Dear Agrarian Studies Friends,

Thank you in advance for offering to slog through my work. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my work with you and to learn from the collective wisdom of this group. I look forward to your comments and suggestions with great enthusiasm.

The attached piece is different from the one announced on the calendar because I have been asked to submit a contribution for an upcoming volume on "property rights in Vietnam" edited by Hue-Tam Ho-Tai (a historian of Vietnam), and this project has thus become more of a priority. (For those curious about "social edginess," I hope to return to that soon). As you read the draft before you, however, I would greatly appreciate any suggestions you might have to help me make the contribution work well as part of an edited volume directed to an audience of non-specialists interested in the general subject of property in Vietnam.

To that end, I imagine I would need to cut several pages of the prose and I would love to know what you, as readers, think might be profitably removed.

With many thanks in advance,

Erik Harms

Social Demolition: Creative Destruction and the Production of Value in Vietnamese Land Clearance

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> Chaos had advanced. The kitchen was a shambles of broken glass and china. The dining-room was stripped of parquet, the skirting was up, the door had been taken off its hinges, and the destroyers had moved up a floor. Streaks of light came in through the closed shutters where they worked with the seriousness of creators---and destruction after all is a form of creation. A kind of imagination had seen this house as it had now become.
>
> Graham Greene, "The Destructors"[1]

The Road to Tây Ninh

The road from Ho Chi Minh City to Tây Ninh passes through Hóc Môn district, an area formerly

known for its areca nut and betel leaf gardens, rice fields, vegetable beds, and more recently, for

its rapid urbanization, land speculation, and in-between status as part countryside and part city.

Built on the tracks of a former *Route Mandarine* connecting Saigon with Phnom Penh, the road

often figures symbolically in the contested histories which have played out along its shoulders.

Graham Green made symbolic use of the road in *The Quiet American,* staging a pivotal scene in

the dark in-between spaces that emerge on the shoulder between road and field. Finding himself

stranded in this liminal space straddling the country and the city, between French colonial-era

watchtowers, and between Saigon and Tây Ninh (called Tanyin in the book), the protagonist

must decide between bright-eyed righteous (American) idealism and dark, cynical, brooding

(English) resignation.[2] Brooding prevails.

Symbolic double meanings on the road have a material face as well. During the modernizing days of the Southern Republic, the road was seen as a link to the outer-city green-belts, where model tobacco and peanut farms were counted on to spur the transformation of industrial agriculture, and where Catholic parishes were designed to thrive as quaint garden communities organized around the Church -- pastoral scenes that might encircle Ngô Đình Diệm's troubled Saigon with green fields of calm. Despite these idealized visions, however, the road was also known for the way it led to spaces fraught with the danger of life outside the city, a place where people "followed the Republic by day, and the VC by night." Indeed, in the symbolic landscape of those who supported the deposed Southern regime the road is perhaps most well known as one of the key arteries along which the Western Column of advancing Northern Vietnamese troops made their final push into Saigon in the days leading up to April 30th, 1975. In those final days, signposts on the road appeared in the news not only as geographic points on a map but as temporal markers of world-historic significance. For some, even today, these place names trumpet the victorious march of advancing revolution; for others they are toponyms of loss, evoking nothing less than the end of a way of life. Tây Ninh… Củ Chi… Hóc Môn… Tân Sơn Nhất airport… Saigon.

If the road once epitomized the destructive and often violent march of troops into Saigon, it now forms one of the central filaments along which an equally destructive, yet ideologically ambiguous, movement edges its way outward from the city towards the countryside: the road is a conduit for urbanization. This urbanizing process has reworked the spatial order of settlement patterns, housing, and social life along the shoulders of the road. Houses have been demolished, and the road, quite literally, has carved its way towards Tây Ninh by cutting through the front yards, storefronts and living rooms of those households that live along its edges. This process has

fundamentally altered the social space and morphology of life in communities on the peri-urban fringe.[3] Yet while the physical transformation of space along this road on the outskirts of the city is arguably just as massive as that experienced during the Vietnam War, the ideological meaning of this new form of demolition is less clear, serving the symbolic work of different agendas.[4]

The dramatic images of demolition fit well into ideological contests about social change and transformation because they can mean many things at once, and they can be filled with ideological content like an empty linguistic vessel. Demolition is inherently hyperplastic; it is a process imbued with double meanings and contradictory potentialities that allow observers and on-the-ground social actors of various persuasions to attribute widely divergent meanings to otherwise objective and extraordinarily material acts. Like so many acts of socially situated destruction, demolition is linked to productive regeneration at the same time that it highlights exploitative oppression. For some, "destruction after all is a form of creation."[5] For others, destruction literally destroys. Period. Accounting for the ways Vietnamese contend with the demolition and reorganization of the spaces in which they live requires accounting for this plasticity of meaning. Demolition is an objective fact; what it means is a social construction.

In 2002-2003, while conducting field-work exploring issues of social change in Hóc Môn, I spent several months walking along the shoulders of this highway, ultimately conducting in-depth interviews with 60 households about their experiences with this road-widening project that was literally cutting its way through their front yards, living rooms, and businesses. As I saw the effects of this process, which appeared so dramatic, transformative, and visibly destructive, I expected to hear complaints and stories of injustice. To be sure, many residents expressed frustration. They described what amounted to the top-down arrogance of project administrators who solicited no input from the local residents, and revealed precious little information about the

project itself. Residents had no idea when the project would actually be completed, and had only vague, often contradictory understandings of what the final road would actually look like. How many square meters would they actually lose from the front of their property? Many could only speculate. Or if they could tell me, it was because they had already lost their living room. By the time I arrived on the scene, the project had sliced through the front of houses on one side of the road, but no one knew for sure if it would do the same to the other. They could only tell me how much land they would be forced to give up *after* they had given it up. Would there be a concrete barrier dividing lanes of traffic? No one knew for sure. That is, until a concrete barrier appeared. What would the final elevation of the road be after grading, paving and installing the drainage system? Everyone insisted they must wait and see. They would only know for sure when it was finished. And when it was finished, it was about six inches higher than many people expected, causing terrible water -runoff problems for those who had rebuilt their houses lower to the ground than they otherwise might have done had they been well informed of project plans.

As people recounted these stories, I expected to hear them describe a sense of anger, produced in response to a sense being alienated from the production of the space where they lived. Instead, they displayed remarkable patience, acceptance, and, in many ways, they described the process like the unfolding of fate. Optimistic, they hoped for a good fate, and most of them insisted that they couldn't wait for the road to be finished. For the most part, despite my expectations, I heard stories that articulated hopes and dreams about what the new road might bring. Hóc Môn, they explained, would be closer to the city. There would be less dust. They could use the compensation payments to build two story houses they could not otherwise afford to build. The area would become more civilized, *văn minh*. Despite my own misgivings about some of these explanations, the more we talked, the more I had to conclude that the people I had

interviewed seemed to think they were getting a fair return for what they were sacrificing. As one man put it memorably, "How can you have development without suffering"?

At the time, I found this lack of anger---this willingness to suffer for development---difficult to reconcile with critical anthropological perspectives on development. The literature on Vietnamese notions of land, especially within the southern regions, had further led me to expect that any state incursions into what people considered their land would be met with stiff resistance. Over time, however, as I have compared the reactions and responses of my friends in Hóc Môn with those documented in other cases throughout Vietnam, it has become clear that the question of land-clearance and compensation is not fixed or stable, and that the experiences faced by different residents in different contexts are deeply tied to the specific contours of particular cases. Based on a comparative look beyond my own fieldwork in Hóc Môn at other cases of land-clearance and demolition in Vietnam, I argue that demolition itself becomes a key part of the context that ultimately---but not immediately---changes the terms through which residents articulate their rights to property. Demolition produces something; namely, it produces the conditions through which a certain kind of critique of demotion becomes possible. The demolition of homes sets in motion a process through which land must be assigned a literal value. Once these values appear as part of the debate, they take on a life of their own, and they eventually become part of the language through which displaced residents can quantify the kinds of injustice demolition itself has wrought.

Land Clearance as "Social Demolition"

In developing this argument, I attempt to put the lack of anger I encountered in Hóc Môn in comparative perspective by presenting a preliminary sketch of the social relationships produced

by the rampant demolition occurring throughout contemporary Vietnam. While these issues are often politically charged, I attempt to step back from them in order to describe some of the nuances and negotiations that emerge in the process of clearing land for development. My aim here is not so much to assign blame or identify a discrete "villain" so much as to outline the way in which this very process of social reorganization produces the conditions within which emergent social debates construct new meanings about the relation of people to their land, which in turn transforms the meaning of subjectivity, rights and citizenship.

