FATHERLAND: CONCEPTIONS OF HOMELAND IN ANTICOLONIAL NATIONALISM

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When the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.) was established in 1945, until Vietnam was officially unified under the Hanoi government in 1976, the realization of a fully independent communist Vietnam was uncertain. The most significant obstacle towards a completely communist Vietnam was the existence of the western-backed Republic of South Vietnam, not only because it stood outside of North Vietnam’s sovereignty but also because it officially espoused international neutralism. As expressed by the nascent international Non-Alignment movement, recently independent states saw a formation of a third block of neutral states as a legitimate way to avoid a neo-colonial communist threat. Given these fears regarding international communism, the emergence of Vietnamese communism as the ideological basis for a single unified Vietnam is a pertinent historical question. In this paper, I will attempt to track the development of a discourse which sought to blend internationalist Marxist-Leninist ideologies with recognizably Vietnamese cultural standards. I seek to provide one answer to why Vietnamese communism surpassed internationalist neutralism as the dominant ideology in Vietnam. This discourse enabled internationalist Marxism to be recoded as essentially Vietnamese, thereby providing an indigenous alternative to Non-Alignment and international neutralism.

Exploring how Vietnam came to be reunified under a government espousing a version of communism rather than another ideology has been explored in a variety of ways. After the Vietnam War, American historians produced intricate diplomatic and political histories. However, most of these histories evaluate Vietnam from a Cold War perspective, often prioritizing American involvement in Vietnam. One early example is George Kahin's Intervention, published in 1987. In it, the widely recognized area expert wove a large body of American sources into a narrative that tracked an intentional, though ill-advised, move towards military involvement in Vietnam. In this paper, Kahin, a critic of the Vietnam War, demonstrates the United States’ political missteps and misconceptions regarding Vietnam's relation to Cold War politics. While Kahin’s analysis is more sophisticated than to reduce the Vietnam War to a simple proxy war between two world powers, superpower relations are central to the narrative. Kahin maintains that the United States’ flawed foreign policy was the key determining factor of political events in Vietnam.

Kahin’s work represents the dominant strain of Vietnam historiography, but not the only one. David Marr’s Vietnamese Tradition on Trial utilizes Vietnamese sources to explore the social and intellectual history of Vietnam from 1920 to 1945. Marr explores the varied reformist traditions beyond radical Marxism and argues that any twentieth-century political developments in Vietnam “must be understood within the context of fundamental changes in political and social consciousness” within Vietnam itself. While Marr’s social and intellectual history covers a wide variety of political orientations and social consequences, it does not completely answer why Vietnamese communism became the dominant anticolonial ideology for two reasons. First, Tradition on Trial does not extend its analysis past 1945 and therefore does not examine the Non-Alignment movement that became South Vietnam’s official orientation and had been successful in other recently independent states by the mid-late 1950s. Just as communism was not clearly the dominant ideological orientation among reformists before 1945, a neutralist solution may have prevailed in Vietnam after 1945. Second, Marr’s focus upon non-communist ideologies led Marr to thoroughly explore the faults of alternative ideologies. Unfortunately, he insufficiently examined why Vietnamese communist ideology succeeded.

Marr’s book stands as an early example of how the historiography of Vietnam would evolve. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Vietnam War historiography began decentralizing binary (Soviet-American) world orders in historical analysis. Robert Brigham’s 1999 book Guerrilla Diplomacy is a good example of this trend, focusing on the multivalent efforts of the Southern National Liberation Front (N.L.F) instead of the diplomatic aims of foreign superpowers. Brigham portrays the politically pluralistic nature of the N.L.F. and its complex, ever-evolving relationship to Hanoi. Reflecting a contemporary trend of finding agency in non-traditional historical subjects, Brigham explores the diverse motives for opposition and meth-

2 Ibid., 414-415.
The presence of resistance among the Front’s leadership and called into question the idea of what “Communism” meant in a Vietnamese anticolonial context. Additionally, Brigham took pains to complicate views of the N.L.F. as simply a set of provincial insurgent groups by granting serious consideration to the international diplomatic efforts of the N.L.F., particularly with non-aligned nations. Importantly, Brigham also demonstrated how Vietnamese sources can be utilized to produce Vietnam War narratives, breaking previously held reliance on American diplomatic sources.

