to take the risks in building the necessary long-term relationships needed to compete in the market economy.

Third, *tình cảm* is not only a defining feature of being Vietnamese but can alternately[27] be cited as a defining feature of being human. This draws on understandings of *tình cảm* as a general category for feelings insofar as emotions are not regularly projected onto animals, including beloved pets. In addition, because *tình cảm* is frequently equated with compassion (*tình thương*) and sympathy/empathy (*thông cảm*), sentiment is foundational to one's humanity. For example, the most vehement argument I heard during my fieldwork involved a tearful accusation by my landlady to her oldest son Khánh that he had no *tình cảm* like a human being would. She was referencing Khánh's display of stoicism when the household's newest puppy died in an accident a few weeks prior while he was supposed to be watching it. It was clear (to me at least) that he felt badly over the turn of events, but the apparent lack of remorse may have been a way to avoid admitting his culpability, either to his family (with whom he was already on

[27] These complementary models of sentiment do not always overlap. That is, this feature of *tình cảm* would not necessarily be used to make the point that Vietnamese were somehow more human than non-Vietnamese.

tenuous terms) or to himself. Matters of sentiment and morality even extend to trivial affairs as well:

> People with sentiment are different than those without. For example, if I don't have any feelings about a friend then it doesn't create any sentiment. If you want to have sentiment, you have to have love, and vice versa. Insensitivity (or "feelinglessness") (*vô cảm*) is the heart-mind (*cái tâm*) of a person who sees something like a baby: you have to have sentiment, know how to love it, see its face laugh or cry, find it lovable (*dễ thương*); you have a connection to it right away (*thiện cảm ngay*). Sentiment happens right away. An insensitive person doesn't have any of those emotions with the baby. They see it as normal. They don't have a heart. Their emotions are very dry and hardened (*khô cứng*) in collectives (*tập thể*) and communities (*cộng đồng*). The heart decides everything. If I think correctly, then I'll do correctly. If I think mistakenly, then I'll make mistakes…
>
> Bác Thiên, 70, male

Worry as a moral sentiment

The study of suffering has enriched anthropological theory by re-examining the relationship between shared cultural knowledge and personal experience (Das et al. 2000). Within this literature, subjectivity has become an integral site for exploring how suffering is articulated in meaningful and moral ways. Buddhist notions of merit (*công*) were traditionally acquired by performing good deeds without an expectation of reciprocity. Kate Jellema (2005) argues that revolutionary and socialist politics re-oriented merit towards suffering for the nation. While in domestic arenas it typically refers to yielding one's own interests (Shohet 2010), sacrifice (*hy sinh*) in state discourse refers to soldiers dying on the battlefield or to mothers whose sons became martyrs (*liệt sĩ*) to the revolution (Kwon 2008, McElwee 2005, Tai 2001). Vietnam's "valorization of

suffering" (Jellema 2005) and "cult of melancholy" (Nash and Nguyen 1995) play an integral role in the construction of moral personhood.

In its most extreme forms, anxiety can unsettle the most taken-for-granted assumptions people hold about the world and unmoor the foundations of the self. It is for this reason that thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard (1981) and Julia Kristeva (1982) have described various forms of anxiety as so bewildering that it destroys people's lifeworlds by corrupting both meaning and the means to make meaning themselves. However, the Vietnamese cultural model of worry articulates it as a moral experience by providing a framework within which anxiety is made meaningful as a reflection of one's devotion, care, and sacrifice to others. In other words, the (negatively-valued) existential suffering of *worrying about something* becomes a moral sentiment when it is understood as *worrying about someone*.

Not only is worrying about someone evidence of proper *tình cảm* and genuine concern, it also provides further avenues of demonstrating *tình cảm*. It provides much of the subtext of everyday conversation because of its unknowable character, which is underscored with the Sino-Vietnamese proverb "*Họa hổ họa bì nan họa cốt. Tri nhân, tri diện, bất tri tâm*" (Draw the tiger, draw its skin, but not its bones. Know the person, know the face, but not the heart). As one of my Vietnamese language tutors explained to me, there are two elements of *tình cảm*: gifting (*quà*) and inquiring (*hỏi thăm*), the latter of which is understood as more relevant to worry. (However, the act of gifting may be a concretized means of reinforcing *hỏi thăm*, which can be considered insufficient if not accompanied by needed material or instrumental support.) Because a person's true nature is difficult to ascertain, an ongoing flow of communication (*giao tiếp*) and conversation

with someone is sought after to ascertain whether or not they can be trusted. Oftentimes it seemed to me that conversation was made principally for conversation's sake. However, a steady exchange strengthens social bonds as well as conveys information. Sharing in the joys and sorrows (*vui buồn*) of others is the grist of much of Vietnamese social life. Inquiries with one's interlocutors are appreciated, and inquiries about a third party are often relayed to them. Asking someone to send their respects to a third party is not a mere formality or pleasantry as it is expected that those respects will be relayed. Also, the frequent act of wishing (*chúc*) people things such as luck, a safe journey, or a fun weekend is taken seriously.

While overtly worrying for someone in a vulnerable position in the United States implies that the object of worry is not self-sufficient, doing so in Vietnam is generally not frowned upon since people readily acknowledge their dependence on others. This sentiment is most clearly enacted in mourning. Death in a household occasions numerous visitors, however tangentially connected to the deceased in life, to share the sorrow (*chia buồn*) with the family. (Indeed, the standard refrain to a mourner is "Let me share in your sorrow.") In this context, "sharing" can also be translated as "dividing" or "distributing," and confiding with others is supposed to have a palliative effect on the mourners. Sickness, even if fairly minor, also draws attention from others. Again, compared to the United States, there is less cultural prerogative to "power through" an illness episode, and people readily adopt a "sick role" that puts into motion a host of care-taking actions from others that are seen as moral obligations. For example, my friend Cường, who will be discussed in chapter 5, laughed to himself at his cousin, with whom he was living in Ho Chi Minh City, for calling his mother "like a baby" to tell her he was ill. Quickly tiring of

his demands, Cường eventually stopped making orange juice for him but was roundly scolded by his mother a few days later for not taking care of his own "flesh and blood" (*ruột thịt*).

On the other hand, endurance (*chịu đựng*) is a testament not only to one's personal mettle but also to the strength of one's attachment to others. To grin and bear one's unfortunate lot in life is an act of compassion because open complaints can disrupt harmonious relationships or complicate implicit tensions within a family (Gammeltoft 1999). Moreover, silent endurance avoids bothering (*phiền*) others or making them feel sad (*buồn*) or worried, especially if the difficulties that are worth bearing without complaint are considered insurmountable. In general, ineffective complaints over common trials are seen as whining and indicative of one's weak (moral) character and, by extension, the poor teaching[28] received from one's family. In particular, reacting to interpersonal conflicts with open hostility can create more problems than it solves in a hierarchical milieu in which the dictates and terms of a social elder has more leverage than an "objective" rationale.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, rumination is discouraged because of the harmful health effects of over-thinking, and people exhort others to "forget" their worries if possible. This coincides with the commonly held notion that putting on a happy face will eventually lead to if not genuine happiness then at least some modicum of it, which is more desirable than none at all, however authentic it is. Furthermore, the ideal form of happiness (*hạnh phúc*) emphasizes an intersubjective kind of family harmony, with every

[28] Two of the most bitter insults to level at someone are to accuse them of having "lost their teaching" (*mất dậy*) or to call them a "child from a house with no education" (*con nhà vô giáo dục*) because it implies a immoral and uncivil family background.

person performing various obligations in accordance to social roles (Pettus 2003, Rydstrøm 2003). Children should always worry about their parents' health, do their share of household chores, and obey their parents. Fathers' anxieties involved providing for their families. Mothers are saddled with the double burden of having to care for both their natal family and their husband's family. Thus, there is not only pressure to endure one's suffering without complaint but also to be happy oneself so as not to make others worry. An encounter I witnessed at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital (see chapter 4) is instructive. A woman brought in her teenaged daughter, a little person, to see a psychiatrist. When he asked the patient if she wanted to die in the course of the diagnostic interview, she said yes through an embarrassed smile. As the doctor went through his notes at the conclusion of the interview, her mother told her not to be sad anymore so that she would not have to worry. This "guilt trip" implied the daughter's filial shortcomings but emphasized her mother's love and support and their mutual contributions to each other's individual happiness. Despite the mother's claim that she did not want to worry, a happy family requires that members worry and care for each other.

Women worriers

Despite the large number of depictions of Vietnamese women as valiant warriors (from the mythical Trưng sisters to infamous Madame Nhu), most people concur that women's social vulnerabilities make them prone to worry about the future more than men. The disproportionate burden of worries that women bear in Vietnamese society stem from several sources, including a Confucian legacy of patriarchal authority,

patrilocal residence patterns that place new brides into their husbands' households, the neoliberal renewal of the petty commercial trading that is traditionally seen as an extension of women's domestic prowess (Pettus 2003), high rates of domestic violence (Horton and Rydstrom 2011), and stricter moral standards for women (Rydstrøm 2003, Gammeltoft 1999), among others. I will not delve further into the causes of women's worries here, instead focusing on the attitudes behind the notion of the woman worrier.

Many of the reasons women are expected to worry more than men are tied to *tình cảm*. Women are considered to be the more conventionally "emotional" of the genders in Vietnam, and their supposedly natural sensitivity predisposes them to care for and worry about others. Women are also said to care more about others because they simply "talk a lot" (*nói nhiều*), suggesting that the content of women's conversations with each other (which tend to be about other people that they know in common, while men's conversations often drift towards topics such as business dealings or sports), if not causing their worry, at least gives them a steady stream of things to worry about.

According to a yin-yang (*âm-dương*) cosmology of gender, masculinity and femininity are complementary to each other. One of the most important gender binaries is that men are associated with the outside world while women are associated with the internal or domestic one. Coupled with the masculine/dynamic and feminine/passive binary, women worry more because they are less confident and resolute than men. This natural caution and deliberation translates into a concern with the petty details of everyday life.[29] For example, when settling a restaurant bill, servers often give the bill to

[29] McGrath (2008) and Tang (2004) have noted the link the feminization of everyday life in post-socialist China.

a man, who then hands it to his female partner for her to re-calculate the total while he gathers the appropriate sum of money from his wallet. This is predicated on her being able to quickly do mental arithmetic, remember every dish that was ordered, and remember how much each dish roughly cost. An attention to detail lends itself to a propensity to worry since monitoring all of them (as opposed to focusing on the "big picture") exerts a significant amount of mental resources and highlights one's own contingency on them.

Differences in worrying behavior between men and women can become so essentialized that for some people they become a matter of biology. For example, Trâm, a 37 year old woman who will be discussed at length in chapter 5, echoed a commonly held assumption that human nature was in-born, not the product of how people are socialized or one's past life experiences.[30] According to her, people grew up knowing how to worry and care (*chăm lo*) for the family as adults as a matter of their instincts (*bản năng*) and nature (*bản tính*). Women expressed this by taking care of people's health, doing housework, and cooking; men did so by going out into the world and earning a living from it. Moreover, women were more considerate (*quan tâm*) because they were naturally more talkative. Here, consideration does not refer just to attending to others but also to inquire about them (either directly to them or to third parties) and express concern through a series of mundane tasks such as asking someone if they had eaten yet or telling someone to text when they had arrived home safely.

[30] This idea will have significant implications for her own marriage and dissatisfactions with her husband, which will be discussed later.

Mothers in particular are valorized for their sacrifice (Tai 2001). While fathers are certainly respected, it is mothers who are the focal point of the family's emotional attachment, and it is no secret that most people love their mothers more than their fathers. Thus, the burden that is placed on wives as a result of patrilineal marriage and residence patterns is both justified and accepted by a feminine ethic of sacrifice (Shohet 2010, Leshkowich 2006). Many women refuse to leave unhappy marriages out of pity for their children, who would be more economically vulnerable without a father's support and stigmatized without a father's "teaching" and civilizing influence (Gammeltoft 1999, Pettus 2003).

Rydstrøm (2003) argues that even though all people are expected to display proper sentiment, *tình cảm* is the province primarily of women. According to her, women are required to foster numerous intimate relationships for emotional and instrumental support on account of their not being able to rely on the support of their husband's family. However, as I have discussed previously, *tình cảm* is also appropriately expressed in ritual action and maintaining their relationships with their extended family members, both of which are domains of behavior traditionally associated with Confucian masculinity. For example, some of the men that I spoke with argued that men care (*quan tâm*) more than women, whom they considered weaker and in greater need of being taken care of. Thus, *tình cảm* being the province of both genders, albeit in very different ways, is a more tenable characterization of its gendered qualities. That being said, men's traditional support from the patriline is more secure, or at least more formalized, than women's broader and more flexible networks of support.

What does worry do?

Thinking about worry as a social practice has a particular resonance in Vietnam for two reasons. First, emotions are discussed in behavioral terms more than in interior or sensory terms, although as described in the previous chapter this may be changing. Syntactically, emotion terms are used often as verbs such that the statement "He is angry" in Vietnamese would be rendered as "Anh ấy giận" (He angers). Thus, in Vietnam one gets the sense that people *do* their emotions as much as *feel* them.[31] When I elicited examples of different emotions, many respondents offered "to laugh" (*cười*) or "to cry" (*khóc*). These respondents tended to be poorer and less educated than those who could list "higher order" feelings such as "stress" (*strés*) or "maudlin" (*ướt át*), and there was debate among the researchers at my host institute whether laughing or crying were "correct" emotions or not. Regardless, for many Vietnamese people, the phenomenology of an emotion is indivisible from its expression. This unison of the embodiment and externalization of affect stands in contrast to the Western ethnopsychology of the emotion that equates it with subjectivity (Lutz 1998).

Second, when asked to reflect on the nature of worry, people generally focused on its cognitive and affective aspects. However, worry most often comes up in conversation as a form of behavior. Its occurrence in natural conversation most often steers towards people "doing" worry;[32] thus, its external manifestation as a social practice is as important as its cognitive-affective elements. With an emphasis on worrying as

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[31] While it the overt performance of emotion is certainly important in this context, I would not argue that people do not speculate about other people's emotions if they are not displayed, as is often found in theories of mind in the Pacific (Hollan and Throop 2011).

[32] In many languages, "to worry" is more readily rendered as a verb than other emotions (Lera Boroditsky, personal communication; Cf. Roland and Jurafsky 2002).

something that is done in the arena of behavior, anxiety is seldom associated with personality traits (see above). For example, people seldom refer to an "anxious person." Rather, this would be rendered as someone who is anxious a lot (*người lo âu nhiều*) or a person who often worries (*người hay lo*). When invoked as an action, worry typically refers to what would be called in English as taking care of something (*lo việc/chuyện*) or taking care of someone (*lo cho ai*). The sorts of behaviors involved are often things done in the service of someone's basic needs, such as cooking, cleaning, paying the bills, and various other errands of everyday life. Thus, a person is deemed independent when they know how to worry for themselves (*biết tự lo*). However, before I describe how worry is articulated through practice in Vietnam, I will briefly discuss how scholars have begun to theorize emotion as a form of social action.

Practice-based theories of emotion

Before the emotional turn in the social sciences, scholars framed issues of behavior as rational and strategic acts designed to achieve a sensible goal. Against claims of people's inherently impulsive or irrational character, rational-actor models entailed ignoring emotion altogether from research into everyday politics. In opposition to the preponderance of rational-actor theory in the social sciences, social constructionists understood emotion in overly cognitive terms. For example, Michelle Rosaldo (1983, 1984) developed a theory of the self that problematized the distinction between thought and feeling and toward the idea of emotions as "embodied thoughts" since they involve an interpretation, judgment, or evaluation. Thus, emotions are "no less cultural and no

more private than beliefs" (Rosaldo 1984, 141). This view of emotion privileges cognitivist views of emotion that reproduce Cartesian mentalist constructions.

In developing a framework for thinking about the bodily and social as well as the rational and irrational nature of emotion together, scholars have increasingly turned to the work of Pierre Bourdieu to theorize emotion as a form of social practice and action. In turn, these practices are emplaced in the context of power structures to examine how everyday praxis reproduces sociopolitical hierarchies. Practices offer theorists an entree into how the ways that people inhabit their bodies and their lifeworlds perpetuate a habitus, which Bourdieu (1977) defined as socially-constituted and commonsense dispositions that give members of a social group a preconscious hexis or orientation to action. The habitus encompasses the dialectical relationship between structure and practice. Social structures cannot exist apart from human practice, which in turn cannot be reduced to the independent actions of the rational actor.

The insights from practice-centered approaches have been used fruitfully to examine emotions at the nexus of personal subjectivity and political subjection. For example, Deborah Gould (2009) defines the "emotional habitus" as the prevailing ways of feeling and emotion and the embodied understandings and norms about emotional experience and expression.[33] Thus, emotion is located not merely within individual biology or discourses but instead primarily in the realm of practice. In her study of African American families with terminally ill children in Los Angeles, Cheryl Mattingly argues that hope is not just a cognitive schema inside people's heads but also "politically

[33] Gould's formulation of the emotional habitus highlights the embodied practices that make up what Gregory Bateson (1958) termed "ethos," the systematized emotional milieu of a society.

charged dramas that shape the rhythms of activity and the experiences and expectations of participants" (2010, 43).

The practice of worry

In their theorization of anxiety as a social practice, Jackson and Everts (2010) distinguish between individual anxieties and anxiety as a social condition, using practice theory to argue that social anxieties can be understood as events that create specific subjects and objects, become "framed" by different communities of practice and are institutionalized to varying degrees. According to them, anxieties have social resonance insofar as they are shared and result in an action by groups of people. Moreover, social anxieties signify a rupture in everyday life when the "wholesome experience of one's being in the world collapses into subjects and objects of anxiety: that is, 'decomposed'" (2798). As a result, efforts are made to destroy both anxiety's subjects and objects in an attempt to eliminate anxiety altogether. Jackson and Everts give an example of the H5N1 virus (or bird flu) pandemic, which involved the destruction of the objects of anxiety—in this case, the virus and the birds—so that people could no longer be the subjects of anxiety. Once "social anxieties" become institutionalized as a set of policies and practices that monitor and intervene in the objects and subjects of anxiety, they can develop and evolve independently from individual fears.

By contrast, my conceptualization of anxiety as a social practice does not dichotomize individual and social anxieties. Rather, it is based on the assumption that individuals and their social contexts are mutually implicated in each other. Moreover, Jackson and Everts' claim that anxieties take on a social character when they are shared

and acted upon by groups of people, including their criteria for what defines a social group or a form of action, is unclear. As I have discussed in this chapter, anxiety and worry do not just happen to individuals. Instead, they are also moral projects that individuals undertake for the sake of others. While such projects may not be formally instituted, they both influence and are influenced by interconnected discourses and patterns of gender, family, and sentiment. When the dialectical construction of individuals and their social context is taken into account, anxiety does not interrupt the holistic experience of everyday life. Rather, in its Vietnamese constructions, worry is a response to the fragmentary and unpredictable nature of everyday life. Thus, anxiety can be seen as a unifying experience across disparate experiences because individuals can enact themselves as moral persons through worrying for others.

To worry (*lo*) can have more practical, routine meanings that do not have a particularly emotional connotation. In this sense of the word, worry (*lo*) refers to attending to everyday chores and activities (*sinh hoạt*). At first glance, that to "worry" can involve something as mundane and un-worrisome as washing dishes or ironing clothes may seem contradictory. Certainly feeling and sense are involved, but there is some hesitancy in referring to these tasks as emotions themselves. It is tempting to explain this as a colloquial application of an emotion term to a behavior. However, this would reinforce the distinction between internal feeling states and external social action that is rooted in Cartesian dualisms. One of the underlying goals of this dissertation is to extend current understandings of emotion by viewing it as a gradation of behavior.

Examining worrying about and caring for others through the lens of practice theory highlights the skillful performance and practical knowledge of social life. This

approach affirms anxiety as a necessary and normal aspect of the everyday instead of as an exceptional state of individual pathology. Indeed, practice-based frameworks conceptualize the emotional not as an individual possession but as a social practice, demystifying the process by which affect becomes a form of social action. In this light, worry is simultaneously thought, affect, and practice. Cultural conceptions of anxiety prepare individuals to deal with socially constructed threats according to socially sanctioned means of dealing with such treats. In contrast to a Western conception of anxiety as an indication of the individual's worth on account of their own business, industriousness, and importance, the cultural model of anxiety in Vietnam valorizes and moralizes worry as indicative of an individual's moral sentiment enacted in the service of others. Seen in the context of gendered notions of care, endurance, and sacrifice, the models and instances of worry that my participants spoke of were interpreted as distinctively Vietnamese. Worry, I was often told, comes naturally to the Vietnamese, as if the country's tumultuous history had become embedded in its cultural DNA. However, as people's emotional lives are transformed the further away Vietnam gets from its troubled past, so has the cultural model of worry. The next chapter examines how anxiety has become connoted with modernity and indicative of self-interest in addition to self-denial.

Chapter 4

The anxiety of well-being:

Medicalizations of worry in the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital

If chapter 2 highlighted Vietnam's emotional efflorescence in the post-reform era, then this chapter describes its emotional fallout. There is a great deal of hand wringing over the soullessness of contemporary modern life in Ho Chi Minh City. Despite vastly improved standards of living for the majority of residents, people often reported worrying more now than ever before. For example, average income had risen, but it was unclear where it would come from. People complained about being too exhausted at the end of the day to spend quality time with their children. Or there simply were more and diverse things to worry about. This has led to the idea that it is its pervasiveness as an everyday social condition that distinguishes anxiety as a distinctively modern phenomenon.[34]

For example, "strés" had not only entered the lexicon but also was seen as a relatively new phenomenon for ordinary Vietnamese (Le 2005). If I pressed them, people would admit that "stress" was just a new word in addition to *căng thẳng* (which translates better as tense or nervous). This is not the stress, however, of hard labor or physical deprivation but of multi-tasking. "Stres" has become linked to the upwardly mobile, professional, and urban elite. Notions of stress were introduced to Vietnam after *đổi mới*

[34] Notions of modern lifestyles being inherently anxious are certainly not limited to Vietnam. R.R. Willoughby argued that anxiety was the "most prominent mental characteristic of Occidental civilization," citing the higher rates of suicide, functional forms of mental disorder, and divorce in the 20th century West (1935, 498). Moreover, the idea that anxiety is reflected in its cultural environs is common enough in the West, where an emphasis on achievement against the backdrop of modern market society is self-reflexively valorized. For example, in mid-20th century America, the increase in peptic ulcers among men was seen as a "disease of the striving and ambitious men of Western civilization." Anxiety was seen as a function of the needs of men to appear strong, independent, and victorious in a competitive struggle and to repress any needs for dependency. Rollo May argues that the question of how individual competitive success became the chief source of anxiety at the time cannot be answered by definitions of "normality."

reforms eased foreign media restrictions and paved the way for Western pop psychology to be published in newspaper advice columns, women's magazines, and translations of (usually American) self-help books. Although the concept of stress can ostensibly be applied to any number of situations that tax a person's internal resources, in Vietnam it has its closest associations with the modern West.

