

Wandering Ghosts of Late Socialism: Conflict, Metaphor, and Memory in a Southern Vietnamese Marketplace

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In the late 1990s, a marketplace trader in Hồ Chí Minh City reported being plagued by wandering ghosts. The postwar Vietnamese landscape teems with angry spirits who died violently without descendents to honor them, but the trader's wandering ghosts were living: male market officials who demanded that merchants, most of them women, pay a fee for use rights to their stalls. Examining the conflict that ensued, this article argues that the wandering ghosts metaphor aptly captures the bitter struggles over resources and status that have accompanied late socialist economic reforms. More subtly, the metaphor also alludes to lingering wartime animosities. Market officials supported the victors, whereas many traders sided with the losers. Although daily interactions have intersubjectively reworked these tensions so that they seem instead to reflect gender differences, "ghosts" inevitably emerge: odd fragments of memory that wander homeless in the wake of social and individual efforts to render the past coherent.

Most traders have paid up simply to avoid the market management board's harassment. It's money sacrificed to appease the wandering ghosts [tiền thí cô hồn].

—Bên Thành market trader, Hồ Chí Minh City

THE VIETNAMESE LANDSCAPE IS teeming with wandering ghosts, spirits of the dead whose lack of filial descendents leaves them suspended between this world and the next. Forgotten and feared by the living—a fate worse than death—ghosts roam the countryside, prey on innocents, and steal offerings intended for benevolent, properly remembered ancestors.¹

Though a wandering ghost can result from any bad death that leaves one without offspring or proper funeral, burial, and memorial rituals, Vietnam's twentieth-century wars generated unprecedented numbers of

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¹The living propitiate these marauders during the annual Feast of the Wandering Souls in the seventh month of the lunar year. For more on these beliefs, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1985b) and Shaun Kingsley Malarney (2001).

them.² These homeless, malevolent spirits serve as poignant reminders of how massive sacrifices of youthful life have ruptured the ongoing relations of commemoration and reciprocity that normally link ancestors and descendants. When novelist Bảo Ninh (1991) describes the horrors of a battlefield turned Jungle of Screaming Souls (*trường Gội Hồn*), or a little girl warns a visitor not to enter a long-abandoned military cemetery for the defeated Republic of Vietnam (commonly referred to as South Vietnam) because “there are ghosts in there,”³ they vividly invoke a popular idiom for conceptualizing war’s enduring suffering. In the northern part of the country, public debates over the legacy of war typically center on how to memorialize the glorious dead through cemeteries, funerary rituals, museums, and ongoing support of their families (Malarney 2001; Tai 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). The tone of war remembrance in the urban south differs markedly. There, rhetoric about glorious martyrs clumsily jostles against the tacit sense that many others cannot be fittingly remembered because no one survives to do it or because they sacrificed themselves for the losing side.

The market trader quoted at the beginning of this essay refers to wandering ghosts of a different sort. These “ghosts” are living humans: marketplace officials or cadres (*cán bộ*) who demanded that she pay a controversial stall use fee (*tiền thuê quyền sử dụng sạp*) in order to receive rights to her selling space for the next five years. Like several previous generations of women in her family, this trader operated a stall in Bến Thành market, Hồ Chí Minh City’s most famous commercial center. Known for its colonial-era façade and must-see status on tourists’ itineraries, Bến Thành market was a key site for my ethnographic study of how late socialist transformations were affecting traders, the vast majority of whom are women.⁴

Over the course of my nearly two years of participant observation and life history interviewing, longtime Bến Thành cloth and clothing traders shared

²Ghosts are a common consequence of mass devastation throughout Southeast Asia. Mary Margaret Steedly (1993, 224) notes the problem of ghosts following widespread violence in Indonesia in 1965. After the 2004 tsunami, the *Wall Street Journal* reported a precipitous rise in ghost sightings and propitiation ceremonies in Thailand (Fairclough 2005).

³My appreciation to Hue-Tam Ho Tai for relating this incident.

⁴I conducted fieldwork in Bến Thành for twenty-one months between 1995 and 1997, with a follow-up visit in 2003–04. My research began with a preliminary market census in which I and an assistant from the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of the National University of Hồ Chí Minh City (then known as the Comprehensive University, Đại Học Tổng Hợp) independently interviewed the owners of 345 of Bến Thành’s more than 500 cloth and clothing stalls. In all, 85 percent of these stallholders were women. After this initial contact, the bulk of my research consisted of daily participant observation with a core group of fifty traders. Twenty of these traders agreed to share their life stories in extensive interviews conducted away from the market, most commonly in their homes late in the evening. Because of the sensitive nature of traders’ recollections, I conducted these interviews alone and without a tape recorder. Instead, I took detailed notes that I would type up and annotate upon my return home. All research was conducted in Vietnamese.

their experiences of the various economic and political regimes they had weathered: state-sponsored, American-underwritten capitalism in the wartime South, nearly fifteen years of centrally planned socialism and cooperativization after the end of the war in 1975, and market-oriented late socialism following the announcement of Renovation (*Đổi mới*) in the late-1980s. As many traders explained, these transitions had not been smooth. Most recently, *Đổi mới* had turned Bến Thành market into a hybrid retail space juxtaposing private and state-run entrepreneurship. More than one thousand individuals and families ran most of the stalls in the market's interior, while the larger counters lining the market's perimeter were operated by trading companies set up by the local government of District One. The local government also oversaw market operations by employing a management board (*Ban Quản lý chợ*) and cadres charged with maintaining order, policing traders' selling practices, collecting fees, and providing sanitation and security. Traders, market employees, district authorities, and higher-ranking officials in the city and central government frequently disagreed over how Bến Thành should be organized and who was entitled to profit from its commerce.

The stall use fee controversy was a very public manifestation of these tensions. The district government had instructed the market management board to impose this fee in 1991. Depending on a stall's size, location, and type of merchandise, traders were told to pay from 150,000 to 2.7 million *đồng*, or approximately US\$13–\$235 at 1996 exchange rates, for papers documenting exclusive rights to their stalls for five years. Given that traders paid roughly these same amounts *each month* in taxes, the fee was hardly excessive. But it aroused vigorous protest, including a strike and public picket in front of the headquarters of the city People's Committee in 1994. Despite a city ruling questioning the policy, numerous newspaper articles, formal complaints, orders from the prime minister, and two financial audits alleging improprieties, Bến Thành market officials continued to collect the fee. By 1997, at least one-third of Bến Thành's 1,432 traders still refused to pay.

That traders might protest fees or bemoan government interference was nothing new in Vietnam, where they are considered notoriously contentious and unruly (see Leshkovich 2005). For example, after a 1994 fire devastated Hà nội's famous Đồng Xuân market, traders took to the streets to contest stall allocation practices, rents, and electricity provision in the new structure that replaced it. But such protest carried the risk of reprisals and was generally undertaken only over matters that significantly threatened livelihoods. Bến Thành's stall use fee, in contrast, concerned a relatively nominal sum of money. Why, then, did this particular fee incite such strong opposition? And what does this legal, economic, and political controversy have to do with wandering ghosts?

This article addresses these questions by tracing the details of the conflict in order to show how the stall use fee exacerbated latent economic and political tensions between cadres and traders, as well as between both groups and various

levels of district, city, and central government. As commonplace as such disputes over resources and services may be, I argue that the wandering ghost metaphor provocatively hints that something more might be going on in Bến Thành. In the most straightforward reading, the metaphor of hungry spirits might simply emphasize that market officials, like ghosts and any other powerful, harassing entity, must be appeased. Metaphorical language can fix meaning in this way by telling us how one thing is like another. Such an interpretation, however, side-steps an important quality of metaphor: an analytical richness and indirect, associative logic that invites the listener to explore implied connections and multiple layers of interpretation.⁵ When a Bến Thành trader compares the mundane business of fee collection to the ethereal realm of wandering ghosts, she raises the possibility that daily life is more mysterious and sinister than it appears, but she leaves it to us to think about the myriad ways in which cadres might resemble wandering ghosts, why, and with what significance. Her mention of ghosts invites the kind of polysemic reading that Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1990) suggests allows metaphors to link collective representations with individual creativity in generating meanings.

In this spirit of polysemy and associative logic, I argue that the wandering ghost metaphor provides a key to unpacking the sources of differences between traders and cadres and the particular ways in which they were understood and articulated—or not articulated—through ongoing daily interactions in the marketplace. I offer two readings of the metaphor. The first, directly suggested by the stallholder herself in subsequent conversation, provides insight into traders' fragmented and uncertain experiences of late socialism. By calling cadres "wandering ghosts," the trader implies that late socialist *Đổi mới* policies have isolated petty officials from both the government largesse that they enjoyed during the earlier phase of high socialism and the new private entrepreneurial activities from which they see others profiting. Precariously suspended between two worlds—not those of the living and the dead but of high socialism and late socialism—these loyal-cadres-turned-ghosts have little choice but to prey on traders.⁶ Vietnam's "late socialism" may seem to have provided

⁵Metaphor can, as James Fernandez asserts, "concretize the inchoateness of subjects" (1974, 129) by declaring a murky or unknowable condition to be just like something mundane, familiar, and determinate. Fernandez finds this conception particularly useful for analyzing how religious rituals make cosmology accessible. At the same time, metaphorical attempts to fix abstract meanings can open up further abstractions by associating them with what Brenda Beck calls "clusters or sets of associations" that "inject analogic reasoning processes into the semantic domain" (1978, 84). In the statement analyzed in this article, the likening of market relationships to the spiritual realm displays both of these aspects of metaphor. It simplifies a complicated conflict (Fernandez) and inserts an esoteric, mystical note into the mundane (Beck).

