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RIVERSIDE

Monuments and Memory: Appropriating the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Southeast Asian Studies

by

Stephen Samuel James

December 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank those Vietnamese who came forward to join me in this project, particularly Westminster Mayor Tạ Đức Trí, T. Nguyễn, F. Nguyễn, Ông Đức, and also Winnie Bell, Records Clerk for the City of Westminster, CA, and Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville (ret.). This project has also become a reality through the generous support of the Dean's Distinguished Fellowship at the University of California, Riverside. I will be forever grateful for the steady and unwavering trust, support, and encouragement of the Dean and staff in the Graduate Division of the University. I am also indebted to Christina Schwenkel, (Chair), Mariam Lam, Muhamad Ali, and to Susan Ossman who have provided guidance along the way with the perfect mix of clarity, challenge and belief. The faculty and staff of both the SEATRiP and Anthropology Departments have exhibited patience and grace as I have attempted to concurrently navigate two streams. My colleagues in both departments have shown their care and support in numerous ways throughout these two years. I am grateful for Megan James who supplied photos for this project as once again, my family have rallied to the call, giving spiritual, emotional, and physical strength when I have wavered, and a rescue when I have lost my way.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Monuments and Memory: Appropriating the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial

by

Stephen Samuel James

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Southeast Asian Studies

University of California, Riverside, December 2015

Dr. Christina Schwenkel, Chairperson

Monuments and memorials have specific purposes and audiences for which and for whom they are built. It is crucial for any visitor to have a clear idea of the purpose for which a particular memorial was erected. Without an understanding of that purpose, the visitor can develop unrealistic expectations or become overly critical, asking the monument to do something for which it was not created. However, it is also true that individuals and groups appropriate monuments for their own personal and private activities of commemoration and memory. Monuments are thus utilized in the maintenance of relationships in imagined communities across living and non-living divides through acts of remembering. Rising out of ethnographic work, I analyze the Westminster memorial within this context of the public absence of representations of South Vietnamese in monumental commemoration. I argue that the memorial acts as a prosthetic device (Landsberg, 2004) that re-writes United States and Vietnamese war

historiography so that it no longer excludes South Vietnamese fallen soldiers, lost ‘boat people,’ and post-war refugee survivors. The memorial provides a physical space for the voicing of long silent discourses associated with, but not limited to, the Vietnam War. This work incorporates six sections including methodology, a descriptive section, the monument as a negotiated prosthetic ‘device,’ memory and appropriations of monumental space, remembering and forgetting in monumentalism, and notions of debt and tribute in reference to commemoration and memorialization. Monuments have specific purposes, however, these purposes are often debated and negotiated with the final product becoming an acceptable compromise. The notion of the prosthetic device involves the idea that monuments invoke the memories of things and people lost. This monument provides a space and place for the living to interact within a milieu of loss – the loss of a nation, the loss of presence and the silencing of voice. In this memorial space, there is the perceived need for the living to pay tribute due to feelings of debt owed to those who gave their lives, and for whom the monument was built.

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“Monuments and Memory: Appropriating the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial”



Figure 1: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial (Courtesy Stephen James).

Introduction

The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial stands in a city park on the edge of Little Saigon, a business district and tourist area between the cities of Westminster and Garden Grove, California. The memorial conveys a significant message to Vietnamese Americans and those with an association to the Vietnam War, but also to a local and transnational audience. Already, at the time plans to design and build the monument were announced, a representative of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Vietnam expressed

deep concern, strongly suggesting that the monument be altered to reflect current relations between the United States and Vietnam and not include the likeness of a South Vietnamese soldier (Tran, 1999). Debates ensued over the appropriateness and location of the monument on Westminster City land, and whether or not the flag of the Republic of (South) Vietnam should be flown on government property. These discussions involved parties on both sides of the Pacific and, brought to the surface the fact that post-Vietnam War representations of South Vietnamese peoples in both American and Socialist Vietnamese national monumentalism and historiography are strikingly absent (Allen-Kim, 2014: 31). In post-war Vietnam, monuments to the South Vietnamese have been purposefully removed (Schwenkel, 2009). In the USA the South Vietnamese simply never appeared in Vietnam memorials. In 2003 the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial changed this.

In this thesis, I analyze the Westminster memorial within this context of the public absence of representations of the South Vietnamese. I argue that the memorial acts as a prosthetic device (Landsberg, 2004) that re-writes United States and Vietnamese war historiography so that it no longer excludes South Vietnamese fallen soldiers, lost 'boat people,' and post-war refugee survivors. The memorial provides a physical space for the voicing of long silent discourses associated with, but not limited to, the Vietnam War. The diversity of South Vietnamese refugee voices, American veteran voices, and Vietnamese American voices becomes apparent in this physical space which activates many individual stories and enables their re-enactment as part of history. My ethnographic research enabled me to listen to these different voices, and brings out the

variety of ways in which visitors talk about and utilize the memorial in the process of memory work, both on an individual and collective scale.

Through visits to the memorial, many Vietnamese Americans who have lived through experiences of flight from Vietnam, exhibit a sense of agency that in some ways mirrors Malkkii's findings that there are alternatives to an "uprooted" and "pathological" refugee experience (Malkkii, 1999: 34). Vietnamese utilize the monument as a prosthetic device to express specific connections to past events associated with the former territorialized nation of South Vietnam. In addition, Vietnamese Americans utilize the memorial and its location as a device to express real, but not exclusive linkages to the territorialized nation of the United States, both in the present and future. Malkkii observed that refugees with a "lively cosmopolitanism...tended to seek ways of assimilating and of manipulating multiple identities – identities derived or borrowed from the social context" in which they live (Malkkii, 1999: 36). Vietnamese Americans described their journey into the American space in terms of stages, first with hopes of return, followed by an acquiescence to their long-term presence in America, and the need to be contextual, that is, Vietnamese in Vietnamese settings and American in American settings.¹ The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial is a place at which activities associated with the Vietnamese experience are publicly enacted and validated by individuals and the community.

Several works have been published on the memorial. These include an examination of the relationship between Vietnam War memorials and the commercial

¹ Interview, Westminster February 9 2015.

spaces of ‘Little Saigon’ in Westminster, California and Houston, Texas (Allen-Kim, 2014) as well as a critique of American memorialization of the Vietnam War that highlights the absence of South Vietnamese and elucidates attempts to redress the imbalance through the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial, (K.V. Nguyen, 2004). In addition, there are brief references to the Westminster Memorial in various publications of a comparative nature such as Linke, (2015), N. Nguyen, (2015), and V.T. Nguyen, (2004, 2008). These sources focus more on the memorial and less on those who visit it. This lack of ethnographic work motivated my research, in that to understand not just the form or placement of the memorial but also its social and political significance, one needs to explore how it is used, by whom, and when. One needs to notice how the monument becomes a public site of memory in Orange County, but also, transnationally. Investigating the different roles the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial plays in memorialization and transnational Vietnamese American discourse requires an on-site ethnographic approach. It permits me to understand how the original intentions of those who built the monument might differ from the intent of those who actually visit it. Ethnography also exposes the variety of these different uses of the monument in memory work, and traces the development of contemporary social and political discourse about the “place” of the South Vietnamese.

Originally designed as a monument to commemorate the relationship between Vietnamese and American service personnel during the Vietnam War, the memorial now serves as a site for the invocation of memories as diverse as those of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians who perished in the decade-long Vietnam conflict, the

loss of seventy-four Vietnamese sailors and marines in a battle with China over the Paracel Islands in 1974, and the loss of relatives at sea during the out-migration of ‘boat people’ from Vietnam. The monument might be said to work as a device that enables what Allison Landsberg describes as “prosthetic memory [that] emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site” (Landsberg, 2004: 2). At the “moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history” she continues (Ibid.).

The notion of prosthetic memory is helpful as a starting point for this work. However, for Landsberg, prosthetic memory involves “a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which [a person] did not live” (Landsberg, 2004: 2). In Westminster most, but not all, of the interviewees who were visitors to the monument had a lived connection with Vietnam or the Vietnam War and would, therefore not fit perfectly into Landsberg’s description. As a result, I feel the need to modify her approach. I do so by emphasizing the materiality of the monument itself. Keeping with the notion of the prosthetic, I describe the memorial as a *prosthetic device* that enables a wide variety of memory experiences. The monument, as a prosthetic device, enables visitors to engage in memory work from an historical perspective that includes both Vietnam and the United States and enables visitors to pay tribute to and honor the dead. In addition, the monument also excludes certain persons and entities not associated with South Vietnam, and this is significant, particularly in light of transnational politics and the continuing development of US-Vietnam diplomatic and economic relations. The monument acts as a rallying point for South Vietnam background Vietnamese Americans who are actively engaged in

current debates associated with these diplomatic and economic ties including critiques of Vietnamese and American policy.

The thesis begins with an outline of the research methods I used in this project. I then describe the monument and its location in the Sid Goldstein Memorial Park in Westminster, CA. This description moves into an examination of the negotiated processes of developing the design and designating the purpose of the memorial. Then, building on ideas of memorial space and commemoration, I use and “materialize” the concept of “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg, 2004) building on this concept to understand the way the monument activates memory and connects those who visit it to history. This leads me to explore notions of tribute and debt that came out among interviewees as especially significant in light of the ways the monument is used to both commemorate the dead and celebrate the living. I conclude by asserting that as a prosthetic device, the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial locates and highlights ‘othered’ South Vietnamese American communities, giving them voice through its public spectacles and private commemorations.

Methodology

Hai was driving through the area, and became curious as he passed the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial, noticing that there was no signage on the main road indicating the presence of the monument.² After wandering through the memorial grounds on foot for half an hour, as he turned to leave, I invited him to become a part of this project through an interview. He readily accepted. When asked about the structure

² Interview, Westminster, January 7, 2015.

and meaning of the memorial, Hai stated emphatically that he was somewhat disappointed that the space “[did not] look more Vietnamese. There should be more Vietnamese landscaping... you would expect bamboo...and the architecture is not Asian or Vietnamese. I haven’t been to Vietnam since I was 2 years old so I don’t know, but I would expect to see an open pavilion”³

Hai went on to describe his reaction to the two well-armed male soldiers noting that there was nothing in the monument that denoted defeat, as the stance of both soldiers was erect. Nor did the statues indicate peace. “For me, it doesn't say ‘peace.’ These are symbols of war – guns, ammunition, battle-gear – not very peace-oriented. From what I know of sculpture, position says a lot – both are standing – a declaration of victory.”⁴

While this is, in some ways true, looking back at the inscription on the monument itself, the purpose of the memorial is to honor those who fought for ‘freedom and democracy’ not explicitly to promote peace. As we sat on a bench in the park overlooking the monument, Hai went on to add that from his perspective:

This memorial pretties up the tragedy. The tragedy was there [in Vietnam]. We won’t walk across this area and find a [land]mine. The statues don’t convey all the pain, death, mental anguish of amputees. If you look at the memorial, you don’t experience or see any of these things...none of this tells of the scarring of the people, the land. I’m talking about even the American psyche. What you see is a very robust, confident, armed statue. If it were done properly, more than two should be there. I hate to say it, but it should have an amputee, even children. The statues indicate 1x1, but about twenty Vietnamese died, soldiers and civilians to each American. Of course, I understand funding and the need to satisfy funders, but...⁵

³ Interview, Westminster, January 7, 2015.

⁴ Interview, Westminster, January 7 2015.

⁵ Ibid.

Hai's strong feelings about representation and the important aspects and people associated with the Vietnam War that were missing in this monument is significant when examining the monument in a holistic way. V.T. Nguyen claims on an ideological level that Vietnamese Americans have been brought into the American milieu in significant ways, in this instance, through the heroic, gendered and nationalized architecture of the monument site (Nguyen, 2008: 27). But as Hai's response to the monument shows, visitors to the monument have diverse reactions to this heroic aesthetic. They have various ways of interpreting the monument related to the many and various motivations for frequenting it. Ethnographic study enabled these other views to come to light.

One Vietnamese interviewee escaped Vietnam in the 1980s and interprets the memorial as a place of healing. While some utilize the monument as a device that celebrates South Vietnamese and American unity and a mutual anti-communist agenda that excludes present-day Vietnam, this interviewee states that:

People should go [to the memorial] with respect, with love and not with hatred. ...to me, that is healing because nobody likes war, either side... nobody really likes war. But we fight. We have to. So, one day we are friends, one day we are enemies, one day we are enemies, one day we are friends. So therefore, whatever has happened, has already happened. We have to change it, we have to create something that people, a hundred years from now, people who go there, will not think about what happened but will think about who died.⁶

This very different perspective, focused on the healing and the memory of the living and of the deceased rather than on war with its winners and losers, indicates that the memorial

⁶ Interview, Westminster, May 31 2015.

indeed evokes various reactions, depending on the person viewing the statues and the surrounding space. Another view came to light through my research in October 2014, when I observed an African American male, about 35 years of age meandering through the monument grounds, reading the plaques, taking photographs every few minutes. He was at the memorial for close to half an hour before I introduced myself as being a graduate student from the University of California carrying out research on the memorial. David informed me that this was his first time at the memorial. “I don’t know anyone who fought in Vietnam, but I felt I should stop and pay my respects. I never knew this memorial was here. I think it’s good that the Vietnamese have done this for their community. They’ve done a good job.”⁷ I asked if he could see it as also for American veterans or other non-Vietnamese Americans. “I suppose so, but Westminster is mostly Vietnamese, so I guess mostly Vietnamese would come here.”⁸ It is understandable that David would have this perspective, given the demographics in Westminster with its majority Vietnamese population and proximity to Little Saigon. The significance of the location of the monument in this strategic region will be examined later in this thesis.