Table 4.1: Incidence of mental illness in Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City. <http://www.bvtt-tphcm.org.vn/gioi-thieu-benh-vien/210-h-thng-chm-soc-sc-khe-tam-thn-cng-ng-ti-tp-h-chi-minh.html>

Diagnosis	**Vietnam**	**HCMC**
Overall incidence	13-20%	16.1%
Schizophrenia	0.45%	Unknown
Major Depressive Disorder	2.47%	9.5%
Anxiety Disorders	*2.27%*	*6.1%*
Alcohol Abuse	4.68%	1.7%
Autism	0.61%	0.9%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.49%	Unknown

Perhaps the most extreme version of the narrative of modernity's emotional fallout is the link between sweeping social changes and psychiatric problems. Indeed, Ho Chi Minh City has higher rates of mental illness than the rest of Vietnam, and the prevalence of all anxiety disorders in the city is 6.1%, compared with 2.27% for the rest of the country. (See table 4.1.) Academics, doctors, and journalists routinely warn people of this dark side of modernity in various media outlets as part of a national conversation on anxiety and modernization. Is the number of people with mental disorders increasing? And is this increase the result, or even a function, of modernization? In both the Vietnamese discourse of modernity and in the international scholarly literature, mental disorders, especially anxiety disorders, are argued to be the byproduct of modernization (Kadushin 1983, Harpham 1994, Marsella 1998). This is supposedly because

modernization (1) disrupts traditional social patterns and relationships that once had a protective effect, (2) changes the people's lifestyles, and (3) introduces greater uncertainty as society becomes more dynamic. Here, anxiety is construed as an unfortunate but unavoidable result of modernity, which is then naturalized as a necessary evil but ultimately blameless as a a neutral and objective social phenomenon.

Anthropologists writing about psychiatric issues have traditionally focused on the culturally distinctive aspects of mental illness, instead of the forms of psychocultural adaptive strategies of patients with occasional psychotic episodes (Jenkins 1994, Kleinman 1988). To the extent that illness experience enters the medical literature, the focus is exclusively on the classic psychotic symptoms and resulting disability, often at the expense of understanding resilience (Jenkins and Cofresi 1998, Jenkins and Carpenter-Song 2005). Good and Subandi (2004) stress the importance of not essentializing people as patients who are wholly defined by the occasional illness episode under the analysis of researchers. Recent approaches to the study of psychiatric topics in Southeast Asia blur the dichotomies between mental health and mental illness, normal and abnormal behavior, and pathological and everyday experience in order to assess how intertwined they are with one another (Browne 2001; Grayman, Good, and Good 2009). Psychotic illness produces dramatic episodes in the midst of everyday worlds so that there is an interpenetration of the extraordinary into the everyday (Cf. Jenkins 2004).

The focus of this chapter is on two psychiatric diagnoses, neurasthenia and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Neurasthenia is one of the most well-known objects of inquiry within medical anthropology. During the 1980s and 1990s, Arthur Kleinman (1982, 1986, 1988, Kleinman and Kleinman 1991) published a series of articles and

books on its causes and effects in China that would become foundational to the field. Taken together, the anthropological scholarship on neurasthenia at that time focused largely on the problem of translating psychiatric diagnoses across cultures. Central to this endeavor was the demonstration that culture is enacted through processes of social interaction that organize perception, emotion, and coping responses around negotiations of what is most at stake for those involved. Suffering, illness, and health are culturally patterned through local worlds of experience, a process that invokes moral, political, and economic factors to mediate the effects of macrosocial forces in ways that are reflected in cognitive, affective, and physiological changes. The result is the manifestation, exacerbation, and/or alleviation of symptoms. The experience of illness in turn structures and shapes the local world by serving as a vehicle for change in the character of social life for both the sufferer and others with whom he or she regularly interacts. Thus, adequate understanding of the mind-body processes producing psychological and physical distress requires acknowledgement and investigation of the effects of social context.

Whereas the previous chapter focused on a conception of worry that was structured through notions of sentiment, this chapter explores the psychologization/emotionalization of worry and its attendant medicalization. In particular, I am interested in how neurasthenia and GAD articulate and transform the experience of anxiety through their respective ideologies of sentiment and emotion. Moreover, I am also interested in what the conceptual space between them have to say about neoliberalism in Vietnam. In doing so, I triangulate neurasthenic forms and discourses in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, in China at the end of

the 20th century, and in Vietnam at the beginning of the 21st century. I argue that the notion that Vietnam's current historical moment is an "age of anxiety" reflects not so much a quantitative change in anxiety but instead its redefinition as it gets linked to new forms of insecurity. Ideas about and attitudes towards anxiety and its disorders are being reassessed as Vietnam continues to embrace a market-based economy. In examining how normative and pathological forms of worry are being re-coded, I argue that anxiety is embedded in neoliberal forms of modernity as part of a recursive relationship between the self and the larger political economy. Thus, I am conceptualizing the changing patterns of stress, neurasthenia, and generalized anxiety disorder not as anxiety in spite of well-being but instead as the anxiety of well-being.

Global mental health and anxiety disorders

As a matter of global health, the effects of anxiety disorders are sorely overlooked despite high levels of anxiety and stress being strongly associated with negative health outcomes (Andrews, Henderson, and Hall 2001). According to the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS), the lifetime prevalence for GAD is 5.1%, with a current prevalence at 1.6%. The female to male ratio of GAD in the United States is 2:1, and the diagnosis is possibly one of the most common disorders among the elderly. Vietnamese immigrants in the West tend to have higher levels of anxiety and depression than average in their local communities (Steel et al. 2002). Despite this, there is evidence of significant "underutilization" of mental health services (McDonald and Steel 1997, Jenkins et al. 1996). Some 82% of people with GAD reported that their symptoms were associated with

significant impairment, indexed by treatment-seeking behavior or interferences to their lifestyle (Wittchen et al. 1994).

Anxiety disorders often have a hidden impact on social functions, work, personal well-being, and health service utilization (Candilis and Pollack 1997, Friedman 1997, Lewis-Fernandez et al. 2009). Chronic anxiety and stress have been shown to underlie many non-mental health issues as well and can affect people's overall senses of well-being. Thus, anxiety provides an entree into how social structures affect people's well-being. Underlying much of this research is the human stress, or "fight or flight," response as a critical physiological pathway that leads from social environment to individual biology. Feelings such as anger, fear, or disappointment can be understood as a manifestation of an activated stress system. This neurophysical system originated in environments that are radically different from the ones that contemporary humans live in. When it enables an organism's escape from finite dangers, it produces the phsyiological changes needed for fight or flight before returning to a resting state. However, when a perceived threat is more or less continuous and when people experience of a lack of predictability or control, then the stress system may remain engaged so that physical and mental health suffers (Burbank 2011, Brunner and Marmot 1999, Sapolsky 2004).

Mental health beliefs in Vietnam

Theories and ideologies about mental health and illness in Vietnam are linked with beliefs not only about the corporeal body but also the body politic. In light of the tremendous pluralism of all stripes in Vietnam, let alone Southeast Asia, people subscribe to a number of knowledge systems about health issues. There is a recognized plurality of

medical traditions in contemporary Vietnam. Eastern medicine is a term used by Vietnamese to denote "traditional" (Asian) medicine, that is, medicine not from the West. This Orientalism is conceived in explicit opposition to Western medicine (Le 1982). Within the category of eastern medicine are northern medicine (*thuốc bắc*) and southern medicine (*thuốc nam*). The medically plural system of health care in Vietnam presently consists of three dominant traditions: biomedicine or *thuốc tây* from the west, *thuốc bắc* from the north, and *thuốc nam* from the south. Although these three are sufficiently distinct in theory, ideology, and history to be catalogued as distinct traditions from the perspective of some health (or culture) specialists, they merge into each other in the daily practice of health maintenance in the popular sector. No single tradition of healing is immune from another. So while the particular configuration of medicine in Viet Nam's health care sector reflects national and international history in the region, it seems largely absent—at least from the perspective of those in the popular sector—in everyday usage due to the personalized, individualized, and syncretic nature of most treatments (Finer, Thuren, and Tomson 1998, Craig 2002, Monnais, Thompson, and Wahlberg 2012).

One of the core assumptions of Chinese (northern) and Vietnamese (southern) medicine is that the entire universe and the body can be mapped onto one another on material and moral planes by examining the yin and yang as well as the qi or life energy of the patient. The body was a microcosmic reproduction of the natural world. Thus, it was linked to these external forces, with good healing depending on physiological internal functions being attuned to the environment and being alert for disruptive changes in either. Disease was an imbalance between external and internal, physical and moral forces (Marr 1987, Hart, Rajadhon, and Couglin 1965). While Western biomedicine

defines health as the natural and homeostatic state of the body in the absence of illness, thuốc bắc and thuốc nam conceptualize it as a balance of qi and yin/yang energy that can only be attained through continual maintenance. This conception of health as a way of being in the world that requires proper action resonates with much of the humoral qualities of other Southeast Asian medical traditions (e.g. Wikan 1990).

A key difference between thuốc bắc and thuốc nam and biomedicine is that in Chinese and Vietnamese medicine the patient does not need to manifest every symptom in order to be classified into a particular diagnosis. As a result, the flexibility in diagnosis and treatment leads to great variance in whether the psychological or physiological components of a patient's illness becomes emphasized. Unlike biomedicine, all patients are unique because their changing surroundings influence each illness episode. An understanding of the recurring patterns and transformations of nature was instrumental to successful treatment. Since no symptom could be divorced from the season of the year, geographical position, individual horoscope, and emotional temperament of the patient, well-trained healers used the deductive bias of Chinese medicine to make every case unique (Marr 1987). However, similar to biomedicine was the passivity of the patient. Asking patients about their medical histories and specific symptomology was an indication of the inexperience of the physician in diagnosing the patient's pulse and astrology. The physician was considered the expert on the matters and should not have to rely on the perceptions of an untutored patient. Thus, patients had little say in their diagnosis, which is particularly relevant for cases of emotional distress stemming from interpersonal difficulties.

The most psychiatrically relevant aspect of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the lack of emphasis on the differences between psychological and physiological functions. Instead of a psychosomatic model of mental illness as found in biomedicine, a somatopsychic model is favored. Psychological factors may cause a somatic imbalance of *yin* and *yang* and *qi*. Since Confucianism emphasizes maintaining harmony in social relationships, which requires the inhibition and avoidance of emotional expression, and Taoism stresses balance with the environment, Chinese culture legitimizes affective repression as a psychoculturally adaptive coping mechanism. Unlike the Western valuation of catharsis, an excess of emotions is considered pathogenic, so that Chinese direct their efforts to avoid them and fit their emotional states to the natural (i.e., Taoist) and social (i.e., Confucian) milieu (KM Lin 1981). This repression in turn leads to a general pattern of somatizing emotional distress.

Investigations of definitions of the psyche in traditional Vietnamese medicine reveal an absence of a description of psychiatric illnesses independent of physical ones, possibly because of the monistic conceptions on which thuốc bắc and thuốc nam are based. Concrete contextual frameworks in medical theory integrate aspects of the immediate environment, feelings, and physical sensations (Phan, Silove, and Steel 2004). The term for psychiatry, *tâm thần học*, goes further to blur distinctions between science and religion, as *tâm* refers to the heart/soul while *thần* refers to spirits/souls. The psyche is constituted with *qi*/*khí* energy and various central nervous system functions, relating to the general functioning of both the brain and the heart, and describes the overall functional system of life. The seat of the psyche is the heart, so that when it is injured, the psyche manifests as a mental abnormality. These conditions are linked to somatic factors,

especially excessive *âm* that leads to an imbalance of *khí* and body heat. The imbalance subsequently disturbs the psyche, presenting as mental lethargy, irritability, and a weakened pulse. Treatment focuses on minimizing *âm* by strengthening *dương*.

The terms for mental illness are *tâm thần bất ổn* (mental ill-health or instability) or *bệnh tâm thần* (mental illness). Vietnamese refugees in Australia clustered symptoms into five general categories, which have some overlap with biomedical notions of psychiatry. This is potentailly a result of acculturation into Australian culture or a lingering influence of the French. First, *phiền não tâm thần* refers to turmoil in mental health and extreme sadness and was glossed as depression. Second, *lo âu sợ* refers to mental weakness and worry and extreme fear, glossed as anxiety. Third, x*áo trộn tâm thần và thể xác* refers to an imbalance in mental and physical functioning, glossed as somatization. Fourth, *khủng hoảng tâm thần và thể xác* refers to extreme irritation and mental distress, glossed as somatization. Fifth, *loạn thần loạn trí* refers to disturbed thoughts, feelings, and social conduct and madness, glossed as psychosis. These terms entail combining mental and bodily idioms that do not adhere to the particular mind-body dichotomy found in the West. (For example, diagnosing depression involves asking about having dark rings around the eyes or having a heavy heart.)

However, this does not mean that the mind and body are viewed as inextricable in Vietnam. An emphasis on the brain and its ability to govern the rest of the body corresponds to a sharp distinction between the mind/heart and the body/physiology. In everyday life, the body is perceived as a functionally integrated system of finely tuned inner balances, harmonious in health and disharmonious in sickness. It is a hierarchical structure, with the brain as the coordinating center that governs the functioning of all

other organs. The physiology is responsible for the mechanical and automatic functions of the body, while the mind/heart refers to specifically human capacities for compassion, understanding, will, and deliberation. All of these are closely interrelated, even though mental capacities are also distinct from and more positively valued than raw physiological functioning (Gammeltoft 1999, 2001).

Biomedicine in Vietnam

Introduced during the French colonial era, biomedicine typically was only available to a small segment of the Vietnamese population until the 20th century (Ladinsky, Volk, and Robinson 1987). The French formed an urban elite class of Vietnamese professionals, many of who were trained as biomedical physicians. Various public health campaigns and health officials with basic knowledge of biomedical treatment were instituted in villages during the colonial period. While relatively isolated, even rural villages and hamlets are now beginning to receive a wide range of specialized biomedical pharmaceuticals in addition to traditional alternatives (Nguyen et al. 1995, Jowett, Contoyannis, and Vinh 2003, Okumura, Wakai, and Umenai 2002, Bloom 1998). As in other Southeast Asian societies, the introduction of biomedicine or any other official form of healing raises questions of how anthropologists are to define the boundaries of a culture (Techatraisak and Gesler 1989, Tsing 1988, Del Casino 2004). Many techniques of biomedicine introduced in Vietnam are only made meaningful by incorporating them into the cultural logic of local traditions (Wolffers 1995, Cheung, Lau, and Wong 1984, Craig 2000, Le 1982).

Biomedical psychiatry is becoming more popular with increasing modernization throughout much of Southeast Asia. Initially used as a tool to motivate people to embrace modernization, psychiatry has always been tied to state efforts to enforce control over the population (Murphy 1971, Tan 1972). While psychiatric institutions and patterns of thought and treatment across Southeast Asia have been found to be relatively homogenous (Higginbotham and Marsella 1988), their effects on local cultures have often been minimal. This is partly due to the difficulty of economic and physical access for many potential patients (Nguyen, Hunt, and Scott 2005, Dusit 1972, Somasundaram et al. 1999, Tan and Wagner 1971). In Vietnam, a mistrust of psychiatry may have stemmed from animosity towards colonialism (Monnais n.d.); however, given the rapid rate of modernization and acceptance of Westernization as a form of cosmopolitanism among many young Vietnamese, attitudes towards psychiatry may be also changing.

A history of neurasthenia

In 1881, the neurologist George Beard published *American Nervousness*, which put forth "neurasthenia" as a new diagnostic label for a host of psychic and bodily complaints, especially exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, sleep disturbance, and a diffuse array of aches and pains. For him, the condition was a "chronic, functional disease of the nervous system" that was rooted in a degeneration of nerve tissue due to overuse (1881, 115). Symptoms included excessive sensitivity and irritability; headaches; pressure and heaviness of the head; tinnitus; hopelessness; lack of concentrations; anxiety, dizziness; insomnia; poor appetite; dyspepsia; temporary paralysis; palpitations; anhedonia; impotence; and a general fatigue or pain following

excessive toil, worry, or lack of food or rest. Thus, neurasthenia was a disease of neurological functioning, distinct from "insanity." Treatment focused on diet, hygiene, medication, adjustments to rest and work patterns, including changing occupations. Beard proclaimed it a uniquely "American disease" as it was more prevalent in the United States, especially the Northeast, than in Europe. This was due to the pressures of modern society and the swelling numbers of "brain workers" required to maintain it.

In this light, neurasthenia became intimately tied to modernization and the early 20th century politics of nationalism and citizenship. The construction of a neurotic American subject became a simultaneous construction of a modern one. Indeed, Beard's *American Nervousness* is an index of many American ideas, attitudes, assumptions, and prejudices that were rooted in the 19th century that also looked forward to the 20th century. For example, members of the "brain worker" class were considered responsible for keeping the engine of civilization running. Neurasthenics were the unfortunate but necessary result of "modern civilization," which was defined by not only technological innovations but social ones as well, including the mental activity of women and the new civil institutions of American society. Eventually, neurasthenia became a point of national pride for many, which likely fed the enthusiasm with which it was taken up. Beard did not argue in favor of a simplistic, universalizing form of nationalism but instead attempted to characterize a particular society that identified with and was driven by its neurasthenics (T. Lutz 1991). The class, race, and gender biases encoded in patterns of likely sufferers reveal that socially constructed practices and positions determined who, how, and why one became neurasthenic.

Beard's claims about the specific nationality of the diagnosis notwithstanding, phsyicians in Europe quickly incorporated neurasthenia into their medical practice. Its popularity not only spread across the Atlantic but also across social fields, as the logic of the diagnosis provided fertile ground for people to re-imagine relations between themselves and social and political transformations. (Interestingly, the diagnosis' popularity dipped in China after the victory of the Communist Party, which held that it was a disorder produced by capitalism and a problem characteristic of the middle-class.) No single motivation unified these different cultural discourses and practices; instead, a set of various motivations, understandings, and practices drew from neurasthenia. Thus, Campbell (2007) argued that neurasthenia is not so much a single ideological formulation but rather a multivalent narrative told from different social positions.

The source of neurasthenia's value for early 20th century doctors—that it united a broad and contradictory set of symptoms into a single, authoritative diagnosis—became the basis of critiques (Campbell 2007). Neurasthenia fell out of favor with psychiatrists during World War I, partly due to the rise of psychoanalytic perspectives on neurosis and Freud's medicalization of the physician's moral authority independent of the ability to heal the body, though it maintained a hold on the popular imagination for a few more decades. While the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (APA 1952) , i.e., DSM-I, referred to it as a psychophysiologic nervous system reaction, the DSM-II (APA 1968) labeled it as neurasthenic neurosis: a "condition characterized by complaints of chronic weakness, easy fatigability, and sometimes exhaustion. Unlike hysterical neurosis the patient's complaints are genuinely distressing to him and there is no evidence of secondary gain." This definition switched neurasthenia from a

somatopsychic entity to a psychosomatic one. Finally, the DSM-III phased neurasthenia out entirely, signaling its death knell in its native environs. Kleinman (1982) suggests more recent reasons for its demise within Western professional psychiatry lie in its inability to be used to viably construct biological or psychological reality across the transformations of late-20th century psychiatry. However, neurasthenia and neurasthenic discourses continued to flourish in a number of other cultural contexts.

Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital

Despite being centrally located, the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital (*Bệnh viện Tâm thần Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*) still managed to seem like an out of the way place. During my research, all roads leading to it were covered in a thick layer of dust from re-paving large swaths of its surrounding neighborhoods. An environmental safety project funded by the Japanese government partially dredged the Tàu Hủ Channel that ran in front of the hospital grounds so that winds from the south brought in the scent of the polluted Saigon River into the hospital. People supposedly in the know occasionally spoke of imminent plans to move it to an outlying district about an hour's motorbike drive from its current location in order to make room for the neighboring Tropical Hospital. However, no one could provide concrete details about when that would happen or its new address and, as of writing, no re-location has occurred yet.

Offering both in-patient and out-patient services, the psychiatric hospital is crowded with patients, their families, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, administrators, security guards, and the occasional foreigner going for a compulsory psychiatric

evaluation before marrying a Vietnamese national. Looking down from the second floor to the separate in-patient wards for men and women, I could see patients milling about in their pajamas with a family member often by their side in the central commons. The patients' rooms are cramped and reflect the hospital's former incarnation as a prison.

Many of the people who request to be admitted are instead diverted to the Central Psychiatric Hospital II,[35] the largest psychiatric facility in the country and its former colonial asylum, in Biên Hòa, some 36 km from Ho Chi Minh City. In fact, the Ministry of Health had a difficult time convincing people in the hinterlands that provincial clinics were adequately equipped to treat many of their ailments. However, central hospitals were considered superior and worth the trip from the countryside, and the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital continued being "overburdened" with patients. Most patients were from Ho Chi Minh City, but many had traveled from out of the city and invested a great deal of time and money to ensure they would receive what they assumed would be the highest quality care. Psychiatrists complained that city hospitals were needlessly overcrowded because provincial clinics and hospitals were more than able to treat most of the cases. However, these medical pilgrimages attest to how seriously people take health matters.

The hospital's outpatient waiting room was noisy and cramped, made even more so by a renovation project separated from the waiting room by a plastic tarp. Patients and accompanying family members (*người thân*) often jostled for space with each other, making way for nurses criss-crossing the room and, less frequently, police officers

[35] I supplement the data from the psychiatric hospital in Ho Chi Minh City with a few in-patient cases from the Central Psychiatric Hospital II and note them when relevant.

bringing in a floridly psychotic person, often with their hands tied behind their backs or even entirely bound to a board. A security guard stood at the doorway of the examination room and called out the names of the patients when it was their turn to see the psychiatrist. He also guided patients along the different steps to their visit and even clarified people's questions about their health insurance. Occasionally pharmaceutical company representatives, almost always stylishly dressed young women, would visit the clinic to give health workers various drug paraphernalia.[36] Psychiatrists typically spent comparatively little time with their patients, with visits lasting 15-20 minutes to meet demand. Doctors in the outpatient ward usually diagnosed and treated 40-70 patients each day, depending on the day of the week. Mondays and Fridays were busier because many patients would take the day off when going to the hospital to give themselves a long weekend—yet another source of vexation for the doctors in the outpatient clinic.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) in its current form has its origins in a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) sponsored conference at the Sterling Forest Conference Center in 1983.[37] Held only three years after the publication of the DSM-III, the conference proceedings, published in the edited volume *Anxiety and the Anxiety Disorders* (Tuma and Maser 1985), reflects early trends towards the biologization and medicalization of anxiety. That mental disorders could be represented in the DSM-III as a set of discrete, heterogenous diseases rested on the assumption that such disorders

[36] Pens from Zoloft were most common.
[37] See Orr (2006) and Hinton and Good (2010) for the similar origins of panic disorder.

"would ultimately be shown to result from pathologies of structure and function at the level of human neurobiology" (Hinton and Good 2010, 5).

The descriptive and neo-Kraepelinian model of psychiatric classification was intended to be atheoretical but was fundamentally rooted in a paradigm of biological psychiatry that eschewed psychodynamic approaches (Good 1992). The medicalization of American psychiatry shifted the field from a biopsychosocial model of disease to a medical one. The rise of psychoanalytic and psychosocial approaches to mental health that emphasized the unconscious meaning of individual symptoms and the relation between psychological disorders and social and environmental stressors was curtailed. Conceptualizations of anxiety as an expression of unconscious conflict or understandings of mental illness as reactions to life events and circumstances and social conditions were replaced by a language of empiricism.

GAD started as a "catch-all" residual diagnostic category, which is to say that it was only used if criteria for other anxiety disorders were not met. In later iterations of the DSM, it was revised so that its defining feature was chronic worry over an "objectively" unrealistic matter. However, this was removed so its current focus is on excessive, uncontrollable worry about life events with at least 3 of 6 symptoms of negative affect and tension. The DSM-IV (APA 1994) diagnosis is currently organized around six criteria that Orr described as the "styleless style of scientific objectivity and empirical precision" (2006, 224). First, there must be at least six months of "excessive anxiety and worry" about various events and situations. "Excessive" is generally interpreted as significantly more than would be expected for a particular object of worry. Second, the anxiety must be felt as difficult to control. Third, individuals must have three of the

following symptoms for most days over the previous six months: (1) feeling wound-up, tense, or restless, (2) easily becoming fatigued, (3) difficulty concentrating, (4) irritability, (5) significant muscle tension, or (6) difficulty sleeping. Fourth, the above symptoms should not be part of a separate mental disorder. Fifth, the symptoms are responsible for distress and impairment of daily functioning. Sixth, the condition is not the result of a substance or medical issue.

