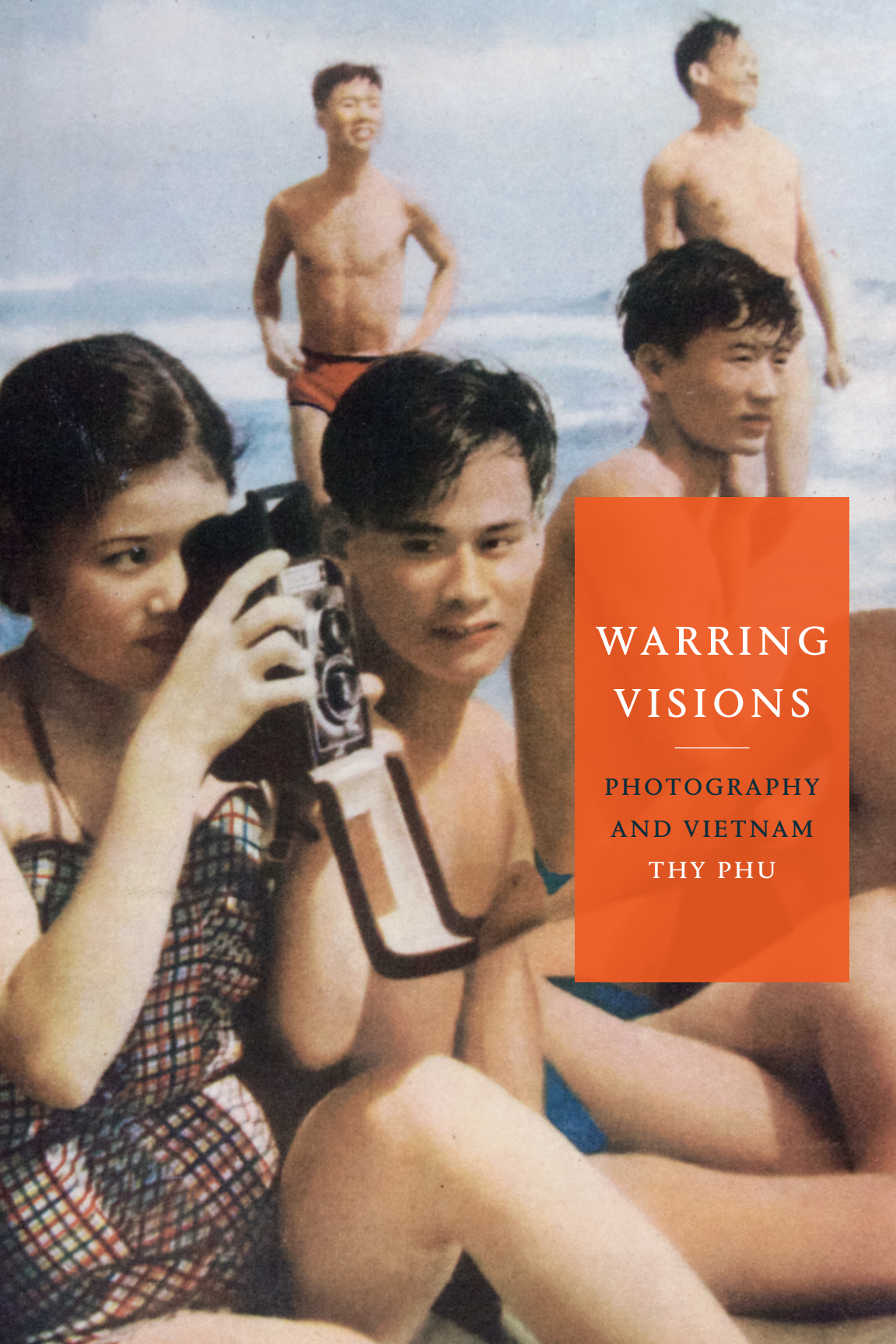

WARRING VISIONS

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIETNAM

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CONTENTS

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Because Vietnamese is a tonal language, I have written out names and quotations using diacritics unless they were omitted in original source documents. According to Vietnamese conventions, proper names begin with the surname followed by middle and given names. However, diasporic Vietnamese often adopt Euro-American naming conventions that reverse this order. Instead of imposing a single convention, here, I respect subjects' own naming preferences.

Saigon, April 30, 1975. The last helicopter skitters atop a roof near the American embassy, while below communist tanks advance in slow, inexorable triumph. Press photographers rush forward to capture South Vietnam's chaotic end: desperate mothers, wailing babies, and churning blades. This is what most people see, what they recall, of the day that Saigon fell.

This is what I see: a bus lurching from Sadec, a small town in the Mekong Delta, to Saigon. My mother cradles me with one arm; with the other, she clasps our ticket out. We pitch forward, our driver dodging cracks and craters on a thinning strip of highway until the bus shudders and stills; the road has ended.

We stay behind until another path opens, this time across the high seas, among millions of overseas Vietnamese, refugees, who scatter to the United States, Canada, Australia, and beyond. We leave villages and loved ones, carry what we can, and toss everything else: ornaments useless in lean times, uniforms of a defeated army, photographs betraying doomed allegiances. Wherever we settle, some of us start again; some of us hold losses close to heart; some of us make new images, perhaps to replace those we lost, perhaps to counter the many others that circulate in their stead.

Look here. In 1963 the monk Thích Quang Đức burns, his body shrouded in a horror of licking flame and rising smoke (figure I.1). In 1968 General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan executes Nguyễn Văn Lém, his revolver aimed point-blank at his prisoner's head (figure I.2). In 1972 ten-year-old Phan Thị Kim Phúc flees a napalm attack, her mouth agape in anguish, her burned clothes torn from her body (figure I.3).

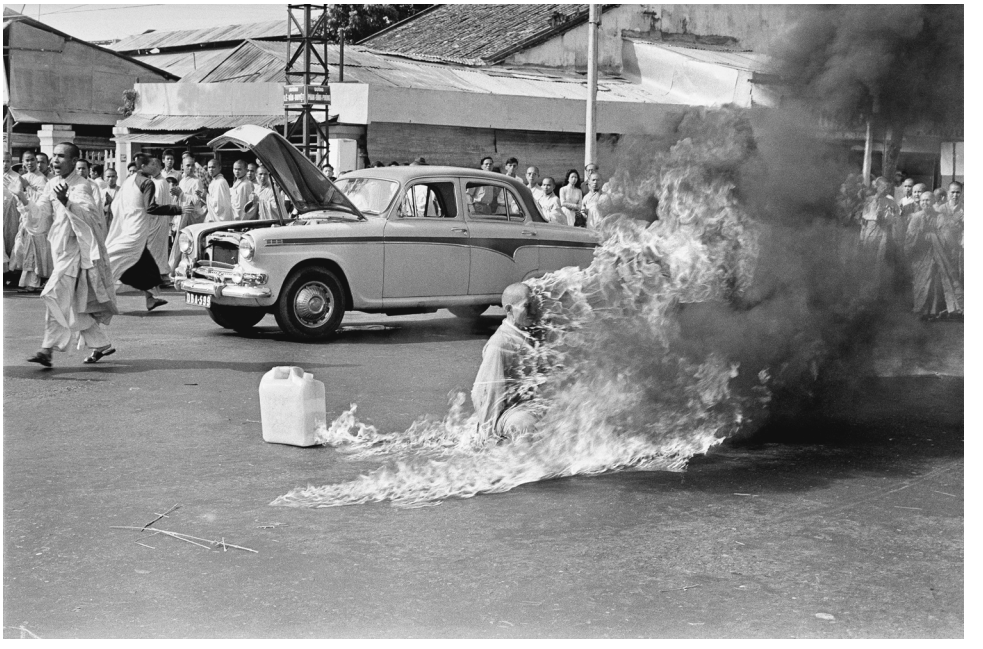

FIGURE 1.1 *Vietnam Monk Protest.* The flaming body of a Buddhist monk, the Reverend Thich Quang Duc, is shown as it fell over on the pavement of a main intersection in Saigon, June 11, 1963. The elderly monk set fire to his clothing and burned himself to death in protest of alleged government persecution of Buddhists. Other monks kneel with hands clasped in prayer. Photographer: Malcolm Browne.

