

An Archive of Displacement

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In the last days of the Vietnamese civil war, tens of thousands of people in the South packed what they could into their suitcases as they fled from the oncoming National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese forces. Wives and mothers sewed jewelry and gold inside the hems and lining of each family member's clothing articles. Children combed through photography albums, reminders of happier times. People scrambled for passage out of the country. For many, and especially for those who fled by boat in the years after 1975, mementoes and remnants of a former life were cast off—burned, hidden, buried, abandoned, secretly entrusted to relatives.

Two decades later, when these former refugees started returning to Vietnam, they visited their old neighborhoods, looked for family and friends, childhood homes and schools. They searched for what war had taken away, and what surviving could offer. In between flight and return was the space of culture. In downtown Saigon, there are a number of stores that sell new and used books, maps, posters, postcards and miscellaneous objects—including old photographs. Studio shots, scenes of family and friends at the beach, one's love on a vespa, a stroll in the park. Stacks and stacks of black and white photographs with elegantly cut borders.

In their own returns, diasporic Vietnamese artists have created works that engage with questions of the archive and representations of displacement, home and collective history. As he was looking at lost photographs while browsing in a bookstore, Đinh Q. Lê could not help but wonder if he would find images of his family. Born in 1968 in the town of Hà Tiên on the border with Cambodia, Lê had fled with his family in 1978 during the Vietnamese war with the Khmer Rouge; they settled in California a year later. One of the first diasporic Vietnamese to return to

the country to work and eventually to live there two decades later, Lê created a quilt, *Một Cối Đi Về* [*Spending One's Life Trying to Return Home*] (1998), comprising found photographs, postcards and letters that he bought in bookstores. Embodying the quests of tens of thousands of people returning to Vietnam and other war-torn pasts, the quilt offers an archival space of collective remembrance and ever arrival.

In this article, I offer a reading of diasporic Vietnamese art as an archive of displacement through an analysis of select projects by Đinh Q. Lê and Hồng-An Trương—both artists who have extensively explored questions about war and national myths of belonging. The U.S. is home to the largest diasporic Vietnamese population in the world, where they constitute 0.5 percent or 1.5 million of the population.ⁱ Most came in the post-1975 waves of exodus, as did the people who settled in France, Canada, Australia and other countries that had supported the Republic of South Vietnam. In East Asia, Vietnamese constitute an increasingly significant immigrant population; according to the 2010 Taiwanese Census, more than 80 percent of the 400,000 immigrants came from Southeast Asia.ⁱⁱ These populations of Vietnamese, however, are recent and mainly move for work in the service and industrial sectors or as brides to often much older Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese spouses. Although the circumstances of dispersion are different, diasporic Vietnamese travel in high numbers regularly to Vietnam, maintaining work and family ties there.

After the Vietnam War, more than a million refugees fled due to persecution for wartime affiliations and economic distress. This part of Vietnamese national history remains a highly contested period, and the Hanoi government still refuses to acknowledge the traumatic effects of its campaign to “reeducate”, dispossess, and remove from all positions of power those officers and families associated with South Vietnam.ⁱⁱⁱ In the U.S., the war is still largely seen either as a

Cold War chapter or as an anti-imperial war of national resistance. The former narrative relegates Vietnamese to minor characters in a proxy war between the Soviet Union, China and the U.S., and the latter narrative privileges the Hanoi regime as the voice of all Vietnamese.

The diaspora provides an important location from which to examine official Vietnamese and other nationalist efforts to erase the complex and conflicting aspirations and entanglements of history. The long view of the Vietnam War stretches back to the French colonization of what was then known as Indochina—not only the pre-World War II colonial project, but also the French attempt to reclaim Vietnam until the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, and the U.S. refusal to aid anti-colonial independence struggles as it sought to establish itself as an imperial power.^{iv}

Diasporic Vietnamese art engages with that multiply layered history by addressing Vietnamese national historiography, French colonialism and U.S. imperialism through the use of media that have been intimately involved in the making of colonial modernity and global capitalism.^v The diasporic subject is both a minority in the country of settlement and a transnational displaced from the “homeland”. This position from the margins allows one to question mainstream ideas and beliefs that are commonly accepted as the norm. Diaspora is often the result of a violent rupture that official histories reproduce by expunging the narratives of the dispossessed. Trương and Lê’s projects question the normalized structures of power that underlie the constructions of national histories and archives.

