Building infrastructure for peace: Critical insights into nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnamese education

By

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Abstract

Rooted in a vision for education to be part of an infrastructure to build sustainable peace in post-war societies, this research maps out the emergence of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system to investigate the intersections between education, politic, development, and peacebuilding. The research utilizes critical discourse analysis and the positioning theory to examine official and unofficial public discourses, exploring how two seemingly contradicting discourses co-exist and shape the government of Vietnam's ideas of education, citizenship, and peacebuilding. This cartography covers six periods—the French colonization (1862 – 1954); the First Indochina War (1945 – 1954); the Second Indochina War (1955 – 1975); the Bao Cấp period (1976 – 1985); the Đổi Mới reform (1986 – mid-2000s) and the Hội Nhập period (mid-2000s – present). The findings show that colonization and wars gave birth to a vision for a unified communist Vietnam. In post-war Vietnam, nationalism enabled neoliberalism to enter the country as the government saw neoliberal practices, such as privatization and internationalization, as patriotic actions to help turn Vietnam into an economic powerhouse of the global world market. Today, neoliberalism and nationalism not only shape the government's understanding of the purpose of public education but also enable neocolonial ideas, such as the Westernization of the curriculum, to influence educational changes. The end of the research provides a list of questions for future research to look at education as part of an infrastructure for peace, along with suggestions for possible places or directions where future research may take to begin engaging with those questions.

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List of Abbreviations

CDA:	Critical discourse analysis
CPV:	The Communist Party of Vietnam
LLE:	Language and literature education
MD:	The Ministry of Defense
MET:	The Ministry of Education and Training
PACS:	Peace and conflict studies
PAV:	The People's Army of Vietnam

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Introduction

How this research came about

When I started writing my thesis proposal in early 2021, my mind was still wrapped around the January 6th Capitol Riot in the United States. Images of bright yellow South Vietnamese flags and anti-Communist banners in the riot left me sleepless for several nights. The participation of former Vietnamese refugees in the Capitol Riot in support of President Trump's popular nationalism and anti-communist agendas illustrates the continuing need for healing from the Second Indochina War and for reconciliation between Vietnamese diasporas and the government of Vietnam. Almost half a century has passed since the end of the Second Indochina War, and both the United States and the Vietnamese governments have moved on to build economic relationships. Yet many people are left with unhealed wounds. War legacies and war trauma have become a chronic disease that presents in people's everyday life and continues to bring with it division, new conflicts, and pain to different individuals and communities.

Growing up in Vietnam and attending both public and private schools in Vietnam, I always learned about the Second Indochina War from one storyline as told by the Vietnamese government, which positions Vietnam as the colonized who fought against the American colonizer to liberate the south and unify the nation. When studying in the United States, I encountered different stories—those from European American war veterans, from members of Vietnamese diasporas, and from young Vietnamese Americans vowing to heal themselves from intergenerational trauma. I started to question my own knowledge about the war and think critically about how different education systems have taught me about the war. My intention was not to strictly criticize a particular perspective, but rather to imagine something that has not yet

existed—an infrastructure upon which to build and sustain peace work, including healing, reconciliation, and education for peace.

From my curiosity to re-think what I learned and the educational systems that I was embedded in, I got entangled in the chaos of inequalities and injustices in Vietnam's system of contemporary education—a complicated system paradoxically saturated with the contradicting yet interrelated ideologies of nationalism and neoliberalism (Ngo, 2020). I was curious how these two ideologies co-exist in Vietnam, with nationalism moves people inward to focus on building a sense of belonging to a shared national identity, while neoliberalism encourages people to move outward to become global citizens and integrate into the global world market. How should Vietnamese students navigate these complexities and contradictions—such as learning to remember the horrors of the Second Indochina War while also learning to build trade partnerships with the United States, learning to be rooted in Vietnamese cultural traditions while also learning to integrate into the multicultural world, learning to be a patriotic Vietnamese citizen while also learning to become a global citizen?

Before I overwhelm myself and my readers with more questions, or else accidently jump ahead into proposing solutions, I need to track down evidence and effects of the discourses of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system—something that existing peace research has not yet done. Lederach (2005) writes that "the birth of constructive change develops in the womb of engaging complex historical relationships, not avoiding them" (p. 55). One cannot imagine futures of peace by ignoring the distant pasts that are still alive and the presents that has to be lived in. And so, in what follows, I will dive into an exploration of how the forces of nationalism and neoliberalism emerged at different times in Vietnam's history, and how the present and future of Vietnam are continuing to be shaped by these forces.

Objectives and research questions

This research is part of my journey of engagement with my country's complex history and our struggle to build peace—not simply as ending wars but to ensure that peace must be woven into the body, the mind, and the spirit of humans as well as the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of our society (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). From this perspective, education is an essential part of the holistic infrastructure for peace. From the ways we learn and what we learn come teachings of compassion and understanding as well as knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of peacebuilding in a contemporary world (Galtung and Fischer, 2013; Galtung & Udayakumar, 2013; Jeong, 2005; Lederach, 2012).

This research has three major objectives. The first objective is to explore the nature and scope of nationalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system. I map out the evolution of nationalism throughout the French colonization period, the Ten Thousand Days war, and post-war periods so as to better understand changes in the larger social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes that shaped and continue influencing Vietnam's contemporary education system. In particular, I pay close attention to the government's political agendas that are either explicitly or implicitly engrained in the curriculum to make visible the entanglement of politics and education in the Vietnamese context.

My second objective is to examine the nature and scope of neoliberalism in Vietnamese education. I focus on disclosing the impacts of neoliberalism on the organizational and functional logics behind the Vietnamese government's idea of education and the role of education. This exploration also allows me to gain a deeper understanding of the government's ideas of citizenship embedded in public education, providing insights into the logic and reasoning

provided by the Vietnamese government to justify its adoption and promotion of neoliberalism, a discourse that seems at odds with the country's ongoing commitment to communism.

