

**Public and Private Selves: A Study of Vietnamese Male and Female Exile  
Memoirists**

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The literary genre that dominates the expressions of Vietnamese exiles after the fall of Saigon is the memoir, wherein “history and politics are narrated in personalized form.”<sup>1</sup> Renny Christopher notes that as of 1990, seven thousand or so books have been written in English about the Viet Nam War. Out of these thousands of books, only a dozen were written by Vietnamese writers.<sup>2</sup> Half of the exile books are memoirs.<sup>3</sup> Although these memoirists reside in France and in the United States, their entire focus is dedicated to their lives in Vietnam from about 1940 to 1975. In these three and a half decades, Vietnamese defeated two powerful Western empires. Hence, Viet Nam’s modern history may be characterized as “locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism—a cultural that is itself a reflexion [sic] of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or . . . of modernization.”<sup>4</sup> If a nation’s literature is shaped by its the social, cultural, and political climate, then Vietnamese exile literature—consisting of stories of private lives embattled in the nation’s political struggle against Western hegemony—is always situated in binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized, imperialist/puppet, victor/vanquished, American power/Vietnamese helplessness, and public/private. According to Fredric Jameson, *all* third-world texts “project a political dimension in the form of national allegory.”<sup>5</sup> With

regards to Vietnamese exile literature, constructions of the private self are only possible within the public and political domain. The split between the private and the public selves is analogous to “Freud versus Marx.”<sup>6</sup> This theory, however, applies aptly to the Vietnamese male memoirs but not to the Vietnamese female memoirs.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper, I examine the three conditions that precipitated the production of the memoirs as they apply to the Vietnamese experiences. I argue that Vietnamese male memoirists write the traditional public and political memoirs whereas Vietnamese female memoirists write the personal and fictive memoirs. The five memoirs examined in this paper are: Bui Diem’s, In the Jaws of History,<sup>8</sup> Truong Nhu Tang’s A Vietcong Memoir,<sup>9</sup> Bui Tin’s Following Ho Chi Minh,<sup>10</sup> Nguyen Thi Thu-Lam’s Fallen Leaves,<sup>11</sup> and Le Ly Hayslip’s When Heaven and Earth Changed Places.<sup>12</sup> Beginning with the discussion with Diem and Tang’s traditional political memoirs, structured in the style of the self-justifying arguments, the discussion leads into Tin’s “confessional” political memoir. Lastly, I define the elements of the fictive memoirs and apply them to the analysis of Nguyen and Hayslip’s memoirs. These explorations into the varying structural styles of the memoirs make evident the differences among the social and political lives of the Vietnamese men and women. While the Vietnamese male political memoirs attest to their public power and dominance, the Vietnamese female memoirs attest to the pain and confusion of their private and public lives.

As a literary genre, the memoir integrates political and historical as well as autobiographical and biographical elements into a personal narrative with the self as the subject; therefore, it is a subdivision of the autobiography, or life writing, like the biography and journal.<sup>13</sup> Through memory, Vietnamese memoirists attempt to

reconstruct Vietnam's social and political history and themselves as actors and subjects in that history. The memoir differs from the autobiography because it is centered in a specific and political engagement and is situated in a historical event. Given this broad definition, memoirs are written not only by political leaders but also by common people who are participants, actors, and victims in a historical experience. Memoir means memory: It is an English derivative from the French, *mémoire*, which is rooted in the Latin, *memoria*, which translates as for memory.<sup>14</sup> Vietnamese memoirs, like other memoirs from the ancient to the modern, are generated by three main conditions, specifically: 1) the occurrence of a dramatic event such as a war or revolution; 2) the desire of the participants or observers to narrate and record their experiences; 3) the allowance of time, space, and leisure to write the stories.<sup>15</sup> The dramatic event that shaped the lives of millions of Vietnamese was the tragic fall of Sai Gon in 1975.

For millions of Vietnamese exiles, the fall of Sai Gon and the subsequent years under Vietnamese Communism, which led to the mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees, were some of the great tragedies of the twentieth century. The Republic of Viet Nam (RVN) depended heavily on the U.S. for military, financial, and political support in their resistance against the Communist North after 1965 when President Johnson authorized air strikes North Viet Nam and landed ground troops in South Viet Nam (SVN). Later when the U.S. saw no signs of military or political victory, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger secretly negotiated with the Communist leader, Le Duc Tho, and formalized the Paris Peace Treaty in January 27, 1973, which called for a withdrawal of U.S. troops.<sup>16</sup> Later, the United States Congress cut off all emergency funds to South Viet Nam. Without military, financial, and political support, signs of defeat became evident to

the South Vietnamese civilians and the occupying Americans in the second week of April 1975. Before 1977, an estimated 130,000 Vietnamese refugees fled their country for fear of reprisals, risking severe dangers from piracy, rape, and death.<sup>17</sup> Thirteen years later after the wrenching events of 1975, approximately two million Vietnamese exiles had scattered over all parts of the world.<sup>18</sup> Their flight makes up what Homi Bhabha calls the “demography of the new internationalism” which is defined as a people whose post-colonial history consists of migration, political diaspora, social displacements, and new economic and political conditions as refugees.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the historical trauma experienced by Vietnamese refugees at the end of the Viet Nam War meets the first condition in the production of the memoir.

The second condition is met by the desire of memoirists to decolonize the subject position and assert voices that have been marginalized by Western media using the voices of the imperialists/colonizers. Vietnamese exile writers overcame their language barrier through the collaborative process of writing in English and in French. With the exception of Bui Tin’s, Following Ho Chi Minh, which was translated and adapted from the Vietnamese by Judy Stowe and Do Van, the other four memoirists collaborated with other writers who were more fluent in English. Writing to an English and French speaking audience, which is presumed to be mostly non-Vietnamese, Vietnamese exiles must confront a major issue of the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of the relationship between the current host countries that were former dominators, like the United States and the French.<sup>20</sup> They must negotiate between personal feelings of being saved from death by the current regime while at the same time feeling betrayed as a people. Their

voices, written in the language of the oppressor, combat the meta-war, or the war of representation that has been a one-sided discourse in Western media.<sup>21</sup>

The third condition, leisure and resources for writing, is met by the authors' new lives in wealthy democratic countries not ravaged by war like France and the United States. Residence in these countries afforded them time and space to work on their writings. Not all the five memoirists analyzed here are refugees as defined by the Refugee and Immigrant Resource Directory.<sup>22</sup> By this definition, refugees are people who fear persecution from their country of nationality, therefore they are unwilling to return. Truong Nhu Tang and Bui Tin were not persecuted in Viet Nam because they worked for the Communist Party (CP). It was only after Truong Nhu Tang realized that the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) he helped set up to defeat the SVG, was annexed into one nation, with the North Politburo being the head, that he decided to escape. In fact, he received pay, a ration card for food, and an official villa to live in right before his escape. He was the only one out of the five memoirists who escaped by boat and who most meets the conditions of a refugee, though his exile was self-imposed. Le Ly Hayslip and Nguyen Thi Thu-Lam flew out of Vietnam with their American husbands respectively in 1970 and in 1971. Bui Diem, his mother, and his sister flew in a navy plane arranged by top U.S. government officials before the collapse of Saigon. Bui Tin was one of the Vietnamese Communist officials who was invited to give a talk by the French Communist Party. Shortly after he publicly spoke out against the brutality of the Communists he was given permission to reside in France. In short, these memoirists were not the refugees who jammed into helicopters in the last weeks of April 1975, nor were they the "boat people" who sailed on leaky overcrowded boats into uncertain terrain

to escape persecution. These factors do not detract from the value and importance of the memoirs, but they clarify the diverse range of refugee migration experiences and inform readers that Diem, Truong, Tin, Nguyen, and Hayslip had support and connections in their new lives. The three men were part of the social and political elite, and the two women obtained U.S. citizenship through their American husbands. Where there was the will for them to narrate the stories of their lives and their nations, so were there opportunities for them to do so in France and in the United States.