Resistance Can Be Quiet (2011)

Hồng-An Trương is particularly interested in nationalist histories and the archives as sites of truth-making. Born in the U.S., she has family in both southern and northern Vietnam. Her parents had migrated south after the Geneva Accords of 1954. The family is Catholic and traces

their roots back to the North. She visited there in 2005, after she heard that her mom's second cousin became ordained as the Bishop in Sơn Tây. His ordination was the first time the communist state had allowed the clergy to be reinstated there in decades. For Truong, that event spurred the question of how Catholics negotiate their position and beliefs in the North.^{vi}

During the war, practicing Catholics had to worship in private and underground. With the Bishop's help and through an interpreter, Truong interviewed the diocese's priests and nuns about their experiences during the French and Vietnam War eras. The interviews would lead to a photography project titled *Resistance Can Be Quiet* (2011). Truong examined how colonialism, through the institution of Catholicism, works to create ideas about civilization, modernity, and the split between the colonizer and the colonized. She found the priests and nuns' stories did not subscribe to the official narratives of anti-colonialist and nationalist mobilization campaigns. Official South Vietnamese Republican and U.S. liberal histories portray the post-1954 flight of thousands of Catholics from the North to the South as evidence of the totalitarian communist state, in contrast to the free South. The priests and nuns told stories about their colleagues being murdered and subjected to harassment by communist forces, but they also recalled the French and Americans as oppressors. Being Catholic did not necessarily ensure the priests and nuns protection by these latter forces. Their stories revealed ideological overlaps and ambiguities in their day-to-day lives and their support of workers' rights, which French and American narratives portrayed simply as communist. Moreover, many of those who moved to the South faced oppression and suspicion from the Republican state.

Resistance Can Be Quiet is a photographic series of interior views of churches, chapels and convents that were built during the French colonial period in northern Vietnam. The title alludes to Michel Foucault's theory that power can never be absolute, and that there are always

locations of resistance that bypass the state's surveillance mechanisms. For the Catholics whom Truong interviewed, resistance was an act of private worship and collective support that defied communist prohibitions against religion and Western suspicions of them as communist. They did not identify with simplified, exclusionary categories that equated Catholicism with the colonizer, modernity with the West, communism with totalitarianism, and republicanism with freedom. The scenes photographed in *Resistance Can Be Quiet* speak to overlapping histories, their ideas and material societies; it would be impossible to trace the origins of any particular object and aesthetic.

***Adaptation Fever* (2006-2007)**

Truong's interest in the elisions and silences of nationalist narratives also led to her multi-channel, video installation *Adaptation Fever* (2006-2007). The project exposes the constructiveness of official sites of history-making by putting into conversation unexpected and jarring combinations of pop culture and archival materials, spatial and temporal locations, and the national and the transnational. *Adaptation Fever* is a looped video comprising four short pieces: "The Past is a Distant Colony" (2007), "A Story in the Process of Self-Alienation" (2007), "It's True Because It's Absurd" (2007), and "Explosions in the Sky" (2006). All of the footage comes from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and historical documentaries made in the U.S.

Adaptation Fever foregrounds the use of framing and juxtaposition to draw our attention to the constructiveness of colonial, imperial and nationalist ideologies and the archives as the nation's depository of truth. The video uses footage of everyday life shot in Vietnam from the 1910s to the 1970s; life in France in the early 20th century; and the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, which marked the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and the escalation of U.S.

military involvement in the ensuing civil war. By putting into conversation images of “official truth” shot in different locations and times, Truong redeploys colonialist and imperialist images as tools of reflection and critical inquiry into their history, discursive usage and transmission.

“The Past is a Distant Colony” (2007) is about the process of looking at oneself and not seeing what one thought of oneself. Truong drew on Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage to represent self-alienation as a splitting of the subject and her reflection. The video comprises images that reflect each other; the two frames of reflection are themselves framed by a black frame so that the viewer is always aware that one is always seeing a self that is framed. This constant process of alienated reflection is a metaphor for the formation of the subject through the process of colonization.

“A Story in the Process of Self-Alienation” (2007) is about nation-building through story-telling and myth-making. The video uses footage of official processions celebrating Hồ Chí Minh and contains a voiceover of a female narrator singing a nostalgic song that children sing on the last day of school to bid their friends farewell and to anticipate their meeting again the next academic year. The footage and the song represent the different ways that community and nation must be continually reproduced and maintained through institutions of official memory-making, in particular seemingly apolitical, citizen-forming spaces such as the school and the archives.

