

CATHERINE EARL

Clashing Memories of the 20th Century: Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism and the Next Generation in Post-conflict Vietnam

In an increasingly globalised world, a generation after the end of the Second Indochinese War, a conflict known in the west as "The Vietnam War", clashing memories of wartime experiences have a profound impact on identity making and meaning making of "Vietnam". "Vietnam" is a term in English which is often – even now 40 years on – conflated with the second Indochinese war, not the post-conflict, post-colonial nation located in mainland Southeast Asia.

Experiences of "Vietnam" as a transnational object of memory in the mid- to late-twentieth century influence how commemorations are manifested – as a badge of honour or shame, as survivor guilt, as forgetting, as national monuments - in Vietnam and beyond, especially in the United States. For Vietnamese, national identity in the postcolonial era was contested, divided between the communist northern republic and capitalist southern republic. For outsiders, national identity was contested, divided between service and patriotism, conscription, and conscientious objection.

Born after the war, Vietnam's next generation have learnt versions of the war in school textbooks and at home living with their elders. The children of Ho Chi Minh City's urban middle classes, however, are increasingly isolated/insulated from past war experience with their focus on economic development and future building. Outside Vietnam, children of the Vietnamese diaspora are influenced by their parents' trauma and political views clashing with their own experiences of travelling, working and visiting family in Vietnam. Children of veterans in the United States, Australia and New Zealand also grow up with views coloured by their parents' (usually fathers') trauma and political views.

This paper explores negotiations of clashing national and cosmopolitan memories of the war from diverse perspectives including Vietnamese veterans from both sides of the conflict, Vietnamese civilians including children, American and Australian and New Zealand veterans and nurses with in-country experiences as well as those involved in "anti-Vietnam" protest movements.

Dr Catherine Earl, Adjunct Research Fellow, School of Applied Media & Social Sciences, Monash University