'We return in order to take leave': Memory and the Return Journeys of Vietnamese Women
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'We return in order to take leave': Memory and the Return Journeys of Vietnamese Women

Abstract

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, more than two million Vietnamese left their homeland and made new lives for themselves overseas, primarily in the United States, Australia, Canada, and France. It was one of the largest and most visible mass migrations of the late twentieth century. The scale of this diaspora was unprecedented in Vietnamese history. Although many left their country under traumatic conditions in the postwar years, an increasing number of overseas Vietnamese are traveling home.

This article will explore the narratives of six Vietnamese women, and their perceptions of return journeys. The narratives form part of an oral history project conducted in Australia between 2005 and 2008. Women reflect on their memories of "home," and convey their experience of loss, displacement, and migration. For most, the return journey is an intensely emotional experience that enables women to reassess and modify their conception of home and homeland. Their narratives illustrate a clear disjuncture between past and present. Four of the six women have returned to Vietnam, but two have opted not to, and their accounts will reveal why. The author will review the literature on return journeys, and then proceed with an analysis of the women's narratives. Return journeys range from difficult early returns in the 1980s to the imaginary undertakings of those who choose not to travel back to Vietnam. The article will examine three factors: how women remember the past, how they negotiate the return journey, and the role of memory in their narratives.

1-2
2 notes:

Return journeys to the homeland may be imbued with a multitude of meanings for travellers, but for Vietnamese refugees and migrants

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it is a journey that is often emotional and fraught. As the Vietnamese American writer Andrew Lam has remarked:

> We return in order to take leave . . .
> And some return only in their mind. (2005:115)

In one of the largest and most visible diasporas of the late twentieth century, more than two million Vietnamese left their homeland after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and resettled overseas, principally in the United States, Australia, Canada, and France. The majority left their country under conditions of great stress and hardship in the postwar years, and the memory of that departure remains engraved in their minds. Even those who left Vietnam in more orderly fashion as sponsored migrants in the 1980s and 1990s have memories of failed escape attempts, internment, or divided families. Under these conditions, the return to Vietnam is not a decision taken lightly. An increasing number of overseas Vietnamese, however, have opted to return to their former country, whether for short or extended stays.[1]

3-4
2 notes:

My work is based on the oral histories of Vietnamese women in Australia. A total of forty-two women were interviewed between 2005 and 2008.[2] Women related their experience of displacement, migration and resettlement, and reflected on their memories of loss and trauma. In this article, I will explore the narratives of six women and the significance of return journeys for them. Four of the women have made return journeys to Vietnam, but two have chosen not to,

[1] According to the Vietnamese government, the number of overseas Vietnamese traveling annually to Vietnam rose from 8,000 in 1986 to approximately 250,000 by the end of the 1990s. In 2004, it reached 400,000 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005). Annual remittances from the diaspora to Vietnam are estimated at US$3 billion, "roughly equivalent to 10 per cent of Vietnam's gross domestic product and constituting a major source of foreign exchange" (Carruthers 2008:71).

[2] These oral narratives form part of a five-year project, "Vietnamese Women: Voices and Narratives of the Diaspora," funded by the Australian Research Council. Vietnamese women from Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, and Adelaide were interviewed. Half the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. I conducted interviews with twenty-one women over three years. The remainder were interviewed by Boitran Huynh-Beattie and Thao Ha. Of the forty-two women, the majority—thirty-one—have made return trips to Vietnam, and most have done so more than once.

and their narratives will reveal why. I will provide a review of the literature on the topic, both theoretical and autobiographical, before proceeding with the presentation and analysis of the women's narratives. I will examine how women have managed and negotiated this return, how they remember the past, and what function memory serves in the context of return narratives.

5-6
2 notes:

While the timing and circumstances of the women's return journeys may vary, their stories contain recurring narrative elements: their overwhelming emotion on first seeing their country again; heightened levels of anxiety, apprehension and anticipation; and, inevitably, the traumatic reliving of their initial departure. Their reconnection with a place that had once been familiar is characterized by ambiguity, as they detail the changes that they observe, and struggle to adjust to the gap between their memories and reality. Return narratives share a sense of grief and loss, as well as the regret engendered by lives lived away from close kin. The return marks not only an opportunity to reunite with family and loved ones, but a journey towards a remembered place, whether the family home, the native village, or the town or city in which women had lived prior to their exodus from Vietnam.

7-8
2 notes:

On the other hand, the narratives of those who were either children when they left or too young to remember the original departure reveal yet another dimension. Their accounts illustrate the extent to which their parents' memories and trauma have in turn colored their perception of Vietnam, and of the return journey. Overall, the women's narratives reveal two central factors: the predominance of family as the motivation for the journey home; and the acknowledgement that their lives now lay in their new country and the Vietnam they remember is truly lost to them.

9-10
2 notes:

In *Return Migration*, Russell King writes, "when migrants are asked to indicate their reasons for return in questionnaire and interview surveys, most studies report the predominance of non-economic factors. The most frequently mentioned motives are family ties and the desire to rejoin kin and old friends" (2000:17). This reflects the experience of the women in these narratives. Their return journeys

were largely undertaken for family reasons and, for two of them, it was the only motivator that was strong enough for them to overcome their initial reluctance to travel and their very real apprehensions about the possible consequences of such a journey in terms of their personal safety.[3] "Imagining the return," suggest Ellen Oxfeld and Lynellyn Long, "is often an emotionally charged experience, becoming more so as it is imminent. In order to return, people analyze the potential consequences (such as degree of danger, financial viability, and reception) and confront strong emotion" (2004:7). The return of refugees is particularly problematic since memories of their homeland are often associated with high levels of trauma. As Oxfeld and Long note, "returns require managing one's own expectations. Both returnees and 'homelands' are altered during the time apart and the return itself forces further alterations" (2004:15). Of the six women whose narratives are explored here, five were refugees in the 1970s or 1980s. The sixth left Vietnam as a sponsored migrant in 1984 after making two failed escape attempts in the 1970s. Their return journeys span two decades, with the earliest taking place in 1989, and the latest in 2006. All were short-term journeys. The narratives highlight the impact of the first return journey in particular, and the disjuncture between past memory and contemporary experience.

