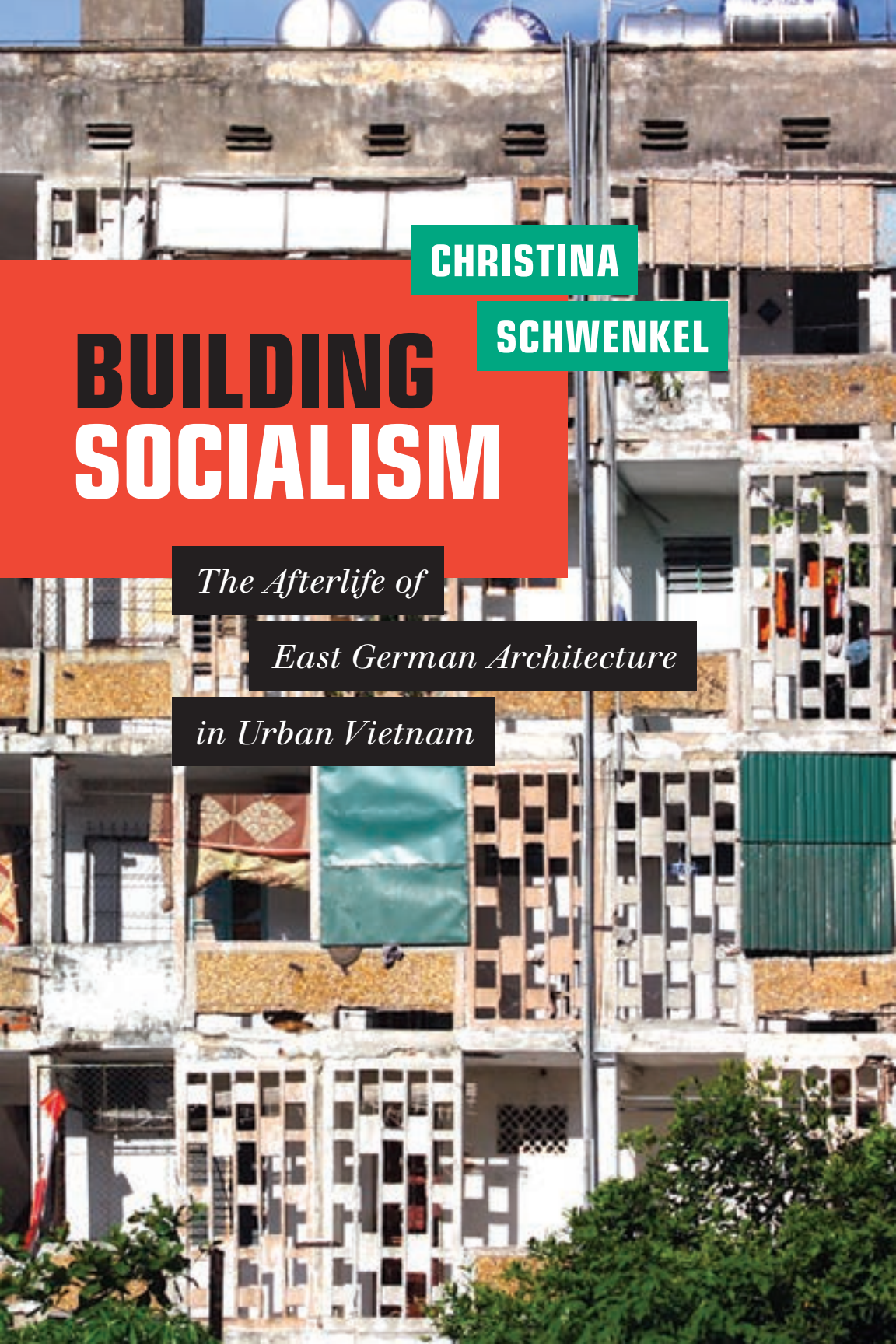

CHRISTINA SCHWENKEL

BUILDING SOCIALISM

The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam

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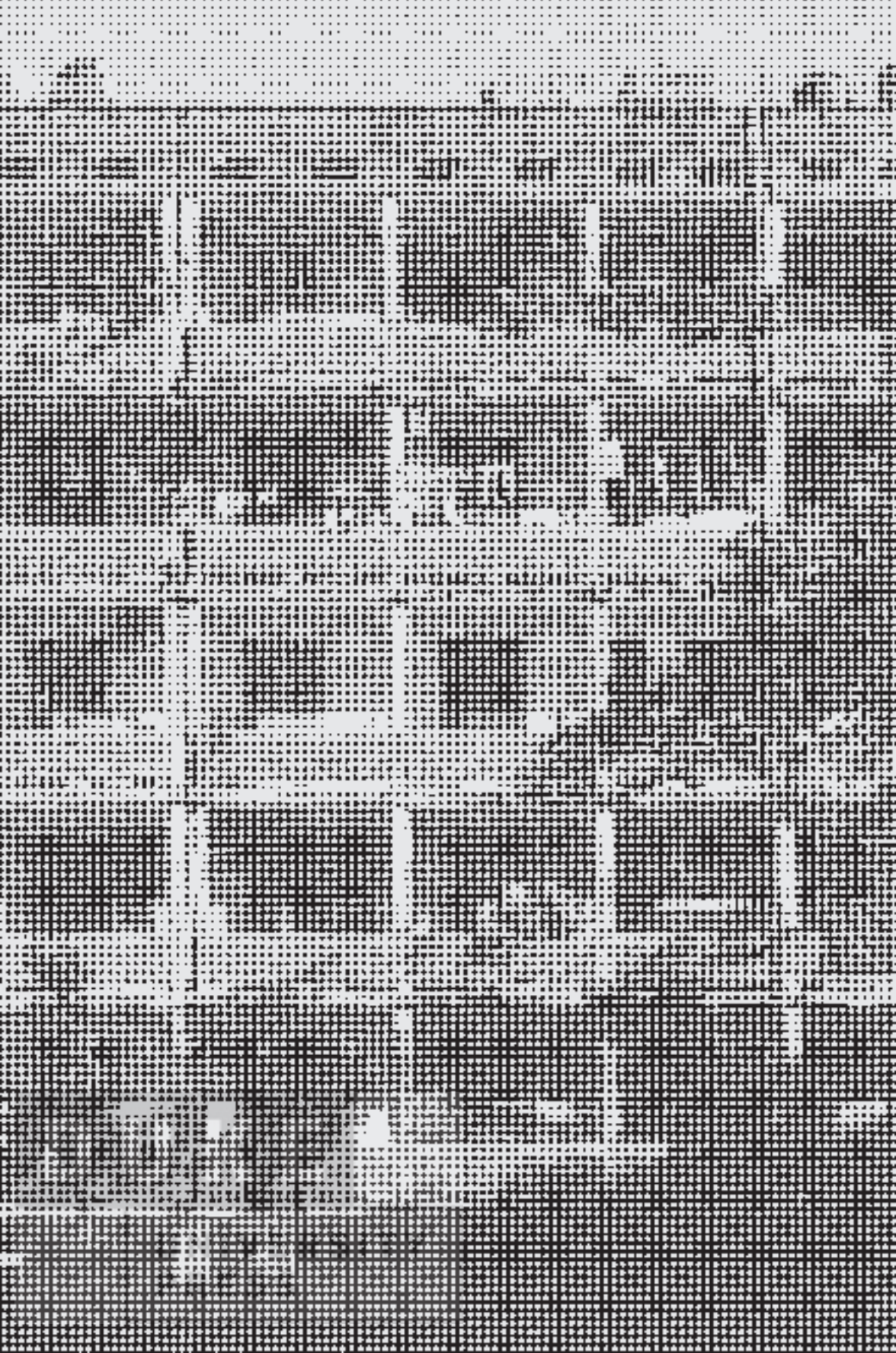

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The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam

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Cover art: Façade of block C7 in Quang Trung housing estate, Vinh City, Vietnam, 2011. Photo by Christina Schwenkel.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDA	bomb damage assessment
BArch	Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CACTA	Combat Air Activities
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
LOC	lines of communication
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NAPA	Nghệ An Provincial Archives
NPL	Nixon Presidential Library
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SED	Socialist Unity Party (GDR)
SEADAB	Southeast Asia Database
USSR	Soviet Union
SAPMO	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR)
CP	Văn Phòng Chính Phủ (Collection of the Office of the Government)
PTT	Văn Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng (Collection of the Prime Minister's Office)
VIỆT MINH	Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh (League for the Independence of Vietnam)
VND	Vietnam đồng
VNA	Vietnam National Archives