“It’s True Because It’s Absurd” (2007) was inspired by a story that Truong’s mother had told her about seeing a boy pick up a gun and accidentally shoot his mother. The incident, the mother’s telling of the story, and the failure at telling, provided the narrative for Truong’s exploration of the process of nation-building through the use of war footage and war stories.

The last piece in the looped video is “Explosions in the Sky” (2006), which combines film footage of the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ with a soundtrack of Simon and Garfunkle’s “The

Sounds of Silence” sung in Vietnamese and English. The piece is about cultural translation and cultural slippage, the translation of an anti-war song into Vietnamese in the 1990s, and its recuperation by Truong, again as an anti-war song.

The event of nation and narration

I will focus my analysis on “The Past is a Distant Colony” and “Explosions in the Sky”, and propose a reading of the whole series as an “event” that intervenes in nation and narration, which themselves are “events.”^{vii} The Derridian concept of “event” represents experience as that which happens at a particular moment in time. That particular moment in present time brings together memory of the past and anticipation of the future. With the past and the future framing it, the event is remembered, and this remembering makes it repeatable and yet not. The memory can never faithfully repeat the moment. Alain Badiou argues an event refers not to the act, but to that which comes afterwards, the after-time when the order of knowledge is upended and a flash of recognition appears. Damian Sutton talks about the scientific event of photography in the history of art, and its use by modern regimes of governmentality to record official observations in institutions such as the archives. At the same time, Sutton argues, photography was also the artistic event of science because “[p]hotography was already outside itself looking in; it always constituted a heterogeneity, a break with itself” (13).^{viii} Photography, in its ability to repeat the event, revealed it as multiple viewings of the same, the present ever looping onto itself, an always already repeated play of the moment. That possibility of repetition called into question claims to fidelity and reliable knowledge. With digital technology, the reproduction of the modern is infinitely easier and unknown. Unlike analog, the digital allows for the use of found materials, its retrieval from remote sites, and the artist’s control of the processes of production,

distribution and access. Textually, multiple images can be viewed on the same plane as with the use of a split screen.

In my analysis of *Adaptation Fever*, I use the concept of the event metaphorically, reading the video as an event in the making of Vietnamese history, a history of the nation from the diaspora. “The Past is a Distant Colony” (2007) revisits archival footage and asks why they were shot. The piece revolves around two particular images, one of a Vietnamese woman turning her head to look and one of two Vietnamese boys making the sign of the cross. Borrowing from Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, Truong made the images as doubles of themselves, images that continuously reflect each other. A black bar splits the doubled image, and a black frame surrounds them, calling the viewer’s attention to the presence of the frame as an interpretative device. In splitting the subject from herself, the black frames also suggest a space emptied of meaning, a space of unknown subject formation. This double vision—the woman’s look of hesitancy and the boys’ repetition of ritual—portray the process of colonial subject-making as one of alienated reflection and mimicry.

The making of the modern was an enterprise of intimate cultural references and colonial expansion. In its title, “The Past is a Distant Colony” refers to the spatial distance between France and Vietnam, and the temporal distance between the time of Vietnam under French colonial rule and the time of the artist’s excavation of the visual tools of empire-making. Most of the footage is set in Vietnam: Catholic priests, nuns and followers, plantation workers, French colons, and street scenes of Saigon. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the piece, there is footage of life in France—vaudeville personalities such as Josephine Baker and lines of showgirls, French tourists looking at “Oriental” art, architectural landmarks such as the Arc de Triomphe, and the wide boulevards of modern Paris. This juxtaposition of the spoils of war and

empire-building, French and American, underscores the dependence of the metropolis' political, economic and cultural institutions on the racialization of other lands and peoples.

The rapture of memory

In “Explosions in the Sky”, the last piece in the looped video, Trương unsettles nationalist histories, assumptions about visuality as truth, and nostalgic memories of pop culture by combining footage of the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ with a soundtrack of Simon and Garfunkle’s “The Sounds of Silence” sung in Vietnamese and English. If the event is a moment in time with a past and a future, “Explosions in the Sky” is the event that simultaneously memorializes and anticipates a Vietnam in-transition from French colonialism to U.S. imperialism and civil warfare. The video’s acceleration of the visual and conjoining of different temporal zones disrupt the linear and unitary conceptions of time and space, precepts of modern colonialist regimes and realist art. The unitary boundaries of the footage in time and space are punctured by the multiple temporal and spatial framings of the extradiegetic frame—the time and space of the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ, the time and space of Trương’s viewing of the footage, those of production, of each installation, of each viewing, the song’s production, its being sung in peace protests in the 1960s, its broadcast in war-time Vietnam, its translation in the 1990s, its re-translation into English by a Vietnamese speaker, the after-times. These puncturings and overlaps undermine the marking of the battle as the end of French colonialism in Vietnam, and point to the continuity of colonial/imperial geo-politics and the historical ties between French colonialism and U.S. imperialism, and the intimate overlaps of political economic discourse, technology and culture.