While Brigham represents a departure in Vietnam War historiography, the field remains dominated by diplomatic and political histories. This is no wonder, given the periodic release of declassified documents from past presidential administrations. Even so, with World History’s deepening reliance on postcolonial studies, a strain of works centralizing cultural discourse during the Vietnam War has developed. Mark Bradley’s *Imagining Vietnam and America* has served as a foundation for cultural histories of the Vietnam War since its 2000 publication. Bradley draws from postcolonial studies to de-center diplomacy from the explanation(s) of how the United States involved itself in Vietnam, focusing on Vietnamese discourse on “America” and “Americans” and American conceptions of “Indochina” and “Annamites.” Bradley provides a basis for a distinctly Vietnamese understanding of the war, bringing his analysis to the writings of anticolonial luminaries like Phan Boi Chau and Ho Chi Minh. In doing so, Bradley maps the legacies of older anticolonial discourses usually not germane to political histories of American involvement in Vietnam. Beginning with the earliest Vietnamese invocation of “America” as a sign of self-determination, Bradley reconstructs the 1950s discursive milieu upon which the United States would impose. For historians exploring the Vietnam War, Bradley’s analysis of Vietnamese ideologies provides a useful cultural backdrop.

Seth Jacobs’ analyses of the Vietnam War, particularly *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam*, synthesize the cultural perspective represented in Bradley’s work and the political analyses preceding him. In *America’s Miracle Man*, Jacobs examines American support of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. While the decisions and policies surrounding America’s support of this autocrat could be, and had been, explained through political lenses, Bradley writes about the cultural reasons, the “power of ideas.”3 Jacobs articulates his approach as “ideological history”. In this genre, ideas and prevailing cultural conception are centered and given priority in policy decisions. Jacobs argues that preexisting conceptions that denigrated Vietnamese race and religion “gave American policymakers their keys to Vietnamese ‘reality.’”4 This type of history provides conceptual frameworks absolutely critical to understanding the Vietnam War. In previous histories, which assume a priori a set of rational, self-interested political actors, the outwardly obvious blunders and misjudgments prove difficult to fully comprehend.

This paper will employ some of the conceptual frameworks laid out by Jacobs and Bradley in tracking the Fatherland discourse. Since this analysis is located during the Cold War, I find the works of Jacobs and Bradley invaluable to escaping the analytical limitations of a Soviet-American binary worldview. Furthermore, I accept the importance of postcolonial ideologies in the formation of contending political philosophies in Vietnam and centrality of “Third World” historical subjects in articulating these through policy. Because Vietnamese communism succeeded where internationalist neutralism failed, a two part structure is necessary. After overviewing the basic strains of Vietnamese anticolonialism, I will provide an explanation of why the neutralism of other non-aligned nations ultimately failed in Vietnam. Afterwards, I will examine the three-staged development of the Fatherland discourse and the ways in which Vietnamese communist discourse incorporated recognizably Vietnamese signs and mapped itself onto the Vietnamese homeland.

### A Third World Order: Non-Alignment Movement and Foundations for Neutralism

For nearly the entire duration of French colonialism in Vietnam, anticolonial reformers attempted to formulate viable bases for independence. Other than collaborationist Vietnamese who worked with the colonial administration, there are three generally accepted Vietnamese anticolonial move-

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4 Ibid., 8-9.
ments in the French period. The initial “Aid the King Movement” in the closing decades of the nineteenth century accomplished little except to convince the next generation of revolutionaries that conservative Confucian ideals that prioritize harmony over revolution had limited value in their anticolonial movement. These new revolutionaries would look outside Vietnam, ironically modifying visions of an ideal Confucian society with the modernist discourses of Social Darwinism made familiar to them in French schools. From the onset of the 20th century until the mid-1920s, the Reform Movement’s blend of Social Darwinist progress and neo-Confucian “utopian peace” emphasized the cultivation of the individual and his relation to society as necessary to advancing Vietnamese civilization. The utilization of foreign ideologies that began with the Reform Movement continued with the Radical Movement. While the Marxist-Leninist thought that Ho Chi Minh explicitly adopted in the late ‘20s and ‘30s initially characterized the Radical Movement, official Soviet Comintern ideologies prioritizing proletariat social revolution became eminent in the early 1930s. Later during the Japanese occupation, Maoist-Marxist ideology, which emphasized the need for independence before socialist reform, resonated among radical Vietnamese revolutionaries.