A final viewpoint came to my attention one evening as the sun sank into the horizon and the evening light deepened from yellows into oranges that complemented the three stripes and yellow field of the flag of the Republic of South Vietnam flying over the memorial. An older, well-dressed Vietnamese gentleman strolled through the grounds of the monument with an older woman and young man, perhaps in his early twenties. The hushed tones of the southern Vietnamese dialect drifted across the plaza in direct contrast

⁷ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

⁸ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

to the occasional snap of the Vietnamese and American flags as they stiffened in the breeze. The conversation shifted to English as the gentleman urged the young man to take his final photos, indicating that it was time to leave. As they turned and began descending the steps toward the road and their waiting car, the Vietnamese gentleman slowed and let the other two move on ahead. Suddenly, he turned on the step, straightened himself, threw his shoulders back, and sharply saluted in the direction of the monument and flags. He then turned once more, descended the stairs, and entered the car. With the young man at the wheel, the gentleman kept his gaze on the monument as the car pulled into the street and out of sight. I could not help but wonder how these Vietnamese visitors felt about this memorial they had come to see for only ten minutes. What would they tell family and friends about this monument? What purpose did it serve for each one of them? What different mental images were conjured in their minds as they walked the grounds reading the messages on the various plaques?

This work examines the question of who is represented and who is not in relation to the memorial. The purpose was to get at the uses of the memorial, its diverse meanings, and ways that visitors engage in acts of remembering. The purpose of the project was also to gain a better understanding of how monuments can enable new forms of national loyalty, patriotism, and community solidarity as historical narratives that are used in efforts to influence current American and Vietnamese transnational policy. Following on from the work of Taylor and Horst (2013), I utilized multiple ethnographic methods in order to more fully address these purposes. As Taylor and Horst observed, there are three key components of the research process, “time, trust, and traces / trajectories” (Taylor

and Horst, 2013: 88). An essential component was time spent on-site and with people. This is anthropology and ethnography enacted. It is the practice of fieldwork out in communities and amongst people (Malinowski, 1922). That is, getting out and “interacting with [people] intimately and over an extended period” (Monaghan and Just, 2000: 13). I spent a total of 56 hours on-site at the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial observing, and at times participating in people’s interactions with one another and their environment. These periods took place on varied days of the week and at varied times, on holidays, and during official memorial activities.

The observations above were recorded as field notes as “the ethnographer’s central purpose is to portray a social world and its people... [through] the following strategies – description, dialogue, and characterization” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011: 57). Each of these strategies is tied to the others in that through time spent at the memorial I developed a familiarity with the site, the area and its people. The ability to carry on a conversation with members of the community in Vietnamese and English, utilizing information gleaned through regular visits, allowed me the opportunity to establish rapport and trust and ultimately led me to an ever-widening circle of relationships of people associated with the memorial in some way. Eventually, one person would encourage me to contact another, phone numbers would be exchanged, which was then followed by Vietnamese coffee or a meal. As is so often the case, the best interviews came at the end of the project, which, as a result, brought focus and clarity to the material. I must note that in the light of trust, the names of all but a few interviewees have been changed. Those who have been public figures in some way are the exception.

Rapport and trust in relationships with interviewees often come through longevity. However, the time taken to build rapport is often expedited through shared experience. This was the case with a number of interviewees with whom I shared my own background, having been raised for almost fourteen years in Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, from 1962 to 1975. I found, over the course of this research, that the inclusion of various elements of my own story in conversation seemed to act as a key to opening the door on people's willingness to engage. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha aptly described it, "my story carries with it their stories, their history..." (Minh-Ha 1989: 122) It is this mutual 'transferring' of shared experience that allowed for the interweaving of stories that then brought a sense that we were telling *our* story though we may have only just met one another. At the same time, I am aware that caution is necessary due to the very different nature of my identity and position as compared to those with whom I was interacting. I was not a 'boat person,' nor am I Vietnamese. While my experience included losses, including the loss of the place in which I was raised, I did not lose my country, my home, or my kin. But neither was I simply an American with an abstract connection to the Vietnam War as part of history. I was brought to Vietnam in 1962 when I was just under two years of age. My family and I lived primarily in Saigon until the age of fourteen, when I had the privilege of leaving the country by plane in April, 1975, during the final days of the Republic of South Vietnam.

I recognise the conflicted nature of my role as a researcher and the ethical considerations at work. Edward Said pointed out that "no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact that his [sic]

involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society” (Said, 2000: 76). This is, of course the reality for any researcher, but doubly so for those researching others with whom his or her life has been intertwined for a significant time. I possessed at that time a different citizenship to those with whom I lived and, therefore, specific powers due to that citizenship that were associated with class, beliefs and social standing. I was a privileged minority in the Republic of South Vietnam. I had a citizenship that not only allowed certain privileges while there, but also provided a landing place at the end of our flight from Saigon in 1975. Such privileges were not afforded Vietnamese who survived often harrowing ocean voyages, and found themselves in refugee camps scattered across Southeast Asia. Citizenship is not only a part of one’s identity, it is also an access point. As a natural-born citizen and white American, I have a different position in America than many of those who visit the monument. I do not visit the memorial with the deep emotion of having lost a relative or loved one. Nor am I one of those who have never been to Vietnam but who mourn a loved one lost in battle. I do reflect on the loss of family friends, both Vietnamese and American soldiers, as well as on the national tragedy of the loss of so many civilians and military personnel in addition to the loss of the nation of South Vietnam. When I began this project in 2013, I had never lived in Southern California, nor had I visited Westminster. My research necessarily included a great deal of background work.

In addition to interviews, I spent time with archival and other material objects in order to gain an historical understanding of the site, its creators, and its visitors, as well as

to gain insight into ‘state-making,’ nationalism, and institutional power through the monument. I utilized press articles, Westminster City Council Minutes, personal papers, brochures, information pamphlets, blogs, YouTube videos, web sources, and other resources. Several archive sources are included in the Appendices (See Appendices I and II, III). As Stoler argues, archives should be utilized “not [only] as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography” (Stoler, 2002: 90). The Westminster City archives proved to be a rich source of material, not only in what was included in the archives, but also in what and who was missing and not a part of the discourse around the monument. Through the course of the research it became clear that there were multiple perspectives in the production of multiple knowledges in relation to the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial.

Moving beyond the archives in order to get at these various ways of knowing, I conducted formal interviews with officials and locally prominent individuals in the City of Westminster. I met with people elsewhere who were instrumental in the development of the monument (See Appendix IV for Interview Questions). For instance, I interviewed the Mayor of Westminster along with Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville, and sculptor Tuan Nguyen, all of whom were officially involved in debates from the time the monument was first proposed. The intent of these interviews was to examine the original negotiations and conclusions as to the intended purpose of the monument. Interviewees were given consent forms and were required to verbally express their willingness to participate in this project (See Appendix V for the “Informed Consent” form).

I also prepared a survey that was to be distributed to up to one hundred individuals. The intention was to utilize the survey to initiate conversations with visitors to the monument. It must be noted that attempts to engage members of the public with a survey were unsuccessful. Visitors to the memorial were reticent to fill in a questionnaire. However, in spite of this, most people were open to conversation. The qualitative phase of the research incorporated both informal conversations as well as semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese members of the public who visited the memorial. These somewhat informal, more in-depth interviews were carried out with twenty-seven individuals. In this work, I have changed the names of those who are not normally in the public domain, or part of official documentation related to the monument.

During both phases of the research, I used the ‘snowball effect’ in order to garner research subjects who had connections with previous interviewees. An example of this snowball effect took place during an early encounter with a Vietnamese elderly gentleman, Ông Trong, who regularly met me in Westminster, giving me lessons in the Vietnamese language. I met this gentleman while I was involved in participant-observation at the research site. Through an interview in the initial stages of this project, Ông Trong introduced me to the Mayor of Westminster, who is one of the first elected Vietnamese American city mayors in the United States. Late in the day that I had met him, Ông Trong made contact with the Mayor who rang my cell phone that evening. This conversation eventually led to an interview with the Mayor and members of his staff. Ông Trong also invited me to a cafe in Westminster, at which groups of older Vietnamese meet regularly, introducing me to several individuals who were willing to chat

informally. In addition to Ông Trong, there were several others who provided contact information, facilitated introductions, and in other ways expanded the scope of this project in significant ways. The results of this project will be placed in the archives of the Westminster City Hall. There were no limitations placed on me or on the research process. These methods opened access to a variety of interviewees who challenged normative views of the monument, thus revealing a negotiated and complex site. A part of that complexity had to do with the deposition of objects at the monument site.

In the course of the research, I attempted to ascertain what material objects individuals visiting the monument left behind, and whether or not this practice was a significant aspect of the use of the monument. During initial observations, it was clear that there was indeed a practice of depositing things as I had seen flowers, incense, wreaths, and photographs. One interviewee, Chi Hai, mentioned earlier, described her practice when she attends official events at the memorial: “I put incense [on the monument] and then pray. Hopefully, their souls will be flying high with the smoke from the incense. They are free from all pain.”⁹ My purpose in this aspect of the project was to address the materiality of memory, that is, how is the monument being used in the everyday, particularly as a place of depositing objects of memory, remembrances, memorials, or items that elicit specific emotions. As I spent many hours at the monument at various times during the day, I often discovered unopened packages of incense, potted plants, wreaths, and occasionally a photo propped up on the plinth at the foot of the statue. While I have not seen any evidence of the burning of joss notes (special paper

⁹ Interview, Westminster, May 6, 2015.

money) or other offerings for the dead, objects of commemoration are significant, as I will discuss later in this work.

In order to get at this materiality I visited the Office of the Clerk at the Westminster City Hall to identify what objects had been left behind, where they might have been archived, and how I might examine them. A sign posted at the site clearly states that city officials pick up any objects left at the memorial on a twice-weekly basis on Tuesdays and Thursdays. According to the city Public Works Department any items of value are given to the Westminster Police Department and are deposited in Lost and Found (See Appendix VI: Correspondence related to items left at the monument). On this note, Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville, Ret., who served as a Vice President for the (Westminster) Vietnam War Memorial Commission, stated in an interview that there are still plans to “convert the shed to the right of the monument [on the property of the Sid Goldstein Freedom Park, where the Vietnam War Memorial stands] into a kiosk that could be used as a place to provide information and display artefacts. We’re still working on it”¹⁰ he informed me. The result of this line of questioning was that at the present time, leaving meaningful objects is not a significant aspect of the monumental practice of visitors to the memorial. The few photographs left at the monument were of a specific nature and had to do more with the spirituality associated with the presence of and communication with spirits at the memorial than with specific memories of loved ones or those lost in the past. Other than incense, flowers and wreaths, there is not a practice of depositing objects of memory. However, in spite of the lack of objects that have

¹⁰ Interview, Riverside, April 11, 2015.

significant memory ties, interviewees indicate deep memories are elicited when they are present at the monument itself. To set the stage for the presentation of my ethnographic findings, I must first describe the monument and the park in which it stands,

The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: A Description



Figure 2: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Panorama (Courtesy of Megan James).

The Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, CA is located on All American Way, a short street, but one that gives access to the Westminster City Hall, police department, courthouse and public library. Also on All American Way is the Coastline Community College and the Westminster Rose Center, a theatre for the performing arts. At the end of the road is a multi-unit housing complex and the parking lot for the nearby courthouse. The plot of ground on which the monument stands belongs to the City of

Westminster and is known as the “Sid Goldstein Freedom Park.” The monument itself, set back into the property and up a series of steps, is known officially as the “Vietnam War Memorial” (See Appendix III).

In the center of the property stands the monument itself, built in the round. There are several steps that take the viewer up from the sidewalk, and wheelchair access is provided on either side of the steps, curving upward and inward. The three steps lead up to a wide path, on both sides of which, twenty-seven pink granite memorial plaques have been sunk into the pavement.



Figures 3, 4: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Memorial Plaques (Courtesy Stephen James).

At present, only fourteen plaques have been used to record personal messages of memory in either Vietnamese or English as is illustrated above. Loved ones and others have dedicated specific messages to a wide variety of people, such as to all those who collectively fought in the Vietnam War, to individual veterans, to military units, colleagues, and to nurses who served during the Vietnam War.



Figure 5: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Central Feature (Courtesy Megan James).

Walking up to the monument, one hears the sound of rushing water. As pictured in the photo above, one climbs a further three steps onto a circular walk. The heart of the monument complex lies one step down and consists of a round, open area that is bordered by a semi-circular wall curving slightly greater than 180 degrees. The wall is approximately six feet high, sloping up and outward, and is twenty feet in diameter, flanked on either end with large black granite anchoring slabs in the shape of a triangle. The wall is made of large, black granite slabs with cool, clear water constantly cascading from top to bottom into a trough at the base as can be seen in the photo below. The water has a cooling effect in the warm, summer sun, and provides a meditative ambiance that drowns out the sounds of occasional traffic on the street in front of the monument.



Figures 6, 7: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Water Feature and Urn (Courtesy Megan James).

Surrounded by the wall, and occupying the center of the area, is a six-foot tall bronze urn (seen above) in the Vietnamese style with an eternal flame emanating from its mouth. The urn sits on its own platform enclosed by an eight-foot diameter moat and metal railing. There are usually coins in the bottom of the moat and on the platform at the foot of the urn, mostly pennies. A number of the coins are discoloured indicating that groundskeepers collect the offerings infrequently. The water in the moat surrounding the urn churns, as if it were a part of the cascades all around it. On my first visit to the memorial a visitor had placed a seven-foot tall, standing floral wreath in front of the urn.

On top of the wall encircling the platform are living shrubs with white flowers. At the back of the circle, and rising out of the black granite wall, is another raised platform.