The malaise that early returns engendered in women reflects that portrayed in Vietnamese literary accounts of return journeys in the first half of the twentieth century. In the works of Vietnamese francophone writers, these journeys are largely undertaken by men and involve protagonists who become alienated from their country and culture after years of study in metropolitan France. Novels such as Pham Van Ky's *Frères de sang* [Blood Brothers] (1947) and Cung Giu Nguyen's *Le fils de la baleine* [The Whale's Son] (1956), depict central characters who return to Vietnam only to find themselves literally and figuratively adrift, at home neither in their country nor overseas.

[3] Overseas Vietnamese may return for a wide variety of reasons aside from reconnecting with family members. These range from establishing businesses to seeking spouses (see Thai 2008) or affordable medical procedures. The women in this study, however, overwhelmingly cited family as the reason for their return.

As cultural and linguistic hybrids, these men have become strangers in their own land (Nguyen 2003:173–74). Their conflicted emotions and reactions to their homecoming are specific to the migrant experience and resurface in the accounts of Vietnamese returnees fifty years later. In his memoir *Saigon to San Diego* for example, Trinh Do relates his return to Vietnam in 1995, seventeen years after he had escaped from the country. Both his parents died at sea in 1982. Do writes,

> On my return, I found some old friends, including Trang, who still lived in the city. The reunions brought me many bittersweet realizations, including the dawning understanding that I had changed so much in the years living outside Vietnam. While I shared a past with my old friends, we had nothing in common in the present and the future. When I left Vung Tau, I felt like a foreigner in my own homeland. (2004:226)

While the return journeys of male protagonists have been depicted in Vietnamese francophone novels because it was young men who went overseas to study in the 1920s and 1930s, those of Vietnamese women who left to study in the 1950s and 1960s have for the most part not been recorded or fictionalized in Vietnamese literary culture. Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison des pluies* [Return to the Rainy Season] (1990) is a notable exception in that it focuses on her return to the country of her birth after a gap of thirty years. Hers is a bittersweet journey, since Vietnam was the site of the rejection and grief she experienced growing up as an illegitimate Eurasian child in the 1930s and 1940s. She chronicles the fact that it was the publication of her earlier autobiographical novel *Métisse blanche* [White Métisse] (1989) that led her to renew ties with her aged mother in Vietnam. She writes:

> Everything changed with the publication of the book. By writing it, I had set in motion, without being aware of it, a time machine to the past. And the light-years that I had wanted to

> throw between Vietnam and myself, between my childhood and myself, like a great space of oblivion, were all at once abolished.
>
> The armour that I had forged, year after year, behind which I shut away an acute sensitivity to all that had to do with the past, cracked silently. (Lefèvre 1990:18)

In *Retour*, Lefèvre relates not only her return journey and reunion with her mother and half-sisters, she also fills in the lacunae in her earlier life story (Nguyen 2001: Paragraph 11). As Jack Yeager observes, "the narrator, her mother and sisters, weave their stories together, moving towards the goal of recording and thus rescuing the past" (1993:54). Lefèvre's return journey therefore enables her to not only reconnect with her family and her past, but to reconstruct that past in her writing, and she is conscious of the fragility of this process:

> The past endures in the receptacle of my memory. There, it lives in the secret of my memory, always as colored, as rich in emotions. But, like those prehistoric caves where rock art fades when the light of the present is introduced, so is my past dissolving. The movement and the noise of everyday life have taken it away. And I cannot resurrect it in any other way except on the paper in which I write. (1990:220–21)

The memory of the past, and its transitory nature, color the narratives of the women explored here, as they reflect on the significance of the return journey and convey what Vietnam means to them now, after more than twenty years of establishing new lives overseas. For most, the return journey is an intensely emotional experience that enables women to reassess and modify their conception of home and homeland. As Hue-Tam Ho Tai suggests,

> Exiles provide, mostly from afar, a truly contrapuntal voice to the official discourse . . . [T]he past is a familiar place and a familiar time; it is the present that is strange. Where they reside does not quite feel like home, but their homeland is now out of bounds. What happens when their own narratives of the past and those circulating in the homeland collide or when their memories are set side by side with present realities is worth further analysis. (2001:229)

With pasts disrupted by war, political upheaval and dislocation, Vietnamese refugees are often unable to dissociate themselves from pervasive memories of their home country and dream obsessively of home. Mandy Thomas notes, these dreams are characteristic of displaced people, and play an important role in counteracting their sense of displacement, as well as reconnecting them to their former lives (1999:177). These dreams are accompanied by acute homesickness (Thomas 1999:177). Although the intensity of this feeling may fade with the passing years, home and the preoccupation with homeland continue to assume a disproportionate importance in the Vietnamese diasporic imaginary. As Michael Seidel reminds us, "the memory of home becomes paramount in narratives where home itself is but a memory" (1986:11).

The strong attachment of the Vietnamese to kin and land is manifest in the extensive flow of money and goods from the diaspora to Vietnam, a flow that, as Thomas notes, "illuminates the extension of the Vietnamese family beyond the boundaries of a single nation" (1999:189). While these women's narratives illustrate their continued attachment to relatives in Vietnam, they also demonstrate that their lives are now based overseas. Even if women had been unsure of where "home" truly was before their return journeys, the trip to their former homeland was to affirm their place in the diaspora, and their adopted land as "home."

First Returns: Fraught Journeys

The first narrative is that of Vinh, born in Quang Nam, central Vietnam, in 1942. A pharmacist in Danang before 1975, she remembers fleeing to Saigon with her two children just a few days before Danang fell to communist forces. Her husband had stayed behind with her parents and for a while she had no news of them. Her husband had an engineering degree from Australia and was imprisoned for two years in a re-education camp. She was not allowed to visit him during his internment. After his release, he had to report to the police every two weeks and their home was subjected to regular midnight raids by authorities. They tried to escape the country in 1978 and then again in 1979. Her husband finally escaped successfully as a land refugee in 1980 and sponsored her and their daughters to Australia in 1984. The traumatic nature of her experiences manifested itself in her depressed state during her first few months in Australia, and recurring dreams of her homeland and of those that she had left behind. As she states, "I left my two sisters and my mother in Vietnam. I thought that I would never see them again." Vinh made her first return trip in 1989, only five years after leaving the country. It was at a time when, as she notes, few refugees had yet made the return trip home. It was a journey filled with anxiety but one that she undertook in order to be reunited with her mother and sisters. She highlights her reception at Tan Son Nhat Airport:

> I can't tell you clearly how I felt by the time the plane landed. It was a mix of emotions: happiness, anxiety and sadness. I had to fill in forms stating how much money and gold I'd brought into the country and lodge them. After about fifteen minutes, a customs officer called out my name and said, "Follow me." I was the only one he took to his office. I started shaking. The airport was hot and dirty, but his office was air conditioned and very modern. He asked me to sit down. He asked me how much gold I'd brought over. I said twelve taels. He said that I was supposed to pay US$800 in tax. I said, "Yes, I know." I was

wearing a gold necklace and ring and he said, "Just declare your necklace and ring. I'll take your form and destroy it. Just declare these two items and I'll forget about the other items on your list." I thought "Oh my God, they're taking all my gold and how can I give it to all those people?" I said, "No, no, this is from my relatives. They gave it to me to give to their families. You can't take this from me!" He said, "No, no, I'm not taking it from you, just do like I said, just fill in the form and declare the money, the necklace and ring. Just do it!" I was so scared. I did it. He said, "You normally have to pay US$800 for that amount of gold. Now you only have to pay US$400 and I'll take you out of the airport." I said, "Are you serious? How about later on when I leave the airport?" He said, "It's just a form so it won't matter." I had no choice. I was still shaking, but he didn't take the gold from me, he didn't ask me to show him the gold, he just asked me to pay the US$400 and then he let me go. I was shaking as I paid him the money. He took me out of the airport. And in the taxi home [to her mother's house] I was still shaking.

13-14
2 notes:

narrative underlines her increasing agitation, and is structured around a rapid succession of interrogative and exclamatory sentences that convey the tempo of feelings and events. The reiterated phrase "I was shaking" reveals the level of her distress and the physiological reaction that she could not seem to control. The first roil of emotions that her return engendered was overtaken by this later reaction. In retelling this episode her voice became quieter and at times almost inaudible, as if her throat were constricting. I had to lean forward to hear her words. Her experience of official corruption parallels that of many other returnees, and this was a memory that had clearly marked her. The fact that she made it through airport customs was a palpable relief. She states, "I was so happy, because I was so worried that something was going to happen to me. I still had to report to the police station and bribe them with money, cigarettes,

and clothes, otherwise they could have made trouble anytime." She was able to visit her mother for four weeks and subsequently made several return trips to Vietnam.

The second narrative is that of Thi. Born in 1965 in Saigon, she made a failed escape attempt as a twelve-year-old in 1977, as a result of which she was imprisoned by the Vietnamese authorities, interrogated, and placed in solitary confinement for three days.[4] She was released from prison two weeks later and was able to rejoin her family in Saigon. This experience, however, scarred her emotionally and psychologically.[5] She finally escaped by boat as an unaccompanied minor when she was thirteen. The refugees were rescued after a harrowing month at sea and the death of a woman on board. Thi then spent more than two years alone in a refugee camp in Thailand. Already traumatized by her first escape attempt and incarceration, this later experience and her isolation in the refugee camp led to depression and attempted suicide. She was eventually reunited with family members in Australia in 1981. Her decision to return to Vietnam in 1990 was therefore a particularly fraught one, but she did so in order to attend her father's funeral and support her eldest sister, the sister who had brought her up and whom she called "mother." She remembers:

> When I decided to go, I was really scared. I contacted the Australian Embassy to see whether they would help me if

[4] Vietnamese authorities did not appear to have a consistent policy towards escapees. If caught, some were fined, but others were imprisoned for any length of time between a few weeks to more than a year, and this included women and children. W. Courtland Robinson notes that, "a 1985 UNHCR study revealed that 65 per cent of those apprehended by the authorities were imprisoned and of those 86 per cent were detained less than a year and 30 per cent less than a month" (1998:179–80). In his memoir *The Unwanted* (2001), Vietnamese Amerasian Kien Nguyen writes of a failed escape attempt he made as a thirteen-year-old in 1981, for which he was interned in "Reeducation Camp No. PK 34," reserved for "boat criminals" (245). He spent two months there doing hard labor before his mother was able to bribe camp authorities for his release, and notes that this was "a specific camp for women and children" (Nguyen 2001:249).

[5] Thi's experiences as an unaccompanied minor are explored in detail in the chapter on "Refugee Children" in Nguyen (2005a: 49–73).

anything happened to me in Vietnam. I had been told that if you were born in Vietnam then you were Vietnamese, and not Australian. It didn't matter if you were the citizen of another country. I had to go through with it, because I loved my father.

I had to stay a few days in Malaysia. I remember that when I went to the airport to get on the plane to Vietnam I was so scared. I didn't really know what was going to happen in an hour's time—it only takes about an hour from Malaysia to Vietnam. I didn't know what to think, what to do. If they asked me questions about my escape, what could I say? I didn't really know the correct answer. When we landed in Vietnam, I saw two policemen holding shotguns, and I remember that I was shocked and said to myself, "Should I go out or should I just sit here and fly back to Malaysia?" But everyone had to get out, you had no choice.

I didn't really know what was going to happen next. I tried to fill in the Vietnamese form at first. I hadn't written Vietnamese for so long, I didn't know all the spelling and accents, and I found it hard to find words in my head and complete the form. When I got to Customs they looked at the form and said, "You haven't filled this, you haven't filled that. Go out there and fill it in again and then come back." The queue was out the door. Why didn't they help me or tell me what I'd done wrong? I wanted to cry, I only came back because of my father. This time I thought, "I don't care, I'll just use the English form." So I filled out the English form and went to a different table. The guy looked at me and said "Can you speak Vietnamese?" and I said "I can" and he said "Do you know how to read and write in Vietnamese?" and I said, "I know some, you know, and I don't know certain words so that's why I filled out the English form," and he just smiled at me and let me through. Then I got out. The last time I saw my family, I was so young, it had been eleven, twelve years and

> I'd changed a lot, and when I saw them, I nearly cried because they didn't recognize me and I thought they weren't welcoming me back. I went past my sister and she just ignored me, so I turned back and said, "Can't you recognize me?" and she screamed, "You've changed! I couldn't recognize you!" I guess they still thought of me as the baby in the family.

This excerpt deals with several elements. First, the overwhelming apprehension she felt even while making arrangements to travel, and her last minute indecision and panic when the plane landed in Vietnam and she thought seriously about not getting off. She then had to deal with Customs, and the unfamiliarity of Vietnamese forms—ys and aggravations that international travelers are accustomed to—but for her this stress was magnified because she had left the country illegally and had experienced internment at the hands of Vietnamese authorities. Her repeated references to her r underline the fact that he was the only denominator that was powerful enough to make her undertake this journey. She states that she fell ill after a week in Vietnam and had to be hospitalized, an experience she describes as "bad, really bad." She wanted to return to Australia at that point, but in the end spent two months with her family. Like Vinh, she remembers regular inspections and interrogations by Vietnamese police during her stay.

