

Making Two Vietnams

North and South Vietnamese youth had very different experiences of growing up during the Vietnamese War. This book gives a unique perspective on the conflict through the prism of adult–youth relations. By studying these relations, including educational systems, social organizations, and texts created by and for children during the war, Olga Dror analyses how the two societies dealt with their wartime experience and strove to shape their futures. She examines the socialization and politicization of Vietnamese children and teenagers, contrasting the North’s highly centralized agenda of indoctrination with the South, which had no such policy, and explores the results of these varied approaches. By considering the influence of Western culture on the youth of the South and of socialist culture on the youth of the North, we learn how the youth culture of both Vietnams diverged from their prewar paths and from each other.

Olga Dror is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Texas A&M University.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-47012-4 — Making Two Vietnams
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Making Two Vietnams

War and Youth Identities, 1965–1975

Olga Dror

Texas A & M University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108470124

DOI: 10.1017/9781108556163

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First published 2018

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Names: Dror, Olga, author.

Title: Making two Vietnams : war and youth identities, 1965–75 / Olga Dror, Texas A & M University.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2018] |

Series: Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia

Identifiers: LCCN 2018021914 | ISBN 9781108470124 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Vietnam War, 1961–1975 – Children – Vietnam. | Vietnam War,

1961–1975 – Youth – Vietnam. | Socialism and youth – Vietnam. | Communist

education – Vietnam – History – 20th century. | Youth – Vietnam (Republic) –

History. | Education – Vietnam (Republic) | Political socialization – Vietnam

(Republic) | Vietnam– Civilization – Western influences. | Textbooks – Vietnam.

Classification: LCC DS559.8.C53 D76 2018 | DDC 959.704–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018021914>

ISBN 978-1-108-47012-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-45524-4 Paperback

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978-1-108-47012-4 — Making Two Vietnams
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To all those who grew up in North Vietnam and in
South Vietnam during the war.

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Acknowledgments

While military and political aspects of the wars in Vietnam have been written about on an astounding scale, the lives of civilians have been largely ignored. Coming from a family that had to endure the blockade of Leningrad by the Germans in World War II, I have always been interested in the experience of non-combatants in wartime. This initially led me to study and translate the account of the Battle of Hue during the 1968 Tet Offensive written in 1969 from a civilian perspective by a South Vietnamese female writer Nha Ca. I thought it important to remember the lives and deaths of South Vietnamese who are so often pushed aside from narratives of the war.

As I saw my son growing up, I thought how lucky he was that he had to live neither in Leningrad during the blockade nor in Vietnam during the war. Thinking about it, I was fascinated by trying to understand how young people in North and South Vietnams were growing up during the war. I wanted to create a comparative work that would consider to an equal extent the youth in both Vietnams at that time.

Thus, my family in Leningrad and my son in the United States have been an inspiration for this work. But, I would not be able to accomplish the project without the help of many people, especially Vietnamese. I have discussed different aspects of the project with hundreds of Vietnamese, in Vietnam and abroad, with those who fought on the communist side, the anti-communist side, or were not sure on whose side they were.

I cannot list all of them here, but I would like to thank some who especially helped with my project. I would like to thank Professor Phan Huy Le, who helped me with establishing necessary connections. I am in great debt to the incredibly helpful people of Kim Dong Publishing House in Hanoi, especially Nguyen Huy Thang and Le Phuong Lien, both of whom are not only administrators there but also writers and editors; to the poet Dinh Hai, who also worked at Kim Dong and did a lot to develop publications for young people and fostering young people's writing skills that led to their publications; to late writer To Hoai who was one of the founders of Kim Dong; to Phong Nha, the composer and first

xii Acknowledgments

editor of *Thieu nien tien phong* (Pioneer) newspaper in North Vietnam; to Associate Editors of *Thieu nien tien phong* newspaper at different times Nguyen Tran Chau and Pham Thanh Long; to the journalist Truong Son; to the composer Pham Tuyen; to the poet and writer Hoang Cat; to two of the DRV's child-poets during the war: Tran Dang Khoa, now one of the leading figures on the Voice of Vietnam Radio; and Nguyen Hong Kien, an archaeologist now working in the Imperial Citadel Museum; and also to former students of the DRV schools in China, in particular Tran Khang Chien who shared with me not only his memories but also documents. Thai Thanh Duc Pho, a writer, who from 1969 to 1975 was an editor in the Giai Phong Publishing House, located in Hanoi, but publishing on behalf of the communists in South Vietnam, detailed to me the mode of work of this legendary press. Without Chu Tuyet Lan's help to find people in and to retrieve documents from different institutions in Vietnam this project would be only half-alive. She has been my angel in Vietnam for many years.

From the South Vietnamese side, the writer Nhat Tien and the educator Bui Van Chuc, aka Quyen Di, who were among the most active publishers for youth in the South, and former Minister of Education Tran Ngoc Ninh were indispensable for my understanding of the situation at the time. Poet Tran Da Tu was a great source for receiving information and establishing connections with writers and publishers of the RVN. Phan Cong Tam rendered me help in the same way but among former politicians of the RVN. Bui Van Phu was very patient when I would constantly run to him with my many questions.

I am also very grateful to the staff in the National Archives Center no. 2 in Ho Chi Minh City and no. 3 in Hanoi, as well as patient librarians who were retrieving for me hundreds and hundreds of books and newspapers at the National Library in Hanoi and in the General Science Library in Ho Chi Minh City.

An earlier shorter version of the first chapter, without correctional education, appeared in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*; parts of my article in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* are included in Chapters 3 and 5; and a modified version of my article in the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* is included in Chapter 4. I especially appreciate anonymous reviewers for each of the journals, whose comments significantly improved my work. I also relied on my other research which appeared in the *Journal of Asian Studies* and the *Journal of Social History*. I thank these journals for publishing my work and allowing me to use these articles and I thank Kim Dong publishing house and *Thieu nien tien phong* (Pioneer) newspaper for allowing me to use images from their publications.

Acknowledgments

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I am very grateful to Ross Yelsey, Publication Coordinator at the Weatherhead East Asia Institute of Columbia University, and to Lien-Hang Nguyen, a historian at Columbia University, for taking interest in my project and including it in the Institute's series.

Lucy Rhymer, Editor at Cambridge University Press, and Lisa Carter, Editorial Assistant, have been very patient and generous with me, as have all the team at Cambridge University Press. I cannot express enough appreciation for the reviewers to whom the Press sent my manuscript. Their comments and encouragement were a tremendous help to me in completing this book.

The project was generously supported by several grants and fellowships from Texas A&M University: SEED Grant, College of Liberal Arts; Program to Enhance Scholarly and Creative Activities Grant; Fellowship from Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities and Research; Inaugural Class of Texas A&M University Arts & Humanities Fellow; and also a Faculty Development Leave, which, in combination with a fantastic year-long fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, enabled me to write this book.

Finally, I want to thank my husband Keith Taylor for always trying to bring out the best in me, for standing by me, reading each page of this project many times, and critiquing it. My son, Michael Dror, though not in scholarship, was and is an inspiration for everything I do in academia. I thank both of them with all my heart.

My deepest appreciation goes to those who shared with me their experiences and helped me to bring them into this book. While I cannot possibly mention all of them by name here, I dedicate this book to them.

All mistakes are mine.