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

Vietnamese is a tonal language written in an adapted version of the Latin alphabet with additional diacritical marks to signify tones and vowel qualities. Without these diacritics, the meaning of a Vietnamese word is ambiguous. For this reason I have chosen to include diacritical marks in this book to most accurately represent terms, locations, and people's names. However, at the same time, I recognize that diacritics may prove distracting to those unfamiliar with the conventions of the language. Taking into concern both specialists and generalists who may read this book, I opted to keep all Vietnamese diacritical marks except in widely known geographical names such as Vietnam, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Saigon. Vietnamese who have migrated to other countries often drop the diacritics from their proper names. I thus refer to individuals according to their own practice and according to their choice in name order (in Vietnam, family names are placed first). While I recognize potential inconsistencies in my own practice here (for example, Ho Chi Minh City versus Hồ Chí Minh Trail), I feel this is the most reliable solution to make the text accessible to all audiences. All translations from German and Vietnamese primary sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

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My fascination with modernist ruins took me from Buffalo, where I grew up, to Berlin, after the fall of the Wall, to Vinh. Needless to say, it has been a long journey, during which I have incurred enormous social debt. Over the course of this research, I have been the recipient of a humbling amount of goodwill, generosity, and gifts—of time, knowledge, wisdom, friendship, and resources—that I will never be able to fully reciprocate. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the residents of Quang Trung housing complex in Vinh (who will remain anonymous to protect their privacy and confidentiality), who opened their doors and invited me into their remarkable, resilient community. Several people, young and old, who befriended and mentored me have passed since my fieldwork, a testament to the enduring, incapacitating effects of toxic war on their bodies. Their spirit and passion for history, and for sharing knowledge, animate the following pages. It is to their memory that I dedicate this book.

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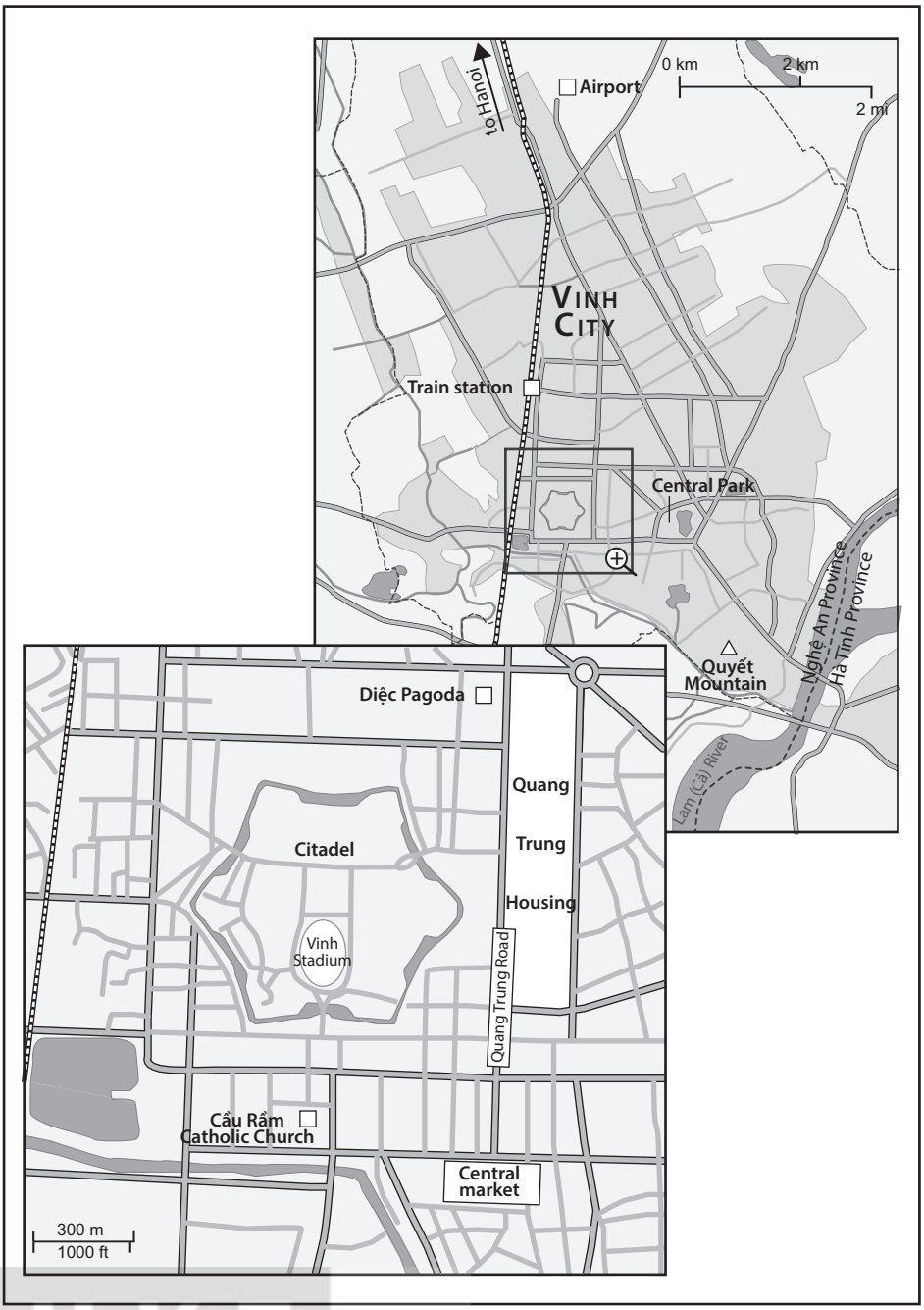
↑ Map of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with field site. Cartography by Jutta Turner.



↑ Map of Vinh City, with close up of Quang Trung housing and its environs. Cartography by Jutta Turner.

INTRODUCTION

September 15, 2010, was the first day of my fieldwork in Quang Trung, the sprawling housing estate in the center of Vinh. Designed in collaboration with East German (German Democratic Republic or GDR) architects, and named after the eighteenth-century emperor and founder of the city, the estate's radically different typology signified an entirely novel form of urbanism and way of dwelling that followed the end of aerial assaults in 1973. I had moved into my fourth-floor unit in block C2 a few days earlier and was making the rounds with my research assistant, an anthropology instructor at Vinh University. Nine resident wardens (*khối trưởng*) oversaw the complex's nineteen five-story buildings, and I wanted to introduce myself and the project to each one. Our first stop was ward 1. Residents located the warden with whistles and shouts; he in turn called the ward secretary, a local architect of Quang Trung who would become one of my main interlocutors. Within minutes, we four were in the ward's community center (*nhà văn hóa*, literally "cultural house"), poring over government documents.

"Here, you should make copies of these," the warden urged, handing me a dossier of redevelopment action plans that would require the relocation of residents in the three housing blocks under his jurisdiction. "We [tenants] are not in agreement with these proposals," he announced, pointing to discontent with urban policy that denied their entitlements. With that statement, the warden shifted from government bureaucrat to concerned citizen and offered my first glimpse into how tensions between residents and the state manifested through built forms, especially with impending changes in property rights to the buildings.

Thanking him, I ran to the print shop in the middle of the housing complex, located in the trade center, also GDR-designed, that had been turned into a public library with support from the Gates Foundation and was soon to be demolished to make way for a modern cinema complex. I had spent my mornings there already, meeting the librarians and examining their archival collections. The elderly male residents, some of whom came in to read the daily paper, had told me the utopian origin story of Quang

Trung: how the now decayed blocks had once been idyllic and iconic, offering shelter and infrastructure—and an identity as "modern"—after years of privation and wartime evacuation from the city. After the U.S. air war, the building of Quang Trung marked the dawn of modernity for the ravaged city, and for those individuals fortunate enough to receive user rights to a self-contained unit.

Scholars have recognized the ways in which affects—as collective intensities that manifest through encounter (Thrift 2004, 62)—are entangled with politics and state making, and certainly the sentiments the seniors expressed to me embodied a familiar register of emotion deemed necessary for postwar nation building. As I demonstrate in this book, affects, such as hope in a brighter future of peace and prosperity, were closely tied to transformative materiality: to modern buildings and their plans and construction technologies, which projected future possibilities once unimaginable in the misery of aerial warfare. This affective community was of course fragmented and, like politics, messy (Leheny 2018, 5). Almost as quickly, I learned that not everyone shared the same modernist vision of urban futurity, and that some people had their doubts about the rebuilt environment and the lifestyle it promoted. As I neared the copy shop, a woman who introduced herself as Bích[1]—who, I later discovered, had been among those who built Quang Trung with her hands—approached me and said candidly, "We didn't want to live in these buildings. We were forced to move in" (*bị bắt buộc lên*).