As I tell this story, one of the key factors running through these developments is undeniably the transformation of land into what Polanyi has rightly called a "fictitious commodity."[6] But unlike Polanyi's argument about the ways in which economy and society became wholly disembedded from each other with the rise of the market economy in Euro-American contexts, the transformation in Vietnam appears to be less an example of a "Great transformation" than an example of "a sort of great restructuring" of the terms in which moral claims about justice become articulated through the mediation of money. While the story is often posed as one in which the Communist Party must confront the market logic of everyday people governed by their own private interests, the story actually reveals the ways in which centralized state-led acts of land clearance themselves lead to the commodification of land, a process which itself transforms the terms through which "fair" and just relationships become evaluated.

When land clearance teams initiate the process of appropriation, demolition, and later compensation, they also initiate a process whereby moral relationships between people become translated into quantifiable idioms of value. When houses are demolished and land is appropriated, the reciprocal exchange of rights and obligations between people becomes reduced to a reciprocal exchange of monetized values: a sum of money is exchanged for its equivalent

value in land. In this process, demolition produces a new idiom of value; it forces the conversion of moral values into money values. The confrontation between "communist" notions of collective ownership and capitalist notions of proprietary rights is thus not forged through a confrontation between "the Party" and "the People" so much as it is created by the productive qualities of destruction, where demolishing homes requires assessing them. Tearing them down makes them valuable.

It is certainly true that land-use rights in Vietnam increasingly operate like commodities which can be bought and sold. In Vietnam, this "fictitious commodity" is doubly fictional, because people can buy and sell not actual land, but only the "land-use rights." The material effects of this fiction have not only been documented by a wide literature,[7] but are immediately recognizable in Vietnam, where entire sections of newspapers are dedicated to real estate advertisements, new Real Estate magazines are available for sale on street-corners, and are often available to read in upscale cafes. One sees the importance of land-use rights as a commodity in the countless real-estate service centers that have appeared throughout Vietnamese cities, and even in small makeshift shops on the urban periphery and in the countryside. In this paper, however, I argue that, in addition to the emergent role land values play in economic transactions, they also function as a new moral gauge for quantifying "fairness." Assigning monetary value to land allows various social actors to express in concrete terms what might otherwise appear like impossibly vague and abstract qualitative sense of 'justice' and the moral responsibility of individuals within society. In contests over land, the monetary value of housing and the land-use rights associated with it, represents a new mechanism through which local residents can quantify what are otherwise more nebulous, socially situated moral frameworks for debating and contesting justice and fairness. The demolition of houses continues to be judged in moral terms,

but money helps quantify morality in new ways. Even more importantly---and this is what might be considered a unique aspect of late socialist marketization guided by bureaucratic central planning---it is the very process of demolition that produces this monetization of moral relations. Over time, this value, which was itself created from the rubble of destruction, becomes the most effective means of challenging the process of destruction itself. Demolition releases value from the fixed capital of homes. It is then in terms of newly released value relations that the meaning of demolition itself may be *evaluated*. With value as a guiding idiom that helps articulate justice and fairness, it becomes a new quantifiable paradigm, through which Vietnamese citizens articulate their demands towards the government that claims to represent them.[8]

Land clearance and the demolition associated with infrastructure development, then, must be understood as a form of "social demolition." I define social demolition in an inclusive anthropological spirit that includes all forms of purposeful, meaningful acts of socially situated destruction, as well as the social response to destructive events. The meaning of destruction itself is always "socially situated"; meaning does not emerge from the act of destruction alone but from the contested social interpretations of the event. The meaning is larger than the act, and this meaning emerges out of social life. The meaning of destruction, then, is an interpretation situated within fields of power, symbolism, and socio-economic struggle. It does not play out in binary relations but involves negotiation among a wide range of actors with shifting positionalities, sometimes cross-cutting and sometimes interwoven agendas.

In a revealing study of land conflicts in Tu Son district, in the Red River Delta province of Bắc Ninh, the anthropologist Nguyen Van Suu notes the need for subtlety and caution in studies concerned with changing patterns of land use in Vietnam. He writes that:

> Inequality in land access among various parties and institutions takes various forms, has varying degrees of impact, and is viewed differently by different parties. Some villagers

simply accept it without any protest, especially when the unfairness of it all is of a minor extent. In other cases, it may stir up discontent and lead to heated arguments between the parties or institutions involved. It can also elicit public and violent reactions from those who see themselves in a disadvantaged position. The criticisms the villagers have articulated, their response to various patterns of inequality in land access, and the conflicts stirred up demonstrate the urgency of a better understanding of land ownership, management, and use from different perspectives.[9]

This important emphasis on the differential responses to changing land use policies

represents an essential anthropological understanding of the diverse contexts within which the

meaning of property relations and land use takes shape. While Nguyen Van Suu and others focus

largely on rural transformations, this emphasis on contextual processes is just as relevant in

Vietnamese urban and peri-urban settings, where very different social actors confront the same

processes with very different needs, resources, relationships to authority, and conceptions of

what the restructuring of the landscape will bring. At root, Suu notes that interpretations hinge on

a subjective interpretation of "unfairness" and positional relations of advantage and

disadvantage. Similar conceptions operate in the urban context. For example, David Koh's study,

Wards of Hanoi, shows that there is much flexibility on the ward level where ward officials

"mediate" between official pronouncements and policies and the everyday urban level. As Koh

shows, actual practices are tempered by interpersonal negotiations, social relations, locally

articulated moral considerations, and "the socioeconomic situation in general and the housing

situation in particular."[10] All of these considerations are mobilized by local officials in order to

facilitate "fairness." When conceiving of demolition as "social demolition," then, these

frameworks show that the social action surrounding an act of demolition quite literally produces

new modes of evaluating what counts as "fairness". While wrecking crews may destroy the built

environment, the response to this destruction proves fruitful as a site for analyzing how people

"socially construct" and "socially produce" their conception of fairness out of the rubble that remains.[11]

Labeling this "social demolition" does not mean, however, that the production of meaning is always harmonious, or that all social actors agree with the world that demolition produces. Interpretations about what demolition means are never stable. One person's socially acceptable destruction is another person's threat. Understanding the "social" elements of demolition requires that we situate apparently destructive practices within wider social and cultural contexts and scholars must explore contested meanings in all their unique facets and contours. The social world is a world inhabited by real people with motivations, expectations, and complex and often competing ways of interpreting the world. As a result, concrete research into the particular contours of destruction offers the only way to fully understand the social aspects of apparently destructive activity.

In what follows, I draw on a range of newspaper and media accounts in an attempt to draw a preliminary sketch of the dynamic and complex features of changing patterns of land use related to cases in which Vietnamese citizens are called upon to release their land to the state for various infrastructure projects, most often road building projects, new urban zones, and industrial processing zones. The stories are full of dynamism and differences, at times representing clear cases of suffering and injustice and at other times representing creativity, local level maneuvering, and even occasional forms of support and cooperation for land clearance projects. The lines of exploitation are sometimes quite clear and sometimes ambiguous, and they force us to think in more nuanced ways about the relationship between the people and the Party, as well as the relationship between the demands of capital and the socialist state. While the pathways of power may seem clear in some cases, power more often seems to move along complex networks

that blur the boundaries among a wide range of actors with seemingly divergent ideological agendas. To begin, I look at language, for the blurry meanings of site-clearance as a form of social demolition emerges first in the words people use.

The Many Meanings of *Giải Tỏa*

In order to understand the complexity of land clearance in Vietnam, it helps to begin with the term Vietnamese use to describe it: *giải tỏa*. A standard Vietnamese-English dictionary translates the terms as follows:

> **giải tỏa 1** Raise the blockade. **2** Reduce the population density of *(a city)*.[12]

In this definition, the word "raise" refers to two things. On the one hand, it refers to the idea of mobilization via the act of "raising" a campaign, or raising a siege. On the other hand, it simultaneously refers to the less-common, more archaic English usage of "raise," essentially meaning to "tear down," to erase, or to scratch or cut out, as in to *raze* a structure.[13] The complexity of the term becomes quite clear when looking carefully at the word *giải*, the first of the two-syllables that form the compound term:

> **giải 1** Raise *(a siege);* relieve *(the tedium…).* **2** March off. *Giải tù binh về trại* To march off P.O.W.'s to camp. **3** Solve *(a mathematics problem…).* *Chỉ cho ai cách giải một bài toán* To show someone how to solve a mathematics problem.