Chances are, most viewers of a certain generation do not need a reproduction to see these images; they are so well-known that media critic Sylvia Shin Huey Chong refers to them as the "Vietnam triptych."[1] These three photographs won prestigious awards, including Pulitzer and World Press Photo prizes, and their respective photographers—Malcolm Browne, Eddie Adams, and Công Hùynh Út (who goes by Nick Ut)—catapulted to fame. The photographs are instantly recognized, endlessly reproduced, and tirelessly celebrated by critics for exposing the brutality and injustice of the war in Vietnam. Viewers praise them as icons that transcend this particular conflict to symbolize the atrocity of war in general.

In contrast, picture this: in August 1968, a radiant bride poses in the foreground on a street just outside Saigon while in the background stacked sandbags are sobering signs of the third phase of the ongoing Tet Offensive. (Although I do not reproduce this image for reasons that will become clear shortly, its absence aptly conveys the significance of a broader absence of similar photos from narratives of the war.) In that same year two villagers

FIGURE 1.2 Vietnam War Saigon execution. South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, chief of the National Police, fires his pistol into the head of suspected Viet Cong officer Nguyen Van Lem (also known as Bay Lop) on a Saigon street, February 1, 1968, early in the Tet Offensive. Photographer: Eddie Adams.

ferry their boats across the Perfume River in Huế, a picturesque and serene landscape disturbed only by the ripples they make with their paddles. On a beach somewhere in Vietnam, a woman looks through the lens of her camera, seemingly oblivious to her male admirers, the glow of their youthful bodies accentuated with the brush that tints the photograph with vibrant colors.

If these last three images are hard to picture, it is probably because they look unlike those that usually illustrate the war in Vietnam or that exemplify contemporary war photography more generally. A cursory survey reveals contemporary war photography's obsession with battlefield spectacles, its concern with exposing brutality in unflinching close-ups. No surprise, then, that the triptych, which contains the war's most recognizable icons, should be acclaimed. In contrast, the latter images linger in the quietude of daily survival, their ordinariness far removed from war photography's trademark idiom of destroyed bodies and pockmarked landscapes, not to mention

FIGURE 1.3 *The Terror of War* (also known as *Napalm Girl*). South Vietnamese forces follow after terrified children, including nine-year-old Kim Phuc, center, as they run down Route 1 near Trang Bang after an aerial napalm attack on suspected Viet Cong hiding places on June 8, 1972. A South Vietnamese plane accidentally dropped its flaming napalm on South Vietnamese troops and civilians. The terrified girl had ripped off her burning clothes while fleeing. The children from left to right are Phan Thanh Tam, younger brother of Kim Phuc, who lost an eye; Phan Thanh Phouc, youngest brother of Kim Phuc; Kim Phuc; and Kim's cousins Ho Van Bon and Ho Thi Ting. Behind them are soldiers of the Vietnam Army 25th Division. 1972. Nick Ut/Associated Press.

its fascination with struggle, pain, sacrifice, and sublime violence. Yet to me they are war photographs even though at first glance they exemplify different genres altogether, such as the quotidian rites of family photography, the sentimentality of landscape, and the glossy slickness of tourism.

As a Vietnamese-born child newly arrived in Toronto in the 1980s, I wrestled with this visual idiom of spectacular violence, its jagged outlines as cutting as the foreign sound of English, which I struggled to learn at the same time. Neither lesson—of English or of seeing Vietnam the way that everyone else appeared to do—was easy. I failed my first test in kindergarten, finding it impossible to match colors to words when I could not grasp the meaning of these words. Similarly, I tried to reconcile my fading memories of Vietnam

with documentaries that then played on public television, a seemingly ceaseless loop of death and devastation. Although my brother and I were young, even we noticed the repetitious themes: an explosion here, an injury there, death everywhere. We were riveted and repulsed. They were titled *Vietnam: A Television History* and *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, the latter directed by Michael Maclear, who was the only North American journalist in North Vietnam when Hồ Chí Minh died in 1969.[2] But both might as well have been called "The Never-Ending War," so often did they air and so interminable was their depiction of carnage, or so it struck me then. With its sensational bursts—spectacles forever paused and fixed as still images in my mind's eye—these documentaries first introduced me to Vietnam-as-war. Presented in this way, Vietnam was above all else a war. For Americans, this was a war they entered ostensibly to contain the threat of communism from spreading throughout Southeast Asia, one that four presidents, including Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon, continued despite increasingly vehement public opposition and diminishing hope of success. For Americans, this was a war that continues to haunt the national psyche with the ignominy of defeat. But there was little in this metanarrative that resembled what my family recognized and held close: a country, a home, memories. To be sure, my family's perspectives were bound in many ways to this war and its legacies. But our experiences are not defined exclusively in terms of war, even as they could not be wholly disentangled from war, and certainly not in the way that played before our eyes.

Yet these documentaries may as well have been any number of films or books that drew from the same visual idiom and that have appeared in the years since the end of this war. Whether I liked it or not, the idiom I learned—now more familiar and vivid than the fog of my early memories—taught me to look at Vietnam as most of the world did. However, I knew, as do so many Vietnamese, whether in Vietnam or overseas, that there was more to see.

PHOTOGRAPHER JORGE LEWINSKI once marveled wistfully that "so far as photographic coverage is concerned, there never was, and probably will never be, another war like Vietnam. . . . Vietnam was a big production number, a big sell."[3] He was not alone in avowing what is now an article of faith: the war in Vietnam—one of the most visible of the twentieth century's many wars—marked a watershed in visual history, at least as told by Euro-American scholars.

Critics often attribute this distinction to the role that the war between Vietnam and the United States (1955–75) played in transforming moving and still pictures, print and television industries alike. The US involvement in Vietnam began in a limited and unofficial capacity after World War II, with its support of the French effort to regain control of its Indochina colony after the Japanese had been driven out. Although the Viet Minh appealed to the United States to support its cause of independence, one that its leader Hồ Chí Minh explicitly linked to core republican principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, its efforts were fruitless because Americans, notwithstanding their disdain of colonialism, supported the French. After the defeat of the French in 1954 by communist patriots, the Geneva Accords split the nation into North and South Vietnam as a temporary measure, with the promise that democratic elections would take place by 1956 and the assurance of peace, self-governance, independence, and reunification. However, the United States began to intervene more directly under the administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy by backing its own anticommunist pick, Ngô Đinh Diem, as head of South Vietnam; by actively contravening the terms of the Geneva Accords; and by dispatching military advisors to ward off the threat posed by North Vietnam. Although war was never formally declared, tensions escalated with President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to dispatch ground troops in 1965. Not until 1972, when Richard Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords, an agreement meant to end the war officially, did American ground troops withdraw. However, this withdrawal served as a pretext for the continued US aerial bombardment of North Vietnam. Not until 1975 did the war in fact end for the Vietnamese.[4]

This war was also important because it was the first to be televised daily, for although US networks sporadically covered the 1950–53 war in Korea, television came of age in Vietnam during the years of American military influence, when newly standardized thirty-minute programs beamed images of faraway violence home to viewers in the United States as they sat eating their suppers.[5] Whereas in 1950, only 9 percent of American households owned television sets, by 1960, that number swelled to 90 percent. By 1968, well into the period of American military escalation in Vietnam, 56.6 million American households owned television sets. Michael J. Arlen stressed the intimacy of this form of transmission when he called the conflict "the living-room war."[6] Moreover, events in Vietnam attracted masses of reporters, as many as 637 in 1968 from North America, Europe, Australia, and even Asia, according to media historian Susan Moeller.[7] These reporters and photographers were drawn to Vietnam largely because the US administration, under the

aegis of the Military Assistance Command, actively courted their presence by granting access to reports and to battlefields. Despite this openness, the administration's policy was not wholly uncensored; instead, journalists experienced censorship indirectly in the form of briefings that exaggerated military gains and minimized losses. Journalists also had limited access to North Vietnam and suffered reprisals on the part of the South Vietnamese government under the leadership of Ngô Đình Diệm, who even expelled reporter François Scully in 1962 for writing unflattering stories about his corrupt regime.[8]

Lured by the promise of free accommodation and transportation as well as seemingly unfettered access to information services, journalists and freelancers flocked to Vietnam to make their names. Rookies, including Tim Page, who first flew into Vietnam at age twenty, swelling with ambition but short on cash, cut their teeth chasing stories of struggles in hamlets and jungles. Legendary photographers such as Larry Burrows, Robert Capa, and Bernard Fall sought to burnish reputations earned covering other wars by documenting this one. In their attempts to shoot this war, most photographers risked their lives; many died. Together, photographers produced a voluminous visual record of the war. Although the war marks a turning point in TV, a handful of still images stand out as icons shaping collective memory in the United States. Moreover, photographs crystallized an American experience of Vietnam, one that produced a metanarrative that prevails not just in the United States but also beyond.[9]