Bích's unexpected counternarrative of involuntary resettlement in *undesirable*, alien buildings, and her detachment from their "cluster of promises" (Berlant 2011, 23), would ultimately transform the direction of my fieldwork on the afterlife of utopian design meant to advance the nation and improve the population through the rebuilt environment. In the late 1970s, Vinh had been an aspiring model socialist city, whose plan for modernist mass housing was bold and unprecedented in its scale and form. Built from the detritus of destruction, the city and its housing assumed a range of conflicting meaning for designers, builders, authorities, and residents, even though framed as progressing toward a common good: socialism. The coexisting affects and temporalities I encountered even during my first days in Quang Trung alerted me to both the positive and negative valences assigned to the buildings as material signs of futures dreamed and denied. These changed over time, space, and scales from global to regional, and even from one area of the complex to another. They also changed with gender and social class within each building, despite claims of egalitarian living conditions.

This book analyzes the heterogeneous meanings and affects attached to the assemblage of buildings and interconnecting spaces that comprise the modernist fantasy of *khu chung cư Quang Trung*, as well as the erosion of that fantasy. Victor Buchli, an anthropologist of architecture, has pointed to the inherently unstable and contested nature of built forms (2013, 67–68). Likewise, I am interested in the temporality of meanings that emerged when different social actors, both Vietnamese and German, envisioned, encountered, and used Vinh's built environment as lived and represented space. These meanings and their affective registers reflected the collective capacity to aspire to emancipation from war and privation on the one hand (Appadurai 2004), and to imagine and build a more just world on the other. At the same time, this form of "transnational urbanism" (Smith 2000, 5) outside the workings of capitalism was steeped in power inequalities and contested spatial practices that disrupt the narrative of seamless global "flows" commonly deployed in literature on networked "global cities."

Quang Trung was a disorienting space of contradictions, caught between global utopian ambitions and local dystopic conditions. For some, the housing estate was a material expression of global connectivity with East Germany and stood as a symbol of its humanitarian beneficence. The buildings were intended to speed up time by overcoming war-induced underdevelopment to establish Vinh at the forefront of Vietnam's urban modernity. As visual evidence of inclusion in the socialist world economy, they affirmed the legitimacy of the Vietnamese state and the Communist Party—as well as that of East Germany—by showing the ability of a caring government to fulfill its obligations to citizens. The estate's unique design enabled authorities to govern daily life more effectively and to discipline subjects through modern infrastructure aimed at improving well-being. At the same time, the radical reorganization of space in ways that departed from previous modes of dwelling afforded tenants new sensory, social, and spatial experiences of the city that were not always desired or welcomed—as Bích informed me outside the copy shop. Like in Brasilia, Brazil (Holston 1989), residents appropriated modernist forms in ways that alarmed authorities, who dreaded a return to backwardness and the loss of national prestige that came from being "more" modern. For some, this new spatial and architectural order assured a hopeful future—of civilization, experimentation, contemporaneity, and material betterment. Many found this urban subjectivity appealing; others like Bích rejected it.

All of this was ephemeral, even though designed to be eternal. While capitalism thrives on obsolescence and the destruction of the old to make way for the new—what scholars identify as "creative destruction," based on

Schumpeter's (1942) postulation—socialism was more invested in durability and displaying the perpetuity of the state through magnificent built forms that would mobilize affect for nation building. Pride and optimism dissolved as the buildings decayed prematurely, however, creating a landscape of inhabited socialist ruins—the material remains of a future yet to come. By the time I arrived, Quang Trung was no longer a grand achievement but a sign of state neglect and failure to deliver on its promises of progress through modern infrastructure. The timelessness of socialist construction, its ability to transmit social and political values into the future through its material legacy, was indeed "timed out"—and affective registers changed accordingly. The hope attached to "utopian materialism" dissipated quickly (Anderson 2006, 700).

This book uses modernist architecture and planning as an entry point into examining socialist nation building in Vietnam as Western utopian fantasy and the attrition of that fantasy, which became "ever *more* fantasmatic" over time, as Lauren Berlant observed of Reagan-era neoliberalism (2011, 11), though her argument resonates with the historical conditions of socialism but with their own material effects and affects. These fantasies of a better urban future, I show, shaped the contours of political worlds (Rose 1996, 79) while forging a collective will to build a new society. As in socialist town planning elsewhere, Vinh's rebuilt environment played an important role in the "transformation of a largely rural population into an urban proletariat" (Fehérváry 2012, 621; Lebow 2013). In Vinh, the state's civilizing project was especially concerned with regulating the urban conduct of rural female migrants, like Bích, who did not display a proper, forward-looking sensibility. Not everyone accepted universalist imaginaries of the good life that traveled from the socialist North to the postcolonial South. Instead, people re-envisioned utopian ideals in an effort to decolonize knowledge and technology. Utopian thought also ran up against harsh material realities that impeded the realization of urban plans.

To better understand the productive tensions between hope and fantasy that coalesced around traveling technologies, this study poses a number of questions about what Bloch has called "creative anticipation" and the horizons of utopian possibility (1986, 202): How did alternative imaginaries of the future city subvert top-down planning and foreign blueprints for urban living? In what ways did the housing estate, as a dramatically different form of spatial organization, redefine political and affective relationships between citizens and the state? To what extent and effect did Vietnamese architects and authorities contest East German standardized design and spatial practices? Quang Trung tenants were not docile subjects, nor were the buildings immutable

forms. Rather, tenants remade their social and material worlds according to spatial logics and cultural practices that expressed their own aspirations for urban futurity. Tracing the building of Vietnam's first planned city and what happened to it after the experts left, I argue that underlying the ambivalent and often unpredictable responses to modernist architecture and what I call "unplanned obsolescence" were gendered anxieties about modernity and the future of socialism itself.

MODELING THE FUTURE

The explosion of social scientific research on "global," "world," or "mega" cities in recent years cannot be disentangled from the oft-cited figure that more than half the world's population now lives in urban or urbanizing areas. Indeed, projections of—and anxieties about—rampant urban growth in the global South fuel much of this "metrocentrist" tendency (Bunnell and Maringanti 2010). And yet, as urban theorist John Friedmann (2010) pointed out, smaller, poorer, and less cosmopolitan cities account for most contemporary urban growth around the world. Moreover, scholarship on the production of urban space often takes neoliberalism as axiomatic while disregarding hundreds of socialist-era cities and "new towns" where capital accumulation was *not* the primary mode of social organization. Nonetheless, these other models for organizing society (and achieving industrial productivity) are critical to understanding post–Cold War transformations to urban space, built forms, and daily life. In this book, decentering the logic of capital reveals the "multiplicity of experienced modernities" (Pred and Watts 1992, xiv) and political fantasies at the intersection of universalist and nationalist aspirations to *socialist* modernization as transnational social, material, and affective practice.

This historical ethnography of the aftermath of urban warfare—of Vinh's postwar reconstruction with foreign material and technological assistance—contributes to postcolonial urban scholarship by showing how an "ordinary" city in north central Vietnam entwined with other forms of global connectivity to build a just and emancipated society (Robinson 2006). This particular historical moment and experimental model of Asian urbanism in the service of socialist revolution remains a gap in the literature on the worlding of cities that decenter the West (for example, in the pioneering volume by Roy and Ong [2011]). As with capitalist urbanization, state-led socialist modernization and projected patterns of industrial development shaped urban forms across African, Asian, Eastern European, Soviet, and Latin American countries. Small regional

cities, in particular, served as motors of industrial growth. Indeed, city making was an iteration of the "cultural Cold War," as I outline in this book.

It is only recently that scholars have attended to the global circulations of architectural forms and planning practices among socialist countries in the industrialized North and the decolonizing South, or between the "Second" and "Third" Worlds (Stanek 2012). A growing body of architectural history examines these prolific—and often Orientalist—creations as built forms or spatial representation, but not as lived spaces of social practice, a distinction made by Lefebvre (1991) in his theorization of urban space. Moreover, this history has been written largely from the standpoint of the global North, and it often deploys passive metaphors—such as the "export" or "transfer" of knowledge and technology—while denying the agency of beneficiaries. Esra Akcan proposes the more active term "translation" to highlight the dynamic cultural process of "transformation during the *act of transportation*" (2012, 3, emphasis added). While this approach to traveling urban forms is attentive to power asymmetries, it confines the exercise of countervailing power to elite actors involved in transmission and "assimilation." This study expands the scope of Akcan's "translation" of rational built forms to also include the *habitation* and *use* of modernist architecture imbued with affect. As Ash Amin has argued, models of the "good city" intended to improve human welfare "never travel unmodified across space and time" (2006, 1010), nor do they travel devoid of emotional investments.