The third objective is to explore the nature and scope of post-colonialism in Vietnam. Vietnam has declared its victory over different colonial powers and believed it could enter a period of national development in peace, but many Vietnamese people have not been fully healed from the wounds of our colonial past. Chen (2010) believes that the lack of a critical reflection on the progress of decolonization in post-colonial contexts could lead former colonies to fall into a cycle of violence by going from anti-colonialism to neo-colonialism. Basically, after the former colonies gained independence from the colonizers, their national developments continued to be shaped by colonial ideas that they unconsciously imported through cultural, economic, and knowledge exchange. From anti-colonial nationalism in the First Indochina War to neoliberal state development after the Second Indochina War, where is Vietnam located on our path to healing from colonialism and building long-term peace?

In this research, the cartography of the emergence and impacts of nationalism, neoliberalism, and post-colonialism enables me to dive deeply into this matter. There has been very little research that looks at the emergence of neocolonial ideas and practices as by-products of Vietnam's adoption of a neoliberal approach to education and state development. Ngo (2020)'s research is among the few recent studies that attempt to answer the question of how neoliberalism infiltrates the Vietnamese education system, which heavily invests in the teaching and promotion of socialism and patriotism. However, Ngo's study focuses on similarities between Confucian pragmatic perception of education and neoliberal individualistic economic rationale. It does not dive into how Vietnam's long path to independence impacts the way the government perceives what education is and is supposed to do, nor does the research make

connections between globalization and the country's colonial and war pasts. With this research, I wish to shed much-needed light on the past-present-future of Vietnam in relations to our colonial pasts, raising questions to think further about what could be beyond the current practices of nationalism and neoliberalism. I specifically use the term "part-present-future" to resist a Eurocentric linear understanding of time that sees the past, the present, and the future as separated entities. Instead, I situate my imaginations for futures of peace within the reality of the presence of postcolonial Vietnam and our colonial past that is still alive and continues shaping our present and futures.

Overall, my research centers on two main questions:

1. What evidence can we find of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system?
2. What are the explicit and implicit effects of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system?

I am also concerning with these sub-questions:

1. What ideas about citizenship are detectable in the Vietnamese government's official and unofficial discourse(s) on public education?
2. What linkage(s) exist between nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's education system? What are the Vietnamese government's logics, reasoning, and/or justification behind its neoliberal approach to education?
3. What is the relation of neoliberalism to colonialism/ neocolonialism/ anticolonialism in the Vietnamese educational context? From colonialism to

nationalism to neoliberalism, what is the trajectory of Vietnam's development and peacebuilding?

How I search for answers

Theoretical lens

To explore my research questions, I situate my inquiry within a post+colonial theoretical lens, much inspired by *A third university is possible* by la paperson (also known as K. Wayne Yang). la paperson (2017) suggests using the term "post+colonialism" instead of the traditional "postcolonialism" to emphasize that colonialism is not something of the past but is well and alive. This understanding is crucial to any decolonial research as it requires the research to be critical of the complex connections between colonial pasts, neocolonial presents, and the decolonized futures that have not yet come into being. In this research, the cartography of the emergence and influence of different discourses in Vietnamese education throughout history enables me to gain a more holistic understanding of "a past that is alive and guides, and a future of hope" (Lederach, 2005, p. 137).

Focus on language and literature education (LLE)

To examine the Vietnamese education system, I focus on language and literature education (Ngữ văn) for three reasons. First, literature, particularly historical fiction, is a common tool used by national elites to convey their vision of nationhood and expressions of anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiments to the general public (Dadabayeva & Sharipova, 2016). Since the First Indochina War, the government of Vietnam has declared language and literature education (LLE) an essential tool to promote the role of the communist party,

socialism, and anti-colonialism to Vietnamese people, particularly youth (Dror, 2018). Examining the LLE curriculum discloses the intersection between education and politics, providing insights into how nationalism and neoliberalism are incorporated into the education system to support the government's political agendas.

Additionally, analyzing the use of texts and public discourses leads to a systemic analysis. I am interested in the Vietnamese government's ideas about citizenship and how these ideas are incorporated into public education in order to support different political agendas. Essentially, linguistic activity is inseparable from "the complex of meaning-making practices in which it is embedded" (Gumperz, 2014, p. 217). Language is political, and language use (speak or write) always involves a battle over the distribution of social goods such as sources of values, power, acceptance, status, etc. (Gee, 2014a, 2014b). Thus, language use has the ability to construct and influence systems of knowledge and belief, social identities, and social relations (Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1972; Gavriely-Nuri, 2018). In the case of literature textbooks, printed texts are embedded within the larger institutional, societal, and national context (Smith, 2013) to produce and legitimize certain truths and realities (Allan, 2003).

Furthermore, language is not only socially and historically constructed; it is also influencing the current society structures (Fairclough, 2001; Pennycook, 1998). Although words carry meanings from the past, these meanings may evolve over time by incorporating new meanings that reflect the current society's ideological and political landscape (Holborow, 2015). Despite the emergence of neoliberalism since the Đổi Mới reform, the national LLE textbooks have gone through minor changes since they were published in the 1980s. This opens a good opportunity to explore the intersection of post-colonialism and neoliberalism in Vietnamese

education, including changes (or the lack thereof) in nationalist discourse, as neoliberal discourse infiltrates the education system.

Sources of data

In this research, I use three sets of data, including both secondary data and primary data. First are eight readings from the national LLE textbooks (lower secondary school level) and their associated teacher's guide to lesson plans published by the Ministry of Education and Training (MET). The teacher's guide to lesson plans is referred to as "teacher's guide" for short. Second, I have the latest state's guide to language and literature curriculum development and teachings, which were published by the MET in 2018. This document is referred to as "state's guide" for short. Last, I use my personal notes/study guide.