On this platform stands the focal point of the memorial, a fourteen-foot high bronze statue designed by Tuan Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee himself and well known Vietnam and Southern California-trained sculptor.



Figure 8: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Bronze Soldiers (Courtesy Stephen James)

As illustrated above, the statue consists of two male soldiers, side-by-side, facing the sunset, one American and the other Vietnamese. Both are similarly dressed in fatigues and flak jackets carrying M-16 rifles and armed with grenades and ammunition pouches. On either side of the statues are two flagpoles. The flag of the Republic of South Vietnam, with its yellow field and three horizontal, red stripes flying on the right, and the

flag of the United States on the left, with the black MIA/POW flag flying underneath. A plaque has been embedded in the wall just underneath the statue on which is recorded in English and in Vietnamese an inscription highlighting for visitors the purpose for which the monument was built. The inscription puts the focus squarely on those soldiers who fought in Vietnam, American and Vietnamese. The inscription reads in English:

DUTY, HONOR, SACRIFICE

IT IS SOMETIMES SAID THAT HEROES ARE HARD TO FIND.

PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF DUTY, HONOR AND
COUNTRY NEED TO LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THOSE WHO FIGHT FOR
FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY.

And in Vietnamese:

TỔ QUỐC-DANH DỰ -TRÁCH NHIỆM

NGƯỜI TA THƯỜNG NÓI: KHÓ MÀ TÌM RA CÁC VỊ ANH HÙNG. NHƯNG, BAN
HIỆU ĐƯỢC Ý NGHĨA CỦA "TỔ QUỐC, DANH DỰ VÀ TRÁCH NHIỆM" THÌ
KHÔNG CẦN TÌM DÂU XA HƠN NHỮNG NGƯỜI ĐÃ VÀ ĐANG CHIẾN ĐẤU
CHO TỰ DO VÀ DÂN CHỦ.

Walking around the monument, one sees multiple plaques of remembrance all along the back side of the black granite wall on which various sponsoring individuals, organizations and businesses have recorded statements in memory of those Vietnamese,

Americans and other allies who fought in the Vietnam War as is seen in the illustrations below.



Figures 9, 10: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Donor Plaques (Courtesy Stephen James)

To the left and right of the monument is a grassy area with maturing shade trees and benches. On the right side at the front of the memorial park, embedded in the grass, is a low, concrete viewing stand with four levels. On the left, and toward the back of the property, is a playground. At the far back of the park, along the rear fence, stand a line of palm and banana trees. At this point, with both a written and visual view of the memorial park in mind, I turn to the process of negotiating the design, placement and purpose of the memorial.

A Negotiated Monument: Debating Design, Placement, and Purpose

With the structure of the monument in focus, I can now consider the design, placement and intended purpose of the memorial from the point of view of those who built it. I begin with Tuan Nguyen, the Vietnamese American sculptor who worked on the project. Sitting in his living room, surrounded by the graceful beauty of a number of sculptures, and with miniature models of both the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial as well as a proposed Refugee Memorial standing at the end of the room, Tuan Nguyen related the following story:

It was 1995 the Mayor Frank Frye of Westminster wanted to create a memorial to link the Vietnamese and American soldiers. They had a contest, and I submitted my work. The contest was to create the Vietnamese soldier and American soldier shaking hands. In a handshake position, as a Sculptor, I look at that description and I think it's difficult. It's impossible to make this look good. Because the soldiers shaking hands composition was not good for me. When I saw that, I said that I would like to change that. So, when I created the sculpture I wanted the Vietnamese soldier and the American soldier to be shoulder by shoulder, to represent the camaraderie between the Vietnamese soldier and the American soldier, not to make them shake hands. So I wanted to have them stand side by side. The idea, and the image in my mind was to make the American stand there with the gun in his hand and the helmet in the other hand and look far away. His eyes say, "I've been here, and I've fought with you guys, and I fought for the country, and now I'm going home, not because I have to go home," because that's a political point of view, right? And then the Vietnamese soldier would still have the helmet on, and his gun still on his shoulder, and he's still fighting. And his finger points to the land, saying, "I'm going to protect my land." [See photo page 22] So, with that image you have two men standing with each other but with a totally different point of view. But they would be still looking in the same direction. One says, "I don't want to go, but I have to go." Those were his orders. There was nothing he could do about it. That's the military, you know. But it did not mean that they just go home because they've done the job. They still have the [military] clothes on. So that was my creation when I submitted it. I

told Mayor Frank Frye, when he was still alive, that I didn't know if shaking hands is good, but this is my idea. And then whole panel started to change that idea and picked me as the winner to create that memorial, not only the sculpture itself, but to create the whole memorial.¹¹

Highlighting the negotiations that took place during the process of arriving at a mutually acceptable design, Tuan Nguyen illustrates the give-and-take that characterizes discourse around the memorial. As we sat discussing these early negotiations and those that followed in detail, it became clear that there were many points along the way at which choices had to be made regarding its purpose. According to Tuan Nguyen, “to people who know, [the memorial is] not a symbol of South Vietnam. But I believe it's some place that people can come and can heal. And, I really want people to not go there and think about war, or hate what's in the past. I want people to go there with respect, with love and not with hatred.”¹² Tuan Nguyen's call not to focus on the Vietnam War with its horrors, but to focus on healing, and on the relationship between those who fought and died alongside one another, as well as on those who lost their lives in the subsequent flight from Vietnam, is a common theme that ran through our the interview. I examine this discourse in greater detail in further sections, particularly as it relates to the side-by-side genre of memorialization. At this juncture, I present further discussions around the realities of the placement of the monument.

In unpacking the significance of the construction and placement of the monument, several important aspects must be noted that reveal underlying issues and highlight important compromises that took place in the process of the realization of the monument

¹¹ Interview, Orange County, May 31 2015.

¹² Interview, Orange County, May 31 2015.

as a project (See Appendix I). The fact that the monument is located on All American Way is significant but not without a contested background. The fact that the monument is located in a public park dedicated to a highly decorated, American World War II veteran, on a street which carries such a patriotic message, and in the vicinity of City Hall, the Westminster Police Station, the public library, and the court house, was one which was contested early on in the approval process. According to the minutes of a City Council meeting held on June 28, 2000, one council member pushed for a public hearing.

Council Member Neugebauer commented that she supports the Vietnam War Memorial. However, the site selection decision needs to be noticed as a public hearing to provide the opportunity for public input. She noted that some time ago, Council received a petition with over 200 names of individuals that do not feel that the Vietnam War Memorial belongs on public property, and that there is a great difference of opinion in the community.¹³

The debate involved the question of whether or not the monument was in fact specifically related to one community – the Vietnamese, or whether it was indeed meant for the use of all the citizens of Westminster and beyond. In the end, after much debate and compromise, it was decided that the City of Westminster would provide the land and manage the park in which the memorial stands, while members of the community would pay the costs of the monument (Letran, 2002).

The fact that the monument is located on All American Way, and on land owned by the City of Westminster; and the fact that it is located in such proximity to sites of power within the city, is testimony to the size and influence of the Vietnamese

¹³ City Council Minutes June 28 2000.

community as well as the fact that Vietnamese are deeply integrated into the City landscape and power structure. This fact is also due to the persuasiveness, not only of the Vietnamese community, but also of non-Vietnamese leaders in the wider Westminster community, such as Frank Fry, then Mayor of City of Westminster and who originated the idea of a monument to commemorate the brotherhood of American and Vietnamese forces in the Republic of Vietnam, as well Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville, (ret.), a Vietnam veteran who served on the steering committee for the development of the monument.

Along with the debate regarding the placement of the monument on public land was an associated controversy related to the flying of the flags of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam. The debate was explained by Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville in the following way:

When we started to build the monument, [Westminster City Councilwoman] Marjorie Rice wanted the American flag to be 1 inch taller than the South Vietnamese flag. I pulled out the US Army regulations that say that if two national flags are flown side by side, they should be flown at the same level with the American flag in the position of honor. And that's the way it is now at the monument.

I asked if there were others who also contested the flying of the flags or the placement of the flags at the memorial. Given the fact that the South Vietnamese flag is prominent at the monument, and given that the Republic of (South) Vietnam ceased to exist as a nation in 1975, I wondered about debates surrounding the decision to fly both flags on the property. Lt. Col. Mandeville replied:

The VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] never seriously contested the issue, and the [Westminster City] Council was not concerned.

What we did was name the area “historical ground,” covering the period 1965 to 1975, in order to fly the flag that was officially the flag of South Vietnam at that time. If there is no longer a country, there can no longer be a flag. It must be called a banner. But at the Vietnam War Memorial, because it is designated an historical site, the flag can still be flown as the flag of the nation at that time.

So the only real issue was whether the American flag should be taller than the other. Marjorie was still uncomfortable, and wanted the American flag higher, so we all agreed that the park was the “Sid Goldstein Park,” and there was a taller American flag already there [separate to the monument as part of the Sid Goldstein Memorial Park]. The issue never came up again.¹⁴

Flying the flags together was one practice illustrative of the unity and brotherhood of those who fought in Vietnam on both the Vietnamese and American sides. Another aspect of this unity was the positioning of the bronze soldiers themselves, side-by-side and ‘at the ready.’

The plaques of remembrance on the opposite side of the granite wall and those plaques located on either side of the walkway illustrate the notion of memory from a very different perspective. These plaques had to do with the memory and recognition of those who donated funds for the building of the monument. An example of one of the plaques associated with the monument follows, and indicates a few of the variety of entities that came forward in support of the building of the monument in Westminster.

¹⁴ Interview, Riverside, May 16, 2015.

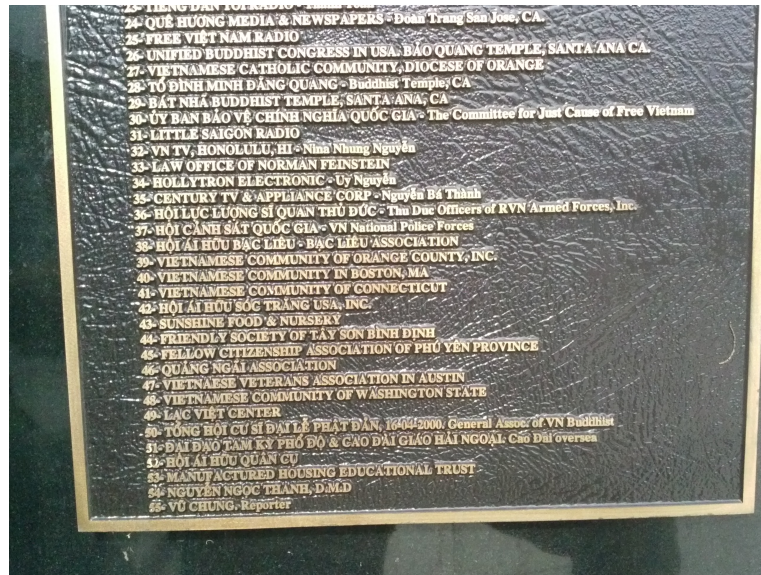


Figure 11: Entities and Organizations Sponsoring the Westminster Memorial (Courtesy Stephen James)

Support for the monument came from particular members of Vietnamese communities, along with non-Vietnamese local and multi-national business leaders that had something to do with either the Vietnam War or with the Vietnamese diaspora. These individuals and entities paid the \$1 million dollars necessary for the construction of the monument and its bronze statue and urn. From international, diasporic Vietnamese pop music stars to former South Vietnamese government officials, many people, organizations and businesses gave generously to the collective fund. One interviewee described a series of fund-raising activities in Orange Country organized by Vietnamese clubs, churches and individuals as being “very successful at pulling together the Vietnamese communities in Southern California.”¹⁵ According to the Orange County Register, “Namloc Nguyen, a Los Angeles resident... raised close to \$400,000 for the memorial by organizing two concerts” (Barath, 2006).

¹⁵ Interview, Westminster, February 7 2014.

This fundraising aspect of the construction of the memorial was also not without its controversy. According to Lt. Col. Craig Mandeville (Ret.), who served on the committee responsible for the establishment of the monument, there was an early suggestion that plaques commemorating donors be placed on the sides of the large, bronze urn in which the ‘eternal flame’ burned. Immediately there was a reaction and “the Vietnamese community said, ‘You can’t do that! It’s disrespectful!’”¹⁶ This clash between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ is indicative of deeper issues and debates around notions of monumentalism. Schwenkel, in her work on remembrance and representation, referring here to monumentalism in Vietnam, but apropos due to the secular nature of the Vietnamese government’s perspective on religion states:

“Moreover, in accordance with the secularist tenets of new socialist culture, and echoing western secularized commemorative practices, memorial sites were constructed as distinctly nonsuperstitious, national spaces of secular memory in which visitors were to commemorate, honor, and pay their respects to the dead, rather than to propitiate and worship them with incense and other offerings” (Schwenkel, 2009: 113-114).

The point of the argument here is that, while new socialist culture in Vietnam has its own practices of separating the sacred from state commemorative practices, in contrast, in the neo-capitalist context of the USA and capitalist-influenced South Vietnamese American communities, interested parties blur the lines between what some members of the community considered sacred objects and the constant need to advertise and utilize any available space for the promotion of ‘philanthropy.’ It was eventually decided that plaques would be made available for those who gave donations. Walking through the

¹⁶ Interview, Riverside, April 11, 2015.

monument, it is possible to read those plaques, which represent individual donors, families, but also corporations such as Vietnamese television and radio studios, community-based businesses, and even the Boeing Corporation as is indicated in Figure 10 above. According to a local reporter, “for weeks, Vietnamese-language radio stations in Orange County blared with pleas for help, and Vietnamese superstars walked door to door, asking for donations” (Tran, 2002). Many Vietnamese participated in the excitement and “joined thousands of spectators in the large fund-raising concert...for the new Vietnam War Memorial statue in Westminster, which honors both United States and South Vietnamese troops” (Ibid.) These are some of the issues inherent in the intercultural interactions associated with the building of a monument that is intended to represent multiple members of a multi-ethnic community.