Vinh's architecture and urban design formed the basis of a celebrated narrative of Vietnam's rebound through collective international effort—until infrastructure broke down and unplanned obsolescence set in. This observation is important for several reasons. The first has to do with urban scale: provincial capitals and regional cities like Vinh have attracted little scholarly attention in Vietnam, compared with the larger and wealthier metropolises of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (but see Endres 2019). Anthropological scholarship itself remains focused more on the fast pace of change in major cities, or on tensions between "tradition" and "modernity" in rural (often ethnic minority) villages, than on so-called secondary cities.[2] Second, scholarship on Vietnam has tended to leap over the subsidy years (*thời bao cấp*) of socialist reconstruction, which entailed crushing poverty and privation for the population. It is as if history involved only "war" until 1975 and then "reforms" after 1986 (known as *Đổi mới*). Some scholars have gone so far as to claim, quite inaccurately, that there was no urban policy or concerted effort at urban planning after the war with the United States until *Đổi mới* (see Smith and Scarpaci 2000). This flawed narrative of urban stagnation reproduces an image of Vietnam as

isolated, static, and stuck in time until finally saved by capitalism. The discursive denial of synchronous temporality that was central to racial ontologies (Zeiderman 2016, 181), that is, presenting Vietnamese as living in an earlier historical time, was also a *material* objective of aerial warfare: deny people their modern world by bombing them "back to the Stone Age," as General Curtis E. LeMay warned. Accounts of stagnation also overlook the *global* scope and scale of *multidirectional* circulations of goods, people, finance, technology, and ideas. Socialist mobilities to access labor markets, educational opportunities, technical expertise, and cultural exchanges brought Vietnamese to new corners of the world, as well as new "friends" to Vietnam (Schwenkel 2015d). Collectively, these propelled "socialist transformation" and helped people make sense of their encounters with the world both at home and overseas (Bayly 2008; Schwenkel 2014b).

General neglect of the period of socialist reconstruction has left a gap in our understanding of the human experience of bombing and how people in northern Vietnam collectively rebuilt their social and material worlds after a decade of U.S. air strikes. This book shows how modernist mass housing as a techno-utopian solution to the rapid repopulation of postwar cities profoundly transformed urban landscapes and people's social and sensory encounters with the city. As a technology of governance over the urban environment, this architectural modality was reworked and adapted in Vinh to build the material and ideological foundations of socialism—and to subvert it. Because there exists no sustained ethnographic examination of this form of sociospatial organization, often referred to as *nhà tập thể* or collective housing, and the subjectivities and social practices it generated, this book makes a much-needed contribution to the literature on socialist urbanisms, particularly in the context of Vietnam. Today, this progressively modified built environment faces the same fate as other collapsing dreamworlds: demolition and disappearance from contemporary urban life.

Few people outside Vietnam know either the history of Vinh's annihilation or how a utopian vision for Vietnam's model socialist city arose from its ruins. That Vinh was chosen as the site for urban experimentation and exemplary modernization may seem ironic. Today, guidebooks and Western journalists have branded Vinh the "least attractive city" in Vietnam.[3] Foreigners passing through often smirk at its crumbling "Soviet" façade, unaware of *other* modernizing forces in Vietnam—in this case East Germany, which helped to rebuild the city and provide social and technical infrastructure around the country. Travelers to Vinh also often fail to notice the cement logo "VĐ" (Việt Đức, or Vietnam-Germany) above building entryways within the housing estate.

As a secular stand-in for altars (which residents would add later), VĐ was a good-luck charm, meant to shield inhabitants from harm and bring fortune, like other talismans placed in transitional spaces. Việt Đức and its inverse, Đức Việt, have since become branded icons (the most famous example being domestic-produced sausages), imprinting the history of anti-imperialist solidarity onto desired capitalist commodities.

The ability of an historical object, like a logo or a building, to transmit collective affects across time and space—what Walter Benjamin referred to as "aura" and its afterlife (1969b)—is one critical focal point of this work. The strong auratic effect of the rebuilt city, its transmission of utopian impulses, opened up imaginative possibilities for what the future could be. But when capitalist forces (investors, tourists, development agencies) assigned a negative valence to this material history, the aura declined into a call for demolition (Hansen 2008, 337–38). This negative valence inspired defiance among residents.

The great social experiment that made Vinh a global contact zone was not unknown in East Germany, which was also heavily cloaked in Cold War tropes of isolation and anachronism. A new generation of German studies scholars has challenged the narrative of stagnancy and boundedness by shifting the scholarly gaze away from the capitalist West as the benchmark of modernity.[4] Instead, these authors look toward countries in the postcolonial South, where political fantasies of progress, development, and technological modernity were persuasive though racially and politically fraught. These mostly historical works tend to privilege East German viewpoints, however, or represent postcoloniality through the lens of German archival research. Seldom are these studies methodologically transnational—that is, linguistically and culturally fluent enough to allow for consultation of primary sources and discussions with key informants in the postcolonial countries themselves.[5] Rarely, too, are they ethnographic. Despite subverting dominant epistemologies and expanding the scope of GDR history beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, this growing body of research has not sufficiently afforded subalterns the opportunity to speak.

This scholarship thus lacks analysis of the deeper meanings attached to complex and contested nation-building projects and their lived experiences and legacies. Neglecting their agency too easily configures socialist citizens as docile subjects and construes cooperation schemes as foreign impositions, if not neocolonialism. These scholars are correct to highlight the role of a strong state and the power asymmetries that undergirded "anticolonial solidarity." GDR assistance to Vietnam was not purely altruistic but driven by national interest

and a quest for international legitimacy (for both countries). Even so, limiting the framework of solidarity to a state-defined "politics machine" (Weis 2011, 367) overlooks how ideologies of solidarity were *felt* and *lived* as ethical practice and meaningful social action. My approach recognizes the political as affective, and affect as political (Massumi 2015), to understand the seductive appeal and emancipatory potential of East German planning to transcend material ruin and the "residual affects" of war (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 5). Who negotiated and translated utopian, future-oriented design, how, and to what spatial, cultural, and temporal effects are the questions that motivate this ethnographic study of the affects that coalesced around the rapid building and the slow material disintegration of socialism.

THE "RED CITY" AS HISTORICAL FRONTIER

In many ways, Vinh is a frontier city, a seemingly untamed place where the civilizing projects of past empires remained contested and incomplete.[6] Geographically, it lies between the mountains and the sea on the north central coast of Nghệ An, Vietnam's largest province.[7] Historically, this isolated region existed on the margins of power and often served as battlefront between warring forces. After independence from Chinese domination in 938 AD and through the fourteenth century, it was a contested border territory between Đại Việt to the north and Champa to the south (Li 1998, 201–21). During the Trịnh-Nguyễn wars (1627–1672), the Vĩnh Doanh River (now Lam or Cả River) served as a natural defense between feudal clans (Chu 1998, 13–14). A century later, in 1788, this river basin played an important role in the Tây Sơn dynasty. Nguyễn Huệ (Quang Trung) declared this sacred hinterland of benevolent animal spirits—equidistant from Thăng Long (today, Hanoi) and Phú Xuân (today, Huế)—as the new Imperial Phoenix Capital, or Phượng Hoàng Trung Đô (Ninh 2008, 44–45; Dutton 2006, 109–10). Although Quang Trung's grand political center atop Quyết Mountain was never realized (he died soon after proposing the new capital site), his declaration changed the course of Nghệ An's history. In Vietnamese historiography, Quang Trung's vision became Vinh's origin story, ironically foretelling a future of aspirational city building that would face recurring and unforeseen impediments. In this myth, 1788 is the year of the founding of Vinh (then, Vĩnh Doanh), and Emperor Quang Trung is its creator.[8]

While the region enjoys abundant natural resources (Ninh 2003), its remoteness, as an effect of power (Piot 2014, 369), left it economically undeveloped. The teleological notion of underdevelopment has formed the basis of

collective impressions about the "character" (*tính cách*) of people who live in Nghệ An (see Chu 2004). In my experience, the province is, more than any other, an object of temporal speculation. In literature and popular imagination, Nghệ An is both ahead of its time and lagging behind, as a paradox of hardship, provincialism, and intellectualism.[9] It is the cradle of the Vietnamese revolution and birthplace of the country's most celebrated scholars and nationalists, including the poet Nguyễn Du and President Hồ Chí Minh. This space of alterity is depicted as a land of suffering (*đất khổ*). Its harsh climate, bouts of warfare, persistent oppression, and natural catastrophes have produced a strong regional identity with distinctive culture traits (*nết văn hóa riêng*), which includes *ví giặm* folk music, with its rhymed satirical couplets. The people are considered dauntless, hardworking, erudite, and rebellious, who live according to their own rule of law. Rumors that feudal lords sent banished rebels and criminals to this wild backwater lend credence to its image as unruly and hostile to outsiders. Guidebooks advise tourists to pass through quickly. The press depicts Vinh as an edgy city prone to violence: mobs lynch dog thieves, and girls film attacks on their schoolmates with their phones to post on social media.[10] The hinterland is thus both object of admiration and source of endless apprehension, triggering both affection and dread in the national imaginary.