The single first syllable thus opens up a wide semantic space that includes notions of social mobilization (raising and marching), as well as solving dilemmas and relieving problems. A quick look at several other common Vietnamese terms beginning with this syllable clarifies the meaning even further, demonstrating the degree to which the term is associated with "relieving" burdens of various types through the application of human agency:

> **giải ách** Deliver from misfortune
>
> **giải buồn** Relieve one's malancholy [sic.], relieve the tedium.
>
> **giải cứu** Rescue from danger.
>
> **giải dáp** Clear up *(someone's)* queries, answer *(someone's)* questions.
>
> **giải khát** Quench one's thirst, refresh oneself.
>
> **giải pháp** Solution *(to a problem)*, answer.
>
> **giải quyết** Solve, settle.[14]

Additionally, the evocative potency of "giải" is further intensified in the Vietnamese context by its association with the term *giải phóng*, which not only means to "liberate, free, or emancipate," but has also become a nominalized temporal marker referencing the historical "Liberation" of Southern Vietnam.[15] In several instances, the term *giải phóng* actually appears in contexts that might otherwise be reserved for the term *giải tỏa,* as in a 1999 publication from the Ministry of Construction, which outlined the need to eliminate road-side shops and curtail street vendors as part of a concerted effort to "liberate the streets and sidewalks" ("giải phóng lòng đường, vỉa hè").[16]

The second syllable of the term, *tỏa*, takes on its specific meaning in the context of how it is coupled with *giải*. On its own, tỏa means:

> **Tỏa 1** Spread. *Khói tỏa.* Smoke spread. **2** Emit, send out. *Hoa tỏa mùi hương.* The flowers sent out their fragrance. *Phản ứng tỏa nhiệt.* Heat-emitting reaction. **3** Hang down. *Tóc tỏa xuống ngang vai.* Hair hanging down to the shoulders.

But when coupled with other words, the word means "to blockade," as in *tỏa cảng* (to blockade a port). Given the context within which the term is typically used, it is this sense of obstruction that most closely approximates the meaning of *tỏa* as it appears in the couplet *giải tỏa.*

In sum, based on definitions alone, the term *giải tỏa* refers specifically to any act of human agency designed to remove a blockade, or otherwise relieve a burden or other form of obstruction. In this literal sense, *giải tỏa* actually has nothing to do with land clearance, but refers to any situation in which a blockage of any sort is removed by the concerted effort of social actors. For example, in describing a contract dispute with the coach of the Vietnamese national soccer team, a newspaper could use the term *giải tỏa* when translating him as saying "I hope disagreements will quickly be reduced (*giải tỏa)* and that the contract will be signed before the Lunar New Year."[17] In Vietnamese Buddhism, furthermore, the term appears in the concept of releasing the practitioner from unjust suffering (*Giải tỏa oan ức*).[18]

Yet in practice and in the everyday discourse generated by Vietnam's rapid urbanization and development, the term appears most often in reference to site clearance and the demolition of the extant built environment. As a result, a term born from the notion of relieving burdens actually signifies demolition, for the object being "relieved" is the built environment itself. Quite literally, then, in the context of development and the restructuring of the built environment, *giải tỏa* means to reduce the amount of built environment blocking the passage of a roadway or other large development or infrastructure project. And the only way to reduce the amount of built environment is to destroy it, demolish it, tear it down, run it over with bulldozers.

Everyday Vietnamese, while certainly aware of what the term means linguistically, have actually fashioned a more complex sense of what it means as a social practice. They both use the term *giải tỏa* to describe demolition projects and, increasingly, pointedly challenge attempts to conceive of it as a benign act of relief. For example, the very notion that it is a process of reducing a burden on the built environment is often undermined by the use of the modifier "bị" in front of the term, effectively transforming the term into something which one suffers from.

This usage directly contrasts with the usage typically found in government policy reports and urban planning documents, which most commonly use the passive construction "được giải tỏa" to imply that an area has been relieved of congestion through clearance. Critical journalistic reportage documenting the struggles of local residents, however, commonly employs the negative construction "bị giải tỏa," which might more accurately be translated as "to suffer from demolition." And everyday citizens, commenting on moments when their homes have been demolished in order to make way for a new road, bridge, or other infrastructure project, almost always use the construction "bị giải tỏa" to describe the events. The term, then, is both commonly used to describe land-clearance and also subjected to debate, much in the same way that North Americans might use and challenge the received meaning of a term like "urban renewal."

The semantic play that operates in between the dictionary definition of the term giải tỏa and the way everyday Vietnamese play on its wide swath of practical and implied meanings reveals the nuance and complexity of the practices surrounding demolition projects. In the meantime, however, while everyday Vietnamese debate the meaning of the very terms used to describe the processes organizing the massive restructuring of their cities, and while they attempt to rethink the very notion of what it means to have land-use rights in Vietnam, Western language commentators paint a much more simple picture organized in simplistic tropes of a monolithic state operating in binary opposition to an equally monolithic caricature of the people.

Difficult Stories, Simple Storylines

The easiest stories to tell about land conflicts in Vietnam are organized around received narrative structures, stories of clear-cut injustice framed as a conflict between "the good people versus the

bad state". While the stories seek to give voice to normally silenced social actors, they also risk

collapsing the diversity of Vietnamese experience into Western frameworks for understanding

the repressive tactics of a communist state posed against individuals who wish to assert their

proprietary rights to land-use rights conceptualized as a form of private property. For example,

Western governments, watch-dog groups, and the English-language media have increasingly

reported on the rise of land-protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In 2004, the United States

Department of State referred to concerns over land in 2003 as part of a more general set of

concerns over human rights violations:

> The CPV and the Government tolerated public discussion on some subjects and permitted somewhat more criticism than in the past. The law allows citizens to complain openly about inefficient government, administrative procedures, corruption, and economic policy. Senior government and party leaders traveled to many provinces to try to resolve citizen complaints. However, on January 29, the Hanoi People's Court sentenced four persons to jail terms ranging from 24 to 42 months after they disseminated to all 61 provinces and the National Assembly letters denouncing local land clearance policies. On August 22, a court in Dong Nai Province sentenced four persons to prison terms of 30 to 42 months for inciting fellow farmers to voice complaints over provincial land use policies."[19]

In a similar vein, Asia Times Online, reporting on protests in Hanoi in 2006, noted a wide range

of illegal and corrupt practices vaguely attributed to the government, and highlighted

corresponding protests in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.[20] Other English language media

reported on several self-immolations by individuals frustrated by state appropriation of their

land, including an incident in which an elderly woman, Tran Thi Thu, burned herself to death in

2005, and another when 53 year old Hoang Huu Hanh set himself on fire in December 2007.[21]

These stories are indeed tragic reminders of the Vietnamese State's capacity to squelch local

dissent, and they certainly deserve the attention they have received. A BBC report focused in

2007 on peasant protestors coming up to Ho Chi Minh City, noting that:

Land seizures in the name of economic development have been a much-debated topic in Vietnam, where the state maintains the sole ownership of land. Peasants frequently complain about unfair compensation and criticise the laws on land use, which in their opinion have too many loopholes and are easily abused by corrupt local government officials.[22]

Stories of this type include several reports on Catholics in Hanoi resisting state appropriation of parish land, as well as reports on Vietnamese War Veterans protesting land seized in central Hanoi to offer to a parking lot company. [23] [24] [25] Even more recently, the 2009 Human Rights Watch report describes land protests as a "movement" that has been met by corresponding repression. Here are a few excerpts from that report:[26]

> "An informal nationwide land rights movement swelled, as thousands of farmers traveled to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to publicly express their grievances about land seizures and local corruption."

> "In March 2008, police arrested Bui Kim Thanh, an activist who defended victims of land confiscation and involuntarily committed her to a mental hospital for the second time in two years."

> "Several land rights activists and landless farmers petitioning for redress were imprisoned during 2008, including seven in July on charges of causing public disorder. In September an appeals court upheld the two-year prison sentence of activist Luong Van Sinh, who had circulated reports and photographs of farmers' protests on the internet."

> "In July 2008, the Kien Giang People's Court upheld a five-year prison sentence for internet reporter, land rights activist, and Vietnam Populist Party member Truong Minh Duc for 'abusing democratic freedom'".

> "Police continue to forcefully disperse land rights demonstrations."

I have no intention of discounting the veracity of these stories, which are clearly grounded in fact-based investigative journalism of the highest standards, and do important work advocating for the rights of everyday Vietnamese citizens. However, taken as a whole, these stories tend to focus inordinately on a homogenous notion of "the Vietnamese people" who are unable to find a political voice in the One-Party state, often at the expense of documenting wider systemic features of Vietnam's marketization process.