Critics also herald this war as a watershed in visual history because images supposedly affected its outcome. Depending on who is talking, pundits and politicians credit or blame images for turning the tide of public opinion in the United States against the war. In an interview, Nick Ut remarked that after taking his 1972 photograph of a napalm attack in Trang Bang, he immediately thought it could well be "the picture that would end the war."[10] Although the US administration hoped to attract favorable coverage through its policy of openness, by the early 1970s, journalists increasingly reported events in such an unflattering light that President Richard Nixon grumbled, "Whatever the intention behind . . . [the] relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home."[11] In 1975 James Reston similarly speculated that "historians will agree that the reporters and the camera were decisive in the end," adding that they "forced the withdrawal of American power from Vietnam."[12]

Even when officials tried to dismiss photographs of the war, their hyperbole betrayed lingering unease about them. Consider, for example, General William Westmoreland's response to Ut's photograph of the horrific aftermath of a napalm attack, which he brushed off as a minor "hibachi accident." His derisive tone echoed the callous sentiments of Madame Nhu, who served as South Vietnam's First Lady (a position she held informally as sister-in-law of Ngô Đình Diệm, the nation's bachelor prime minister from 1950 to 1963). In June 1963 Madame Nhu trivialized the self-immolation of the monk, Thích Quang Đức, as a "barbecue." In response to his protest of the Diệm regime's repression of Buddhist organizations she taunted, "Let them burn and we will clap our hands." Thus, the adherents of two camps fortified their positions, on the one hand praising images for ending the war and on the other hand denying that they had any impact. However, the most important lesson of this impasse is not which side was proved right; media critics show that the truth lies somewhere between these two positions, with images functioning less directly and more equivocally than assumed.[13] Rather, this impasse reveals that despite disagreements about the politics of pictures, the two camps were equally fascinated by images. As much as Westmoreland and Madame Nhu wished to discredit photographs, they could not disregard them. Their contempt belied their studied indifference.

The war in Vietnam was thus a watershed in visual history because it shaped the ways that spectators, located mainly in the global North, look at and think about images. For scholars based in the United States and Europe, where the most influential visual theory developed, looking at images provoked distrust and suspicion. In a series of essays first published in 1973, Susan Sontag captured this quandary when she argued for the necessity of witnessing atrocity, singling out the horrors of the napalm attack depicted in Ut's *Napalm Girl* (also titled *The Terror of War*) for special consideration. Although she conceded the power of this photograph, she still concluded that in a world she bemoaned as "image-choked," the sheer abundance of photographs anaesthetized rather than galvanized ethical action.[14] Sontag was drawn to photos yet worried about the effects of doing so.

This ambivalence stemmed from her experiences in Vietnam, according to critic Franny Nudelman.[15] In 1968 Sontag recorded her impressions of a first visit to Vietnam in a book titled *Trip to Hanoi*, where she confessed early doubts about photography.[16] She had landed in Hanoi, only to realize that photographs had clouded her perspective with preconceptions of Vietnam. To understand how the war truly affected the people in the North, she needed to see beyond photographs. Only a year after her second trip to Vietnam in 1972,

Sontag published the series of essays that first appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and that would be collected in *On Photography,* the landmark book where she expressed her misgivings about the political efficacy of images.

Sontag shared these misgivings with numerous scholars who claimed that images enchant and delude in their guises as agents of ideology, mass entertainments, seductive commodities, and instruments of surveillance. Writing in the 1980s, for example, Victor Burgin and John Tagg considered photography as an apparatus of state surveillance.[17] Likewise, Allan Sekula plunged beneath the depths of the history of bourgeois photographic portraiture to expose a "shadow archive" of surveillance.[18] These critics set out to unmask—and thereby defuse—the tyranny of an image-saturated world. Remarking on this striking repudiation of images, an enduring legacy of this critical moment, Susie Linfield observed that "the postmodern and poststructuralist children of Sontag, Berger, and Barthes transformed their predecessors' skepticism about the photograph into outright venom."[19] Rather than admiring and revering images, the adherents of this critical tradition looked at images only to look away from them.

In short, contemporary visual theorists espoused a hermeneutics of suspicion that mirrored and perpetuated the global Cold War's pervasive mood of fear and paranoia. The foundations of contemporary photography studies were laid during the height of the global Cold War. What's more, photographs of the war in Vietnam—a conflict integrally tied to a broader superpower competition—reinforced these foundations, foregrounding the spectacle that played out in Vietnam. Indeed, the war in Vietnam unfolded in the context and as part of the global Cold War, which conscripted even more players, including Filipino contractors, Australian soldiers, Korean mercenaries, and Laotian allies.[20]

Whether they are casual observers or committed scholars, students of visual culture thus absorb two fundamental lessons: first, the war in Vietnam played a special role in visual history, and, second, an influential thread of studies on photography developed in response to images from this war. Although I studied these lessons, over the years my doubts deepened with the hazy recollection of half-forgotten scenes, though whether witnessed firsthand or described to me I could no longer tell. From this roiling, the blurred edges of one image sharpened into view, a photograph that I remember from my childhood visits to the suburban home just east of Toronto that belonged to my mother's close friend, whom I will call by the pseudonym Hoa.

Compared to our bare apartment, with its makeshift cardboard-box furniture, stuffy summers and drafty winters, and pests skittering beneath floor-

boards with the flickering of lights, Hoa's modest home seemed luxurious. It even had a fireplace, whose polished mantle she adorned with Wedgwood figurines, crystal candlesticks, and her wedding photo framed in silver. I knew from my time in a Malaysian refugee camp that such knickknacks were unnecessary; food and shelter were all one required, a lesson my thrifty parents never tired of drilling into me. Still, these gleaming ornaments drew me. I returned to the photograph with every visit, moved by different details over the years. For a time, the tiara she wore as an eighteen-year-old bride beckoned; here was a beauty queen awaiting coronation, alluring and resplendent. Then it was the magnificent turquoise Ford near which she posed, a chrome chariot to transport her from the drudgery of the developing world. I looked nothing like this stunning woman. Yet I could not take my eyes away. The photo sparked schoolgirl fantasies of shedding adolescent awkwardness; I wished to smile as she smiled. For years, I lingered on the foreground with its vision of youthful grace, its promise of a felicitous future. I do not know when, exactly, I thought to look, really look, at the background. But then one day, I finally noticed the stacked sandbags, fortification against an unnamed threat, and the photograph's very mood seemed to sink. This family photograph, I realized, was also a war photograph.

My mother's friend was married in a town south of Saigon in 1968, several months after the start of the Tet Offensive on January 10, which had also targeted surrounding southern areas and other regions, particularly in central Vietnam, including Khe Sanh and Huế. The photograph straddles two temporalities, gesturing toward the future while bearing the burdens of the present. The photograph evinces mixed emotions, both a joy to come and an all-too-present fear. To many Vietnamese, this is what war looks like, by turns a hopeful smile and an anguished scream. War improbably straddles battlefield explosions, mundane errands, domestic rituals, and more. For Hoa the photograph suspends the war on the knife edge between expectation and devastation. This is probably why she would refuse to let me include it here, although I know better than to ask. After all, this book shows images from opposing sides, a decision that may unsettle many overseas Vietnamese. For her the war ended in total ruin; like many in this group who fled and whose sense of community coheres around a passionate anticommunism, the very thought of visual reunion with an enemy they cannot put to rest is unfathomable.[21]

The visual record of the war produced by the Western press and described by scholars in conventional histories may be as vast as it is familiar, but it misses such subtleties. According to Moeller, the way photographers shoot war, in some instances guided by their government's objectives, influences

how viewers see war. Conversely, the way that viewers expect to see war guides the decisions that photographers make. The process forms a feedback loop of sorts. In the contemporary moment, one of the defining characteristics of war is combat (although, as chapter 3 shows, the banality of war has become an emerging theme).[22] Moeller elaborates: "Combat, no matter how peripheral, how Pyrrhic, how purposeless, is the heart of war. It is what young boys glamorize, old men remember, poets celebrate, governments rally around, women cry about, and soldiers die in. It is also what photographers take pictures of."[23] Yet this was not always the case; historically, war photography encompasses a broad spectrum of war experiences, including not just dramatic action but also the tension and tedium leading up to combat and the stillness of reflection afterward. In the nineteenth century, the wet-plate collodion process posed technical limitations, most notably slow shutter speed, which prevented photographers from shooting battles at all, never mind up close.