Though the different strains of anticolonial resistance fluctuated, no complete synthesis was reached and romanticized neo-Confucian portrayals of heroic revolutionaries fighting for civilizational progress never disappeared either. Upon this ideological backdrop, American policymakers imposed a bifurcated worldview that generalized these divergent ideological strains as international communism. Not only does this perspective ignore the conceptual diversity of anticolonial nationalist movements present in Vietnam, but it ignores the fundamentally nationalist goals of its participants.

While the radical anticolonialism of the 1930s became emblematic of Vietnamese resistance, divergent strains of political orientations and ideologies remained in Vietnam. Differences between northern and southern Vietnam were especially apparent, and class identities often informed the political differences. The dominance of the Radical Movement’s ideology was by no means guaranteed, especially during and after the Japanese occupation in 1945. Revolutionary leaders felt the need to legitimize their philosophies as by and for Vietnam. With the collapse of formal European colonization of Africa and Asia, some Vietnamese nationalists increasingly turned to neutralist rhetoric, later characterized by the Non-Alignment Movement beginning in the 1950s, as a basis for native solutions to Western imperialism. Neutralist discourses gained popularity among recently independent nations in the 1950s largely in response to fears of global communist hegemony and might have become the basis for lasting South Vietnamese independence. However, Vietnamese Communist discourses culturally out-maneuvered neutralist solutions by prioritizing local characteristics over internationalist duties. Inherent problems with neutralist solutions, Vietnamese anticolonial legacies, and intense cultural efforts at reframing international Marxism as Vietnamese in nature account for the ultimate success of Communism as the dominant ideology over neutralism.

In April of 1955, after the conclusion of the Geneva Accords and just before Ngo Dinh Diem’s ascendency in South Vietnam, twenty-four newly independent nations met in Bandung, Indonesia for the “Asian-African Conference”. This meeting, which set several principles that eventually characterized the Non-Alignment Movement, had the aim of establishing further solidarity between states with colonial pasts in an attempt to grant increased self-determination to each member. Notably, all four states of former French Indochina were represented, as well as the People’s Republic of China. The Non-Alignment Movement is usually referred to as a way for smaller nations to avoid the superpower politics of the Cold War by maintaining explicitly neutral relations with all other states. This intentional neutrality held the promise of development free of foreign domination which characterized their recent pasts. While it may have been expected that many of the Conference attendees sought to contain American political influence in their countries, the main anxiety of many member states was the fear of

6 Ibid., 13, 24-25.
7 Bradley, Imagining Vietnam and America, 25, 37-38, 40-41.
8 Ibid., 33-34, 36, 40, 44.
new Communist colonialism. Many Bandung Conference states, including China and North Vietnam, had utilized some strain of communist ideology as the primary basis for their national independence movements.

Despite this, communist ideology became one of the main concerns of the Bandung Conference. One of the key goals of the Conference was to contain the Viet Minh and China’s “illegal and subversive Communist activities in all non-Communist Asia.” Many states felt threatened by the international aims of communist ideologies and sought to present an alternative front. At the Conference, some delegates specifically cited their concerns about Chinese aggression, the most vocal of whom was India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who criticized Chinese promotion of “peaceful co-existence,” saying that though he agreed with the validity of the sentiment, the presence of “aggressive and interfering propaganda obviously goes against the principle.” Here, the perceived foreign nature of Communist ideas is seen as a threat to nationalist development. The criticism was widely shared enough by the Bandung delegates for China to spend much of its effort responding to these fears. Premier Zhou Enlai answered these anxieties by focusing on the long anticolonial revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party. Zhou stated explicitly that the Chinese revolution was “certainly not imported from without” and that China could not possibly “want to interfere in the internal affairs of others.”

With a seemingly disarming Communist presence at the Conference, where did that leave neutralist inclined Vietnamese? The Conference had a split decision on what stance it should take on Communist influence in South Vietnam. While most of the delegates agreed that Cambodia and Laos should be protected from Viet Minh influence to maintain their neutrality, the complex and temporary nature of the national division of Vietnam did not encourage many leaders to comment decisively on South Vietnam’s future. The closest consensus was that a “unified Vietnam” would meet the requirements for United Nations membership. This was paired with North Vietnamese assurances of non-aggression in Southeast Asia which reflected parallel Chinese guarantees.