Diem, Tang, and Tin held positions of high rank and power in Viet Nam, and thus their memoirs reflect the style of the classical political narratives. Classical political memoirs following the Greek historians—Thucydides and Polybius—are composed in the form of the political *apologia*, or the political narratives.<sup>23</sup> The narratives were interpreted as historical documents and records of seminal events. The *apologia* served the following purposes: vindicate the behaviors of the leaders, assert their political will, justify their actions, and condemn the actions of the enemies.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the political memoirs written by statesman, political exiles write a more embittered and more introspective *apologia*. These writers are often motivated to justify their actions, condemn the actions of their enemy, and detail plausibility that may have changed the course of events. Diem, Tang, and Tin's memoirs categorically fit the definition of a traditional political memoir where the authors faithfully recount the truth based on their life experiences and factual data. In doing so, the authorial "I" asserts a public image or persona of a coherent and unified subject/author whose authority comes from first-hand knowledge and eye-witness accounts. In the Vietnamese male memoirs, the authorial "I" is embedded in the structure of the argument.

Diem's In the Jaws of History and Tang's A Vietcong's Memoir were produced through collaboration with David Chanoff, an assistant professor of political science at Harvard University.<sup>25</sup> Stylistically, these two memoirs read like political science essays perhaps in part because of Professor Chanoff's influence. The essay-like memoirs provide clear theses supported by source citations, maps, glossaries of names, appendices, indexes, tables, and photos of public figures as textual evidences to substantiate the premises of the arguments. These textual evidences attempt to convince readers that the personal accounts are grounded in historical facts, and therefore they represent historical truths. Hence, inclusion of these "historical facts" validates political claims aimed at justifying the authors' own actions and behaviors and condemning the actions of their enemies.

As South Viet Nam's ambassador to the United States in the critical years of 1966-75, Bui Diem argues that he, like many Vietnamese nationalists, was a victim of various political forces and social events outside of his control. The preposition "in" in Diem's In the Jaws of History connotes a fusion of the nation and self victimized by giant forces. One could not miss the metaphor of the big fish gobbling up the little fish in the title as symbolic of the United States and South Viet Nam. The metaphor extends to Diem who asserts that he was a victim of circumstances. This claim is hardly convincing considering Diem's father and uncle were well known scholars; his uncle, Tran Trong Kim, was appointed Prime Minister by Emperor Bao Dai. His privileged background enabled him to attend Thang Long High School, a famous private elite school in Ha Noi. Nonetheless, Diem claims that his struggle is essentially that of everyman who ever dreamt of generating democracy and establishing a constitution for Viet Nam. He

explains that his *raison d'être* for working for the “corrupt,” “incompetent,” and “unpalatable” Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), supported by the Americans, was to establish a democratic government with a constitution and free election patterned after the United States. Yet, the historical details that he provides in his memoir only discredits his reasoning that democracy was even possible given the social and political conditions that he outlines. According to Diem, RVN would have been able to establish democracy if only:<sup>26</sup> 1) the Communists were not so well organized and had such a charismatic leader like Ho; 2) the French had worked with Bao Dai to establish an independent Viet Nam; 3) the South Vietnamese government was not so corrupt; 4) the U.S. citizens did not protest so much about the atrocities and killings; and 5) U.S. journalists did not just present Communist victories but also U.S. and ARVN military strengths and the likes. As Alan Tolson rightly observes the “if onlys” set forth by Diem do nothing to add to his *raison d'être*, rather they expose “ever more damning questions about the political movement to which Diem devoted his life.”<sup>27</sup> Diem’s re-creation and re-vision of history as a kind of utopian dream enable him to evade deeper ethical and moral issues concerning the atrocities committed by the political factions that he served, the RVN, and the Americans.

Diem evades his personal responsibility for aligning himself with a corrupt government by building a case against the totalitarian regime of the Communist Party (CP) as the worst evil compared to the RVN and the U.S. that were *le moindre mal*, the lesser evil.<sup>28</sup> He sets up a hierarchy of evil: the most evil (CP, especially Giap and Ho), the not so evil (Thieu and the young Turks), and the good guys (victimized nationalists and idealistic Americans). The case he makes against the CP is weak because he does



not contextualize and scrutinize his own party's "evil" with the same passion and condemnation as he does the CP. The case against the CP amounts to no more than a classic case of Orientalism whereby colonized subjects employ the same structure of cultural domination by representing the subjects as an inferior people and the imperialists as an enlightened people.<sup>29</sup>

Diem divides the world between the most evil/the lesser evil against the American enlightened democracy and constitution. This binary opposition created by Diem is exemplified by his re-presentation of the CP as savage and barbaric versus the Americans' moral intervention. His case against the CP, notably General Giap, is that they use extreme violent and lethal means to exterminate all political rivalries including Dai Viet members, to which Diem was a member. Diem calls the extermination "Giap's reign of terror"<sup>30</sup> and likens Giap to Robespierre, Giap's revolutionary hero. The analogy to Robespierre, France's known terrorist, conveys moral and righteous indignation at Giap who is the center focus of Chapter 7, called "The Terror." Diem further expresses moral repugnance at Giap, Ho, and the Viet Minh for forcing the abdication of Bao Dai, known as the August Revolution, and calls this period in Vietnamese history the "savage period." This moral outrage at the violence and political aggression committed by the RVN and the United States, however, is subdued and rationalized as the lesser evil. In fact, Diem does not use terms like "extermination" and "savage" when it comes to defining U.S. and RVN policies and violence against the Vietnamese people

In Chapter 19 when Diem describes American policies and military intervention in Viet Nam, he benignly entitles it, "Toward a Constitution." The following chapter, which details the search and destroy strategy initiated by General Westmoreland is called

“Second Step.” These titles obliterate the terror of violence committed by the Americans and suggest that America’s presence was the only source of hope “toward a constitution” for Viet Nam. Although Diem informs us that the search and destroy mission consisted of the use of U.S. artillery, navel gunfire, B-52’s, and other air strikes, he fails to mention that from 1965 to 1967, RVN and the U.S. dropped over a million tons of bombs on South Viet Nam and about half a million on North Viet Nam.<sup>31</sup> Diem also avoids informing the readers that the bombings were part of a strategic goal of “attriting the enemy” or victory by body count.<sup>32</sup> In short, it means mass annihilation of Vietnamese no matter what their political faction because the bombs killed indiscriminately. In fact, what Diem does not personally confront is that during the years he served as ambassador to the U.S., more bombs were dropped in Viet Nam and the Cambodia by RVN and the U.S. than in all of WWII.<sup>33</sup> Giap’s terror, as presented by Diem, pales in comparison, and yet he is called a killer while the Americans—killers no less—are hailed as supporters of Viet Nam’s democracy.