The first war photographs, taken during the Mexican-American War (1848), attest to these technical limitations; they feature quiet, contemplative scenes that were staged and most often taken after, not during, battle, as was the case with coverage of the Crimean War (1853–56). During the American Civil War (1861–65), the first war to be photographed widely, Mathew Brady and his associates produced images that were also quiet, contemplative, and staged. Despite this well-documented history, contemporary war photography represses this commonplace practice of staging, a kind of manipulation, and instead idealizes documentary objectivity and privileges the coverage of explosive action made possible with technological developments such as faster film. For a broader perspective on war, we need to expand "war photography" beyond the narrow parameters defined by the Western press. We need to stretch the framework to consider how seemingly domestic images depicting weddings, reunions, and quotidian, apparently frivolous rituals denoting pleasure, survival, and resilience might also be war photographs.

The visual record of war, when considered solely from the perspective of the Western press, overlooks the fuller spectrum of representation. We can attribute this disregard to prejudices concerning what counts as newsworthy, formed because of numerous factors such as personal or political priorities, ignorance, and even indifference. In addition to overlooking unspectacular forms of representation, the Western press, then as now, neglects Vietnamese perspectives, emphasizing instead the American experience of this war, which is understood as a uniform and singular phenomenon. However, recent scholarship in critical ethnic studies and Asian studies has drawn at-

tention to important, long-overlooked sources that document Vietnamese experiences.[24] Indeed, the concept of the universal American experience of war is limited. To grasp the paucity of the focus on the American experience, we need only consider the divisive response to the war in the United States, evident in antiwar movements that mobilized diverse groups across the nation. It would be more accurate to speak of American *experiences* of this war.

Yet this perspective persists thanks to a sophisticated media infrastructure that grants unequal access to the means of production, circulation, and consumption in a process similar to the skewed "visual economy" described by anthropologist Deborah Poole.[25] This infrastructure encourages viewers to see and remember the war in Vietnam in a manner that for some critics constitutes an "American worldview."[26] Because the phrase *American worldview* problematically implies that the United States is a monolith, I draw attention instead to an American framework for viewing the war in Vietnam that foregrounds the heterogeneous political voices of dissent that characterized this tumultuous period. An American framework for seeing became persuasive because of a hegemonic political economy, which exerted a determining influence on the production and global circulation of photography. This American framework, in other words, affected what images are made and which ones are widely seen. To emphasize the American framework for viewing the war in Vietnam does not suggest that there is a uniform US way of seeing; indeed, in the United States responses to the war in Vietnam were contentious, and as I have shown, debates about the impact of press images of this war published in American magazines and newspapers remain unresolved.

Nor does one have to be American to contribute to an American visual framework. Both American and Vietnamese photographers, in their capacity as freelancers or "stringers," shaped this framework. News organizations and wire services hired stringers to contribute photographs and provide information for stories, especially when they lacked resources to engage the services of full-time foreign correspondents. Vietnamese stringers were valuable because of their language fluency, knowledge of the terrain, and local contacts. Horst Faas particularly depended on his network of stringers, known as "Faas's Army," whom he trained and equipped with cameras. Vietnamese stringers were such a fixture at the Associated Press (AP) Saigon office that Faas recalled they were even "living in the darkroom day and night."[27] Despite the importance of Vietnamese photographers, agencies paid them a per-picture rate and seldom credited them for their work.[28] Recently, a *New York Times* obituary confirmed this practice in a story honoring Nguyen Ngoc

Luong, whom reporter Sam Roberts identified as a "guide" for the newspaper during the war. In his tribute, Roberts acknowledged that "hundreds of unheralded guides and translators like Mr. Luong have served in war zones around the world, [and] their contribution to journalism [is] as essential as it is anonymous."[29] In an online eulogy, David K. Shipler reflected that "there are hundreds of people like Luong all over the world, local citizens of countries in conflict, who interpret, arrange, guide, open doors, and protect the foreigners who arrive as journalists or aid workers to observe and assist. Their help is crucial, and is done mostly behind the scenes, where they become invisible heroes."[30] An American visual framework emerged as such—as American—in part by ensuring the anonymity of stringers, such as the men who photographed for the AP, including Dang Van Phuoc, Le Ngoc Cung, Tran Khiem, Huynh Cong La, Ha Thuc Can, and Huynh Cong Thanh My.[31] At its most cynical and self-promoting, then, an American visual framework for the war disavowed the contributions of Vietnamese stringers even as it depended on their labor.

The most well-known of these stringers is Nick Ut, whose brother, Huỳnh Thanh Mỹ, was killed while on assignment for the AP. Ut was just sixteen when Faas hired him in 1965 after his brother's death. Seven years later, newspapers and magazines worldwide selected Ut's 1972 photo *Napalm Girl* as their cover image. At first glance, this iconic photograph would seem to tell us little about the American framework: it was made by a Vietnamese stringer and focuses on Vietnamese suffering. However, Chong reminds us that as was the case with the triptych of iconic photographs that emblematize the war, *Napalm Girl* became especially meaningful as an index of the range of *American* responses to this suffering instead of critical conversations about the significance of Vietnamese perspectives. The iconic photograph became meaningful not just for its representation of the child's pain but even more so, arguably, because it launched an agonized critique about the extent to which the United States might salve this pain or, as Chong puts it, how Americans might save the burning child and thereby realize the white savior fantasy.[32] This is not to say that American and Vietnamese perspectives cannot overlap, but so long as an American framework remains transfixed on the exposure of the Vietnamese child's pain while still perceiving the child as other, they remain distinct. Conversely, the American visual framework for war has fixated on images that attend to the vulnerability of US soldiers.[33] Larry Burrows's raw photographs of mortally wounded Marines in a series of photographs he took for *Life* magazine vividly portray this theme and, along with similar images taken by Eddie Adams and others, helped establish an enduring meta-

narrative of the war that dwells on the suffering and sainthood of American soldiers (plate 2). Neither monolithic, nor unified, nor essentialist, an American framework for the war nevertheless centers US perspectives in all their messy heterogeneity, hawkish or not. Moreover, an American framework for seeing the war entails overlooking other perspectives.

The global Cold War offered competing frameworks for seeing. Indeed, Chinese and Soviet newspapers took advantage of stories about violence against civil rights protestors, which buttressed their claims about the fundamentally unjust US system.[34] Similarly, the communist Vietnam News Agency (VNA) and Liberation News Agency (LNA) paid careful attention to US and worldwide coverage of antiwar protests, selecting images from the American press to promote their struggle instead of mainstream American perspectives. Among the many US press photos that proved especially potent for socialist purposes were shocking images of the self-immolation of antiwar protestor Norman Morrison in 1965 and the devastating napalm attack on Trang Bang that scarred ten-year-old Phan Thị Kim Phúc. As the former editor of the state-run *Vietnam Pictorial* Nguyễn Thắng remarked, after communists saw the photo of Kim Phúc, "We used it right away."[35] By reframing this photograph, the communist press challenged the American perspective. When we attend to the ways that the Vietnamese press redeployed *Napalm Girl*, we can observe more clearly the contest for meaning: the icon became a warring image and not just an image of war.

Warring—I invoke this gerund deliberately to denote the active deployment of photographs for the ends of war and to suggest the labor and practice of war. Visual struggles are central to the conduct of war and its memory. Elsewhere, I have written about the ways that the socialist Vietnamese state recirculated images of Kim Phúc, especially in the 1980s, to establish its moral authority as the child's protector and as guardian of an emerging nation struggling to recover from the damage wrought by American imperial aggression.[36] The circulation of US press photos in communist contexts further unsettles not only the primacy of an American framework for seeing but also the ostensible singularity of the American experience that this framework secures and legitimates. *Napalm Girl* does not signify an essential American quality; however, the reception of this photograph in the United States underscores the influence of a political economy that shapes ways of seeing the Vietnamese child's pain to foreground the US response.