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2 notes:

17-18
2 notes:

For Thi and Vinh, the return journey was a fraught experience, from the moment of its conception to that of its realization. Both women were marked by their background as escapees or failed escapees and had understandable fears relating to their return to their former country. It was the strength of family loyalty, and the love for, or memory of kin that finally brought them back. Both have since made several return trips to Vietnam but these later journeys have not overlaid the memory of that first and most difficult journey home or the powerful emotions and apprehensions associated with it.

Later Returns: Nostalgia and Family Memories

For women who made later returns in the last decade of the twentieth century or the first decade of the twenty-first, and as more and more overseas Vietnamese travelled back to Vietnam, the return is less linked with fears of being arrested or subjected to harassment by the local authorities. However, it can be no less painful an experience for that.

Tien was born in 1950 in Saigon. She was studying for a postgraduate degree in legislation and working as a teacher to supplement her family's income when South Vietnam fell in 1975. A Vietnamese Chinese, she became a refugee following the regime's discriminatory measures against the Chinese community. The compulsory registration of Chinese citizenship in 1976–77 was followed by the closure of private businesses and the forced relocations of tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese to the New Economic Zones (Robinson 1998:20).[6] As a high school teacher, Tien witnessed students denouncing their parents in public. She objected to what she termed the "brainwashing" of children. She made several failed attempts to leave Vietnam before finally succeeding in 1979. Her boat was 14 meters long and held 136 people. Three days into the voyage they were rescued by the crew of an American petrol tanker just as a storm came up and their boat was about to sink.[7] She made two return trips to Vietnam: the first in 1994 and the second in 2005. The first return brought in its wake memories of her departure, and the second underscored her feelings of loss. She relates:

[6] The forced closure of Southern businesses affected the Chinese community particularly badly. Robinson writes: "On 24 March 1978 the government radio station announced: 'The policy of terminating all bourgeois tradesmen's business will be carried out in a uniform manner throughout [Ho Chi Minh City] and all southern provinces, regardless of nationality or religion." In fact, the hammer came down first and hardest in Cholon, the Chinatown of Ho Chi Minh City and 'a strong capitalist heart beating inside the Socialist body of Vietnam.' The same day, 30,000 youth volunteers accompanied by soldiers conducted a house-to-house search, confiscating hidden gold bars and dollar bills, inventorying property for state appropriation, and closing businesses. By mid-June, the authorities had relocated nearly 16,000 people to three NEZs outside the city" (1998:29).

[7] Tien's account of her escape by sea is depicted in Nguyen (2005a: 25–26).

I returned for the first time in 1994, fifteen years after I left the country. The purpose of my return was to attend the wedding of my second youngest brother, the only one who wasn't married at the time. It was a very emotional trip because it was the first time after fifteen years. From the airplane, I looked down and I could see the city, the Saigon river, and I couldn't stop crying. The river reminded me of the sea and the time that I left the country [crying]. It was such a dangerous journey and I didn't know whether I'd survive. I've always longed to see the place that I thought I'd never see again. I thought I'd already lost my country. I thought I'd lost it forever.

The first time, I travelled alone back to Vietnam. My children were very small and I didn't know what conditions were like and I didn't think it was safe to bring them—I was worried about hygiene and medical care—so I didn't bring them with me.

Saigon, before it fell, was beautiful. The streets were still quite quiet and tree-lined, and I could go on bicycle rides along the river. But when I went back there were so many people, so many cars. The second time around in Saigon, I felt like a stranger. I won't ever live in Saigon, it's now lost to me. The things that I most longed to see, I couldn't find them anymore. All the memories, the street corners, the schools, I couldn't find them anymore. I've lost the city that I loved.

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2 notes:

Vietnamese word for water, *nuoc*, as Huynh Sanh Thong reminds us, also denotes homeland, country, and nation (1998:vii). To lose one's country, *mat nuoc*, "evokes an ordeal by thirst, the despair of a fish out of water" (Huynh 1998:vii). Tien's narrative has an elegiac and nostalgic dimension. Her repeated assertions that she can no longer find what she is seeking reflect the experience of many other diasporic Vietnamese. Her words underline the feelings of bereavement that the return journey engendered. The city and country that she once knew had altered beyond recognition. Her memory

of Saigon may bear the patina of melancholy reminiscence, but it accords with the portrayal of the wartime city provided by Susan Terry, an Australian nurse who worked in South Vietnam in 1964–65 and published a book of her experiences the following year.[8] Terry describes Saigon in the following terms:

> Saigon we found to be a beautiful city, though we could imagine it to have been more beautiful still before so many restrictions had closed over it. Tree-lined streets, very tall shady trees, many parks at the corners, many gardens; lovely buildings, charming homes and stately French architecture give that city an air of graciousness and dignity. (It is sad that because the government has more pressing problems so many have fallen into disrepair.) (1966:7)

Terry also notes the large numbers of soldiers in the city and increasing troop movements, midnight curfews, the nightly sound of artillery fire around the city's outskirts, signs of extreme poverty, and Saigon's beggars, but these observations do not detract from her assessment of the city's fading attractions. Tien's recollections of the level of traffic in the city before 1975 are also borne out by the fact that although there were more than 700 taxi drivers registered by 1968 (and taxicabs were for the most part French-made Renault compacts), private vehicles were still comparatively rare (Lone 2007:221).[9] Urban traffic consisted largely of bicycles and increasing numbers of Honda motorcycles (222). On the other hand, there was the constant

[8] Susan Terry was part of an Australian medical team consisting of eight surgeons, four anesthesiologists, four physicians, two radiologists, and five nursing staff from the Royal Melbourne Hospital who were assigned to Long Xuyen Hospital in An Giang, South Vietnam, between October 1964 and November 1965. She worked as Ward Sister. Her book *House of Love: Life in a Vietnamese Hospital* was published in 1966. "House of Love" is the literal translation of the Vietnamese term for hospital: *nha* (house) *thuong* (to love).

[9] Stewart Lone writes that "the total number of imported cars registered between January and May 1967 was just 1,587" (2007:221).

noise of street vendors that began early in the morning and lasted well into the night (221).