The resolutions to these debates point toward a conception of the monument that underscored the camaraderie, the unity and the brotherhood of the combatants during the Vietnam War. Councilman Frank Fry, a World War II veteran originally proposed the idea of a Vietnam War Memorial in 1997, six years before its dedication, stated that, “it’s symbolic on many levels, but mainly...to unite the Vietnamese and American communities” (Letran, 2002). Other descriptions of the monument indicate that:

[The statues were] created to honor both the American and South Vietnamese soldiers who fought so gallantly and heroically in the name of freedom during the Vietnam War. This... memorial was designed to convey the appreciation and respect felt by the South Vietnamese, and all who love freedom, for the bravery and sacrifice of the soldiers who did their very best to try to secure freedom for the people of South Vietnam.”¹⁷

¹⁷ <http://www.paragonfineart.com/artists/n-tuan.html>.

Viet Thanh Nguyen writes that Tuan Nguyen, the sculptor of the statues at the monument, stated emphatically that the statues at the monument represent friendship not war (Nguyen, 2008: 26). In the photo below, the soldiers embodied in the



Figure 12: Westminister Vietnam War Memorial: Side-by-Side Soldiers (Courtesy Megan James)

monument are not in a battle pose, but are standing side-by-side, both armed with similar weapons and dressed in similar uniforms, both looking off in the same direction. One gets a sense that these two figures are linked, but at the same time are quite different.

According to the sculptor, Tuan Nguyen, the soldiers have fought the same war but now “the American is going home, his M-16 is hanging in his hand, his helmet is off and he is leaving, not of his own will, but on orders. The South Vietnamese soldier is still ready for battle. His rifle is hanging over his shoulder, his helmet is on, and his finger is pointing at the soil. He is staying to continue the fight.”¹⁸ This brief explanation on the part of the sculptor, juxtaposed with the assumptions of others such as Hai quoted earlier in this work, who hoped for a more broad meaning of the monument that would include civilian casualties is indicative of the nature of monumentalism. Once the monument is built and put on display, it is released by the sculptor and its meaning is open for contestation by the audience.¹⁹ I argue that the meanings attributed to the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial are varied and are based on both the context and the experience in which the observer finds himself or herself. By drawing on that context, the visitor to the monument appropriates the memorial in specific ways and for specific purposes. This is subject of the next section.

Memory: Appropriations of Monumental Space

Monuments and memorials have intended purposes and audiences, for which and for whom they are built. But they are also often sites of contestation and, as Bodnar points out, “the shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration in the present is contested and involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments” (Bodnar, 1993: 13). Individuals and groups appropriate monuments

¹⁸ Interview, Orange County, May 31 2015.

¹⁹ Ibid.

for their own personal and private activities of commemoration and memory in addition to the public exercise of those collective memories. Mary Caruthers provides a classical basis for this point noting that early medieval definitions described memory as “a storehouse of mental images” (Caruthers, 2008: 40). Caruthers goes on to write, that “for whatever memory holds occupies a *topos* or place, by the very nature of what it is, and these *topica*, like bins in a storehouse, have both contents and structure. Every topic is in this sense... a structure of memory for recollection... [an] inventory... of experiential knowledge” (Ibid.). The content of the ‘structure’ and ‘inventory’ is what determines the grouping to which one belongs as one typically groups with those who have similar experiential knowledges.

There are a number of Vietnamese communities in Southern California, and each individual has a variant set of memories based on varied experiences and connections to the war. Individuals who take the time to visit and recount their memories at the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial, become connected and “coherent” with those who accompany them, developing a bond that opens possibilities for deeper connections that engender trust. A great deal of that trust is inherent in the shared connection of American citizenship following the shared connection of flight as refugees. These shared connections create unique groupings that contrast with other groupings of visitors in the ways that the memorial is utilized as a device for commemoration. For one group the monument is a space for familial commemoration and reflection, while for another it is a place at which a spectacle is organized for the commemoration of a specific battle in

Vietnam, or for the celebration of the Lunar New Year. In each case, the memorial works as a prosthetic device for memory work in specific ways unique to each grouping.

Bodnar asserts, “public memory emerges from the intersections of official and vernacular cultural expressions” (Ibid.). Memory is thus utilized by both official and non-official members in the maintenance of imagined communities through acts of remembering. However, the various players who have stakes, as it were, in the exercise of that public memory are often arriving at the notion of the meaning of monuments from competing perspectives, they are in Bodnar’s terms, “multivocal” (Bodnar, 1993: 16). Official perspectives seek to emphasize unity that utilizes monuments for the purpose of holding a community together with the same cultural norms and expectations. Bodnar points out:

Whether in positions of prominence in small towns, ethnic communities, or in educational, government, or military bureaucracies, these leaders share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo... and they advance these concerns by promoting interpretations of past and present reality that reduce the power of competing interests” (Bodnar, 1993: 13).

Bodnar’s notion of the monument serving as a “device” for the propagation of “national unity and patriotism” (Ibid.) in reference to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, is apropos here, but is only a part of the story. She goes on to describe the “vernacular culture” aspect of the public memory binary as “an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole” (Bodnar, 1993: 14). Finally, public memory is defined as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future. It is fashioned ideally in a public sphere in which various parts of the social structure exchange views”

(Bodnar, 1993: 15). Rather than a set of competing political claims implied by Bodnar, this research indicates that there are a plethora of perspectives which, often are not competing at all, but exist side by side in the form of visitors to the monument who are personally invested in the memorial for deeply personal reasons. Schwenkel notes, addressing the limitations of a binary-based model, that “though attentive to processes of contestation and negation, this approach tends to reinscribe and delimit borders between dissimilar arrangements of memory” (Schwenkel, 2009: 11). Visitors to the monument are engaged in a transnationalizing process of locating in the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial memories that originated thousands of miles away, memories that required numerous border crossings. While Bodnar’s notions of public memory are certainly at work in Westminster in the Vietnamese community, care must be taken not to lose sight of the variety of memory spaces and individual trajectories and their uses of the monument in the midst of the “Black April” commemorations that highlights the fall of Saigon, the “Battle of Hoàng Sa” commemorations of those who died in battle against China on the high seas, or the Tet, lunar New Year celebrations that take place at the memorial.

The month of April is of great significance for many Vietnamese in the diaspora. Known as Black April due to the anniversary of the “Fall of Saigon” and the loss of the Republic of Vietnam nation as a political entity on April 30th 1975, there are always events at the Vietnam War Memorial at this time. This year, Chi Hai attended the commemoration and gave the following description:

I have just attended the 40th Anniversary of the Fall of Saigon at
The Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster on April 30th, 2015.

There were more people, more organizations there this year. It was very emotional, especially when religious leaders prayed for souls of unknown soldiers, the wreaths were respectfully offered by each group, candle -light vigil, and names of all soldiers of Republic of South Vietnam who committed suicide during the Black April 1975 were read. People could not hold back their tears.²⁰

It is of note that for Chi Hai and others, even after 40 years, emotion is still just under the surface. This is the power of memory, and also the power of the community to keep that memory both alive and current. Also of note is that often, religious leaders from various religions and denominations come together at these momentous events. There are various organizations in Orange County who staged commemorations at the monument during the month of April 2015. Those who applied for permits, according to the Westminster City Council archives were, the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, Inc., the original organizing group for the monument, who applied to host the Twelfth Anniversary of the Vietnam War Memorial in conjunction with a Black April Commemoration Ceremony on April 26 2015. The second organization was the Vietnamese Community of Southern California that held a special event at the memorial on April 29 2015, and the Vietnamese Federation of Southern California also held an event at the monument on April 30 2015.²¹

Perhaps the most significant event I attended at the memorial was the annual commemoration of the 1974 battle of Hoàng Sa, or the battle for the Paracel Islands. This battle took place between the Navies of the Republic of Vietnam and the Peoples Republic of China one year before the unification of Vietnam by the North Vietnamese

²⁰ Interview, Westminster, May 6, 2015.

²¹ See Appendix VIII for official applications by these organizations for commemorative events.

and National Liberation Front. Here, I present the ceremony in full as I experienced it in order to illustrate the elaborate nature of many of the commemorations at the monument.



Figure 13: Battle of Hoàng Sa Commemoration: Color Guard
(Courtesy Stephen James)

South Vietnamese flags flanked by American flags adorned the fence in front of the monument, forming a ring along the property of the park and along the road at the entrance of the memorial. Elderly gentlemen in a variety of military uniforms, gathered around the front of the monument chatting, greeting one another warmly with the shaking of hands and light hugs. A few elderly women in uniform milled about. Most women, many dressed in traditional áo dài, were seated, chatting quietly in white folding chairs facing the monument. The sun was bright, high in the sky, and the sweet scent of incense wafted across the crowd of sailors in dress whites, army in fatigues, a few sailors in jeans and blue shirts. The announcer outlined the purposes of the ceremony in Vietnamese.



Figure 14: Battle of Hoàng Sa Commemoration Vintage Jeeps
(Courtesy Stephen. James)

The National anthem of former South Vietnam played as the officer in charge called for a salute. Then the US anthem was played. The color guard dispersed and speeches ensued calling for the crowd ‘never to forget.’ ‘To hold the memory of the events of 1974.’ A wreath was placed to the right of the monument by Navy and Marine personnel in dress whites. Reveille was played on the PA. Then a gong was sounded 3 by 3 beats – a mournful, soulful sound echoed through the silence.



Figure 15: Participants in the Battle of Hoàng Sa Commemoration
(Courtesy Stephen James)

Officials from various Southern California Vietnamese communities/cities were invited to come forward. Each was given

incense and, after bowing three times, placed the incense on a table with a tablet commemorating seventy-four fallen comrades.

Another speaker spoke of the forty-two years since the battle. The speaker called the audience to ‘never forget, even though the country is now controlled by Communists.’ In another speech, the speaker asserted that ‘it is not about the republic, but about the country or the people.’ This was followed by applause (Not ‘*Công Hòa*,’ the republic, but ‘*Nuóc*,’ the people). The final speech thanked the crowd stating: ‘We’re grateful and happy that forty years on there are still people who come to remember this battle and the country of South Vietnam in Southern California.’ The program finished with Fight/March songs on the P.A. and people milling about catching up on the news with one another.

(Translations by Author).

Once again, the commemoration and speeches, songs and drama were about remembering and reminding. There were multiple generations present. According to one interviewee, this was the fifth year of the annual Battle of Hoàng Sa commemoration. I learned that the program was handled by a committee of veterans that meet in a local seafood Restaurant in Westminster. I interviewed the owner, Ông Hiếu, who informed me that he lost a good friend in the Battle for Hoàng Sa and so he named his restaurant in his friend’s honor. “Seventy-four men died in that battle,” he said. “It was very difficult. We also lost a ship. Now we must remember, and teach our children so they don’t forget”²²

The Vietnam War Memorial provided an appropriate space to commemorate the loss of life in what was not actually a Vietnam War battle. Thus the memorial participated in memory work of a broader scope. It was required to keep the South Vietnamese nation in the forefront of the minds of all who attended the commemoration as well as all who will read about it in the future. The narrative of the dramatic

²² Interview, Westminster April 13, 2015.

presentations and music during the commemoration was clearly intended to tie the heroes of Hoàng Sa to the ancient heroes of the Vietnamese past as well as the more recent heroes who were beaten during street protests, and who are still fighting today in diplomatic ways for Vietnamese sovereignty over the islands.

According to the organizers and choreographers, the nation still exists in exile and in the memory of all who experienced or heard, not only about the battle of Hoàng Sa, but also the on-going battle against communism as could be seen in the vocabulary and the tenor of the speeches. The rhetoric inherent in the speeches and drama of the Hoàng Sa commemoration reveal strong connections to ideology, nationalism and loyalty. These spectacles are an integral part of public memory for the community as Bodnar points out, however, many who visit the monument do so with a very different agenda and sense of its place in their histories.

Yoneyama asserts, “when questions of history are formulated in terms of memory, researchers must examine not only the content of historical knowledge but also the processes whereby that knowledge is accessed (Yoneyama, 1999: 27). This bringing together of history and memory is an important aspect of the use of prosthetics.

In a sense, the prosthesis, that is the monument, acts as an historical anchor, with which people engage in diverse ways in the community. Visitors regularly return to the monument bearing their memories, which are accessed in a wide variety of ways, both public and private. Stiegler (2001), following on from the work of Derrida (1996), describes the notion of prosthetics and memory in the following way: “What is exceeded is the essential fallibility of a person’s memory that, as living, is mortal; the supplement

of writing [and, I would add, object re-defining] allows that person to confide the trace of his or her intuitions, which become as a result transmissible, to future generations” (Stiegler, 2001: 245). In many ways, monuments become the ‘writings’ that are transmitted to future generations, but only as long as stories are told and meanings are elucidated. Who represents the memorial as it is transmitted from one generation to another? Is it the power entities of the City of Westminster, or the individuals who visit the memorial? Coffey points out the complexities inherent in the utilization of prosthetic devices for memory work, and the unifying effects of linking prosthetics to an individual’s or a society’s reality. She notes that “Like Derrida, Stiegler does not use the supplement as a device for separating the artificial and the real, but rather as a concept that is inseparable from existence, and in which many seeming oppositions collapse together” (Coffey, 2014). Coffey goes on to note that, “by definition, prosthetics concerns a replacement for that which is missing, an artificial mediator between amputation and extension” (Coffey, 2014). In the case of the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, the monument itself, its grounds, and the objects left behind can represent a lost nation but also lost loved ones, lost ways of life and lost dreams.