Accounting for the full range of wartime experiences requires a contrapuntal approach that decenters the United States and considers Vietnamese responses within a broader, international context. Indeed, to discern the com-

plexity of these links, as novelist and scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen reminds us, we need only observe the multiple names by which the war in Vietnam was known.[37] To Americans, it was the Vietnam War. Sometimes it is known as a conflict because the United States never officially declared war on North Vietnam, instead preferring to consider itself merely advisors to the South Vietnamese. To the North Vietnamese, it was the American War. Within South Vietnam, and for numerous overseas Vietnamese or Viet Kieu, it was a bitter civil war—in which the fractured nation served as proxy battleground for the global Cold War. Yet with few exceptions, visual histories of the war in Vietnam have nearly erased Vietnamese perspectives, relegating them to the backdrop of an American obsession with national humiliation and, in the post-1975 period, with moral redemption through militarized humanitarianism, wherein the United States rescued hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees.[38] Even photographs that unequivocally disclose the magnitude of *Vietnamese* suffering attest to the so-called American experience, according to these conventional histories. After all, the triptych of icons, as noted above, documents Vietnamese violence, whether waged in response to Vietnamese injustices (the burning monk), in retaliation (the Saigon execution), and as the result of an accidental bombing run (the napalm attack). Yet scholars persist in imputing to these icons signs of American guilt, grief, and sympathy, and in ascribing to them the ability to fashion an American public sphere. What counternarratives emerge if we reflect on Vietnamese experiences of this war?

This book invokes the concept of "warring visions" to examine these nuances. Warring visions denote how Vietnamese communities actively enlisted images to project aesthetic and ideological positions, the stakes of which were nothing less than legitimizing competing claims to the nation. The concept of warring visions also enlarges the category of war photography, a genre that critics usually consider as consisting of images that illustrate the immediacy of combat. Despite an amply documented history of war photography's varied forms and subjects, many viewers still define this category in narrow terms: authentic illustrations of active combat qualify as war photographs whereas images that are staged or manipulated do not. Warring visions redefine the genre of war photography beyond simply illustrations, to encompass the ways that communities engage images in symbolic combat. This engagement extends beyond the image object, however, for it can also take the form of refusal, as Hoa's protective stance on her wedding portrait reminded me. Warring visions form part of an arsenal of soft power, they serve as a strategy for peaceful reconciliation, and they provide a means of quiet

resistance. Warring visions thus necessarily include manipulated images—whether they are produced through seemingly innocuous approaches such as staging or seemingly more deceptive artifices such as enhancement, retouching, colorization, cropping, and reenactment—to explain how these communities crafted their account of the war and imaginatively reckoned with the war's aftermath. Just as importantly, the concept of warring visions reveals how Vietnamese communities deployed images to secure the moral resolve, political allegiance, and cultural memory of viewers. *Warring Visions* thus surveys an expansive range of images, including disparaged and overlooked ones, which communities mobilize for the ends of war. Together, these images enrich our understanding of how war is waged, how it unfolds, and how it is resolved.

Warring Visions traces how Vietnamese photography shaped Vietnamese experiences of the war. It joins a growing body of work that examines the visual record of the "other side," extending this scholarship to consider the diversity of alternative perspectives.[39] The very notion of Vietnamese experiences challenges conventional perspectives that consider the American experience as a singular, uniform phenomenon. However, the notion of Vietnamese experiences does not replace one reductive perspective with another so that a focus on Vietnam simply supplants the dominant concern with the United States. Rather, attending to Vietnamese experiences expands insights in the visual culture of this war, highlights overlaps and discontinuities between multiple perspectives, illuminates how these perspectives converged and diverged, and explains the cultural contexts for the creation, circulation, and remediation of images.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN VIETNAM

It is perhaps fitting that historians should be split on the story of photography's emergence in Vietnam given the ways that the nation has been violently divided. Vietnam has endured the turmoil of war for centuries, including uprisings against Chinese rule (111 BC – 938 AD) and resistance against French colonialism (1887 – 1954) and against American imperialism (1955 – 1975). Following the defeat of the French under the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh, the Geneva Accord split the nation, in an ostensibly temporary arrangement pending elections, into North Vietnam and South Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel at the demilitarized zone.[40] Consider, for example, the historian Nguyễn Đức Hiệp's account, provided by scholar Ellen Takata, which

singles out French photographer Alphonse Jules Itier for distinction.[41] Itier had accompanied diplomat Théodore de Lagrené on a mission to negotiate the 1844 Treaty of Whampoa, the first agreement between France and China. That year their travels brought them to Danang, a port city in Vietnam's central region, where Itier took photographs of Vietnamese soldiers. At this moment, travel overlapped with war in a process that underscores photography's amenability to the process of colonization. These photographs, which depicted the militarism of French colonial rule, are rare first images of Vietnam. But it was Émile Gsell who, sometime in the 1860s, set up the first commercial photography studio in Saigon. Nguyễn Đức Hiệp's story about photography's emergence in Vietnam emphasizes photography's status as a French invention and its utility for advancing French colonialism.

Lê Ngọc Minh tells a different story. An amateur photographer based in southern California, Minh penned an unpublished history that credits Đặng Huy Trứ, a mandarin under Emperor Tự Đức, for bringing photography to Vietnam.[42] In 1865 Trứ embarked on a state visit to China, where he bought a camera, developed film he shot there, and persuaded a Chinese photographer to engage in a joint business venture. They returned to Hanoi, where on March 14, 1869, they opened the first Vietnamese-owned commercial studio.[43] This unmistakably nationalistic account of the emergence of Vietnamese photography emphasizes the role of an enterprising Vietnamese photographer. Although he may have acquired his expertise and equipment from China, Vietnam's main rival, Trứ successfully adapted both for local uses. In the talented hands of the Vietnamese photographer and shrewd businessman, Vietnamese photography developed and thrived.

These different tales of photography's path to Vietnam share a concern common to modernizing nations struggling for independence: the problem that this technology posed as a foreign innovation and commodity to national self-fashioning and a nascent anticolonial consciousness. But as Karen Strassler persuasively argues in her study of Indonesian modernity, popular photography is simultaneously national and transnational.[44] Practitioners adapt "foreign" technologies to create idioms to express local desires, to fashion what Strassler describes as "refracted visions," ways of seeing specific to a local context while also inseparable from geopolitical contexts that also shape this nation. A similar framework for how to see developed in Vietnam. The second version of the story thus salves photography's threat by crediting China as a relatively innocuous source of the technology's introduction to the emerging nation, for in the late 1860s, French colonizers were more despised than the Chinese. By contrast, the first version spells out the principal ob-

stacle for Vietnamese patriots. To enlist photography toward the ends of anticolonial resistance, these patriots needed to overcome France's corrupting influence. They had to adapt a French instrument for Vietnamese purposes. From 1865 to the mid-twentieth century, however, commercial studios catered to the desires of a bourgeois class that could afford to commission their likenesses. Salon photography, characterized by its indulgence of decadent bourgeois tastes, flourished. The question of how photography could be marshaled for class warfare—how it could serve revolutionary ends—would not be posed explicitly until well into the twentieth century.

The Vietnamese public began to appreciate photography's political potential in 1945. During this year a disastrous famine struck. Directly caused by the Japanese occupation of French Indochina during World War II and indirectly by decades of inequitable land policy at the behest of French colonial administrators, the famine claimed as many as two million lives in North Vietnam, then known as Tonkin. Photographer Võ An Ninh traveled throughout the region, documenting the catastrophe. His photographs attest to the brutality of Japanese occupation and French colonialism.

With the end of World War II the French sought to reclaim Vietnam as a colony but met fierce resistance from the Viet Minh, the abbreviated name for Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội, an organization led by Hồ Chí Minh. This clash between French colonizers and Vietnamese nationalists is known as the First Indochina War (1946–54) and culminated in the legendary standoff at Điện Biên Phủ, where French soldiers sought to draw out and crush Viet Minh guerrillas using superior firepower. But they suffered defeat instead, underestimating the guerrillas' resilience and tactical sophistication. The First Indochina War ended with the Viet Minh as victors and saviors of Vietnam. The French were forced to quell their colonial ambitions just as the Americans stepped forward as powers in the region.

Although the Western press covered the First Indochina War with keen interest, particularly on the part of French newspapers and magazines, visual documentation of the conflict on the part of Vietnamese photographers was sparse.[45] A respected Vietnamese photographer from that era is Nguyễn Mạnh Đan, who started out as an apprentice in a Hanoi photo shop. When he was only twenty-two, a French journalist entered the shop asking whether anyone spoke French. Mạnh Đan recalled that "I stood up. The Frenchman looked at me from head to toe and said, 'Come to the editorial office tomorrow for probation.' I was so stunned and happy. There were very few Vietnamese photographers working for the French at the time, so I was paid a lot of respect wherever I went."[46] Recruited to work alongside a French pho-

tographer, Mạnh Đan took photographs for *Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique*, an illustrated magazine published in France.