Throughout the length of the war, Saigon and other Southern urban centers witnessed successive waves of refugees, most notably the massive influx of refugees from North Vietnam in 1954–55. For many Saigonese, however, war became a backdrop to busy lives. Tien's nostalgia is for the Saigon of her past, a city that she could navigate easily and confidently, and in which streets and buildings were familiar. This nostalgia not only reflects a longing for a younger self, but also provides a commentary on how drastically life altered for Tien after the end of the war. It may also signify, as Thomas notes, "a yearning for the promise of democracy, freedom and capitalism that the South brought in the 1950s and 1960s" (1999:185). The fall of Saigon in 1975 marked a traumatic turn of events for Tien as an individual, a Vietnamese Chinese, and a Southerner. The postwar years represented a time of instability and anguish, while the Saigon of the new millennium appears in the guise of a polluted, overcrowded, and alien cityscape. Saigon "before the fall" is therefore remembered as quiet and beautiful in contrast. Nicola King suggests, "there are moments when memory seems to return us to a past unchanged by the passing of time; such memories tend to be suffused with a sense of loss, the nostalgia out of which they may be at least in part created" (2000:2).

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The second narrative, Diem's, differs considerably from Tien's. It is lighter in tone. Born in Ba Tri in 1975 and a child refugee in 1979, Diem states that she has no memories of Vietnam at that time. Her parents were from a rural background and were farmers. They left the country after experiencing harassment at the hands of Vietnamese authorities and losing their farm. The regime began collectivizing agriculture in early 1978 (Hitchcox 1990:40–44). Diem's earliest memories are of the refugee camp in the Philippines where her family awaited resettlement overseas. She returned to Vietnam for the first time in 2003, and did so for a holiday. She and her older sister traveled with their partners. Diem's reunion with her extended

23-24
2 notes:

family in Ba Tri led to some unexpected insights into her family story and its place in the wider narrative of the diaspora. became conscious of the grief experienced not only by those who had left (her parents), but by those who had been left behind (grandparents, aunts, and uncles). Her discovery of the strength of interlocking family relationships in her native village—her aunts and uncles all lived in the same street—made her realize the scale of what her parents had lost when they left their country and escaped with their seven children.

Growing up in Australia, Diem remembers that most of the Vietnamese children she went to school with came from what she terms "broken families"—in other words, families in which either the mother or father and some children were still in Vietnam. Her visit to Vietnam allowed her not only to get acquainted with her parents' siblings and their children, but also to acknowledge her family's legacy of loss. Like many others in the postwar years, her parents made the decision to escape in secret. They simply disappeared one night. Considering the high fatality rate of escapees and the possible repercussions for family members left behind, their relatives had to bear their concerns in private. As Diem relates:

> One of the things I wanted to experience was to see my relatives. Going South, we went to the place where my parents grew up. It was far south 'cause we were in Saigon, we had to take a long bus ride and then we had to go on the ferry. It took hours to get there. We went to visit my grandmother in the house that my mother grew up in, and across the street lives my father's sister and her family and then there's about five other siblings who live in houses right next to each other so the whole street is pretty much full of close relatives. It's such a large and close-knit family, it's amazing, 'cause I guess that sense of family is not something that we get in Australia 'cause we don't have family here, but over there, my mother has nine or ten siblings. One of them owns a glass shop in the town and

> others are farmers, and they do all sorts of stuff. And so we'd just walk down the street and through people's backyards and went into all these houses, you know, and they're all family, so it was really cool, and I got a real impression of what my parents had left behind when they came to Australia, and how hard it must have been.
>
> When my parents left they didn't actually tell anybody that they were leaving, they just disappeared one night, and so it was really hard for my relatives. My parents said, well, they couldn't tell anyone, they didn't want anyone to get into trouble if they were found out. I think that it was really tough for their family when they just disappeared. They didn't know what was going on, they didn't even have a chance to say goodbye.

Her return narrative begins as an untroubled account of a holiday and then reveals successive layers of family history, as well as a greater insight into the sorrows experienced by her parents' generation. Her journey, and her exposure to her wider family, also enabled her to discern missing elements in her own life: the support and closeness that an extended kinship network can provide.

No Returns: Loyalty and Imagination

This article would not be complete without discussing the reasons these women chose not to return to Vietnam, even thirty years after the end of the war. While some of the reasons given for this may be anticipated, such as the refugees' experience of state repression, imprisonment, harassment, or escape in postwar Vietnam, others are less predictable, especially on the part of the younger generation.

Ngoc was born in Saigon in 1969 and left the country as a child refugee with her parents and siblings in 1979. Their boat was 12 meters long and held 140 people. There was no compass on board. They were rescued after a few days at sea by the crew of an American petrol tanker but only because her father spoke English and was able

to plead their case with the captain of the tanker. She gives the following reasons for not returning to Vietnam:

> Even though I have been here since 1980, I have no yearning to return to Vietnam at all. I have no close connection with Vietnam. My first love was in Australia, and all the sweet memories I have are all here, so I have never thought of going back to Vietnam even though my grandfather and grandmother only recently passed away. But even before that I had no inclination to go back, because I left the country as a refugee and it was a very treacherous journey and I felt that by going back I'd be betraying all the people who have lost their lives and all the soldiers who have risked their life to defend our country, so that's why I haven't returned.
>
> I remember all the struggles we had after 1975. It was a very hard time. We couldn't afford to have rice every day to eat, we had to use cheaper substitutes, not *bo-bo*[10] but some type of bean, and I remember that we had finely minced peanuts and sesame seeds with lots of salt to eat with rice when we couldn't have real food. We used whatever substitute we could have. My grandfather and uncle had to go to the re-education camps because they were both highly ranked soldiers. My grandfather was a colonel. They had to do hard labor in the camps and had very little food and my mum had to go to North Vietnam to support them. They were only released after ten years, after we had all left as refugees. My grandfather was too old to be any danger to the government and my uncle had

25-26
2 notes:

[10] *Bo-bo* is a type of grain that Vietnamese ate in the postwar years. It figures in other refugee accounts. Here is one: "I tried to cut down on my family's expenses. At that time the government sold *bo-bo* grains and noodles to the people. *Bo-bo* was a very hard grain and only used to feed horses in other countries. I had to use a lot of fuel to cook it, however eating this type of grain made us feel full for a long time. To save money, I bought green and red beans and cooked them together with the *bo-bo* or noodles and we ate them with salt or salted sesame. I divided this food equally into five bowls so that the youngest child would have as much to eat as the oldest" (Nguyen 2005:113).