These promises would become the basis for diplomatic relations between North Vietnam and other states in the years leading up to American invasion. Theoretically, the Bandung Conference carved a space for South Vietnamese neutralist anticolonialism independent of Hanoi’s interference. Officially this was the case, as the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (N.L.F.) consistently espoused neutralist solutions for South Vietnam while also carrying out armed resistance against the American-backed Republic of South Vietnam. In the earliest years of the N.L.F., the goal for a unified Vietnam was a coalition government that included the northern Lao Dong, roughly resembling the Cambodian government. Initially, the N.L.F. enjoyed broad popular support both for its opposition to the unpopular Diem regime, and for its seemingly moderate political agenda. Internationally, however, many were suspicious of the N.L.F.’s cooperation with the Lao Dong party and critics would refuse to differentiate between the two. Americans either believed the N.L.F. sought a Communist state aligned with the omnipresent threat of “international Communism” or questioned the viability of Vietnamese neutrality as a staging ground for Communism. This final belief was imbricated with American culturalist assumptions about “oriental passivity” and the inability for Vietnamese to resist forceful Communist ideology on the grounds of racialized weakness. The N.L.F. had operational independence in those early years, drawing a broad membership that included communists, non-communists, and other South Vietnamese resistance groups including Buddhists, Caodaists, and

11 Ibid., 5.
12 Ibid., 30.
13 Ibid., 54.
14 Ibid., 8.
16 Ibid., 37.
the Binh Xuyen. However, the influence of the Lao Dong was present from the inception of the N.L.F. Founding members certainly had contact with Hanoi in developing the N.L.F.’s neutralist platform and many of its founding members were openly or secretly Lao Dong Party members. Furthermore, some Hanoi officials expressed their pragmatic approval for a neutralist solution since it would cast a possible American invasion in a negative light, thereby complicating its stated motivation to limit the spread of Communism.

By the time President Johnson sent ground troops to Vietnam, Vietnamese neutralism had suffered for a few reasons. First, many members of the N.L.F. sought further cooperation with Hanoi to improve resistance efforts. After this period, operational control of the N.L.F. would shift steadily towards the Lao Dong. Communist N.L.F. leaders would secure the highest level positions. Second, international criticism of the invasion would lead many Western European states, most prominently France, to shift their foreign policy towards a neutralist position. For non-communist South Vietnamese, Vietnamese neutralism became tainted by international neutralism which was sometimes deployed as a means to retain influence with former colonies. With French President Charles de Gaulle’s August 1963 call for the neutralization of South Vietnam in the manner of other Indochinese states, Vietnamese neutralist revolutionaries would risk indirect affiliation with the recently ousted colonial power. This became even more problematic as Ngo Dinh Nhu had been in negotiations with France on designing a neutralist solution. Finally, even nations that supported neutralism or remained non-aligned had to contend with influences from anti-communist or Soviet blocs. Even during the Bandung conference, Prime Minister Nehru noted the affiliation of many of the member nations. Furthermore, many newly independent nations sought international aid for development, creating a complex political situation for certain states. While some politicians were well regarded for their ability to play superpower rivalries against each other to secure funds for their own development (e.g. Nasser in Egypt during the construction of the Aswan Dam and Ho Chi Minh throughout the Sino-Soviet dispute), others faced compromising their neutrality entirely. One example is the Colombo Plan aid packages offered to Southeast Asian nations. The Colombo Plan sought to provide funding to poorer, non-communist states in an effort to inhibit the growth of domestic communist parties on the assumption that the appeal of communism was heavily related to economic impoverishment. However, the association with Commonwealth nations and acceptance of certain governmental restrictions to qualify for aid did limit the sovereignty of newly independent countries. By 1973, all neutralist Southeast Asian states, as well as larger states like Indonesia and India, were Colombo members, demonstrating a need for international economic aid. For South Vietnamese neutralists, this meant that establishing a viable neutralist alternative to the Republic of South Vietnam and the communist North would almost necessarily include international assistance, limiting its appeal as an indigenous solution for Vietnam. By 1964, neutralist anti-colonialism in Vietnam would cease to have a promising future. However, anxieties about the dominating, foreign nature of Communism required Vietnamese communists to indigenize their ideologies to retain legitimacy as a nationalist solution.