Doctors at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital insisted that they adhered to international diagnostic guidelines like the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), though I am doubtful they could do this in the short time they met with patients. The doctors I spoke with mentioned that anything could ostensibly trigger GAD, which is a nod to the subjective allowances afforded by the later revisions. However, in their own intake interviews with patients, doctors explicitly honed in on family conflicts and financial troubles as potential causes to speed up the process. They would ask patients if they were married (as a proxy for spousal conflicts or, even worse, not even being married), how old their children were (as a proxy for stress over tuition), or if their children were obedient. If a patient were to go into a few minor details, doctors might mutter to me “Vietnamese patients talk a lot.” Treatment centered around psychopharmaceuticals, though doctors sometimes encouraged patients to use the counseling services on the second floor of the hospital. If the patient lived in Ho Chi Minh City, doctors might give them a business card for their private after-hours clinics.

Neurasthenia as a culture bound syndrome

Culture bound syndromes refer to recurring, culturally-specific patterns of abnormal behavior that may or may not correspond to the nosology of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. When viewed as "folk illnesses," they reflect how symptom and society as well as agency and structure are intertwined. Anthropologists have described in great detail the many ways that the folk syndrome known collectively as "nerves" reflect their sociocultural milieu (Finkler 1989, Low 1989). For example, it has been characterized as a culture-bound syndrome (Low 1989), a wide ranging illness category (Jenkins 1988a, 1988b), a folk model of anxiety (Kay and Portillo 1989, Nations et al. 1988), a covert way to express socially unsanctioned emotions (Clark 1989), or a reaction to poverty (Scheper-Hughes 1992).

Kleinman (1986) made the case that the connections between neurasthenia, depression, and pain illuminated poorly understood sectors of both American and Chinese psychiatry and society. The Chinese equivalent of neurasthenia, *shenjing shuairuo* (neurological weakness), is widely recognized and applied by people in the folk and professional sectors of medicine and connotes an illness with vague symptoms due to weakness of the neurological system, the brain, and more generally the body, reflecting the somatopsychic orientation of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in that bodily changes are seen as causing changes in the mental and emotional state of the patient (Lin, Kleinman, and Lin 1981). This concept of neurasthenia integrates TCM theory with biomedicine in a synthesis dominated by a somatopsychic orientation to both. Primary symptoms include bodily fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and a range of gastrointestinal complaints. Neurasthenia is conceived in TCM terms as a decrease in vital energy (*qi*) caused by external and internal factors to the patient's body. These factors are held to

produce changes in the functioning of the five internal organ systems (heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys), leading to a deficiency of *qi* and low bodily resistance. Mental disorders result from an imbalance of the nervous system's excitation and inhibition or the impairment of the nervous system at current working capacity due to excessive environmental pressures, somatic disease, or incorrect attitudes and thoughts.

Taking a cue from Kleinman, this chapter examines the links between neurasthenia and anxiety to explore Vietnamese psychiatry and society. Lutz (1991) argues that individual appropriations of neurasthenia had a variety of personal motivations and personal outcomes, but in aggregate they led to a set of social causes and effects. The patients I spoke with in the Ho Chi Minh Psychiatric Hospital did not always agree with their doctors. When I asked them what brought them to the hospital that day, patients typically listed their symptoms. And when I asked them what diagnosis they had just been given, only a handful reported GAD. Instead, most talked about something else entirely: *suy nhược thần kinh*, which translates most directly as "nervous/neurological degeneration" but is better glossed as neurasthenia. I am unsure how the concept of neurasthenia came to Vietnam in the first place. Given its low incidence in epidemiologic studies of the overseas Vietnamese population and its current ubiquity within Vietnam, I suspect scientists and physicians trained in the Soviet Union after Vietnam's reunification in 1975 played a substantial role in its cultural transmission.

Symptoms

The relation of local social worlds and the larger forces that animate them to bodily symptoms is revealed in a number of ways in the explanatory models. The lived

experience of bodily symptoms can be interpreted as an indirect means to communicate individual and collective distress. The ways that people explained the cause of their conditions tended to focus on the stresses of family and work life that manifested in small moments but then exacerbated into the states that they presented. For example, Kleinman interpreted much of the dysthymia of neurasthenic patients in China against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution. Kleinman described a China still reeling from the (then somewhat recent) traumas of the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, etc. On the other hand, my research took place in a Vietnam that had gained an uneasy distance from the past. In my interviews, only one patient—a woman in her late 50s—traced her emotional distress back to Vietnam's turbulent past, in this case, the immediate post-war period. (She also mentioned having a sister who is still in a psychiatric institute after being forcibly taken to a farming collective outside Ho Chi Minh City during the post-war period.)

Core symptoms of neurasthenia in Vietnam were insomnia, exhaustion/tiredness, and headaches along with body aches and loss of appetite. More psychologically-oriented complaints included difficulty concentrating, stress and nervousness, constant worry, and racing and disordered thought processes. Such labels shaped the quality of the experience of neurasthenia into a bodily experience, as opposed to the intrapsychic and existential experience of depression in Western cultures. While biomedical diagnoses of anxiety and depression often include physiological symptoms, the patients that I interviewed

foregrounded these symptoms over their psychological ones. Psychic distress was frequently referred to in terms of a physical malady.[38]

Insomnia

The most commonly reported symptom was insomnia (*mất ngủ*) or unsound sleep (*ngủ không ngon*, lit. non-delicious sleep). A significant proportion of patients who did not receive diagnoses from the psychiatrists had come to the hospital to seek treatment for their insomnia. Patients described not being able to fall asleep or only being able to fall asleep for a few hours before waking up again (without falling back asleep). Others complained that they felt no rest from what sleep they did manage to get. Most patients had struggled with insomnia for years before seeking treatment because they were afraid of sleeping pills. Some patients tried to get back to sleep by watching television or drinking a beer in order to go back to bed. This was often the most maddening of the symptoms that patients presented.

Many patients complained that they were unable to sleep because they could not stop thinking about any number of their preoccupations, which tended to fall into two categories: finances and family conflicts. A subset of patients also complained that their thoughts were disorganized, with topics and images rapidly and incoherently cycling through their attention. Regardless of the degree of organization of the thought processes,

[38] Similarly, Chinese physicians and laypersons alike used *shenjing shuairuo* to designate a set of vague and variable symptoms due to a weakness of the nervous system, in which fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and a range of gastrointestinal complaints. In Hong Kong, the most common symptoms were tiredness, pains and aches, and gastrointestinal and cardiovascular complaints (Cheung et al. 1981). The primary somatic complaints were sleep disturbance, tiredness/malaise, headache, dizziness, menopausal complaints, abdominal pain, anorexia, weakness, palpitation, fearfulness, and epigastric pain. The central nervous system was the most frequently cited source of the symptoms. Most relevant to this chapter, patients were aware of a depressed or anxious mood, but most did not present emotional distress as their primary complaint.

patients found it difficult to control their thoughts. As discussed in chapter 3, calm and orderly thought processes are ideal and signify maturity and control. However, patients did exhibit strong desires to alter the nature of their thinking, focusing instead of a solution to their insomnia that left their thought processes undisturbed. Because thinking and worrying are central to moral personhood in Vietnam, biomedical interventions to them are considered both unwarranted and dangerous.

For example, man in his 50s had traveled from Vũng Tàu, a large city about 90 kilometers away from the hospital. Although he had officially been diagnosed with depression, he admitted to me that he did not understand the diagnosis. His primary concern was insomnia and quickly glossed over questions about any sources of sadness (that his sons had become addicted to drugs), as if it was irrelevant to his health concerns. A 57 year old woman who had traveled from her home in Quảng Ngãi for inpatient care at the Central Psychiatric Hospital II in Biên Hoà blamed a steadily increasing insomnia for causing her neurasthenia.

Tiredness/exhaustion

Exhaustion was often presented as out of proportion to energy expended. For example, many female patients reported needing to lie down after performing formerly simple household tasks such as ironing or washing dishes. Some patients specified that they were tired from an internal source, instead of physical activity, by noting that they were "tired inside/in the body" (*mệt trong người*). Exhaustion was also frequently linked to losses in appetite or not enjoying foods they previously liked (*ăn không ngon*). It

should be noted that Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), which is often described as a present-day version of neurasthenia (Bailly 2002), was not used at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital.

Complaints of tiredness often drew on various idioms about weakness , a common trope in Vietnamese descriptions of distress. The notion of being drained or having no more strength (*hết sức*) implies a finite amount of energy that may or may not be replaced (Hinton et al. 2003). However, given the many banal reasons for their complaints and the often dire financial circumstances patients found themselves in, there was the risk that people would not be able to find ways to replenish their energy or strength and, by extension, their health. Indeed, the word for health (*sức khỏe*) in Vietnam is explicitly related to strength, which emphasizes a "fullness and stability of inner dynamism: an inner, stable, harmonious strength expressed in the appropriate, stable dynamism of the body's functions and systems, and their ability to cope with the changing environment and daily stresses of work" (Craig 2002: 73). Physical strength is correlated with an emotional strength that is marked by resilience when faced with difficulties. Patients expressed weakness in terms of being unable to perform formerly simple activities that were crucial to a smoothly functioning household.

Nerves

In Vietnam, the nervous system (*thần kinh*) is thought to be one of four major bodily functions, with the others being digestion (*tiêu hoa*), circulation (*lưu thông*), and reproduction (*sinh sản*). The nervous system connects the workings of the body with aspects of the physical environment (e.g. temperature, drafts) and conveys feelings such

as stress or sadness (*buồn*). Being "hit by the wind" is a common affliction in Vietnam that can refer to a broad range of sudden and violent episodes such as strokes, epileptic seizures, or psychotic breakdowns. It has been tied to panic disorder and post-traumatic disorder among Vietnamese refugees (Hinton et al. 2003, Hinton et al. 2007). The nerves (*dây thần kinh)* themselves are a network of fibers that spread outwards from the brain (*đầu ốc*, *não*) (Craig 2002). Nerves are required to control one's own body and behavior. They can be compromised by a variety of social and environmental factors. Changes in wind and temperature may weaken the nervous system, as well as working too hard. Dwelling on distressing matters should be avoided because it taxes the nerves and weakens the body.

Thus, strong nerves are associated with vitality, determination, and intelligence—qualities that are necessary to fulfill family and work-related obligations. Weak nerves, on the other hand, put people at risks that range from mild headaches or dizziness[39] to stark madness. It is for this reason that Tine Gammeltoft notes that nerves connect individual and social bodies: "healthy individual bodies know how to behave and position themselves socially, while ill and imbalanced bodies are socially and morally confused" (1999, 144). The physical, psychological, and social imbalances of weak nerves compromises people's capacity to meet their obligations.

Within Vietnamese medical beliefs, the nervous system links the body and is responsible for sensation, including emotions. For example, one woman ascribed a greater number of nerves in a woman's body to their supposed emotionality. Nerves can

[39] See Hinton, Um, and Ba (2001) for a discussion of dizziness in relation to anxiety disorders among Cambodian refugees.

be assessed for their relative strength and tautness (*căng thẳng*).[40] In this sense, *căng thẳng* refers to a physical tension as well as an emotional one insofar as it means both "stress" and "nervous." However, "stress" as a means to indicate a state of emotional tension without a clearly defined object has become an increasingly common component of Vietnam's affective lexicon.

Hạnh, a 40 year old vegetable seller, had a bad fall two years prior and hurt her spine, forcing her to lie down for most of the day for about two months according to doctor's orders. During this time, she developed heart palpitations out of worrying that she might become permanently paralyzed, but she saw no choice but to suffer through it. After her physical recovery, she found that her heart would still race and that she would sleep for 10 hours a night but still felt unreasonably tired the next day. She went to see a number of cardiologists in Ho Chi Minh City and eventually was told that these symptoms were not serious—only the result of *suy nhược thần kinh tim* (neurasthenia of the heart). Her concerns over the threat of her paralysis, restless sleep, and heart palpitations also affected her insofar as they compounded her other worries, including a husband prone to gambling and two feckless adults sons who didn't contribute enough to the household income. Hạnh hoped that her family would have provided more comfort than they did, but instead she found herself still having to work long hours in the marketplace without much family support. In the end, she said her main goal was just to be able to do things "normally" again.

[40] *Căng* means tight, and *thẳng* means straight.

Emotional distress and somatization

More psychologically-oriented complaints included difficulty concentrating, constant stress or worry, and racing and disordered thought processes, but they were presented less frequently and less intensely (Cf. Gold 1992, Nguyen, Hunt, and Scott 2005). Such symptoms were rarely volunteered, and doctors elicited such symptoms with direct questions, regardless of whether or not the patient was accompanied by a family member (which was more often the case than not). Inquiries about chronic worry, depression, suicidal ideation, and hallucinations were phrased in simple yes/no questions to which patients quietly answered. During the diagnostic interview, doctors, patients, and their family members alike tended to look at the doctor's diagnostic chart, and little eye contact with anyone was made by anybody.

In their EMIC interviews, patients also did not readily divulge emotional distress due to a number of overlapping factors. For example, situational factors related to privacy likely prevented patients' elaboration of their emotional concerns. Patients on the whole are more likely to express uncomfortable symptoms to health care workers than to their family or friends. Outside the context of the clinical encounter, valuing the harmony of social relations over the expression of potentially disruptive and ego-centric displays of intrapsychic experience, a situation orientation that emphasizes state appropriate emotional expressions over trait appropriate ones, strongly negative valuation of the open verbal expression of personal distress outside close family relations (which is viewed as embarrassing and shameful), the use of a rich cultural code of bodily metaphors of psychosocial problems, and a desire to avoid the stigma that attaches to families with

members labeled emotionally ill also promote the use of somatization as a means to receive help for people's problems (Shohet 2010, Gammeltoft 2006, Kleinman 1988, Slote 1992).[41]

When explicitly questioned about their mood, most admitted to feelings of sadness and anxiety but did not identify them as their most salient symptoms, suppressing their feelings for fear of stigma associated with the mentally ill.[42] Mental illness is heavily stigmatized in Vietnam and is often ascribed to psychosis and mental retardation. Minor psychiatric problems are given a medical sick role by both popular culture and health professionals. Sick roles can be taken on easily for physical diagnoses, though psychiatric ones were more difficult to navigate among peers. (I was once asked to refer a Vietnamese graduate student who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at her American university's health clinic. When she returned to Ho Chi Minh City after her studies, her family did not accept the diagnosis or her sick role and asked her to "stop" her symptoms herself.)[43]

One's virtue during periods of suffering in Vietnam is predicated on the demonstration of stoicism and endurance as a matter of proper sentiment (Shohet 2010, Gammeltoft 1999; see chapter 3). From a Western biomedical perspective, the apparent

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[41] Many of these norms also contributed to the unique illness career of an ethnic Chinese woman from Vietnam who had recently migrated to the United States (Cheung and Lin 1997) and among Vietnamese refugees (Hirayama 1980, Hollifield, Geppert, Johnson, and Fryer 2003, S. Kleinman 1990, Steel, Phan, and Bauman 2002).

[42] How much mental illness-related stigma exists in Vietnam is debatable, as conflicting reports note either a great deal of familial shame surrounding it (Gammeltoft 1999; Gold 1992; Phan and Silove 1997, 1999) or only mild embarrassment akin to a social *faux pas* (Tran 1972). This may be due to rural-urban differences, with less stigma being found in the cities than in the countryside.

[43] See Wagner et al. (2006) for a similar sentiment expressed among members of the Vietnamese Australian community.

de-emphasis on emotional distress is consistent with the somatopsychic orientation of traditional Vietnamese and Chinese medicine that privilege the physical manifestations of distress (Zhang 2007). This is opposed to the existentially and intrapsychically charged experiences of mood and anxiety disorders in the West. For example, the Quảng Ngãi woman mentioned above first learned about depression (*trầm cảm*) from one of her children. (She viewed depression as a symptom of the overarching diagnosis of neurasthenia.) She reported that before she became ill she could produce tears when she cried, reducing her sadness (*đỡ buồn*). However, she had since lost the ability to cry. Instead, she could only fixate on troubling matters without recourse to the solace provided by crying (Cf. Katz 1994). Her daughter, who had moved to Biên Hoà to take care of her mother while she was in the hospital, also mentioned that her mother seldom laughed, another marked change. The chronic anhedonia she experienced was somatized as a "broken" ability to laugh or cry.

Moreover, bodily symptoms have more social cachet than psychological ones, so help-seeking behavior is only oriented to bodily complaints. Kleinman (1988) interprets neurasthenia as the manifestation of people's perception and explanation of their problems, mediated by the body. Somatization is "the normative expression of personal and social distress in an idiom of bodily complaints and medical help-seeking" (Kleinman 1986, 2). Neurasthenia is a culturally shaped form of somatization that elaborates depression and other diseases that conform to a psychobiological template. Personal and social problems are interpreted, articulated, and experienced through the medium of the body, so that they become transformed into a discourse of pain that is a

metaphor for discourse and action about the self and the social world (Kleinman and Becker 1998).

Even if aware of anxious or depressive moods, patients may rationalize or hide their emotional problems due to the stigma associated with mental illness. Alternately, a tendency to somatize may reflect difficulties in expressing, or even identifying, inner feelings.[44] This may be the result of culturally and socially constituted cognitive styles that significantly determine which symptoms are perceived and elaborated. Several hypotheses have been advanced to account for somatization as resulting from cognitive style: amplification of normal sensations, misattribution and labeling as illness of the somatic symptoms of affective arousal, and utilization of externalizing cognitive coping processes to handle stress as a final common cognitive-behavioral pathway along which is channeled dysphoria or disease.

Thus, neurasthenic somatization is not just a disease or illness but also an interpersonal coping process and a cultural idiom of distress. A variety of symptoms, including tiredness, headaches, dizziness, and other symptoms that could not be diagnosed as due to a specific organic lesion or do not respond to treatment or became chronic and interfered with normal social activities, came to be understood in lay culture as "neurasthenia." The social responses to a diagnosis (whether made by a professional or otherwise) often necessitated rest from physically and psychosocially stressful situations and warranted excuses for poor performances in school or work (Vogel 1966). Assuming a sick role also led to aid from family, friends, and co-workers. They also

[44] Echoing my findings in Vietnam, Kleinman writes that "for most working class Chinese who are used to more concrete modes of expression, conceptualization at the psychic level may seem too abstract" (1982, 128).

were able to more openly express dissatisfaction and demoralization with their lives because of a culturally sanctioned recognition that the disorder is an appropriate explanation for personal irritability, distress, and failure to perform normal social obligations and for family dysfunction. Neurasthenia assumes the blame for intense suffering, generally absolving the patient from responsibility for their actions.

Etiology

Although they did not present emotional distress as a principal symptom, patients acknowledged their symptoms had emotional bases, linking social and financial challenges with somatic complaints. For example, Chú Đen ("Uncle Black"), as he was affectionately called by the nursing staff on account of his darker complection, was a 54 year old man from rural Long An Province who reported that thinking too much was the cause of his symptoms. Ten years prior he been treated at the outpatient clinic in the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital before being treated as an in-patient at the Central Psychiatric Hospital II for two weeks. On the day of the interview, he was to be discharged the following day. A married father of 5 children, his thoughts concerned his family's economic situation. Moreover, he was unemployed and, compared to his neighbors, he simply had less. When he tried to sleep, he often spent time reminiscing about his life and remembering/missing people from his past in addition to thinking about his financial challenges. His doctors told him that "worrying about this and that created a spiritual crisis" (*lo chuyện này chuyện nọ thành ra tinh thần nó khủng hoảng*). It should be noted that, as an in-patient with more intensive contact with mental health professionals, he likely had internalized biomedical understandings of mental illness to a

greater extent than the patients at the outpatient clinic in Ho Chi Minh City. Despite this, he still presented with a diagnosis of neurasthenia.

Some patients framed their current symptoms as the result of or were intertwined with other illnesses. For example, a 29 year old woman traced her primary complaints of insomnia, headaches, and exhaustion to her pregnancy four years prior. While such symptoms might be expected during a pregnancy, she still incorporated them into her diagnosis of neurasthenia. A 48 year old woman was unusual in that the psychiatric hospital was the first place she sought treatment for her insomnia and indigestion, which started two years prior when she discovered she had contracted HIV from her husband.[45]

The psychological causes of neurasthenia were disconnected from the rest of the explanatory models, which emphasized the organic components of patients' illness experience. Such causes seemed detached from the explanatory models because they were not pathologized. When patients' depressed moods and anxiety were recognized as symptoms, many patients did not tell anybody about them because they were "normal" (*bình thường*) and "natural" (*tự nhiên*). Patients that did admit emotional distress rarely identified a specific cause, instead only mentioning a generally stressful situation (e.g. having small children). The separation of the psychologically-oriented etiology from the physiologically-oriented frameworks of symptoms and treatments reflects many of the patients' emphasis on their discrete symptoms over an underlying disorder.

[45] A study of HIV seropositive patients in Hanoi found that 97.2% of them suffered from an anxiety disorder (Nguyễn 2004).

Pathophysiology

Most patients reported having little knowledge or concern about the pathophysiology of their diagnoses or symptoms, perhaps reflecting a trust of professionalized medical knowledge. Many stated that they did not pay attention to why or how their symptoms or medications worked, and a few suggested I ask their doctor if I wanted to know. The doctor-patient relationship in Vietnam is marked by a strict hierarchy in which the patient is expected to submit to the doctor. Patients address doctors as *bác sĩ* (doctor) and can refer to themselves as *tôi* (a polite form of "I" that older persons may use with people much younger than them) or *con* (child) even if they were several decades older than the doctor. However, I suspect that patients might have had some theories of the bio-mechanics of their illness and treatment but were embarrassed that their ideas were incorrect or unscientific.

Although the patients tended not to elaborate on the workings of their illnesses, it should be noted that professional medical theories about mental illnesses have existed in Vietnam for centuries. For example, many of the internal organs are associated with various centers of psychological functioning. When a person suffers from emotional difficulties, he or she will direct attention to the purported psychological function of the corresponding body organ. Both Vietnamese and Chinese medicine depend equally on behavioral as well as physiological evidence for diagnosis and therapeutic action (Craig 2002, Lin, Kleinman, and Lin 1981). Thus, emotional imbalances have the potential to lead to both physical and mental illness (Cheung, Lau, and Wong 1984, Kleinman and Mechanic 1981).

Treatment

Very few of the people in the study began their foray into treatment at a psychiatric clinic, and only a handful had sought psychiatric treatment elsewhere. General understandings of illness in Vietnam lead early physical symptoms to be taken seriously. For example, a 55 year old woman initially interpreted chronic insomnia and headaches as symptoms of cancer and made several long trips to Ho Chi Minh City's large Chợ Rẫy and Nguyện Trí Phương Hospitals from her home province for X-rays, blood work, and urinalysis. When all of the tests came back negative, her family suspected her "superstitions" (*mê tín*) and consulted a fortune teller (*thầy bối*), who proved to be ineffectual in reducing her symptoms.[46] Finally, someone suggested going to a rural mental health clinic, where she received medication that had a positive but minimal effect. It was then, several years after the onset of her symptoms, that she went to the psychiatric hospital in Biên Hòa.