The simple storylines attached to these difficult stories often conceal some of the complex relations hidden behind them, and the overly simplistic binary frame that sets the Communist Party and the Vietnamese people against each other obscures a host of other important actors and factors. For example, as I detail in another paper, many of the demands for land clearance that Western institutions attribute to the heavy-handed repressiveness of the Vietnamese state emerge from multinational interests seeking land for investment purposes.[27] On the one hand, as Martin Gainsborough has shown in important recent work, the opposition between communist cadres and capitalist developers is itself untenable, because the earliest developments leading to privatization began among well-connected cadres within the Communist Party itself.[28] And on the other hand, as Annette Kim has shown through her work with Vietnamese real estate developers in Ho Chi Minh City, it is often those who thwart the plans of real estate developers and defend the interests of displaced groups who become labeled as "real communists."[29] The dynamic leading to privatization, and the contested relations involved are more complex than a Party versus the people storyline implies. Evidence for the demands foreign multinationals place on the Vietnamese state to clear land for real-estate investment is readily available in English language newspapers, real-estate trade magazines, and economic publications both inside and outside Vietnam, but is rarely cited when describing the repressive apparatus of the Communist Party.[30] This framing of the topic ignores some of the basic political economic factors driving Vietnam's increasing need to facilitate the circulation of capital through infrastructure projects, and especially roads that cut through inhabited areas. It also ignores the degree to which similar contests over land rights have taken place in decidedly non-communist settings, where eminent domain laws have been used to appropriate private property in order to clear space for everything from freeways to taxable shopping malls.[31] David

Harvey has shown, taking a page from the *Grundrisse*, the demand to create clear unimpeded pathways through urban landscapes by demolishing local housing and anything else that stands in the way of moving goods is itself quite typical of capitalist circulation that seeks to "annihilate space through time."[32]

In this way, moral claims linking land disputes to human rights abuses often obscure Western complicity in the very processes they decry.[33] For example, in a legal briefing, a United States-based legal scholar first cites the 2004 State Department report condemning Vietnamese forceful land appropriation tactics and then goes on to argue that the Vietnamese state needs to make it easier for Foreign (United States) investors to make timely use of real estate. "Vietnam," the lawyer writes, "may be able to ameliorate some of the excessive financial burdens and humanitarian issues associated with investors conducting site clearance by conducting site clearance on its own prior to luring investors."[34] In another case, the 1997 "Draft Report Review of HCM City Master Plans," produced jointly by the United Nations Development Program and the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, explicitly indicates that the lack of private property rights in Vietnam will be an asset to the development of the city, enabling the Party to intervene in urban land management and effectively manage urban growth, thereby avoiding the problems experienced in Bangkok.[35] In these examples, American lawyers and United Nations advisors explicitly encourage the Vietnamese government to wield top-down authority in instituting urban plans for the larger public good of guiding development. What is often posed in the Western language media as examples of Communist strong-arm tactics could be just as easily understood as following directly in line with a broader, explicitly anti-communist history of organizing urban development around the needs of Capital, prioritizing the circulation of people and goods across space above the preservation of the social fabric embedded within urban space.

The process of urban demolition, land appropriation, and wholesale reorganization may be guided by a nominally socialist state, but it looks uncannily similar to Haussmann's reorganization of Paris, Robert Moses' violent reordering of New York City, and processes of demolition and reconstruction that have transformed North America cities throughout the second half of the 20th century.[36]

Rearticulating the story in this way, however, is also rather simplistic, for it simply turns the table by blaming Capitalism. The storyline is more complex than even this revision might imply. What is at stake is less a blame game than a negotiation of social actors from all walks of life as they try to accommodate notions of social justice and fairness with the demands of very real infrastructure concerns. In telling the complex story of *giải tỏa,* the Vietnamese media, despite its many faults, proves much more nuanced than its Western counterpart.

Giải Tỏa in the Vietnamese Media

The notion that the Communist government is a uniform actor intent on suppressing popular demands to protect private property rights also ignores the fact that the Vietnamese state-run media has itself been quite proactive in detailing examples of popular suffering in the face of giải tỏa. While the media is regulated by the Party, it often offers much more compelling and nuanced stories of land clearance than the Western popular media. In this section, excerpts from Vietnamese newspaper stories of *giải tỏa* in and around Ho Chi Minh City reveal complex relationships and moral quandaries. The power exerted in these stories is not always the power of the socialist state conceived as a uniform entity, but emerges as socially situated contests among varied sets of actors with different intentions and motivations. In these examples, exploitation and contestation appears at many levels---everywhere from the acts of corrupt cadres and

unscrupulous land speculators, to the demands of foreign investors and the machinations of local

citizens. While the contested issues are arguably all connected to issues of private property, the

relations expressed more clearly articulate moral claims about "fairness" within social

interactions than about property rights per se. This "fairness," while always present in the

framing of these stories, becomes most visible when draped in the language of value.

In August of 2006, for example, *Thanh Niên* newspaper published a story detailing the

struggles of close to one thousand households "pushed out into the streets because of *giải tỏa*"

and ineffective resettlement arrangements associated with the building of a National University

complex in neighborhood number 6, Linh Trung Ward, Thủ Đức district (a rapidly urbanizing

suburb of Ho Chi Minh City). According to the article, all of the displaced residents were

promised the chance to purchase homes in a housing development. Yet in reality there was no

resettlement space reserved for them at all. To punctuate the article with a human face, the piece

tells the heart-rending story of an elderly couple who in 2001 had been pushed out of a previous

home in district 1. They went on to buy the land for their current house with compensation

payments, spent most of their savings rebuilding a new home, and then found themselves about

to be pushed out again:

> In his crumbling home, 84-year-old uncle Nguyễn Thành Tuy lies curled up in a
> hammock. With a pair of trembling hands, uncle Tuy's wife is attaching nylon liners
> inside a rattan basket with painful difficulty. Before 2000 uncle's family lived in Nguyễn
> Thái Bình ward, district 1. In 2001, their home suffered from demolition (*bị giải tỏa*).
> With almost 60 million đồng in compensation payments, uncle's whole family went to
> find a new place to live. When someone introduced him, uncle bought a 4x14m home
> (located today in residential group number 10). Upon arrival, the house wasn't much of a
> house, so they also used up all of the back payments for his honorable service (*số tiền
> truy lĩnh huân chương*) to pay for repair work. Now, uncle Tuy and his wife and youngest
> child all live by the handicraft art of weaving rattan baskets. "If he's healthy then we
> make about 30 thousand dong a day, and when he's sick we only make about 20
> thousand. His urinary tract infection and blood pressure continues and will likely defeat
> him. If we continue suffering from *giải tỏa* then we'll only have water and will have to
> beg to eat," uncle Tuy's wife confided. Uncle Tuy is one of close to 1,000 households in

> neighborhood 6 that lies in the area slated for complete demolition (they are only offered compensation according to agricultural land prices of 150,000 dong per m2) because all of neighborhood 6 is part of the planned National University Zone.[37]

The article goes on to describe how most of the householders in the area don't have proper land-use right papers, emphasizing that they are mostly the homes of marginalized laborers. While it is true that many of the houses were built illegally after the land was already zoned as part of the University project, the article adds that the local authorities never prohibited people building there. Indeed, despite the impending demolition, the article notes with alarm that authorities are still letting people build new homes in the area!

In a similar genre, a 2004 story from *Tuổi Trẻ* offers a searing and direct critique of the manipulation and exploitation that took place in Trảng Bàng, as the Linh Trung 3 Industrial Zone was acquiring land near the district seat of Củ Chi (a largely agricultural suburb of Ho Chi Minh City). According to the article, a great number of displaced families received absurdly low compensation payments and were struggling to make ends meet, with little attention or sympathy from local authorities. In addition to detailing the inequities and low levels of compensation, in order to illustrate the piece, the journalist describes the family of a handicapped man displaced from his property and never compensated, as well as the Kafkaesque story of a 94 year old man who was displaced twice in one year. In another heart-rending emphatic twist, the author describes how the second displacement came only six months after the gracious man had invited local cadres to a housewarming party to celebrate the completion of his new house. The very same local officials who celebrated with him at his new home failed to inform him that the land where they feasted together would soon be appropriated because it lay within an area zoned for industry.[38]

> The family of *cụ* (great grandfather) Lê Văn Kích, who is over 90-years-old, lives in Suối Sâu hamlet. In the first phase great-grandfather grudgingly turned over half a hectare of

land to the Industrial Zone, within which there was his ancestral land and a home worth 30 taels of gold, for which he received … 160 million đồng (looks like there was no money for the land). He then moved to another plot of land and built a home in which to live and to … die (his wife is also over 85 years old). When he bought the land he sent his son up to the commune in order to inquire, and the commune agreed to the purchase and issued the proper land-use right certificate. On the day celebrating the new home, at 94 years old, great-grandfather held a housewarming party, and while many commune cadres came to share the happiness, only one month later he suffered from giải tỏa again. The compensation price this time was just like the previous time: equal to 50% of the land value and the money the family had invested… [39]

In both of these stories, land values and compensation levels play an important role in the discussion. They make visible, but do not wholly transform, a larger moral claim that most dramatically centers on undue suffering. Both stories employ kinship terms that establish a familial relationship with vulnerable uncles, aunts, and great-grandparents who, while named, remain otherwise stylized as universal, depoliticized images of "Vietnamese elders". To the Vietnamese reader, these elderly victims of insensitive developers and irresponsible cadres could be anyone's uncles and grandparents. The focus on land values enters not as the root claim, but rather enters as a quantifiable form of evidence that puts a number on the injustice, but only means something when cast against the moral claim of the human story.