Diem extricates himself from the mass killings by informing his reader that he raised the concerns over them, “I and others met with Westmoreland many times to discuss our deep concerns about the situation [the bombings]. We knew that the human tragedy was immense and the effect on international public opinion devastating. But we were fighting a war whose venue and circumstances were largely defined by the enemy.”<sup>34</sup> Notice how the pronoun “I” extricates the author from the killings, and later the pronoun “we” implicates the author as a victim. His self-victimization is self-serving and unconvincing because he could have resigned as ambassador if he wanted. Notice how extermination is called “human tragedy” which implies a natural course of human

condition rather than a subjection of imperialism. Diem never refers to American policies and intervention as imperialism, though he calls the Viet Minh totalitarians. He defends American intervention in the Epilogue when imploring America of its moral obligation to intervene in the war against totalitarian government. In doing so, Diem adopts the values of American imperialism in his dreams and aspirations for a democratic Viet Nam. The utopian dream is really a pipe dream which enables Diem to close his eyes to the atrocities committed by the Americans in the name of democracy. The binary oppositions he creates (most evil/lesser evil against good guy nationalists) expose him to *ad hominem* criticism where his moral and ethical actions are extremely questionable. After twelve years of serving lesser evil men, he writes against them and absolves himself. Diem records and defends his political actions, his political image, and his public self as a statesman of Viet Nam for twenty-five years. If the purpose of the memoir was to refurbish a tarnished political image, then the relevance of this influence is inconsequential to Viet Nam or to the U.S. since he is an exile and no longer possesses political influence. Diem constructs a case to support his political career and evades the deep division in his family life.

Ironically, his father and older brother joined forces with the Communists. In three short sentences, Diem describes a momentous and major break in his family which reflects the division of the country in three simple declarative sentences: “By this time [1949] my father had become a notable figure in the Vietminh zone. My brother – seven years older than I and a professor of literature – had also joined the Vietminh. But regardless of the different political paths we had taken, the war had done nothing to loosen the family bonds between us.”<sup>35</sup> These three simple declarative sentences fail to

capture the drama and emotional rift that one imagines in a situation in which these fundamental differences would mean that family members would end up fighting against one another and being separated from each other with no guarantee of seeing each other ever again. Diem, his sister, and his mother flew from Vietnam to Washington on a Navy plane before the final days of the Communists takeover; there was no mention of his father and his brother. Diem avoids personal disclosures, and what he does share remains in the political rather than the personal.

Like Diem, Tang's memoir justifies his *raison d'être* in his political life. Unlike Diem, Tang has to justify why he helped the North Communists, though he lived in the South and was a citizen of the South Vietnamese government. Though he never calls himself a traitor, as others would, he claims: "Whatever my personal inclinations, I would have been willing to accept *any* [my italics] regime that could achieve real independence and that had the welfare of the people."<sup>36</sup> This statement declares essentially that Tang does not avow to Communism, and that he could go with whichever faction that could achieve the two aims that he set forth. In some sense, Tang is like a political pimp who can commit to any faction regardless of its social and political ideologies or its violent track records. Then when he has chosen a particular faction, he then can find faults with the other faction to justify his allegiance, just as does when he criticizes President Diem's corrupt government and creates a bad guy/good guy dichotomy. The title of his memoir, A Vietcong Memoir, is disingenuous and misleading because Vietcong is a derivative of Cong San Viet Nam which means Vietnamese Communist. The title serves as an intrigue and a facade rather than personal insights into the political, philosophical, and social underpinnings of Vietnamese Communism.

In failing to confront Communist ideologies at work in the Communist Party, Tang could then align Ho Chi Minh's nationalism to his own and ignore the historical fact that Ho Chi Minh was both, a nationalist and a communist. Tang asserts that the "Leninism he [Ho] espoused was an accretion that served the cause of Vietnamese nationalism."<sup>37</sup> The word accretion implies that "Leninism" or Communism was a kind of nebulous process of growth and not a historical reality with deadly consequences to the Vietnamese people. Tang's failure to confront Marxist ideologies instituted by the CP via Ho Chi Minh discredit Tang's entire twenty-five years political career in the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), both are political machines of the Communist Party. Communism was not just an accretion but a social and political reality that divided the Vietnamese people. There was class warfare, land reform programs, and social reorganization of land owners implemented by Ho Chi Minh right after Dien Bien Phu. Tang dismisses reports of atrocities committed by the CP in the land reform programs. He writes, "Reports of what was happening in the North were very hard to come by. A mass of refugees had fled from the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel after the Accords. But most of them were Catholics with an ingrained hatred of communism in any form. Consequently, the stories they told about collectivization and 'people's justice' were not especially credible."<sup>38</sup> In the footnote, Tang informs the readers that after the Geneva Accords, 900,000 Northerners migrated South, and 100,000 Southerners migrated North. Yet he discredits the stories of 900,000 Northerners and evidently never bothered to research the reasons why almost one million people would uproot their homes and the land of their ancestors to become refugees. What Tang dismisses as hearsay in "collectivization" and "people's justice" was in actuality the

infamous land reform which stripped land, property, and political control from land owners and rich peasants, executed an estimated 50,000 men, and incarcerated 100,000 people.<sup>39</sup> Peasants in the North did not own large land like the South, and in fact, very few landlords in the North owned more than 3 or 4 acres.<sup>40</sup> Yet, the landowners represented five percent of the rural population, and therefore they were considered the elite that under Marxist ideology had to be liquidated for the sake of social reform. Ho later publicly apologized and admitted that “errors have been committed” and he promised to reclassify the landlords and rich peasants correctly.<sup>41</sup> Tang could plead ignorance to not knowing these facts at the time they occurred. However by not acknowledging these stories of atrocities after having earned a master’s degree in political science in Paris and being in exile eight years in France where the facts should have been available amounts to nothing more than historical amnesia. The land reform program was not indexed in Tang’s memoir, and yet historically it significantly defined the political, social, and philosophical underpinnings of the Communist Party. The land reform and the social reorganization of the countryside were modeled after Chinese and Russian Communists and epitomized the class warfare waged against the current economic and political powers. Tang’s grave historical amnesia and his non-existent explanation as to why Communism would provide a better form of government for the Vietnamese people makes the incredible personal sacrifice he made seem null and void, and damages his personal integrity. Hence his memoir inspires pity rather than respect and discredits him as a revolutionary with genuine personal convictions.