Nghệ An's status as borderland changed in 1802, with Vietnam's unification under Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, or Emperor Gia Long. Following the lead of his adversary, Quang Trung, the new emperor sought to establish an administrative center midway between Phú Xuân and Thăng Long, a few kilometers from the not-yet-built Phoenix capital. This brought the renegade frontier under the imperial gaze of the new dynasty. Two years later, construction on the hexagon-shaped citadel (*thành*) began in the Vĩnh Doanh delta, the same year as building began on the imperial city of Huế. Nghệ An was one of the only other sites of planned imperial expansion (other citadels came later),[11] which attests to its strategic importance to the hegemon. The walled fortress established the region as a political center, as Quang Trung had once imagined. This set into motion the slow urbanization of what eventually became the city of Vinh. Citadels require public services and infrastructure, which in turn require labor. The lands outside the royal gates attracted migrants, traders, and craftspeople. No longer solely dependent on a subsistence economy, they formed a small *thành thị*—a term that suggests the synthesis of imperial administration (*thành*) with market trade (*thị*) that gave rise to early Vietnamese "cities" (Ngô 2000, 205). As the population increased, so too did ethnic stratification (Woodside 1971, 32). The arrival of Chinese (and, to a lesser extent, Indian)

traders, European businessmen, and, after 1885, French colonists accelerated the frontier's conversion into an international hub of trade and commerce.[12]

Where Gia Long saw political possibility, the French saw economic opportunity. The settler fantasy that Nghệ An was rich in untapped resources further transformed the region through land dispossession and expansion of capitalist modes of production. French officials merged three neighboring townships (*thị xã*) into one colonial municipality, Ville de Vinh–Ben Thuy, which became the largest industrial center in Annam (central Vietnam) but had the lowest standard of living (Nguyễn 2008). The maritime port of Bến Thủy was the focal point of industrial development, with dockyards, a sawmill, a match factory, and a power plant at the base of the planned Phoenix city, while the railway workshop at Trường Thi provided thousands of jobs to an emergent class of landless wage workers (Del Testa 2007). In 1930–1931, these industries became critical sites for the strikes and uprisings that the "Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviets" carried out across the region, earning Vinh the proud moniker "red city" (*thành phố đỏ*).[13] The area around the citadel remained the commercial and administrative center of Ville de Vinh–Ben Thuy, and foreign elites enjoyed the benefits of newly built infrastructure inaccessible to most Vietnamese. As it did in other colonized territories in Southeast Asia, modern infrastructure became a cornerstone of domination that denied full citizenship to indigenous populations (Mrázek 2002). Following Hồ Chí Minh's call to "phá hoại để kháng chiến" (destroy to resist) during the First Indochina War (1946–1954), the VIỆT MINH's scorched-earth policy targeted colonial infrastructure and, along with French (and American) air raids, gutted the built environment, bringing an end to urban capital accumulation.[14]

Emancipation from colonialism and the overthrow of capitalism allowed for a critical reimagining of Vinh as a center of socialist modernization. An emphasis on manufacturing and heavy industry accompanied the "advance to socialism," aided by Soviet and Chinese expertise. By 1961, Vinh boasted sixty state enterprises, including the largest power plant in central Vietnam (Phạm and Bùi 2003, 139) and a new university. That same year, its status changed from township (*thị xã*) to city (*thành phố*), marking its regional ascendancy. Novel built forms populated the landscape, with new infrastructure intended to be universal. Rehabilitation (*khôi phục*) increased both global and national connectivity as workers produced goods for export to socialist bloc countries and Vietnamese students traveled overseas to study in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The completion of repairs to the railway line connecting Vinh with Hanoi in May 1964 affirmed the integration of the hinterland into the national economy. More than five thousand residents turned out, along

with officials from Hanoi, to welcome the inaugural train.[15] The train's successful journey to Vinh symbolized growth and progress, not unlike the colonial railway inauguration in 1905 (Del Testa 1999). Even so, Vinh's location as the end station signified its remoteness and disconnection (as well as the division of the country, since the train could not travel farther south). By the start of the U.S. air war (1964–1973), Vinh was poised yet again as a border territory—a frontline to the socialist North and launching pad for incursions into the U.S.-backed South.

American airpower abruptly halted socialist transformation and reversed the course of Vinh's modernization. As a technology to deny shared contemporaneity, U.S. bombing swiftly undid the material achievements of a decade of reconstruction, only two months after that celebrated arrival of the inaugural train. Once the United States began carrying out its threats to return Vietnam to an earlier period of evolutionary time, Vinh found itself once more ruined, empty, and cut off from the rest of the country. Its forced deurbanization required a new savior—a task that fell to East Germany, to the "children of Marx" who aided collective efforts to rebuild the "homeland of Hồ Chí Minh." Technological assistance would not only set Vinh back on the path to progress but also transform the remote frontier city into a global contact zone and showcase of socialist civilization.

FIELDWORK: COLD WAR POSITIONINGS

One cold winter day in 2011, I drove into the spacious grounds of the Nghệ An Provincial Museum on land that once had housed the colonial prison. The guard motioned for me to turn off the engine and walk my motorbike to the parking area. "Where are you from?" he called. "Are you Soviet" (*Liên Xô*)? I smiled and shook my head, accustomed to this socialist-era holdover term for foreigners (akin to *Tây*, or Westerner, used commonly today).[16] "German?" he guessed. "Không phải" (no), I laughed. He thought for a moment, and then asked if I was *Tiệp*, or Czechoslovakian, another obsolete term (now *Séc*, for Czech Republic). His attempt to read my body through Cold War geography suggested a history of *học nghề*, or vocational training in the former Eastern Bloc. I finally gave in and said, cautiously, "Người Mỹ" (American). He snickered. "American? No, I don't believe you" (*Không tin*). As if I would willingly adopt the nationality of a country that had, without remorse, systematically annihilated the very place where we were conversing!

Because I was a white, Vietnamese-speaking, child-free, American woman with a German surname and an absent partner (working elsewhere in Viet-

nam), my residence in Quang Trung was a conundrum for many people living there. My presence signified many "firsts": the first foreigner to conduct sustained ethnographic research in Vinh and to live in Quang Trung, and the first American (and second foreigner) to gain access to the provincial archives. I was also the first American that most people had met; the few exceptions included those who had apprehended American POWs shot down over Vinh. Local police introduced themselves, shared their version of Vinh's history, and reminded me to register; after that, they left me alone, although they likely continued to keep tabs on me. As we drank coffee together, the police chief briefly expressed concern about my security—a shell-shocked veteran might have a flashback and attack me—before he moved on to other topics, such as his passion for Buddhist temples. It became clear early on that people from all social groups, for different reasons, were eager to speak with a foreigner who, in turn, eagerly listened to their stories. They deployed different tactics, however, to reconcile the fact that I came from the country that had destroyed their homes, families, livelihoods, and city—and then had the gall to return to search for the remains of their own.

Many chose to "forget" that I carried an American passport. Given my German heritage, in-laws, social connections (for example, to the experts who had helped rebuild Vinh), and language fluency, some coded me as *ethnically* German rather than *nationally* American. Others said I was *người Mỹ gốc Đức*, or American with German origins, to which I would respond, jokingly, that I was *Đức kiều*, or overseas German—a play on *Việt kiều*, or overseas Vietnamese, as Vietnamese Americans are commonly called. In Vinh, being German was associated with moral goodness and technological prowess; after all, according to the rescue narrative, the GDR saved Vinh from ruin and underdevelopment. As one might expect, there was considerable ambivalence about the United States, especially among the older generation, but I encountered no palpable, widespread anti-Americanism;[17] indeed, anti-Chinese sentiments were much stronger. In many ways the United States was irrelevant and outside people's *Weltanschauung*, as seen in my interaction with the guard. Youth culture was more oriented to East Asian pop stars (and some European footballers), for instance, than to Western cultural production. There were, of course, exceptions, such as my neighbor, who purchased a U.S. army jeep covered with American flag stickers in Đà Nẵng to use commercially for wedding transportation and photography.[18] As a status symbol, the jeep was less a sign of desire for American things, however, than a triumphant war trophy that translated imperial iconography into expressive, national idioms (Strassler 2010, 80).

My "firsts" in Vinh were only possible because I was not new to the city. I visited Vinh intermittently in 2000 while conducting my dissertation fieldwork on postwar memory (Schwenkel 2009a), and I lived there with my partner, a German aid worker, across from the housing estate during the summer of 2001. There were only a handful of foreign experts and foreign language teachers in the city at the time (and equally few today). International tourists might stop for a night while traveling between Hanoi and Huế and grab a drink at the quirky Zulu Bar. But in contrast to the situation in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, economic reforms were only beginning to strongly affect everyday life in the impoverished city at the turn of the millennium. For example, when Maximart, the city's first "supermarket," opened in late 1999, the large crowds who wanted to visit did not fit inside; it was about as big as a U.S. convenience store.