> been badly injured after an accident. I think they would not have been released had this not happened, because they [the government] wanted to destroy people's spirit. That's why I don't want to go back under that same regime.
>
> It took a long time for my parents to plan our escape, I think it took a few years, it seemed like ages, and we had to keep that information secret. I remember getting very agitated because the plan took a long time to eventuate. It was a long time before we actually made the final journey. When we left, I was worried about being starved to death, of not having enough food or water, but obviously my parents were a lot more worried, about the pirates, the weather conditions, and things like that. When we left the country it was July, it was the roughest time of year for the sea, it was a really rough journey.

Her narrative contains a clear summary of her principal reasons for refusing to return, and then elaborates in more detail on these reasons. 27-28 2 notes: central theme here is that of loyalty. She is loyal to the memory of those who died in the exodus and of those who died defending the South. She remembers her grandfather's and uncle's ordeal and the hardships experienced by her mother and family. Her family's journey by boat, and the high levels of stress and anxiety associated with the planning of their escape as well as the escape itself, left an indelible mark on her childhood. She links her reluctance to return to her sense of belonging to a new land, and the fact that what she terms her "sweet memories" are bound up with the country of resettlement rather than that of her birth.

Another young woman whose memory is compelling is Thy, who was one year old when her family escaped from Vietnam by boat in 1979.[11] For her, 29-30 2 notes: nam is an imaginary place shaped by the stories of others and by old pictures, news footage, and documentaries of the Vietnam War. Her imaginary return to Vietnam took the form

[11] Thy's narrative features in Nguyen (2005a: 13–14 and 142–45).

of travel to another Southeast Asian country, Indonesia, where she went holidaying in 2005. She says:

> I don't remember Vietnam at all. I don't have a personal image of Vietnam or a personal recollection of anything that ever happened to me in Vietnam. The only ties that I have with Vietnam are my parents, and the stories they told, not that they told me stories, but the stories that I would overhear. My parents spoke about boats and *ma* (ghosts). My mother would talk about *ma* stories. My dad used to talk a lot about the war. He spoke of it with pride because I think it was a time in his life when he had purpose, he was worth something, his life had value. He was wounded several times, he still has the bullet scars. I think that the war was something really big in his life, so big that he can't share it with his kids.
>
> When I went to Bali, I thought, this is what Vietnam would be like—the scenery, the trees, the sky, the sea, the smells, and the air. The image that I have of Vietnam is of the sky being not the blue-blue that we have here, but a blue-purple like in the seventies, maybe because there were so many images of Vietnam in the seventies, because of the Vietnam War, and maybe the resolution that they had on the TV programs gave it that grade and color. In my head the sky is purply-blue, and the sea is not crystal blue but more kind of like a green-blue, and the grass is that avocado-mix green, you know. The colors are different and strange. And going back to Bali, when I looked at it, it was quite different, it was a tropical place, it wasn't home—like a gum tree is home, you know. When I stepped off the plane in Bali I thought, "I can't breathe because of the heat, this is not good for me," the air was too sickly, and it bothered me a bit. I think also that I'm not a good traveler, I don't like traveling, I love Melbourne, I don't think I'll ever move anywhere else.

31-32
2 notes:

Ngoc, she is sensitive to the experiences of the generation before her. Her narrative is composed of a palimpsest of images, impressions, and memories, many of which are not her own. Vietnam consists of fragments of her parents' memory, stories that she gleaned from overheard conversations, and the vivid imprint of photographs and television footage of the war. Her reconstruction contains several strands that interweave her parents' experience of war, trauma, and dislocation with their imperfect transmission of this experience to their children, and her own frustrated efforts to obtain more information. Her visual "memory" of Vietnam is extraordinarily rich and multi-hued because it speaks of a potent and imaginative interpretation of family history.

Memory and Return Narratives

These narratives reveal that these women's perceptions of Vietnam and their former home are principally driven by emotional attachment to family. It is this desire to reconnect with loved ones that provides the impetus and motivation for the journey "home."

33-34
2 notes:

Vietnam means above all, family. The women stressed that they felt no sense of yearning for the place itself, but only returned for the sake of family, whether mother, father, or sibling. Their stories reveal, however, how strongly the women reacted to the physical sight of their native land and to familiar landscapes. The narratives chronicle their difficult and constantly evolving negotiation of past and present. Their perceptions of Vietnam shift and alter as they lay personal recollections and expectations alongside their experience of the return journey. For those who left Vietnam as adults, this journey is marked by a recognition of loss, and of missed years that could have been spent close to kin. Vinh has made several return trips, the latest in 2006, but these have lost much of their attraction since her mother died in 2002. She reveals:

> Now that she is no longer there, I think about her whenever I travel. I still feel very sad and the reason for that is that I

wished I could have stayed with her for the last few years of her life. I will always feel sad about that.

These women's memories of the past, and of pre-1975 Saigon are valuable, not so much because of the images they convey—important as they are as perceptions of a vanished time—but for what they reveal about the ways in which the events of April 1975 and postwar communism impacted women's lives. Vietnam was at war for thirty years. Women had relatives who served in the armed forces; they lived with curfews, the sight of soldiers in the streets, the sound of helicopters, planes, gunfire, and bombardments. Even the Saigonese, who felt particularly sheltered throughout the duration of most of the war, were subjected to terrorist attacks and rocket fire. War was such a constant in these women's lives, however, that it ceased to feature uppermost in their minds. Rather, they were concerned with their education, work, and families, and made plans for their futures. This part of their lives is remembered as a time of stability and hope. As Nicola King writes, "we long for a time when we didn't know what was going to happen next—or, conversely, to relive the past with the foreknowledge we then lacked" (2000:2). The communist takeover in 1975 destroyed these women's hopes and plans. Their memories of the South are colored not only by nostalgia, they provide a sharp contrast with their experience of destabilization, detention, and discrimination, whether on political or ethnic grounds, in the postwar years. Tien's vivid memories of Saigon before 1975 are evocative precisely because they are such a powerful reverse reflection of the sense of distress and alienation that she experienced after 1975.