The aestheticization of war footage as a succession of black and white flashes points to the ambiguous pleasures of viewing and remembering. The horrors of war are hypnotic to watch

from a distance, flashes of brilliance in the night accompanied by a catchy song. The flatness of the images—in its refusal to differentiate between positive and negative spaces, light and darkness—and the continual presence of the frame unsettle the construction of reality and truthful sight in war footage, which are shot in real space and real time. The flatness of the images underscores the artist’s manipulation of archival materials, and their authority as historical records of French colonial enterprise, Vietnamese nation-building, and U.S. “benevolent” tutelage.

If the archives represent the official records of the nation, the inclusion of pop culture calls into question the making of collective memories and nation-states. The use of Simon and Garfunkle’s “The Sounds of Silence” as the soundtrack insists on an examination of the connections between French colonialism, Vietnamese domestic politics, U.S. imperialism, and Cold War geo-politics. The video’s rapid succession of flashes in the sky seem never-ending, each flash a repeated and yet slightly different version of the previous. Against that illusion of unitary space and time, the song continually loops back onto itself in its exploration of darkness and light, silence and protest.

Slippage occurs not only through time and space, but across the media of the visual and the audio. Temporality and space are multiple and mobile as they move among the coordinates of the footage, song and viewers. The slippages in time, space and language register with varying degrees of comprehensibility and incomprehensibility for different viewers and listeners. The bilingual soundtrack offers an ironic moment for thinking about the American involvement in Vietnam, and the cultural residue of war. The flashes of “vision”, “neon light”, “naked light” expressed in the song’s call to action enables the listener’s movement back in time in anticipation of the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam after the Battle of *Điên Biên Phủ*.

The translation of the lyrics into Vietnamese and back into English, its transnational displacement from 1960s America to 1960s Vietnam, and forward to 1990s Vietnamese America and beyond, present a multiply appropriated vehicle for reflection on the reach of U.S. imperialism, the post-war formation of diasporic Vietnamese communities, and the ambiguous power of art to incite protest and critical inquiry.

With the acceleration of time and the compression of space offered by digital technology and the intense flows of global capitalism, video art, as an artistic event in science, offers new possibilities for questioning the truthfulness of official record-keeping and nation-making. However, its aesthetic appeal, the rapture of the visual, is always subject to re-appropriation and commodification by nationalist discourses and global capitalism. Truong's multi-channel video *Adaptation Fever* points to the ambiguous redeployment of visual pleasure and historical memories by foregrounding flatness, repetition and incomprehensibility.

Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War (2012)

For the 30th anniversary of the Vietnam War, The Drawing Center in New York City had invited Đinh Q. Lê to participate in an exhibition titled *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War*. The curator, Catherine De Zegher, flew to Saigon to meet with him. While there, she invited him to join her for some studio visits in Hanoi. Little did Lê expect to meet a group of soldier-artists whose convictions enabled them to survive the brutality of the wars against the French and the U.S.-backed South Vietnam; they revealed a treasure trove of drawings in pencil, watercolor, ink and oil on paper. The artists had made hundreds of drawings during their years of deployment, sending their work up north to the Fine Arts Association in Hanoi or directly to their families. But many lost drawings along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, or to termites and deterioration in storage. After meeting them, Lê would start collecting their work.

For dOCUMENTA (13), he made a film interviewing some of the artists and included 100 drawings for an installation titled *Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War* (2012).^{ix}

The drawings are delicate portraits and scenes of soldiers and militia volunteers taking up position, men and women carrying supplies, resting in hammocks, finding shade under a tree, sitting on a mound of earth. Lê had seen similar drawings at the Fine Arts Museum in Saigon, but had dismissed them as propaganda despite their fine craftsmanship. “There’s no violence, no death, no destruction,” he says. “They’re very pretty. I thought there was a mandate from the [Hanoi] government that you can’t draw anything violent.”