The reader can pity the personal sacrifices Tang made when he discloses the turmoil in his private life. He sacrificed two marriages, spent eight months in jail, and

lived six years in the jungles of Tay Ninh Province to set up his work as Justice Minister of the PRG. When the Vietnamese Communists defeated the South with the help of the NLF and PRG, Tang called his mother and found that his father had died, his second wife had divorced him and was living in the U.S., and his son from his first wife had moved to France. Later, about the same time that Tang discovered the duplicitous scheme of the Communists to annex the South and eventually dissolve the political influence of the PRG, Tang drove two of his brothers to the cruel and inhuman “re-education camps” that were really prisons. He was able to get one of his brothers out of jail, but the other brother still languished in prison at the time Tang was writing the memoir. Perhaps Tang’s only way of reconciling his private self is to quote his father: “My son . . . I simply cannot understand you. You have abandoned everything. A good family, happiness, wealth—to follow the Communists. They will never return to you a particle of the things you have left. You will see. They will betray you, and you will suffer your entire life”.<sup>42</sup> This is perhaps one of the more memorable, compelling, and respectful statements in the memoir. The father indicts and condemns his son’s personal life as a moral failure and his political life as a blind illusion. In a culture where personal duties towards the family is an essential part of Vietnamese identity and ethics, Tang’s political and public life negates him from his moral and ethical responsibilities to his family. While portraying himself as a nationalistic martyr, Tang’s family life reveals that he has lived a double life with his family, who did not know about his membership in the Front until he was imprisoned. The statement made by the father heightens the complexity of the divided selves—the private and the public—though Tang does not consciously examine the fragmentation. This self-reflection escapes Tang, who quotes his father to

confirm only after he has experienced the political betrayal of the Politburo. The construction of the private self remains in the public, political domain.

Bui Tin's Following Ho Chi Minh is the only memoir out of the five memoirs to be translated from Vietnamese. Unlike Diem and Tang, Tin's memoir opens with a confession and an apology for his own life, his forty-five years working for the CP, without attempting to be exculpatory. He describes Ha Noi sixteen years after the "liberation" of Sai Gon, as a place where "women are gaunt and anxious. Sewage spills here and there. Sometimes arguments explode, abuse is hurled and knives are brandished. The city teems with gamblers, thieves, pickpockets, prostitutes and opium smokers."<sup>43</sup> Tin connects the horrible social milieu of Ha Noi to the CP then to himself to show direct cause and effect relationships. He further confesses that all of his past the writings as a journalist for the CP, the myriad of articles and eight books, were Communist propaganda. His memoir promises to be different. He is writing with the pain of someone who has been a member of the CP for forty-five years before expulsion. He does this by revealing the dark sides of the Communist Party and also his own complicity in it.

Unlike Tang who ignored the peasant land reform, Tin imputes Ho Chi Minh as the primary person responsible for the debauchery of the land reform and the current totalitarian regime. Out of the three politicians who wrote the memoirs examined here, Tin had the most personal contacts with Ho. Tin's father was a personal friend of Ho and was also appointed by Ho as Government Inspector General. He explicitly states that though Ho called himself the enlightened one, his actions would prove otherwise. Ho blindly followed Mao and Maoism in 1951, which led Vietnamese people to take on



another yoke; Viet Nam traded one form of colonialism (the French) for another (the Chinese and later the Russian). Marxism via Mao meant that everyone had to conform to basic norms of behavior. For example, all members of Tin's unit had to confess their fears, desires, and jealousies and be forced into repentance. To Tin, Maoism was a threat to Vietnamese identity and culture. The name Ho is then synonymous with the course of the nation and nationalism under Marxist ideologies where "the rights and freedom of democracy were obliterated."<sup>44</sup> The title Following Ho Chi Minh connotes Tin's discipleship and blind faith in a man and in the entire course of Vietnamese Communism which Ho instituted. The title is self-incriminating and apologetic; it undermines Ho's moral, ethical, and intellectual vision, and yet it also endows Ho with hypnotic power. Tin could not fully explain Ho's mysterious power which inspired Tin to follow him for forty-five years as a commander of the units and as a journalist, even after Ho's death in 1969.

By placing the blame solely on Ho, Tin evades his own ethical and moral dilemma, especially as a journalist. When an author confesses that everything he had written, the more than eighty articles and eight books, have been lies, he carries the burden of disclosing what those false ideas, allegations, or facts were and the detrimental effects of those lies. Tin does not do this, instead he merely explains and paraphrases what he did. He explains that the journalists who worked for the Politburo, himself included, had "good and heartfelt intentions," but they were "suppressed and annihilated by a stifling bureaucracy."<sup>45</sup> He paraphrases an article he had written in 1990 which contradicted with the Party. It was Tin's view that the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe was due to "lack of democracy, an excess of bureaucracy and

irresponsible attitudes”.<sup>46</sup> Yet nothing paraphrased in the memoir expresses moral outrage at the Party for basic human rights violations.<sup>47</sup> Even as he quotes Duong Thu Huong’s criticism of the Party written in 1987 when the Party advised writers to NOT “‘bend the nibs of their pens’ and distort their writing,”<sup>48</sup> (Tin was present at this meeting) Tin avoids examining or acknowledging the self-contradictions her heroism raises against his complicity. The people whom he criticizes (in his memoir, not in the articles) as buffoons like Le Duan and Truong Chinh were people whom he interviewed as their personal biographer. Though he prides himself as knowing famous foreign journalists like Wilfred Burchett, Walter Cronkite, Peter Arnett, Nayan Chanda, and Tiziano Terzani, yet he fails to make the connection that he worked under a different system. The paper he wrote for was Nhan Dan, the official newspaper of the Party as late as September 1990. It was not until the French Communist Party newspaper L’Humanité invited Tin to Paris in September 1990, when he was on the safe shores of France, that he publicly denounced the Party.<sup>49</sup>

The last fifteen pages of the memoir that detail his departure to France are perhaps the most disturbing personal aspects of Tin’s memoir; they reveal a total disconnect between the private self and the public self, between family duties and public heroism. Tin makes plans to leave Viet Nam for good; finally after forty-five years, he decides he no longer wants to work for the CP. He keeps this major life decision from his wife, though he does not explain why. In two sentences, Tin articulates his cruel and cold severance of the relationship between his wife and him. He writes, “When she [his wife] heard my interviews on the BBC and learned that I had decided to remain temporarily in France, she was astonished. *Yet* [my italics] at the end of one of her letters she said that

on occasions as she rode her bicycle through the streets of Hanoi, other unknown cyclists had approached her with words of encouragement for what I was doing and to express sympathy for all the family was suffering as a result.”<sup>50</sup> Notice how quickly he moves from the wife’s shock to her words of encouragement for him. He moves from victimizer to placing himself as the victim. The letter which expresses consolation for him is the only one mentioned. Her other letters that may have expressed her outrage and sense of betrayal are silenced. The adverb yet, which denoting besides or in addition to as well as any contradiction, diminishes her feelings and moves to console him. The two sentences are written without emotions, without pain, without torment, and without remorse or love for his family who was placed under surveillance. Up until chronicling the time of his departure, Tin does not reveal that he had a wife, and he expends no more words or after thoughts about her beyond these two sentences. Tin informs his readers that he remembers the many years of abuse and scorn experienced by family members in similar cases, but he offers no reconciliation or reasons why he has now subjected his family to the abuse.<sup>51</sup> On the safe shore of France, Tin thinks about his mother: “But while I too have not forgotten that it was the French who killed my mother and many of my friends, I have come to appreciate a lot about France including the freedom of choice and the rule of law”.<sup>52</sup> France is represented as law and order as opposed to Viet Nam which is represented as barbaric and chaotic; this is a case of Orientalism where colonial subjects internalized colonial oppression and articulate the superiority of the colonizers. YET it is to this barbaric society which he subjects his wife and children. In the author’s preface, there is a picture of Tin holding a flower in front of the Vietnam Veteran Memorial. He dedicates his book in this order: to his American friend, Stanley Karnow (an American

journalist), to Karnow's wife, and daughter, to other American friends, journalists, veterans, politicians, and aid workers, and lastly to his countrymen; YET there is no mention of his wife and children. In the Introduction of Tin's memoir, Carlyle Thayer states that Tin's book is not an autobiography but a memoir; Tin has to write the political memoir because his personal conduct towards his family is so appalling.