The rationale for using mainly secondary data is because a focus on discourse, especially official discourse, provides a rare opportunity to reveal the public face—as well as the private assumptions, contradictions, interests, and ambitions—of a government that has not provided much formal justification for its actions and policies. The state guide was chosen because it was created by the MET for teachers expected to use it to develop their LLE lesson plans, and so it provides the latest and most comprehensive guide to Vietnam's curricular logic. This document offers insights into contemporary social and political ideologies and practices during the Hội nhập era (2007–present), which are not found in readings in textbooks. This research also collects data from the teacher's guide to lesson plans that is published by the Vietnamese government. If the state guide contains broad visions and overarching goals for teaching LLE at public schools, these teacher's guides show details of the government's understanding of the

nature of the wars in Vietnam and the citizenship duties it expects students to take on through their education.

In addition, I examine eight selected readings from national lower secondary school textbooks, the first educational level where the subject of LLE is introduced. Based on the list of recommended or required readings found in the state guide, I choose eight readings written by Vietnamese authors and covered five periods that reflect Vietnamese history, culture, and socio-political landscape from the early 19th century until present (see Table 1). One reading was written during the period of French colonization (1862–1954); two were produced during the First Indochina War (1945–1954); two during the Second Indochina War (1955–1975); two during the era of the Bao Cấp report (1976–1985); and one appeared during the time of the Đổi Mới reform (1986–1996/early 2000s). I distinguish the First Indochina War period from the period of French colonization since the war era was marked by the establishment of the communist party, and war trauma played a significant role in shaping post-war Vietnamese national identity (Ring et al., 2017; Volkan, 1998, 2019). Given that the list of recommended and required readings in the state guide is relatively extensive, I chose readings that are considered by the government to be among the most outstanding works of Vietnamese literature or else which were written by authors celebrated by the government.

Out of the eight selected readings, only one reading is a non-fictional work—an argumentative essay written by a former politician. Overall, not only because the lower secondary school textbooks seldom include any non-fictional literary content but also because through critical engagement with fictions, it becomes possible to extract ideas about the Vietnamese government's hidden logics, reasoning, and/or justification behind its nationalist and neoliberal approaches to education. Previous research has shown that post-conflict states use

literature, especially historical fictions, as a tool to imagine statehood and create desirable conditions to advance the development of the national collective culture (Dadabayeva & Sharipova, 2016). As Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye (1963) writes: "You wouldn't go to *Macbeth* to learn about the history of Scotland–you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul" (p. 35). Literature reveals the worlds that individuals and groups construct (Frye, 1963). Therefore, a focus on primarily fiction readings in the curriculum and how the government regulates the ways they are being taught helps unpack the implicit interests and agendas of the Vietnamese government.

The only source of primary data in this research is a 13-page set of personal notes/study guide, which I created in 2011 in order to prepare for Vietnam's national high school entrance exam. This exam is one of the most significant exams that any Vietnamese students at public schools (or private schools teaching the national curriculum) must take at the end of the nineth grade. At that time, this study guide was produced to document key knowledge and details of all readings required for that grade, providing an overview of ninth grade LLE curriculum and important knowledge accumulated throughout the four years of lower secondary school (grades six to nine). Although I was the person who actually developed this study guide, its contents and the knowledge it contains were taken strictly from the textbooks and the lessons taught by teachers who also developed their lesson plans based on guidance from the state. This means that the analysis of specific works in the study guide was less concerned with my personal interpretations of the readings and more with what I understood and remembered of what was being taught in class. Therefore, this document serves as a valuable source of data by providing insights into what knowledge and values was being mobilized by the government in the classroom, particularly with a view to nourishing civic responsibility and supporting the

government's political agendas. It is important to note that different students may remember different things about what they learn, but it is out of this research's scope to collect primary data from other students. This opens more opportunities for future research.

Table 1. *Information about the eight selected readings*

Title	Year	Period	Author	Form of Literature	Key Content	Included visual images?
"Thuế máu" ("Blood tax")	1925	French colonization	Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Hồ Chí Minh)	Argumentative essay	A chapter "Le Procès de la colonisation française" that criticizes the brutality of the French colonization in Indochina.	Yes
"Đồng chí" ("Comrade")	1948	The First Indochina War	Chính Hữu	Poetry	A poem describing the life of Vietnamese soldiers during the First Indochina War based on the author's experiences participating in the Việt Bắc/ Operation	Yes

					Léa campaign in 1947.	
"Làng" ("Village")	1948	The First Indochina War	Kim Lân	Short story	A fictional story portraying the patriotism of people living in rural areas in northern Vietnam during the First Indochina War.	No
"Chiếc lược ngà" ("The ivory comb")	1966	The Second Indochina War	Nguyễn Quang Sáng	Short story	A fictional story set in South Vietnam about how the Vietnam War separated families.	No
"Những ngôi sao xa xôi" ("The distant stars")	1971	The Second Indochina War	Lê Minh Khuê	Short story	A fictional story about three young girls and women in the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League who were tasked with documenting the U.S. bombing locations, clearing the roads	No

					after bombing incidents, and locating and disposing of unexploded ordnance within the Trường Sơn mountain range.	
Nói với con	1980	The Bao Cấp reform	Y Phương	Poetry	A free-style poetry in which the author talks to his son about the culture and strengths of their people, an ethnic minority group lives in the mountain areas across the northern region of Vietnam.	No
"Tôi và chúng ta" ("I and we")	1985	The Bao Cấp reform	Lưu Quang Vũ	Stage play	A stage play focusing on the concepts of individualism and collectivism regarding Vietnam's process of moving from a centrally planned	No

					economy to become a socialist-oriented market.	
"Chuẩn bị hành trang vào thế kỉ mới" ("Preparing for a new century")	2001	The Đổi Mới reform	Vũ Khoan	Argumentative essay	An argumentative essay discussing three main points: the modern stage of the world, Vietnam's missions, and the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese people.	No