⁶In his ethnography of Southwest China, Erik Mueggler (2001) similarly links socialism to wandering ghosts, but of a different sort. The homeless souls that plagued villagers were victims of high socialist policies that resulted in both the Great Leap famine of 1958–60 that claimed many lives and a prohibition against the traditional ceremonies that would normally help those victims pass

a smoother process of transition because it has not been rocked by the dramatic political upheavals that ushered in central European “postsocialism.” Analysis of the legal, political, and economic issues surrounding the stall use fee controversy, however, reveals a transition that, despite increased standards of living overall, has hardly been smooth or certain.

The second interpretation rests on a less direct link, but one that is nonetheless apparent to those familiar with how discussions of ghosts in contemporary Vietnam frequently serve as a way to talk about the consequences of war. This association links traders’ tense relations with market cadres to the particular experiences of war and socialism among urban southerners. It is widely known in Bến Thành market that traders and cadres were, generally speaking, on opposite sides during the American War.⁷ Traders or their families tended to be associated with the losing side, whereas many cadres’ families demonstrated a loyalty to the victors that earned them their positions. These histories, coupled with the different perspectives on private enterprise arising from their current occupations, meant that traders and cadres typically differed in their attitudes toward the government. Although these tensions could easily have existed since war’s end in 1975, traders also recalled liking and working closely with market cadres during the cooperative period of the 1980s. Their stories suggest that contemporary experiences of *Đổi mới* have prompted them to revisit the immediate postwar period in order to construct a genealogy of current tensions—a memory project consistent with what Jayne Werner (2006, 312) has identified as a broader cultural preoccupation with the wartime past in response to the dislocations of the *Đổi mới* present. The wandering ghosts metaphor is thus significant as a momentary gesture toward the possibility that the stall use fee conflict has something to do with war—an implication supported by the reminiscences that traders shared privately during our life history interviews—but it is the war reworked through the lens of *Đổi mới*.

As obvious as the political and economic differences between cadres and traders may be, the parties involved avoided naming them directly. Instead, they described their differences as centering on gender. In the third section

to the other side. Ritual restrictions in Vietnam from the 1950s to the 1980s produced similar dilemmas of soul management and may help to explain why life cycle rituals have had such a visible resurgence under *Đổi mới* (see Kleinen 1999; Luong 1993; Malarney 1996). Whereas Muegler and anthropologists interested in Vietnam’s current florescence of religion recount tales of the literal ghosts of socialism, the present account focuses on the metaphorical ghosts of late socialism.

⁷The phrase “American War” (*Chiến tranh chống Mỹ*) or “War against America for National Salvation” (*Chiến tranh chống Mỹ cứu nước*) is used by the current regime to refer to what those outside the country call the Vietnam War or the Second Indochina War. My informants in the urban south generally did not use this term, as they considered the war less a conflict between Vietnam and America and more a civil war between north and south. To avoid this politically charged topic, they referred to “the war” (*chiến tranh*) or “before ‘75” (*trước bảy mươi lăm*).

of this article, I locate gendered accounts of the Bến Thành conflict within a broader preoccupation in Vietnam with gender roles and relations in a time of rapid socioeconomic transformation (see, e.g., Barry 1996; Drummond and Rydstrom 2004; Leshkovich 2005, 2006; Luong 2003; Pettus 2003; Taylor and Bousquet 2005; Werner 2005; Werner and Bélanger 2002). Invoking popular stereotypes of both women and traders, cadres and market management officials referred to stallholders as “sister petty traders” (*các chị em tiểu thương*) who were weak, ignorant, and prone to disorder and hence in need of management’s paternalistic structure and guidance. Though traders resisted these negative characterizations, they, too, voiced their position in gendered terms, describing themselves as powerless women supporting families and in need of protection from male corruption. This rhetorical gendering of daily life constrained how both sides could represent their positions, but it also allowed them to avoid broaching the sensitive topic that their differences may stem from the political and class divisions accompanying postwar social restructuring.

In subsuming an implied subtext of war under an overt text of gender, the rhetoric employed during Bến Thành market’s stall use fee dispute suggests the complex ways in which memories of war and its aftermath are gendered. It is tempting to think of memory as hierarchically layered, so that the deeper one delves into the realm of the private, buried, unspoken, or repressed, the closer one gets to truth. In this vein, the wandering ghosts metaphor might seem to reveal the war-related foundations of the stall use fee controversy hidden beneath gendered language. Recent studies of memory by Jennifer Cole (2001), Mary Margaret Steedly (2000), and Ann Laura Stoler and Karen Strassler (2002), however, caution against any easy bifurcation between false surface appearances and the submerged truths of the past. Instead, they urge us to consider memory as a kind of work that continually refashions the past through acts of public and private recollection. This prompts me to consider in the final section of the article what the wandering ghosts metaphor’s oblique references to the legacy of war can tell us about processes of individual and social remembering—and forgetting—more generally.

A rich academic literature has established the analytical importance of gender to understandings of war: how women and men might experience war and its aftermath differently, how war constructs femininities and masculinities, and how gender provides a conceptual framework for interpreting, articulating, or obscuring the consequences of war and violence (De Pauw 1998; Elshtain 1987; Enloe 1989, 1993, 2005; Goldstein 2001; Goodman 2000; Jacobson, Jacobs, and Marchbank 2000; Kumar 2001; Utas 2005; Vickers 1993; Yuval-Davis 1997; Zur 1997). Attending to gender allows such scholars to illuminate previously obscured narratives, histories, and perspectives.

Consistent with this idea that gender renders the consequences of war more visible, Vietnam specialists have noted an increase in public acts of remembrance or commemoration of war, many of them explicitly gendered (Bradley

2001; Jellema 2005; Malarney 1996, 2001; McElwee 2005; Pelley 2002; Phinney 2005; Schwenkel 2006; Tai 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Turner and Phan Thanh Hao 1998). Surveying these developments, Werner (2006, 311) has argued that a state-sponsored public discourse of wartime sacrifice and loyalty has become articulated through visions of “essentialized womanhoods” that metaphorically represent the Vietnamese nation.

Though the rhetoric used in the Bến Thành stall use fee controversy likewise suggests that gender inflects wartime memories in *Đổi mới* Vietnam, it does so with two noteworthy differences. First, gender imagery in Bến Thành seems to obscure rather than reveal narratives about the consequences of war by substituting gender differences for class or political ones. Second, these acts of memory are not public projects aimed at consecrating victors’ recollections at particular moments or in specific concrete manifestations but private projects of memory work that have been intersubjectively generated through the daily experiences of the war’s losers as they interact with representatives of the winning side who are themselves uneasy about their status in postwar society.

These differences demand that we rethink the ways in which gendered war memories might be constructed, mobilized, contested, and obscured in *Đổi mới* Vietnam. Building on Cole’s (2001) analysis of how social practices and experiences render certain schemas of memory reasonable and intelligible at particular historical junctures, I argue that the wandering ghosts metaphor and the gendered rhetoric employed in the stall use fee controversy alert us to a corollary process. As circumstances make some perceptions of the past and of women plausible, compelling, or legible, they consign others to the shadows by discouraging their articulation. These fragmentary elements of the past linger and, like hungry spirits on the spatial landscape who threaten the tranquility of the living, pose a danger to memory work’s attempts to achieve coherent ordering.

THE WANDERING GHOSTS OF LATE SOCIALISM

When asked how business was faring, traders frequently told me, “The market is deserted and taxes are high” (*Chợ thì ê, thuế thì cao*). Although stereotypical, these laments aptly captured traders’ frustration with the shifting and often excessive roster of fees and levies that accompanied the government’s move from centrally planned collectivism to *Đổi mới* during the 1990s. In the absence of reliable accounting mechanisms, traders were assessed according to estimates of a stall’s profit margin and turnover based on its type of merchandise, size, and location within the market. For clothing sellers, monthly bills ranged from US\$100 to \$200 per month for a combination of turnover and income taxes (*doanh thu* and *lợi tức*, roughly 75–90 percent of total taxes and fees), commercial licensing fees (*môn bài*), land use fees (*hoa chi*), and market fees for order, security, electricity, sanitation, and water. Fabric stalls generally did more business, so their taxes

and fees were typically twice as high as those for clothing sellers. Traders found the system vexing, for the estimates did not allow for lean periods in which sales slumped and traders would have to endure a net loss, “being in the hole because of taxes” (*bị lỗ thuế*). To make matters worse, they frequently did not know the rationale behind individual taxes, such as the difference between turnover tax (*doanh thu*) and income tax (*lợi tức*), and thus had difficulty requesting abatements. They were not alone in their confusion. Bến Thành’s representative from the Women’s Union described one of the primary duties of her full-time job to be informing traders about their tax obligations. Yet when I asked her to explain the policies behind the different fees, she brusquely snapped that I should pick up a copy of the codes from the local bookstore. The formulae outlined in such publications bore little resemblance to the way taxes were levied and described in Bến Thành market.

This gap between the laws enshrined in central government codes and individuals’ experiences of the actions undertaken in the name of those laws reveals the ambivalences, miscommunications, and disagreements swirling around private entrepreneurship and property in late socialist Vietnam. The confusion pervaded not just “the people” (*nhân dân*), or masses, but the various levels of central, city, and district officials who governed in their name. Bến Thành market was a microcosm of these broader tensions. As *Đổi mới* transformed the marketplace from a district-run cooperative to a district-managed market of mostly private stalls, the petty officials working there felt cast out of their formerly comfortable positions as loyal, authoritative agents of the government. Meanwhile, traders worried that the right to conduct business and generate profit granted to them by *Đổi mới* policies could suddenly evaporate if powerful officials decided that Renovation had gone too far. City and central government officials’ actions and media statements confirmed their desire to establish the rule of late socialist law throughout the country, but their cautions against changing too quickly and their reluctance to intervene in local affairs betrayed a problem: How could a government, now committed to change, reduce its financial support for the many cadres under its employ during the earlier phase of high socialism, when it was precisely those functionaries who tended to be the regime’s most loyal partisans? These tensions fueled the stall use fee controversy and help to explain both why cadres persisted in levying the fee and why stallholders resisted remitting what was, after all, a nominal amount of money. An overview of the legal and economic aspects of the conflict and the various parties’ rationales for their positions, although at times convoluted, is crucial to understanding these tensions. The wandering ghost, in this case, is in the details, for they illuminate the metaphor’s first layer of meaning: how the simmering tensions, uncertainties, and ruptures of a late socialist transition led traders to view cadres as desperate, malevolent spirits.