However, personal and cultural reasons led to people minimizing or denying the potential significance of possible psychological symptoms and causes. For example, headaches were viewed as something that people should respond immediately to. On the other hand, stress was something to be endured. The psychological aspects of dysphoria are not readily pathologized when its cause, in this case social and economic difficulties, is a socially legitimate concern. Extreme emotional reactions can be considered pathological if they are seen as disproportionate to the situation at hand.

[46] See Gustafsson (2009) for an exegesis of ritual healing in northern Vietnam.

When symptoms initially arose, patients often turned to over-the-counter medication, especially if they suffered from various aches and pains. Most were more reticent to treat themselves for insomnia out of fear of overdosing or developing a dependency on sleeping pills. Some patients reported being scared of taking psychopharmaceuticals and had to be reassured by their doctors that their symptoms would decrease. The side effects of biomedical pharmaceuticals are seen as more harmful to the body than traditional Chinese or Vietnamese remedies (Craig 2002). A few others were forthright in telling their doctors that they did not fear any medication—an implicit message to their doctors that they were willing to take extreme measures to cure their illness. Herbal remedies were also used, as were changes in lifestyle, especially in diet.

A number of relaxation techniques were also tried, including taking long walks with friends, playing with their children, or talking with their spouses. Many women spoke of distracting themselves from worrisome thoughts by performing household chores, an effort that increased productivity but perhaps elided the personal significance and implications of their feelings. However, as symptoms became prolonged and/or exacerbated, patients increasingly turned to doctors, either at hospitals or private clinics. Though official statistics were not available, many doctors assured me that rates of psychosomatization were high throughout the city, and that many hospitals were needlessly clogged with patients who needed psychiatric care. Indeed, most of the patients I spoke with reported being directed to the Psychiatric Hospital only after repeated visits to their primary care physicians yielded no results. (I suspect many patients were first diagnosed with neurasthenia by their non-mental health specialists.)

Almost all of the interviewees' ideal course of treatment involved pharmaceuticals. Vietnamese medical beliefs emphasize medications for a variety of ailments. This stems from the diverse array of tonics used in informal traditional Vietnamese medicine (*thuốc nam* or southern medicine) as well as the more prestigious, professional, and specialized Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) (*thuốc bắc* or northern medicine). In turn, the importance of medication in treating illness has been translated into biomedical understandings of health and illness, which has surpassed Eastern medicine in terms of influence and pervasiveness. However, the Vietnamese medical belief system is extremely pluralist, exemplified in the proverb of praying to all four cardinal directions when sick. Of traditional Vietnamese medicine, TCM, and Western biomedicine, the latter is viewed as the most powerful option, but this power is double-edged as it associated with the most side effects. As in other traditions of Eastern medicine, biomedicine is seen as something that does not cure an illness but only alleviates the symptoms.

Recourse to pharmaceuticals was seen as a logical and acceptable short-term treatment strategy. However, people recognized neurasthenia and its symptoms were rooted in difficult social and financial situations. Different circumstances could resolve their complaints, and most patients did not go to the psychiatric hospital expecting anything other than short-term relief. Patients accepted that medications would not remove the stressors that caused and exacerbated their symptoms in part because there was no expectation that those parts of their lives were under the domain of medical knowledge or mental health. Thus, the pharmaceutical self, one increasingly oriented to

as well as produced and regulated by psychotropic medication (Jenkins 2011), is at a crossroads in Vietnam. On the one hand, many of the patients had long been modifying their bodies and how they experienced them with a host of drugs. On the other hand, these drugs are not aimed to directly treat or transform the culturally constituted self (*bản thân*); instead, their intended usage is to support or buttress it. The psychiatrists' efforts to increase patients' compliance with prescription medications can be read as an attempt to create more pharmaceutical selves. Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that much continuing education for the doctors is funded by multinational drug corporations, often taking place at beach resorts.

Many doctors complained that their patients had unrealistic expectations of psychopharmaceuticals. Returning to the outpatient clinic to get a new prescription, one patient was chastised by his doctor. "Have you stopped taking medication for long yet? Are you better yet?" (*Bỏ thuốc lâu chưa? Khoẻ hơn chưa?*) According to doctors, patients, especially those who could scarcely afford their prescriptions, were too impatient to wait for psychopharmaceuticals to take effect after months of consistent usage. Vietnam has one of the highest drug non-compliance rates in the world (Craig 2000). Okumura, Wakai, and Umenai (2002) estimate that 40-60% of Vietnam's population self-medicates, and there is little government regulation of pharmacies. Individuals often rely on word of mouth strategies from trusted neighbors, friends, and family members instead of complying with physician instruction. Psychiatrists in particular attributed this to their lack of acceptance of a diagnosis of depression or anxiety. They did not want to face the reality of their situation. Moreover, many would

stop taking the medication after their symptoms abated, only to return again after the symptoms came back. This was because they were supposedly in denial about a chronic illness. From the perspective of viewing their illness as a loose collection of symptoms, not taking medications for a long time makes sense because they do not view their problems as part of a larger syndrome.

Course

Reflecting many of the same themes in the pathophysiology, patients' understandings of neurasthenia's course were similarly unelaborated upon. However, this does not imply a simplistic understanding of neurasthenia's course. Most patients responded that left untreated their symptoms would continue and possibly exacerbate over time. Such ideas were no doubt informed by personal experience as many of the patients had their symptoms for several years before seeking psychiatric care. Many were also concerned that other health problems would be exacerbated by their primary symptoms. A small number of patients expressed fears that they would eventually go crazy. One woman in her mid-30s bitterly joked that she was afraid she would end up like the woman who was excitedly yelling across the room at her doctor while being led out of the examination room by a family member; she was afraid of losing self-control. Many of the patients' intuitions about the course of neurasthenia were not just based on their understandings of its pathophysiology but on the how the illness affected their own lives over time.

Discussion

Patients who identified with a diagnosis of neurasthenia had an explanatory model of their illness that did not differ significantly from the handful of patients who identified with either major depressive disorder or GAD.[47] Regardless of which diagnosis was identified with, they shared common symptoms, blamed the stresses of household conflicts and financial circumstances, and wanted medication to address their complaints. Moreover, the descriptions of symptomology, etiology, pathophysiology, treatment, and course of patients who identified neurasthenia, depression, and generalized anxiety were similar to those patients who did not identify with any particular disorder. Indeed, the majority of patients interviewed did not label their illness under a singular diagnosis but rather presented a list of physical complaints as the reason they sought treatment at the hospital. This may reflect an overall denial of mental illness as a legitimate way to understand people's experiences of a set of experiences that is not readily accepted as within the purview of mental health and illness. The explanatory models of neurasthenia, depression, and GAD performed the same role in offering patients a means to understand their illness experience in a rubric that supported their various ideas of moral and modern persons.

Many of the psychiatrists were surprised when I told them how many of their patients told me they had neurasthenia. They generally dismissed it as a problem of health illiteracy. Even commonly used terms for neurasthenia among patients, *suy nghĩ thần kinh* (nervous thinking) and *suy yếu thần kinh* (nervous weakness), were indicative

[47] Likewise, Vietnamese Australian patients at an anxiety clinic did not differentiate clearly between "stress," "anxiety," and "depression" (Wagner et al. 2006).

of the extent of the lack of proper education and information about psychiatry because they weren't "real words." At best, in this view, patients merely misspoke or misremembered the proper term, *suy nhược thần kinh*.[48] One resident segued into a discussion of how people in the countryside believed psychiatric problems were caused by ghosts and resorted to herbal remedies or amulets before consulting a physician. That he implicitly grouped neurasthenia with spirit possession and other forms of "traditional" Vietnamese culture or superstition is ironic since neurasthenia is rooted in an American invention.

One of the most common criticisms of biomedical psychiatry is that it medicalizes people's suffering and strips away the experiential richness of their illness. Moreover, the rise of psychopharmaceuticals over various psychotherapeutic measures as a primary form of treatment is often associated with an emphasis on biological processes over a rich network of cultural meanings used in the healing process. However, it is important to avoid conflating the medicalization of people's suffering with the psychologization of their experience. Medical anthropology studies on the tension between doctors and patients' understandings of disease often often frame it as the difference between a system of knowledge that is Western, biomedical, and rational/scientific versus one that is local, traditional, and meaningful/symbolic. But in the case that I've just described, this dichotomy doesn't apply since GAD and neurasthenia are (more or less) biomedical in nature. Rather, the main difference is in their conceptualizations of emotion. If we look at neurasthenia and GAD as ways to organize emotional distress, patients emphasized *tình*

[48] Of these, *suy nhược thần kinh* conveys the most seriousness, while *suy yếu thần kinh* conveys the least and is often used as a euphemism for craziness (*điên rồ*) or someone's delicate psychological constitution.

cảm (sentiment) in their emotional reasoning of their illness episodes. On the other hand, doctors emphasized *cảm xúc* (emotion).

So in the example of Hạnh, the woman with "neurasthenia of the heart" mentioned earlier, sentiment is what gave her the impetus to carry on and fulfill her role obligations as both wife and mother, even if the rest of her family did not care enough about her. In the story she told me, her worries about her own health were always couched in concerns and disappointments with regards to her family life. Her husband did tell her she was worrying needlessly, and I think she would agree with this. But the inability to control her worry and thought processes are very much tied to what was expected of her. Thus, it is difficult to tease apart the distinction between the object of worry and the process of worry itself.

For many patients, one of the attractions of neurasthenia over a diagnosis like GAD is that the treatment focuses on something that pertains to their model of disease. Emotional problems are not considered a medical domain, let alone something to discuss with a doctor. Moreover, because many of the causes of worry are considered not resolvable, treating neurasthenia is a way of at least reducing the suffering of patients who were willing to live with some of it. Their emotions were too closely intertwined with their causes to be seen as something that could be treated or even medicalized (and pathologized) to begin with. Excessive worry was not a symptom but an appropriate response to patients' difficulties. In neurasthenia, worry can't be fixed by either medication or self-work because it is something that is knitted into structured hierarchies, relations, and obligations.

The psychiatrists' focus on emotion was often confusing for patients because "emotion," as discussed in chapter 2, is unfamiliar terrain for many people in Vietnam. This is the result of a blurred distinction between one's affective bonds with other people and how one feels about anything else. GAD operates on a liberal theory of emotion as something that individuals can possess and therefore control. The diagnoses that the psychiatrists use operate within a discourse that flattens affect and its social connections, even if it is not the intent of the psychiatrists themselves.

Doctors saw one of their main tasks was to properly educate patients about their illness. Indeed, the hospital had an entire department devoted to proper mental health education (*giáo dục*) that sent doctors and nurses to rural areas to make presentations. In order to medicalize their suffering in a more "modern" sense, patients would need to frame their symptoms as underlying GAD. Psychiatrists wanted patients to understand their dysthymia in terms of their own emotions so that they could address the conditions in their lives that led to chronic anxiety. They assumed that with the proper knowledge and tools, patients could properly transform themselves. Patients, on the other hand, wanted doctors to only treat their somatic symptoms. Suffering was to be alleviated, but its source was not something to be removed. They rejected what Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good (2001) has called the "biotechnical embrace" of their doctors' clinical discourses on emotion. What the psychiatrists did not seem to understand is that an "emotional modernization" of sorts would need to accompany the acceptance of a diagnosis of something like GAD.

The project of self-realization implied in "emotional modernization" often assumes its liberating potential stems from exercising individual agency and choice.

Individuals who are more attuned to themselves are supposedly better able to create more "emotionally democratic" relationships and to be independent enough to help themselves and others (Furedi 2004). However, as articulated in clinical settings, these powers of the self are contradicted by the ways the self is marked by vulnerability. When the trials of everyday life take their toll and in turn are psychologized and pathologized by biomedical discourses, the emotional self is constructed as a source of power that is inherently vulnerable—a vulnerability that increasingly can only be addressed by biomedical psychiatry.

Conclusion

The conflicts between doctors and patient's medicalizations of anxiety were brought to the fore in one encounter I will conclude this chapter with. I always found the "bedside manner" of Dr. Hung, a young doctor who often ended up at the table next to mine, to be especially brusque. However, I do remember one time when he came across as exceptionally caring and interested in a patient's story—and this was because he was flirting with a female patient. After they had finished the interview, Dr. Hung continued making typical small talk before asking her what she wanted out of life. She told him that she didn't know repeatedly. This went on for a while until he tried a new strategy. Dr. Hung chided her for not knowing what she wanted. "How could you not know? It's simple!" He told her she needed take a step back from her situation and figure out what she wanted. To this, she responded "I don't know how."

There is something intriguing, albeit very subtle, in the movement from "I don't know" to "I don't know *how*." The former is a relatively simple declaration—an

admission that the patient didn't have a piece of information. But the latter focuses inward and highlights a deficiency not just of knowledge but of the self. And what brings it about is the doctor's invocation of a new technique of the self, to search her feelings for the answer. The neoliberalization of the self offers new potentials and horizons for how to live a good life. What this case suggests is that a vision made clearer through clinical discourses can heighten both a sense of one's own power and emancipation as well as one's own vulnerability; it highlights both the affective fallout and flourishing of neoliberalism.

The core symptoms of neurasthenia serve as embodied metaphors for social experience, in this case the pressures of a "modern" life. Symptoms offer a means of critiquing social and political relations for those who feel powerless to mount challenges in more straightforward ways. The language of bodily complaint and its metaphoric meanings make available a way for expressing otherwise unsanctioned criticisms in coded forms or at least discontent with an ethos in which the pressures of modernity and the way out of the country's recent history have become inflated, unfulfilling, and ultimately destructive of personal well-being. As idioms of dissent, symptoms form part of a "hidden transcript," a covert, unofficial discourse that takes place out of the sight of the wielders of power. The hidden transcript comments on, and often challenges or contradicts, publicly agreed-upon versions of relations between dominant powers and their subordinates. At the same that the rhetoric of neurasthenia had particular functions for individuals in their negotiations of and personal relations to social transformation, neurasthenic language was widely used in general, abstract explanations of the nature and conditions of social life. These two functions are closely related, since the appeal of

neurasthenia as a disease was in part the way in which it allowed patients to re-explain the world to themselves, and the appeal of neurasthenic discourse for social theorists and commentators was also the ease with which it was recognized as an explanation.

Chapter 5

Love in the age of anxiety

Into the Wild

Shortly after graduating from Emory University with bachelor's degrees in history and anthropology, Christopher Johnson McCandless sold most of his possessions and, under the pseudonym Alexander Supertramp, worked odd jobs across the United States. His two years on the road, a testament to self-reliance, self-discovery, and romanticized individualism, culminated in a Jack London-esque "Alaskan odyssey." Stranded and lost, McCandless died of starvation after four months of living by himself in Denali National Park, and it remains open to interpretation whether the result of his spiritual pilgrimage was accidental or suicidal in nature. A shrine built where he died became a destination for many adventurers fascinated by his story, which was popularized by a book written by Jon Krakaeur (1996) and a movie directed by Sean Penn (2007).

Thịnh, 18, saw the film version of *Into the Wild*, probably on a bootleg DVD (which is how I myself saw it). He often talked about it with an American woman,[49] 10 years his senior, who was a regular customer at his parents' small *nhậu* (drinking) establishment in the Mekong Delta. He also began sending her ponderous text messages, which she either ignored or only politely responded to. Late one night he arrived at the house she was renting a room in to announce his devotion to her uninvited, unannounced, and inebriated. She came downstairs to meet him at the entry gate so that her landlady would not be disturbed and told him to go home. When he asked her if she loved him, she

[49] The woman, an aid worker, relayed this story to me. I have never met Thịnh.

pronounced as clearly and directly as she could “Không” (No). Back at his own home, he sent her several text messages that night, telling her that her personal happiness was more important to him than her reciprocating his feelings and that he would stop all contact with her if she wished. She did not respond to any of these messages. Around 3:00 a.m. he sent a final text to let her know that he was going “into the wild,” took one of his parents’ motorbikes without telling them, and drove five hours to his sister’s home in Ho Chi Minh City.

Winds of Change

The wind has traditionally been associated with change in Vietnam. Subtle shifts in the weather, often undetectable to me, are often commented on as people monitored the myriad features of the external environment that the body must cope with. Sudden fluctuations in the weather are more difficult for the body to adapt to and are often cited as the initial reason for the onset of physical symptoms. Winds are particularly dangerous because they can be so unpredictable and can carry unseen pathogens from unknown regions (Craig 2002). Medical beliefs warn people of the hazardous fluctuations caused by winds, and being “struck by the wind" (*bị trung gío*) is an ailment that can refer to seizures, strokes, and some forms of madness as well as leprosy. The conceptual links between wind, change, and danger reflect some of the more conservative elements of Confucianism.

A commonly held assumption about Americans is that they are somewhat unique in their active embrace of change for the sake of change. For an American, a “change of scenery” or a “change of pace” is not necessarily disruptive in a negative sense and can

be as simple as checking out a new café when meeting a friend for lunch. Indeed, it was such an occasion when I first tried to use the Vietnamese equivalent of a "change of scenery": *dổi gío* (a change of wind). My bemused friend Trâm, 37, told me in her characteristically blunt manner that my usage was incorrect. "A change of wind" is reserved for more momentous occasions or longer distances.

Sometimes, Trâm told me, when feeling sad, she would imagine going by herself to Vũng Tàu, a coastal city 95 kilometers from Ho Chi Minh City. This struck me as odd for two reasons. First, the idea of wanting to go on trip by oneself, or even wanting to be by oneself for longer than a few hours, is a strange one to most Vietnamese. I got several puzzled reactions when people learned of my decision to rent an apartment by myself. "Don't you ever get sad/bored (*buồn*)?" Moreover, while I relished the occasional trips I took by myself, my Vietnamese friends' vacations tended to be crowded affairs. One of my friends even invited two of his co-workers on his honeymoon.

Second, the tone of our conversation quickly turned from light-hearted to quietly serious. Trâm always stood out to me as unusually forthright and bold. She was usually quick to point out my mistakes, linguistic and otherwise, and to tell me what to do and how to do it, so I viewed her as self-assured and self-possessed (in addition to incredibly bossy). Why would someone so unabashedly opinionated take such a drastic step to avoid confrontation? Or was this hypothetical situation a form of confrontation, or preparation for one, itself? What would have to happen for her to follow through with this plan/fantasy? What led Trâm to this line of thought in the first place? What did she want to communicate to her family and friends in doing so? What would the time by herself do

for her state of mind? How unbearable would her situation need to be for her to follow through on this?

The subtext of Trâm's fantasy was that she herself was going through a crisis, what she called the second big "shock" (*sốc*) in her life.[50] She had recently discovered her husband was having an affair, and she was seriously considering a divorce. For months after her discovery, she and her husband would often get into heated arguments over seemingly insignificant matters, and the only times they were not fighting were when they were not speaking to each other at all. Once, in the middle of a minor disagreement over household matters, Trâm quietly walked out of their apartment and drove to Vũng Tàu.

* * *

What does this pair of vignettes reveal about the romantic foibles and dramas facing many middle-class Vietnamese? The motorbikes that provide spatial mobility and that are the products of class mobility became vehicles to achieve romantic aims. However, this mobility becomes a challenge itself. Trâm and Thịnh undertook arduous journeys—journeys meant not just to get away from romantic partners but also to understand themselves and their limits in new ways. Underlying both of these stories may be a deep uncertainty that threatens but might also extend and re-define the boundaries and foundations of the self. The trips can be seen as attempts to escape anxious conditions or to resolve them, or projects that perhaps only engender more anxiety.

[50] The first was when she discovered a fiance had been seeing another woman and she broke off their engagement. She recalled being unable to sleep or eat for weeks afterwards, losing roughly 20 pounds as a result.

Although Trâm and Thịnh understood their futures to hinge on issues of romance, love itself has become a site of anxiety.

Romance has long been an arena for struggles and experiments in freedom, choice, and self-realization. Popular discourses about love often assume its universality with the result that it gets placed on a spiritual pedestal as proof of our shared humanity. In its purest distillations, romantic love is supposed to be independent of financial and material vagaries, even overcoming them if need be.[51] However, recent scholarship on the politics of romantic love has focused on the ways that emotion and social action become fused as simultaneously tacit and culturally elaborated, embodied and rational, and spoken and unspoken. "Far from being a 'haven from the marketplace, modern romantic love is a practice intimately complicit with the political economy of late capitalism" (Illouz 1997, 22). Thus, in this chapter I locate romantic love in its political and economic context.

Moreover, I examine love in relation to anxiety. Accompanied by vulnerability, insecurity, and uncertainty, love acknowledges the importance of the love object to a person and that person's need and lack of control over the love object (Nussbaum 2001). In this sense, love cannot exist without anxiety. That anxiety and love are often conceptually separated is a curious matter since many of the same expressions used to describe their respective phenomenological experiences refer to a common set of bodily tropes: heightened arousal, internal states of flux, sensations exceeding the limits and

[51] For example, a man in his 20s told me that he "cried like a baby" when his girlfriend ended their relationship. She had been under considerable pressure to break up with him in order to meet and eventually marry an overseas Vietnamese to benefit her family financially. When she did break off (*chia tay*, lit. divide hands) the relationship, he interpreted this not just as her not loving him enough to defy her parents (as I did) but as their relationship having never been based on "true love."

boundaries of the body, etc. Perhaps a step towards a more rigorous examination of how love and anxiety are related to each other could be to demarcate their boundaries. However, this risks reifying static categories instead of attending to the interpenetration of the phenomenological experience of what gets labeled as anxiety and/or love. Examining how these experiences are made meaningful as love, anxiety, or a blend of the two is important to the task at hand. For as vaunted and heady as it is, why can love be equally as anxiety inducing?[52] How does anxiety undergird the experience of love? How are love and anxiety co-produced by changing social institutions? What are the emerging anxieties about love? What kind of anxieties are caused by love? My tentative answer to these questions highlights an intersubjective style between (potential) lovers that has been reconfigured by new ways of attending to emotion and the self in post-reform Ho Chi Minh City.

Anthropological perspectives on romantic love

Despite its global ubiquity, studies of romantic love in the social sciences and humanities are rare, perhaps because of the conventional wisdom that it only emerged from other variations of love (e.g. courtly love during the medieval era) in the West a few hundred years ago (de Rougemont 1983). Historical studies have portrayed it as secondary to more instrumental ambitions in pre-modern Europe (Aries 1962). Stone asserted that the development of romantic love outside of the West would most likely be found among the elite, who would have the requisite time to cultivate an aesthetic

[52] In some respects, this chapter is an inverse of chapter 3, which examined how worry is construed as a moral sentiment, i.e. an expression of love.

appreciation of subjective states (1988). Such studies assume romantic love is produced from modernization and emerging individualism. Like anxiety, romantic love has often been linked to modernization (cf. Borscheid 1986, Burguiere 1987, Gillis 1988, MacFarlane 1987, Stone 1977). For example, Frederick Engels argued that the wage labor of the industrial age and early capitalism allowed young people to attain economic independence and, thus, the ability to choose marriage partners on the basis of individual attraction. Love subsequently became commoditized, and lovers become alienated from the product of their emotional labor. Moreover, the invention of private property along with the increased emphasis of subjectivity, imagination, emotion allowed for discourses of happiness and relationships based on love to take hold in a family unit (Taylor 1988).