Fatherland Discourse: Indigenizing the Radical Movement’s Ideology

While neutralism had its roots in the 1950s as a response to global superpower politics, Vietnamese Communism had been a part of anticolonial struggles since the late 1920s. By the 1950s, Communist ideology remained the primary basis for anticolonial movements and had been formally institutionalized by the Hanoi government. The best example of this is the Vietnamese Fatherland Front established in 1955 with the explicit

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20 Ibid., 71, 85.
The formulation of the Vietnamese homeland as a “Fatherland” holds cultural significance. As a sign, Fatherland has its roots during the Japanese occupation of Indochina. Ho Chi Minh used the term in a letter in June 1941, saying “The sacred call of the Fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of heroic predecessors who sacrificed their lives is stirring in your hearts.” The use of the term here was to connect Vietnam’s current struggle with its long history of popular rebellion against various Chinese dynasties. This is one of the earlier uses of the term, preceding the formation of the Fatherland Front by fourteen years. In the above quote, Ho Chi Minh’s use of Fatherland primarily sought to unite all Vietnamese by appealing to a sense of duty based on place of birth and may have had further significance in countering Japanese Pan-Asianism, which initially inspired the Vietnamese Reform Movement, but quickly lost favor after the realization that its anti-Western stance came at the cost of Japanese imperialism in East Asia. Appeals to the Fatherland gained initial utility by differentiating the Vietnamese Fatherland from the Pan-Asian vision of Japan and simultaneously rallying possible “Revolutionary Fighters” to the Vietnamese resistance based on a unique national heritage. However, in this earliest form, Fatherland referred directly to romanticized heroic figures of Vietnamese history (that is, the “Founding Fathers”) rather than specifically to the land of Vietnam. This tendency was common in Vietnamese revolutionary rhetoric throughout the Reform and Radical movements, appealing to the exemplar “heroic volunteer,” whose actions were often described in Confucian virtues.

The sign of the Fatherland, though utilized in communist revolutionary discourse, had important Confucian undertones. Confucianism in Vietnam had wide cultural and social significance even though institutionalized Confucianism ceased to be significant by the 1930s, largely due to the Reformation Movement’s efforts at modernization. Broadly, the cultural significance was recognized in literature, ensuring that educated classes would have some knowledge of Confucian ideals through forms of poetry. Broader still, the mandarin ruling classes, which dominated Vietnam until French colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century, had propagated a long heritage of formalized class relations as a form of social control, ensuring that most of the population would have some sense of the relationship between lower classes and upper classes along Confucian lines. Throughout the French colonial period, classically trained mandarins still held local offices but retained little decision-making autonomy. Outside of the educated upper classes, Confucianism impacted wider social organization. Filial obligations still maintained ideal of a three-generation household well into the 1920s after Confucianism ceased to be the basis of reform. Furthermore, most Vietnamese children learned the five core relationships as a part of their often brief education. In fact, this was encouraged by the French authorities, who saw the duties expected of the “father and son” relationship as a particularly useful analogy.


28 As it will be used often throughout the remainder of this paper, I will clarify my usage of the term “sign”. By this I mean the embodiment of significant and understood cultural references in, for the purposes of this paper, a word. While the word “Fatherland,” as a signifier of values, remained constant in verbal form, the signified meanings shifted over time in response to political circumstance.


30 Bradley, Imagining Vietnam, 14.

31 Bradley, Imagining Vietnam, 24-25, 31-32.


33 These relationships each contained a set of appropriate and expected duties. The “Father and Son”, for example, expected the Son to revere, obey and, later in life, protect the Father in return for things like reputation, defense, and good word.
for the colonial relationship between France and Vietnam. Collaborationists in Vietnam would rely on this analogy within the colonial schooling systems.

With the widespread influence of Confucian ideology in Vietnam, the Fatherland took on certain specific characteristics. While some scholars of different nations have studied the gendering of homelands as the “motherland” in need of protection, Fatherland would be more useful in a Vietnamese context given the patrilineal nature of the Confucian social organization. During the nascent stage of the Fatherland discourse, notions of filial obligation to protect the Fatherland held central importance. Given the recognized Confucian influence even in the Radical movement, it stands to reason that the use of a motherland sign would not have the same effect as a more culturally recognizable Fatherland did. The Confucian undertones of the Fatherland sign would remain in later stages of Vietnamese resistance while its gendered framing would take on later contemporary importance.