I have demonstrated so far that Diem, Tang, and Tin's memoirs evade confronting their private selves and present their political or public lives, confirming Fredric Jameson's theory of third-world texts as national allegories. They set up binary oppositions to build cases to support their polemics using historical textual evidences to support their claims of historical veracity. The authorial "I" is undoubtedly the coherent and unified subject. However, contemporary critics and theorists question whether historical accuracy and veracity is possible or even necessarily desirable in self-representation. Critics like Gerri Reaves doubt the possibility of a unified subject and a coherent construction of the self is a fictional construction. What was once a literary genre with distinct demarcation of the self-identifying text has expanded to include the fictive forms of self-identification and self-representation.<sup>53</sup> This expansion defies any neat categorization of the polymorphous corpus of the autobiography. Unlike the Vietnamese male memoirists who present the selves as unified subjects engaged in polemical binary positions, Vietnamese female memoirists construct the fragmented and fictive selves engaged in interpersonal relationships. Whereas the men use historical textual evidences to support their arguments in the traditional political memoir, the women use their body-as-text to articulate their oppression in the novelistic memoir. Hence, for the Vietnamese women memoirists, the personal or private is the political.

This paradigm reflects the patriarchal Vietnamese society where men dominate politically and socially and where women are oppressed under the double bind of feudalism and capitalism.<sup>54</sup>

The socio-economic and political conditions of women who lived in Viet Nam from 1945 to 1975 may be best described as living “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitutional and object-formation, the figure of a woman disappears, into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world caught between tradition and modernization.”<sup>55</sup> More specifically, Vietnamese women have been oppressed by Confucian dogmas and indoctrination from the time of Chinese colonialism (111 B.C.-A.D.939) which mostly emphasized female chastity before and after marriage to one man, alive or deceased.<sup>56</sup> Women were taught to be submissive to three masters: father, husband, and eldest son and to obey the four virtues regarding labor, physical appearance, appropriate speech, and proper behavior.<sup>57</sup> These virtues have been instituted in Vietnamese culture since the Chinese colonialization by Confucian mandarins and scholars, and further reinforced in publications of moral texts soon after the establishment of the first modern printing press in 1861.<sup>58</sup> When the American soldiers landed troops in Viet Nam, the “displaced figuration” of Vietnamese women was not just caught between two oppressive systems but violated because women have internalized their oppression, thereby making them more vulnerable to sexual, physical, and emotional abuses.

Writing as women “hidden from history,”<sup>59</sup> Nguyen Thi Thu-Lam and Le Ly Hayslip expose their private selves by using their body-as-evidence<sup>60</sup> to attest to the historical trauma and violence committed by men against women in the traditional and

modern systems. The body-as-evidence becomes interstices between history and memory; between the public and the private; between social statements and self-revelations. Unlike the Vietnamese male memoirists who evade the personal and focus on the political and public lives, Vietnamese female memoirists create a discourse whereby the personal becomes the political. Both Nguyen and Hayslip write from personal experiences of being beaten, raped, and sexually exploited, and also as witnesses to the mutilation of Vietnamese bodies. The form of their memoirs, however, is not the linear causal relationship of victimizer/victims like that of the political memoirs. Instead, multiple perspectives are utilized to re-create the complex interpersonal relationships that form the basis of their fragmented identity and their multiple selves. These relationships are constructed and dramatized in the style of the novel, rather than the argument. Elements of the novel--the story, characters, plot, fantasy, prophecy, and pattern and rhythm--are contained in Nguyen and Hayslip's memoir.

Because of the scope of the aspects of the novel, I will limit my discussion to characterization of the fathers and examine the father/daughter relationship to illustrate the fusion of the private and public selves. In referring to the fathers as characters, I do not imply that they are not historical people. However, Nguyen and Hayslip at times assume the role of the omniscient narrator to expose the private hidden thoughts and actions of their fathers. Writing outside the eye-witness range of experience, Nguyen and Hayslip forego the desire to be factually accurate and aim to make you feel for the characters by transcending the polemics (telling) into the poetics (showing). According to E.M. Forster, historians record the actions and the merits of the characters of persons so far as they can interpret from their actions whereas novelists reveal the hidden life of

the people through characterization.<sup>61</sup> While I am not suggesting that the memoirs are novels, I am suggesting that they employ novelistic elements in order to dramatize and show rather than tell the stories of their authors' personal lives.

Nguyen Thi Thu-Lam devotes more than half of the memoir dramatizing the conflicts that confront her father. He is not known as "my father" in the narrative, rather she uses the proper noun "Father" to denote respect and intimacy. In this sense, her identity is enmeshed with his and does not individuate from his life. The narrator shifts back and forth in time to depict the entire dynamic course of his life as a single man, as a married man, as a adulterer, as a revolutionary, as a father of eight children, and finally as an exile. The drama of the nation unfolds in the father who is a politically conscientious man torn between French colonialism and Viet Minh fanaticism. Through her father's life, Nguyen weaves the story of her nation; his struggle is a microcosm for the struggle of her nation. Like a good short story, the setting opens with a beautiful picture of Bien Hoa in an idyllic upper middle-class white brick villa with maids and chauffeurs on hand. Soon, however, this idyllic picture is disrupted. The first sign of this happening occurs when Nguyen's family drives to Saigon for a family outing. Thu-Lam's father orders the chauffeur to pass a slow-driving car in front. The car pulls up in front of Thu-Lam's car. A Frenchman charges out of it, yells, and slaps the chauffeur. Nguyen's father also gets out and slaps the Frenchman, and orders his chauffeur to drive away. The incident is reported in the newspaper, and the father is questioned by French officials. The French authority demands an apology and even offers to raise the father's salary if he gives it, but he remains steadfast. He defies the French by claiming his native identity, "*Je suis Vietnamien. Je serai toujours Vietnamien*"<sup>62</sup> (I am Vietnamese; I will always be

Vietnamese). The father's pronouncement of his Vietnamese identity parrots Nguyen's pronouncing her national identity against the oppressor. This incident exemplifies the how colonialism and the colonial experience serve to intensify nationalism and nationalistic identity. The question of authenticity is irrelevant because the fictive construction of the event shows the ethical, social, and moral dilemma experienced by Vietnamese who worked for the French and who educated their children in French history and literature, and yet despised French colonialism. The incident shows the complexity of the ambivalence of the colonizer/colonized relationships. In the father, Nguyen constructs a prototype of the father as a Vietnamese version of an "everyman" sort of hero. Driven by nationalist fervor of an independent Viet Nam, he sacrifices the idyllic upper middle-class home, made possible by the French, in Bien Hoa to migrate to various places in north and south Viet Nam, and later to America. Being Vietnamese under French colonialism meant that he has to compromise the prosperity and security of his family for the independence of his nation. What is truly lost is home and the coherence of family is eroded by the conditions of homelessness and rootlessness. The family's migration and plight symbolize Viet Nam's turbulent resistance against French colonialism and later Viet Minh fanaticism.