On October 9, 1991, the People’s Committee of Hồ Chí Minh City’s District One enacted Decision 380 (Quyết Định 380/QĐ-UB), which declared that the

right to trade in Bến Thành's stalls would be "regularized" through the signing of five-year contracts between the market management board and each trader. In exchange for paying stall use fees, traders would receive legal sanction to do business in their stalls, the right to transfer the use of the stall to someone else, and legal papers so they could use their stalls as collateral for loans from state and local government-run banks. Although the use fee's logic seemed clear, many Bến Thành traders complained that it duplicated other fees that they already paid to the market, the district, and the central government, both currently and in the past. One seller told me, "Mother has been selling in Bến Thành market for decades. She's already paid, not just one time, but many times, for the right to sell from this stall. It's her stall. Why should she pay for rights to it just because District One suddenly decided she has to?" Others added that the policy was inconsistent with rental schemes in other city markets. Consequently, many traders refused to comply. In 1994, traders organized a strike; one hundred of their representatives marched to the offices of the city people's committee (Đình Nghĩa and Đặng Ngọc Khoa 1994, 1).⁸ One journalist estimated that by 1996, one-third of all Bến Thành traders had not paid the stall use fee (Đình Nghĩa 1996, 7). My contacts estimated the number to be higher: roughly half.

Understanding traders' discontent requires some background in Vietnam's property laws during the 1990s. Traders often described themselves as owning and selling stalls, but technically they possessed only the right to use the stall—a right that could be transferred to someone else. Under the property laws of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "the people" own all land collectively, and the state or local levels of government distribute and administer it on their behalf. Consistent with this, fabric and clothing traders paid a yearly land use fee (*hoa chi*) of approximately US\$10 per month to the central government to compensate the people for the use of the small parcel of land—typically 1.5 square meters—on which their stalls rested. The leaders of the protesting traders claimed that paying the *hoa chi* fee secured the use rights to their stalls.

Other traders correctly noted that Bến Thành's stall use fee differed from prevailing practices in other city markets. Anticipating an upsurge in consumption, many district and local governments had underwritten the refurbishment or construction of marketplaces during the early years of *Đổi mới*. For example, the Soái Kinh Lâm wholesale fabric market, in which I also conducted several months of participant observation and life history interviewing, was organized in 1990 by the government of District Five. Traders in that market began

⁸This article and another in the *Thanh Niên* (Youth) newspaper describe the strike as precipitated by a management board prohibition against traders' common practice of erecting wooden frames to augment their display areas (Đặng Ngọc Khoa 1994a; Đình Nghĩa and Đặng Ngọc Khoa 1994). Most traders with whom I spoke claimed that the newspaper had downplayed the connection between the strike and the stall use fee controversy so as not to embarrass local officials.

to lease stalls for five-year terms payable in advance at fixed rates of approximately US\$1,000–\$1,500 per square meter, depending on their location within the market.⁹ Unlike Soái Kinh Lâm, Bên Thành market had not undergone extensive refurbishment. Several traders contended that what improvements had been made had already been underwritten by their contributions in 1984–85 when, as I will describe later, they had become shareholders (*cổ đông*) in what was then a state-run cooperative. Additional minor improvements followed the market's privatization in 1989, but traders claimed that these were funded by their monthly payment of market maintenance fees, averaging US\$15 per stall. Finally, they pointed out that the small amount of the stall use fee—US\$87–\$235 for clothing and fabric stalls over five years—clearly suggested that this was not the same kind of rental agreement as in other markets.

Traders who protested the fee, and even many of those who paid, argued that this unjustified collection of money did not and would not benefit the market or its sellers but would instead line the pockets of petty officials. Their claims appeared validated by a 1993 resolution from the city People's Committee (Quyết Định 1117/QĐ-UB, §12, 14) decreeing that markets could impose stall rental fees only to recoup budgetary capital that they had invested in the market's physical plant, as had been the case in the wholesale fabric market. In those markets that had not been extensively refurbished with capital from the district government, stall use fees could be imposed only by petition of traders to have policies "regularized" by the management board. Bên Thành traders claimed that minor renovations done in 1985 in what was then a cooperative did not justify the imposition of a new fee in 1991, after *Đổi mới* policies had returned stalls to private ownership.

The responses of the city People's Committee to traders' numerous complaints were contradictory. For example, a 1994 decision (Quyết Định 1500/QĐ-UB) asserted that the district government had funded sufficient renovation to justify a stall use fee in Bên Thành market, but then it ambiguously suggested that the stall use fee be revised to bring it in line with practices in other city marketplaces. Later that year, the city's Inspection Department called for the policy to be abandoned (Báo Cáo số 4000/CCTTHC). From 1994 to 1996, several newspaper articles wondered how the district could persist in collecting a fee that higher levels of city government had told them to rescind (Đăng Ngọc Khoa 1994b; Đình Nghĩa 1996; Thu An 1996). One of these (Đình Nghĩa 1996) alleged corruption on the part of market officials, prompting the prime minister in Hanoi to send a letter to the Hồ Chí Minh City People's Committee to resolve the matter quickly and fairly (L. Q. 1997). The People's Committee

⁹The figures reflect those in effect during the late 1990s. Traders in this market did not pay the *hoa chi* land use fee to the central government. Instead, it was my understanding that the district government used a portion of the rental monies it collected to remit this fee. Of the markets in which I conducted research, only Bên Thành required traders to pay *hoa chi* themselves.

responded by ordering a thorough audit (L. Q. 1997; Thu An 1997). Even as the market management board complied with this request in 1997, it had begun collecting stall use fees for a second five-year term. As before, a significant number of Bến Thành traders refused to pay a single *đồng*. Others, like the trader who mentioned wandering ghosts, quietly submitted.

In continuing to impose and collect a stall use fee, the management board withstood significant opposition and the potentially damning scrutiny of higher levels of city and central government, the media, and the general public. How did they justify their actions? In one of our discussions, the Women's Union cadre stationed in Bến Thành market claimed that the local government had the right to tax all transactions occurring within its jurisdiction:

When transferring a stall, the person taking the stall sometimes must pay the owner a sum of money. That's something that they agree to with each other, the market management board doesn't get any bit of money from that at all. But there are a number of stalls whose value has risen to around 30 taels of gold [approximately US\$15,000], relatively the same as a house or a family inheritance, and yet they don't have to spend any money at all because they were given their stall by the government. That's unreasonable. When you buy a house, buy a car, then the buyer has to pay some money at the registry in order to have property rights, the seller has to pay a certain percentage of the sale price.

Like all states, the Vietnamese government can, of course, levy taxes and assign property rights, but the stall use fee controversy revealed confusion about exactly which level of government could impose which kind of tax. The Women's Union cadre portrayed the district government as the rightful legal "owner" of the market. According to her, Bến Thành stalls, like all real property in Vietnam, belonged to the people collectively, not to individuals. The people therefore needed to be compensated by the traders for their use of this land, as set forth in the stall use rights contract. The cadre positioned the district as the duly appointed representative of the people to which compensation should be remitted. Typically, the central government reserved this authority for itself. Though it could transfer the right to tax to local organs of the state, the district's unilateral assertion of this right could be rejected as presumptuous.

If the district's behavior rankled higher-ups, this was not apparent in the media coverage of the controversy. Perhaps preferring not to draw attention to this internal dispute, both the city and central levels of government instead linked the fee to the district's role as manager of the physical plant of Bến Thành. In their public pronouncements, the fee's appropriateness rested on whether District One had invested in the market and whether the policy resembled those in force in other markets. Their statements and actions were hardly decisive, for they ordered investigations that hinted at impropriety,

suggested that perhaps the fee was inappropriate, but then claimed that the market management board had extensively renovated the market. Many traders viewed these statements as hollow. The city government seemed on their side, yet it lacked the will or power to intervene. The central government publicly ordered local officials to investigate but then retreated to the sidelines, where it mutely allowed the status quo to continue. This behavior lent credence to traders' sense that all three levels of government—district, city, and national—tacitly conspired to allow the use rights policy to continue.

One reason for the failure of the city People's Committee or the central government to take decisive action may be both entities' ongoing ambivalence toward private enterprise. Under late socialist schemes of socioeconomic classification, retail market stallholders are considered to be *tiểu thương*, or petty traders. *Tiểu thương* occupy a lower position than family enterprises (*hộ kinh doanh*) and consequently can be depicted as vulnerable subsistence workers earning a living rather than as entrepreneurs seeking profit. This term has strong gender associations, so that a petty trader is often assumed to be a woman struggling to support her family. While the term *tiểu thương* might clearly apply to a woman selling rice from a basket in a rural market, it seemed incongruous for Bến Thành stallholders who had invested tens of thousands of dollars and employed familial or outside help in stalls that, although tiny, often did high-volume business. Signs of traders' prosperity were evident in their new Honda motorbikes, recently renovated houses, and confidently middle-class consumer lifestyles. *Đổi mới* certainly encouraged private enterprise, but the government's continued commitment to socialism might reasonably leave its agents disinclined to defend the interests of the comparatively well off.