Whether or not romantic love is relatively rare cross-culturally,[53] some social patterning of love is found in most societies. Moreover, as William Goode (1959) argues in "The theoretical importance of love," love deserves recognition as an integral component of social action and social structure.[54] What social institutions create and regulate romantic affection? What are the structural arrangements through which love patterns occur? Early cross-cultural studies of love often used a functionalist approach, assuming that the social construction of reality and the standardization of sentiment were so closely correlated as to be isomorphic (Coppinger and Rosenblatt 1968). For example, social norms and institutions determined whether the relationships individuals had with

[53] Writing in the 1930s, Ralph Linton argued that every society acknowledges the passionate attachments between sexual/romantic partners but that "American culture is practically the only one which has attempted to capitalize these, and make them the basis for marriage" (1936, 175). However, Rosenblatt (1967) argued that romantic love can be found in greather or lesser degrees cross-culturally based on a survey of Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) data (cf. de Munck and Korotayev 1999).

[54] Most scholarly work on romantic love is psychological, stemming from the Freudian notion that love is "an idealized passion which develops from the frustration of sex" (Goode 1959, 39).

others was intense or diffuse, thus channeling their emotional attachments and investments (cf. Hsu 1981, Endleman 1989, Jankowiak and Fischer 1992, Padilla et al. 2008). In societies organized by rigid kin relationships, romance is possible solely outside of marriage. However, as market forces boost mobility, competition, and individualism, people find refuge from the instability of the structural differentiation of the family in marriage. Love gets transformed from a duty to a romantic endeavor that supports psychological and existential security.

More recent scholarship on the cross-cultural manifestation and variation of romantic love has situated interpersonal experiences of emotional intimacy in its sociopolitical context, examining how the organization of production and consumption facilitates (or not) conjugal relations and the different tactics that men and women rely on to navigate companionate marriage (Padilla et al. 2008, Rebhun 1999, Yan 2003). Moreover, an emphasis on individual agency in these studies brings attention to the strategies that social actors use in order to realize the ideals of romantic love, moving away from modernist explanations that frame it as the inevitable product of social changes (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006).

Anthony Giddens[55] notably argues that romantic love is associated not only with the emergence of 18th century romantic literature but also as a form of storytelling in which the self is narrated. In the pre-modern era's contractual marriages, which emphasized economic conditions over sexual attraction, love and intimacy were unconnected. On the other hand, in romantic marriages, intimacy assumes a psychic

[55] Giddens' analysis was based on an interpretation of Western history, so I am not attempting to apply his insights directly to the case of Vietnam. Rather, I draw on his argument as an interlocutor to throw my own data into relief.

communication in which individuals' characters fulfill one another. Thus, one of intimacy's prerequisites is the acknowledgment that the self is incomplete and that love acts as a form of communication and communion between these incomplete selves. Discourses of love and romance introduced the narrativization of people's lives as a story of two individuals with little connection to wider social processes. Long-term relationships and future-oriented narratives of romantic love focused on a shared history that gave meaning to and acknowledged the importance of the relationship.

Maintaining the degree of intimacy most associated with romantic partnerships became possible in the modern era and coincided with the emergence of the self and self-reflexivity, two necessary components of romantic love. Thus, self-identity is constructed in relation to others, and mutual intimacy becomes critical to establishing certain relationships; it is one's reflexive understanding of their own biography and something that people create, maintain, and revise to explain their past but also to orient them to their supposed futures. Intimacy becomes for Giddens the core of personal independence and emancipation as well as the "democratization of daily life"[56] (1991, 95).

Romantic love in Vietnam

French romantic literature brought new notions of romantic love (*tình yêu*) into Vietnam during the colonial period. Scholars have argued that the incorporation of new

[56] Consequently, the problem of intimacy is deeply related with the process of democratization of the private sphere. It is "above all a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality"(130). As political democracy is concerned with free and equal relations between individuals and "the constitutional limitation of (distributive) power"(186) in the public sphere, intimacy is structurally correspondent to the private sphere. Democratized relationship between men and women, children and parents, and any other pure relationship, is based on "respect for the independent views and personal traits of the other"(189-90).

literary conventions into Vietnamese poetry introduced and incubated new ways of thinking about the individual that were critical to the popularity of socialism in northern Vietnam[57] (McHale 1995, Marr 2000). However, romance was de-legitimized during the country's period of high socialist[58] modernity, especially as public affect was directed towards the state and loyalties outside of the individual and the state, including family obligations, were discouraged. The International Communist Party (ICP) in particular exhorted youth to be nation builders as vanguards of the socialist revolution. Women were encouraged to join the ICP as a way to liberate themselves from the patriarchal confines of the family[59] (Tai 1992). Young wives upset that their husbands were sent to war were chastised for being selfish and were encouraged to redefine love as a sacrifice to the state (Pettus 2003). In addition to being considered too bourgeois, individualistic/selfish, and Western, ideals of romantic love were criticized as a means of subordinating women, further reinforcing Confucian gender hierarchies, often related to the "three submissions"[60] (*tam tòng*) (Soucy 2001).

Complicating Giddens' claim that romantic love is rooted in the politically-motivated individuation of the self, Harriet Phinney argues that the state-envisioned subjectivity after the *đổi mới* reforms shifted from what she calls "revolutionary love" and "socialist love" with emphases on the individual's allegiance to the state to one of a

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[57] Many early leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), including Ho Chi Minh, were accomplished poets or at least fancied themselves to be.

[58] This trend was not only limited to life under socialist rule. For example, Bác Đào, 58, recalled municipal police dispersing private parties at her personal residence in war-era Saigon because the dancing was considered disrespectful to South Vietnamese soldiers on the front lines.

[59] Phan Bội Châu famously published a school primer that suggested young woman answer the teasing question of whether or not they had found a husband yet with "Yes, his surname is Việt, and his given name is Nam" (cf. Marr 1981).

[60] According to the three submissions, *tại gia tòng phụ, xuất giá tòng phu, phu tử tòng tử* (As a daughter, obey the father. As a wife, obey the husband. As a widow, obey the son.).

happy, healthy, and wealthy family. “This new form of governmentality necessitated that people shift their object of affection from building the nation to focusing on one’s family and oneself. This shift would be essential for producing modern subjects who, by taking responsibility for themselves, could ensure the nation’s success in the global market economy” (Phinney 2008a, 330). In effect, the state yielded its position as an object of sentiment and love once the household was established as the primary economic unit (Nguyễn-võ 2008); conjugal and family love replaced it. Certainly romance (*lãng mạn*) in Vietnam has long been an acceptable and expected condition for courtship, but it is only more recently that its institutionalization in marriage has become expected by husbands and wives. Indeed, the way that romantic love often gets naturalized in contemporary Vietnam reaffirms an anti-Communist perspective.

Such shifting patterns also occur concomitantly with and have implications for domains aside from marriage. This chapter examines the social context of romance, love, and intimacy in relation to how people make sense of market forces and state discourses as well as each other and themselves. Following Farrer (2002), I focus on the cultural practices through which people react to the neoliberalization of sentiment and emotion. I do so through two case studies of thwarted romantic love. First, I delve further into Trâm’s experiences with her husband’s infidelity to explore the vulnerability of discontinuing one’s dependence on another person. Second, I describe a young man named Cường and his failed search for recognition from an unrequited love object, which highlights the uncertainty over the exchange of emotions and an intersubjective gap. I examine what they worry about in their respective situations and how this reflects the changing nature of romantic love in Vietnam. When both Trâm and Cường discussed

love, they spoke specifically about the objects of their affection, their intentions, and their plans. They considered the mutual recognition of two lovers and the intimacy that results from it to be the defining feature of a meaningful relationship based on romance. But at a more implicit level they also drew from love as a trope by which to claim their own versions of a modern identity partially defined as a self with unique traits that was searching for recognition as such. Together, Trâm and Cường's experiences show us how anxiety structures the expectations about and experience of romantic love in Ho Chi Minh City and, more specifically, how these two individuals attempt to form romantic relationships based on "both the grammar of love and the grammar of the market" (Nguyen 2007, 287).

Trâm

Unlike many of the people in my study, Trâm was born and raised in Ho Chi Minh City. She was too young to remember what most Saigonese, regardless of their political allegiances, refer to as the "liberation" (*giải phóng*) of Saigon on April 30, 1975. However, she did have memories of her childhood during the lean years of the immediate post-war subsidy (*bao cấp*) period that predates the current neoliberal (*đổi mới*) era. Although she was only a few years older than people who came of age during economic liberalization and an ensuing relaxation and opening of society, Trâm and her friends were considerably more conservative and "traditional" in many respects than others, including Cường.

Trâm lived in the same apartment she grew up in with her mother and brother. Her elderly father lived in a different part of Ho Chi Minh City with his second family.

Trâm told me that she did not anticipate being sad when he dies in the future. She worked as an elementary school teacher for a few years but quit in order to study accounting because, although she enjoyed teaching, she did not get along with the principal of her school and because working for a multinational company would offer a higher income. Before the global economic downturn in 2008, many Vietnamese office workers would routinely quit well-paying jobs with the confidence that they could find better work elsewhere. However, Trâm did not have as much luck, and she bounced from job to job before settling at a ward-level administrative unit that overworked and underpaid her.

Marriage in its ideal form in Vietnam emphasizes cooperation and the performance of customary roles (Williams and Guest 2005, Bui 2010, Chin 2011). The interests spouses share revolve around their children and economic status, and their strongest affective bonds are with their parents and children, but not necessarily to each other. Indeed, many of the people I talked to in Vietnam emphasized traits in any potential mates that underscored particular social roles: savvy (the better to get rich) and loyal for husbands, hard working and beautiful for wives, and devoted parents for both. At weddings, the couple's elder relatives make short speeches in front of their new in-laws (and increasingly the camera crew hired to record the wedding) exhorting the new couple to love each other and, with greater emphasis and elaboration, to provide for their future offspring. This reflects the more "traditional" institutionalization of respect instead of an intense emotional attachment or cathexis, between spouses in many East Asian contexts (Jamieson 1993).

Romantic partnerships place emphasis on things like personality, habits, and mutual interests, most of which were not yet reflected in evolving Vietnamese wedding

practices (Goodkind 1996). The model for romantic marriages emphasizes intimacy as a matter of emotional communication in the context of interpersonal equality. For this reason, women have "prepared the way for an expansion of the domain of intimacy in their role as the emotional revolutionaries of modernity" (Giddens 1993, 130). When describing their ideal mates to me, many Vietnamese typically would start by describing a good parent to their hypothetical children. However, they also spoke of closeness (*gần gủi*), compatibility (*hợp với nhau*), and someone to confide in or have a heart-to-heart with (*tâm sự*), a constellation of traits is conducive to emotional intimacy. However, Trâm complained that Danh seemed less invested in sharing a relationship with her than in regressing to bachelorhood and spending his free time with his workmates. Trâm was also upset that Danh did not inquire who she was meeting or where she was going when she went out with her friends. However, her objection to this was not focused only on her husband's disinterest in her life and a lack of emotional intimacy but on him not worrying or caring enough about her.

Trâm and Danh had been married for over five years without much incident, which was part of the problem. They had been unable to conceive a child, much to their consternation. Perhaps even more concerned were their relatives, who eventually began barraging them with questions on when they would have a baby. Trâm saw a number of fertility specialists and underwent a few surgeries to increase her chances of conceiving. She also prayed for a baby at Buddhist temples and Catholic churches[61] and spent hundreds of dollars on fortune tellers and votive goods to burn at particularly auspicious

[61] Danh came from a Catholic family so Trâm converted when they married. This did not prevent either of them from participating in religious activities associated with Buddhism or Catholicism. According to Trâm, the more religion people have, the more moral they are.

and powerful temples. Danh had a low sperm count but refused to take any medication to address it. (She was not clear why he did not want to take any medication.) Trâm reasoned that it was common enough for one person in a couple to have reproductive difficulties but wondered what stroke of luck or fate caused both her and her husband to be challenged in this way. Given that she and her husband were not making enough money to raise a child anyways, she told me that she no longer cared whether or not she would have a baby. She just did not want people to gossip about or pity her. However, when her best friend became pregnant towards the end of my fieldwork period, she later cried in private out of a sense of jealousy and loss.

In the meantime, the initial romance of their marriage had faded. According to Trâm and her friends, Vietnamese men apologized for the smallest of infractions before they were married. Much of courtship in contemporary Vietnam is predicated on male chivalry, in which men demonstrate their ability to take care of (*chăm sóc*, *nuôi*) their female partners and shower them with attention. Multiple stories abound of men gradually winning over their initially uninterested partners with caring gestures, both large and small. Many women hoped their husbands would stay the same long after they got married, but inevitably their husbands did not, and the intimate formalities of romance gradually disappeared from their routines together. Indeed, when I observed Trâm and Danh interacting at restaurants, I occasionally saw her become peeved when he did not pay her certain courtesies that she expected of him, such as putting food from a newly arrived course on her plate or squeezing lime into her soup. To this, she would loudly say to me (and by extension the other men at the table) that Vietnamese husbands, as opposed to American ones, did not know how to treat their wives. She wanted a

marriage based on romantic ideals but was unsure how to propagate one without a child to focus their energies on.

Outside of love

Marital infidelity (*ngoại tình*, lit. outside love) has become a flash point for conflicting opinions towards Vietnam's recent socioeconomic transformation. On the one hand, it was cited as evidence of an encroaching urbanized and Westernized lifestyle. Rapidly growing cities provide both anonymity and an availability of sexual partners for individuals, and an increase in disposable income has transformed and intensified the commercial sex work industry (Nguyễn-võ 2008). Many people I spoke with blamed the corrupting influence of the West as sexual libertine or as purveyor of an immoral lifestyle for people to succumb to. Modernization was seen as eroding the Vietnamese traditional family by causing both men and women to stray from their moral grounding and possibly destroy their families in the process (McGrath 2008). According to a professor of urban studies at a Ho Chi Minh City university I spoke with, seemingly high rates of infidelity could be explained by the sense of unmoored confusion that people felt because of rapid Westernization and modernization. As evidence, he cited the same trend that had occurred in South Korea in the 1980s. According to his logic, once the country stabilized, then rates of infidelity would drop of their own accord.

On the other hand, some people highlighted Western-style feminism having a protective effect on marriages. Indeed, the high rates of infidelity and adultery were seen as extensions of traditional Vietnamese culture. Women often complained of philandering husbands, and both men and women cited a feudal tradition of polygamy as

a principal reason for Vietnam's seemingly high rates of infidelity. In addition, discourses of gender emphasize the restlessness and adventurousness of men's tastes (culinary and sexual) as a matter of their essential nature and instincts (*bản năng*) (Phinney 2008b, Horton and Rydstrom 2011, see also Rydstrom 2003). These tastes are linked in a commonly heard expression when talking about extramarital sexual activities: "*Chán cơm, thèm phở*" (When you're bored with rice, you crave noodles). In either case, the trope of adultery provides a conceptual penumbra for ambivalent attitudes towards the neoliberal era with its opportunities and means to satisfy personal desires alongside the anxieties over the demise of cultural traditions (McGrath 2008).

As a sales representative for a beer company, Danh spent so much of his time drinking with potential and long-term clients that his employers gave him medication usually prescribed for hepatitis to protect his liver. One of his clients, Ngọc, was a manager of a restaurant who had recently divorced her husband, who retained custody of their child and refused his ex-wife visitation rights.[62] Furthermore, she was called upon to support financially both of her parents' families (as they had divorced long before) as well as a few sick relatives. Danh's intense feelings of compassion eventually turned into romantic love. The Vietnamese word *thương* can be translated as wound, pity/compassion, and affection/platonic love. (In this regard it is not dissimilar from the Ifaluk word *fago*, which Catherine Lutz [1998] translated as pity/compassion/love.) Danh confessed to Trâm that he had developed feelings for another woman but did not have a sexual relationship with her. He affirmed that he would be loyal to Trâm and discontinue

[62] Women typically get custody of the children in divorce cases, but Vietnam's strong patrilineal culture often mean that the husband's family claim the couple's children as theirs more than the wife/mother's.

his friendship with Ngọc. Not wanting to be an obstacle to two people who loved each other, Trâm even met Ngọc in person to yield (*nhường*) Danh to her. Trâm was told she was crazy (*điên*) since Danh had already made the decision to remain loyal to her.

Trâm believed Danh had broken off all communication with Ngọc until she accidentally read a text message from Ngọc to Danh a few months later. On an outing to Vũng Tàu with some of their friends, Trâm absentmindedly looked over her husband's shoulder as he read an incoming text message from Ngọc. In the message, it was apparent Ngọc was responding to something Danh had already written to her. At the hospital to treat a stomach problem,[63] she told him to enjoy Vũng Tàu and mentioned a few other things that Trâm did not believe a platonic friend would say to another. Trâm reported immediately feeling betrayed, although it was uncertain whether or not Danh had been at least sexually faithful.

One night a few weeks later, Trâm brought a friend an item she had asked for. However, the friend was not at home so Trâm just left it to the friend's roommate instead. Trâm knew that Ngọc lived only a few houses down from her friend where she saw two figures in the dark. She called out Danh's name, and both people looked towards her. Trâm primarily focused on the woman to verify that it was indeed Ngọc. Recognizing her, Trâm immediately drove to her in-laws to report their son's infidelity. She asked her

[63] At this point in her narrative, Trâm noted how terrible she felt for Ngọc. When she read in the text that Ngọc was in the hospital for an ulcer, Trâm felt a (perhaps sympathetic) pain in her gut (*lòng*). This highlighted Trâm's sense of compassion and fairness to her ostensible rival. On the other hand, it may also be the case that the situation as described by Danh was a form of emotional manipulation insofar as he gave Trâm a narrative that she could not say no to: being a sympathetic woman, what choice would she have but to pity Ngọc?

father-in-law, whom she disliked intensely, three times to take his son back,[64] but he kept defending Danh and refused to allow him to come home. Indeed, that night, Danh returned home to Trâm, which she interpreted as a sign that he still loved her. She changed his caller identification in her cell phone to "Lier" until her brother corrected her spelling to "Liar." Ngọc's new caller ID was "Hồ Ly Tinh," after a demonic figure known for seducing unwitting men with her beauty in order to take advantage of them.

Divorce?

Trâm cried herself to sleep in silence as she lay next to Danh. After roughly a month, she decided to apply for a divorce. Since they had no children, she did not anticipate divorce proceedings to be particularly difficult or lengthy. She was afraid of being the topic of gossip, but she also expected that particular downside to be temporary. (A married couple without children in her apartment complex had recently separated, and the neighbors' gossip over them quickly subsided.) Moreover, she doubted her mother would object since she herself had divorced Trâm's father nearly 30 years prior. Indeed, as time went on, both her mother and brother thought that divorce was the best option for Trâm. Although the three of them agreed on this course of action, Trâm hesitated because the easiest thing to do was to continue living with Danh, even if they no longer got along. For her, the uncertainty was the most difficult thing to bear. At work and at home with her family, she knew what she should do. However, when it came to her marriage, there was no script for her to follow.

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[64] According to patrilineal marriage patterns, in Vietnam newly married couples usually live with the groom's family. However, because Danh's house was already crowded, Trâm and Danh lived with her natal family. Danh's distant cousin lived in Atlanta but owned a house not far from them so they often lived in that house on their own when it was available.

Trâm's new goal was to marry a Westerner in part because Vietnamese (and other Asian) men changed too much after marriage. She remembered Danh being unnecessarily apologetic for the smallest inconvenience he may have posed to her before they were married. She gave the example of him making trips to the pharmacy to buy her aspirin while they were dating. Now, when she complained of a headache, Danh would only ask her why she just did not take some headache medication. Sunday nights are typically when couples go out (*đi chơi*, see chapter 6), but Danh seemed more interested in hanging out with his friends than his wife. Trâm was glad they did not have children because she did not want to be stuck in a marriage when the husband and wife were "bored" (*chán*) of each other. Boredom in this context suggests an intensity beyond mere disinterest. Being "bored of" something often means an individual can no longer stand it, whether "it" is a type of food, job, or person, and carries an extremely negative connotation.[65]

When Trâm first told me of Danh's infidelity, we were having dinner with her best friend and a friend of mine from the United States who was in Ho Chi Minh City for a pilot study. On the way from dinner to a separate bar afterwards, Trâm asked my American friend if after 16 years of marriage he still loved his wife. He told her, "Even more." She took his response to be indicative of a greater commitment to romance in the West. I told her the oft-cited statistic that some 50% of marriages in the US end in divorce, but that did not phase her. In fact, it encouraged her since her potential future

[65] I once complained on the phone to a friend of being "bored" (*chán*) at my workplace and could sense my colleagues' unease at my choice of words. (To properly convey my feelings at the time, I should have merely said that I was "tired" [*mệt*].) A woman younger than me that I did not know very well approached me a few days later advising me to separate my work life and my personal life by viewing the job as what allows me to pursue what makes me happy, as she herself had done.

marital status of "divorced" would not bear as much stigma in the US as it would in Vietnam.

This put me in the awkward position of having to play "matchmaker" for her and any unmarried friends I might have in the US. While I was once at lunch with Trâm, her best friend stopped by the cafe to request help in translating the transcript of a sexual innuendo-filled online chat between her and someone who was supposed to be an American man looking for a Vietnamese bride. Her friend explained to me that she was trying to set up her friend (someone that I did not know) with an American, but it was clear that Trâm was the actual subject of the transcript from the context and by how uncharacteristically unengaged she was in the proceedings. I told them that Trâm's friend had been chatting with did not seem serious in his intent and otherwise warned them of the extreme and dangerous power inequality that result from many cross-border marriages. They countered that despite this they would still have more parity with a Western partner, such is entrenchment of a Confucian mentality of Vietnamese men. This dichotomization between the modern West and the feudal East reflects an essentialization of Vietnamese culture as well as a self-Orientalization that often occurs in postcolonial Southeast Asia (cf. Leshkowich and Jones 2003) but also offered Trâm an object and a model of hope to project onto her own future. The risks of marrying a foreigner and moving away from her family were outweighed by the possibility of attaining an ideal transformation of love.

However, the hopes of marrying a Westerner gradually dimmed, and she had a number of designs for her future. For example, Trâm was still ready for her marriage to be over, but she wanted to have a baby first. She planned on getting a divorce as soon as

she had the baby. Asked if she ever wanted to remarry, she said "No, no, no, no." At other times, she hoped to salvage her marriage. Over the months, Trâm unsuccessfully tried to open a dialogue with Danh about their marriage. However, such attempts were usually shut down by him asking her why she was posing certain questions in the first place. She did not know if Danh was still seeing Ngọc at any given point and could not bring herself to trust him again. Once she drove past Ngọc's house and thought she saw Danh's motorbike parked out in front. He discovered that Trâm had changed his and Ngọc's caller ID on her cell phone when he saw one of Ngọc's text messages to Trâm but did not say anything, likely out of anger, according to Trâm.

Frustrated and wanting to talk about something that had been kept in her heart (*trong lòng*), she again went to her in-laws. She had three specific questions in mind. First, did Danh still think of Trâm as his wife? Second, did he still want to live with her? Third, what did he want her to do? Putting the onus on her to figure out how to salvage her marriage, her father-in-law told her to observe his behavior (*xem xét hành động*) for the answers. Given how often she complained about her husband's actions, this advice could not have bided well for Trâm and Danh's future together. One time she was present when her in-laws scolded their son. His father reminded him that he was now married and had to accept his responsibilities as a husband, which entailed no longer being able to do what he wanted and worrying (*lo*) about his wife. His mother was never as talkative as his father and merely told him to get rid of his bad characteristics (*bỏ tính xấu*).