Several people I interviewed spoke passionately about their sense of the monument representing the heavy losses so many Vietnamese and Americans experienced during the course of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. The statues of the monument have become the embodiment of those losses in the sense that when one who has experienced loss comes into the presence of the memorial, there is an invocation of

memories, and the statues become the focus or prosthesis associated with those memories.

Once again, Mayor Ta spoke to this point as he stated:

The memorial [statues]... they really speak for everyone regardless of where you are coming from.... Like during the Vietnam War there were sacrifices, many families lost their father, they lost their son, their wife, I mean they lost their houses! So the memorial really speaks for two generations... it speaks for everyone, regardless of where you're coming from. I saw a movie of American people at that time... I believe that people here were also suffering, because a member of their family died during the Vietnam War. So that speaks for everyone in the world who got involved in the war."²³

An experience, distant in both time and geography is profoundly brought into the present by the monument/prosthesis whether one is a Vietnam War veteran, former South Vietnamese citizen, uprooted refugee, or one who lost a loved one in Vietnam. The monument makes accessible many experiences and elicits a wide variety of responses. On this point, Huyssen asserts that in the last ten years or so sculpture has moved into an era in which:

It is worked in such a way that it articulates memory as a displacing of past into present, offering a trace of a past that can be experienced and read by the viewer. It thus opens up an extended time-space challenging the viewer to move beyond the material presence of the sculpture... and to enter into dialogue with the temporal and historical dimension implicit in the work (Huyssen, 2003: 111).

My observations and interviews clearly indicate that in spite of the efforts to “nationalize” the memories produced at the Westminster memorial, the multiplicity of meanings and uses exceed simplistic categories. Visitors to the monument, in contrast, seem to move beyond that ‘Huyssen-type’ ‘time-space’ dialogue with the statues, adding a relational or

²³ Interview, Westminster, April 13, 2015.

‘grouping’ dimension. While each individual comes to their own perspective on what is being said and what is being heard, these individuals also group according to what they have heard or experienced. On this note, Alison Landsberg states that, “the radical potential of prosthetic memory derives from the fact that the subjectivities they produce are not ‘natural,’ not based on some count of authenticity. Furthermore, prosthetic memories cannot be owned exclusively” (Landsberg, 2004: 146). She goes on to assert that, “as memories no one person can own, that people can only share with others and whose meanings can never be completely stabilized, prosthetic memories themselves become a challenge to the ‘total possession’ of private property” (Ibid.). The monument, belongs to anyone and everyone and can be appropriated and used to remember events, people, nations, etc. in many ways. A key example of this notion of ‘open’ memory-work is found in the next section of this work in the practice of several Vietnamese who use the monument, not to remember hero soldiers who fought and died in the Vietnam War, but to commemorate the deaths of others on the periphery of the Vietnam War.

Monuments: Remembering and Forgetting

Chi Thanh is a middle-aged woman, married to an older gentleman who escaped on a boat with family members not long after the demise of the Saigon government. I met Chi Thanh as I was spending time in the Westminster community getting to know people. I stopped by an orchid shop next to a large Vietnamese supermarket. The owner was a Taiwanese who befriended me and to whom I subsequently went for gifts, which I offered as thanks for the Administrative assistant in the Mayor’s office, or the City Clerk

who assisted me with archival material. As the owner of the shop and I chatted one afternoon, he suddenly turned to his part-time assistant whom I had not yet met, and said “You talk to him. You’re Vietnamese. He wants to talk about Vietnamese culture!” I then turned to Chi Thanh and explained my project. She immediately told me about a family ritual. “We go to the memorial every year. We go on the anniversary of the death of my husband’s cousin. He died on a boat. You know, many Vietnamese left Vietnam on boats many years ago. Many people died. We go to the memorial each year to remember his death.”²⁴ Here, the memorial is used not to remember a combatant, but to memorialize a relative who lost his life along with thousands of others during the crisis of the boat escapes from Vietnam.

In another case, Alex, a white American brought his two young sons, 4 years and 5 years of age. As we chatted at the monument, Alex said, “I bring my boys here to play and I walk around and think about my life. At first, I worried about letting the boys play in the water and on the monument, but then I thought, ‘I’m sure a lot of the guys who died fighting for their country had kids too, and they would be happy to see kids playing on their monument.’”²⁵ Here is a father who utilizes monumental space to process and ponder life, something the men and women commemorated were not given the privilege to do. Alex is not ‘connecting’ with the dead, but he is aware of their memory, aware of their presence in a respectful way.

Through the ethnographic process, a variety of perspectives are revealed and examined. Visitors to the Vietnam War Memorial are a little-studied example of this

²⁴ Interview, Westminster, January 19, 2015.

²⁵ Interview, Westminster, February 21, 2015.

complex interplay of often-conflicting loyalties, ideologies, and memories. The myriad of perspectives can be seen in the varied experiences that visitors to the monument have, as can be seen throughout this paper. There are those who appropriate the monument for their own purposes, ignoring aspects of the architecture or verbal displays that might limit their experience and narrow the usefulness of the monument space. Christina Schwenkel asserts:

National memory, scholars such as Renan (1990 [1882]) and Anderson (1991 [1983]) remind us, depends as much upon remembrance and representation as it does upon forgetfulness. Thus I approach monuments not only as a technology of memory (Sturken, 1997), but also as an instrument of forgetting that silences and displaces particular historical pasts and sociocultural modes of memory making (Schwenkel, 2009: 107).

This notion of forgetting is also addressed by Espiritu who states that in the national American consciousness, “as scholars, public historians, and the media have repeatedly documented, Americans have been obsessed with the [Vietnam] war as an *American* tragedy. As a result, most American writings on the war involve the highly organized and strategic forgetting of the Vietnamese people” (Espiritu, 2006: 424) (emphasis in original). It must be noted that, nearly ten years on, this critique has been addressed by multiple scholars as can be seen in the plethora of literature not only *about* Vietnamese, but *by* Vietnamese scholars themselves. Vietnamese authors writing on the war and its aftermath are not only publishing in America, but also in Australia where Vietnamese and Australian side-by-side monuments predate the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial (Linke, 2015: 90). Academic projects have been published recently comparing the purpose and role of Vietnam War monuments located amongst the Vietnamese diaspora

in Australia, Europe and the United States (Linke, 2015; N. Nguyen, 2015; Hamilton and Ashton, 2001; and V. T. Nguyen, 2008). These academic works have focused on monuments and memorials as objects of memory and representation.

However, the important notion of forgetting does beg the question: What do memorials forget? What is missing? As an object of memory-agency, what is perhaps intentionally left out in the physical or mental realities associated with a monument? This point is significant in Vietnam War discourse. Eymann and Wollenberg discuss the “homogenization of the Vietnamese experience” in “discussions of ‘the Vietnamese people,’” arguing that references to the ‘Vietnamese’ “do not allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which South Vietnam and South Vietnamese are erased from official memorializations” (Eymann and Wollenberg, 2004: 155). The erasure of Vietnamese from American Vietnam War narratives is significant to those who have life experience and memories associated with the Republic of South Vietnam. The absence of the South Vietnamese experience from official memorialization has less of an effect on Vietnamese Americans who do not share experiences of the Vietnam War or life in the former Republic of South Vietnam. For instance, according to Espiritu, with reference to the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial in Washington, DC:

The highly controversial Vietnam War Memorial, commissioned to commemorate and memorialize the U.S. soldiers who fought in Vietnam, provides a pointed example of this “forgetting.” Framed within the nationalist context of the Washington Mall, the memorial must necessarily “forget” the Vietnamese and “remember” the American veterans as the primary victims of the war. Because the memorial is a key site where cultural memory is produced and debated, the Vietnamese become unmentionable in this context: “They are conspicuously absent in their roles as

collaborators, victims, enemies, or simply the people whose land and over whom (supposedly) this war was fought.” Without creating an opening for a Vietnamese perspective of the war, these dramatic and public commemorations of the Vietnam War refuse to remember Vietnam as a historical site, Vietnamese people as genuine subjects, and the Vietnam War as having any kind of integrity of its own (Espiritu, 2006: 424).

Rather than engage in the debates surrounding the purpose of the Washington, DC ‘Vietnam *Veterans* Memorial’ (note the precise nomenclature), my purpose here is to argue that the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster is a response to the clear absence of South Vietnamese veterans and the nation of the Republic of South Vietnam in the physical and literary expressions of the Washington DC memorial, and indeed almost every official American monument addressing the Vietnam War. One must recall that the memorial in Washington, DC was built for a specific purpose, and it is essential to understand that purpose as one interacts with and critiques the memorial. In the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, there was perhaps never any intention to address non-American veteran combatants or civilians in any significant way. Is the lack of any focus on Vietnamese associated with the Vietnam War the result of ‘forgetting,’ or is it simply the result of a specific focus on United States Vietnam War veterans? The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is, in a sense, a ‘private’ memorial in that its focus is on a bounded community, American Vietnam War veterans. This same principle can be applied to the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, which was intended to serve the memory and community of the South Vietnamese *and* American soldiers.

In spite of efforts to make the memorial an object of primarily national, ideological significance for the South Vietnamese in relationship with American

veterans, the monument has exceeded this use, serving as a prosthetic for a much richer set of memories and experiences, albeit including the glaring absence of the fact that the Vietnamese and Americans were defeated. Monuments aid in memory but also in strategic forgetting according to the purposes for which they are built.

One of the purposes for erecting the monument came as the result of the perceived absence of any real locus for mourning lost Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers by some members Vietnamese Diasporic community in Southern California. Given the fact that many Vietnamese Americans are unable or unwilling to return to Vietnam, these realities preclude opportunities to mourn in the place of loss. As one interviewee stated, “I will not go back to Vietnam until the people are free again.”²⁶ Many respondents, particularly of the older, first generation of immigrants, indicated their aversion to contact with the current Vietnamese regime based on their experiences of loss and persecution. Chi Hoa stated: “We should not cooperate with such a government. We Vietnamese suffered so much. We lost everything. Then we came here and built our lives again. How can we go back there now? Our people there still suffer. We must be a strong community here to influence the [Vietnamese] government for human rights and freedom.”²⁷

When asked about her perspective on the notion of ‘freedom’, Chi Hoa further explained that, “in Vietnam people are controlled by the government. Many people don’t have basic human rights. They have restrictions on travel, study, making money and business, some people are persecuted strongly, especially in the highlands [Central

²⁶ Interview, Westminster, February 21, 2015.

²⁷ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

Vietnam], and there is not freedom of religion like we have here. And also, political opposition is not allowed, so the government can do whatever it wants.”²⁸ Everyone with whom I interacted had a strongly-held opinion regarding the current Vietnamese government. Assertions related to the need to utilize the economic and political strength of the Vietnamese American community to change the regime or make it conform to international treaties on human rights was a common theme in these discussions. ‘Influence’ was described by a number of these interviewees as putting pressure on the US government to exert its influence on the Vietnamese government with regard to violations of human rights. Another common suggestion involved efforts to support organizations and shore up businesses in Vietnam that are also involved in the pursuit of ‘freedom’ for Vietnamese. The question of just how first generation Vietnamese Americans would personally carry out that influence in Vietnam was less clear. When I raised the question with a member of the commonly called the ‘1.5’ generation, those who came to the United States as babies or small children, answers became more complex and vague.

Sitting on a bench with Hai, the young Vietnamese American professional who was passing through Westminster on business. I continued discussing the monument. He was quick to point out that while he was Vietnamese American, he was born and raised in the United States and did not have a good understanding of Vietnamese culture or history. He did however, have some thoughts about the memorial as a first-time visitor.

²⁸ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

His concern was related to the notion of “forgetting,” and the glaring “absence” in the structure of the memorial of suffering and defeated bodies.

In a café in Little Saigon, I recognized one of the younger men. Taking leave from his companion (who was, in any case, on his cell phone), this gentleman turned his chair and began explaining his perspective on his current role in Vietnam to me. Having arrived in the United States as a young boy, Dung speaks Vietnamese well, having used it at home and in the neighborhood growing up. He travels back and forth from his home in Southern California to Vietnam as an administrator and engineer in a factory in the southern part of the country. In his view, as he works to “strengthen Vietnam’s economy, changes will take place slowly but surely on the political side.”²⁹ (It is notable that Dung does not visit the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial.) The desired changes relate to those grievances mentioned above, however, Dung’s generation actively engages the Vietnamese government which encourages the sending of remittances, facilitates training offered by professional Việt Kiều (overseas Vietnamese), and courts investment by those who fled the country some forty years before.

In light of the perspective of the 1.5 and second generations, the government of Vietnam is seeking to connect with Vietnamese abroad. This point has been made through official Vietnamese channels by government publications. An example of this desire to cooperate with Vietnamese Americans can be found on the website of the Houston Vietnamese Consulate. It seems significant that these statements are targeted to an overseas Vietnamese population that experienced massive upheaval following the

²⁹ Interview, Westminster, February 16, 2015.

devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans that prompted a large intra-US migration of Vietnamese and others to Houston. Moving on from the atrocities of the past, without any mention of the war or its aftermath, the Vietnamese Consular Office suggests that:

Fully aware that the overseas Vietnamese communities form an integral part of the national community, the State of Viet Nam has elaborated policies that give incentives to the overseas Vietnamese, providing them with favorable conditions to deepen their relations with the motherland, to take part in national construction and development as well as the promotion of Viet Nam's image to the world and the enhancement of friendship and cooperation between Viet Nam and resident countries of the overseas Vietnamese.³⁰

The site goes on to note that: "The State of Viet Nam always attaches great importance to the overseas Vietnamese communities and consistently observes the policy of broad national unity."³¹ The fact that there are Vietnamese Americans who are benefitting from the Vietnamese government's policy of Doi Moi, or reconstruction and openness, complexifies the communist-anti-communist binaries typically associated with the older generations of Vietnamese Americans who experienced first-hand the Vietnam War.