The division within her home is a metaphor for the divided nation. Nguyen's two sisters joined the Viet Minh when they were sixteen and fifteen. One of them returned and accused Nguyen's father of being a French puppet; later, his son would also accuse him of betraying the Vietnamese. The father witnessed two "trials" conducted by the Viet Minh that resulted in an execution and a death by suicide which greatly disillusioned him and caused him to migrate and uproot the family again. As a patriarch, Nguyen's



father embodies her identification with Vietnamese nationalism because he is heroic, noble, self-sacrificing, and wholistic. Her public self is enmeshed with his life as a devoted public man. However, when she presents her private self or her body beaten by her husbands, Hieu and Michael, the fragmented self encompasses the other half of the memoir where her father is no longer present.

The other half of the memoir details Nguyen's private life where she uses body-as-text to implicate the Catholic, Confucian, and capitalist institutions, as well as the Vietnamese patriarch in the oppression of Vietnamese female bodies. Her father's silence and his non-existence in her private life denote complicity through his silence and absence. The fragmentation of her self-identity is directly related to her family, particularly her mother who is agency of institutional oppressions. It was her mother who called her ugly and skinny and condemned her manners as unfeminine and unworthy of male interest. The mother tells Nguyen that her sexual body was a sin. Nguyen writes, "I wore a tight bra and tried to conceal my 'sins.'"<sup>63</sup> The word sin in quotes indicates Nguyen does not adopt her parents' values, but this is only a textual rebellion, not an interactive rebellion. Nguyen is beaten by her father when her mother feels she is too rebellious. Her parents' indoctrination combines Catholic dogmas of the body as a sacred temple of God and that should only be engaged for the purpose of procreation, Confucian principle of chastity, and Confucian doctrine of virtue which confines girls' behaviors for male consumption. When Nguyen attempts suicide because her betrothed has left her, her mother expresses shame and anger towards her rather than love. Nguyen internalizes her mother's loathing of her body and attempts to destroy it by suicide. Her sense of worth and esteem derive from male desires. Because marriages had to be

approved by her parents, the parents have unlimited control of her body until she gets married. She moves from one institution (family) to another (marriage). By using her body as textual evidence, Nguyen discloses pain, confusion, and fragmentation of identity juxtaposed to her portrayal of her father. These disclosures assault the nation of Viet Nam via the family outside of French colonialism and American imperialism. The female body-as-text attests to female bodies symbolizing conquered land.<sup>64</sup> By the time Nguyen meets Michael, her Caucasian American husband who beats her, she was a “scared, inexperienced girl” who was fractured inside. The yoke carried from her personal life as a third-world woman would make her vulnerable to Battered Women Syndrome (BWS), as revealed in her relationship with Michael.

Nguyen describes her relationship with Michael:

My happiness would have been perfect except that I began to have doubts about Michael. He was impatient, critical, even hostile towards me and what he felt was my unsophistication. I was a shrewd, capable business woman, but outside of that narrow sphere, I was the scared, inexperienced girl. I sensed I might need a more mature, patient, understanding man than Michael, since I had seldom dated before and had little experience dealing with men as men, I felt unsure of my feelings. Perhaps it was my fault and not Michael's.”<sup>65</sup>

This monologue reflects a battered psyche which toggles between control and helplessness. There is no unity in the content of her speech. It moves from an ideal state, to doubt, to self-affirmation, to fear, then to self-doubt, and self-blame, characteristic of fragmentation. It is really another version of her loathing of the body

which rationalizes the abuser's actions while denying her feelings of justified anger at the violation against her body common in BWS.<sup>66</sup> She discloses that Michael kicks her while she was pregnant with his child and does not allow her to see her two sons by her first husband. He continues to beat her after he marries her. He slaps her in front of her family. The disconnect between body and mind is indicative of her fragmentation and symptomatic of internal self-loathing of her body.

Vietnamese tradition and American imperialism are under fire in Nguyen's memoir. Beginning with the institutions of the family and marriage, Nguyen's body was scorned as sinful but dressed for male consumption. Her identity as a person is defined always in relation to a man; she alone is not worthy of praise and esteem. She marries to escape one form of yoke for another. It was these yokes that Nguyen tries to escape and liberate herself in her relationships with American men. While her father is one of the most sympathetic and heroic characters representing the struggles of the nation, his silence and absence in her fragmented private life imply complicity and betrayal of his daughters. This juxtaposition is a social commentary on the conditions of women in third-world countries: the political agenda of national independence takes priority over female rights and sovereignty over their bodies. In the character of the father and in the exposé of her body-as-evidence, Nguyen weaves the private (everywoman) and public (everyman) using her body to assault Vietnamese patriarchal society and American domination. The title Fallen Leaves is a partial derivative of Nguyen's first name, Thu, which means fall or autumn. The author's first name embedded in the adjective "fallen" modifying "leaves" implies an existential condition of the fallen state of physical, emotional, and spiritual selves.

Like Nguyen, Hayslip's memoir utilizes all the elements of fiction to construct the character of her father in When Heaven and Earth Changed Places. Hayslip's father remains one of the most compelling, tragic, and memorable characters or actors of all the five memoirs examined here. Unlike Mr. Nguyen who was educated in French culture and who had the means to migrate from one place to another, Hayslip's father cleaves to the land of his ancestors, his home, as his main source of self-identity and subsistence. Politically, he would be labeled a peasant because of his economic and spiritual bond to the land,<sup>67</sup> but Hayslip transcends politics and stereotypes and portrays her father's singular wish and desire through the father/daughter dialogues as both virtuous and simultaneously tragic. Unlike Nguyen who exposes only her own body-as-text, Hayslip exhibits her father's body as well as her own body to show the schizophrenic state of mind and condition of disenfranchised peasants. She differs from Nguyen in that she does not split the public and private self textually, half of the memoir devoted to her father's, the other half hers. The split, or schizophrenic state of mind flows continuously and is interspersed in a narrative which combines dialogues, descriptions, interpretations, and plot, and develops into a climax. In this way, her memoir is superior in literary quality to that of Nguyen's.