Trâm also consulted her best friend for advice on how to resolve her marital conflicts and her thoughts on what could have led Danh to stray from her. She was mainly told to avoid fighting or talking back with Danh and that she needed to learn how

to control her anger. However, Trâm did not know how the latter would be possible. She only resolved to be quiet (*im lặng*) when she was angry. Her anger (*giận dữ*) was conceptualized in behavioral terms, and her response to it would accordingly emphasize behavior, that of silence. Trâm did not mention any internal or mentalistic mechanism through which she could control her anger. Although her anger had subsided greatly, she still did not know if she had forgiven Danh yet or even if she still loved him. In order to interpret her inner self in the definitive terms she was comfortable with, she had to read her own behavior.

Yet Trâm was envious of the freedom I had in living alone. If she wanted to go out or come home late, she needed to consult with her mother or husband. She said it was "complicated" and made her tired. She said I probably didn't have to care (*quan tâm*) for anyone. She herself said she did not care for Danh anymore since he did not care for her. She cited him not knowing the addresses for the offices for her two more recent jobs. According to him, that kind of information is not necessary so he did not want to know it. However, Trâm protested that it is something a person should know about their own spouse, as she knew where his job was located. Any number of emergencies or strange situations could arise, so it was important to know these seemingly extraneous bits of information. Moreover, when they initially started living together, Danh helped her do many household activities. Now, she complained about him not doing anything. (Indeed, on the day of this interview, she was hungry from not having breakfast because there was too much housework that needed to be done before she left for work.) She regretted having invested so much emotional energy in their relationship because she cared too

much for him and got too little in return. “Quá chán. Quá ghét.” (I’m beyond fed up. I hate him.)

Standard discourses of adultery in Vietnam blame husbands for their weakness and irresponsibility in putting their families at risk and the “other” women for their greed and manipulativeness. In this narrative, adultery is corrosive because a husband’s economic resources are re-allocated to a mistress or even a new, second family. Implicit in this is that the husband’s betrayal is also a sentimental one; his instrumental support and emotional support were one and the same. Trâm drew from this discourse to articulate her anger at Ngọc, who was portrayed as greedy. If she truly loved him, according to Trâm’s logic, she would not have pursued Danh because remaining loyal in his marriage was best for him. Instead, she was only after his money and was in some ways stealing from Trâm.

Trâm gave varying, sometimes conflicting accounts of how she was betrayed. Her most clearly argued versions related to domains such as spousal responsibilities[66] (*tình nghĩa*) and finances that resonated with the standard discourse of adultery. However, her more pressing accounts—the ones that seemed to bother her more because she had not yet come to terms with them—focused on Danh’s emotional betrayal. Trâm seemed aware of this tension and was careful to avoid coming across to me as materialistic. However, as Farrer argues, for women in market societies, love is both a strategic choice and a refuge from market strategies” (2002, 192). Moreover, Jane Collier notes “women in market societies find it difficult to attain the standard of pure love… A woman’s

[66] This refers to the responsibilities that a person may fulfill out of a sense of social obligation, which may or may not be accompanied by love. For example, an unhappily married couple might stay together for the sake of their children’s welfare.

choice of a husband always appears tainted by greed" (1997, 75). The back-and-forth nature of Trâm's positions reflect an emerging dilemma of trying to find love yet still situating oneself in terms of moral obligations.

To Vũng Tàu

Arriving late one day for our regular lunches, I noticed Trâm was considerably darker than usual. As I sat down, she gave me a look so I could tell she had a story for me. She asked me if I would follow my wife going somewhere, possibly with another man, even if the distance was as far as Saigon and Vũng Tàu. I joked that it would depend on how much I loved my wife at that moment and was reminded that the hypothetical person was my wife so of course I loved her. I told Trâm that she had a pattern of asking me these kinds of questions after something had happened, as if she needed help in figuring something out. Laughing, she patted my arm and said, "Giỏi" (Well done).

Trâm was not even very angry when she left for Vũng Tàu without telling anyone. The highway to Vũng Tàu is not especially perilous, but Trâm was scared the entire way there. She was most afraid of getting into a traffic collision or driving off the road at a high speed, all the while not having anyone to help her in case of such an emergency. What started out as an act of defiance and courage turned out to be terrifying. Although she knew the road to Vũng Tàu well, she was frightened of any number of dangerous scenarios that presented themselves to her imagination on the way there. However, she refused to turn around. According to her, she wanted to test herself to know if she could make it or not by herself, joking that if not then she could just lie in her coffin. Moreover,

she wanted to know if she could handle herself in the case she did get into an accident. Although she was tired after her adventure, she still did not regret going because of the opportunity to test her mettle (*xem thường tính mạng*). In fact, Trâm prided herself on carrying out the occasional act of reckless abandon and rebellion. In this regard, she joked that she was more like a man than a woman.[67] She was also glad she went to find out where she and Danh stood in relation to each other. Moreover, she complained that he did not know how to make her happy because he did not know how to manage their finances such that even minor things became a source of considerable conflict. Their friends had managed to buy or even build homes of their own, but Trâm and Danh still moved back and forth between their families' homes. Despite this, Trâm felt that Danh still loved/cared for (*thương*)[68] her and worried for her. Thus, he was still a good husband in that respect. She chose to stay with him because of that, but she had come to the realization that it is better to be happy (*vui*) than to be sad (*buồn*).

When she got to Vũng Tàu, Trâm called Danh to tell him where she was, but he refused to go. Her goal was that he would come to get her if she went as far as she did, and they could spend the rest of the weekend in Vũng Tàu, where they had already gone once to rekindle (*ham lại*, lit. reheat) their love. Instead, they only ended up fighting over the phone. When Trâm first told me her fantasy of escaping to the beach by herself, I assumed it was a way to avoid confrontation. However, it was designed to provoke one. This was a journey that she needed to make for a number of reasons I am still unclear

[67] On the other hand, she criticized Danh for being more "like a woman" (in English) than a man because he did not perform his responsibilities by following her to Vũng Tàu and escorting her back home. If he had gone to Vũng Tàu, she would not follow him because men and women are different: women are weaker so they should not face the same risks that men have to take.
[68] It is notable that she did not say the word for love in a romantic sense, *yêu*.

about, and she found out that her husband was someone who could not make it with her. She spent the entire day in a hotel room watching TV. At night, she did the same but was more scared than bored because of the unfamiliar noises echoing in the hotel. Returning home exhausted the next day, she laughed at how dirty her sunglasses had gotten.

Trâm clearly enjoyed challenging herself in manageable increments. In her childhood, Trâm often got into trouble by testing her personal limits. (Her first time driving a motorbike ended up with her, her cousin, and her cousin's motorbike crashing into a vegetable stand.) In my time in Vietnam, I rarely heard people describe life in terms of abstract or grand metaphors (e.g. "life is a journey"). Rather, life was discussed most often in terms of *everyday* life, which itself consisted of a series of often routinized tasks that need to be completed. Perhaps because I was seen as naive and utterly incompetent in what was portrayed as a dog-eat-dog social environment that did not actually reconcile with my experience of Ho Chi Minh City, people often gave me detailed instructions on how to carry out mundane chores. While family life was often sacralized, non-domestic arenas were viewed as dangerous and worthy of suspicion. With the demands of the global economy increasingly putting individuals in contact with a wider range of people in Ho Chi Minh City, the tasks of everyday life increasingly became challenges to the self. Thus, Trâm's simultaneously impulsive and long gestating trip to Vũng Tàu was a test of Danh's loyalty and husbandly responsibilities and of Trâm's ability to lead her life without him. Although she did not regret her decision, her fears on the way to and in Vũng Tàu reflect a doubt in herself or perhaps even a greater fear of her own abilities. What started out as a romantic project to transform her and Danh's intersubjective entanglements in the end became a self-making project. She

discovered that she was—or made herself—brave enough to embark on new courses of action.

For about two months, I had minimal contact with Trâm, only seeing her when going out with our mutual friends. When we did have lunch finally, I asked her if she had anything new in her life. She paused for a moment and looked down before telling me she had taken a new lover.[69] He was her co-worker and seemed to be diametrically opposed to Danh in many ways, except that they were both married. She asked me if I was surprised that she was having an affair. I told her yes, but mainly insofar as she had told me multiple times she was through with men. She had surprised herself as well, but said that it just happened. About two months later, she ended the affair since it was clear that her paramour would not leave his wife, to whom she felt a tremendous amount of guilt. He still loved his wife and, more importantly, his young daughter. Trâm was relieved to no longer have to be secretive around Danh, who had finally begun to act suspicious.

Many have made note of the mysticism often tied up with romantic love. People frequently joked to me of the love charms, tonics, and amulets used on unwitting souls or fortune tellers consulted to divine the uncertainties of love. Implied in such stories is that individual destinies are situated in broader cosmologies. Certainly Trâm had moments when she believed that her circumstances were ordained by powers far outside of her control, including her husband's actions, Vietnam's patriarchal culture, or her own karma. At other times—more often than not, I would gather—she looked to a more open-

[69] This was not the first chance Trâm had to have an affair of her own. After she had discovered Danh's infidelity, she told a male acquaintance of her troubles. He obliquely propositioned her by suggesting they rent a hotel room for an hour to "rest." Trâm told me she had every right to go with him but did not want to bring herself down to Danh's level.

ended future and set about to navigate it. She missed the unruly passions of romance but at the same time wanted to control it. For many in today's Vietnam, romance is no longer the stuff of fairy tales and far-flung destinies. It has turned into a realm in which they can control their futures. For Trâm, however, this did not mean that romance seemed any less fictional.

When my fieldwork ended, she was still married to him. Given her tendency to interpret her emotions through her behavior, I suspect she rationalized her not decision to not pursue a divorce as one motivated by her still loving Danh since they were still married. This is opposed to an interpretation of her behavior through the emotions, which would be that she still loved Danh so stayed with him. Her decision could be read as the triumph of love over the anxiety of getting a divorce, but it is perhaps more plausible that anxiety won out over love. However, I underestimated Trâm and her capacity to change. The next time I saw her in Vietnam three years later, she and Danh were markedly different, happy even. He more readily and enthusiastically engaged with his in-laws at family gathering. She reported that they understood each other better than they had in the past because they began to communicate their anger towards each other instead of holding it in. Ever straddling caution and bravery and optimism and pessimism, when I asked her if she was happy, Trâm replied "I don't know."

Cường

Some of the most striking stories I heard during my research were the lengths to which certain individuals would go to get the attention of the objects of their affection. These were dramatic stories of mostly young men who threw caution to the wind and,

quite frankly, made fools of themselves in the name of love, continuing to wait in the rain, drunkenly show up at doorstops unannounced, or leave embarrassingly honest and earnest posts on the object of their affection's Facebook wall. All this was in spite of (or perhaps because of) the object of their affections' repeated rejections.

Cường, like Thịnh (the man whose experience of going "into the wild" was described at the beginning of this chapter), is a young, restless man from central Vietnam whose attempts to make a life for himself seemed tied to finding true love. A bright (if unfocused) college student, he had moved to the city to study finance at the behest of his parents. Eventually Cường became my closest friend in Vietnam. He had the hallmark characteristic of the type of person that many ethnographers seem to attract: marginality (cf. Raybeck 1996). He said he did not fit in with his peers, mostly other college students, because they were too materialistic[70] and too serious. I suspect many of these students also shunned him for being an undisciplined student. His intelligence and quick wit were obvious to those who knew him, but Vietnam's Confucian-influenced university system rewards repetition and rote memorization, both of which Cường complained of being too boring to bother with. Aside from his cousin and roommate, who both grew up in his hometown, most of the people Cường spent time with in Ho Chi Minh City were expatriates, as he spoke English very well and was always eager to improve. Indeed, his fun-loving and mischievous personality meshed well with the Western recent college

[70] When I first met him, I assumed he was Vietnamese American because his simple style of dress was more similar to male undergraduates in the United States than college students in Vietnam, whose dress follows South Korean fashion.

graduates he befriended.[71] As one of them told me with a mix of admiration and reproach, "This guy is trouble."

However, unlike many people who become key informants, Cường was not particularly reflexive or articulate about his life experiences. My attempts to conduct formal interviews with him fell flat because he found most of my questions to be too difficult to answer. Often his responses would boil down to "You study psychology. You tell me." Yet it was this inability to verbalize his feelings that I found interesting. As described in chapter 2, many people in Vietnam find it difficult to talk about their "emotions" as such in some part because discourses surrounding psychic interiority are still emergent. Cường was interested in understanding the self more and made efforts to do so in his own un-self-reflexive way. It is the disjuncture between his actions and his difficulty in articulating them as well as the attempts to reconcile the two that I find compelling. Thus, my analysis here draws primarily from casual conversations (often held with several beers) and observations of the stories he told me rather than formal interviews. His narratives disclose not only the unfolding of events but also the ways he attributed meaning to those events (Cf. Garro and Mattingly 2000).

Because he saw me as an expert in psychology (which as I discussed in chapter 2 is considered a Western domain), Cường would sometimes use me as a sounding board to understand himself or even as an impromptu therapist. Mostly, though, our interactions were more brotherly than therapeutic and took on many of the features of an *anh-em* (older brother-younger sibling) relationship. For example, he sometimes sought advice

[71] In this respect, I was an outlier in terms of both age and purpose for living in Vietnam. I did not get to know most of his expatriate friends well.

from me regarding his education and potential career paths or how to navigate social conflicts.[72] The focus of this section of the chapter started with him asking advice on how to talk to Australian women.

Intersubjectivity

A consideration of intersubjectivity will be helpful here to understand Cường's attachment to the object of his own affections and to his own ardor towards her. How are we to account for the peculiarity in which the fate of an individual's self is clearly contingent on the fluctuations of another's, even as the former remains constant in his or her intentions and devotion? What might an explicit focus on intersubjectivity, typically invoked (and oversimplified) to imply sharedness, reveal about this disconnect and its experience?

The anthropology of self and feeling proposes that selfhood is intrinsically relational and that the self should not be solely associated with interiority or the private. Key to this endeavor is using emotion as an entree into how culture enters into social consciousness and action. For example, Levy's foundational conceptualization of feeling cast it as a type of "awareness that entails a sense of pressure for action of some kind, but an action that requires information about an 'external' world, information that must be learned and entails the whole organism's relation to that world" (1984, 220). Thus, emotions signify the individual's encounter with "an understood external world." They

[72] Although I consider myself to be conflict averse, many Vietnamese youth rarely "stand up for themselves," especially to their elders. Cường considered me to be assertive after I dispatched a fortune teller (*thầy bói*) who approached Cường and I at a cafe and then tried to charge us $50 for a brief conversation. I refused to pay the entire amount, but Cường offered to chip in 200,000VNĐ ($18), a small fortune for him. I ended up paying the fortune teller $10, double an acceptable rate.

involve a bodily feeling in response to some stimulus and an interpretation of that feeling, which is typically identified in this view as a culturally recognized emotion. Being able to recognize, even implicitly, that one is experiencing an emotion allows an individual to use it as an indication of his or her relationship to the stimulus that triggered that particular emotion. Now, this framework has led to an emphasis on personal meanings and how emotions are used as a resource for self-knowledge, even though they are conceptualized as an indication of engagement *with* the world. The self that emerges from such frameworks can come across as monadic, sometimes revealing persistently familiar container models of the self, emotion, and experience. What is overlooked is how we can see the ways emotions are used to understand others and the experience of others, and what gets lost is the sense of otherness in one's own perceptions and experiences.

The issue of intentionality is critical to this discussion since an emotional experience does not only belong to a subject, as if the emotion is about something outside which can then be "represented by internal imitation or reflection." It is directed towards an object with a particular set of properties (e.g. being in love with an Australian expat). This implies a simultaneous reflexive attention to one's own bodily experiences and an unreflexive engagement with the world outside the body so that selfhood entails the consciousness of one's bodily condition or of oneself as experiencing an emotion to varying degrees (Csordas 2008). Emotions, then, give us a starting point to examine the intersubjective basis of social life in which people find themselves in emotional states that come from their being-in-the-world, neither fully internal nor external. Intersubjectivity is not merely the merger of isolated subjects or intentionalities (Crossley 1996). Instead, it is a process that encompasses a wide range of connection and

disconnection. In this light, selfhood is made and remade through social interaction and becomes the site at which it is objectified by others in the presence of others. Emotions are not experiences that merely happen to people but are instead activities that we *do*, shaping the boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they were objects.

If intersubjectivity is to be based on the notion of consciousnesses existing with and for one another, then emotions can be viewed in part as an engagement with self-other relations (Husserl 1999, Liu 2002, Hollan 2008). Emotions that are directed towards others do reveal a great deal of knowledge about the self but, in some instances, can also be responsible for a sense of self-alterity that may or may not be used to reflect back onto the self. Some of the feelings associated with unrequited love prevent a particular kind of self-understanding. Jason Throop writes that love is in some respects "a giving over of a part of our being to another, or perhaps more accurately, the self-estrangement of our being in its intimate entanglement with another" (2010, 774). I now turn my attention to a case in which a love for someone seemed to become more fervent the less involvement the love object actually had in it.

The loneliest direction

Before I continue, some historical and ethnographic background of unrequited love in contemporary Vietnam is in order. *Tình đơn phương* can be most closely translated as "love with a lonely direction" or "love in a lonely direction" and occupies a prominent position in much of everyday conversation and joking and Vietnamese pop culture. It actually covers a much wider range of possibilities than unrequited love in the

U.S., i.e., when person A loves person B, but knowing this B does not love A in return. In Vietnam, it also includes most instances of love thwarted by external circumstances, e.g., disapproving parents, the lovers' disparate class backgrounds, or geographic separation. The rich corpus of poems and pop songs that eventually came to be affixed with the label of "pre-1975"--basically any music or poetry composed during either the French occupation or what is called the American War--features stories and scenarios of women wondering if their husbands were cold or hungry in Pleiku (the site of an air base and infamous battle) or teenage boys not acting on their feelings because they knew they would be drafted upon graduation, and so on. On the other hand, the vast majority of contemporary music on Ho Chi Minh City's radio stations is about unrequited love due to one person's agentive rejection of another. Here, there is a closer alignment to the standard Western notion of unrequited love, especially with an emphasis that is not unconnected to the transformation of the self in light of Vietnam's neoliberal reforms on personality differences and more or less "internal" barriers.

Also relevant to this case is that men and women are constructed to have different styles of unrequited love. Women were considered to be too shy to reveal, let alone act on, their feelings. Their strategies were often indirect and meek.[73] Men, on the other hand, are considered to be more brash, hot-natured, and externally-oriented--a reflection of the yin-yang cosmology found throughout East Asia. Married women often told me of the romantic gestures, both grand and slight, that their husbands did to win them over as a counterpoint to how much men change after they get married.

[73] One story I heard involved the pretense of a woman repeatedly borrowing a little bit of money here and there from the object of her affections to get a soda or whatnot so that the exchange relationship could blossom into something more meaningful. They eventually married.

While still in high school, Cường had become very taken with a fellow classmate named Moon in his hometown on the south-central coast of Vietnam, and thus began a three-year crush (obsession?) that every so often was interrupted by girlfriends he had at university. He described the kisses on their cheeks as feeling cold to him because he was not in love with them. These relationships tended to last only a few weeks before he ended them out of loyalty to Moon (or perhaps, it often seemed, a devotion to his own misery). One of these girlfriends tearily told him he needed to mature because he was not bearing the responsibility (*chịu trách nhiệm*) as a boyfriend to care/nurture (*chăm sóc*) for her emotional welfare. Moon had also moved to Ho Chi Minh City for college, and every so often Cường would stop by her apartment to inquire (*hỏi thăm*) how she was doing, one of the most important ways of demonstrating sentiment, or give her small gifts, which she would receive politely. On a number of occasions, when Cường and I were hanging out, he paused in mid-sentence when he saw a woman that reminded him of her. The first few times it happened, he would dreamily tell me why he had suddenly stopped, and I quickly got the picture.

Cường's friends told him to forget Moon, though the only concrete advice they ever gave to him was to distract himself with his schoolwork[74] to make his parents proud of him. They wondered why he did not have a girlfriend and there were plenty of available alternatives for him in Ho Chi Minh City. He was frequently advised to be more

[74] The European emphasis on the romantic beauty of frustrated longing is related to the Christian belief in the virtue of celibacy and the theological importance of altruistic self-sacrifice. This is certainly relevant to Cường insofar as he was so willing to paint himself as a martyr. The passionate love that they were attracted to was marked by an urgency that ruptured and conflicted with everyday routines. His emotional involvement with both Moon and Anna was so consuming that he ignored his ordinary obligations.

confident with himself, and many people told him how handsome he was.[75] Yet he kept at it, even after she left a comment on his blog: *Tôi*[76] *mãi mãi sẽ không thích anh* ("I will not like you forever."), which he did not delete because it "came from her." Although such matters were more typically discussed with women, Cường was too embarrassed to do so, but most of his male friends quickly tired of him bringing Moon up or just made crass jokes at both his and Moon's expense. In large part, he and I initially bonded because I was the only person he knew who would not dismiss his concerns.

Then one night, his English teacher invited some of his colleagues for a night of bar-hopping with the hidden agenda of introducing Cường to the daughter of a co-worker, whom I will call Anna. Several drinks later, Cường and Anna were kissing on a dance floor for half an hour in full view of everyone (including her mother). He said of his aimless life that for that night: *Cuộc sống là màu hồng* (Life is pink).[77] Over the next few months, an obsessional love would occupy most of his thoughts and replace the anomie of the seemingly random events and interactions that made up his everyday life. Despite his evident elation when I met him at a cafe the next morning, he was afraid that things had moved too fast—that they had fallen in love too fast and would then break up too fast. He desperately wanted whatever connection they had between them to be love so he could have someone to confide in after, say, a night out with friends. He was scared that Anna regretted the night before or was only interested in a sexual relationship.

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[75] There is no equivalent for "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" in Vietnamese, and Vietnamese often comment on people's physical appearance quite openly. I observed random strangers remark on Cường's good looks. On the other hand, our mutual American friends only made remarks about his appearance when he was not present.

[76] *Tôi* is a very formal way to address oneself for someone their age and was used here to create distance from him.

[77] Pink is a happy color in Vietnam.

Unfortunately for him, the subsequent times Cường and Anna met at parties or with groups of mutual friends were stilted and awkward, and Cường became increasingly frustrated with his inability to hold a smooth conversation with her. When they went out with a mutual group of friends, he would ask her about what kind of music she liked, what she missed about Australia, what her favorite Vietnamese dishes were, etc., but he was rarely successful in getting her to open up to him beyond simple answers, though he took heart in the occasional texts she sent him afterwards in which she apologized for not talking to him more. On a few occasions, Cường arrived unannounced at Anna's workplace (a kindergarten for expatriate children) to hang out with her, which she was always dismayed by. I once arrived at a mutual friend's home to find him gorging on pizza, nearly eating two of them alone because neither our friend nor I were hungry. He had brought two pizzas (at a significant financial cost to him) to the kindergarten to share with Anna and the students but was shooed away by the principal. The mix of adrenaline over following through with his scheme and the sting of its failure had produced an overwhelming physical arousal that he tried to adumbrate by eating.

These mixed signals and ambiguous rejections of his advances only seemed to spur more ardor, however, as he resorted to increasingly blatant overtures and concocted elaborate scenarios that were inspired by Hollywood romantic comedies to "win her over." One of these plans involved me playing a romantic song on my laptop while he flipped through placards with love notes he had written on them a la the music video to Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." This idea was inspired by a similar tactic a character used in the 2003 film *Love, Actually*. The intersubjectivity between Cường and Anna was problematic in part because they had such different expectations of what it

should be like. Cường formed his ideas on what would successfully woo Western women from Hollywood films, missing cultural conventions about maintaining some distance that are purposefully violated in romantic comedies for entertainment purposes. My suggestions for him to "play it cool" eventually turned into entreaties for him to stop obsessing over her, but Cường continued to feel compelled to find excuses to see Anna in person. Even though he was following a cultural script of devotion and chivalry, he attributed his behavior as motivated by the universal experience of love.