The list of articles in the Vietnamese media presenting detailed descriptions of the problems associated with *giải tỏa* proves extremely extensive, and I can only give a brief selection of some of the issues involved. In 2005, several articles appeared in multiple papers reporting on discontent among residents affected by the East-West highway project in Ho Chi Minh City.[40] According to *Thanh Niên*, the issue boiled largely down to disagreements about the level of compensation. But again, the focus on property value becomes a medium through with to express a broader meaningful framework of social relationships. Importantly, the families in the site clearance area for the project are described as supporting the leadership of the government, and they claim to appreciate efforts to guide infrastructure development and

modernize the roadway. However, the residents were unhappy with the actions of the office that is carrying out the project without attending to the specifics of their own cases and the hardships they will endure. In the case of this project, residents voiced three major concerns: First, the land was going to be compensated at the value of agricultural land, but the highway project itself is driving up land values, meaning that they will not be able to find new places to live at those levels of compensation. Second, they reveal that promises have not been kept. In particular, the amount of money promised in compensation discussions and approved by the People's Committee is not what they received in actual fact. And third, the compensation process ignores the fact that many people had built homes and gardens on their land, and they are not being compensated for all the infrastructure costs they had invested in improving the land. Despite these grievances, the authorities knocked down several homes before solving disagreements about compensation. In examples like this, compensation values are of course quite important. But the major moral claim of injustice turns on the notion that negotiated compromises have been reneged upon, and that, despite the way residents express their support for generalized notions of development and modernization, they are being asked to make a sacrifice without adequate concern for their fate. The guiding theme is that this situation is unfair, it "is not sensible" (là không hợp lý).

The question of sensibility, fairness and the equitable application of regulations emerges quite clearly as a common theme. In 2007, another article detailed the arbitrary decisions made by the local district 3 authorities regulating compensation and issuing building permits along the Nhiêu Lộc---Thị Nghè canal in Ho Chi Minh City. For example, while some residents complied with the letter of the law and relinquished property and moved to other areas of the city, other residents appear to have been granted exceptions. The authorities were not very systematic and

they granted building permissions arbitrarily and inconsistently, unfairly. While some households were arbitrarily denied building permits, others were allowed to build 3 story homes. The article describes one home which was granted official building permits even though the balconies on 2nd and 3rd floors jut out illegally into the space above the street. In conclusion, the piece exclaims that "those who follow the law suffer."[41] This theme of citizens suffering from the selective application of the law is not isolated. In another case, the authors cite the revised land law of 2003 and subsequent decisions that clearly stipulate that there must be some consensus on the land settlement prices before a development project can officially proceed. Despite this, many projects get pushed through even though the locals have not yet agreed to the terms of compensation payments. As if to add insult to injury, the article describes how local officials elide blame by subcontracting the work of site clearance. In District 9, it explains, officials responsible for negotiating compensation terms for a university project "rented" officials from a separate land compensation committee and deflected inquiries and complaints about the process onto their hired hands.[42] Using rented officials effectively allows development officials to evade the legal ramifications of the land law. More importantly, it implies a break between the classic moral relationship between the people and their representatives though which articulations of rights and responsibilities can be negotiated.

Many of these examples all imply top-down machinations of corrupt officials selectively applying the law to their own benefit. But the media also references complications that emerge from other sources as well, often depicting a combination of stubbornness on multiple sides, including among everyday citizens. At a project intended to build a traffic flyover in Tân Tạo (near an important Industrial Zone), for example, both the authorities and the local residents are seen as equally responsible for the long-drawn out, and effectively stalled process of giải tỏa

which has halted the project for more than three years, causing suffering both to local residents left in limbo and to project managers who have been forced to let machinery lay unused. At root lay complex negotiations about the real value of land; residents have refused to move because they have only been offered compensation at rates based on agricultural land despite the rapid urbanization of the area.[43] The moral relationship between rights and responsibilities is not only undermined by local residents holding out for higher payments, but can be violated by top-down agents who fail to account for changing circumstances. Unfairness cuts in many directions.

Everyday citizens are not released from blame. Some have been exposed for building unlivable shacks on land in order to claim compensation in advance of land-clearance projects and others have been caught constructing fake additions to their homes in order to increase the square footage of property being valued. In one particularly memorable example, an entire neighborhood of residents in Đà Nẵng rushed to hire local artists to "decorate" their homes and create impromptu landscaping features and feng shui elements before the land compensation teams came to value the land. Enterprising local residents discovered that the official land compensation criteria offered special compensation for architectural flourishes and home improvements, so they rushed to add such elements to their homes in order to receive greater benefits.[44]

If media reports succeed in showing how creative everyday people can be in their deceptions, they also convincingly show the cadres as quite creative too, especially when spurred on by unscrupulous land developers. In 2007, for example, The People's Committee Chair and a member of the land compensation committee in An Phú ward of Ho Chi Minh City's district 2 were both arrested for facilitating the placement of fake tombstones on land slated for clearance. They sought to illegally gain higher land compensation payments by exploiting a clause that

provided special compensation on cemetery land. The officials, working in conjunction with enterprising con-men, signed verification papers on hundreds of dossiers associated with empty "graves." The police confiscated 196 falsified dossiers and 600 million dong that had been compensated on false pretenses.[45]

While it may appear that these issues all boil down to a simple question of fights over land valuation, other articles indicate that while money certainly plays a role, other factors are also important. For example, the very same journalist who wrote about the compensation disputes stalling the Tân Tạo flyover wrote another piece describing a group of families who voluntarily contributed parts of their land to public works projects that would benefit their community. In Tân Phú district, 85 families on either side of the Tây Sơn Road widening project offered up land and "self-demolished" (từ giải tỏa) property worth 11.1 billion đồng.[46] Another article celebrates Ho Chi Minh City's Phú Nhuận district as the leader in a movement in which residents voluntarily offer land (hiến đất) in order to widen roads. From 2003 until 2009 people in the various wards in the district have offered close to 11.300m2 of land which could be valued at several hundred billion đồng in order to carry out 50 road widening projects. By the beginning of 2009, 42 of those projects had been completed and put into use. In describing these types of negotiations, the authors again cite land values as a form of evidence for the sacrifice local residents have made. But ultimately, the descriptions paint a picture of a moral relationship of mutual benefit. In the Phú Nhuận case, residents explained to the journalist that voluntarily offering land was quite difficult to imagine doing in the beginning, because people both worried about being exploited and also lacked confidence in the capacity for authorities to successfully complete the projects.[47] Ultimately, however, a resident explained that making such a sacrifice benefitted everyone involved:

> Ms. Diệp Bạch Yến, who lives on Vườn Lài Street, comments: "When people "self-giải tỏa" so that the government can make more spacious roads, they actually benefit more. New roads not only raise land and home values, but lead to the development of service businesses and improving people's living standards; so everyone is in agreement." [48]

Implicit here is a reconceptualization of land and home value as an index of the just moral exchange of sacrifices and benefits between the people and the government rather than as an end in itself. The question of value is subordinated to the symbiotic relationship in which "everyone is in agreement." Nevertheless citing land values provides quantifiable evidence that a just relationship can be achieved when local residents relinquish land rights and the government lives up to its promises by improving living standards.

As these examples show, the Vietnamese media rearticulates simple economic considerations into a moral framework outlining a vision of rights and responsibilities. While certainly recognizing the emergence of land as a commodity that can be exchanged for money, this construction of what demolition *means* subordinates value to more broadly conceived framework of understanding an idealized notion of social relations. Critical articles detail violations of this moral relation on all levels of society. Articles have exposed project developers who ignore legal stipulations designed to adequately compensate displaced residents.[49] They have revealed a general failure of government policies and officials to account for the "psychological effects" of displacement[50] and have shown the negative effects of delayed or incomplete compensation and the failure to provide displaced residents with alternative housing options.[51] Other pieces have called for policies to improve the "post giải tỏa" circumstances of residents by developing worker training programs, job placement services, and allowing residents to stay on their land longer.[52] And more generally, newspaper articles take great delight in revealing some rather extraordinary and creative acts of deception put on by social actors who seem to come from all levels of society. Demolition, as these articles show through their wide

range of examples is eminently social, irreducible to simplistic binaries of the good people versus the bad government.