Method of analysis

This research utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a qualitative analytical approach to analyze core readings as well as the state's guide to lesson plans and curriculum development. This study is interested in two ways of understanding power in relation to discursive practices: first, I am concerned with how power is maintained through operations of language; and, second, I am looking to explain how power (re)produces and operates within social and political systems (McNamara, 2012; Pennycook, 2001). The latter focus is vital because language can concurrently reflect and construct realities (Gee, 2014a), enabling people to engage in different identities based on different contexts and times (Gee, 2014b). This is relevant in the context of Vietnam where the textbooks have not changed much throughout the

years, while the guide to teaching the curriculum has gone through several many changes since the emergence of neoliberalism.

In addition to CDA, this research also uses the positioning theory to assess and explain how the Vietnamese government engraves its ideas about citizenship into official and unofficial discourses on public education. Using positioning theory allows my study to go beyond simply pointing out the circulation of power behind the national curriculum and instead supports a deep dive into consideration of the state's explicit and implicit interests and the complex, dynamic relationship linking politics and education.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA is an interdisciplinary critical-interpretive methodology that centers on providing critical analyses of discourse, perceiving discourse as a social and cultural practice (Fairclough, 2006; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 2005). Although CDA is similar to traditional discourse analysis in its focus on linguistic artifacts, CDA also weaves in various strands of contemporary social theory (Gee, 2008; Rogers et al., 2005). CDA operates within the critical research paradigm and explores the interrelated relationships between texts, discourses, power, and broader social and cultural structures (Gee, 2005; Mogashoa, 2014). From this perspective, language is an essential aspect of social life that connects to the larger societal, political, and cultural contexts and issues such as power, national identity, international and national economic system, organizational structures, human relations, etc. (Fairclough, 1999, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak et al., 2009).

CDA is one of the most influential critical approaches to language use (Pennycook, 2001). This methodology is useful in exploring tensions and complexities between how language

has been socially and historically constructed and how language itself has also (re)constructed society (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Pennycook, 2001). CDA primarily deals with discourses of social injustice, inequality, and power asymmetry (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) in order to challenge ideological systems that have been naturalized or normalized by society (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Mogashoa, 2014). In education, CDA has been used in various studies in education to analyze textbooks and explore the relationships between texts, discourses, and power dynamics in different educational contexts and systems (Rogti, 2019; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2017; Ververi, 2017). Another strength of CDA, which is crucial in this study, is its capacity to investigate implicit, hidden meanings and interests in texts and discursive practices (Skillington, 2006). Using CDA allows this research to reveal not just explicit statements of desire and intent but also latent traces of interests, contradictions, confusion, bias, and/or greed embedded in official and unofficial discourses on public education.

Since discourse analysis is interpretive, there is no specific guidance on how to apply CDA (Mogashoa, 2014), nor is there a dominant approach to using this method (Rogers, 2004). There are instead a wide range of critical approaches that incorporate CDA, such as critical linguistics, social semiotics, and cultural studies (Catalano & Waugh, 2020; Gavriely-Nuri, 2018; Reisigl, 2018). Depending on the research objectives, researchers can be flexible about choosing one or more approaches to CDA as a method of analysis (Rogers, 2004). In general, CDA works alongside and extends techniques used in linguistics and applied linguistics to analyze texts and discourse (Mullet, 2018). Both written and recorded oral texts can be used as primary units of analysis, with data coming from a wide range of sources, including but not limited to textbooks, policy documents, public statements, letters, interviews, conversations, and images (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Stein, 2018; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2017).

On the other hand, as a methodology, CDA is limited in a sense that it primarily hinges upon the researcher's analysis. Although CDA is appropriate for this research, for future research, in order to gather voices of other individuals and groups, it would be useful to use different methodologies, such as community-based participatory action research or collaborative writing, to be inclusive of more diverse voices and encourage the development of solutions and ideas from the grassroots.

Fairclough's model of CDA

This study makes extensive use of Fairclough's model of CDA (1995), which consists of three levels of analysis: (1) description, interpretation, and explanation, (2) text production and reception, and (3) the larger sociopolitical context. There may be overlaps between different levels of analysis, but the general process involves working from a micro-level analysis to a macro-level analysis so that the researchers can thoroughly examine the relationships between texts, discourses, power, and social structures (Fairclough, 2001; Rogers, 2004).

At the first analytical level, the researcher uses texts as the unit of analysis and describes the characteristics of the textual and/or visual elements, such as grammar, word choice, use of figures of speech, use of adjectives and verbs, sequencing of information, tone and voice, etc. (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 2005). With images considered data, the characteristics of images' subjects, composition, and other attributes may be examined (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). The second level of Fairclough's model is process analysis, which involves how the text is produced, used, and interpreted. The main unit of analysis here is the discourse and the discursive practice. This level examines the relationship between the text and its producer to identify what discourse and discursive practice connect to the larger societal systems

and conditions (Fairclough, 2001). The highest level of analysis is the societal level, which explains the relationships between texts, discourse, and larger cultural, historical, societal, and political structures and practices. With regard to the readings featured in Vietnamese LLE textbooks, what the authors of the texts wrote was a byproduct of their times; however, when their works are used in national textbooks and are taught to students today, these earlier texts are woven into the fabric of current contexts in ways that reflect the Vietnamese government's contemporary agendas.