During the French recolonization of Vietnam, after the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh continued to use the sign of the Fatherland in his speeches. However, it became re-signified, referring more directly to the actual homeland of Vietnam as a father to the people. In this subtle reformulation, the father is portrayed as under attack or held captive. In a 1945 speech after a National Congress of the Viet Minh committee meeting, Ho Chi Minh said that by increasing the ranks of the Viet Minh front, “our Fatherland will certainly win independence.” Again, in December of 1946 after the beginning of the First Indochina War, Ho Chi Minh criticized the “French reactionaries” demanding that “All Vietnamese people must stand up to safeguard their Fatherland.” In these appeals, the Fatherland is beset upon, in a rather passive role, and it is the duty of all Vietnamese to protect him. This framing places the Vietnamese as the children of the Father and siblings to each other, regardless of political orientation. The powerful invocation of filial ties between all Vietnamese not only reconciled any potential internal divisions, but also sought to expand the broad front of the Viet Minh, an organization with diverse membership but dominated by communist revolutionaries. In this phase the Fatherland discourse more roundly articulated familial links in an attempt to gain patriarchal sovereignty back from foreigners.

Throughout the Vietnamese resistance to French colonialism, a discourse of the homeland-as-father served as the grounds for a hybridization of Marxist-Leninist ideology and Vietnamese culture. Most significantly, it combined ideas of popular armed resistance against imperialist threats with culturally recognizable Vietnamese terminology. The calls for mass resistance drew their inspiration from Maoist critiques of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary doctrine. Two influential Vietnamese Communist Revolutionaries, Le Duan and Vo Nguyen Giap, openly espoused Maoist rhetoric and policies. By 1964, Le Duan’s official speech, which praised Maoist commitment to peasant-based revolutions rather than proletarian revolutions, marked an important shift in the dominant Lao Dong party line. Earlier, Vo Nguyen Giap, the most influential communist military figure in Vietnam, articulated this concept of rural revolt in People’s War, People’s Army, which drew obvious inspiration from Maoist revolutionary doctrine, especially in his focus on mass peasant revolution and guerrilla war tactics. In that collection of essays, published after the defeat of the French, Giap used Fatherland in the same way it had been used by Ho Chi Minh in 1940s. When describing French colonialist “determination to invade our country once more” Giap claimed that, “obviously there was no other way to resolutely safeguard the Fatherland” than to wage a popular revolution, a People’s War. Giap’s text has clear propagandistic purposes, describing the armed resistance to French colonialism in typically ideological terms. His use of Fatherland does not come about by accident. Given Giap’s influence and his focus on popularizing Communist ideas, the utilization of Fatherland discourse in this sem-

34 This is in contrast to the other four relationships, significantly “Ruler and Subject” which may seem more relevant to the colonial relationship between France and Vietnam.
35 Marr, Tradition on Trial, 54-55, 58, 63.
37 Ibid., 38.
39 Vo Nguyen Giap, People’s War People’s Army (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 92.
inal Vietnamese Communist text demonstrates the importance of the discourse as a means of cultural resistance during the French periods.

However, Fatherland discourse as the basis for a specifically Vietnamese form of Communist resistance reached its most significant stage during the resistance to American imperialism and the Diem regime. While during the First Indochina War, Fatherland discourse centered on the need to protect or save an “attacked father”, the post-Geneva stage of this discourse shifted to accommodate new political situations. In a 1956 address to the Vietnam People’s University students, Ho Chi Minh called on intellectuals to “strive to serve the Fatherland and people.”40 In a stark shift away from the need to inspire mass revolution and protect the Fatherland, Ho Chi Minh invoked a son’s duty to serve the father. This is significant in two ways. First, by this time, the Fatherland Front had been institutionalized for several months, meaning that calling intellectuals to “serve the Fatherland” took on more than symbolic meaning. Ho Chi Minh’s request can be understood as an attempt to affect notions of patriotism to the nation of Vietnam, and also as an attempt to consolidate loyalty to the Hanoi based government. Second, the inclusion of “the people” along with “the Fatherland” maintained the popular legitimacy of the Lao Dong while simultaneously shifting “the people” from the subject of the address (as in earlier speeches) to the object of loyalty. This established that by “serving the Fatherland” these future intellectuals would also serve “the people,” maintaining correct communist ideological standing as well as relatable cultural terms.