When I returned to Vinh five years later, there were new buildings and commercial establishments, including new spaces of consumption like indoor cafés.[19] As I walked around Quang Trung with one of its architects, people came out to greet me and tell me the solidarity origin story of their housing. Anthropologists have often noted the role that serendipity plays in fieldwork, and my time in Vinh was no exception. The five-year preparation process—conducting preliminary research in Germany and Vietnam, writing grant applications, securing research permissions, and so on—culminated in an important change in the matrix of my *quan hệ*, or key social relationships based on mutual trust and obligation: the promotion of my partner's former supervisor to chief of staff (*chánh văn phòng*) at the Municipal People's Committee. Within the chain of government command and the Communist Party hierarchy, his stamp of approval on my letters of introduction from Hanoi National University facilitated the permissions I needed to conduct research at all administrative levels in the municipality, from the province (*tỉnh*) to the district (*phường*) and the Quang Trung wards (*khối*). As mediators of bureaucratic efficacy (see Hull 2012, 253), these red-stamped documents enabled other generative processes and relations among bureaucrats, citizens, and anthropologist. They opened doors, secured access to people, institutions, and knowledge, and protected my informants (by affirming they could share information with a foreigner). The red stamp was akin to a talisman that possessed agency, such as the power to accelerate bureaucratic time: documents materialized quickly after its inspection. The red stamps also ensured that I had been vetted accordingly and could be entrusted with government maps, plans, charts, reports, and diagrams. This official paperwork not only constituted my ethnographic authority, but also regulated and circumscribed it: there

was no need for officials to comply with requests beyond the scope of my research. For example, one day a young policeman asked if I would like to visit the municipal court with him. But he quickly caught himself and abandoned the idea, saying the courts might not fall under the purview of my research.

My research also involved participant observation in Quang Trung, which expanded and even challenged the official storylines I had gleaned from archival documents by including the unarchived voices of common people like local architects and construction workers. I moved in on a sunny fall morning in September 2010, on a date and time chosen by a local diviner (*thầy bói*) whom my landlord had consulted. The one-bedroom, forty-square-meter apartment on the fourth floor was my home for the next nine months.[20] Along with my research assistant, I introduced myself and my project to each of the nine wardens who administered Quang Trung's nineteen housing blocks across areas A, B, and C. They, in turn, announced my residency on community blackboards (*bảng thông báo*) across the twenty-hectare complex so people would understand what I was doing there—and that my presence was authorized. "An American professor will live among us to conduct research," the notices read. "Please welcome her. Thank you for your cooperation." In the months that followed, I participated in everyday activities, including Women's Day meetings, collective cleaning, poetry readings, holiday events, and funerals. I was not invited to Fatherland Front meetings under the Communist Party, nor did I ask to be included. Along with my neighbors, I hung my flag on national holidays (as instructed on the blackboard) and contributed to maintenance and solidarity funds, which were also recorded on the board: "143 Chị Linh 100,000đ người Hoa Kỳ," or "Room 143, Miss Linh [my Vietnamese name] the American donated 100,000 *đồng*" (VND).[21] Each day, I traversed the complex, moving from café to tea stall to soup stand for meals. I shopped in the outdoor markets, visited with neighbors (at first with my research assistant to establish familiarity, and then by myself), dropped by small shops, went to aerobics, read in the library, played with children, watched sports (such as senior badminton), and talked to as many people as possible in the vibrant, shared outdoor spaces, as well as in the privacy of their homes.

Residents across the housing complex gave me different names, which helped me to place someone quickly when I met them along the paths between buildings, and which gave me insights into their age and social background. In bureaucratic circles, among people I had known for a decade, I was called by my given name, Christina. In the market, traders called me chị Liên Xô, or Miss Soviet, to which I would jokingly reply, "Sụp đổ rồi!" or "Collapsed already!" The wardens and retired female workers in area B called me Linh,

based on my middle name, while cultural elites in area C called me Kiều Linh, short for Christina Lyn, which they felt to be more poetic. My gender was also fluid. Several older men in their eighties mentored me. I called them teacher (*thầy*), and they called me *anh*, or brother, given my "male" social role as a mobile professional not embedded in a family structure. My respondents thus "translated the translator" (Williams 1996), continuously shifting aspects of my personhood—name, gender, nationality—to fit the social and moral categories that allowed them to establish cultural intimacy with me.

Because of the scale of Quang Trung, after moving in, I launched a qualitative survey to familiarize myself with the nineteen buildings and the families that inhabited them. I was interested in the spatial organization of the complex and each block's history of design, allocation, and settlement. This information helped me to understand the demographics of the buildings and to gauge residents' sentiments about the privatization of state property, which was underway during my fieldwork. Conducting the survey also made me more visible to residents and allowed me access to their apartments to document changes to interiors. I established connections—including with the designers, planners, and (female) builders of Quang Trung—and set up interviews so that I could better comprehend residents' economic and affective investments in their living spaces. There was also a pedagogical component to this method. My survey team consisted of seven anthropology undergraduates enrolled in a methodology course at Vinh University under the instruction of my research assistant; some had grown up in rural districts hearing about the "tall, yellow, modern buildings" in the center of the city.

According to government statistics, in Quang Trung there were 1,262 households and a total population of 4,439, with an average of 3.5 residents per flat. Our survey found a slightly higher number of households, closer to 1,275, due to shared occupancies. Our strategy was to target 50 percent of apartments in each building for a total sample size of 647 households. The survey took place over a month; questions were both quantitative and qualitative, and they focused on family background and composition, work history, monthly expenses, consumption practices, community activities, and apartment renovations. Open-ended questions also asked about privatization and visions for the future of Quang Trung. Each day, I accompanied a student to a different block to meet the residents. The refusal rate was fairly low, at 2 percent (thirteen households).[22] Most respondents agreed to follow-up interviews and were generally enthusiastic to share their life histories, though I always proceeded with caution and sensitivity to their trauma. There are of course a host of problems with the data that surveys generate. My goal was to get a general

picture of Quang Trung's population and its social and economic characteristics rather than create statistically sound facts. Even so, the data did generate useful information that appeared representative of the larger population, as I was able to confirm over the following months of fieldwork. For example, most households, I quickly discovered, were "policy families" (*gia đình chính sách*), who received some form of state support for wartime injuries and losses. Dozens had immediate family members who had fallen (*liệt sĩ*), and even more were registered as wounded veterans (*thương binh*). Fifty families suffered from exposure to Agent Orange, seventeen of which included children of the third generation affected.[23] While little debris was visible in Vinh forty years after U.S. bombings,[24] toxic residues of war continued to manifest in the bodies of my neighbors and their children.

My study of the material and ideological *builders* of socialism took me also to the former East Germany. There, I was as much of a curiosity for my interlocutors as I was in Vinh. As one German architect put it, I was a professor from a capitalist-imperialist country interested in how the labor of socialist solidarity rebuilt what the enemy had destroyed. Ironically, the fact that I was *not* German opened doors in Germany; in Vietnam, by contrast, my presumed embodiment of Germanness was a desirable characteristic. I had begun to build research relationships with East German experts beginning in 2006, only seventeen years after the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Many of these engineers and craftspeople had lost their professional positions after German unification, which some discussed as "colonization" and institutionalized exclusion; for example, as pensioners, they receive lower social security payments than their counterparts in western Bundesländer (states). When I began my research, my contacts felt that scholars from western parts of Germany belittled their history and accomplishments. As an American, I did not see East Germans through the lens of deficiency, as did many of their compatriots in the West (Berdahl 1999). For their part, they saw my research interests as genuine and sympathetic, though not uncritical. Our connections were further supported by the fact that we had mutual acquaintances in Vinh and by my residency in the housing that they had helped to build.