Anti-communist rhetoric is not unique to South Vietnamese in Westminster. (See current debates around the normalization of diplomatic relations with Cuba.) However, I argue that anti-communist perspectives are driving a growing monumentalism around the Vietnam War that has resulted in the establishment of a number of Vietnam War-associated memorials in the US states of California and Texas, and also in other nations. It is not a coincidence that this emphasis on memory and memorialization coincides with

³⁰ <http://vietnamconsulateinhouston.org/en/learn-about-vietnam/overseas-vietnamese>

³¹ Ibid.

the aging of Vietnam War-era South Vietnamese Americans who practice the stories they know. Nostalgia conditions anti-communist ideology and strengthens community cohesion. There is a growing body of literature addressing anti-communist perspectives amongst Vietnamese Americans. Here, I reference Vietnamese American scholars such as C.N. Le (2009) who addresses issues associated with anti-communist sentiment. In his work entitled “Better Dead than Red: Anti-Communist Politics Among Vietnamese Americans,” Le contributes to Ieva Zake’s edited volume examining wider anti-communist perspectives and political activism amongst ‘ethnic refugees’ in the United States. (Zake, 2009) T. T. V. Dang (2008), refers to ‘anti-communism’ amongst Vietnamese Americans as a ‘paradigm’ shaping many Vietnamese American perspectives and serving as a key element in South Vietnamese American community formation, maintenance and identity (Dang, 2008). In order to bring balance to the discourse, it is important to point out that while much of this thesis is about the interrelationship between Vietnamese Americans with an anti-communist perspective and Vietnamese communists in Vietnam, this is by no means the entire story. Far from being in a binary constellation, Vietnamese, both in America and in Vietnam and around the world, hold multiple perspectives, which render any simplistic generalizations false. There are supporters of the communist state within Vietnamese communities in America, and also Vietnamese residing throughout Vietnam who have long supported nationalist if not democratic policies. A key figure in this vein is Truong Nhu Tang, the highest National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) figure to leave Vietnam, defecting to Paris after becoming disillusioned with official government policy following unification (Truong, 1985).

In recent times, Vietnam has been opening its doors to Vietnamese Americans in the United States, just as other communist governments are softening their stances vis-à-vis their own overseas populations in exile. The fact that the opening of relations and ties to Vietnam is now well established does not mean that the losses of the war are forgotten. But, it is significant that it is at the point of ‘normalization’ of relations between the Socialist government of Vietnam and the United States, and with the emergence of the second generation of South Vietnam-background Vietnamese Americans that the Westminster site was conceived. I contend that the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial was a response to many factors that had been affecting the South Vietnamese American communities in Southern California which came to a head in the mid-1990s.

A key element in the memory work of many South Vietnamese Americans has been the erasure of Republic of South Vietnamese influences in Vietnam, including the removal of monuments and memorials commemorating the battlefield losses of the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam. Schwenkel notes the absence of a place or space of mourning for Republic of Vietnam casualties in Vietnam, finding that “while monuments and martyr cemeteries acknowledge the collective contribution of liệt sĩ (martyrs) regardless of their deed and rank, this memory excludes, for example, war dead from the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], whose monuments were promptly dismantled after the end of the war and who currently have no official public spaces of commemoration [in Vietnam]” (Ibid, 2009: 108). Without an official monument in Vietnam, and given that many (but not all by any means) Vietnamese Americans are estranged from the current government of Vietnam, one must consider the importance of

the Westminster monument not just for preserving memories one would have in any case, but enabling recollections one would not otherwise have. Chi Tran explained that, “when you go to the memorial, you can see the flag, the yellow flag with three red stripes, when I see it, I see the whole country [of South Vietnam].”³² “I don’t think that space [the monument] belongs to the Republic of Vietnam. Just like anything else, when you live in a third country, you would have your own little space to be proud of... so [the monument is] just that particular space that we are proud of. It shows the flag and the soldier as part of the nation, and it’s a place where people go to reflect.”³³ The physical space elicits memories one might not have had otherwise: “Every time I come to this monument I have memories. This place stirs my memories and brings them into my mind so that they’re fresh once again, even though they are from far away.”³⁴ One man wondered aloud, “How is it that my life there seems so long ago and [there is] so much distance, and then I come here to commemorate, and now it is all here with me...in this place.”³⁵ With a few exceptions, these statements related to the importance of the Westminster memorial for South Vietnamese American memory work are exclusive to the older, first generation refugees from the former South Vietnam.

In addition to the removal of memorialization of South Vietnamese war dead in Vietnam, the American South Vietnamese communities are faced with the realities associated with an aging population. Eymann and Wollenberg describe the critical situation thus:

³² Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

³³ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

³⁴ Interview, Westminster, February 21, 2015.

³⁵ Interview, Westminster, April 10, 2015.

Not only are South Vietnamese exiles faced with historical and official erasure by their host and home countries, but they are also confronted by an inevitable social eradication from within their own community. Characteristic of an aging diaspora, the transmission of ideas and memory from an older to a younger generation in the Vietnamese community is further complicated by the ever-broadening linguistic and cultural gap. Young Vietnamese Americans, shielded from the actual experience of the war, are less and less interested in pursuing an earlier generation's memory of the war. The lack of interest among their children, many Vietnamese veterans fear, presents the possibility of a final erasure of the South Vietnamese political and ideological *chính nghĩa*, or legitimacy, from Vietnam War history" (Eymann and Wallenberg, 2004: 155).

In order to preserve the memories of the Republic of South Vietnam and its peoples, it is essential to immortalize these memories in stone and bronze as a prosthetic memory device that will serve future generations. Eymann and Wollenberg conclude that it is "against this backdrop the South Vietnamese in California came together to build a memorial that would honor their dead and heal their own deeply fractured [communities]" (Eymann and Wallenberg, 2004: 155). One of the important ways that the memorial is utilized as a prosthetic device is in the way that it employs Durkheim's notion of the "symbolic construction of social unity" (Kwon, 2008: 24). Vietnamese Americans who frequent the monument, describe a deep sense of unity with others during commemorative activities, a unity that is centered around discourses of nationhood associated with the Republic of South Vietnam.

However, not all Vietnamese Americans in Westminster attend commemorations at the memorial, nor do they have a sense of debt to war dead or the lost nation. In conversations with young Vietnamese Americans who had come to America as small children or who were born in the United States, I found there to be an absence of interest

in the memorial. A number of young people stated that they had never been to the monument, though they had heard about it. One interviewee stated that the memorial, in his opinion, was “a place where the older generation goes to share their memories.”³⁶

The realities associated with the loss of the refugee generation, coupled with the lack of commemorative space, both in Vietnam and in America, combined with the erasure of South Vietnamese narratives from American Vietnam War monumentalism is driving the development of a series of monuments of which the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial is one. The Westminster memorial serves a wide range of purposes for the various communities who frequent it, but for many South Vietnamese, the monument is foremost a tribute and a reminder.

Tribute and Notions of Debt

Paying one’s respects to one’s ancestors is a critical element in traditional Vietnamese society. As Endres and Lauser point out, “the Confucian concept of filial piety (hiếu)... is respect, obedience, gratitude, and the obligation to repay the moral debt (on) to past generations” (Endres and Lauser, 2011: 124). This practice is all the more important in the case of fallen South Vietnamese soldiers in that according to Kwon, they are “political ghosts,” that is identities [that] have been uprooted from home and excluded from the sphere of ritual remembrance for political reasons” (Kwon, 2008: 21). Drawing on the most famous story in Vietnamese literature, “The Tale of Kiều,” Trinh T. Minh Hà speaks of debt and previous lives in the context of suffering and loss in the refugee

³⁶ Interview, Westminster, February 7, 2015.

experience. In answer to her own question about the enduring identification of the Vietnamese people with such a tragic tale of love and loss, she states:

Perhaps it's because through Kiêu's story, the worst imaginable and the very best of that which has been called "human" is vividly brought into the picture. And then perhaps, as it is widely perceived, it's because this unpredictable turn in her life (in one's life – as war victim, refugee, exile, émigré, prisoner of conscience, homeless, mourner, etc.) results both from social injustices and from an old debt that one carries on from one's previous lives. This is where the tale strikes a most sensitive chord in the Vietnamese psyche" (Trinh T. Minh Hà, 2011: 18).

Whether one is in debt due to activity in a previous life or due to life in a previous place, the result is the same – the debt is there, always running in the background. For those with memories from the past, as well as those with borrowed memories from those who experienced them, the Westminster monument plays a key role as a prosthetic device in providing a space to re-encounter those memories and connect on some level to others with similar memories and to spirits of those who have gone before. It is beyond the scope of this project to explore in depth the background and deeper implications of the spirit world with respect to the Westminster memorial, however, the majority of interviewees mentioned the spirits of the dead and the need to remember and pay tribute to them as a significant factor in their visits to the monument. As can be seen in the photos below, visitors to the monument leave incense, sometimes in packets, sometimes burned with the stems remaining at the foot of the statues.



Figures 16 and 17: Westminster Vietnam War Memorial: Incense and Offerings
(Courtesy Megan James)

Incense is used in both personal and official commemorations of the dead as an aid in prayer, not so much as a practice of religion per se, but as a practice of personal devotion. Janet Hoskins, in her work on spirit mediums in Southern California quotes an interviewee who succinctly describes the effect of the use of incense in ancestor veneration: “I felt that the ancestors I prayed to when I burned incense had become real for me again” (Hoskins, 2014: 77).

It is this ‘reality’ of the ancestors described by the spirit medium that is the focus of statements made by interviewees involved in this project. Of significance are the ways in which various visitors to the monument interact with those spirits. I observed these interactions at the monument as visitors who described themselves as Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, or ‘of no religion’ paid tribute to the dead through the use of

incense, meditation, and prayer. In one case, a photographer took photographs of the cloud formations above the monument, capturing images of soldier's faces, the face of Jesus, 'good' dragons, and others. His message was one of warning, that the spirits of the soldiers were warning visitors to pay attention to their lifestyles and "listen to God."³⁷ In the case of the Battle of Hoàng Sa commemoration, the names of the dead were read aloud as representatives of each deceased sailor brought burning incense to a table, and a Buddhist monk punctuated the ceremony with the ringing of a bell.

As Mayor Tạ Đức Trí put it: "Many people come to the Vietnam War Memorial to pay tribute to the 58,000 Americans who died during the war as well as the 100,000 South Vietnamese soldiers who gave their lives. We owe *them*. My generation, the younger generation... we owe our lives to the South Vietnamese soldiers."³⁸

Another interviewee, an elderly woman stated: "We show our respect for *their* sacrifice [those who have passed away]."³⁹ When asked if the memorial fulfills its purpose, Chi Hai linked notions of tribute to emotion, asserting that the memorial "definitely" served its purpose, "not only [for] myself but [for] other people also, we were so emotional every time we visited or mentioned the memorial. This is the place that we could come to pay our tribute to those brave men."⁴⁰

Continuing with her comments about the emotion brought out by the memorial, Chi Hai went on to say that she has "mixed feelings; sad, emotional, spiritual, and proud! I think of the pain of families and friends of those brave men, the honour they and their

³⁷ Interview, Westminster, October 18, 2015.

³⁸ Interview, Westminster, April 13, 2015.

³⁹ Interview, Westminster, May 16, 2015.

⁴⁰ Interview, Westminster, May 6, 2015.

families deserved; and of all Vietnam Veterans of America and Republic of South Vietnam Veterans as well. They deserve a “bravo,” a special recognition!”⁴¹ This notion of paying tribute by visitors to the memorial reveals that there is a deep sense that a debt is owed. Many visitors to the memorial remember those who have passed on from this life, and have a sense that they are alive because of the actions of those who died. Once again, Chi Hai expressed her perspective on the purpose of the monument thus: “The memorial is a place for us to pay our respects to the unknown brave Vietnamese and American soldiers who sacrificed their lives to protect us from communists before 1975; also to let younger generations learn that freedom is not free. Many people had to pay the very expensive price of their lives for the freedom that they have now.”⁴²

This memory work and sense of debt, in many ways, keeps alive the deep felt need to hold the varied South Vietnamese American communities together and to legitimate the survival of those who escaped and have established a new life in Southern California. As a prosthetic device, the memorial stands as a gathering place, certainly to commemorate the dead, but also to celebrate the enduring presence of the South Vietnamese community in the American context. Each time an event occurs at the memorial, connections are made and networks are established and strengthened that fundamentally benefit members of these communities.

The monument is a site of emotion, but also of tension. There is a growing divergence between the isolating ideology of the older generation and the openness to a new story amongst the young. It is clear that rather than confront the elders, young

⁴¹ Interview, Westminster, May 6, 2015.

⁴² Interview, Westminster, May 6, 2015.

Vietnamese Americans simply remain silent or stay away from the monument in deference to those elders. In a surprising twist on the purpose of the monument, one interviewee stated, “I want to think that even the North Vietnamese [communists] can go [to the monument], but the Vietnamese community, they really protect that, and they would not allow anyone [from the north] to come there. But to me, they [communists] should go there. They should go there because either they are ashamed for themselves, or they respect the people who fought in the war.”⁴³ The monument, in this view should be a place for both sides, north and south, to focus on those who served as combatants. This interviewee went on to say, “we have to create something that people, a hundred years from now, people who go there, will not think about what happened but will think about who died.”⁴⁴ One major purpose of the memorial, according to this interviewee, is clearly about engaging with the consequences of the Vietnam War with respect to the human cost rather than with the ideologies and policies that led to the conflict. In this way, refusing to allow Vietnamese officials access to the memorial space is negating an opportunity for attention to be paid to the humanity of the war, and also perpetuates the ideologies that led up to it. As has been pointed out earlier in this work, even in the midst of prevailing ideologies that ‘other’ and reify the two sides in the past (and present) conflict, the nature of Vietnamese communities has always been far more complex. While the focus in the above perspective is on two geographical sides in the Vietnam conflict, there have always been, and still are, Vietnamese who have struggled with the prevailing ideologies of their own geographical community. Historically, there have been

⁴³ Interview, Orange County, May 31 2015.