The story begins in the idyllic setting of Ky La, the home of Hayslip's ancestors and also a strategic location used by the Viet Minh and American troops. This village is made sacred by her father's stories told to her as they work out in the field and because it is the family's burial ground. The father/daughter dialogues transcribe the orality of tales and legends passed down by Vietnamese from one generation to the next. Hayslip's memoir opens with a celebration of Vietnamese glorious past and an invocation of

ancient kings and women warriors like Trung Nhi Trung Trac and Phung Thi Chinh, heroines who lead rebellions against foreign invaders. She is the only memoirist to invoke ancient heroes, thus her inclusion of them add a folkloric quality to her stories and reveals another dimension of her father's psyche. Through these stories, the father instructs Hayslip to follow in the steps of such women and protect the land of their ancestors from foreigners. He invokes these warriors to explain to Hayslip her duties in the current conditions of their lives:

You know, some of these lands are battlefields where your brothers and cousins are fighting. They may never come back. Even your sisters have all left home in search of a better life. You are the only one left in my house. If the enemy comes back, you must be both a daughter and a son. I told you how the Chinese used to rule our land. People in this village had to risk their lives diving in the ocean just to find pearls for the Chinese emperor's gown. They had had to risk tigers and snakes in the jungle just to find herbs for his table. Their payment for this hardship was a bowl of rice and another day of life. This is why Le Loi, Gia Long, the Trung Sisters, and Phung Thi Chinh fought so hard to expel the Chinese. When the French came, it was the same old story. . . Freedom is never a gift, Bay Ly. It must be won and won again.<sup>68</sup>

The speech is mythical and provocative of revolutionary spirit. Spoken from a father to his daughter, masculine and feminine identification collapse, since she is expected to be both daughter and son in order to protect the land. Land and spirit are one and the father is both the keeper of legends and guardian of his land. To him, the land and home are

sacred grounds as indicated by his reference ancestral “shrines” which designates a place of worship or a spiritual relationship. Much of his speech here is spoke in a way like a fable with a moral lesson. The present conditions are connected to the epic history of a people who dived in the ocean to find pearls for the emperor’s crown finery. The narrative combines myth and fable to explain the current conditions of oppression in Ky La and then to instruct Hayslip to be a woman warrior, or defender of the land. Hayslip’s childhood heroes are women warriors who did not prescribe to traditional submissive roles of proper female behaviors. Unlike Nguyen, whose middle-class upbringing seems more restricted, Hayslip was raised by her peasant father as an androgyne. While telling her stories about women warriors, he teaches her how to make a doorstep, hammer, and how to cook. All the tales and legends of ancient heroes direct Hayslip to remain in Ky La and tend the family shrine. Her father’s speech is instructive and prophetic of the ensuing forced exiles of Hayslip and her mother out of Ky La as a result of Hayslip’s revolutionary work for the Viet Minh.

Living out her father’s teachings of such legendary figures, Hayslip at the age of fourteen helps the Vietnamese Communists fight against foreigners. She is captured and tortured twice by the Republicans. The second time, she is sent to My Thi, a prison notorious for having few survivors. The torture she endures is described as something like a scene out of Dante’s *Inferno*. Hayslip is tied to a pole. The guard brushes honey on her feet, and black ants bit her flesh. Later, the soldier brings out a glistening snake and drops it down Ly’s shirt. She writes: “I screamed at the snake, then screamed at the guards, then screamed at the sky until the noon blue turned black and my voice was reduced to a squeak.”<sup>69</sup> She remains silent to their questions, however, because she

remembers that she is a Phung Thi woman, meaning that though her body is tortured, the mythology and legend from her father keep her intact and wholistic. However, the body/mind disconnect is not sustainable in wartime; fragmentation is inevitable for her family.

Upon her return from My Thi prison, there are no homecoming songs to welcome Ly as in her first return. Instead, she is suspected by the cadres as being a traitor who has exchanged important information for her release. Her family is harassed and she is called to go to a “meeting” by comrades, Loi and Mau. There in the field of Ky La, her own home village, they threaten, beat, and rape her, one after the other. The description is painfully startling and gruesome. The Confucius lessons of chastity as a gift a woman saves for her husband are crudely stripped. She discloses the rape, “I have now been raped—I now knew the horror that every woman dreads. What had been saved a lifetime for my husband had been ripped away in less time than it takes to tell.”<sup>70</sup> Nothing in her father’s stories of women warrior could have prepared her for these violations. The female body is sexually exploited and conquered in the same way that Ky La would be exploited and conquered by the Viet Minh and the Americans. Because she became a suspect, the Viet Minh harassed her family and her daily. After Hayslip’s exile to Da Nang and Sai Gon, the father/daughter dialogues cease and the third-person omniscient takes over to describe the father’s isolation in Ky La without his family. Third-person narrative creates distance between the father and the daughter and enlarges the reader’s view of the father’s inner turmoil. Without his family, the father is emasculated and the extension of his way of life is annihilated.

The father's harrowing journeys to Da Nang and Sai Gon where he goes to reconnect with his family are metaphors of his emasculation and fragmentation. Hayslip's father takes a bus trip one day to visit his daughter Lan in Da Nang. Lan left the family in 1960 to Sai Gon then moved back to Da Nang in 1964 when the Americans built their base there. She works as a tea-girl and lives with her American boyfriend. When the father goes to see her, she was not home. Her American boyfriend answers the door and tells the father she is working. When the father tells him that he would wait, the American shouted, "Pap-san, Di di mau!" (Old man, stupid farmer—get out of here quick!) and shoves my father into the stairwell at the center of the building."<sup>71</sup> Later the father's experience worsens when his daughter comes home:

At a little past five, he heard Lan come home and went in through the kitchen door. Rather than being pleased, my sister was distressed to see him and felt torn between honoring her father, as she had been raised to do, and pleasing 'her man,' which was what the Americans expected. In the end she told my father to wait and took her American into the bedroom—which was actually no more than a small area of the studio bounded by a curtain—and did what she had to do to please him.

According to my mother's story, my father sat on the couch and cried. After an hour, when my sister had not come out, my father went back to Ky La.<sup>72</sup>

In this scene, both father and daughter are victims and victimizers. The father/daughter relationship is determined by economic and political means. Lan, a tea-girl, has to please



her American boyfriend whom she could only meet working as a tea-girl. The small one-room studio with a bedroom set off by a curtain discloses her economic status. Her entire subsistence is dependent on servicing American men, and she does this at the expense of her father because he has no economic means. Her cohabitation with a man before marriage is hardly considered self-liberating given her tolerance of his insolence to her and her father. As a pattern, the narrator reveals that Lan keeps a company of American men who beat her and exploit her sexually. The position of the father as patriarch is subverted. By visiting her, he exposes her studio and all the means of production required in keeping up with the studio. She victimizes him because her life is not that of a woman warrior, which surely he must have taught her as he did Hayslip, but that of a service woman to foreigners. Yet, one cannot excuse the utter disrespect Lan shows towards her father; the narrator does not spare her sibling of her utter disregard and insensitivity for her father. The visit represents the disenfranchisement and rootlessness of father and daughter.

Each visit to these cities further deepens the father's alienation and fragmentation. Through his ungrasping eyes, Da Nang and Sai Gon are places where economic means of survival supercede spiritual connections with one's family and fractured relationships become the norms. He learns that his wife and daughter were homeless because of Hayslip's pregnancy by the master to whom they were servants. He hears stories of Lan putting Hayslip out on the street when she was pregnant, and that other members of the family would not help her. In short, the father bears witness to the homelessness and the temporality of their living quarters in these cities while the burial ground and home in Ky

La are deserted. Though he continues to call Hayslip his “peach blossom” and implores her to “choose life no matter what” in his letters to her, he himself is dying inside.

Hayslip’s father ends his own life after two attempts. He takes rat poison the first time and the second time he drinks a bottle of acid. Father and daughters’ bodies-as-evidence assault the Viet Minh, the RVN, and the Americans and their treatment of Viet Nam’s land and ultimately its people. However, the indictments surpass political blame and rises to the level of tragedy by the portrayal of her father’s character. By creating a three-dimensional character and hero, Hayslip inspires sympathy for her father who is victim and actor. The narrative shows how the father’s sense of identity is shaped by myths and legends, and in commemorating him, Hayslip transcribes these stories told to her by her father.