Living and working in danger and austerity in the aftermath of aerial warfare in Vietnam had been deeply formative for these men and women and remained at the core of their subjectivities and social relationships. I came to know a dozen experts whose lives continue to revolve around Vietnam: homes adorned with Vietnamese knickknacks, visits to Vinh, cohort reunions, beer at the Viet Haus in Berlin, *Tết* celebrations, and so on. As Dominic Boyer observed, the sense of loss that accompanied unification was less about the desire

for East Germany to continue as a sovereign nation-state than it was sorrow over the end of the fantasy of utopian socialism (2006, 372). This sense of loss deepened with the devaluation of their work to build that utopia, I argue here. Returning to Vietnam, where their achievements were still glorified, revived feelings of accomplishment and self-worth (Schwenkel 2015b). "No one wants to hear about the good things we did," one senior planner told me bluntly about the endurance of Cold War hostility toward former East Germany. "It doesn't fit with the story they've created about the East."[25] He was right. However, the cynicism I encountered in Germany at the start of my research has since begun to wane.[26] There is a resurging interest in socialist modernist architecture (Kulić 2018), and once-maligned forms are now deemed worthy of exhibition or commodification (for example, in coffee table books on the period's "cosmic creativity" and "stunning diversity"), and as objects of ruin-gazing. While this ethnography shows the social and historical significance of modernist buildings for the people who designed, built, and lived in them, my hope is to do so without turning their creation and ruination into spectacle.

MAPPING THE FUTURE CITY

Building Socialism weaves history and ethnography into a multiperspectival account of the affects attached to modernist planning and its afterlife in mass housing. Utopian ideas about how to rebuild and spatially organize postwar society to achieve radical social transformation traveled from countries in the global socialist North to those in the postcolonial South, including Vietnam. Within a Cold War context of deimperialization (Chen 2010), these authoritative ideas underwent significant translation at all stages of design, implementation, and usage. At the center of the narrative is thus a scalar tension between *global* and *national* approaches to socialist reconstruction through *regional* development that aimed to achieve decolonization without lapsing into new dependencies. Competing priorities and socialist worldviews, informed by Western imaginaries of progress through technology, collided in the project to industrialize Vinh and create a global proletariat that transcended race and nation. This twofold project of material and ideological construction—manufacturing cities and the people with appropriate affect displays who inhabited them—captures the double entendre of "building socialism" as a redemptive, urban experiment that was at once a seemingly colonial *and* a decolonizing intervention (Parreñas 2018, 35).

While analogous models across the "socialist global" and the "socialist local" shaped debates about urban planning, this is not a linear national

narrative of rebound and recovery through social and technological development. Rather, *Building Socialism* tells of struggles and aspirations to achieve progressive temporality in the aftermath of imperialism. The people of Vinh, busy rebuilding their city according to socialist ideals, wanted no more than to occupy the same historical time as their cosmopolitan contemporaries. Vietnamese authorities thus sought assistance from East German visionaries to help Vinh "catch up" with the rest of the socialist world. Like Benjamin's wreckage of progress, Vinh's history of modernization was nonlinear—it comprised fits and starts, devastation and regeneration, and the desire to advance alongside fear of decline. In the book's three parts, I trace this friction between progressive and cyclical time, which underpinned postcolonial, Marxist-Leninist imaginaries of Vietnamese history advancing toward a prosperous future (Raffin 2008, 338). I illustrate how Vietnamese aspirations to socialist modernity were tinged with temporal anxieties about lagging behind. Interludes in the first two parts contain what I call "urban fragments" to foreground lived spatial and temporal experiences, first of urban devastation and then of postwar urban transformation imbued with utopian promise. In these interludes, pictures, poems, and other cultural expressions offer insights into conflicting timescales of development and the affective relationships that formed between people and the built environment. These expressions included Orientalist tropes of a timelessly resilient Vietnam that were important to Vietnam's political fantasy of Communist Party victory and to East Germany's ambitions to export technological modernity.

The first part of the book, "Ruination," provides historical context for the state-sponsored, nationalist project to transform Vinh into a model socialist city by examining its obliteration by the U.S. military. Highlighting the distinct ways that architecture was used as evidence to make distinctive truth claims (Weizman 2017), each of three chapters offers a different perspective on aerial warfare that left the city empty, flattened, and in need of rescue: the doctrine of U.S. strategic bombing, the lived experience of spatial annihilation, and mobilization of international solidarity.

To date, scholars have paid little attention to America's imperial fantasy of Asian subjugation through its relentless air raids over northern Vietnam. In Vinh, this material and ecological razing left a surreal and uninhabitable landscape poised for utopian possibility. Chapter 1 argues that infrastructural warfare and its modes of seeing, including aerial photography, created an "imaginative geography" of a distant and dangerous place outside history (Said 1978, 57) that made people on the ground invisible. A racialized optics of war that measured "material kills" instead of body counts enabled this erasure

of human beings while affirming U.S. claims to technological superiority. Governed by techno-fanaticism, logistical warfare against objects and built forms took an irrational turn as bombers used excessive force to destroy the material and environmental conditions of human life.

Chapter 2 shifts perspective from the air to the ground, from optical mapping to sonic tracking, to highlight the embodied experiences of material devastation and loss that are absent from nationalist histories of the war in Vietnam. This chapter draws on photographs, oral histories, and classified government reports to reveal sensory memories and representations of the war against nonhuman objects that forced people to seek refuge underground. Unlike the metaphors of sight that framed aerial warfare and its knowledge systems for U.S. pilots and military technocrats discussed in chapter 1, here I show how evacuated urban residents apprehended and navigated spatial violence through the senses, particularly through sensorial encounters with the sounds of war.

Chapter 3 moves to the former East Germany, where I develop the idea of solidarity as affective practice, based on German claims to shared victimhood with Vietnamese "kin." These claims reduced Otherness to sameness, denying historical difference, including the history of fascism. Opposition to the air war propelled a state-led apparatus of aid and expertise to assist Vietnam in its struggle against imperialism. A paternalistic sense of responsibility underpinned the sympathetic solidarities that the media produced and sustained among the population. As the GDR asserted its moral superiority as benefactor to the unjustly besieged country, the Cold War between East and West Germany would play out, in part, through Vietnam.

Humanitarian discourses and practices of anti-imperialist solidarity paved the way for East Germany's role in rebuilding Vinh as an "experimental utopia" of new possibilities (Lefebvre 1961). The second part of the book, "Reconstruction," foregrounds the radical visions of socialist modernization that emerged from the devastation of war. International collaborations generated new spatial tools and technologies of state power to liberate the country from the "premodern backwardness" to which it had been bombed.

Chapter 4 analyzes regional industrial development as the driver of postcolonial growth through socialist internationalism. Since the 1950s, participation in modernization efforts in Vietnam allowed weaker socialist countries like East Germany to claim geopolitical legitimacy through large-scale infrastructure projects and the training of Vietnamese experts. Against this backdrop, planning and rebuilding Vinh in the late 1970s became a prestige project rooted in imaginaries of horizontal solidarity. The distinctive labor conditions

of postwar reconstruction allowed for new forms of legibility and intimacy between East German experts and Vietnamese nationals that circumvented Soviet imperialism while exacerbating inequalities in both Vietnam and the GDR.

Chapter 5 looks at notions of modernist planning as transferable and transformative, and their limitations. Architectural experiments turned Vinh into an urban laboratory with the goal to scientifically design an optimal socialist city that would increase labor productivity and create a population of enlightened proletarians. The resulting plans expressed conflicting visions and projections of the city's future. They imposed rigid schemes of social and economic order on spaces and people considered disorderly, thus expanding the reach of the state. Technical objects, like maps and blueprints, rendered utopian ideals believable, although in practice they were not always achievable or even desirable. Universalist approaches to planning were framed as benevolent coproduction, which allowed foreign experts to sidestep damaging allegations of neocolonialism.

Chapter 6 shifts the scale from the redesigned city to the more intimate spaces of the family dwelling. It examines standardized housing and its infrastructure as an emblem of socialist modernity that was meant to liberate families from the workplace and women from domestic drudgery. For the Vietnamese state, mass housing was a new technology of social control that extended its power deeper into homes. These architectural forms from the socialist North did not travel to the South unchanged, however. Vietnamese revisions to GDR housing designs revealed conflicting interests, spatial logics, and ideas about socialist urban futurity among officials and residents alike. These tensions notwithstanding, Vinh's new housing complex was positioned to become the design prototype for future building across Vietnam.

The rapid ascendance of Vinh as a model city was followed by its swift descent into deterioration, or what I call "unplanned obsolescence." Utopian ambitions produced dystopian living conditions, the focus of the book's last part, "Obsolescence," which moves from the planned to the unplanned, from designers to dwellers, as collective hope for future betterment turned to mounting despair.

Decay of the housing complex was associated with feminine activity, particularly the conduct of rural migrant women who did not possess an appropriate urban sensibility, the subject of chapter 7. Litter and trash around the housing blocks showed ambivalence about modernization. Female migrant laborers, in particular, were targets of state discipline and ethical discourses about infrastructure. Unruly practices commonly associated with the female sphere of rural domesticity threatened to derail the state's project to build an

advanced socialist society inhabited by a modern proletariat. Debates over disorderly conduct in the housing blocks revealed the limitations of utopian design to shape daily practices and exposed hierarchies that undermined socialist commitments to egalitarianism.