The Vietnamese Communist Party’s top cultural theorist, Truong Chinh, had in the 1940s written two important theses that stated all art is propaganda, because all art embodies ideas and beliefs. The Party called upon and expected artists to use art as a tool to rally the people in the fight against the French, and later the U.S.-backed Republic of Vietnam. The majority of artists in the North embraced their new role, as part of their transformation from bourgeois to revolutionary, to rid the country of what they viewed as foreign aggressors. Their support of the Party mandate was much more willing during the Anti-French War of Resistance, when Southerners and Northerners fought the same enemy. It was during the intermittent years between the First and the Second Indochinese Wars that artists in the North questioned the Party’s unwavering control. The majority continued to support the Party when it mobilized to fight the U.S.-backed Southern regime, even if some were alarmed by the absolutist position. Those who resisted would be subjected to vociferous criticism and self-criticism sessions; the die-hards would be ostracized from society and spend the rest of their lives in poverty, if not imprisoned as well.^x

Created in the heyday of revolution, the drawings show the French colonial art training in the soft lines, curves and the focus on portraiture; the Party would later condemn this style in favor of socialist realist images of the collective and muscular bodies of the proletariat, peasants and soldiers. The artists whom Lê met had lived under French colonialism, and their sustained convictions moved him to reconsider his dismissal of the drawings as mere propaganda. What he saw and heard contrasted with his view that the younger generations of artists in Vietnam lack a clear direction and purpose. He would return to Hanoi to conduct in-depth interviews with some of the artists for dOCUMENTA (13).

In the context of socialist revolution in Vietnam, propaganda did not carry the negative connotation of heavy-handed didacticism. The majority of artists in the North shared the view that art could and should offer representations of heroism and humanity to rally the population to the war effort. The older generation in northern Vietnam, those in their 60s and above, continue to hold this belief, according to Lê. As did viewers in their 20s who had grown up under a much less overtly repressive regime; they viewed the film with wonder as a time capsule they have little knowledge of. In contrast, those viewers in their 30s, 40s and 50s hated the film because their knowledge of French colonialism and U.S. imperialism has been filtered through the state's educational and political institutions, which they see as corrupt and authoritarian.

“I still have complicated feelings about the artists. We know what happened after the war against the South, the horror that took place. These artists are not willing to visit those issues, and that makes me uncomfortable,” Lê says. “They lived under a particular environment for so long that they see things a certain way and have learned to censor themselves. If they ask questions, their world would crumble.”

Lê is making another film about a marginalized figure whose story complicates the officially acceptable narratives of these artists, which support the state's self-constructed image of itself as the inevitable defender of revolution and freedom from foreign aggression. This second film is about Trần Trung Tin, an actor-turned-artist who taught himself abstraction and refused to practice the state-mandated socialist realism. Unlike the tens of thousands of Northerners who went southward after the Geneva Accords split the country, he had migrated from the South to the North to support the communist vision of revolution. But that support was not unequivocal, and he spoke out when he disagreed with the Party's policies. The state placed him under surveillance and deprived him of livelihood—he would spend the rest of his life in isolation and poverty. “The drawings are completely abstract and for me an answer to the figurative and technical quality of the other drawings,” says Lê. “He entered abstraction in the 1950s. At that time, abstraction was considered bourgeoisie. His being ostracized and isolated allowed him freedom to develop his style. The film is a counter to the first one because it shows that even in that environment you still have a choice. It's about the conditions that shape your ideas and the choices that you make.” It is important to remember that Trần Trung Tin was one of the few Southerners who chose to migrate north after 1954, and killing him would have made him a martyr for the American and Southern regime's depiction of the communist state as totalitarian. It is not clear how much choice one has under any repressive regime, but occasionally the stories of the dispossessed erupt to the surface despite state efforts to obliterate them.

Erasure (2011)

In 2010, a ship carrying refugees from the Middle East crashed off Christmas Island. This was during the beginning of the revolts and civil wars that came to be known as the Arab Spring.

Touted in the Western media as a wave of uprisings against dictators, the turmoil displaced tens of thousands of people who sought asylum in Europe and Australia. Conservatives in these places did not see them as praiseworthy, but as criminal and illegal. Lê had read a newspaper article about the boat crash, and decided to create a project about the politics of immigration and asylum for a commission by Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in New South Wales.

The film and installation project is part of Lê's expanding research into issues of displacement and the right to home in various parts of the world. Recurring media and political narratives that represent asylum seekers as illegal trespassers strike Lê as racist and a gross misunderstanding or distortion of the Geneva Convention. The international agreement states that all people have the right to seek asylum, and signatory countries must process their requests. "The debate has been devoid of humanity. They forgot refugees are people. They're presented as criminals," Lê says.