Conclusion: Creative Destruction and the Social Products of Demolition

In revealing the complex social processes embedded in acts of demolition, stories of giải tỏa take on a productive quality. They quite literally produce an idealized moral framework for re-conceptualizing the role land disputes play in articulating a fair and just relationship between social agents at all levels of society. This newly conceived relationship transcends binary frameworks by focusing on the intricacies of individual cases and revealing how contests over fairness involve a wide swath of social actors at all levels of social life. The state, we learn, is not always diametrically opposed to the diversity of interests that make up society, and the state itself is a more complex network of actors than we often imagine. This more complex understanding of social relations not only incorporates emergent relations of land as a fictitious commodity with real economic qualities and tangible effects on livelihoods; it also amounts to a model for broadly construed notions of rights and responsibilities that are being refashioned in ways that might accommodate the relationship between market imperatives and collective social goals. Of course, however, just as this moral framework can cast a skeptical light on land-speculators, developers and corrupt local level cadres, it also poses a challenge to the state to live up to its role as a just sovereign within this moral order. [53] It is in this role, that the Vietnamese media finds itself most carefully muzzled, and where the work of foreign journalists and outside commentators plays a key role. As Bill Hayton and Ken MacLean have shown in their important work on the PMU 18 corruption scandal, the Party can quickly pull out the censor's knife when

media reports expose its own complicity in unjust practices, high-level corruption, gambling, and land-speculation.[54]

Nevertheless, while the state has been wary of its own journalists when they challenge its moral legitimacy, the socialist state actually has much to gain from journalistic accounts that draw upon a moral framework such as this. For in doing so, these stories craft a larger argument for the legitimacy of an accountable government that can steward the process of development, transcending the machinations of individuals in order to consider the collective interests of society as a whole. Indeed, while many residents have clearly protested state intervention, there are many others who willingly call on the state to guide the process. Several articles describing the widening of Ho Chi Minh City's Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa---Nguyễn Văn Trỗi street, for example, have described the conflicts involved, highlighted arguments over compensation, and explored the difficulty faced by many residents who were forced out of their houses, apartments, and businesses.[55] But again, the conflict is not strictly a binary contest between the state and the people. Some people in the area voiced a desire for *more* state intervention:

> Ms. Lan, a building engineer whose home suffered from giải tỏa, said that she understood that the City shouldn't force households to build in a particular way, but, for the collective good, still thinks the City should quickly devise some concrete guidelines about standards and style. That would make the area and the city beautiful. While waiting for the city to study the issue they should urge the district authorities, the architect and planning office, and the various ward-level people's committees to come together and issue collective guidelines so the people know how they should build their homes in such a way that doesn't spoil the "face of the city". They shouldn't just let people build their homes and then give them guidance because they won't be able to tear down their homes and build them again.[56]

What this shows is that what constitutes fairness can often depend on who you speak to. For someone like Ms. Lan in this example, government intervention is a price worth paying if it will contribute to developing a beautiful "face" to the city, and regularizing the architectural style on the street where she lives. Of course, this is a steep price to pay for some of the less fortunate

residents who were displaced by the project. The conflict here is not simply one between the people and the party but also between different people themselves.

Ms. Lan, of course, is probably concerned not only with beauty but with property value. In cases of giải tỏa, the conceptualization of land-use rights as a commodity with values dictated by the market plays an increasingly important role in outlining the parameters of what constitutes fairness. While value and price are not the only criterion for assessing fairness or moral rectitude, land-values do enter the description of contests over giải tỏa as one of many lines of evidence used to illustrate the moral dilemmas at hand. References to land values support more generalized descriptions of displacement or social upheaval by enumerating otherwise complex social relations and questions of livelihood.

The role land values play in making moral judgments, however, is itself in flux because the process of *giải tỏa* itself contributes to the production of land value. In important ways, land only acquires monetary value when it is brought into circulation and exchange, and the demolition of the built environment actually initiates the very process that forces land into exchange. It "releases" value otherwise stored in land and housing. When one sits on a piece of land or lives in a house, the value of the house and the land exists only as a kind of *potential* value. It is only when one confronts the need to transfer it that the value embedded in a house sitting on land becomes manifest. In this way, state-led infrastructure projects themselves contribute to the process in which land must be construed as a commodity; land commodification is produced by the act of demolition itself. The latent value potentially present in parcels of land, much like the value contained in the coppers of a Kwakiutl potlatch, or the value of "blighted" American neighborhood slated for renewal, is produced and intensified precisely when the material object faces destruction. Social demolition releases latent value in things, brings them

into circulation and makes them part of an eminently social landscape of moral contest and exchange. Once released, these values become a key factor in moral debates about fairness and social justice.

Let me conclude by returning to the road to Tây Ninh. When I was in Hóc Môn interviewing residents along the side of the highway, this process of attributing value to land was undergoing a transformation that was itself set in motion by the expansion of the road. At the beginning of the project, people primarily conceived of their land in abstract moral terms that subordinated the value of individual plots to a larger goal of developing their area on the margin of the city. They were willing to subordinate their individual interests to the notion that they were making a fair exchange by contributing to a larger infrastructure project that would hopefully benefit everyone in the community. [Much like members of the Yale community, who quietly endure untold suffering for the improvement of the Prospect street bridge, likely do not construe it as "unfair" so much as they look forward to its completion.] But the process of evaluating the terms of this moral relationship is not fixed, precisely because the highway has itself brought new meanings to land. While it was being built, people willingly subordinated individual questions of value to larger hopes for what the project might bring. And in many ways, this was itself a wise economic decision as much as a moral one. For the value of land in Hóc Môn is now much greater than it was before the road cut through, and the area is now a prime site for real-estate speculation and property development. Were they asked to *giải tỏa* today, however, the story would likely be quite different. Social demolition on the margins of the city produces a whole new landscape of value that has emerged from the rubble of destruction itself. If it is increasingly true that the monetary value of land increasingly figures into how people judge the moral values of fairness, then another thing must be true as well: Demolition, in

producing value, has also produced the conditions for its own critique. Perhaps there's a value to

that.

Notes:

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[1] Graham Greene, "The Destructors", Collected Stories (London: The Bodley Head & William Heinemann, 1967), 327-346.

[2] Graham Greene, The Quiet American (New York: Penguin, 1955 [1977]). For Greene's protagonist, in the darkness between safe-zones, naïve idealism is finally exposed as nothing less than wickedness, while cynicism becomes the mark of justice.

[3] Erik Harms, Saigon's Edge (Minneapolis: University of Minnessota Press, forthcoming), chapter 6.

[4] David Harvey, writes, "The economically, politically and social driven processes of creative destruction through abandonment and redevelopment are often every bit as destructive as arbitrary acts of war." "The City as Body Politic", in Jane Schneider and Ida Susser (ed.), Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World (New York: Berg, 2003), 26.

[5] The phrasing is Greene's, but the idea evokes, wittingly or unwittingly, Schumpeter, who most clearly described how the constant reinvention of capitalism "incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism." Joseph A. Schumpeter, ""The Process of Creative Destruction," and "Crumbling Walls"", Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976 [1942]), 81.

[6] "A market economy must comprise all elements of industry, including labor, land, and money. […] But labor and land are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market" Polanyi, *Great Transformation* 70.

[7] The literature on this is extensive. For a useful and accurate summary of key developments, see Quy-Toan Do and Lakshmi Iyer, "Land Titling and Rural Transition in Vietnam," Economic Development and Cultural Change, Vol. 56, No. 3 (2008), 534-539. For a critical reading of these developments, see Erik Harms, "Neo-Geomancy, Real Estate Fever, and the Privatization of Land in Post-reform Vietnam," Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, (Under Review).

[8] While the legitimizing framework behind land-clearance is itself guided by particular notions of the collective needs of Vietnamese society, the process of reclaiming land, displacing people who occupy it, and ultimately negotiating appropriate forms of compensation actually reveals a trend towards seeing land as commodity that transcends any simple understanding of this process as driven by the ideological impulses of communism.

[9] Nguyen Van Suu, "The Politics of Land: Inequality in Land Access and Local Conflicts in the Red River Delta since Decollectivization", in Philip Taylor (ed.), Social inequality in Vietnam and the challenges to reform (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 291-92.

[10] David W.H. Koh, Wards of Hanoi (Singapore: ISEAS Publications, 2006), *passim,* 239.