The mixed messages emanating from higher echelons of city and central government fueled the animosity between cadres and traders, as both sides mobilized their available resources to bolster their claims. According to Hà, a trader who led protests against the stall use fee, the market management board exploited its ties to the district police in order to intimidate traders and block their access to public information about the conflict. In 1996, Hà used personal connections to obtain copies of the documents surrounding the People's Committee's 1994 request that the management bring Bến Thành policies into line with those in other markets (Quyết Định 1500/QĐ-UB). Limited public access to official decrees meant that traders had not previously known the details of a decision that could be interpreted as sympathetic to their position.

Hà immediately photocopied and distributed the document throughout the market. The local police called her in for questioning at what she assumed was the behest of the market management. District officials told Hà that the document was an internal government matter, not a public decree, and threatened to fine her. Though no such fine was levied, Hà complained that she had paid the price of losing a day's work. Shortly after this episode, the management board stationed a surveillance camera directly above Hà's stall. Justified

as necessary to protect consumers from sellers' "uncivilized" pressure tactics, the positioning of this camera over this particular stall left Hà with no doubt as to why her activities were being scrutinized.

A year later, on March 18, 1997, the Lawyers' Union of the Communist Party published an article in its official journal, *Kinh Doanh và Pháp Luật* (Business and Law), providing a succinct summary of the government decisions surrounding the Bến Thành controversy (L. Q. 1997). The article offered little new information, although it did mention that traders without papers documenting their use rights had been continuously harassed by management officials and questioned why a surveillance camera had been positioned over Hà's stall. Hà promptly made photocopies of the article and distributed them throughout the market. Shortly after I received a copy from Hà, a market guard "invited" me to accompany him to the management office. There, an official, whom one trader described to me as having the "ravenous eyes of a wolf," demanded to know why Hà had given me a copy of the article. He asserted that it was filled with lies and that Hà could have had only one motive in distributing such garbage: to create havoc and discord within the market. Intended for erudite lawyers, the article could not possibly be understood by "uneducated traders." After confiscating my copy of the article, the assistant head asked me what Hà and I had discussed. I learned later that many traders were similarly required to account for their behavior and that the publication quickly disappeared from local newsstands, presumably through the machinations of the district government. Hà was brought into the district police office the next day, and once again she lost a day's trade.

To many traders, the management board's attempts to strong-arm them exemplified officials' greed and paranoia. *Đổi mới* allowed many traders to prosper right under the noses of cadres who continued to earn meager civil service salaries of US\$30–\$50 per month. Officials resorted to an extortionist policy such as the use fee and used their ties to the district police and local government to give their actions the appearance of official approval. One newspaper sympathetic to the traders characterized Bến Thành as ruled by "village customs" (*lệ làng*) (Đình Nghĩa 1996, 7), a reference to a well-known Vietnamese proverb: "The laws of the Emperor yield to the customs of the village" (*Phép vua thua lệ làng*). The phrase is typically used to evoke the spirit of moral order, democracy, and cohesion that led Vietnam's traditional villages to resist or ignore intrusive central government. The saying, however, permits a less flattering interpretation. Shielded from scrutiny, communities could be tyrannized from within by mercurial local rulers. This seemed to be the case within the Bến Thành "village," as traders increasingly resented petty officials' whims and corruption. According to one clothing seller,

The lower down the scale, the more dictatorial the decision-making becomes. It's like with parents. To raise good children, parents need to

lay down fair and consistent rules and expectations. If they tell the child to do something, the child does it, and then they turn around and punish the child for it, that's not good. . . . So, first, the parents need to be consistent. Even if the parent is wrong, the child must follow. It's not good to be wrong, but at least that's better than being unclear or unpredictable. But, in the past, parents tended to be correct. If there was a chicken, the parents said it was a chicken, and the children agreed. But, even if the parents said the chicken was a duck, the children had to agree. Today, the situation is there's a duck, the parents say it's a chicken, then the next day they say it's a rat. Every time, the children have to agree, but they also lose faith in the parents' judgment.

This tale aptly captured traders' resentment and insecurity in the face of dictatorial, arbitrary direction from above. They described local officials as lost in a new era in which party connections might matter less than individual skill and savvy. Rather than adapt, officials grasped onto a disappearing socialist reality by issuing arbitrary pronouncements and asserting their authority in ways that might not be legally justified but could still be imposed within the confines of the market. A few traders expressed sympathy for how late socialism had allowed them to hawk their wares but had left cadres adrift without sufficient means of economic support; wandering ghosts can arouse pity as well as fear. They nonetheless resented that cadres responded by trying to grab whatever they could from those whose hard work had generated financial security. Traders also astutely recognized that political circumstances had changed less quickly than economic ones, and cadres continued to have connections to higher authorities. Some traders read the lack of direct central or city government intervention as evidence of an ongoing cronyism that left them fearful that attempts to draw attention to the dispute might result, not in legal redress, but in repression and the kinds of denunciations of pariah capitalists that had marked the postwar decade of socialism. Unable to alter the late socialist circumstances that had turned cadres into wandering ghosts, most traders chose the path of least resistance: Quietly appease them and focus on the business of making money.

In their survey of the literature on postsocialism, Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery (1999, 5) note that evolutionary-minded economists and political scientists see the Communist Party's ongoing political control in China as providing a stability for incubating economic change that contrasts sharply with the political, economic, and social cleavages following the collapse of socialism in Central Europe and the Soviet Union. Burawoy and Verdery share this sense that European postsocialist "transition"—a term they critique for suggesting a problematic teleology—has followed uneven, unpredictable, and multiple trajectories, but they also highlight points of socialist–postsocialist continuity. Several other anthropologists of postsocialist Europe also complicate facile descriptions of either sudden rupture or inevitable transition (see, e.g.,

Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996). Presumptions of stability and continuity in late socialist China or Vietnam demand similar scrutiny. As Li Zhang (2001) argues in her study of Beijing's floating population, the government has not so much retreated from daily life as shifted the aspects of it to which officials apply themselves. This produces new cleavages and conflicts.

In Hồ Chí Minh City, supposed political continuity has generated its own sort of ambiguity. Many traders were suspicious of party leaders promoting policies that they had condemned a decade before. Although stallholders had generally benefited from *Đổi mới*, most saw the architects of Renovation as arbitrary, self-interested, and worried about opposition. Despite official claims that market mechanisms were a necessary step on the path to socialism, *Đổi mới* could be interpreted as an abandonment of the government's revolutionary mandate. Loyal cadres might feel betrayed, making it likely that the central government would engage in its own rituals of appeasement by ignoring their attempts to siphon resources from the private sector. As a result, daily life for small-scale entrepreneurs was rife with danger and uncertainty. When higher-ups did not follow their calls for policy transparency in Bến Thành market with direct intervention, they deflected attention from their own culpability for the uncertainties of *Đổi mới* by implying that the stall use fee conflict was merely a local struggle over control and resources. Traders and local officials consequently perceived each other as greedy and the most immediate threat to their own financial security.

The broader forces of late socialism may have unleashed a new form of wandering ghost, but traders tended to blame the ghosts themselves. That traders and cadres would resent each other was not surprising, for their mutual hostility did not suddenly materialize in 1991 with the imposition of a modest fee. Its roots reached deeper: to the end of the war in 1975 and the social upheavals that followed.

THE WANDERING GHOSTS OF WAR

The mention of ghosts in Vietnam typically brings to listeners' minds the decades of war that claimed so many unremembered victims. Prior to *Đổi mới*, the state frowned on what it deemed superstitious (*mê tín*) attempts to propitiate these spirits, although such rituals occurred covertly. Now that religious restrictions have been relaxed, ritual specialists have greater latitude to deal publicly with malevolent spirits, the most dangerous of which possess the living to draw attention to their plight. For example, I witnessed a ceremony in which a Buddhist monk argued with the spirit of a young girl killed during the war who had possessed a middle-aged woman. As the monk ordered the spirit to leave its corporeal host, the woman wailed in a child's pitiful voice, "But where can I go? I'm cold and hungry and no one cares for me."

Ghost stories, ritual precautions, and agonizing encounters with the dead—these intense reminders of a population’s wartime suffering complicate ongoing attempts to achieve a personal and social peace to match the political peace declared thirty years ago. Conversational references to ghosts remind the listener of these tortuous processes of recovery. Although the wandering ghosts in Bến Thành market stem from recent circumstances of late socialism, the metaphor alludes to a second interpretive possibility: These ghosts, too, have something to do with war. Traders privately implied such a link in their tendency to describe cadres as coming from “revolutionary families” (*gia đình cách mạng*), whereas their own families often had associations with the defeated Republic of Vietnam. Though the sensitivity of the topic made a systematic survey of traders’ political backgrounds difficult, the economic and occupational status of traders’ families prior to and following 1975 provided an indirect measure. I estimated that three-quarters of cloth and clothing stallholders came from nonrevolutionary families, most of whom had members who had been sent to reeducation camps. These actual differences, coupled with socialist suspicion of trade as an inherently reactionary profession, meant that traders and cadres could be glossed as “losers” and “winners” of the war, respectively. One trader made this difference explicit:

Most of the management board got their jobs because they followed the revolution, or are from families who did. Thus, they don’t understand petty traders and are resentful of the amounts of money they see passing through our hands. Revolutionary credentials are more important than ability, and this leads to corruption. They decide to get as much money as possible from us... Everything is because the traders created it, and they steal it, they take it all.

At the same time, these differences have not always been explicit. Nor have they necessarily been as hard and fast as some traders claimed. The life histories that twenty traders shared with me during our extended conversations in their homes at night chronicle how the animosities of war have waxed and waned over the years in accordance with changing postwar social, political, and economic circumstances. These perspectives are crucial to understanding the course of the stall use fee conflict and why, by the 1990s, both traders and cadres seemed invested in not drawing attention to the legacy of war.