35-36
2 notes:

mory serves three different functions here. The first is to remember and commemorate a country that ceased to exist in 1975. This entails recreations of past homes, villages, towns, and cities, many of which have changed profoundly. Women describe social and familial networks that were disrupted by the collapse of the South and its aftermath. The second is to justify the women's decision to join the exodus from their country (or for those who left as

children, to justify their parents' decision to do so). All the women left their homeland under difficult conditions. Whatever form it took, their departure signified their rejection of Vietnam's postwar regime. The level of state repression after 1975, and the erosion of much of Southern society, served only to underline how much better life seemed before 1975. The third is to anchor the women firmly in their new lives and adopted homes. Their narratives signify a resistance to Vietnam in the present. As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer note, "a past reconstructed through the animating vision of nostalgia can serve as a creative inspiration and possible emulation within the present" (2003:83). The women's nostalgia for and remembrance of the past highlights their past trauma, as well as the fact that they have constructed new lives and identities elsewhere. Vinh asserts:

> I now feel more familiar with Australia than Vietnam. When I go back to Australia I feel it is my home, but when I go back to Vietnam I feel like a visitor. Of course the memories are still there, but I don't want to go past my old house in Saigon or my house in Danang because that would bring back a lot of memories I don't want to remember because it makes me so sad.

Returnees, write Oxfeld and Long, "reconstruct their homelands both figuratively and in practice" (2004:13). These women remember their former homeland but affirm their attachment to their new country, even if this affirmation is laced with heartache. As Tien says,

> Australia is definitely home for me. I feel this even more deeply since my second trip to Vietnam. I've lived longer in Australia now than in Vietnam and my children were born here. Vietnam is my first home, but it is out of reach. I love it deeply. It represents my memories, my childhood, the place in which I was brought up and educated, and I'm still grateful to it. But I knew in my heart that Australia was my home, I already knew that.

narratives of the older generation are colored by grief and longing since their memories encompass formative parts of their lives—childhood, youth, and adulthood—and therefore a correspondingly deeper sense of loss. The memories of younger women, on the other hand, take a different shape by failing to reveal a similar nostalgic yearning for Vietnam. For them, images of early happiness are largely overlaid by the difficulties and tensions of the postwar years and the memory of the exodus. Even those who have no personal memory of Vietnam remain responsive to the experience of their parents and the collective experience of the diaspora.

The narratives of Ngoc and Thy are the most unexpectedly poignant. Their consciousness of Vietnam and what Vietnam signifies are shaped by their parents' stories and experiences. As narrators, they inscribe themselves and their stories into a wider collective framework of loss. In this way they remember those who have gone before them. Ngoc was ten years old when she became a refugee. Although her family survived the sea journey, she is marked by the memory of that voyage. Her reluctance to return is not only shaped by her awareness of the sacrifices made by so many soldiers for the preservation of South Vietnam, but by her recollection of postwar privations and injustices, and the knowledge that many were less fortunate than her family. She does not discount ever going back and imagines that she will do so one day for the sake of her children, so that they can "discover their roots." Her reflections include a hypothetical return narrative detailing the potential dangers of such a journey: "What if we couldn't leave?" She articulates a sentiment expressed by many others, that if she went back to Vietnam it would be as a foreigner:

> I that some day I will have to bring my children back to Vietnam to their roots to know their ancestors, and for them to get a feel of the country where their parents were brought up. I think it would be essential for me to do that, but I'm very reluctant to do any such thing at this stage, because I have

> very strong feelings about going back and I've heard all these horrible stories about all the bribery that you need to do at the airport, and the corruption that's rife in Vietnam. Frankly I'm very anxious, I feel like I'd be a foreigner going back to my own country.

43-44
2 notes:

for her part, has no memory of either Vietnam or the exodus, but she bears the imprint of the previous generation's trauma. The kaleidoscope of visual and sensory impressions that she has of Vietnam represents what Hirsch and Spitzer, writing about the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors, refer to as a "postmemory, a secondary, belated memory mediated by stories, images and behaviors among which [they] grew up, but which never added up to a complete or linear tale" (2003:85). Thy is conscious of this postmemory and feels the lack of a "complete tale" acutely. As she says:

> I think that parents should be encouraged to talk about their story and their history, 'cause for children, it's their only connection to Vietnam, it's through their stories. And if they're not sharing them, then their children are basically cut off. If you don't share stories of what happened in Vietnam, then, you know, you've lost it. You can't expect your child to understand. And if you don't have a history, if you don't know your history, you can't know yourself. In terms of cultural identity, I think a lot of us [second generation] are lost, because we lack that history, because the first generation has not shared that story with us. And because the second generation hasn't asked the first generation to share that story.

Her narrative illustrates the difficulty of transmitting traumatic history across the generations. She mourns the fact that much of this history is lost to her and to other members of the second generation. Her mother died of leukemia when she was seventeen. It is perhaps for this reason that she is particularly conscious of the lost histories

of the first generation. Like the narratives of post-Holocaust generations, hers "speaks about what is not known by one generation and what has not been said by another" (Wajnryb 2001:27). Diagnosed with depression when she was twenty, she reflects:

> My mother would say, you know, that when she was pregnant with me, she was really sad so that's why I'm sad. And my dad fought in the war, and he was in hiding a lot, because people were trying to find him to lock him up in a re-education camp, and so it was not a good time. And I think in his head, he has never let go of Vietnam. I grew up with stories about Vietnam. I shared in my parents' struggles, you know. I shared in that story. I remember hearing someone talking about the Jewish community and the children of Holocaust survivors, and about the high number of the second generation having depression, and that was the first time I thought, "Oh, maybe that's what happened to me."

Thy's narrative reveals not only the partial and truncated stories of her parents, but also her frustration that it is a story she will never truly know. The secondary trauma to which she is subjected is compounded by her grief at her mother's premature death and the difficulty in communicating with her father. There is too great a silence between the generations, and it is one that she is unlikely to bridge. Vietnam remains an imaginary site associated with a pain-filled past: her parents, the war, and the exodus. It represents a geographical space that she is reluctant to revisit. Even though it took many years for her to feel "at home" in her new homeland, since, like the children of other refugees, she "inherited [her] parents' knowledge of the fragility of place, their suspicion of the notion of home" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2003:93), her affirmation of Australia as her new "home" is a tribute to her parents, a means of justifying their decision to leave Vietnam, and of thanking them for the sacrifices they made.