Erasure reminds viewers that all countries comprise indigenous and immigrant populations, and that the criminalization of asylum seekers requires a selective narration of history based on racial assumptions. The installation consists of the debris of a wrecked ship scattered on an "ocean" of found photographs of people who had fled after the fall of South Vietnam. The photographs remind the viewer that refugees have families and lives and stories, and these particular images connect the history of the Vietnamese refugees with the current flight of people from the civil wars in the Middle East. In both cases, the boat is a shared vestige of their routes of flight. Lê had wanted a boat that was used by refugees entering Australia. But the country's quarantine laws require that the authorities burn the wooden structures and pull the metal ships out into the ocean and sink them. The mandate to burn led Lê to think about it as an act of erasing a people's history and presence, and the active amnesia that nationalist narratives

enact to exclude racialized minorities. In Australia, that amnesia began with the white colonizers' conquest of Aboriginal lands and the construction of the country as an unpopulated frontier founded by European settlers.

The politics of migration, displacement, colonialism and national amnesia in Australia can be traced back to Captain James Cook's reaching the southeastern coast in 1770. His voyage would lead to the British colonization of the continent; a replica of his ship *Endeavour* sits in Sydney Harbor as an embodiment of the official narrative of the founding of the nation. While it is a symbol of a new and civilized nation for the Australian mainstream, the schooner is a reminder of the violence of colonial dispossession and ongoing racism for the Aboriginal population. For his installation *Erasure*, Lê commissioned the building of three replicas of the schooner. He then had the replicas burned for filming. The narrative structure resists a linear trajectory, which defines stories of nation-building that move from native to modern. The ship burns and disintegrates, but the burning is never concluded—the film interrupts itself through editing that splices together discordant stages of burning. The burning of all traces of the ship is an unending repetition; the images continually loop back onto themselves. This constant labor and destruction echoes the work of nation-building, which requires continual maintenance through the repetition of commemorations, the endless reproduction of officially sanctioned narratives and the constant policing of who has the right to claim a home.

The past is never that distant, and it insists on intruding into the present. The sails that flutter as the schooner burns appear diaphanous at times; the edited scenes are a palimpsest of white sheets. These temporal and spatial layers are the pages of a book, the story of the nation that requires the annual trumpeting of national symbols and the repeated erasure of the ostracized. Michel Foucault argues that history is a dispersion of fragments and traces, remnants broken and

displaced, without an origin and without a coherent narrative to give them structure.^{xi} State definitions of the nation require the construction of a naturalized account of the past and the imagining of a unified whole. This entails the suppression of alternative and divergent representations and understandings of home. As Lê traces routes of memory and migration, he will make visible the debris of different ships for each installation of *Erasure*.^{xii}

ⁱ United States Census Bureau, *2010 Census Data*, Web, Accessed 10 June 2014.

ⁱⁱ Republic of China (Taiwan), *General Statistical Analysis Report*, National Statistics, Web, Accessed 12 August 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ As an example, at a conference called *Agent Orange: Landscape, Body, Image*, the former Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the 11th National Assembly of Vietnam, Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh asserted that South Vietnamese had been overly “paranoid” about persecution by the communist government, and it was due to their paranoia that they fled the country in droves. *Agent Orange: Landscape, Body, Image*, University of California, Riverside, May 8, 2008. See also Nguyễn-Võ Thu-Huong, “Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?” *Amerasia Journal* 31:2 (2005): 157-175.

^{iv} Mark Phillip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

^v The few studies on diaspora, war and visual culture include Kobena Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts/MIT Press, 2008; and Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

^{vi} Information about the making of *Silence Can Be Quiet* and *Adaptation Fever* comes from interviews I conducted with Hồng-An Trương on 28 December 2008, 31 May 2009, and 11 August 2014.

^{vii} The phrase “nation and narration” comes from Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

^{viii} Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988; Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 2nd Ed., Trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 1993/2000; and Damian Sutton, *Photography Cinema Memory: The Crystal Image of Time*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

^{ix} Information about the making of *Light and Belief* and *Erasure*, as well as quotations of Đinh Q. Lê, come from my interview with the artist, 11 August 2014.

^x See Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002/2005.

^{xi} Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York and London: Routledge, 1969/1972.

^{xii} For a biennale in Cochin, India, Lê will restage *Erasure* with a boat made there. And he will bring a boat from Vietnam for his mid-career exhibition at Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.