What I saw at the time as him "just trying too hard" to force an effortless rapport was an attempt to will Anna into reciprocating his feelings for her in lieu of a concrete plan with its own rationale. However, along with the passivity[78] implied in Cường's not knowing how to stop thinking about her or how to control his own emotions, there is an active component to his feelings in that the notion that his demonstrations of the authenticity of these feelings could make her acquiesce was predicated not just on an act of persuasion (as in *look-at-what-a-great-boyfriend-I-am-already-being*) but on an automatic interlocking of social roles defined by a mutual demonstration of affection. I would speculate that Cường viewed this logic of relations of sentiment as unreliable in dealing with Westerners, who are viewed as placing less relative weight on attachment than on sex, but depended on it regardless. (See chapter 3.)

A paradox in the intersubjectivity of unrequited love is that the love object exists so vividly in a person's experience of him or her, producing an illusory immediacy that can be construed as quite monadic. The focus on the unattainable object absorbs attention

[78] Cường reported feeling like a weak person from not being able to control his emotions and threw himself into martial arts training to strengthen his body, only to find that it did not work.

so that the person may be in love with the image of the love object within him or herself instead of as part of a more reciprocal form of intersubjectivity. Cường's experience of Anna as part of his own consciousness is certainly produced in large part by him--an increasingly solipsistic intersubjectivity. As he became more and more obsessed with Anna, the divide between the intensity of his emotions and how much he actually knew about her became more glaring. The escalation of unrequited love may have been a response to continually feeling rejected such that the object of his emotions was not only Anna but also his feelings for her.[79] (Meta-emotions, if you will.) Thus, the boundaries between self and other are difficult to navigate in what could alternately to be viewed as a conflation of or a co-construction of the love itself and the love object. Though it is typically conceived as the product of individuals building something together, love, whether returned or not, is an act of creation because it brings about and realizes a distinctive relation between two people. Cường's feelings towards Anna seemed to operate independently of him even though they were rooted in his own romantic ideals and imagination.

Falling in like

Perhaps what was most troubling to Cường about his feelings was that he sought out a particular form of recognition from her, but at times it seemed that she didn't recognize his existence at all. He gave me the same answers when I asked him "Why do

[79] This is not dissimilar to the American cliche of loving someone vs. loving how you feel when you're with them.

you love her?" and "How do you know you love her?":[80] "I don't know; I just do." In this instance, the objectification of his feelings as love gives him a social identity based on a cultural model of love, passion, and ardor as a romantic, unpragmatic, etc. His emotions reveal how he navigates and experiments with the world. However, they also preclude him from other forms of self-understanding, including that kind of rational, reflexive understanding that eluded him and caused greater consternation. This is further complicated by the re-organization of emotion and sentiment brought on by neoliberal reforms that have introduced new ways of being-in-the-world. Perhaps misery can be considered as its own form of self-knowledge, but that is a set of issues for a different paper. His intersubjectivity was marked by a consciousness existing with another and *especially* for another in such a way that he felt alienated from himself at times.

What for Cường was "love" was less charitably labeled as "infatuation," "passion," or "ardor" by others in his social network, including myself at first. As he discussed his experiences with Anna with more and more people, he himself began to revise his feelings as he told the story to others as well as himself. In this new narrative, he no longer had fallen in love. Instead, he realized he had only "fallen in like." This introduced into his head-over-heels narrative the greater importance of reason and the insufficient amount of it that he had. To "fall in like" establishes a gradient of romantic attachment spread across varying degrees of emotional intensity and rational thought. Moreover, if "true love" was a stable foundation for the type of relationship that Cường wanted but that also seemed farther and farther away on the horizon with every stilted

[80] Certainly Cường's self-interrogation and how he thought about his problems were influenced by (flat-footed) interview questions such as these. His friendships with so many foreigners were also likely a major factor in how much more "modern" he came across than someone liked Tram. One of his American friends described him as a "sponge."

interaction he had with Anna, then his emotions could not be "love." He was beginning to admit the validity of the commonly heard scolding from older generations that people his age were too young to properly fall in love. Corrupted by the external influences of global media, they insisted, young people had become too fascinated with sex and conflated it with love (cf. Nguyen 2007, Nguyen and Liamputtong 2007, Bui 2010).

Reframing the experience of (unrequited) love as "falling in like" was an attempt to reason himself out of his own misery/suffering (*đau khổ*) but ultimately proved unsuccessful in rationalizing his feelings and bring them in line with Anna's. Over the following weeks, Cường had not began to think about Anna less or feel more positive about his situation or himself. However, this did not reverse his opinion on having "fallen in like," and he asserted that only time could alleviate his heartache. In the meantime, he threw himself into his martial arts training in the hopes that increasing his bodily control would correspond to greater emotional control. Instead, the disparity between his growing physical strength and his continued emotional vulnerability only exacerbated his feelings of being held under Anna's sway.

One reason for the failure of replacing love with infatuation in his understanding of his feelings may lie in a distinction of passionate love and romantic love that can be found in older generations' criticisms of youthful ardor and in much of the scholarly literature on love. The former has a liberating quality insofar as it breaks from social obligations and everyday routines (Lindholm 1998). The latter in its ideal form connects emergent notions of individual freedom and self-realization, often by provoking self-interrogation: how do I feel about the love object, and how does the love object feel about me?

However, Cường's experiences clearly defy such a simple dichotomization. As somewhat of an outside in his own culture, his choices in carving out a niche for himself were frequently invalidated by his peers and his parents. As a young man, he was expected, using family connections, to join some kind of corporate entity at an entry level and gradually climb the bureaucratic ranks. Unfortunately, his lack of good grades and diligence prevented much success in this realm; at one point, he dropped out of school without telling anyone because of his frustrations over the curriculum and shame over his performance. Instead, relying on his "charm" (*duyên*), he found greater success on his own as an English tutor for children from wealthy Vietnamese and South Korean families. Cường sought validation from Anna not just for his worth as a romantic suitor (which at times seemingly became conflated with his worth as an individual) but also for his lifestyle. His obsession over a Western woman implies a greater rupture from everyday life than one over a Vietnamese woman. Cường had unusually high expectations of the transformative and transgressive powers of romantic love, and it put more pressure on Anna to be his savior.

Back in his hometown for summer break, Cường reached the nadir of his (lack of) experiences with Anna. Trying to push her out of his consciousness without the myriad distractions of Ho Chi Minh City, he did not feel anything, only numbness and emptiness, something he found difficult to put into words. When I asked him if he thought the English phrase "feeling dead inside" was an apt descriptor, he agreed and went on to quote the early 20th century poet Xuân Diệu: *Yêu là chết trong lòng một ít.* To love is to die inside a little.

It was only as I was leaving Vietnam did Cường seem to gradually begin "getting over" Anna. As he predicted, only time could make him forget her. As far as I could tell over email a few months later, he did not seem particularly distraught when Anna became pregnant with her new boyfriend of a few months, a Vietnamese American from Escondido, CA. Cường continued socializing mostly with foreigners he met in his martial arts classes, who introduced him to their fellow expatriates. He had flirtatious relationships with a few Belgian women and eventually entered into a casual sexual relationship with an Australian woman. Despite being self-consciously careful to avoid developing too strong of an emotional attachment to her, he was unwilling to continue a sexual relationship with her when she refused to have a monogamous relationship with him. When I asked him if he had started seeing anyone else, he said, "You know me. I still have feelings for her."

Conclusion

Considerations of what kinds of worry are evoked by love reveal the differing ways of relating to the love object and to love itself. Trâm's anxieties were centered on the strength and continued viability of her marriage to Danh. She questioned Danh's loyalty and her own feelings towards him, but overall her conclusion that she still loved him did not seem to bother her very much. More pressing for her was not knowing what to do about it. But more specifically the critical issue is perhaps the sense of urgency and unease at not wanting to go through with her decision. She did not want to dwell concretely on the steps she needed to take, and she seemed viscerally averse to carrying a divorce out. Trâm's experiences with her husband's marital infidelity reveals some of the

mechanisms that are changing the co-production of anxiety and love. The state discourses described by Phinney (2008) place love at the center of a "happy family." Trâm often complained of Danh being a bad husband because he was unable to fulfill his responsibilities. In her portrayal of him, he seemed rudderless and passive. For example, while her married friends had already built or bought their own homes, she and Danh had yet to establish one. Given the lesser emphasis on the lack of emotional intimacy in her narratives and discussions, Trâm seems to have not internalized to the same extent the individualizing and psychologizing notions of romantic love that Giddens described. However, both models of romantic love can be read in her case study.

On the other hand, Cường's concerns were with Anna's feelings and her intent. From my perspective, the writing was on the wall that she would not relent to his advances, but despite my arguments he refused to come to terms with that possibility. His desire for a relationship with her overrode a protective form of self-preservation. His anxiety was one of the vulnerability of desire, rejection, and disappointment. In this, he wanted an affirmation of the self as worthy of Anna's affections and a validation of his own feelings. Potential rejection only seemed to intensify this need for affirmation, boosting his love object and his own emotions until they were seemingly out of proportion with the situation. Cường's case study demonstrates an instance in which love and anxiety are not just co-produced but are co-existent with each other. It is clear that his experience of unrequited love was full of angst, yet he focused most consciously on addressing love. Why did he interpret his feelings through a rubric of love instead of anxiety? Phenomenologically love and anxiety share much in common, but conceptually they are perhaps each other's opposites. If anxiety is distinctive among the emotions for

not having an object, then love is its opposite because when else do we have a more intimate sense of the object? Anna was certainly the most vivid thing in Cường's life for several months, to the point where his attempts to forget her made him feel him and his entire world somehow more numb. Yet part of the vividness of the object in his case stems from it being constituted by his own self in the process of orienting to romantic love. If one of the main reasons why romance is so anxiety-inducing is because it demands self-interrogation, then it highlights the intersubjective gap in the uncertain exchange of emotion.

Both of these case studies demonstrate the hybrid forms that romantic love takes in *đổi mới* era Vietnam. Much of the particularities of this hybridity is driven by the influence of foreign forms of pop culture and the empowering fantasies and projections they provide. Trâm and Cường were disenfranchised by their subordinate positions in the family (for Trâm) or in a community (for Cường) and by way of their desires (for Trâm) or personalities (for Cường). Confronted with alternative forms of personhood, neither Trâm nor Cường believed they could enact them on their own. For them, it required another person, a love object, to become who they wanted to be. Moreover, intuiting that a greater sense of alterity with the love object would be required to take them farther away from their present circumstances, they at times pursued an American husband and an Australian girlfriend.

Cường once told me to interview people about who their ideal partner is, what makes them happy, and what they are looking for because, according to him, Vietnamese people are always thinking about love. That "to think" is often synonymous with "to worry" in Vietnam underscores the prevalence of the anxiety of love. Together, Cường

and Trâm's romantic trials reveal some of the mechanisms that are changing the production of anxiety and love. Both confront new twists on the problems of marital infidelity and unrequited love by drawing on powers of the self that to them have felt dormant but always present. However, it is not only the conditions that allow such powers to be accessed but the self as well that has changed.

Chapter 6

Driving Ho Chi Minh City

How do people escape anxiety when it takes on a life of its own, simultaneously belonging to an individual yet becoming out of control? What do Ho Chi Minh City residents do to relax, and how does that relaxation take effect, if it does at all? The answers to these questions might seem straightforward: forgetting about one's worries gives people a brief respite and refreshes the mind. However, this assumes that what William James (2007 [1890]) referred to as the "stream of consciousness" is fed and channeled by a handful of rivulets. Instead of being a mere reduction of anxiety in one's conscious state, relaxation involves a transformation of one's selfhood in addition to one's emotional state.

One of the newer cultural touchstones that Americans have with Vietnam is the practice of mindfulness, which has become popularized in large part by the Vietnamese expatriate Buddhist monk Thích Nhật Hạnh. When I discuss my research with Americans, I have occasionally fielded questions on the role of mindfulness in how people in Vietnam cope with their chronic worries. Although I must confess to not being familiar with Thích Nhật Hạnh's body of work, when he came to Vietnam I did attend one of his sermons at Chùa Vĩnh Nghiêm, one of Ho Chi Minh City's biggest and most well-known temples. Despite the loudspeakers that were set up for the occasion, the large audience that assembled outside of the temple struggled to hear the serenely-delivered sermon. At one point, a woman complained that Thích Nhật Hạnh had become a Western monk. Most of the people I knew in Ho Chi Minh City identified as Buddhists but not as particularly "devout" ones. Although they would make offerings at temples on certain

holidays or abstain from eating meet on the 15th day of the month according to the lunar calendar, most of them simply proclaimed that they did not believe much (*không tin nhiều*). According to them, meditation required a patience and serenity that stereotypically busy urbanites could not afford to have.

Instead, to relax many Saigonese revel in what is often the most stressful aspect of their (adopted) hometown to foreigners: its traffic. Every night thousands of people cruise somewhat aimlessly through the city on their motorbikes, a practice commonly referred to as *đi chơi* (to go play). Routes of *đi chơi* often take people through the brightly-lit streets of downtown and past landmarks like the Bến Thành Market (the unofficial symbol of the city), the intersection of Nguyễn Huệ and Lê Lợi Streets (with the Rex Hotel, the Hotel Continental, and the Opera House all nearby), Reunification Palace, and the Notre Dame Basilica. These areas are especially popular during holidays when the various landmarks and commercial centers are elaborately decorated. In other instances, people will *đi chơi* farther away from the bustle of the city in a nostalgic reverie for their rural hometowns. Sometimes people will stop off at a bar, cafe, or ice cream parlor, but in many instances people are content to stay mobile since the cooling breeze is free but spending time in an air conditioned bar is not.

In many cases, the driver and passenger are a romantically-linked couple, but platonic friends also *đi chơi* together. Individuals may drive through the city by themselves to *đi chơi* or, more commonly, with a group of friends for the sake of a convivial atmosphere.[81] Often times the people atop several motorbikes driving in

[81] This does not always have the achieved effect. Cường (described in chapter 5) reported feeling only more lonely when he went out with his friends, all of whom were paired off with each other, to distract himself from Anna.

coordinated proximity will be in communication with each other, with passengers directing drivers whom to drive closer to in order to converse more easily. The majority of these revelers on the move are youth (*thanh niên*) since lingering over food or drinks can be out of many young people's budgets. Moreover, the heightened activity of *đi chơi* was considered appealing to more easily excitable youth. The cacophony of sensations that is the goal of *đi chơi* is a far cry from peaceful meditation or even the act of going on a walk to clear/empty one's mind. Indeed, examining how sensory overload can be considered an antidote to a person's busy mind (*bận tâm*) illuminates a different kind of transformation of selfhood that is involved in relaxation.

Almost always done with others, *đi chơi* also encompasses many other forms of play or "going out," including window-shopping, patronizing bars or cafes, or seeing a movie, all of which are often interspersed with quick motorbike rides from venue to venue (Truitt 2008). Attitudes towards play (*chơi*) in general vary widely. It is recognized as one of life's small but important pleasures but must gradually be balanced with accepting responsibility as one matures. As an adult, play has the benefits of temporarily releasing one from various duties and their attendant worries and can provide friends, spouses, colleagues, etc. with opportunities for bonding (*gắn bó*). However, people who abscond from their responsibilities are often criticized. Having a passion for playing (*ham chơi*) suggests being lazy, irresponsible, undisciplined, immature, wasteful, and—one of the more damning insults one often hears in Vietnam—useless (*vô dụng*). Since people often "play" or hang out with their friends and go outside of the home in order to do so, playing too much also implies being unfilial. For example, one of my friends reported that as he was leaving to *đi chơi* his mother complained that he abandoned his (single)

mother at home at night. The complaint was designed to evoke guilt over not re-paying the sacrifices she made by keeping her company when she herself had no one to go out with.

Public spaces in Vietnamese cities are dominated by youth and youth culture. This is only partly a reflection of a demographic shift in which more than half of the population is under 16 years old. Ho Chi Minh City is engaged with the future not because of the age of its residents but because new technologies, pop culture, and leisure activities have come to represent the acquisition of the markers of modern lifestyles (Thomas and Drummond 2003; Nguyen 2006; King, Nguyen, and Minh 2008; Belanger, Drummond, and Nguyen-Marshall 2012). Play is not only associated with youth in general but also with today's generation of young people. Some people often distinguished between people born during the 1980s and the 1990s because the latter were born after the tumultuous years of the subsidy era had passed by then. As a result of the stability of the nation and their family's financial situations, their levels of satisfaction with their lives are greater than those of older generations. However, problems arise among the younger generation because their material happiness (*sung sướng*) makes them selfish (*ích kỹ*) and inconsiderate (*thích quan tâm đến mình*). Moreover, because family planning policies limited most families to two children, the attention their parents paid them has made them too used to standing out amidst the crowd (*nổi trội giữa đám đông*). The stable employment of their parents that often translates to their frequent being away at work loosens (*lỏng lẻo*) family relationships and tightens peer relationships. This decreased in time spent with family along with an increase in disposable income facilitate congregating with friends.

In this chapter, I broadly contextualize one of the most striking everyday tactics and strategies used in Ho Chi Minh City to relax and alleviate anxiety. More specifically, I examine how sources of and relief from worry that are understood as specific to urban life are implicated in each other. A phenomenological analysis reveals not only aspects of the subjective experience of driving but also how motorists relate to one another and the city itself. Traditionally associated with excitement and fun, the way in which the city orchestrates play is in considerable upheaval. Urbanism is often associated with the reduction of everyday life to a series of fragmented operations (Augoyard 2007, de Certeau 1984). Urban spaces like Ho Chi Minh City seem to dominate their residents (and decidedly not the other way around), who are able to find increasingly little respite from overcrowding, poverty, mismanagement, and many of the other alarming concerns that have come to characterize rapid urbanization. Yet in the small practices that make up everyday life, the experience of something like *đi chơi* is not wholly determined by the city. Instead, the motivations behind it are intimate in myriad ways, and taken together the drivers and passengers of the hundreds of motorbikes alleviate their own and each others' anxiety. In other words, while many features of the urban environment may indeed be anxiety-provoking for Ho Chi Minh City's denizens, together their individual anxieties produce a distinct urban form.

Driving đổi mới

First-time visitors to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese alike, are often astonished by the controlled chaos of traffic patterns in a place where motorbikes vastly outnumber all other modes of transportation such as bicycles, three-

wheeled motorized carts (*xe lam*), SUVs, buses and cyclos (*xích-lô*)/rickshaws. Streets that are ostensibly designed for two-way traffic are overwhelmed during the peak rush hours and quickly become the sites of four or five identifiable traffic directions. On the busiest streets, traffic flow sometimes reaches 10,000 motorbikes per hour (Freire 2009). Ho Chi Minh City pedestrians walk on the side of the street instead of the sidewalks because they have become increasingly taken over by both parked and mobile motorbikes. Moreover, a significant proportion of visual representations of contemporary Ho Chi Minh City feature traffic congestion as a symbol of its recent and sudden urbanization[82] and a prototypical vision of Vietnamese modernity as exciting, haphazard, and uneven. It is no mean feat of urban planning and individual driving skills that so many people are able to drive at varying speeds and in varying directions with accidents only rarely occurring.

Driving patterns do not always correlate with traffic lights, although in recent years I have noticed that motorists heed them more attention than they have in the past. The biggest traffic roundabouts (*ngã*), especially those on the main arteries in and out of the city, can be particularly harrying, as all manner of motorbikes, bicycles, automobiles, buses, and cargo trucks maneuver their way to the desired outlet. Despite these hazards, Ho Chi Minh City is one of the safer places to drive a motorbike in Vietnam and has lower rates of fatalities. Traffic congestion ensures that people cannot drive at dangerous speeds. Indeed, in fall 2008, wearing helmets became mandatory as a public health

[82] For example, short videos of Ho Chi Minh City traffic have become their own genre on video hosting websites. These range from raw first person footage from the perspective of individual motorists as they drive through the city or more carefully edited time-lapse videos. One of the latter <http://vimeo.com/32958521> recently became viral and was featured on the travel sections of the online versions of *Time* magazine and CNN.

measure for adult motorbike drivers and passengers in urban areas a few months after the helmet law began to be enforced in rural areas. Most people disliked wearing helmets because they were hot, inconvenient, expensive, and unflattering to carefully coifed hairstyles, but they agreed that the decree was a positive thing. With teams of traffic police (*cảnh sát giao thông*) prominently monitoring busy intersections, compliance with the helmet law was very high and almost immediate. I was attending an anthropology conference near Vũng Tàu when it went into effect, and the sea of helmets that I saw upon my return to Ho Chi Minh City was shocking.

The liminality and transformations of motorbikes

During the subsidy era, instances of *đi chơi* were primarily orchestrated through people's work collectives. People fondly remembered the times when they gathered to attend films or concerts, even when space was limited and they resorted to pushing, shoving, and fighting their way to the front of the line to secure a seat. Such experiences were trying but bonded (gắn bó) people together. The *đi chơi* of today produces a different kind of sociality. Although going out with one's workmates is still often essential to climbing the corporate ladder, there are more options for whom one spends their leisure time with. Moreover, King, Nguyen, and Minh (2007) have noted the recent trends towards socializing with peers than with family members. Moreover, the mobility offered by motorbikes allows people to form new relationships to each other and to society that are not dictated by the confines of old surroundings. This creates notions of identity that can be tied to multiple places and multiple parties.

The motorbike (*xe máy*) has become the most visible sign of Vietnam's post-reform economic growth, transforming social and economic life, redefining the boundary between private and public space, and otherwise reflecting a great deal of the most dominant social forces in contemporary Vietnam. The country currently has more motorbikes per capita (169 per 1,000 people) than either China (44) or Indonesia (79). Motorbikes are also used more frequently in Vietnam than neighboring countries, even though their public transport systems are not significantly different. For example, Ho Chi Minh City residents make 2.6 motorbike trips every day. In contrast, residents of Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila makes 2.3, 1.7, and 2.2 trips, respectively (Hsu 2003). There are officially 16 million motorbikes officially registered in Vietnam; in 1999 that number was 1.2 million (Freire 2009).

Scholars have noted the importance of motorbikes' role in the country's increasing class stratification and positioning (Truitt 2008, Vann 2012). In particular, as the rigors and discipline of the subsidy era have faded away, a culture of self-interest and hedonism has become ascendant, symbolized by the motorbike and the new social practices it makes possible. However, motorbikes are used to enhance or extend social traditions as well, expressing the contradictions of the *đổi mới* era. For example, while they lead people out of structured social relations and offer a means of escape (as in the cases of Trâm and Thịnh when they went to Vũng Tàu and Ho Chi Minh City, respectively [see chapter 5]), motorbikes are also considered possessions of the household. For most households, they represent a significant financial investment and are needed to make a living, whether directly tied to a family's livelihood (e.g. transporting goods, visiting clients and customers, etc.) or just used to commute to one's workplace.

Through various discourses on the family and neighborhood-level administrative units, the state has not entirely relinquished its presence in private and domestic spaces. For example, family planning projects, household registrations, the regulation of ritual spaces have been designed to advance state agendas and promote Party values. However, public spaces, especially the streets, were seized upon and re-appropriated by the informal commercial sector after *đổi mới*. A quick motorbike tour of Ho Chi Minh City shows a place brimming with economic activity made all the more visible by public spaces being used for private commercial reasons, dubbed "streetfront capitalism" by Donald Freeman (1996). Various governmental agencies have tried to regulate such spaces under the auspices of campaigns to establish "urban civilization" (*văn minh đô thị*) (Koh 2004, Drummond 2000, Harms 2012). These spaces are intensely contested: in ways both subtle and blatant residents ignore or resist the state' attempts to impose order on places marked by sometimes frantic social and economic activity (Thomas 2002). Although the campaigns have been effective in clearing certain landmarks and neighborhoods of some commercial activities (Cf. Harms 2009), their effects tend to be fleeting. For example, I once observed a crackdown of unlicensed commercial trading that sent vendors scrambling to hide their wares. The commotion lasted for roughly fifteen minutes, and after the police left with the confiscated goods amidst an eerie quiet the neighborhood almost immediately returned to normal. In many cases, unlicensed commercial activity is moved to a nearby location until another crackdown occurs.