⁴⁴ Interview, Orange County, May 31 2015.

northern Vietnamese who supported the cause of the South and in the same way, southerners who fought for the cause of the North, as has been documented in the memoir of Truong Nhu Tang (Truong, 1985). In Vietnamese communities in Southern California there are Vietnamese Americans who are doing business in Vietnam and are influencing policies of the current communist government, showing openness to new ideologies of relationship in spite of some local opposition (Harris, 2005).

So there are varying views on the relationship between Vietnamese Americans in Southern California, both with one another, and with Vietnamese citizens and officials in Vietnam. These differences extend to the use of the memorial space. The above interviewee is calling for an opportunity for the monument to speak for itself in the sense that it should draw the viewer in to a contemplative reaction to the role of the soldier in general, and, more specifically, to the need for a reaction to the price paid by those soldiers. That there were men and women who were willing to fight alongside one another for their nation's ideals, and that there were many who died is the focus of the reaction invoked by the monument. The reaction should be one of tribute and debt as the numerous plaques and messages surrounding the monument indicate.

There are different angles on ways of addressing debt to those who fought and died, but what of the Vietnamese debt to the American soldier? What of debt to America in the post-war period of flight and rescue? The danger is that the notion of 'debt' becomes a lifetime albatross around the neck of the Vietnamese refugee as she senses that she owes America for the freedom and lifestyle she enjoys. Mimi Nguyen speaks to this point stating that she begins her work:

With the particular optimism of this figure of the Vietnamese refugee, not to recoup a different story about her arrival, but to inquire about the powers that promise her freedom and demand an enduring consciousness of her debt. In doing so, [Nguyen focuses] on the subject of freedom as an object of knowledge and a critical methodology that discloses for us the assemblages and powers through which liberal empire orders the world (M. Nguyen, 2013: 5).

Mimi Nguyen asserts that for the refugee, promises of freedom go hand in hand with demands for a continuous recognition of the burden of the debt owed America for that freedom. The question must be asked then, was the memorial built as a reminder of this perpetual debt? Could it be that in suggesting that a monument be erected to commemorate the camaraderie of the Vietnamese and American soldier, the American leadership in Westminster intended to plant in American soil a reminder of that debt that would last far beyond the lifetime of those who benefitted from America's offer of freedom? In this vein, M. Nguyen goes on to assert that the refugee "cannot hope to acquit her debt" due to the "price" of freedom (Ibid.).

At this point, it is important to define the concept of freedom from the perspective of interviewees as they invoked the term in conversation at the memorial. Mayor Ta speaks of freedom in terms of those that lost their freedom and those thousands who gave their lives and who, therefore we should thank.⁴⁵ Another interviewee spoke of that freedom that we now have in this country to study, to have an opinion, to vote, to pursue the career of our choice, and to travel freely.⁴⁶ Chi Tran asserted that freedom from communism was paid for by the blood of soldiers and refugees. And finally, freedom is so precious and costly that it drives some interviewees to strive for excellence in all

⁴⁵ Interview, Westminster, April 13, 2015.

⁴⁶ Interview, Westminster, May 7 2015.

things as Chi Hai stated as she spoke with sadness in her eyes of her children's laziness as second generation Vietnamese Americans who cannot appreciate the freedom they have to be educated, to have a career and make money.⁴⁷ American freedom, Mimi Nguyen concludes, is the "gift...of freedom [that] secures [the refugees'] life in multiple dimensions; its preservation, convenience, and pleasure" (Ibid.). However, her debt according to Nguyen, is "monumental" (M. Nguyen, 2013:5). The irony in this statement as it relates to this project is not lost. Perhaps the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial has become the prosthetic device needed to dislodge a focus on paying back America, and place that focus on those who paid the debt on behalf of all who live and breathe and remember. When discussing the notion of debt and tribute, not a single interviewee in this project mentioned any kind of 'refugee' debt to America. I returned to several interviewees for further elaboration and asked them about their sense of debt, the experience of having been accepted into the United States, and whether or not they felt that they 'owed' a debt to America for their freedom.

One interviewee, who left Vietnam in her teenage years stated, "I don't have feelings that I'm in debt to America. I was educated here and naturalized here. In that sense I am an American and I have to live within the laws of America. Debt is a heavy word, maybe for the older generation there is a greater sense of debt"⁴⁸ Speaking with members of the older generation, there was an overwhelming sense of gratitude, but no one spoke of a perpetual debt owed to the nation of the United States.

⁴⁷ Interview, Westminster, February 21 2015.

⁴⁸ Interview, Westminster, July 19 2015.

Tuan Nguyen, the sculptor who designed and built the monument, states emphatically that thanks are due the country of the United States, but that the debt owed is to those who died. He states: “To me, what we paid and what we have now is enough. ...I don’t think about refugees anymore. The people who escaped and the people who came here, give thanks to the country [the United States]? Yes, of course. But what can we do for the people who died... the spirit of the refugees at that time, ...the people who escaped the country at the time. A million people died, so to me if we think about how we should repay, I think we should repay that first.”⁴⁹ In thinking about lives lost, Mimi Nguyen concludes her argument stating that “with this, we might reconceive debt not as the duration of gratitude, or the demand for repayment, but instead as a troubling reminder of unfinished histories that continue to cross us” (M. Nguyen, 2012: 32). Nguyen’s assertion calls for a re-focus of Mauss’ “obligation to reciprocate” (Mauss, 1954: 39), from attention on the rescuing nation, to attention on unfinished lives of people remembered at the memorial site. In sum, it is this openness to interpretation that makes the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial a space of memory, a prosthetic device that invites memory that calls for commemoration on multiple levels.

Conclusion

I conclude by revisiting the rather shocking suggestion that perhaps ‘northern’ Vietnamese, that is Vietnamese from the current Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the enduring enemy of many southern Vietnamese, would somehow come to the Vietnam

⁴⁹ Interview Orange County, July 19 2015.

War Memorial in Westminster and reflect on the losses incurred by all sides of the conflict. This interviewee's comment, or perhaps invitation, is controversial, certainly for those avowed anti-communists in the Orange County Vietnamese American community, and perhaps for many American veterans as well.

However, in keeping with other findings of the uses of the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial, this interviewee seeks to appropriate the monument as a prosthetic device for three purposes, healing of the deep rift between the two sides through the acknowledgment of the enduring presence of South Vietnamese peoples in the United States and the hearing of their once-silenced voices, education for future generations, and commemoration of those who died in the conflict and its aftermath. Utilizing the monument as a stage on which to enact a dream of reconciliation, this interviewee seeks to put in the past deep divides between some Vietnamese, separated by strong ideologies and painful and tragic experiences. This proposed use of the monument is clearly controversial. However, it is not inconceivable that the monument could be used for such a transnational, reconciliatory purpose at some point in future.

In its materiality, the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial is a space that includes a variety of ideals, uses and projects. However, as this project indicates, the ambiguities associated with meaning-making at the memorial allow for a wide range of responses as individuals appropriate the monument for personal and community memory work. I have shown that the memorial is a prosthetic device that is appropriated by visitors from multiple cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and generations for a variety of uses far beyond the original friendship and camaraderie purposes for which the monument was

originally built. Each viewer engages the emotions associated with their memories and the materiality of the monument in various ways and with varying purposes. In addition, I have argued that the Westminster memorial, with its celebrations, flags and other official uses attempts to place the focus squarely on the correction of a historiography that has excluded the bodily presence and voices of South Vietnamese in official monumentalism both in America and in Vietnam.

In the everyday, memorials are defined by the people who visit them. For Mayor Trí Tạ the memorial is a place of personal reflection, a place of quiet introspection. For Lt. Col. (ret.) Craig Mandeville, the memorial is a place of remembrance and prayer, with a particular focus on those colleagues lost in battle. For Hieu, the monument serves as the backdrop for the memorialization of the Battle of Hoàng Sa (the Paracel Islands), and the 74 sailors lost. And then, for Chi Thanh, the memorial stands as both a reminder of those lost in war, but more importantly, for a family member lost as a refugee on the high seas. This research has also shown that the monument represents the past and continuing group unity of the various and sometimes contending communities that associate themselves with the former Republic of South Vietnam and the nation of the United States. The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial stands for these frequent visitors and many others as both *symbol* and *reminder*, thus accomplishing two primary purposes of monumentalism. The memorial also stands as a reminder to the governments of both the United States and Vietnam that Vietnamese Americans seek to influence policy. The monument marks the presence of South Vietnamese Americans in America, not only

locally in Westminster, but nationally and transnationally through the spectacles carried out at the site of the monument.

And so, one must live in the present, with occasional nods to the past in order to engage the world around with agency and confidence, choosing, as Chi Hai explained, ‘when to be Vietnamese, when to be American, and when to be Vietnamese American.’⁵⁰ The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial is a monument to what took place in the past. It is also for some, a claim on American space and an assertion of American belonging. But to most interviewees in this project, the monument stands as a reminder to act. A reminder that is a ‘spur’ for some Vietnamese to engage the Chinese in the dispute over the Hoàng Sa or Paracel Islands even as I write this thesis.⁵¹ The monument reminds visitors to support, respect and thank all veterans of the Vietnam War, but also provides a space to challenge the erasure of the South Vietnamese who died as refugees, as well as a way of showing the place the Vietnamese community has staked out in the United States. The Westminster Vietnam War Memorial can serve as a space to offer personal gratitude and to carry on the names of those refugees lost at sea, but also to contemplate similar loss of life among refugees in the Mediterranean at the present time, and elsewhere in future. And finally, the monument facilitates the comfort of those who mourn, but also provides a space for the instruction of those who will listen with wisdom anchored in the past but useful in the present. The memorial in its prosthetic materiality, serves multiple purposes beyond the initial intention of recognizing those South Vietnamese and

⁵⁰ Interview, Westminster February 9 2015.

⁵¹ See Ahn Do’s article in the LA Times titled “Dispute Between China and Vietnam is Felt in Little Saigon.” Online: <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-ff-island-dispute-20141220-story.html>

American allies who fought in the war. The monument offers a gathering space and public visibility for Americans of South Vietnamese background. It serves as a place for reflection for those Americans who lost loved-ones in the war, but also other Americans, and who knows, perhaps a place where the children of those who grew up in North and South Vietnam will one day come together.

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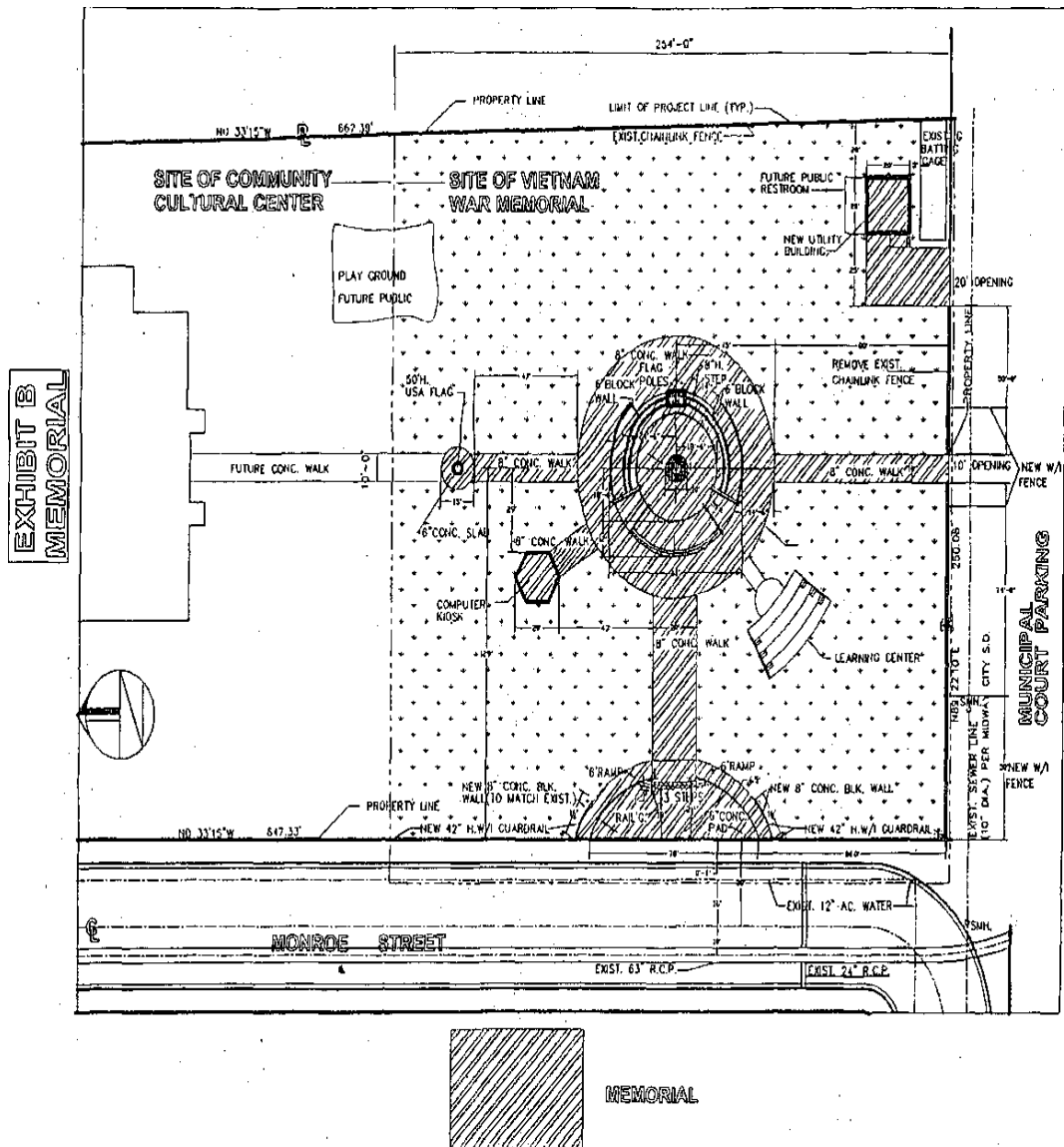
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APPENDICES

Appendix I: The Monument Architectural Plans.⁵²



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Vietnam War Memorial Agreement

⁵² Westminster City Council Archives: April 1 2002)

EXHIBIT B

MEMORIAL

The Memorial will be located in the center of the Park at 14180 Monroe Street. The prominent features of the Memorial will be as follows: a twelve foot (12') tall bronze statue, including structural base, accented by one fifty foot (50') flagpole flying the American Flag, one thirty foot (30') flagpole flying the American Flag and MIA POW flag, and one thirty foot (30') flagpole with the flag of the former Republic of Vietnam flying below the level of the adjacent American flag; a water feature; circular concrete and granite plaza; Memorial planters; Memorial grass berms; and an eternal flame. The Memorial flags shall be flown at all times and illuminated at night. American flags shall also be flown at all times in accordance with appropriate etiquette. The flags shall be provided by the Committee and shall be maintained at all times in good condition. The Memorial will also include straight concrete walks, which begin at and radiate from the statue but which do not include curved walkways that do not lead to the statue; access driveway; memorial lighting; hand railing; and all memorial utilities.