Prior to 1975, Sài Gòn was a bustling boomtown, its population swollen with refugees from the war-torn countryside and foreigners. Largely spared the violence of war and benefiting from American largesse, the Republic of Vietnam’s capital was a center of commerce. Many of Bến Thành’s sellers of such durable commodities as cloth and clothing were large wholesalers based in Chợ Lớn, historically Sài Gòn’s Chinatown; their Bến Thành stall was one small retail outlet in a much larger enterprise. Other traders worked exclusively in Bến Thành, often in stalls inherited directly from other family members

(*cha truyền con nối*). Many of today's Bến Thành cloth and clothing sellers were not traders at that time. They were students or young professionals whose families worked as civil servants or owned larger businesses. Mai, who in the 1990s owned a clothing stall with her husband Tuấn, was born into a military family. Her father served as an officer in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. In 1975, she was attending college in Sài Gòn. Though she acknowledged the notorious corruption and ruthlessness of the government her father served, she, like other traders from similar backgrounds, recalled the pre-1975 period as prosperous and free.

After the war ended with the April 1975 "liberation" (*Giải phóng*) of Sài Gòn, the victorious regime began a process of political and economic accounting designed to identify its enemies and redistribute property belonging to "puppets of the American government, bourgeois reactionaries, and dishonest traders" (Nguyễn Văn Linh 1985, 150). Individuals so identified were remanded to camps for indefinite periods of reeducation (*cải tạo*). Mai's father would spend a total of thirteen years in such camps. The government confiscated all of the family's property, although they had managed to hide some of it in the days prior to liberation. Forced to withdraw from college and provide for her younger siblings, Mai was allowed to remain in her family's Sài Gòn home, but the first floor was transformed into a state-run café. When I conducted a life history interview with her twenty-two years later, Mai's resentment had not faded: "It's an anger, a bitterness which I keep deep inside my belly. I don't show it, but some day, when I have the chance, I'll be able to let it out. Then, I'll get revenge on my enemies. It's a hate that will never go away."

Not long after achieving victory, the regime took steps to socialize private enterprise. This initial campaign targeted only the most successful entrepreneurs, many of them Chinese. Many more, fearing punishment, liquidated their stock and assets by selling them at greatly reduced prices to government officials (Trần Khánh 1993, 81–83). Some fled the country. The exodus intensified in 1978–79 when the government moved to socialize the remaining large and medium-sized enterprises, including the stalls in Bến Thành market.¹⁰ Youth brigades were mobilized to take inventory simultaneously throughout the city. Traders handed over the keys to their stalls and received receipts documenting their stock. Though the goods were supposed to be transferred to the new Bến Thành cooperative, many traders recalled that most of the goods confiscated in the name of "the people" mysteriously disappeared from the market. They assumed that the "male bosses" (*các ông chủ*) overseeing the socialization campaign sold the merchandise on the black market and pocketed the profits. Traders who did not leave the country or abandon selling were allowed

¹⁰Many of those targeted by these campaigns and subsequently fleeing the country were ethnic Chinese, both because of their prominence in southern business and because of escalating tensions between the Vietnamese and Chinese governments over Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia.

to return to their stalls as employees of state-run cooperatives. The remaining retail spaces were allocated to traders from families who had supported the revolution.

While the government struggled to transform Bến Thành into a cooperative, a thriving black market sprang up on the streets surrounding the marketplace. Mai was one of many women from formerly comfortable families who joined this illegal trade out of necessity. For several years after 1975, Mai's family had lived on money secreted away prior to liberation. In 1977, she married Tuấn, a friend whose family had owned a department store prior to liberation. By 1979, Mai needed another source of income. Though the store and their two homes had been confiscated, Mai and Tuấn had managed to hide much of their merchandise. Mai began selling these goods, mostly American-made clothes, on the streets near Bến Thành market. When this supply dwindled, she used her profits to buy smuggled clothes sent by Vietnamese who had fled abroad. The black market was technically illegal, but, as the claims about Bến Thành's male bosses taking all the goods suggest, cadres were as invested as private traders in maintaining this source of income. Mai and other black marketeers easily reached "understandings" with police and other local officials.

Around 1982, orthodox members of the central government wishing to promote Stalinist-style industrialization in the South moved to stop the black market (Duiker 1995, 150). Their reasons were economic and political: They wanted to capture this sizeable revenue stream for the state sector and stem the flagrant flouting of the government's policies on street corners throughout the former southern capital. Mai and other traders felt the effects of these policies beginning in 1984, when Hồ Chí Minh City's newspapers called for mass mobilization to "eradicate the system of exploitation and the exploiting class" (*Sài Gòn Giải Phóng* 1984) by creating state-run cooperatives. Marching down the streets where Mai and others conducted their business, police patrols dismantled the physical structures of traders' stalls, confiscated their goods, and "invited" traders to accompany them to the station. Once there, traders were told that they could recover their merchandise only by paying a fine and accepting the government's "invitation" to enter a state-run cooperative located in an officially sanctioned marketplace.

Some street traders found ways to evade the police, but most of the women I met, including Mai, saw no alternative but to accept the government's offer. Mai entered Bến Thành market as a clothing seller. To accommodate this expansion, the market was refurbished; it is this refurbishment that has since become a focus of the legal debate over the stall use fees. All traders became shareholders (*cổ đông*) by contributing either money or goods to fund this construction. They were then organized into selling teams of between ten and twenty persons. Technically, the prices for goods were fixed, and traders would receive a salary based on their meeting a certain sales quota. The state media heralded the cooperativization campaign as a triumph of rational order and a decisive step toward the expansion of socialism. But to Mai, it was a profoundly unsettling

time: “Businesses were scooped up, and I couldn’t be my own boss anymore... Everything was changing. I didn’t understand how I’d be able to sell tomorrow, how I’d be able to live. At that time, everybody was frightened, nobody knew what to do.”

Traders’ fears proved unfounded as the old ways of doing business quickly returned. Bên Thành sellers recalled that the cooperative system utterly failed to stem under-the-table dealings. The marketplace became a site for displaying goods and meeting buyers, but only a small proportion of sales actually took place there. Instead, traders might surreptitiously invite customers to their homes to purchase smuggled or home-produced goods. Or they might supplement state-supplied goods with identical but illegally acquired ones, such as bolts of cloth that traders smuggled into the market by wrapping them around their bodies underneath their clothes. As they shuffled through the main gate each day, the guards conveniently averted their eyes. One trader estimated that she sold ten times more contraband fabric than cooperative merchandise.

In exchange for the market staff’s silence, traders would share their profits with the guards, bookkeepers, and even management. The scarcity of consumer goods created significant demand for Bên Thành’s wares, and profits were high. Though most of the traders entering the market in 1984–85 were, like Mai, from families who had been on the losing side in 1975, pervasive economic difficulties and the opportunities for substantial profit from under-the-table collusion suppressed potential animosity between them, the revolutionary traders who had entered the market in the late 1970s, and the market cadres who had acquired their positions due to demonstrated loyalty to the regime. Traders today joke that one of the great ironies of the central government’s cooperative system was that the primary cooperation it fostered was between traders and market management in outwitting the state.

By 1989, such rampant bending of the rules had crippled the cooperative system. Mai recalled that the state was left without a source of revenue from trade: “Before the cooperatives, the government would at least get the traders’ taxes. After, they lost their tax money. They didn’t get anything, it all went into the pockets of their employees.” As part of its *Đổi mới* economic reform policies, the Hồ Chí Minh City government declared all markets de-collectivized. From the traders’ perspective, this change was surprisingly uneventful, for it merely legalized the status quo. According to Mai, her stall and its merchandise simply reverted to her “ownership” one day, without any money or papers changing hands. Because traders had previously contributed a sum of money in order to enter the cooperatives, many already considered themselves “owners” of their stalls, so no one questioned the logic of privatization or the lack of a more formal transition.

Traders continued to make profits as before, but the legalization of free trade effectively separated market cadres and the district government from what had been an important source of income. As they struggled to survive on their official

salaries, they observed with envy the large sums of cash passing through traders' hands. Traders perceived the resulting stall use fee policy as a flagrant attempt to rob them of the fruits of their labor. In the words of one trader, the market's director "went to war against petty traders." This was not simply a case of old hatred returning. Rather, *Đổi mới* generated economic anxiety that reconfigured traders' and cadres' relationships to the regime and each other so that two tenuously allied groups came to be opposed. Whereas representatives of the state had confiscated property from families like Mai's, traders entering Bến Thành in the 1980s had little reason to hate the bookkeepers and petty officials posted there. In fact, those cadres' eagerness to work with traders to outwit the cooperative system led to friendships and alliances. To my surprise, the large number of traders from nonrevolutionary backgrounds and the smaller number with revolutionary credentials *both* recalled the 1980s in Bến Thành market as a relatively prosperous and happy time, despite the deprivations indicated in national economic reports from that period. Whatever political differences the groups might have had in the abstract, they were not salient in the immediate context of a Bến Thành cooperative that both traders and cadres saw as overly restrictive.

Đổi mới changed that. Cut off from Bến Thành enterprises, cadres came to resent traders as reactionary capitalists—losers now reascendant. They responded with what traders perceived as newfound revolutionary zeal. Nonrevolutionary traders viewed their onetime allies against the state as now part of a regime intent on continuing to punish them for the past. The small minority of revolutionary traders found themselves in an ambiguous position. Lumped together with nonrevolutionaries in cadres' eyes as suspect for their entrepreneurship, they responded by adopting critiques of the government similar to those voiced by the war's losers. To be sure, the differences had been there: Cadres had typically expressed sympathy for the regime's goals, nonrevolutionary traders had the kind of "bitterness in my belly" that Mai recalls, and the victorious revolutionary traders, by virtue of their occupation, had often found their interests aligned with those of the losers. It is also important to note that when traders declare that officials have gone to war against them and condemn their ravenous, wolf-life eyes, laziness, or propensity for corruption, they render absolute what are, in fact, more porous categories. Not all cadres have caused Mai's misfortune, a point evident in the friendships that she formed with cadres during the cooperative period, as well as in the fact that some Bến Thành traders from nonrevolutionary families today have husbands who work as police officers, local officials, and employees of state enterprises. Similarly, not all cadres view traders as pariah capitalist holdovers from a previous era, and some quietly criticize greedy higher-ups for making private entrepreneurship unduly "complicated" (*phức tạp*). Therefore, it is misleading to reduce the conflict between traders and cadres to an intractable opposition between the war's winners and losers. Rather, *Đổi mới* has prompted those who work in Bến Thành market to mobilize

their perceived and actual differences into a decisive break between sides that came to be conceived of as cadre-winners and trader-losers.