In May 2013, I met ninety-two-year-old Mạnh Đan at the Saigon studio in District 10 at a shop that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren now operate. Though retired, he still presided over the photo studio he had opened more than sixty years ago, an ever-present cigarette burning to the stub between bony fingers. Smoke curling in the dusty air, he reminisced about his adventures photographing the wars in Vietnam. Working alongside the French, he remembered, prepared him for the next war, when he embarked on a project for the Government of Vietnam alongside Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh (no relation), who was then a young officer with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). By 1968, the year that their project was published in a book titled *Việt Nam Khói Lửa*, Mạnh Đan was an esteemed senior photographer. He invited Hạnh to participate, asking, "Do you want to be famous?"[47]

It was thus not until the Second Indochina War (yet another name for the war in Vietnam) that Vietnamese photographers began testing in earnest the camera's capacity to represent their struggles, to broker their political positions, and to establish solidarities with other organizations. In 1968 Nguyễn Mạnh Đan and Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh documented the course of the war and its toll on soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam, including their own coverage of the Tet Offensive and its aftermath in a book published by the Government of Vietnam and printed in Hong Kong, a site selected likely because of scarce local resources.[48] To my knowledge, this is the only surviving official visual record of the fallen Saigon regime. The original title, *Việt Nam Khói Lửa* (literally translated in the English edition as *Vietnam in Flames*), is a phrase that refers to the book's overall theme of conflagration. The phrase also stresses the photographers' distinctively Vietnamese perspective insofar as *khói lửa* is the Vietnamese idiom for war. Just as importantly, the South-based Republic of Vietnam projected a vision of war that encompassed more than fire and brimstone; the photographers structured the book loosely into sections that focus on the sites hardest hit during the Tet Offensive, including Saigon, Khe Sanh, and Huế. The book also features photographs that pause to marvel on unexpected beauty, as with the picturesque landscape of the Perfume River ferry ride (figure I.4); to admire the stillness of the countryside, a reminder of the stakes of struggle; and to meditate on the gravity of grief, a photograph that I discuss in detail in chapter 3 (see figure 3.4).

Walter Benjamin famously worried about mass culture's power to entrance the masses and urged that it be harnessed for revolutionary ends. In his oft-cited essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he

FIGURE 1.4 Villagers paddling on the Perfume River, 1968. Photographer: Nguyễn Mạnh Đan.

argued that mass culture be deployed to mobilize and politicize the masses.[49] Photographers from South Vietnam need not have known about Benjamin to grasp the urgency of this challenge, which they readily took up. During the war, their counterparts in the north, namely the Hanoi-based VNA, likewise dispatched photographers to produce images, also in hopes of reaching the masses. The VNA established training programs for journalists and photographers who went on to produce images and stories that would promote the cause, recruit volunteers, and foster sympathy with antiwar organizations and other decolonizing movements. Despite scarce resources and rudimentary media infrastructure, the communist press sought to project a vision of socialist revolution through photography. At the same time, the proliferation of propaganda posters, which were often displayed to peasants in the jungles where they were made, attests to the magnitude of the technical obstacles that the communist press encountered; posters supplemented and, when needed, substituted for photos. As I explain more fully in chapters 1 and 2, these photographers shaped a socialist way of seeing as a process that entailed purifying the taint of French and bourgeois influence from photography, developing a style amenable to revolutionary ideals in a distinctly unapologetic way. Plate 1, a photograph published in 1957 on the cover of the illustrated magazine *Vietnam Pictorial*, exemplifies the communist stance on propaganda. Depicting children at play in a field of impossibly large and implausibly hued flowers, the photograph seems painted in luminous tones that make plain its fantastical contrivance. This painted photograph makes no effort at naturalism. Rather, the photo overtly conjures a socialist future that had yet to come. Put simply, the National Liberation Front and its People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese Army, and their supporters published, displayed, and circulated these photos during the war without hiding their status as propaganda.

Not surprisingly, critics, who prefer at least the semblance of objectivity if not neutrality, repudiate such photos as heavy-handed vehicles of ideology, as evidenced in recent controversy in response to reports that work by the VNA had been manipulated (a case that I explore in greater detail in chapter 1). Viewers attuned to the ideals associated with a certain style of photojournalism and to a taste for documentary naturalism associated with a Euro-American tradition of critique are quick to dismiss the relevance of such photographs to visual histories of the war, most likely because of blinders imposed by abiding assumptions about objectivity as a measure of journalistic truth. In this sense, conventional visual histories of the war in Vietnam are incomplete because they offer little guidance for how to understand pro-

paganda, merely judging such material as worthless. This reflex judgment is as clumsy as the material it indicts, enabling groups and states—who are far from disinterested—to dispense with inconveniently competing perspectives on the war. Consequently, the United States could disregard evidence of civilian bombing raids by labeling them as propaganda.

For their part, communist photographers and photo editors were not above such tactics themselves, even though they were open and indeed unashamed about their use of propaganda. At times, communists wielded the very judgment they endured as a damning weapon to dispatch ARVN opponents. During the postwar, late-socialist period the Vietnamese state drew on communist photography to shore up an official narrative of reunification and liberation. Võ An Khánh's touching photograph of embracing matriarchs (see figure E.1) offers a powerful allegory of national reconciliation, one cleared of rancor. At the same time, the state reinforced this official narrative of national reunification by discrediting the only complete set of ARVN images that remain, namely the work of Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh and Nguyễn Mạnh Đan. *Vietnam in Flames* is fiction rather than journalism, charged Nguyễn Đức Chính in his history of photography in Vietnam, because its photographers staged images instead of presenting scenes as they happened.[50] All sides—whether American, North Vietnamese, or South Vietnamese—volleyed the charge of propaganda as a means of putting their images at war with one another. *Warring Visions* thus names a contest for what can be seen in a way that extends beyond just image objects to include a jostling for power to render invisible subjects and sites deemed ideologically unacceptable. Although critics often perceive propaganda as ham-fisted, it can also be nuanced, operating subtly and heavy-handedly to broadcast information for the ends of political persuasion.

Visual counternarratives require alternative archives, resources that are not easily accessible or interpretable. Consider, for example, the problem of records relating to the ARVN perspective. In contrast to the abundant record left by the VNA and LNA, the visual legacy of the ARVN is sparse. In its time the book *Vietnam in Flames* was well-known, its photographers widely admired. These days, however, few members among the overseas community know of the photographers or have heard of *Vietnam in Flames*. Copies of the English version are rare and expensive (one online auction has even listed it at more than $2,500). Only after months of online digging did I manage to acquire my edition for a more modest price and have yet to come across a copy of the Vietnamese version. In Vietnam, many collectors and photographers know of the eminent Nguyễn Mạnh Đan, but only a few admit they

have heard of Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh, who, because he served as an ARVN officer, was sentenced to a labor camp, where he spent eight years before a human rights organization secured his release and eventual resettlement in the United States. (By contrast, his partner, a civilian, received a lighter sentence of several months in a reeducation camp.) A couple of these collectors cautiously admit they are aware of *Vietnam in Flames*. During one of my research trips to Vietnam, I spoke with a man whom I will call Khải. After greeting me warmly, he excused himself and dove into a warren of notes and papers, emerging after some moments clutching a clandestine copy. Khải never told me how he found this contraband artifact. The book was in pristine condition, but when I opened it, I realized that a photograph of the flag of South Vietnam, whose display the state still forbids, was missing from one of the front pages.

If I had not studied my own copy of the book, I would not have suspected the surgically precise excision. In this moment, the thrill of my discovery—proof that a record of an ARVN point of view, however partial, persists in Vietnam—deflated with dawning awareness that much remained ungraspable. All the questions I had—how *Vietnam in Flames* came to be, why it was published in Hong Kong, how the photographers selected their images, what they hoped to accomplish, and more—dissolved at the tip of my tongue when I met Mạnh Đan, who after an hour of conversation grew impatient. He was eager to return to his storefront perch so that he could contemplate Saigon's afternoon traffic while smoking yet another cigarette. As for Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh, Mạnh Đan's erstwhile collaborator, he had fallen ill, I learned, and could not be interviewed.