Though the Fatherland discourse shifted away from being fundamentally a staging ground for popular revolt, it did not lose any anticolonial overtones. In a speech concluding the Vietnam Fatherland Front Congress in September of 1955, Ho Chi Minh stated that “the [Fatherland] Front is ready to welcome into its ranks all those opposed to U.S.-Diem schemes,” that is, all those “persons who now want to serve the Fatherland.”41 These clear statements, made at the inception of the Fatherland Front, ensured that Fatherland discourses retained their anti-imperial nature during the shift away from calls to save or protect the Fatherland. Furthermore, as the United States becomes the primary Western antagonist in Vietnamese anticolonial discourse, the pragmatism of representing the homeland as father became doubly important. American discourse on Vietnam often drew upon assumptions of the “Orient,” which characterized the Vietnamese in certain essentialist terms. First, it infantilized the Vietnamese, adding a patriarchal tone of guidance to certain U.S. policies. Framing the homeland as father represented the opposite of this, giving patriarchal rights to Hanoi instead. Second, it portrayed the Vietnamese as passive and effeminate. This essentialization became the basis for U.S. support of Diem who, despite his unpopularity, was seen by American policymakers as the “kind of Asian we can live with.”42 Instead, Fatherland discourse granted the Vietnamese a decidedly active, masculine national character. These elements of Fatherland discourse became important in its utilization during resistance to American imperialism.

By November 1964, after the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in the United States and President Johnson’s escalation of the Vietnam War, the Fatherland Front had gained wide influence in both the North and South through Southern Lao Dong members. This was represented by a Conference held in Hanoi called the “International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Vietnam against U.S. Imperialist Aggression and for the Defense of Peace”. Organized by the Fatherland Front, the five-day conference saw speeches from delegations from over 50 countries, including many non-aligned nations, South and North Vietnamese, and even some anti-war U.S. citizens. The stated purpose of the conference was to condemn the U.S. “sabotage of the Geneva Accords” and to rally international statements of support for the NLF. This had obvious propagandistic purposes.43 However, it also marked the final evolution of Fatherland discourse. After being utilized as a broad base of support for the Lao Dong and a means to rally all Vietnamese anticolonial nationalists under a communist banner, the 1964 International

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40 Ho Chi Minh, Selected Speeches, 109.
41 Ibid., 99.
42 Seth Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 14-17.
Conference marked the beginning of Fatherland Front’s foresight in attempting to dominate the terms of reunification and the Southern resistance. In a long speech, the head of the North Vietnamese delegation claimed that many members of “the South Vietnam puppet army and administration realize that the way of their salvation is not to oppose the people, but to return to the Fatherland, to the nation.”44 Here, the representation of “the people” as near synonymous with the Fatherland remained, further representing the undemocratic and unjust nature of the Republic of South Vietnam. More importantly, however, was the recognition that all Vietnamese, regardless of political orientation, belonged to the Fatherland. By calling for a “return to the Fatherland,” South Vietnamese soldiers were framed as rebellious children with a chance of recognizing their need to serve the father once again by allowing for the reunification of Vietnam. This statement also did not recognize the division of Vietnam, instead reminding the conference that the Geneva agreements only recognized a temporary division and that Vietnam ought to be one nation-state. Furthermore, the new focus of Fatherland as the site of reunification of Vietnam asserted an extension of control of the Fatherland Front over South Vietnam. The President of the Vietnam Fatherland Front’s Central Committee invoked this clearly in the opening address to the International Conference. In regards to the N.L.F. resistance to the American backed regime, he said “our South Vietnamese people….wage a second resistance war to save their Fatherland with a view to….achieving independence, democracy, peace and neutrality, and advancing onwards to the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.”45 Aside from the use of “our” when referring to South Vietnamese combatants, which asserted clear possession of the resistance, the inclusion of neutrality as a means to reunification by the Fatherland Front’s representative represented the extent to which Hanoi realized the utility of promoting Southern neutralism while simultaneously maintaining control of South Vietnamese organizations. Notably, the utilization of Fatherland discourse was one-sided. In the entirety of the lengthy report by the head of the N.L.F.’s delegation, “Fatherland” comes up only in reference to the Fatherland Front, opting instead to speak about the N.L.F. resistance in an international political context.46