In the final analysis, these women's return journeys, whether real or imagined, were undertaken, in Lam's words, "in order to take leave" (2005:115). The return brings with it a double realization: the fact that they have truly lost the country they remember and that their lives now lie elsewhere. Their narratives explore plural truths, a mixture of experience, history, and perceptions (Personal Narratives Group 1989:262). They record an elusive history, in which "memory acquires a central importance for the preservation of authenticity and truth as well as a peculiar poignancy" (Skultans 1998:28). They chronicle the mourning and adjustments of the Vietnamese diaspora over time, and the shifts in understanding and allegiance that women bring to their experience of migration and resettlement. ■

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We return in order to take leave ': Memory and the Return Journeys of Vietnamese Women

Nguyen, Nathalie Huynh Chau

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imaginary undertakings of those who choose not to travel back to Vietnam. The article will examine three factors: how
women remember the past, how they negotiate the return journey, and the role of memory in their narratives.
women remember the past, how they negotiate the return journey, and the role of memory in their narratives.

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methodology

a. A total of forty-two women were interviewed between 2005 and 2008.

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recurring narrative elements:

While the timing and circumstances of the women's return journeys may vary, their stories contain recurring narrative elements: their overwhelming emotion on first seeing their country again; heightened levels of anxiety, apprehension and anticipation; and, inevitably, the traumatic reliving of their initial departure

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generational memory of first gen.

. On the other hand, the narratives of those who were either children when they left or too young to remember the original departure reveal yet another dimension. Their accounts illustrate the extent to which their parents' memories and trauma have in turn colored their perception of Vietnam, and of the return journey

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narratives reveal two factors:

1. motivation of return is family
2. life now centered in host country and origin country is lost

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home and preoccupation with homeland continue to assume disproportionate importance in Viet diasporic memory.

. As Mandy Thomas notes, these dreams are characteristic of displaced people, and play an important role in counteracting their sense of displacement, as well as reconnecting them to their former lives (1999:177). These dreams are accompanied by acute homesickness (Thomas 1999:177). Although the intensity of this feel-
ing may fade with the passing years, home and the preoccupation with homeland continue to assume a disproportionate importance in the Vietnamese diasporic imaginary

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juxtaposed with Nguyne's research, the 2nd generation did not feel the same type of anxieties as their 1st generation parents may have.

Her narrative underlines her increasing agitation, and is struc- tured around a rapid succession of interrogative and exclamatory sentences that convey the tempo of feelings and events. The reiter- ated phrase "I was shaking" reveals the level of her distress and the physiological reaction that she could not seem to contro

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stress of delays and aggravations associated with travel but compounded by illegal fleeing and internment in VN

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if it weren't for her father, she wouldn't have returned.

father underline the fact that he was the only denominator that was powerful enough to make her undertake this journe

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1st gen diasporic vietnamese experience nostalgia that cannot be found.
mat nuoc, "evokes an ordeal by thirst, the despair of a fish out of water".

The Vietnamese word for water, nuoc, as Huynh Sanh Thong reminds us, also denotes homeland, country, and nation (1998:vii). To lose one's country, mat nuoc, "evokes an ordeal by thirst, the despair of a fish out of water" (Huynh 1998:vii). Tien's narrative has an elegiac and nostalgic dimension. Her repeated assertions that she can no longer find what she is seeking reflect the experience of many other diasporic Vietnamese. Her words underline the feelings of bereave- ment that the return journey engendered. The city and country that she once knew had altered beyond recognition. Her memor

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memory returning unchanged but suffused with a sense of loss.

t. As Nicola King suggests, "there are moments when memory seems to return us to a past unchanged by the passing of time; such memories tend to be suffused with a sense of loss, the nostalgia out of which they may be at least in part created" (2000:2

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conscious of the grief of not only those who left (parents) but those who were left behind (graphdparents, relatives)

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return as a betrayal to those who lost their lives partaking in the journey. no desire to return.

I had no inclination to go back, because I left the country as a refugee and it was a very treacherous journey and I felt that by
going back I'd be betraying all the people who have lost their lives and all the soldiers who have risked their life to defend
our country, so that's why I haven't returned

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loyalty as the main theme of Ngoc who decides not to return to preserve her loyalty to relatives in re-education camps and struggles of those who escaped (and died).

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VN in the imaginary of Thy, who left as a 1-yr-old

, Vietnam is an imaginary place shaped by the stories of others and by old pictures, news footage, and documentaries of the Vietnam War

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generational memory of VN although didn't live through it. gleaned through overheard stories and footage of war.

Like Ngoc, she is sensitive to the experiences of the generation before her. Her narrative is composed of a palimpsest of images, impres- sions, and memories, many of which are not her own. Vietnam consists of fragments of her parents' memory, stories that she gleaned from overheard conversations, and the vivid imprint of photographs and television footage of the war.

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underlying theme of all returns were "family". Vietnam means above all, family" (p. 24)

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Memory serves three different functions here. The first is to remember and commemorate a country that ceased to exist in 1975.

The second is to justify the women's deci- sion to join the exodus from their country.

The third is to anchor the women firmly in their new lives and adopted homes, "a past reconstructed through the animating vision of nostalgia can serve as a creative inspiration and possible emulation within the present" (2003:83)

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narratives of older generation colored by grief and longing since their formative years were spent in VN. Younger women who left before formative years are also colored in similar ways, but of postwar years and memories of difficulties in AUS. Even those w/ "no personal memory of VN remain responsive to the experience of their parents and the collective experience of the diaspora."

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Ngoc hasn't gone back but may return for the sake of her children so they can "discover their roots"

. Ngoc was ten years old when she became a refugee.
Although her family survived the sea journey, she is marked by the memory of that voyage. Her reluctance to return is not only shaped by her awareness of the sacrifices made by so many soldiers for the preservation of South Vietnam, but by her recollection of postwar privations and injustices, and the knowledge that many were less fortunate than her family. She does not discount ever going back and imagines that she will do so one day for the sake of her children, so that they can "discover their roots.

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great quote to use in my own research.

I feel that some day I will have to bring my children back to Vietnam to their roots to know their ancestors, and for them to get a feel of the country where their parents were brought up. I think it would be essential for me to do that, but I'm very reluctant to do any such thing at this stage, because I havevery strong feelings about going back and I've heard all these horrible stories about all the bribery that you need to do at the airport, and the corruption that's rife in Vietnam. Frankly I'm very anxious, I feel like I'd be a foreigner going back to my own country. Thy,

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"postmemory"

Thy, for her part, has no memory of either Vietnam or the exodus, but she bears the imprint of the previous generation's trauma. The kaleidoscope of visual and sensory impressions that she has of Vietnam represents what Hirsch and Spitzer, writing about the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors, refer to as a "postmemory, a secondary, belated memory mediated by stories, images and behaviors among which [they] grew up, but which never added up to a complete or linear tale" (2003:85)

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