My research in Bến Thành market confirms what Werner (2006) has noted for Vietnamese films and fiction: Economic transformation has fomented an uncertainty that has led to a preoccupation with memories and experiences of war. This is not simply a case of greater openness allowing people to broach previously forbidden subjects. Rather, the 1990s witnessed a palpable anxiety that compelled many in Vietnam to make sense of the present through the past, albeit a past that was clearly selectively and retrospectively invoked.

Though past and present political divisions both fueled and have been reconfigured by the stall use fee dispute, cadres and traders seemed reluctant to identify them as the source of their conflict. Most traders did not wish to draw attention to their politically incorrect nonrevolutionary pasts, although these were hardly secret. The market management, for its part, preferred to portray a market of “many components” (*nhieu thành phần*), a euphemism for class and other hierarchical differences, now peacefully united in pursuit of prosperity.¹¹ Instead of publicly explaining their conflict as attributable to wartime oppositions, traders and management cadres typically pointed to another difference between them: gender.

GENDERED RHETORICS

In the hyperbolic rhetoric swirling around the stall use fee controversy, traders might be described, on the one hand, as ignorant, disorderly women in need of authoritative male supervision or, on the other, as hard-working wives, mothers, and “sister petty traders” (*các chị em tiểu thương*) victimized by lazy and greedy men. In cadres’ descriptions of Bến Thành traders, gender often substituted for class and educational status. The Women’s Union cadre identified the “sister petty traders” as “common people, with a low level of education” (*bình dân, có mức học văn thấp*). Both she and another market official claimed the management board had a responsibility to educate the traders by showing them the correct way to conduct business. For the Women’s Union cadre, the women’s needs merited sympathy, whereas the male official who had questioned me about my interactions with Hà seemed disdainful. During that conversation, his claim that traders could not possibly understand an article intended for lawyers rested on the dismissive assumption of a gendered educational and

¹¹Literally meaning “many components,” *nhieu thành phần* typically refers to socioeconomic differences of class, education, and occupation. When market officials talked about the *nhieu thành phần* within Bến Thành, the differences were often political. For example, the Women’s Union cadre explained that the wife of a former Republic of Vietnam general and the wife of a famous undercover agent for the revolution both ran stalls in the market. She mentioned such differences to assert that they no longer affected daily life. Of course, the fact that she emphasized this point suggested exactly the opposite: namely, the continued salience of wartime divisions.

professional gap in which it would be inappropriate and fruitless to expose mere traders to lawyers' erudite debates. He claimed that Hà's only intention was to foment disorder—a condition to which women, because of their supposedly lower comprehension, might be particularly prone (see Leshkovich 2005). Banners urging sellers to trade honestly as part of an effort to build a civilized city deserving of Hồ Chí Minh's name strongly implied that "civilization" might be particularly difficult for them to cultivate.¹² Even when some traders' wealth was being highlighted, as in the Women's Union cadre's assertion that the government had a legitimate claim to part of their sudden windfall, the implication was that this wealth had not been meritoriously acquired.

Such gendered characterizations were hardly unique to Bến Thành market. During the 1990s, much public discussion about the sociocultural effects of *Đổi mới* deployed the figure of women to symbolize, variously, tradition and change, regression and progress, and good and bad morality. Vietnamese women seeking new roles or adopting new attitudes and practices came to stand more generally for a culture in flux and crisis. As Ashley Pettus has observed, "Women, as both symbols and disciplined national subjects, have provided the cultural terrain on which the government and the wider public have sought to define what should constitute 'our national traditions' in the face of global capitalist integration" (2003, 6). This ubiquitous symbolic production and the occasional moral panic focused on women and the family have prompted scholars outside Vietnam to attend to gender as a key axis for understanding socioeconomic transformation more generally (e.g., Drummond and Rydstrøm 2004; Gammeltoft 1999; Luong 2003; Pettus 2003; Rydstrøm 2003; Tai 2001b; Taylor 2004; Werner 2005).¹³

Much of *Đổi mới* anxiety has centered on the morality of the pursuit of wealth and its impact on family relationships. Because of her association with both private enterprise and domesticity, the female *tiểu thương* petty trader became an important vehicle for articulating these dilemmas. She was far from a simple symbol. Discussions of Vietnamese-ness tend to include references to Vietnamese women's supposedly distinctive determination, hard work, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, qualities often expressed through their support of families in the arduous labor of trade. Moreover, as Helle Rydstrøm and Lisa Drummond (2004) note, this link between women and trade is often read back into Vietnamese history as a way of asserting indigenous gender ideology and practices that predate the imposition of Chinese Confucianism more than 2,000 years

¹²Such banners appeared in different contexts throughout the city and were not always directed at women. Nevertheless, the spaces deemed less civilized tended to be those that prominently featured women's petty trade. For a discussion of space, gender, and disorder in Hồ Chí Minh City, see Ann Marie Leshkovich (2005).

¹³Jayne Werner (2005, 19) found that, of the PhD dissertations and master's theses on Vietnam produced between 1995 and 2003 and available from University Microfilms, more than half focused on gender.

ago. In this way, the essential qualities of Vietnamese femininity embodied by the petty trader can be an integral part of the national narrative of resistance to foreign domination—in both the colonial past and the neoliberal present.

At the same time, the work of petty trade demands a relentless seeking of advantage, particularly in the marketplace environment of haggling and unequal access to knowledge about the provenance, quality, or prices of merchandise. Traders, especially those in large, busy markets such as Bến Thành, are commonly decried for preying on ignorant, poor customers. Again, these claims have historical depth, from Confucian moral codes that condemned traders for buying cheap and selling dear and suggested women less capable of cultivating virtue than men were (see, e.g., Rydstrøm 2003; Tai 1985a), to socialist critiques of pariah entrepreneurs. One postwar southern journalist went so far as to proclaim, “There’s no way a trader can be an honest person” (Thạch Trú 1978, 11). Women’s dominance of trade may be cited as quintessentially Vietnamese, yet trade itself seems at odds with traditional, praiseworthy cultural and moral values, which are more comfortably situated in the form of the heroic peasant resisting foreign aggression (see also Taylor 2002, 94 n. 27).

Of course, gender is never simply a matter of rhetoric and discourse. Practices of differentiation have material and social consequences; gender differences in Vietnam do indeed make a difference, to borrow Jane Monnig Atkinson’s (1990) phrase. Women typically cannot stay in school as long as men can, and lack of connections or sources of credit prevents many women from developing their businesses. Women dominate small-scale trade in part because other forms of employment are not as readily available. But these gender differences are clearly inflected through other factors, such as class and place of residence. By these measures, many of Bến Thành’s traders, particularly the comparatively prosperous cloth and clothing merchants, bore even less resemblance to the stereotype of ignorant, poor, female *tiểu thương*. Examined together as rhetorical claims, then, characterizing traders’ qualities as gendered naturalizes and essentializes them as inherently more disordered and lower class than men and hence in need of the civilizing supervision of a masculine governmental apparatus. A conflict about access to resources in a time of economic uncertainty becomes transposed into a moral question of the inherent qualities of types of people. At the same time, the complexity of, and contradictions within, popular gender discourses provided traders with their own rhetorical ammunition.

Some of the management’s characterizations rang true with traders. For example, many traders were disturbed that Bến Thành had acquired a reputation for high prices and unscrupulous salespeople who would say anything (*nói xạo*) to clinch a sale. The self-described honest traders looked to officials to discourage and punish unfair practices. Likewise, the more prosperous or educated traders, some of whom, like Mai, possessed partial or full college educations, criticized those whose manners lacked refinement. Others tried to help traders

whom they perceived as disadvantaged by inferior education or experience. Such narratives showed a striking difference from cadres' characterizations: The honest and dishonest or educated and uneducated differed because of character, class, or background—not gender. In fact, several told me that they resented the way male cadres used gender to treat them disrespectfully.

Although gender was not salient to traders in describing differentiation within their ranks, they did use gendered imagery to critique market officials and to highlight their own victimization. Often they would complain that cadres simply lazed around and talked all day, whereas traders worked hard to support their families—characterizations frequently applied to men and women in Vietnam. In the city during the day, women can most commonly be seen working or running errands. Men, in contrast, visibly engage in recreational pursuits: hanging out at cafés, drinking, chatting, and playing cards. Never mind that in markets during the slow months, traders themselves spend much of the day simply waiting around for customers and complaining of boredom—nevertheless, the image of the busy woman and the idle man is discursively compelling.

In other circumstances, traders associated femininity with vulnerability. One protesting trader told the city's *Tuổi Trẻ* (Youth) newspaper,

As one of the masses, I always tell myself that I must live and work according to the constitution, according to the law. But I want whoever manages us sister traders to also have to carry out the law correctly, to have to correctly carry out the government's regulations to regularize our stall use rights. (Thu An 1997)

Her plea is compelling on several levels. First, the trader arouses sympathy for her position as a hardworking and law-abiding citizen. Second, she suggests the laws that apply to her should apply as forcefully to those who design and implement them. Finally, she preempts critiques of market traders as bourgeois pariahs by depicting herself as just one of many “sister petty traders” engaged in what are presumed to be small-scale subsistence activities rather than larger capitalistic profit-making ventures. Although she only once refers explicitly to gender identities, the qualities she highlights are feminized; they suggest a woman who focuses on working to support her family and does not understand the larger issues of laws and their enforcement—the nobler version of the traditional *tiểu thương* imagery discussed earlier. Even as she hints at a misapplication of Vietnam's laws by Bến Thành's male officials, she distances herself from this accusation by not stating definitively what she believes a correct interpretation to be. She is merely aligning herself with the masses and calling on those with greater power and knowledge to protect her.