So too did breakdowns in infrastructure, the subject of chapter 8. The unplanned use of planned urban space challenged top-down planning and heightened anxieties about failed urbanization and a not-yet-modern population held responsible for the premature aging of the buildings. At the same time, decay and disrepair strengthened residents' solidarities and antipathy toward the state. Crumbling building exteriors and dangerous interiors unsettled future-oriented development, putting residents at risk of architectural catastrophe: the collapse of decrepit buildings. Decay did not disempower residents, however, nor did it affect them equally. As people grew embittered by disrepair and more critical of state neglect, they deployed collective strategies to mitigate risk.

Decay also emboldened those with the means to produce new living environments. In chapter 9, I move from decayed exteriors to renovated interiors to examine how encounters with precarity shaped architecture through the unlawful remodeling of flats. The creative remaking of lived spaces turned residents into designers and architects who challenged the idea that industrialized housing was static, uniform, and beset by poverty. Interior renovations disrupted the temporality of ruins as a linear decline. Aspirational spaces of dwelling redefined residents' relationships with both the state and the dying buildings and became sites for fashioning new middle-class subjectivities and livelihood practices.

The deteriorating city provided fodder for capitalist redevelopment. Chapter 10 examines the politics of value through residents' resignification of "ruins" to contest privatization and the aesthetics of the New Modern. Denationalization of state property was a fraught process, but it also generated political subjectivities that ascribed historical, ecological, technical, and affective values to the crumbling buildings. Anxious about displacement from their homes, residents took collective action to disrupt the cycle of raze and rebuild, which had suspended them in an endless socialist meantime. Ruination thus emerged as a powerful tool in the struggle for control over spatial restructuring and the material conditions of urban life.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 The names of all research respondents in this book have been changed to maintain anonymity.

2 For recent compelling urban and village ethnographies, see especially Harms (2016) on Ho Chi Minh City and Meeker (2013) on *quan họ* folk singing in Bắc Ninh province.

3 David Lamb, "Country's Least Attractive City Trying to Put on a New Face," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1999.

4 See, especially, contributors to the edited volume *Comrades of Color* (Slobodian 2015b), as well as book-length studies by Hosek (2011) and Hong (2015).

5 I recognize that this is changing among a new generation of scholars, for example, in research on the "Black East" (Schenck 2018).

6 Though the context differs, here I draw on Neil Smith's notion of the "urban frontier," where both environment and people, imagined at the intersection of wilderness and civilization, are progressively "tamed" (1996, xv).

7 Throughout history, Nghệ An and its southern neighbor, Hà Tĩnh, have been at times merged into the region of Nghệ Tĩnh, most recently between 1976 and 1991, the period between Vietnam's reunification and the Soviet Union's dissolution.

8 In October 2018, Vinh celebrated its 230th anniversary since the founding and its tenth anniversary as a "Grade 1" city.

9 A common observation about Nghệ An is that people *học giỏi vì nghèo*, or study hard to escape poverty. Because a number of preeminent national scholars come from the region, and its students place at top universities, Nghệ An is also referred to as *đất học*, or land of the studious (Chu 1998, 62).

10 A string of schoolgirl attacks and lynch mobs occurred during my fieldwork.

11 Gia Long later built citadels in Quảng Bình (1812), Nam Định (1814), and Quảng Trị (1824).

12 Even before France annexed Nghệ An in 1885, urban stratification "reflected the dominance of the alien [Chinese] merchant class" (Woodside 1971, 32), who lined Vinh's main street with their two-story brick-and-tile houses (Chu 1998, 40–41).

13 While there is no consensus on who exactly coined this term, historians generally agree that it came out of the "Soviet Nghệ-Tĩnh movement," as the uprisings were called.

14 Figures show that the anticolonial VIỆT MINH destroyed more than thirteen hundred structures (including bridges, buildings, and factories), dug up access roads and

turned them into trenches, and pushed more than three hundred railcars and locomotives into the river to thwart the advance of enemy warships (Phạm 2008, 111).

15 *Nghệ An News*, May 20, 1964.

16 The use of the term *Liên Xô* to identify foreigners was so common after the war that Swedes working on aid projects in the 1980s playfully wore T-shirts that read, "Không phải Liên Xô" (Not Soviet).

17 Because of the violence suffered, Vinh is known for "hating Americans," and this was most likely the case for many years after the war, but I found that this sentiment had decreased significantly since I first began visiting Vinh in 2000. Individual hostility toward the United States remains, understandably so, but people tended to direct their anger toward the U.S. government rather than its population (a common expression in Vietnam). Over the course of my research, three people declined to talk with me based on my nationality.

18 Such costly possessions were rare. Only three households in Quang Trung owned cars at the time of my research. As of publication (2020), cars are a common means of transportation.

19 For an overview of the material changes to the city at this time, including the demolition of Quang Trung building C1, see Schwenkel (2012).

20 I continued my research in Vinh, and in archives in Hanoi, through summer 2011 and have made annual visits since.

21 While framed as voluntary, all donations were recorded on the community boards to ensure compliance. Making these contributions raised a host of questions about my moral obligations in relation to war reparations for U.S. atrocities in Vietnam: What was an appropriate amount to give to the various causes posted on the blackboard—floods in central Vietnam, Agent Orange victims, earthquake in Japan—without calling attention to my economic status, which could be seen as pompous? Would I be considered stingy if I paid a similar amount as my neighbors? Would people think I was denying the violent history of U.S. empire that made funds for Agent Orange victims necessary? I decided in the end to make public donations equal to those of my neighbors, and to give extra money privately to the wardens. My neighbors laughed and thanked me when they saw my name on the board, but I felt ashamed that my contributions could never compensate for the tremendous damage and losses they had endured.

22 Respondents gave a number of reasons why they refused to participate, including concerns about time and reluctance to share information about private finances. One man—irate at the government—wanted to talk to me and not to a student, and one household refused because I was American. Not being chosen for the survey created tension as well. In one area, people that I did survey used my foreign status to make neighbors who had not been surveyed envious. In another area, false information circulated that I paid respondents for their participation.

23 The president of the Association of Agent Orange Victims of Quang Trung, whose daughter was born with severe disabilities due to his exposure to toxins in wartime, shared these numbers with me.

24 One of the last major ruins—the student dormitory—was demolished in fall 2010. On the ruins of war as haunted landscape, see Schwenkel (2017b).
25 Personal interview, Germany, August 21, 2012. Note that throughout this book, I do not specify location for interviews that took place in Germany. Many of my German respondents live in cities and towns small enough that naming those places would reveal the respondent's identity.
26 For example, in 2011, German television executives declined to support a film project on Vinh that I was involved with. Since 2015, however, there have been two programs on the afterlives of GDR projects in Vietnam: on coffee plantations in Đắk Lắk and Vietnamese students in the GDR.

CHAPTER 1. ANNIHILATION

1 Bernard Weinraub, "Leader of the First Raid on North Returning to U.S.," *New York Times*, January 20, 1968.
2 Though Urban claimed that indiscriminate bombing was not condoned, strong evidence exists that it nonetheless took place. See Schwenkel (2009a, 200) for an account of the dumping of excess bombs over a residential area of Hải Phòng by a young girl fleeing the city with her father.
3 For example, Thrift and Forbes (1986). For an exception, see Logan (2000) on Hanoi.
4 Huntington estimates that the RVN's rural population decreased by 20 to 25 percent during the 1960s, making it the most urban state in Southeast Asia after Singapore (1968, 648).
5 In addition to the bombing of Hanoi and Hải Phòng, 28 of 30 provincial capitals were bombed (twelve of which were demolished), and 96 of 116 district capitals were bombed. More than half of the DRV's four thousand villages were also targeted by air raids (Thrift and Forbes 1986, 96).
6 By contrast, maps produced in Hanoi at the time show the country as united. As political projects, maps were an especially important tool of socialist world making, used to prove that there was only one legitimate Vietnam under communist rule. Militarily, this meant there could be no North "invasion" of the South, which was the rationale for aerial bombing.
7 Officially, according to the U.S. military, this operation lasted from March 2, 1965, to November 1, 1968 (U.S. time; Vietnam was one day ahead). Bombs fell on Vinh, however, outside this time frame. According to the DRV, the War of Destruction started on August 5, 1964, and continued through the end of January 1973.
8 "171 U.S. Missions over North Vietnam Set Record for War," *New York Times*, September 13, 1966. At the time, it was U.S. military policy to reveal the number of attack missions carried out but not the number of jets involved.
9 Again, bombs fell on Vinh outside the official U.S. military time frame for this operation, which lasted from May 9 to October 23, 1972.
10 White House memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger, September 5, 1972, 1. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Nixon Presidential Library (NPL), Vietnam Subject File, Box 97, Folder 4.