By the time US infantry entered South Vietnam in 1965, communist rhetoric had developed a strongly nationalistic and indigenous appeal that superseded the confines of class and ideology, appealing to broad swaths of Vietnamese. Meanwhile, the North had growing control over the N.L.F. In January of 1968, the Tet Offensive marked the most direct cooperation of the N.L.F. and North Vietnamese Army since the foundation of the N.L.F. Initial military success quickly gave way to heavy casualties, especially on the N.L.F. side. The heavy losses sustained by Southern insurgents led some to suspect Hanoi had purposely let the N.L.F. take heavy losses in order to weaken it.47 This suspicion had earlier roots, and tensions between non-communist members of the N.L.F. and those with Lao Dong connections had been apparent before. At least as early as 1966, some more moderate members had been seeking to establish a “Third Force” in response to the N.L.F.’s leftist shift.48 In May 1968, the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces was established by these moderate members with the explicit goals of promoting a neutralist, coalition government in South Vietnam.49 However, even this associated organization came about, indirectly, by Hanoi’s consent. Because of the growing concerns of radical takeover in the South, Hanoi’s post-Tet rhetoric focused on assuaging such concerns. For example, Le Duan, Lao Dong Party secretary, asserted the South’s “special and unique situation” while Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, denied anyone in the North “has this stupid and criminal idea of annexing the South.”50 These image-forming statements were heavily influential in the foundation of the Alliance and remained a cause for worry among those Alliance members.

The Alliance was not the most prominent neutralist organization to come to being after the Tet Offensive. The Provisional Revolutionary Government (P.R.G.) was established in June 1969 as the legitimate governmental body of South Vietnam. The P.R.G. had an explicitly neutralist stance and, in fact, the Alliance’s President presided over its creation. This endorsement prompted immediate local popularity and many non-aligned and commu-

44 International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Vietnam, 50-51.
46 Ibid., 66-90.
47 Brigham, Guerrilla Diplomacy, 83-84.
48 Truong, Vietcong Memoir, 130-131.
49 Brigham, Guerrilla Diplomacy, 89.
50 Truong, Vietcong Memoir, 135.
nist states granted diplomatic recognition to the P.R.G. within the month.\textsuperscript{51} Eventually, the P.R.G. enjoyed considerably more international regard among communist and non-aligned nations than even North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{52} However, for all the recognition and positive regard for the Alliance and P.R.G., Hanoi never allowed either group to wield effective power independent of their influence. By 1970, Hanoi had appointed Marxist ideologues to key Alliance positions.\textsuperscript{53} Furthermore, though neutralist foreign policies had become prevalent in some Western states, none of them, including France, had recognized the P.R.G. by 1970.\textsuperscript{54} Although the P.R.G. had international popularity, there was no attempt by the P.R.G. to model itself as the most likely domestic solution in Vietnam in the same way the Lao Dong had. Finally, although the Paris Accords granted provisions for a coalition government, the long-standing goal of South Vietnamese moderates, it did not seem that Le Duc Tho and other Northern politicians were confident Nguyen Van Thieu\textsuperscript{55} would accept the coalition, especially since they had cut him out of the peace talks.\textsuperscript{56}

Ultimately, the Alliance’s anxieties would come to fruition, the Fatherland Front would institutionally and symbolically absorb the N.L.F. and Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces after Saigon was captured in 1975. This ended any possibility for a neutralist solution for Vietnam. But, for years before, key organizations and individuals who may have championed neutralist solutions had either become Lao Dong party members or cooperated with Hanoi’s ideologically inspired political aims. From an international perspective, neutralism seemed like a viable solution for Vietnam, but Vietnamese nationalism had a heavily anticolonial character that was more effectively harnessed by Lao Dong discourses. Through the sign of the Fatherland, Vietnamese communists developed and presented a culturally unifying discourse, blending Vietnamese understandings of Confucianism indigenous anticolonial nationalism with international Marxism. While the Non-Alignment movement attempted to counter the threat of communist neo-colonialism, such a discourse never became dominant in Vietnam, even though anxieties about communist takeover were present among many South Vietnamese nationalists. Fatherland discourse effectively made communist ideologies present since the 1930s Radical movement hegemonic.

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\textsuperscript{51} Brigham, \textit{Guerrilla Diplomacy}, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{52} Truong, \textit{Vietcong Memoir}, 254.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 186-188.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid 191.
\textsuperscript{55} Nguyen Van Thieu became the president of South Vietnam after a coup against Diem who had fallen out of favor with the United States.
\textsuperscript{56} Truong, \textit{Vietcong Memoir}, 221; Brigham, \textit{Guerrilla Diplomacy}, 111, 113.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