Many of the protesting traders' representations of their situation similarly invoked a sense of their feminine vulnerability. In the example quoted earlier

in which a trader compared officials to parents who tell their children that a duck is a chicken or a rat, traders occupy the position of dependent children who may lose faith in their parents but must obey their rules. The analogy succeeds in part because women in Vietnam traditionally were legally akin to perpetual minors who had to obey, in sequence, their fathers, husbands, and sons. In a socialist society, portraying oneself as feminine, dependent, weak, and vulnerable allows traders to claim a rhetorically privileged position as “one of the masses.” As *Đổi mới* policies fueled concern about a resurgence of class inequalities and Bến Thành market was thought to be rife with inflated prices palatable only to the wealthy and foreign, traders concealed their growing middle-class privilege and deflected assumptions about their nonrevolutionary pasts by highlighting their feminine vulnerability. Ironically, even as market officials asserted that traders had prospered and demanded compensation in the name of “the people,” their assertions of legitimate authority over the market rested on its being composed of backward, uneducated women in need of their guidance.

In public, both sides were therefore confined to portraying their differences through compelling but timeworn and inaccurate clichés about gender, trade, and status. Such claims reference popular Vietnamese notions of gender and hence allow those who deploy them to represent their positions as reasonable and familiar, but they also limited traders’ expression to the logic of stereotypes that demeaned them. But this was a safer strategy than acknowledging that Bến Thành’s problems were connected to a wartime past whose divisions, smoothed over during the previous decade, had now resurfaced and been reconfigured through daily interactions under *Đổi mới*.

THE GENDERED GHOSTS OF WAR MEMORIES

The processes of selectively remembering and forgetting, voicing and silencing that I discerned in Bến Thành market are part of what Stoler and Strassler (2002, 170) term memory work: “interpretive labor” in an “ongoing and uneven production process” that refracts the past through the experience of the present in ways that can create collective consciousness, but also open up multiple interpretive possibilities. Memory work is evident in public and private moments that explicitly call for recollection of the past: reburial ceremonies that physically construct a prototypical ancestor from multiple, fragmentary remains (Cole 2001), invited recollections of colonial domestic service (Stoler and Strassler 2002), or songs recalling evacuation during a struggle for national independence (Steedly 2000). But it can also occur less explicitly, as when an experience unexpectedly reminds one of something and prompts reflection on its significance. The processes of memory work are by no means smooth or totalizing.

That memory is constructed through social and cultural processes that render certain stories intelligible or credible has been an important theme in the

scholarly literature on gender and war. Much of this work has attempted to make visible women's concrete experiences of war that are otherwise invisible because women are presumed to be war's helpless victims rather than its active agents. Some of this work attempts to fill gaps in the historical record by documenting women's substantial roles in combat: as fighters, as wartime correspondents, and as laborers on the home front or in guerilla outposts (see, e.g., De Pauw 1998; Goodman 2000; Turner and Phan Thanh Hao 1998; Utas 2005; Yuval-Davis 1997). Writing women into historical narratives of war can also have important implications for their postwar status. This has been particularly true in Vietnam, where popular fascination in the 1990s with stories of women whose wartime sacrifices for the winning side prevented them from following the normal feminine path of marrying and bearing children has allowed such women to demand the right to be single mothers and has changed prevailing attitudes toward single motherhood (Phinney 2005; Werner 2006).

Other scholars, while seeming to support the conventional view that women experience war primarily as its victims, have interrogated the construction of victimhood. Nuanced accounts of women's experiences of and responses to violence, rape, or dislocation suggest that victimhood can enable powerful forms of agency through creating communities of shared memories or by providing a voice of outrage that commands attention (Jacobson, Jacobs, and Marchbank 2000; Kumar 2001; Vickers 1993). Their point is not to dismiss trauma and suffering but to complicate accounts that render experience only in those terms. Again, there is evidence that northerners in Vietnam engage in similar processes when stories of women's personal suffering during war invite broader recollections about loss and redemption.

A final theme has been the ways in which war and gender are mutually constructed. War, in this view, does not simply reflect gender ideals or divisions of labor but constitutes them. Consequently, attending to gender in the context of war illuminates these constructions. Examples include how the sexually alluring masculinity of the soldier can incite women to support wars and men to fight them, notwithstanding claims that women are "naturally" pacifist (De Pauw 1998; Goldstein 2000; Utas 2005; Vickers 1993). If masculinity is militarized and the military masculinized, these associations rest on a corollary construction of non-militarized femininity in which women are complicit (Elshtain 1987; Enloe 1989, 1993; Goldstein 2000). Jena Bethke Elshtain suggests that the stereotypical roles of women and war provide an opportunity for the self-reflective construction of gendered personhood: "... [W]ars destroy and bring into being men *and* women as particular *identities* by canalizing energy and giving permission to narrate" (1987, 166). This also explains a widespread tendency for winners of war to emasculate the losers, as in the rhetoric in Bến Thành market conflating the categories of cadres and traders with those of victors and vanquished, male and female.

Running through many of these studies is the sense that war works to naturalize or obscure its gendered aspects and that attending to gender will illuminate

heretofore hidden elements of individual experience and sociocultural process that will expand our understanding of both war and gender. As noted earlier, this seems to be the case in Vietnam, with explicit public discussions about women's wartime sacrifices producing a flood of personal memoirs and representations. Prominent examples of gendered war remembrances include ceremonies honoring heroic mothers (*Các bà mẹ anh hùng*) who lost sons or husbands, novels and movies exploring the sacrifices of young women whose military service required that they forgo marriage and childbearing (Turner 2007), and the popularity of the recently uncovered diary of a female doctor killed on the front. Werner (2006) sees in these memory acts a sense of melancholy that clearly complicates official rhetoric of glorious, typically masculine, wartime heroism. At the same time, a sense of national unity is recouped through the image of women called on to sacrifice key aspects of their femininity—youth, beauty, sexual desire, and marriage prospects—in service of the cause of revolution. Women come to represent the Vietnamese nation, an association that is reminiscent of the anticolonial debates in the 1920s about Vietnamese identity that Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1992) has so richly documented, as well as common to nationalist representations more broadly (Yuval-Davis 1997). Although the images of women are stereotypical and essentializing, they can serve as points of entry to articulate individual experience of loss, suffering, and melancholy that can be incorporated into a glorious project of national salvation. As Cynthia Enloe notes in recalling her visit to the Southern Vietnamese Women's Museum in Hồ Chí Minh City, "A 'postwar' era in any country lasts as long as its people have a stake in debating exactly what wartime experiences meant. Many of these debates are about what it meant during that war to be a woman or a man" (2005, 201).

In such representations, popular and official versions of the past are not so much in conflict as in dialogue. According to Tai, Vietnam's leadership seeks to justify its authority by "promoting a version of the past which inscribes it as the legitimate inheritor of the Vietnamese patriotic tradition and the dominant force in the recent history of the country. Such a version of the past tends to empty the historical stage of alternative scenarios and actors" (2001c, 3; see also Pelley 2002).¹⁴ Though it may be tempting to see this version of the past as inaccurate because of its instrumentality, Tai argues that official histories succeed not in spite of popular or individual memories but by selectively and compellingly mobilizing them (see also Werner 2006). As a corollary, although the official history of the state can be counterpoised to popular memories, individuals often develop their sense of the past in conjunction with official

¹⁴As Rubie Watson (1994) notes, such dynamics are common in state socialism, in which leaders proclaim the historical inevitability of present power structures. They are also present in nonsocialist societies, for, as Trouillot suggests, creating history always rests on power-laden fluidity between that which happened and that which is said to have happened, and between speaking and silence (Trouillot 1995, see also Sider and Smith 1997; Stoler 1992).

histories and strive to see their own versions affirmed by their correspondence to the tales enshrined in military cemeteries, monuments, or rituals of national commemoration.

Even when participants on the winning side pose versions of the wartime past that seem to challenge the grand narrative of national struggle, they tend not to debunk the official version so much as demand that it be expanded to include them. Such dynamics have motivated controversies in the northern part of the country over public acts and sites of commemoration, such as in museums (Tai 2001b), in cinema (Bradley 2001; Werner 2006), in fiction (Werner 2006), and in funerals (Malarney 1996, 2001). They are also present in more private complaints that certain actors who labored for the winning side have not been sufficiently included in narratives of heroism and sacrifice (Jellema 2005; McElwee 2005; Phinney 2005; Turner and Phan Thanh Hao 1998). These include personal memories of female war veterans and reservists that critique state historical production, not primarily to challenge its fundamental metanarrative of heroic resistance, although they do so to some extent, but to advocate that the narrators be included and hence rewarded for actions and lives consistent with those claims.