Positioning theory

In addition to CDA, I use positioning theory as a guiding framework to theorize how the Vietnamese government uses texts and discourses to express its ideas about education and assign civic duties to students who study the national curriculum. In the 1990s, positioning theory advanced by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré emerged as a new research methodology along with the emergent field of discursive psychology (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Kayı-Aydar, 2019). Positioning theory was born as a social constructionist approach designed to explore how people produce, circulate, and re-produce meanings, rights, and duties through discursive actions, as well as how people and societal structures are shaped by these actions (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010; Slocum & Langenhove, 2004). Although positioning theory first emerged from the field of psychology and gender studies (Davies & Harré, 1990), it has been applied in various other fields as well, including peace and conflict studies, education, and postcolonial studies (Aberdeen, 2003; McVee et al., 2011, 2018; Moghaddam et al., 2003, 2008; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010).

By scrutinizing how people position others (which include assigning people their rights and duties), how people are positioned and how they negotiate their positions (which include negotiating their rights and duties) within a storyline, the positioning theory investigates discursive actions and social interactions between individuals within a conversation as well as between larger social units, such as organizations, communities, and nations, in a specific context and time (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). I would argue that Vietnam's national textbooks and the state's guide to curriculum development are not dead objects but media guiding interactions between the state and the students. As Harré and Slocum (2003) point out, positioning theory is a useful tool that enables researchers to take a deep dive into complex "situations that otherwise have proved opaque… and intractable" to researchers and institutions charged with dealing with the situations (p. 135). In this case, the Vietnamese government rarely ever explains rationales behind its actions, policies, and reforms. It would be extremely difficult to identify a context where the government and students openly converse about the complexities, contradictions, and politics in the Vietnamese education system. Therefore, analyzing textbooks and other public discourses (i.e., state's guide and teacher's guide) provides one way to shed lights onto how the government assigns citizenship duties to students as it embeds explicit and implicit political agendas into the public education system.

Definitions of terms

I acknowledge that binary terms, such as "Western" and "non-Western-countries," and "More Developed Countries" and "Less Developed Countries," can suggest an uncritical acceptance of socio-economic theories of knowledge and development, as well as a neoliberal approach to development which uses the Global North as the point of reference and standard for

success. In this study, the use of terms such as "the Global North," "the Global South," "Westernization," and "Eurocentrism" is not about geography but is instead about epistemology. Although decolonization is time-specific and land-specific (Tuck & Wang, 2012), my research rests on a premise that the "where" in decolonization must move beyond a geographical location in order to analyze the geopolitical implications of how imperially-made regions influence people settling on those territories (Mignolo, 2011). More specifically, I am concerned with the coloniality of knowledge, which in some contexts reinforces global capitalist structures and maintains power asymmetries in knowledge production and knowledge mobilization. Similarly, there have been robust theoretical critiques generated of the use of binary terms such as "Other" and "Us" (Wevers, 2006). Wevers (2006) believes that because "postcolonial scholars are trying to illuminate the representational and discursive violences and inequities which structure our political and textual worlds," they must avoid falling into the trap of binarism (p. 398). Nonetheless, I use these binary terms because I purposefully want to highlight how knowledge has been produced and mobilized in ways to create an enemy in order to serve certain political objectives, such as to strength a unified national identity in a an increasingly neoliberal society.

The concept of "peace" in Vietnam

The understanding of peace varies across cultures and languages (Anderson, 2004). Given that the focus of this study is on Vietnam, it is helpful to review how peace and peacebuilding are understood in Vietnam. Unfortunately, there has not been much research conducted on how people in Vietnam or the government of Vietnam defines peace. A quick search using the terms "peace" and "Vietnam" on Google Scholar shows peace research that mainly centers on the Second Indochina War. Therefore, in my thesis I attempt to provide

different interpretations of peace in Vietnam through evidence shown in Vietnamese oral and written literature rather than replying on the limited numbers of existing peace studies.

In general, the concept of peace in Vietnam encompasses both the idea of negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and of positive peace (the presence and promotion of social justice, equity, reciprocal relationships, compassion, and dignity, among others) (Galtung, 1969, 1981; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). In Vietnamese oral literature, the concept of peace is often associated with the building of reciprocal relationships. Idioms such as "một con ngựa đau cả tàu bỏ cỏ" (when a horse is hurt, the entire team of horses quits eating) or "lá lành đùm lá rách" (the good leaf embraces the broken leaf) are teachings that call on people for understanding, compassion, unification, and solidarity during difficult times. In the famous folktale *Sơn Tinh Thủy Tinh,* the ancient Việt people envisioned a peaceful society as one where people do not suffer from natural disasters. As such, peace is not only a term designating the harmony between humans and humans, it also speaks to relations between humans and the land. In the renowned legend of *Thánh Gióng,* for example, peace is evident in the absence of war as well as the reclamation of national sovereignty from the foreign invaders, specifically the ancient Chinese.

The understanding of peace became increasingly focused on negative peace in Vietnamese written literature produced during the Phong Kiến period, when ancient China invaded Vietnam. In 1428, following the order of king Lê Thái Tổ, Nguyễn Trãi wrote *Bình Ngô đại cáo* ("The Great proclamation upon the pacification of the Wu") to declare the Vietnamese victory over the Ming army from ancient China. Nguyễn Trãi declared that peace is the philosophical foundation of the king's approach to national governance—meaning that to govern well requires ensuring that all people enjoy a peaceful society. Moreover, within the context of interstate conflicts, wars against the enemy of the state can be justified as necessary to regain the

peaceful conditions of society. Peace, in this sense, is about national independence, national pride, and national security.