Today, empty and clear sidewalks are often associated with the state for two reasons. First, they are reminiscent of the subsidy era.[83] While economic production under neoliberalism is connected with a set of values and practices that are assumed to allow for sensory overstimulation and innovation, socialism in Asia is associated with deprivation and uniformity (Schwenkel 2012, McGrath 2008). Moreover, the increasingly successful crackdowns of informal commercial activity at some of the more popular intersections in downtown Ho Chi Minh City are further separating private usage from public spaces. According to Erik Harms (2011), despite all the attention paid to roads by the state, they still maintain an air of the "law of the jungle" (*luật rừng*) for motorists, as if traffic were somehow outside of the reach of civilization (*văn minh*).

As Freire (2009) notes, because private space is infringed upon and public space is contested, the motorbike has become a mobile site of hard-found intimacy without the constraints of the domestic sphere. Because of their mobility, some even find them more conducive to private conversation than the relatively anonymous but often crowded cafes (see chapter 2), where people often run into someone they know or risk being unknowingly seen and identified by others. For example, Trâm (whom I discussed in chapter 5) asked an American friend of mine who was visiting if he (and by extension other American men) still loved his wife while she was giving him a ride. She told him that her husband had been having an extramarital affair and told him not to tell me so. (I was a passenger on her friend's motorbike during this interaction.) She would not have

[83] For example, I remember going to Hanoi for a conference with a friend who had never been to northern Vietnam. When she saw Hanoi's relatively quiet outer districts for the first time, she was amazed at how "sad" (*buồn*) it looked. As a native Saigonese, she was accustomed to more bustling urban scenes. Moreover, the works of the painter Bùi Xuân Phải were at one point censored by the country's culture bureau because his sobering depictions of everyday life in Hanoi during its subsidy era focused on barren and drab cityscapes.

been able to have this brief yet very personal interaction had we still been at a restaurant. The close and necessary proximity of the driver and passenger create a bodily intimacy as well as an emotional one. Romantic couples can share more physical contact on a motorbike without disapproving glances from others than they could if they were seated at a bar or cafe. One woman I knew spoke with nostalgia about the first time she rested her chin on a boyfriend's shoulder as he drove her around Ho Chi Minh City. Motorbikes even maintain some semblance of private space when not in motion. At night, public parks are crowded with couples perched on motorbikes, kissing and cuddling within inches of other couples. Thus, motorbikes and the literal and figurative space they occupy in Vietnam are sites where the private and public, the individual and collective overlap.

Đi chơi both results from and is the result of new urban forms in the wake of đổi mới. It evokes not only a set of moving bodies through public space but also migration in and out of the city and the movement of commodities, capital, and money. Unlike those movements, however, *đi chơi* has no destination; it is movement for the sake of movement. The increasing amounts of leisure time and disposable income made possible by Vietnam's rapid economic growth also shape new means of *đi chơi*. Ho Chi Minh City's notorious traffic emerges as a social experience through individual practice and institutional structures. People must not only navigate the confines of the roads but also each other as part of a larger whole that they are a part of yet cannot control. Erik Harms (2011) argues that Saigonese experience traffic as an alienating anti-social space. Confronted with a mass of movement and objects with social origins that are not readily apparent to individuals, motorists reify traffic as an impersonal force beyond their control. Thus, people described the roads as chaotic and unruly. However, in my analysis

of *đi chơi*, the road is understood and experienced as an intensely social space. Although they do not explicitly frame it as much, motorists and their passengers take to the streets specifically to be a part of an undifferentiated mass of traffic as a social phenomena. This does not negate Harms' claims of traffic's alienating effects since alienation and anonymity may be precisely what people who *đi chơi* are seeking out.

Whither road rage?

While the majority of scholarship within Vietnam studies related to motorbikes examines consumption and class mobility, I focus on a phenomenologically-informed analysis to provide an alternative appreciation for the role of motorbikes in the transformation people's everyday lives. This chapter owes an intellectual debt to the sociologist Jack Katz's (1999) phenomenological study of road rage in Los Angeles and how the body's intertwining with automobiles both mediates and acts as a conduit for anger. While it is not within the purview of this chapter to ask why there is relatively little road rage or why it has not become a locally salient trope, I begin a phenomenological analysis of *đi chơi* by comparing the conditions it shares in common with road rage to further orient us to the emotional atmosphere of Ho Chi Minh City's streets.

After I became accustomed to the volume of Ho Chi Minh City traffic (and realized that blaring horns were not necessarily an indication of anger or frustration), I was struck anew by the relative lack of road rage—or at least what I would expect from my own experiences with Los Angeles' infamous gridlock. The experience of being stuck in traffic in Ho Chi Minh City, especially on a motorbike, is miserable. The sounds of

engines and the constant horns, the exhaust fumes, the heat coming from so many engines in addition to the ambient temperature and humidity, and competing for inches of space with hundreds of people are overwhelming. Yet people rarely lashed out at each other in these circumstances. I do not mean to imply that there are no angry or even violent exchanges between motorists. Minor collisions between any combination of cars, motorbikes, and transport vehicles can quickly lead to physical fights between drivers, especially if both are young men, and the spectacle often draws large crowds of curious onlookers.

Raised as one of the downsides of rapid economic growth, traffic congestion has become yet another source of stress and anxiety for residents. When I met new people, they often brought up gridlock as a matter of small talk to get my impressions of the city. Many also complained of the selfishness and competitiveness of their fellow drivers during rush hour and of how exhausted and hollow they felt when they finally arrived home. Although traffic was certainly enraging for many, if not most, motorbike drivers, "road rage" does not have an equivalent form in Vietnam. When I tried to explain the concept of what I translated as *cơn giận con đường* (lit., a street spell/storm of anger) to people, they affirmed that motorists did indeed become angry at each other, but their descriptions and stories did not indicate that such episodes had taken on a culturally identified or regularized form akin to road rage. Instead, anger at other motorists is rarely expressed to anyone other than a passenger, if present, since doing otherwise would be considered a loss of face (*mất mặt*). Moreover, if they are not already impeded by traffic conditions such as congestion or excessive noise levels, expressions of anger are mediated by numerous social conventions. For example, when another motorist cut him

off so closely that the motorbikes had a brief and destabilizing physical contact, a 30 year old man told me (his passenger) that had the other driver been younger than him he would have scolded (*la*) him for his reckless driving. While most motorists in Ho Chi Minh City have certainly had occasions when they believed an open expression of anger was warranted, many people thought that such confrontations were not worth the trouble and ultimately would not improve the situation.

Katz argued that road rage is not an aberrant or irrational emotional phenomenon but instead specifically rooted in social situations that have meaningful goals. Nor is it the mere surface manifestation of pre-anger background factors such as frustrations earlier in the day since there are many instances in which drivers were in good moods when they suddenly became intensely angry. Instead, road rage is specifically conditioned by particular patterns of spatial relationship. For example, driving a car renders one mute to others sharing the road. The aggravation of only being able to express oneself without being heard leads to many people shouting in closed cars when they feel slighted on the road. Katz argues that many of the behaviors associated with road rage, such as shouting at or enacting revenge on the other offending, careless, or inattentive driver, are attempts to be "effectively appreciated by other drivers about whom one has become all too aware" (26).

Because drivers of motorbikes are more exposed to their environs than drivers of private cars and in turn expose themselves to other motorists, the communication between motorbike drivers is not as asymmetrical as between automobile drivers. A motorbike driver who would give in to an episode of "road rage" would invite considerable unwanted attention. Such censure is another incentive to maintain one's

equanimity in public, but it is not the only reason for the lack of road rage in Ho Chi Minh City. After all, such an explanation assumes that road rage is principally an internal phenomena of anger that subsequently manifests externally in behaviors such as shouting or rude gestures and reinforces dichotomies between subjective and objective, internal and external, and individual and social that phenomenological analyses eschew. Road rage neither not simply comes from the driver's personality nor is determined solely by external circumstances.

Instead, Katz argues that getting angry is an attempt to regain a taken-for-granted intertwining with the environment that is interrupted by another driver. When a driver is "cut off," they sense the space between the trajectory of their trip and their current interaction with other vehicles. Suddenly stepping on the brakes forces one to fall out of the flow of that trajectory, disrupting the formerly tacit communion of body, machine, and roadway. Driving is "not a series of discrete touches on a machine and discrete sightings within a perceptual field, but an ongoing process in which one inevitably becomes sensually intertwined with mechanical tool and perceptual field" (Katz 1999, 41). Whereas driving a car predominantly engages the body's extremities, driving a motorbike requires individuals to simply use more of their bodies in order to balance the vehicle when it is in motion or at rest. In particular, turning requires drivers to subtly and unconsciously lean in to the turns. Thus, the "tacit communion" of driver, motorbike, and roadway encompasses a smaller amount of space than Katz's "car-body," which does not facilitate the feeling of being metaphorically "cut off" despite the frequency and intensity with which motorbike drivers must compete for space with each other in Ho Chi Minh City.

Moreover, driving a car suggests the metaphoric and literal passing through society. That driving juxtaposes the immediate interactions with other drivers and more transcendent meanings of driving creates conditions rife with emotional volatility. On the other hand, driving a motorbike, specifically in the context of *đi chơi*, suggests passing through society in a different style than the commute. Because its purpose is not only of passage but also one of lingering, one of the main attractions of *đi chơi* is to be a part of a large crowd on account of it producing a livelier atmosphere.

Play

I did not learn how to drive a motorbike until several months into my fieldwork, and my initial experiences with *đi chơi* were with someone else driving. As a passenger, I found the experience to be liberating because I could let my attention wander while I was in the middle of the street. Since my first way of relating to Ho Chi Minh City's traffic was as a pedestrian, I associated streets with hypervigilance. One of the most common pieces of practical advice given to people unfamiliar with traffic in urban Vietnam is to walk slowly and steadily when crossing the street. This makes the pedestrian's movements more visible and predictable for oncoming motorists who adjust their trajectories accordingly. However, drivers of larger vehicles such as cars and buses cannot adjust as easily so pedestrians are advised to make way for them more quickly. Thus, when walking across a crowded street, one must heed not only the route to one's destination but also anticipate how traffic will flow around one's moving position. Non-residents are easy to identify by their tentative, stop-and-start perambulations. Overall, this has contributed to the idea that "might makes right" in Ho Chi Minh City and is

further proof to many people that Vietnam requires further development if orderly traffic patterns as a matter of urban civility (*văn minh đo thị*) are to be established.

However, a motorbike driver's attention is less focused on the overall mise-en-scene of the street than on what is immediately in front of the driver. (Thus, driving a motorbike in Ho Chi Minh City is much easier than often assumed.) Mirrors on the handles allow drivers to see what is behind them, but they seem rarely used for that purpose.[84] It is required that motorbikes have at least one mirror on them, suggesting that many people did not feel the need to mount any beforehand. At any rate, the principal means through which motorists gather information about what is behind them is auditory. Ho Chi Minh City's relatively high levels of noise pollution result from motorbike engines and horns (Phan et al. 2010). In Vietnam, horns being sounded at someone do not have an aggressive connotation. Instead, on the road they are used mainly to make someone's presence known to those who cannot see them. Whereas a broad range of the motorbike driver's sensory modalities is engaged, visuality is most explicitly emphasized for pedestrians in the street.

Perhaps it is this multi-faceted sensory engagement that gives driving a motorbike, at least under certain circumstances such as *đi chơi*, its freeing quality. People occasionally spoke of the motorbike setting its own course to describe relinquishing self-control and letting the motorbike, the traffic flow, and the built environment dictate their movement. Without any set destination, motorists are able to "go with the flow," as it were, by only allocating enough attention to follow the traffic patterns immediately in

[84] It often seemed that their main function of the mirrors was for people to check themselves in them, sometimes while driving.

front of them and otherwise engage the other senses—visual, aural, olfactory, or kinetic—more fully than normal with the city's environs.

Attitudes about đi chơi

The rate of internal migration to Ho Chi Minh City is high, driven by opportunities to both make and spend money. People often construct their own and each other's identities through their hometowns (*quê hương*), a topic imbued with nostalgia and quasi-nationalist pride (Harms 2011). Despite this, I knew few people who wanted to move back. Although life outside of Vietnam's rapidly growing cities (including Hanoi and more recently Đà Nãng) is idealized as peaceful, relaxing, and safe, people have outgrown their hometowns.[85] The Ho Chi Minh City that is portrayed in the media is a place of constant renewal and entertainment. The effects of market reforms and new patterns of mobility along with the metropolitan desires of youthful populations have reinforced perceptions of the city as the seat of modern occupations and recreation. As a born-and-bred Saigonese assured me, Ho Chi Minh City residents liked going to places that were bustling with activity (*sôi động*, lit. boiling and moving). For example, quiet restaurants not only were suspect for having bad food (and hence few customers) but also were avoided for their boring and staid atmospheres. Indeed, I found Ho Chi Minh City to be by turns thrilling and exhausting for the sensory overload of constant bombardment of human activity.

[85] This phenomena is not only limited to the young. Many people are retiring in Ho Chi Minh City in order to be closer to their already resettled children and help raise their grandchildren.

Many studies of Southeast Asia have noted the overlap between the desire for a fast-paced urban lifestyle and the desire for a modern identity (Mills 2001, Lindquist 2009, Harms 2011). Indeed, at night when *đi chơi* takes place most often (perhaps not coincidentally), after traffic congestion had eased and temperatures cooled, Ho Chi Minh City seemed the most modern. This is the time when many of the reminders of poverty and urban decay are covered by the dark as many of the day laborers in downtown go home and the neon and fluorescent lights shine brighter. For many people, participating in and contributing to the cacophony of urban life was one of the best opportunities to include their understandings of a modern lifestyle into their own lives. After the drudgery and tedium of the workplace, the *đi chơi* outings were the highlights of their day, if not the highlight of living in the city.

The version of *đi chơi* that residents of rural villages or smaller towns engage in tends to involve specific destinations, such as going to a friend's home or a small restaurant instead of circulating throughout space. When Ho Chi Minh City residents return to their hometowns (*quê hương*) en masse for major holidays, they often reported extreme boredom and became eager to return to the noise and bustle of the city. This boredom was an indication of how much they had been changed by their urban and newly modern lifestyles insofar as they were no longer content to spend time visiting their numerous relatives. For example, returning to Tuy Hoà, a provincial capital, for the lunar new year (*Tết*), Cường and his former high school classmates took a break from visiting with their families and had a reunion of sorts at a bar. Ever the standout, he complained that the topic of conversations that most excited his friends, most of whom had also

attended university in Ho Chi Minh City, focused on comparing each others' knowledge of the most stylish, elaborate, and luxurious bars in their adopted home towns.

Although *đi chơi* is certainly an important part of the urban landscape, its status still remains unclear. For example, a 26 year old man insisted that it was not a Vietnamese custom (*phong tục*) but instead a way of living (*cách sống*). According to him, Vietnamese people congregate in streets because they like do things in groups. This group activity, however, is a far cry from the more unified collectivism of the subsidy period. Instead, the *đi chơi* mode of sociality involves what Sartre (1960) referred to as seriality, or a "plurality of isolations," in which individuals are assembled together but ultimately interchangeable with each other. The urban environment shapes the individual's subjectivity and joins them together in actions through which they are oriented. A reveler's cruising is not communal, in this regard, but merely instances of the same actions performed separately and discretely.

Cultivating relaxation and selfhood

As discussed in chapter 3, rumination on unresolvable matters is strongly discouraged because of its deteriorating effects on physical health and its interference with fulfilling an individual's various role obligations. At best, thinking too much is time that can be better spent. Worse still, it can exacerbate or create more problems by making the individual more aware of different aspects of their problems. For example, dwelling on the injustices committed against oneself by an authority figure is not encouraged because it only creates more anger against an authority that cannot be challenged; it is more practical to just suffer through minor indignities. Instead, people are told to *đi chơi*

as a matter of distraction from those problems weighing heavily on their minds. However, forgetting life's worries is not the only value of *đi chơi*. People took advantage of the anonymity of the streets to confide in each other about their problems and to seek out advice. Moreover, clearing one's head can be useful for addressing a pressing concern with a different perspective later on.

That being said, the majority of my respondents reported that *đi chơi* was first and foremost about distracting oneself to prevent harmful overthinking. Asked to explain how *đi chơi* worked, most people simply reported that it gave people a small measure of temporary respite from their troubles. Forgetting one's problems was often described in fairly simplistic terms: one only needed to stop thinking about them little by little until the difficulties resolved themselves, the distress that they caused dissipated, or one became habituated to them. However, people acknowledged the difficulty of this endeavor. Although they were unable to articulate how this process did (or did not) succeed, they were more certain of its effects.

Relaxation (*thoải mái*) is often claimed as the antidote to chronic anxiety because it is conceptualized as its complementary opposite. An ideal psychological state is to be unencumbered and at ease without anything troubling their minds. This is particularly salient for Ho Chi Minh City residents since Saigon has long occupied a place in the national imagination as a city of indolent leisure. This reputation derives from both its greater material comforts and the less hierarchical and formalized structure of kinship and sociality. For example, a commonly-held distinction between Saigonese and their rural counterparts is that the former turn to pampering (e.g. manicures, massages) or expensive hobbies while the latter do menial but necessary household chores when they

want to relax. However, as the demands of Ho Chi Minh City's economy claims more and more of people's free time, there are fewer chances to reproduce oneself as a social person, and people are aware of having sacrificed sociality for their economic success.

However, relaxation is not merely the antithesis of or even a decrease of anxious or stressful feelings. Instead, it is a state that often requires active cultivation and inducement through particular practices, including *đi chơi*. The process of "letting go" of one's worries in *đi chơi* frequently involves both letting go of one's sense of control and taking on a different version of the self. First, driving a motorbike (and riding on one) with no specific destination, as discussed earlier, can be liberating from the constant demands of having to make decisions that affect oneself and others. To resolve chronic worries, individuals are faced with making both momentous decisions and series of small decisions. People often spoke of being paralyzed by indecision. Moreover, decisiveness amidst an array of choices is associated with having a clear mental character and strong nerves. Instead, in traffic, there aren't so many conscious decisions that are pressing as there are a series of decisions imposed on you by the flow of traffic.

Second, taking on a different version of the self can allow for individuals to understand their problems from new perspectives. Thus, it is instructive to consider *đi chơi* not just as the transformation of an emotional state from more to less anxious but also as the transformation of the self as well. Such transformations take a negotiation and working through that often goes by unnoticed in the pursuit of relaxation. Many of people's stressors are closely tied to the social obligations that are crucial to the construction of upstanding, moral selves. Because the social self is very much considered to be genuine and not just an external mask of one's true inner nature, people in Vietnam

do not have very many spaces to turn to work out their issues that are not always already entangled in existing social conflicts and dynamics. Thus, the liminal space of the street at night allows people to explore different social dynamics that are predicated on the flattening effect that the anonymity of the roadway can have on social relationships.

* * *

Consumption has become a critical component of urban middle-class leisure, and as income levels rise *đi chơi* for the sake of moving through the city is likely to become less and less popular. Indeed, in the three years since the conclusion of my fieldwork, traffic patterns have become significantly less hectic, and the streets of District 1 are considerably less congested. People are spending less of their leisure time on the road and more of it in restaurants, shopping centers, and cinemas. Certainly motorbikes are still a rich source of emotions, both positive and negative. The interactions that drivers share crystallize challenges common in people's public and private lives. Rather than being a general digression from the seriousness and specificity of the content of one's worries, *đi chơi* presents people with different ways of relating to the city and enacting a form of selfhood that exists apart, but only partially so, from the sources and repercussions of people's anxieties.

Chapter 7

Epilogue

If I were to venture a guess as to what the majority of the people I interacted with during my research would report wanting an audience outside of Vietnam to know about their lives, it would be that Vietnam is much more than a war, which is to say that representations of Vietnam from abroad have tended to focus on events in its history that many people in Vietnam consider themselves as having moved past. A few times I was bluntly told that whatever assumptions about the country that I held as an American, especially a Vietnamese American descendent of refugees, were distorted. However, I was more likely to receive a sheepish question about whether or not I was surprised at the pace of development in Ho Chi Minh City—a question that seemed to ask for validation their own image of Vietnam and perhaps a reason for optimism or to gauge my level of knowledge or open-mindedness than to make small talk. I mention this not just to caution against any presumptions—and how could we not, given the loaded place that "Vietnam" has in our collective imagination—but also to highlight the use of a Western lens to gain a new perspective on themselves.

This project began with a casually made observation that upended assumptions I had about the relations between Vietnam's past and present, suffering and emotion, and anxiety and well-being, among others: that people in Ho Chi Minh City worried now more than ever before. The veracity of this statement can be debated, measured, and defined in any number of ways, but I am more interested in what it reveals about new projects of self-making and the cultural politics of subjectivities that are mediated through a range of technologies, from motorbikes to biomedical diagnoses. The inward

turn towards a "psychological self" with a deep well of emotionality is a significant departure in a country where individuality has been denigrated by socialist and Confucian modes of governance. The notion that the current historical moment is an "age of anxiety" is more of an expression of contemporary anxieties being linked to new forms of insecurity than a quantitative shift with regards to anxiety. In contrast, anxiety is a social practice and a key means through which people in Vietnam can transform themselves to meet the demands of the social transformations that are thrust on them. Debates about whether Vietnam is becoming more or less modernized, globalized, or neoliberalized obscure the culturally and historically distinct ways that neoliberal logics are articulated cross-culturally.

In this dissertation I have examined the multiple and pervasive ways that anxiety is situated in the lives of Ho Chi Minh City residents. Anxiety, by definition among the most inchoate of human experiences, is made intelligible through core cultural ideals as well as by new and old technologies of the self, all of which are configured and re-configured in the experience and interpretation of people's emotional lives. *Đổi mới*'s ways of relating emotion and sentiment to one another contradicts the rationalization of the self that is expected in neoliberalism. However, such articulations do not fully capture anxious experiences. There is always a remainder: a "what else" and a "what if." Life in urban Vietnam is indeed imbued with more and more worries, and it seems sometimes that these worries assume a life of their own. Overriding personal control and taking over people's lives, anxiety somehow ma nages to both belong to individuals and transcend them.

Over the past 30 years, social scientists and clinicians have learned a great deal about the symptoms and sequelae of mental illness. This has come at the expense of understanding what is constitutive of mental health. Well-being should be conceived as more than the mere absence of disease and dysfunction. That being noted, I am not advocating for doing away with the approach of viewing mental illness as a window into mental health since we would be hard pressed to think of a conception of well-being that does not somehow involve issues of health. Thus, mental illness and mental health should be considered in conjunction to one another. As medical discourse encroaches on more and more domains of our lives and recasts our relationships to ourselves and with each other in clinical terms, it is instructive to compare cross-culturally broadly similar processes. These issues run parallel to trends within medical anthropology and in cultural anthropology more generally that move away from the study of suffering and towards the more positive end of the human spectrum. Philosophers have often posed questions about well-being, but such questions are perhaps best answered through ethnography.

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