[11] Setha M. Low, "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica," American Ethnologist, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1996), 861-879; Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991).

[12] Viện Ngôn Ngữ Học, Từ Điển Việt-Anh [Vietnamese English Dictionary] (TP.HCM: Nhà Xuất Bản TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 1997), 288.

[13] Oxford English Dictionary, "Oxford English Dictionary Online: "Raise"", (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

> **1.** *trans.* To tear; to scratch, to cut. Now *rare*.
>   In some earlier cases perh. with idea of 'raising' or lifting a portion of the surface; in recent use prob. felt to be a use of RAISE *v.*[1]
>   ✝**2.** *trans.* To erase; to raze. *Obs.*

[14] Ibid., 287-288.

[15] If one asks a southern Vietnamese city dweller when they were born, for example, they may very well reply "I was born two years before *Giải Phóng*" irrespective of their political feelings about whether April 30th, 1975 was experienced more as a "Liberation" or a "Fall."

[16] [Ministry of Construction] Bộ Xây Dựng, Quy Hoạch Xây Dựng các Đô Thị Việt Nam [Master Building Plans for Vietnam's Urban Areas] (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Xây Dựng, 1999). See also a recent paper by anthropologist Lauren Meeker, where local village authorities in Diềm village, Bắc Ninh province, agreed to ""liberate the space" or land (giải phóng mặt bằng) needed for" a road project being developed by the provincial authorities hoping to increase tourism in the area. Lauren Meeker, "If "they" build it, will you come? Local administration of cultural policy in a Vietnamese village.," New York Conference on Asian Studies, (2009), 3.

[17] "Tôi hy vọng mọi khúc mắc sẽ nhanh chóng được **giải tỏa** và hợp đồng sẽ được ký trước Tết Nguyên đán". Thanh niên, "Hợp đồng của HLV Dido: Vướng mắc vẫn chưa được giải quyết [Coach Dido's Contract: Entanglements not yet Solved] " Vnexpress, No. 10/01/2001 (2001). http://vnexpress.net/GL/The-thao/2001/01/3B9AD63C/

[18] HT.Thích Trí Quảng, "Giải tỏa oan ức [Release from Unjust Suffering]", (Phật Tử Việt Nam [Vietnamese Buddhist], 2008).

[19] United States Department of State, "Vietnam: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2003", (**Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor**, 2004).

[20] Tran Dinh Thanh Lam, " The great Vietnam land grab " Asia Times Online, No. 10/08/2006 (2006). http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HH10Ae01.html

[21] Associated Press, "Vietnamese man sets himself on fire to protest land confiscation," AsiaOne News, No. 26/12/2007 (2007)

Tran Dinh Thanh Lam, " The great Vietnam land grab " Asia Times Online, No. 10/08/2006 (2006). http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HH10Ae01.html

[22] Nga Pham, "Vietnam hit by mass land protests," BBC Vietnamese service, No. 18/07/2007 (2007). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6904733.stm

[23] Nga Pham, "Prayers and protests in Vietnam," BBC Vietnamese service, No. 02/09/2008 (2008). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7593251.stm

[24] France 24, "Catholics protest Hanoi park on 'church land'," France24, No. Tuesday 23 September 2008 (2008). http://www.france24.com/en/20080923-catholics-protest-public-park-church-land-vietnam-hanoi

[25] Matt Steinglass, "Disabled War Veterans in Vietnam Protest Land Seizure," VOANews.com, No. 07 March 2009 (2009).
http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-03/2009-03-07-voa16.cfm?moddate=2009-03-07

[26] Human Right Watch, "Vietnam - Human Rights Development in 2008", (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

[27] Erik Harms, "Neo-Geomancy, Real Estate Fever, and the Privatization of Land in Post-reform Vietnam," Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, (Under Review).

[28] Martin Gainsborough, "Understanding Communist Transition: Property Rights in Ho Chi Minh City in the Late 1990s," Post-Communist Economies, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2002), 227-243.

[29] "Some of the developers characterized the state as being frustratingly weak in standing up to social pressure. "If the farmer protests and petitions, the government is on the farmer's side. By law, the state could force them to sell, but so far it is impossible to do so," said a veteran developer. Others blamed the persistent "communist" mentality of some government leaders. For example, several mentioned how a new deputy mayor of HCMC came into office and enforced laws and regulations more carefully starting in 2003. One firm's leader described him as "a real Communist.Annette M. Kim, "The Role of Decentralization and Discourse in Land Compensation Changes in Transitional Vietnam," Property and Property Rights in Vietnam, (2009), 11."

[30] A simple Lexis-Nexis search produces a wide range of articles on real-estate and investment perspectives.

[31] Robert A. Beauregard, ""Selections"", When America Became Suburban (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Robert A. Caro, ""One Mile" ", The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York. (New York: Vintage, 1975); James Kunstler, "Chapter Seven: The Evil Empire", The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); Neil Smith, "Gentrification and Uneven Development," Economic Geography, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1982), 139-155; Gary Greenberg, ""The Condemned"", Mother Jones (2005).

[32] David Harvey, "The City as Body Politic", in Jane Schneider and Ida Susser (ed.), Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World (New York: Berg, 2003), 25-46. Karl Marx, ""Influence of circulation on the determination of value" ", Grundrisse (New York: Vintage Book, 1973), 537-549.

[33] Laura Nader, "Human Rights and Moral Imperialism," Anthropology News, No. September (2006).

[34] Stephanie Strike, "Breaking Down Barriers to U.S. Investment in Vietnam's Real Estate Market," Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2006), 857-882.

[35] UNDP and Ho Chi Minh City Master Plan Review Team, "Draft Report Review of HCM City Master Plans", (Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City, 1997).

[36] David Harvey, Paris, Capital of Modernity (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Robert Caro, "One Mile", The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Vintage, 1975).

[37] Hoài Nam, "Gần 1.000 hộ dân bị đẩy ra đường do dự án giải tỏa - tái định cư [Nearly 1000 families pushed out onto the streets because of a site clearance and resettlement project]," No. 08/08/2006 (2006).
http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Gan-1.000-ho-dan-bi-day-ra-duong-do-du-an-giai-toa-tai-dinh-cu/45203767/157/

"Trong căn nhà ọp ẹp, bác Nguyễn Thành Tuy, 84 tuổi, đang nằm co quắp trên chiếc võng. Vợ bác Tuy với đôi tay run rẩy đang bọc từng lớp nilon vào trong chiếc rổ mây một cách khó nhọc. Trước năm 2000, gia đình bác ở phường Nguyễn Thái Bình, Q.1. Năm 2001, nhà bị giải tỏa. Cầm trong tay gần 60 triệu đồng tiền đền bù, cả gia đình bác đi tìm chỗ ở mới. Có người giới thiệu, bác mua căn nhà 4 x14m (ở tổ 10 hiện nay). Lúc đến ở thì nhà chẳng ra nhà, nên số tiền truy lĩnh huân chương cũng đã dùng hết vào việc sửa chữa. Hiện tại bác Tuy và vợ đang sống cùng người con út bằng nghề gia công rổ mây. "Nếu ổng khỏe thì

mỗi ngày làm được 30 ngàn, còn bệnh thì chỉ được 20 ngàn thôi. Cái bệnh tiểu đường và huyết áp ngày nào mà chẳng hành hạ ông ấy. Nếu nhà tôi tiếp tục bị giải tỏa thì chỉ có nước đi ăn mày" - vợ bác Tuy tâm sự. Bác Tuy là một trong gần 1.000 hộ dân thuộc khu phố 6 nằm trong diện giải tỏa trắng (chỉ được đền bù theo giá đất nông nghiệp 150.000đ/m2) vì toàn bộ đất khu phố 6 thuộc khu quy hoạch của ĐHQG."

[38] NGUYỄN HUY CƯỜNG, "Khu công nghiệp Trảng Bàng: Những điều còn lại sau "giải tỏa" [Trảng Bàng Industrial Zone: Some things remain after "site clearance"]," Việt Báo (Theo Tuổi Trẻ), No. 15/5/2004 (2004). http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Khu-cong-nghiep-Trang-Bang-Nhung-dieu-con-lai-sau-giai-toa/40033037/157/

[39] Ibid. "Gia đình cụ Lê Văn Kích, tuổi ngoài 90, ấp Suối Sâu. Đợt đầu cụ dằn lòng nộp cho KCN già nửa hecta đất, trong đó có đất thổ cư và cái nhà trị giá 30 lượng vàng để nhận... 160 triệu đồng (coi như không có tiền đất). Cụ sang nhượng một thửa đất và làm ngôi nhà mới để ở và để... chết (cụ bà cũng đã 85 tuổi). Khi mua, cụ cho con trai lên tận xã hỏi, xã thuận cho mua và đã cấp giấy chứng nhận quyền sử dụng đất đàng hoàng. Ngày tân gia cụ sửa mâm tiệc mừng nhà mới ở tuổi 94, nhiều cán bộ xã cũng đến chia vui nhưng chưa đầy một tháng sau bị giải tỏa tiếp. Giá đền bù lần này cũng như lần trước: bằng 50% giá trị đất và khoản gia đình đầu tư..."