This understanding of peace was also prominent during the 19th and 20th centuries. By the time of the First Indochina War (1945–1954), the word peace (hòa bình) appeared more frequently in written texts as an expression of people's desire for the war to end. Specifically, the term "hòa bình lập lại" (the restoration of peace) was used to refer to the post-Geneva Accords period (post-1954). The use of this term appears in various written texts, such as in the short story *Chiếc Lược Ngà* by Nguyễn Quang Sáng in 1966, which advances the notion that Vietnam was a peaceful country prior to the invasion of France. Historically, this was untrue. Roughly 100 years before French colonization, Vietnam experienced a 159-year civil war that divided the country into two halves—Đàng Ngoài (today's northern Vietnam) and Đàng Trong (today's centre Vietnam)—then followed continuous riots and armed conflicts until France officially made a decision to invade Vietnam in 1857 (Phong, 2018). Accordingly, the concept of a post-1954 restoration of peace has no historical precedent. After 1973, the term "hòa bình lập lại" was popularized again by the official title of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet Nam, more commonly known as the Paris Peace Accords—an attempt to end the Second Indochina War. Once again, peace was understood in this context as the absence of foreign invasions, and peacebuilding centered on reclaiming and strengthening national sovereignty and the collective national identity.

Today, the understanding of peace in Vietnam has been greatly influenced by the emergence and spread of neoliberalism in the country. After 1986, Vietnam opened to the global market, quickly built international relations, and sought funding from international institutions, such as the United Nations or the World Bank, in order to boost its economic growth. This

significant change in political, economic, and societal structure marked a turn in how Vietnam looked at peacebuilding as part of state development. In 1999, Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, earned the title "City for Peace" from UNESCO—a title that the Vietnamese government has been proudly embraced and promoted in the last twenty years. According to the *Nhân dân điện tử*, an online newspaper of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Chi & Ngoc, 2019), Hanoi is a symbol of peace because the city has successfully:

> … trở thành trung tâm lớn về văn hóa, khoa học, giáo dục, kinh tế và giao dịch quốc tế… Thủ đô ngày nay to đẹp hơn, khang trang hơn, là thành phố đa sắc màu văn hóa; các loại hình kinh tế phát triển mạnh, môi trường đầu tư, kinh doanh không ngừng được cải thiện; quốc phòng - an ninh được giữ vững, đối ngoại được mở rộng.
> (… became a major centre of culture, science, education, economy, and international trade… The capital city today is bigger, more beautiful, more spacious, a multicultural city; the economy thrives, the economic investment and business environment are constantly improved; the national defense and security are stable, foreign affairs has been expanded.)

This public discourse reveals that Vietnam's 21st-century understanding of peace has been shaped by the technological and economic interdependence caused by the global capitalist milieu. Peace is no longer simply a post-war outcome but a desirable characteristic and a necessity for Vietnam as it strives to enter "thời kì hội nhập" (an era of integration into the global world). Education, the promotion of innovation and creativity, and the learning of intercultural knowledge become an essential commodity within this peacebuilding-as-state-development approach, in which Vietnam is required to globalize, to follow the international economic demands, and to extensively consume and exploit recourses to support a continuous economic growth.

Nationalism

Nation-state and national identity

From the field of political science, Barrington (2006) defines a nation as a collective of people who are unified by culture as well as a sense of group membership and belonging that are deeply rooted in a desire to control a particular territory. Anderson (1991) describes a nation as an "imagined political community" constructed by a group of people (p. 6). However, the fact that a nation is imagined does not mean that it is simply and no more than just imaginary (Jerkins, 2008). The Vietnamese government often associates the idea of Vietnamese nationhood with a mythical origin story about the Vietnamese people being the descendants of a dragon lord and a goddess (Grigoreva, 2014). The blurry boundary between legends and history does not delegitimize the existence of Vietnam but rather encourages patriotism among people by nurturing a sense of pride regarding this honourable origin.

Internally, nationhood cannot be maintained without a national consciousness and national identity (Kesylyte-Allis, 2017). A national consciousness is a group's vision(s) or idea(s) of their homeland that allows them to distinguish between their and other nations (Barrington, 2006). This desire to develop in-group association and intergroup boundaries leads to the creation of national identity—a form of social identity that can be imagined, (re)produced, and transformed to (de)construct nationhood (Wodak et al., 2009). Having a strong national identity can enhance state stability by giving people a sense of unity, security, and tranquility (Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016).

Externally, nations often engage in various political, economic, and social activities to proclaim their territorial control and strengthen their state legitimacy in the eyes of other nations and international organizations (Gilley, 2006). This tendency leads to an increase in international trades and cooperation on the one hand and interstate conflicts and territorial disputes on the other hand.

Definitions and characteristics of nationalism

Nationalism is a contested term whose definitions differ per scholar (Kecmanovic, 1996). Kho (2020) defines nationalism broadly as an umbrella term for political activism that creates a collective national identity based on patriotism—one's feeling of attachment and devotion to one's country. Although some people mistakenly use the two terms "patriotism" and "nationalism" interchangeably, patriotism is not a synonym for nationalism. Patriotism and nationalism are two different projects that emerge from different histories but have in common a concern with national sovereignty. Patriotism emerged in Western political discourses in the Middle Ages and was further popularized during the American revolution against the British in the 18th century, when it helped establish linkages between citizenship, ethics, and virtues (Dietz, 2020; J. M. Smith, 2000). Being patriotic—to love and to be willing to serve one's country—is a duty of any so-called good or ideal citizen. Dietz (2020) perceives patriotism not as a philosophical concept but rather as a discourse engraved in political practices.

On the other hand, although there is debate over whether nationalism is a modern or pre-modern phenomenon (Kecmanovic, 2005), various scholars from different fields of study have linked nationalism to the logic of colonial social formation (Chen, 2010; Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1967). Nationalism originates as an anti-colonial concept that leverages patriotism as a political discourse to create and empower national liberation movements across the third world. In the 19th and 20th centuries, needs for the colonized to organize their force and distinguish themselves from the colonizing "Other"-led liberation struggles to take on demands for nationhood (Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1967). This strongly nationalist sentiment is legitimized by the discourse of patriotism—a call to reclaim stolen lands and restore cultures that have been taken away by the

colonizing Other. Specifically, many governments embrace ethnic nationalism, which is an approach to nationalism that focuses on building a collective identity based on "a myth of common biological descent," in which objective cultural characteristics, such as languages, serve as "the foundation of political nationhood" (Roshwald, 2002, p. 5).