Confronted by these challenges, I was constantly reminded of the commonplace notion that those who wind up on the losing side of history disappear from official records. Little wonder, then, that scholars are drawn to iconic images. I count myself among them, having written about the napalm photo of Kim Phúc, and in chapter 2 I consider how icons function within Vietnam.[51] By definition, icons are hard to miss and easy to talk about, so scholars endlessly debate them. Icons also help shape collective memory and public culture, according to communications studies critics Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites.[52] Indeed, icons shore up dominant narratives through the influence of sophisticated mass media infrastructures that in many cases outmatch, technologically and logistically, the resources of developing nations. In so doing, icons often erase marginalized stories from collective memory and public culture—as is the case with the Vietnam triptych—whether deliberately through censorship or tacitly through indifference. Yet

icons can direct attentive viewers to forgotten or forbidden stories when we take them back to their original contexts of production, circulation, and reception, as critic Andrea Noble contended in her study of the Mexican Revolution.[53] We gain much by looking at icons, for they illuminate supposedly universal truths. However, we lose even more if this is all we dwell on, not least a sense of the specificity of struggles and the varied shades of meaning. When we look closely, the general truths that icons impart turn out to have a history, but this history tends to be obscured.

Warring Visions is thus not a book that focuses solely on icons understood in the conventional sense as transhistorical signifiers. However, this book does consider some icons, particularly in chapters 1 and 2, which trace the circulation of socialist images and the potency of the symbol of the revolutionary Vietnamese woman. Nor is this a book about dashing photographers who earned their laurels through derring-do, nor even about conventional approaches to the genre of war photography, which favor the canonical, the icons, and the heroic photographers who produced them.[54] Instead, this book enlarges the category of war photography to account for a full range of visual practices and styles, from studio portraiture to photojournalism to propaganda to domestic images and beyond, which all engage with what war means and what it looks like to those who survived it and must reckon with its legacies.

Official archives provide scant information about the despised and disavowed from South Vietnam. In today's Vietnam, for example, state rites of remembrance take highly visible forms, such as monumental statues that praise the sacrifices of the humble soldier, farmer, and factory worker while denying altogether the existence of an opposing side. What one can ask and say about the war depends on where this discussion takes place. Only in the shelter of the home do family members privately participate in ancestral rites that resurrect the memory of "this" side, rites that subvert official narratives of the war, according to anthropologist Heonik Kwon.[55] In the United States officials reserve rites of commemoration for their own troops; at the most famous monument of this war, the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial in Washington, one finds on its implacable granite surface only the names of American soldiers. Officials are silent on the subject of their fallen ARVN allies, whom they maligned during and even after the war as unworthy and cowardly. This phenomenon persists, as demonstrated in the controversy sparked by *The Vietnam War*, the much-heralded release of the documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, which serves as a heady remainder of the public's seemingly inexhaustible fascination with this topic. Although the film is

nearly eighteen hours long, as I discuss more fully in the epilogue it is hardly an exhaustive account of the conflict and ultimately leans into an American framework for seeing, despite attempts to take account of the viewpoint of ARVN veterans and South Vietnamese survivors.[56]

For a glimpse of the ARVN perspective, I had to look elsewhere. *Vietnam in Flames* was just the start. I scoured vintage shops, where I was told I had the best chance of finding artifacts too incendiary for families to hold on to. With their record of such bourgeois indulgences as holidays abroad, of impolitic friendships with foreigners, and of allegiances to the losing side, such albums were too perilous to keep. Consider, for example, the school album of Thủ Đức Military Academy, which artfully chronicles close male friendships formed through military service (see figure 4.4). How did it end up in a store, tucked away among chipped porcelain, and kept near stacks of orphaned family snaps, an artifact painstakingly assembled yet carelessly left behind?

The shopkeeper, whom I will call Mai, tells me that many families who fled Vietnam as refugees carried with them only a few valuables that could be traded along the way for water, food, or favor. They sold or discarded photo albums. In the hands of strangers, these albums have become orphaned objects, lacking names, dates, and contexts. Personal records often take up subjects that state records dismiss as irrelevant and unimportant, which is why I turned to diasporic Vietnamese communities for insights on images that managed to survive the war and the journey. Chapter 4 details the loose images and albums I found and the war stories they contain.

Oral history interviews with some community members about their family photos helped fill in some of the blanks left by the orphan images. However, the material I stumbled on through luck, serendipity, or sheer stubbornness offers only glimpses of the overall picture of the war in Vietnam. At the same time, such recalcitrance suggested that counternarratives form in unexpected ways. Counternarratives sketch details that occasionally fill in the blanks of official histories. For all that I managed to piece together, a lot remains missing from the overall picture. Still, blanks make up a crucial part of the overall picture. Instead of simply obscuring narratives of Vietnam, the silence and secrecy of these alternative archives, to say nothing of official archives, integrally form *Warring Visions*.

This book surveys both highly visible and less obvious subjects and, to delineate the opposing perspectives, is divided into two parts. Part I addresses the communist perspective, following its production by photographers in the Vietnam News Agency stationed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and among the National Liberation Front in the Mekong Delta; its exhibition among Viet-

namese villagers to promote socialism; and its circulation among international communities to establish moral authority for the joined causes of anticolonialism and national liberation. Chapter 1 explores the development of a socialist way of seeing, a concept that I borrow from art historian Xiaobing Tang's study of visual culture in China, to explain how North Vietnam produced and disseminated ideological perspectives in dialogue with yet distinct from its Communist Bloc allies. This chapter considers how North Vietnamese photographers confronted material, technical, and infrastructural obstacles in the course of shaping a socialist way of seeing specific to local contexts and the cause of national liberation while attuned to and eager for an international audience. This process entailed adapting the French introduction of photography as a resource for Vietnamese liberation, rejecting aesthetics as bourgeois indulgence, while slipping into the picture stylistic flourishes in the form of ideologically suitable subjects and embracing, instead of condemning, contrivance as part of its signature boldness. This chapter also considers the futurity of this socialist way of seeing by focusing on *Vietnam Pictorial*, an illustrated magazine run by the communist state, and its striking use of color in 1954–75, a period bracketed by two wars against the French and Americans. This was also a period of aesthetic innovation in illustrated magazines, according to Moeller, who notes that starting in 1963, *Life* began experimenting with color photography to capture more vividly combat's gritty quality in photo essays that covered developments of the war in Vietnam. At around the same time, *Vietnam Pictorial* began printing sections of the magazine in color but without any attempt at the realism to which *Life* aspired. Instead, communist photo editors rendered color in fantastical ways that imagined a future of national renewal and unity that had yet to come.

Chapter 2 addresses the gendered dimensions of socialist ways of seeing by focusing on the symbol of revolutionary Vietnamese women. This chapter considers the contexts in which communists martialed the symbol of revolutionary Vietnamese women to link two causes, women's emancipation and national liberation. It also explores the remediation and resignification of this symbol at the hands of various actors and groups in Vietnam and abroad. During the war, different organizations within Vietnam and abroad—including the Vietnam Women's Union, the Women's Solidarity of Vietnam (a group founded and led by Madame Nhu), and women's movements in Canada and the United States—projected and reinvented the symbol of revolutionary women to suit their own political aspirations. However, these groups did so in ways that did not necessarily align with one another, even though they deployed this figure in the name of international solidarity. In a process that

evokes anthropologist Anna Tsing's concept of "friction," misperception, unwitting and sometimes willful, served as the basis of, not obstacle to, establishing solidarity.[57]

Part II examines the warring visions projected by South Vietnamese photographers. To do so, however, the chapters address a central methodological problem—the lack of archives devoted to the history of South Vietnam—by looking more closely at materials not usually considered part of the canon of war photography: images that have been staged, vernacular artifacts, and personal collections. All of these materials engage with experiences of war in unexpected ways and disclose how the process of constructing "warring visions" is critical to rites of commemoration, acts of recollection, and the constitution of diasporic communities.

Chapter 3 investigates the category of images that critics are loathe to include in the history of photography: those that are manifestly staged or reenacted. This chapter focuses on reenactment as it appears in photographs created during the war and in its aftermath as a way of understanding the war's legacy and considers how reenactment challenges historical interpretation. Chapter 4 turns to personal images, especially family photographs, as a means of understanding the intimate connections between ordinary domestic rites and extraordinary experiences of war. Family photographs reveal a quieter dimension of survival and offer a means of recollecting the full range of what war looks like. *Warring Visions* concludes with an epilogue that considers how the opposing sides of North and South might be reconciled. Visual *reunion* provides the potential of healing the political fractures that the discourse of national *reunification* only deepens, although in considering this issue the chapter also acknowledges the significance of diasporic Vietnamese community members, including my mother's friend, who refused to contemplate this potential. This epilogue also considers the public approach to reunion offered in the *Requiem* exhibition, which was organized by US-based researchers in collaboration with partners in Vietnam, and more recent efforts to broach reconciliation through *The Vietnam War* documentary. By contrasting these forms of visual remembrance, the epilogue assesses the contexts in which photographs might reconcile war's psychic wounds.