[40] Hoàng Tạo, "Bất ổn trong công tác đền bù giải tỏa dự án Đại lộ Đông Tây [Instability in Demolition and Compensation Work on the East-West Throughway]," Việt Báo, Originally from Thanh Niên, No. 11/09/2005 (2005). http://vietbao.vn/Trang-ban-doc/Bat-on-trong-cong-tac-den-bu-giai-toa-du-an-Dai-lo-Dong-Tay/45167770/478/

[41] Huy Thịnh (2007) "Khuất tất đằng sau dự án dọc kênh Nhiêu Lộc – Thị Nghè [Dubious deeds behind the project along the Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe canal project] " *Việt Báo*, from http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Khuat-tat-dang-sau-du-an-doc-kenh-Nhieu-Loc-Thi-Nghe/70089969/157/.

[42] Nhóm PV Chính trị - xã hội (2004) "Bức xúc chuyện đền bù giải tỏa - Kỳ 1: Ép dân bằng cách "thuê"chính quyền giải tỏa! [The Pressing Demolition and Compensation Issue - Part 1 Squeeze the People with "rented" compensation authorities!]." *Việt Báo*, from http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Buc-xuc-chuyen-den-bu-giai-toa-Ky-1-Ep-dan-bang-cach-thue-chinh-quyen-giai-toa/45111867/157/.

[43] NGỌC ẨN, "Chậm giải tỏa, hại "đôi đàng" [Slow site clearance, double damage] " Việt Báo, No. 10/12/2007 (2007)

[44] KIM EM - ĐĂNG NAM, ""Chơi nghệ thuật" chờ giải tỏa ['Playing With Art' While Waiting for Demolition]," Việt Báo, No. 08/11/2004 (2004). http://vietbao.vn/Phong-su/Choi-nghe-thuat-cho-giai-toa/40054729/263/

[45] Sài Gòn Giải Phóng (2007) "Phá đường dây "ăn mộ" [Breaking the network of "tombstone eaters"] " *Việt Báo (Theo Sài Gòn Giải Phóng)*, from http://vietbao.vn/The-gioi-giai-tri/Pha-duong-day-an-mo/50795665/400/.

Tr.Nguyên (2007) "Làm mộ giả để lấy tiền đền bù, Chủ tịch phường bị bắt giam [Ward Chairman Arrested for Making Fake Tombstones to Receive Compensation Money]." *việt Báo (Theo Tien Phong)*, from http://vietbao.vn/An-ninh-Phap-luat/Lam-mo-gia-de-lay-tien-den-bu-Chu-tich-phuong-bi-bat-giam/70104413/218/.

[46] NGỌC ẨN, "TP.HCM: dân hiến đất trị giá hàng chục tỉ đồng [HCMC: People Offer Land Worth Tens of Billions Dong]," Tuổi Trẻ, No. 09/12/2006 (2006). http://www3.tuoitre.com.vn/Vieclam/Index.aspx?ArticleID=176769&ChannelID=3

[47] Minh Nam, "Hiến đất mở đường [Offering up land to widen roads]," Thanh Niên, No. 03/05/2009 (2009). http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/News/Pages/200918/20090503234811.aspx

[48] "Chị Diệp Bạch Yến, nhà ở đường Vườn Lài tâm sự: "Người dân tự giải tỏa nhà để Nhà nước làm đường cho khang trang hơn là dân được lợi nhiều hơn. Không chỉ tăng giá trị đất đai, nhà cửa, mà khi có đường mới, kinh doanh dịch vụ cũng phát triển, đời sống người dân ngày càng được cải thiện, nên ai cũng đồng tình".

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[50] QUỐC THANH (2004) "Giải tỏa đền bù: làm sao dân đồng thuận? [Demolition and Compensation: How to Satisfy the People?]." *Việt Báo*.

[51] Đ.TR., "Cấp sổ đỏ và chuyển nhượng: thủ tục ra sao, bao lâu? [How are "Red Dossiers" issued and transferred and how long does it take?] " Tuổi Trẻ online, No. Thứ Tư, 03/11/2004, 07:35 (GMT+7) (2004). http://www.tuoitre.com.vn/tianyon/Index.aspx?ArticleID=54133&ChannelID=3

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[52] Thanh niên, "TP.HCM: người dân trong khu vực bị giải tỏa sẽ được hỗ trợ việc làm, học hành [HCMC: People in Demolished Areas will Receive Work and Educational Assistance]," Việt Báo, No. 19/06/2006 (2006). http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/TP-HCM-nguoi-dan-trong-khu-vuc-bi-giai-toa-se-duoc-ho-tro-viec-lam-hoc-hanh/40145149/157/

[53] In careful language, Nguyen Van Suu argues that the struggle to gain adequate compensation for appropriated land can be read as struggle to gain "voice" and "rights"

> "In relation to land compensation price (or, more exactly, the compensation price of land-use rights), my research shows that in many cases the villagers had to fight for compensation policies that were more reasonable (at least in their view). The villagers have not said specifically that they would like to participate in the decision-making in land compensation policies. But their struggle against the policies, or for a more reasonable compensation price, and more economic rights, is in fact a struggle from a voice over matters including how land-taking should be done, the rights of peasant holders versus land-use rights of the state, and the role of the state in land-taking. In many cases, whether or not they can participate in decision-making over land compensation is extremely crucial to them. If they could, they would achieve more economic benefits, including higher compensations and a confirmation of job opportunities, labour employment, for instance. Otherwise, they have to accept the given policies at their cost."

[54] Bill Hayton, "A sharp knife, but not too sharp", The New Vietnam (New Haven: Yale University Press, In Press); Ken MacLean, "Audit Regimes and the Rituals of Compliance in Contemporary Vietnam", (Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms: An International Symposium, Yale University, April 25th, 2009, 2009).

[55] Đức Trung, "TP Hồ Chí Minh mở rộng đường Nguyễn Văn Trỗi - Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa [Ho Chi Minh City Widening Nguyễn Văn Trỗi - Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa Street]," Việt Báo, No. 15/9/2004 (2004). http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/TP-Ho-Chi-Minh-mo-rong-duong-Nguyen-Van-Troi-Nam-Ky-Khoi-Nghia-Gan-300-ti-dong-km-duong-van-chua-on/45112067/157/; Thanh Tòng, "Mở rộng đường Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa: 85 hộ giải tỏa trắng [Widening Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa Street: 85 households will be completely demolished]," Việt Báo, No. 16/09/2004 (2004); http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Mo-rong-duong-Nam-Ky-Khoi-Nghia-85-ho-giai-toa-

trang/10878646/157/; VÕ HƯƠNG, "Mở đường NKKN - Nguyễn Văn Trỗi: Bộ mặt cửa ngõ ra sao? [Widening NKKN - Nguyen Van Troi Street: What will the face of the gateway to the city look like?]," Việt Báo, Originally from Tuổi Trẻ, No. 11/05/2005 (2005). http://vietbao.vn/Xa-hoi/Mo-duong-NKKN-Nguyen-Van-Troi-Bo-mat-cua-ngo-ra-sao/40077990/157/

[56] Kiên Cường, "Đường 'ngoại giao' của TP HCM sẽ hoàn thành vào cuối năm [Ho Chi minh City's 'Foreign Relations' Street to be Completed by Year's End]," vnexpress, No. 05/03/2009 (2009). http://vnexpress.net/GL/Xa-hoi/2009/03/3BA0C995/

"Chị Lan, một kỹ sư xây dựng có nhà bị giải tỏa, nói chị hiểu rằng TP không ép buộc các hộ dân xây dựng như thế nào nhưng vì lợi ích chung, thiết nghĩ TP nhanh chóng hướng dẫn cụ thể về qui chuẩn, kiểu dáng. Đó là làm đẹp cho khu vực và cho TP. Trong khi chờ nghiên cứu TP nên yêu cầu các quận huyện hoặc Sở Qui hoạch - kiến trúc, thậm chí UBND phường cũng được đưa ra định hướng chung cho người dân biết họ cần xây như thế nào để không làm hỏng "bộ mặt của TP". Không nên để người dân xây dựng lại xong mới có hướng dẫn thiết kế đô thị vì lúc này người dân không thể đập đi, xây lại. (Kiên Cường 2009)"