Nationalism did not come to an end with the collapse of colonial empires towards the end of the 20th century. Rather, it has continued to evolve over time, withstanding some significant changes in the political structures and the world order during and after the Cold War. In many ways nationalism has become a response by many nation-states to the emergence of globalization, which brings with it intense interstate economic and political competition (Chen, 2010; Tekinirk, 2020; Wu, 2020). Globalization reflects Europeans' desire to create a global capitalist structure that limits the efficacy of nation-state boundaries, which are undermined by unregulated "freedom" in order to serve Western imperialistic interests (Chen, 2010; Mignolo, 2011; Ogar et al., 2019). Urry (2000) believes that the nation-state model will become invalid in the age of globalization. Yet, globalization has provoked the re-emergence of nationalism and the popular nationalist movement across many countries, such as China, the United States, and the Great Britain (Cai, 2020; Mignolo, 2011; Tekinirk, 2020). This phenomenon also reveals how nationalism is a double-edge sword that can promote "benign patriotism on the one end of the spectrum" and "violent fascism on the other" (Boylan et al., 2021). Galtung and Fischer (2013) coin the term "hard nationalism" to designate nationalist cultures that are rooted in statism (p. 64)—a doctrine whereby political authority holds an utmost power to control various aspects and structures of the society.

The chosen trilogy

The fact that nationalism not only survives but also thrives in the era of globalization demonstrates its remarkable resilience. This resilience stems from nationalism's power to create, recreate, and transform narratives regarding patriotism and national identity (Tekinirk, 2020). In the case of post-conflict/colonial nations, a new national identity formation is tasked to justify the violence and sacrifices made during the prior conflict (Kingston, 2016). Thus, the chosen trilogy is often used by states to create a collective national identity by linking people's personal memories of and/or feelings about the conflict with selected memories that the state keeps alive for political purposes. At its core, the chosen trilogy is a discourse of nationalism that provokes a "search [for] an enemy" and creating "myth-making, selective memories and dubious interpretations to construct the basis of a common identity and shared past that arouses and inspires" (Kingston, 2016, p. xv–xvi). This trilogy consists of three different but interrelated narratives: the chosen people, the chosen trauma, and the chosen glory.

The chosen people. Galtung and Fischer (2013) use the term "Chosen People" to describe a discourse about a group of people with a distinct origin and a promised land that has been taken away from them by Others. This chosen people narrative evokes and reifies a sense of loss and victimization within the group and urge its members to reclaim their land, pride, and dignity.

The first component of a chosen people narrative involves the proposition that there is a unified group of people coming from the same, special point of origin. According to the official website of the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, a Vietnamese ministry-level state agency that administers ethnic minority affairs nationwide, Vietnam is a "unified nation" with 54 ethnic groups—the descendants of Father Lạc Long Quân (the dragon) and Mother Âu Cơ (the fairy)

(*Hình ảnh cộng đồng 54 dân tộc Việt Nam*, 2021). This public narrative announces that Vietnamese people, regardless of the differences in histories and cultures among various ethnic groups, come from the same origin. Thus, the narrative reminds people to honour and be proud of their roots and identity as Vietnamese. It also reaffirms the sovereignty rights of the Vietnamese people over the Vietnamese state by claiming that the Vietnamese people have made the Vietnamese land their home for thousands of years.

The second major element of the chosen people discourse is the proposal that a particular national group has a common enemy who attempts to take over the land that rightfully belongs to the people "chosen" to inhabit it. In this narrative, chosen people have the right to defend their land, and they are expected to win this fight gloriously because the land is destined to be theirs. The Vietnamese government often cites the victories of Vietnam over ancient China as well as the defeats of France and the United States in modern times to highlight the storyline that Vietnam was the oppressed party who righteously won the wars responsible for its freedom.

The chosen trauma. Volkan (1998) describes a "Chosen Trauma" as the collective memory of a catastrophic event—such as wars, conflicts, natural disasters, etc.—that has been transmitted to the next generation(s) as "a shared mental representation of the event" (p.48). This memory leads current group members to develop a collective feeling of victimization and humiliation caused by the actions of Others (Volkan, 2019). Furthermore, the descendants of victims inherit and use this collective memory to define their current identity (Volkan, 1998). It is important to clarify that the use of the term "Chosen Trauma" never implies that people "choose" to hold on to intergenerational traumas. Rather, historical and cultural traumas live in the body and are passed down to generations through diverse means (DeAngelis, 2019).

Accordingly, the idea of a chosen trauma centers on the deliberate attempt, often by a national, ethnic, or religious leader, to highlight and remember certain traumas, privileged over others, in order to advance specific agendas whether for a good or a bad cause.

In post-war countries, national traumas have significant impacts on nation-building (Kingston, 2016). When a group leader chooses to fetishize a trauma to support their political agendas, that trauma may become a "hot trauma" (Volkan, 2019, p. 186). A trauma turns hot when the victims and their descendants emotionally invest in memorizing and grieving it (Volkan, 2019). A hot trauma eventually escalates into a chosen trauma when the descendants' identity is significantly influenced by the traumatic experiences of their ancestors, and the former are tasked to continue grieving and coping with unhealed wounds. There are many ways for a state to keep a trauma heated. For example, the Vietnamese government cultivates a collective memory and national narrative of the First Indochina and Second Indochina Wars through curriculums, holidays, museums, and works of music, art, and literature (Ring et al., 2017).