Warring Visions explores Vietnamese photographs produced by dispersed communities in North Vietnam, in South Vietnam, and across the diaspora. Vietnamese communities are as disparate as the wars that split them apart, as contradictory as the memories that shape their postwar lives, and as distinct as the photographs they made to prosecute this war and to reflect on its traumas. From 1954, with the end of the First Indochina War, when the Viet Minh

defeated the French, through to the end of the Second Indochina War, with the fall of Saigon and the defeat of the Americans, to the Đổi Mới era of economic renovation, and to the present era of market liberalization, Vietnamese photography circulated within the nation and, to a limited extent beyond, as a means of shaping how the war would be seen and ultimately the terms in which it would be remembered and forgotten.

WARRING. INTRODUCTION

1 Chong, *The Oriental Obscene*, 76. For a fascinating overview of the varied cultural forms taken up in remembering this war, see Chong and Schlund-Vials, *(Re)Collecting the Vietnam War*.

2 Maclear worked for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and freelanced briefly for the *New York Times*. See Maclear, dir., *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*.

3 Lewinsky, *The Camera at War*, 197.

4 For landmark histories of the two wars involving the French and the Americans, see, for example, Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990*; and Logevall's Pulitzer Prize–winning *Embers of War*.

5 Bonier, Champlain, and Kolly, *The Vietnam Veteran*.

6 Arlen, *Living-Room War*. See also Hoskins, *Televising War*; Small, *Covering Dissent*; and Mandelbaum, "Vietnam: The Television War."

7 Moeller, *Shooting War*, 358.

8 On the role of the US media in covering Vietnam, see Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*; Hallin, *The Uncensored War*; and Hagopian, "Vietnam War Photography as a Locus of Memory."

9 On the significance of icons, see Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*; Kroes, *Photographic Memories*; and Andermann and Rowe, eds., *Images of Power*.

10 Gendy Alimurung, "Nick Ut's *Napalm Girl* Helped End the Vietnam War. Today in L.A., He's Still Shooting," *LA Weekly*, July 17, 2014, accessed March 13, 2017, www.laweekly.com/news/nick-uts-napalm-girl-helped-end-the-vietnam-war-today-in-la-hes-still-shooting-4861747.

11 For studies of the political and social influence of images, see Zelizer, *About to Die*; Kennedy, *Afterimages*; and Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*.

12 Quoted in Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 3.

13 As Hariman points out in the context of the Syrian conflict, it is difficult to prove whether images can influence policy; the truth, media historians have demonstrated, lies somewhere between these extreme positions, with images functioning equivocally rather than decisively. See Hariman, "Why Photographs Don't Stop the War."

14 Sontag, *On Photography*, 11.
15 Nudelman, "Against Photography."
16 Sontag, *Trip to Hanoi*.
17 Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography*; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*.
18 Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 10.
19 Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, 7.
20 The concept of the global Cold War broadens scholarship to consider arenas of conflict beyond the dominant US – USSR binary. See Kwon, *The Other Cold War*; Gaddis, *We Now Know*; and Westad, *The Global Cold War*. Regarding outside players, see Man, *Soldiering through Empire*; and Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's More Flags*.
21 See Dang, "The Cultural Work of Anticommunism in the San Diego Vietnamese American Community."
22 See Adelman and Kozol, "Unremarkable Suffering."
23 Moeller, *Shooting War*, 3.
24 Important historical studies that draw attention to Vietnamese perspectives include Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*; Bradley, *Vietnam at War*; Ninh, *A World Transformed*; Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*; and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*. For an official account from the "other" side, see Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*.
25 Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean World Image*.
26 Kennedy introduces the term *American worldview* to underscore the ways that the political economy of photojournalism overwhelmingly favors the interests of US foreign policy. See Kennedy, *Afterimages*, 3–4.
27 "Horst Faas interview with Sarit Hand," Oral History Archivist, Associated Press Oral History Program, New York, September 29, 1997, Associated Press Corporate Archives.
28 According to Malcolm Browne, the Associated Press paid stringers $5 per photograph (or the equivalent in Vietnamese piastres). See *A Short Guide to News Coverage in Viet Nam*. Photographer Jorge Lewinsky alleges that Horst Faas was one of the editors who used Vietnamese stringers "quite ruthlessly," adding that the AP Saigon bureau chief "would buy their pictures, which they had frequently taken at great personal risk, for paltry amounts; the pictures were not even credited to the individual photographers on publication." See Lewinksy, *The Camera at War*, 208.
29 Sam Roberts, "Nguyen Ngoc Luong, *Times* Guide in Vietnam, Dies at 79," *New York Times*, December 7, 2016, accessed January 19, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/07/world/asia/luong-interpreter-vietnam-new-york-times.html.
30 Shipler, "In Vietnam, a Patriot without a Place."
31 Hess, "The 'Cheaper Solution'"; Smyth, "Out on a Limb"; and Seo, "Marginal Majority at the Postcolonial News Agency."
32 To this day I see this skewed perspective play out at conferences when presenters shift from slide after slide of atrocity images, often culminating in *Trang Bang 1972*, the anguish of a racialized child as backdrop to arguments that don't center on the child.
33 On the figure of the American soldier and the antiwar movement, see Kreusch, "Violent Representation."
34 Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

35 Nguyễn Thắng, interview with author, Hanoi, May 10, 2013.

36 Phu, *Picturing Model Citizens*. See also Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*.

37 Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*. See also Tai, *The Country of Memory*; and Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*.

38 On critical refugee studies and Vietnamese subjectivity, see Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*; Vinh Nguyen, *Our Hearts and Minds*; Espiritu, *Body Counts*; and Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*.

39 Since the late 1990s, a handful of exhibitions, photo books, and documentary films have examined Vietnamese photography but are primarily configured as works from the "other" side. These include Emering, *Viet Cong*; Faas and Page, *Requiem*; Page, Niven, and Riley, *Another Vietnam*; Guenette, dir., *Vietnam's Unseen War*; and Chauvel, *Ceux du Nord*. Vietnamese photographers have also published books that feature their works from the war. See Tính, *Khoảnh Khắc*; and Nam, *Một Thời Hào Hùng*. The few scholarly studies of Vietnamese photography include Schwenkel's brilliant analysis of the *Requiem* exhibition and museum as sites where memory is negotiated transnationally and Hien's research on photography in late-socialist Vietnam. See Schwenkel, "Exhibiting War, Reconciling Pasts"; and Hien, *Reanimating Vietnam*. In addition to exhibitions on photography, scholars have examined propaganda posters from the other side, including Heather, *Vietnam Posters*.

40 Zhuang, *Photography in Southeast Asia*.

41 Takata, "Photography in Vietnam from the End of the Nineteenth Century to the Start of the Twentieth Century, by Nguyễn Đức Hiệp."

42 Although Minh's history of Vietnamese photography was unpublished at his death, it circulates widely online for overseas Vietnamese readers. See, for example, Minh, "Lịch Sử Nhiếp Ảnh Việt Nam."

43 A statue was unveiled to commemorate Đặng Huy Trứ. See "Tướng Nhớ Ông Tổ Nghệ Nhiếp Ảnh Đặng Huy Trứ," *Nhân Dân*, March 14, 2016, accessed June 13, 2016, www.nhandan.com.vn/vanhoa/dong-chay/item/29009102-tuong-nho-ong-to-nghe-nhiep-anh-dang-huy-tru.html.

44 Strassler, *Refracted Visions*.

45 "The Pursuit of Beauty."

46 Quoted in "The Pursuit of Beauty."

47 Nguyễn Mạnh Đan, interview with author, Ho Chi Minh City, May 6, 2013.

48 It is unclear why the Government of Vietnam opted to print the book in Hong Kong, but considering the scarcity of supplies during the war, it is possible that outsourcing was the expedient option.

49 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

50 Đức Chính Nguyễn, *Văn Hóa Nhiếp Ảnh*.

51 See Phu, *Picturing Model Citizens*.

52 Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*.

53 Noble, "The Politics of Emotion in the Mexican Revolution."

54 On war in photography, see Griffin, "Media Images of War"; Brasheeth, "Projecting Trauma"; Butler, *Frames of War*; Baker and Mavlian, eds., *Conflict, Time, Photography*; Moeller, *Shooting War*; Kennedy and Patrick, *The Violence of the Image*; Kozol, *Distant Wars Made Visible*; Zarzycka, *Gendered Tropes in War Photography*; and Stallabrass, *Memory of Fire*.