A short distance to the southeast of the eternal flame will be the utility building, which is the responsibility of the Committee.

The main access to the Memorial will be a concrete walk from the sidewalk adjacent to Monroe Street. Secondary access to the Memorial will be via concrete walks from the County of Orange parking lot to the south and the future Community Cultural Center to the north.

Appendix II: Sample Use Permit for the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial

Date: April 22, 2015

KIPR 28.15.14110-25-RCVD

**CITY OF WESTMINSTER
TRANSMITTAL FOR CONTRACT/AGREEMENT EXECUTION**

Form must be completed and submitted with 3 original agreements to City Clerk's Office

Contractor Name: Vietnamese Federation of Southern California Agreement No. (If Amendment) N/A

Description of Services: Special Event at Ste Goldstein Freedom Park

Commencement Date: April 30, 2015 Termination Date: May 1, 2015

Contract Amount: \$ ~~_____~~ Budget Account No N/A

Dept. Head Approval: (e51/466atA/ Dept./Staff Contact: Pam Grevling

(Submitting Department will verify that all state & local agencies are in compliance with City, State and Federal regulations.)

Please initial the attached, where indicated and return to the City Clerk. When the contract is fully executed the City Clerk will retain original, will return either a duplicate original or a copy to the submitting department and will send a copy to contractor/consultant if requested.

Route To:

F Finance Department

<input type="checkbox"/>	Identified Funding Source
<input type="checkbox"/>	Council Approved Appropriation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Completed P.O. Resolution
Verified by Initials/Date _____	

Z Risk Management - Insurance Requirements:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Commercial General Liability	Verified by _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Auto Liability	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Errors and Omissions	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Worker's Compensation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Additional Insured Endorsement	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Works Contract — all insurance above	

F Business Licensing

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bus. License Required
<input type="checkbox"/>	No License Required
If yes, License # and expiration date _____	
Verified by Initials/Date _____	

Z City Clerk

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Approved by Council on <u>4/23/15</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Approved by Council
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approved as to Form by City Attorney
Agreement No. Assigned: _____	
City Clerk's Initials/Date _____	

F City Manager

<input type="checkbox"/>	Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>	Denied	<input type="checkbox"/>	700 Form Needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Return to Submitting Dept.
Notes: _____							

Date: _____							

Appendix III: Highlights of Westminster City Council Minutes Related to the Vietnam War Memorial

11/26/1996	Mayor Fry advises Council of press release for possible Statue
01/11/2000	Location of Memorial Statue discussed - Foundation for the Arts reported \$107,683.35 collected for the project to date - Need \$500,000 before location can be decided upon. MOTION made to authorize expedited planning process & all fees paid by private entity, no construction without money raised. 5-0 vote
01/25/2000	Mayor FRY advises (in response to speakers) that the Statue will be a GIFT to the City and that it is not a City project.
03/14/2000	Foundation for the Arts state they act as Trustee for the funds for the Vietnam War Memorial Statue - applied and were granted a Special Permit to hold Groundbreaking Ceremony on 04/29/2000 at Civic Center as NO LOCATION had been finalized.
03/28/2000	MOTION to move Groundbreaking to Monroe & 15th 3-2 vote
06/28/2000	MOTION that Memorial be located across from PD between 13th & 15th St. 3-2 vote.
09/20/2000	Mayor FRY announced Memorial will be unveiled 10/1/2000
10/04/2000	Mayor FRY announced a New Foundation has been formed to make sure that the upkeep of property is maintained.
12/06/2000	Public Hearing - Resolution 3612 adopted MND for Memorial (Westminster Foundation for the Arts, applicant) , Planning Director FISK provides synopsis of project - Consideration of NO FEE plan check & permits was
04/09/2001	Preliminary Plans discussed - CDBG Funds proposed for grass area (park) Maintenance issues - DEFERRED to 04/18/2001
04/18/2001	MOTIONS to approve Preliminary plans, No Fee permits, CDBG funds ok to use for surrounding Memorial area & staff to prepare development agreement for development & maintenance of site
07/09/2001	Mention of Foundation for the Arts group fundraising
08/01/2001	Vietnam War Memorial Agreement - discussion of ownership of statue, maintenance - deferred for need of specific terms
10/03/2001	Discussion re: Money Raised by Committee - MPT FRY stated that information not for public disclosure. CM MARSH wants financial information

10/17/2001	MARSH - mentioned lack of disclosure of finances by Committee. - FINAL plans approved for Memorial
02/20/2002	Approval of AGREEMENT for development & maintenance (Fry abstains)
03/20/2002	Committee still accepting donations
04/03/2002	Committee presents check to city for \$275,340.00
10/01/2002	City Council accepts Vietnam War Memorial statue as a gift from Westminster Foundation for the Arts
10/16/2002	AGREEMENT addendum - shifts responsibility of maintenance (Fry abstains)
11/06/2002	Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster Inc. Committee applies for and is granted a Special event permit (Fry abstains)
12/18/2002	City co-sponsor Vietnam War Memorial dedication 04/27/2003 was approved
03/19/2003	Council approved \$45,000 for Dedication ceremony
06/09/2003	Vietnam Memorial dedication - FINAL REPORT
10/08/2003	Staff report - approving KIOSK
03/03/2004	Mayor RICE mentions dedication of War Memorial in state of the City address.
03/17/2004	Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster Inc. Committee applies for and is granted a
03/07/2005	Mention by MARSH of exclusive rights park by Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster
03/08/2006	Financial obligation by Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster Inc. Committee discussed
03/22/2006	Anticipated Litigation re: Vietnam War Memorial Committee CLOSED SESSION
08/30/2006	OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE - requested records of Vietnam War Memorial Committee
02/14/2007	Grant to fund KIOSK
02/28/2007	Mid Year Budget Amendments re: War Memorial Maintenance Costs - MARSH states City
03/14/2007	MARSH Mentions that Vietnam War Memorial Committee is substantially in debt
03/28/2007	URGENT CLOSED SESSION ITEM - re: Vietnam War Memorial Committee anticipated
01/27/2010	Federal Legislative Priorities - KIOSK

Highlights of the Westminster City Council Minutes Related to the Westminster Vietnam War Memorial, 1996-2010.⁵³

⁵³ Westminster City Archives. Prepared by Winnie Bell, City Clerk's Office

Appendix IV: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Goal of Interview Questions: The goal of this interview is to identify the activities in which the Interviewee is currently involved while at the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, CA.

Interviewee Name: _____

Date: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Are you willing to participate in this Project? Yes _____ **No** _____

I. Background Information:

Sex: ___ Male ___ Female ___ Transgender

Age Range: ___ 15-20 ___ 21-30 ___ 31-40 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60 ___ 61-70 ___ 71-80
___ 81-90

Ethnicity: _____

II. Residence:

Are you currently living in the United States? What city and state?

How long have you lived in the United States?

Were you born in the United States or Abroad? Where were you born?

If you were born abroad, how did you come to the United States?

How would you describe your identity?

Politically –

Culturally –

Spiritually –

III. General: Vietnam War Memorial

How would you describe the structure of the Memorial itself?

What do you think was the original purpose of the Memorial?

Do you think the Memorial fulfills that purpose?

What events or celebrations are carried out at the Memorial?

Do you attend those events or celebrations?

Do you know anyone who provided financial or political support for the Memorial?

Why do you think people gave money and other resources to build the Memorial?

IV. Personal: Vietnam War Memorial

How often do you come to the Vietnam War Memorial?

What feelings do you have when you visit the Memorial?
What does the Memorial represent or mean to you?

V. Spiritual: Vietnam War Memorial

How does the Memorial serve a spiritual purpose for yourself or others?
Is the Memorial a place for you to remember those who have gone before?
At the Memorial, how do you remember or memorialize those who have gone before?
Have you placed objects or incense at the Memorial?
What is the meaning of those objects or incense?

VI. Nation: Vietnam War Memorial

What relationship does the Memorial have with the Republic of South Vietnam?
If you are Vietnamese, how would you describe “homeland”?
What does this Memorial assist you in remembering?
How does the Memorial assist you in remembering?
If you have travelled to Vietnam since 1995, how would you describe your trip?

VII. Stories: Vietnam War Memorial

Can you share with me any stories you have of events or significant moments at the Memorial?

Do you have any memories of the Vietnam War that you would be willing to share with me?

Appendix V: Informed Consent for Interviewees

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT**

TITLE: “Migration and Memory: Memorializing a Conflict, Remembering a Nation”

You are being asked to participate because you have described yourself as an individual who is **18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER**, and who is a visitor to the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, CA. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. The researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

INVESTIGATORS AND SPONSOR

Lead Researcher

Stephen James

MPhil – Goldsmiths College, University of London,
United Kingdom

MA Candidate - Department of Southeast Asian
Studies (SEATrIP), University of California,
Riverside, USA

Faculty Sponsor

Dr. Christina Schwenkel

Department of Southeast Asian Studies (SEATrIP);
Department of Anthropology – University of
California,
Riverside, USA

Study Location(s):

Vietnam War Memorial, Westminster, CA

Study Sponsor(s):

This study is funded by the University of California, Riverside.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research project is to further scholarly understanding of the migration history, current identities, and connective memories of Vietnamese and others who visit the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, California.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements:

You are being asked to participate because you have described yourself as an individual who **IS 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER**, and who is a visitor to the Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, CA.

Exclusion Requirements:

None.

You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you withdraw from the study, you will be notified that any information given prior to withdrawal will be used in the study unless you request that the interview material be withdrawn. In the case of such a request, material you have given will be excluded and destroyed

CONFIDENTIALITY**Data Storage**

Your information, including the audio recording and computer-based data will be stored in the following manner: In a locked cabinet, in a secured building, on a password protected computer.

Data Access

Only the researcher will have access to your data.

Level of Privacy

Pseudonyms will be used in publications unless you inform the researcher you're your real name can be used. To protect your privacy and the confidentiality of the data, all personal identifiers will be removed from the data records at the end of the study.

NEW FINDINGS

If during the course of this study, significant new information becomes available that may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the researcher if you provide the researcher with your contact details.

IF I HAVE QUESTIONS

Contacts:

Stephen James MA Candidate, Department of Southeast Asian Studies (SEATRiP)
Contact Phone: (951)-525-8159 Email: stephen.james@email.ucr.edu

Dr. Christina Schwenkel, Supervisor, Department of Southeast Asian Studies (SEATRiP)
and
Department of Anthropology
Daytime Phone: (951)-827-5521 Email: christina.schwenkel@ucr.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of California Office of Research Integrity by phone at (951)-827-4811 or (951) 827-5549).

To contact the Office of Research Integrity by email, please use: HRRB1@ucr.edu

Appendix VI: Correspondence related to material items left by visitors at the Westminster Vietnam War memorial.

4/20/2015

RMail Mail - Items left at Vietnam War Memorial



Stephen James <sjame004@ucr.edu>

Items left at Vietnam War Memorial

Bell, Winnie <WcBell@westminster-ca.gov>
To: "Stephen James (sjame004@ucr.edu)" <sjame004@ucr.edu>
Cc: "Jensen, Amanda" <AJensen@westminster-ca.gov>

Fri, Feb 6, 2015 at 10:05 AM

Stephen,

In answer to your question about artifacts or items left at the Vietnam War Memorial, the following is the response received from Pete Quinn of our Public Works Department:

"There are signs posted in both English & Vietnamese that state that any items left will be taken away every Tuesday & Thursday. If there is anything of value we take it to PD. Normally it is just flowers that are left."

Hope this answers your question.

Winnie Bell, Records Clerk

City Clerk's Office, City of Westminster

8200 Westminster Blvd., Westminster, CA 92683

Department 714-548-3237 / Direct 714-548-3175

www.westminster-ca.gov