Nguyen and Hayslip’s memoirs move from the polemic to the poetic. They expose the private and the public selves using elements of fiction to create sympathetic characters who embody the tragedies of their nations. While the Vietnamese male political memoirs attest to their public power and dominance, the Vietnamese female memoirs attest to the pain and confusion of their private and public lives. Close examination of the Vietnamese male memoirs reveal that the men split the public and private selves choosing only to argue the *raison d’être* of the public self. For the women, the private is the political. Bodies-as-texts rather than historical textual evidences convey fragmentation of societies and selves. In regards to Jameson’s analysis, it is the men who foreground their texts in the economic and political situation while the women foreground their texts in the interpersonal relationships that encompass both the private and public.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

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6. Jameson 69.
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31. George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975* 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) 151.

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36. Tang 36.

37. Tang 36.

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39. Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968) 190-91.

40. Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam A History*. (New York: Penguin, 1983) 225.

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42. Tang 260.

43. Tin xv.

44. Tin 37.

45. Tin 149.

46. Tin 163.

47. The articles that Tin claimed he wrote were all paraphrased in the memoir. The view he expressed about the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe is the only one that may potentially place him at odds with the Party (see p. 163). The other articles seemed to be about "the spirit of discipline and public health" in other parts of the world.

48. Tin 145.

49. It is not clear from the memoir why Tin was invited to Paris. Though he states it was to give a talk about an article he had written, the contents of the article remain vague.

50. Tin 178.
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52. Tin 172.
53. Reaves 11.
54. David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 238.
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- 68. Hayslip 30.
- 69. Hayslip 84.
- 70. Hayslip 93.
- 71. Hayslip 169.
- 72. Hayslip 170.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> George Egerton, ed., introduction, Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory (Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1994) xi.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Renny, The Viet Nam War The American War: Images and Representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese Exile Narratives (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) 26.

<sup>3</sup> Renny 40.

<sup>4</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," New Political Science 5 (1986): 68.

- <sup>5</sup> Jameson 69.
- <sup>6</sup> Jameson 69.
- <sup>7</sup> Public and political are used interchangeably and so are private and personal.
- <sup>8</sup> Bui Diem with David Chanoff, In the Jaws of History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).
- <sup>9</sup> Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of The Vietnam War and Its Aftermath (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).
- <sup>10</sup> Bui Tin, Following Ho Chi Minh. Trans. and adapt. Judy Stowe and Do Van (U Hawaii P, 1995).
- <sup>11</sup> Thu-Lam Thi Nguyen with Edith Kreisler and Sandra Christenson, Fallen Leaves: Memoirs of a Vietnamese Woman from 1940 to 1975 (Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1989).
- <sup>12</sup> Le Ly Hayslip with Jay Wurts, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace (New York: Doubleday, 1989).
- <sup>13</sup> Gerri Reaves, Mapping the Private Geography: Autobiography, Identity, and America (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000) 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Egerton 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Egerton xv.
- <sup>16</sup> Tucker, Spencer, ed., Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History, 3 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998) 1074.



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<sup>17</sup> Carl L Bankson and Min Zhou, “Displacement: Leaving Vietnam and Arriving in America.” Straddling Two Social Worlds: Displacement (June 2000): 3 pp. online, Internet. 5 July 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Qui-Phiet Tan, “Exiles in the Land of the Free: Vietnamese Artists and Writers in America, 1975 to the Present,” Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas 30 (1989): 101.

<sup>19</sup> Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994) 5.

<sup>20</sup> Than Dinh Nguyen, Studies on Vietnamese Language and Literature: A Preliminary Bibliography (Southeast Asia Program: Cornell University, 1992) lists 2,500 entries of books, monographs, and journal articles written mostly in English and in French about Vietnamese language and literature as of 1988.

<sup>21</sup> This paper will only focus on the memoirs written in English.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Rutledge, The Vietnamese Experience in America (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Egerton 7.

<sup>24</sup> Egerton 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Manning, “Defeated by Victory,” rev. of A Vietcong Memoir, by Truong Nhu Tang, The New York Times Book Review 26 May 1985: 12.

<sup>26</sup> I am using Alan Tonelson’s “if only” phrase used in his review of Diem’s memoir. Alan Tonelson, “Vietnam: What Might Have Been,” rev. of In the Jaws of History by Bui Diem, The New York Times Book Review 13 Sept. 1987: 16.

<sup>27</sup> Tonelson 16.

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- <sup>28</sup> Diem 322.
- <sup>29</sup> Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
- <sup>30</sup> Diem 46.
- <sup>31</sup> George Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) 151.
- <sup>32</sup> Herring 153.
- <sup>33</sup> Herring 269.
- <sup>34</sup> Diem 169.
- <sup>35</sup> Diem 60.
- <sup>36</sup> Tang 36.
- <sup>37</sup> Tang 36.
- <sup>38</sup> Tang 36.
- <sup>39</sup> Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968) 190-91
- <sup>40</sup> Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam A History. (New York: Penguin, 1983) 225.
- <sup>41</sup> Karnow 225.
- <sup>42</sup> Tang 260.
- <sup>43</sup> Tin xv.
- <sup>44</sup> Tin 37.
- <sup>45</sup> Tin 149.
- <sup>46</sup> Tin 163.

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<sup>47</sup> The articles that Tin claimed he wrote were all paraphrased in the memoir. The view he expressed about the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe is the only one that may potentially place him at odds with the Party (see p. 163). The other articles seemed to be about “the spirit of discipline and public health” in other parts of the world.

<sup>48</sup> Tin 145.

<sup>49</sup> It is not clear from the memoir why Tin was invited to Paris. Though he states it was to give a talk about an article he had written, the contents of the article remain vague.

<sup>50</sup> Tin 178.

<sup>51</sup> His son-in-law was barred from leaving Viet Nam to attend Harvard University.

<sup>52</sup> Tin 172.

<sup>53</sup> Reaves 11.

<sup>54</sup> David Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 238.

<sup>55</sup> Written by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and quoted in Viet Thang Nguyen, “Representing Reconciliation: Le Ly Hayslip and the Victimized Body,” Position 5:2 (1997): 605-642.

<sup>56</sup> Marr 191-92.

<sup>57</sup> Marr 192.

<sup>58</sup> Marr 44.

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<sup>59</sup> I am adopting this term from Cromwell, Valerie, “‘Married to Affairs of State’: Memoirs of the Wives and Daughters of British Diplomats,” Political Memoir, ed. George Egerton (Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co, LTD, 1994) 209.

<sup>60</sup> Viet Nguyen 605-42.

<sup>61</sup> E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1973) 72.

<sup>62</sup> Nguyen, Thu-Lam 8.

<sup>63</sup> Nguyen, Thu-Lam 107.

<sup>64</sup> Ania Loomb, Colonialism/Postcolonialism (London: Routledge, 1998) 152.

<sup>65</sup> Nguyen, Thu-Lam 162.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Alexander Downs, More Than Victims: Battered Women, The Syndrome, Society, and the Law (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) xiv.

<sup>68</sup> Hayslip 30.

<sup>69</sup> Hayslip 84.

<sup>70</sup> Hayslip 93.

<sup>71</sup> Hayslip 169.

<sup>72</sup> Hayslip 170.