In contrast to debates about the past among the victors, the links between gender and memories of the wartime and postwar periods in Bến Thành market do little to promote inclusion or empowerment. That Vietnam's war was a civil one dividing the country has both raised the stakes involved in memory work and highlighted just how partial and instrumental versions of the past can be. Tai (2001a) has observed that scholarship has not sufficiently explored forms of memory coming from other subject locations within contemporary Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora. Memoirs penned by those who fled Vietnam after 1975 begin to represent these perspectives,¹⁵ but those from the losing side who remain in Vietnam have not been as able to voice their memories.¹⁶

This is why attending to the stories of the past told by Bến Thành market traders is so important. There, talk of gender seems not to open up the diversity of wartime experiences, but to divert attention from them. Female traders are the losers. They are not women who sacrificed in the name of the nation but women who suffered because they or their families were labeled enemies of the victorious national project. They are not noble but greedy. And for the

¹⁵Examples of such memoirs include Doan Van Tai and David Chanoff (1986), Ha Pham Kim Nhung (1997), Le Ly Hayslip and James Hayslip (1989), Le Ly Hayslip and Jay Wurts (1993), Huynh Sanh Thong (1988), Yung Krall (1995), Lu Van Thanh (1997), Nam Phuong (1991), Nguyen Ngoc Ngan (1982), Nguyen Qui Duc (1994), Nguyen Trieu Dan (1991), and Truong Nhu Tang (1985).

¹⁶An interesting exception to this silence is the group of veterans from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam who, marginalized after 1975, have now found informal employment as guides sharing their memories with international travelers at war-related sites such as the DMZ and the Củ Chi tunnels (Schwenkel 2006, 18–20).

particular cloth and clothing traders whom I came to know, their current prosperity suggests that they have not in fact endured much loss. Though stories similar to theirs may be valorized in the diaspora (Nguyen-Vo 2005), they are not within Vietnam. Their sufferings primarily fall into the category of that which should be forgotten.

The gendered rhetoric of the stall use fee conflict aids in this process of public forgetting. “Losers” such as Mai have recently regained a measure of prosperity, but they have learned not to speak about their pasts publicly. At the same time, the supporters of the Sài Gòn regime have not simply submerged those pasts. Rather, they have effectively learned how to voice their pasts privately and subtly by reworking and reconstructing them through their quotidian experiences. Mai, for example, tells her family’s tale of dispossession, imprisonment, internal exile, and emotional collapse by highlighting the themes of oppression, sacrifice, and resilience that—somewhat ironically—also characterize the tales of loss and suffering told by the state on behalf of veterans (Malarney 2001) and heroic mothers whose children died in service to the revolution (Tai 2001b). She can be equally selective, however, in idealizing her pre-1975 past. For example, the father whom Mai describes as a loving family man, decorated army officer, and hapless victim of post-1975 political retribution was, in fact, the head of a South Vietnamese prison—the type of place not known for its humane treatment. That his former victims might seek retribution seems understandable.

Engaging with Mai and other traders’ versions of the past may complicate official tales of glorious revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism, but I find them to be even more significant for their own processes of memory work that are simultaneously individual and social. In her work on memory practices in postcolonial Madagascar, Cole (2001) argues that attention to the social dimensions of memory must be tempered by a concern for those individual memories that do not get incorporated into collective histories. At the same time, those individual memories need to be understood, not simply as the unique outcomes of internal psychodynamics but as themselves intersubjective, social products.

Cole’s description of Betsimisaraka reburial practices and the relationships between the living and the dead that they enact is particularly instructive for thinking about memory and ghosts in Bến Thành market. Reburial occurs when a diviner informs an ill person that an ancestor’s tomb needs to be replaced. As the bones are taken up from their gender-segregated collective tombs, the group often cannot recall the individual ancestors from whom they originated. Instead of being reburied separately, the bones are reconstituted into an archetypical male and female ancestral pair that is then reburied. Cole (2001, 8) interprets this as a potent representation of memory processes that use ties to the past to construct a collectivity from many individual fragments.

The evocation of wandering ghosts in Bến Thành market provides a similarly apt metaphor for a community’s intersubjective construction of memory through

relations with the dead. The ghosts, however, point to an aspect of memory work directly opposite to that constructed by Betsimisaraka reburial: Rather than combining memories into a protective, collective ancestor, the image of ghosts alludes to fragments of the past that cannot be incorporated into publicly voiced, shared representations. The ghosts tell us that there are events and elements of the past that cannot be fully grasped and articulated in the present, and hence there are people uneasily situated at the margins of the social whole. Unable to become part of collective memories and risky to share privately, these memory fragments and their hosts must wander—shadowy, threatening, and homeless—over the social landscape of memory.

Encounters between cadres and traders afford a key site for memory work because these moments generate perceptions of the past that are neither fully fashioned to suit the concerns of the present nor hermetically sealed as inviolable truths of past experience. Daily interactions have posed predicaments that people have sought to understand in light of previous experiences. Mai has had bitterness in her belly since 1975, yet the target of her wrath has shifted and its ramifications have been rearticulated. Different daily experiences prompt her to reflect on who and what has caused her hardship, and she tries to discern how her family background concretely shapes each new encounter that she has with the regime and those who claim to represent it. When a cadre felt jealous of Mai's recent prosperity, her family history provided a convenient, politically righteous rationale for him to condemn the ascendancy of antirevolutionary elements and stake a claim to her profits in the name of the masses. For Mai, the sense that cadres' resentment centered less on the idea of money making than on the fact that someone with her background was doing it successfully, initiated a shift in her own memories of the past. Someone who might have been an ally in the 1980s now became the latest agent of the revolution to oppress her. In light of these new experiences, "1975" is not just responsible for her father's imprisonment or the commandeering of her home as a state-run café but for a new victimization twenty years later.

When a trader, resenting a fee, dubs cadres wandering ghosts, her metaphor alludes to a vision of the wartime past to explain her recent experiences. At the same time, her act of locating echoes of the past in the present iteratively transforms what she conceives the past to be, for she now ascribes its significance to her sense of its current legacy while pushing aside other memory strands less germane to contemporary experiences. Personal instrumentality and social legibility intersect to make particular schemas of memory reasonable and intelligible. The stall use fee controversy is merely one obvious manifestation of the kinds of rearticulations that occur without fanfare throughout Bến Thành market every day.

With every act of rendering the past intelligible and coherent, fragmentary events and disruptive processes become released. When traders and cadres perceive their differences in terms of wartime animosity and politics, they may

be able to voice these memories privately to each other and to a foreign anthropologist in ways that build community, but they cannot incorporate them into the more public portrayals of the stall use fee controversy. Hence, gender—a difference that does indeed divide them—is called on to bear even greater rhetorical weight and in so doing bypasses more divisive memories of war and its repercussions. These memories are submerged rather than repressed; they are not forgotten so much as exiled to the hinterlands of articulated memory. In this view, the wandering ghosts haunting Bến Thành market are more than cadres dislocated by late socialism or the lingering legacy of war, but memory itself—versions of the past that have been cast aside by processes of gendered memory work that have privileged other interpretations as socially legible, compelling, or strategic.

CONCLUSION

When I returned to Bến Thành market at the end of 2003, the stall use fee controversy had dissipated. The market management continued to collect the fees, but it now justified them as funding a modest refurbishment of the facility's floor and roof a few years earlier. With the state media focusing on several high profile multimillion-dollar corruption cases, allegations that Bến Thành's "hungry ghosts" may have been appeased by US\$130,000 in stall use fees and additional payments during the 1990s seemed quite paltry. Most traders reported that they had resigned themselves to paying the fee because it was the easy thing to do. The internal government confusion over who had the right to taxes and profits from Bến Thành seemed to have been consigned to the past as just one of the fits and starts accompanying the early stages of the previous decade's implementation of *Đổi mới*.

As Mai's life history suggests, however, antagonism between traders and market officials has much deeper roots in the lines of conflict surrounding April 30, 1975. This animosity has a long history, but it has been neither constant nor absolute. During the cooperative period, traders and cadres successfully put aside their political differences as they cooperated to divert as much profit as possible from state coffers. What *Đổi mới* has done is not so much allow an old antagonism to reemerge as it has placed two groups in conflict in such a way as to make them plausibly see their current antagonism as foundational. Daily interaction and confrontations between market traders and management staff during the stall use fee controversy reinforced these apparently long-standing battle lines, but attention to the longer history of traders' relationships with cadres suggests that the lines have, in fact, shifted or blurred over the years.

In a context of differential power between winners and losers, historical memories get voiced not in overt, public debates over commemoration but in smaller articulations of suppressed pasts that have themselves been reworked through the daily social and cultural negotiations of the present. These may

occasionally surface in open conflict, as they did in the stall use fee controversy. But even then, these personal and interpersonal memories cannot readily be addressed and tend instead to be expressed through the rhetorical devices of indirection and metaphor.

The specific problem of stall use rights in Bến Thành may have been resolved, at least temporarily, but the deeper questions of history and memory in Vietnam's late socialist period that fueled the controversy remain. Beyond visible debates about official versus unofficial forms of commemoration or individual versus collective memory, lurk the wandering ghosts—bits and pieces of the past that either do not get explicitly remembered or cannot comfortably be incorporated into collective, socially legitimated representations of history. But these fragments, too, are subject to processes of memory work, as when recollections of wartime divisions get recast as less perilous gender differences through their continuous rearticulation in daily interpersonal encounters between traders and cadres. References to wandering ghosts and the wartime tragedy that generated them are significant, not as much for their attempts to propose alternative, counterofficial versions of the past (although these should command our attention), as for their implication that the past always remains a partial and inchoate landscape littered with the souls made homeless by attempts to construct order and cohesion. These ghosts dimly remind us that memory is always a work in progress.

Acknowledgments

The research and writing of this article was supported through grants and assistance from the Social Science Research Council, Fulbright-Hays, the American Philosophical Society, Vietnam National University, Harvard University, and College of the Holy Cross. I would like to thank Carla Jones, Susan Rodgers, Karen Strassler, Christine Walley, Smita Lahiri, Janet McIntosh, Ajantha Subramanian, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Mary Steedly, Mark Sidel, Karen Turner, Trần Thị Kim Liên, and three anonymous reviewers for providing extensive feedback and suggestions on earlier versions of this article. Although I am unable to list them by name, I am indebted to the stallholders of chợ Bến Thành for so graciously welcoming me into their daily lives and sharing stories about the ghosts of the past.

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