Maintaining a hot or chosen trauma is not necessarily bad. Sometimes a trauma is so severe it takes generations to heal. In such cases, a chosen trauma narrative may inspire the work of healing and reconciliation by cultivating solidarity among people (Grigoreva, 2014). On the other hand, this narrative also has the potential to turn into a form of cultural violence and create complex conflicts when group members use a sense of victimization to legitimize their violence and dehumanization toward Others (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Volkan, 2019).

The chosen glory. Chosen glories are positive memories of victories and other laudable aspects of the wars or conflicts that have been highlighted and promoted, primarily by authorities, in order to foster a sense of group membership and self-esteem (Volkan, 1998). In

post-war nations where building a grand narrative of nation-building demands that states cope with myriad tragedies and traumas of the war, hero worshipping is a political strategy that helps supress negative memories and bolsters the state's legitimacy (Grigoreva, 2014; Nourzhanov, 2017). Heroic stories of local resistance and resilience nurture solidarity and the national spirit (Smith, 1986). Many countries use wars of independence to seed the chosen glory narrative because these wars are defining moments that shape an ethnic or national identity/pride (Volkan, 1998).

A chosen glory is less potent than a chosen trauma in terms of its ability to influence and structure emotions because it is less complex. Thus memories of a chosen glory are generally less enduring than traumatic memories (Volkan, 2019). Nonetheless, a chosen glory discourse can be potent when it is combined with chosen people and chosen trauma discourses. For example, the teaching of the Sino-Vietnamese poem "Nam Quốc Sơn Hà" in Vietnamese public schools illustrates this interrelationship between the three different nationalist discourses. Not only has the state been using an ancient poem with an unknown origin to proclaim and legitimize the national sovereignty (chosen people), it also reminds students about the myriad traumatic wars of resistance (i.e. chosen trauma) successfully waged against ancient Chinese regimes (i.e. chosen glory). It is not a coincidence that contemporary Vietnam education has been promoting a poem written a thousand year ago. Vietnam and China have been in a tense relationship over a territorial dispute over the Paracel Islands (also known as the Xisha Islands in China and the Hoang Sa Archipelago in Vietnam). As a result, governmental leaders from both countries have been developing a robust public discourse centered on war memories and nationalism, calling their citizens to be vocal about their land sovereignty (Bui, 2017; Cotillon, 2017).

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV)'s attitude toward nationalism

An understanding of the CPV's attitude toward nationalism is essential in this research because it provides insights into not only explicit but also implicit effects of nationalism in Vietnam's system of education. In recent years, there have been public debates and speculations on whether Hồ Chí Minh was a nationalist, which leads to the larger question of whether Vietnam today supports nationalism. Hồ Chí Minh was a revolutionist, the first president of North Vietnam, and an influential political leader who introduced communism to Vietnam. Therefore, a question that potentially criticizes Hồ Chí Minh is perceived by the government of Vietnam perceives as a national security concern because it seems to question, doubt, and/or challenge the CPV's approach to national building. As a result, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAV) and the Ministry of Defense (MD)—two important forces in charge of military affairs and national security in Vietnam, have been tasked to publicly respond to the question above. In an online article on a state-owned newspaper, the PAV and the MD declare:

> Chỉ có một sự thật là: Chủ nghĩa dân tộc trong tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh thực chất là chủ nghĩa dân tộc vô sản… Cương lĩnh đã nêu rõ con đường cách mạng Việt Nam phải trải qua hai giai đoạn: Cách mạng tư sản dân quyền và cách mạng thổ địa để đi tới xã hội cộng sản… Cần nhấn mạnh rằng, độc lập dân tộc gắn liền với chủ nghĩa xã hội là nội dung nổi bật và nhất quán trong tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh.
> (There is only one truth: Nationalism in Hồ Chí Minh's ideology is in fact proletarian internationalism... The Mission Statement [of the CPV] clearly states that the Vietnamese revolutionary path went through two stages: the people's democratic revolution and the land revolution. It should be emphasized that national independence in association with socialism is a prominent and consistent element in Hồ Chí Minh's ideology.) (Nguyen & Ha, 2020)

According to the statement given by the PAV and the MD (Nguyen & Ha, 2020), the Vietnamese government denounces nationalism outright. Specifically, Vietnam overtly declares support for proletarian internationalism—a Marxist-Leninist ideology that believes all proletarians in the world are unified by the common goal of achieving global socialism

(Chakladar, 1964). This ideology argues that the structure of global capitalism erodes national sovereignty through its hunt for natural resources, wealth, and power. To challenge, resist, and transform the capitalist world order, the doctrine of proletarian internationalism supports national independence but on the ground that this independence is the first step to support a socialist world structure (Chakladar, 1964). From this perspective, a nationalist movement to reclaim national sovereignty is necessary to advance socialism, but nationalism should not become a dominant doctrine for a post-conflict nation. Therefore, the government of Vietnam believes that although Hồ Chí Minh used a nationalist strategy to establish Communist forces early in the First Indochina War, the nation has slowly travelled beyond the path of nationalism to the path of proletarian internationalism as it became a fully-established communist state.

Within the same article, the PAV and the MD has made it clear that without nationalism, Vietnam would not have be able to gain independence from France and the United States. Nationalism is acknowledged as once a powerful force giving rise to the Việt Nam Độc lập Đồng minh (also known as Viet Minh)—an anti-imperialist, anti-French independence front of North Vietnam at work during the First Indochina War (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). The government also recognizes patriotism, a political discourse used to advance nationalism and enhance individual's feelings of belonging to the nation, as the core element of the Vietnamese national identity and the construction of the modern Vietnamese state and citizenship (K. C. Tran, 2021). On the other hand, the PAV declares that post-independence nationalism is the enemy of socialism and the Leninist worldview because it supports chauvinism and fascism (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). The PAV explains that because nationalism moves countries inward, it also obstructs the growth of transnational socialist movements. Vietnam believes that communist revolutions are not localized events but components of a wider global class struggle in which national liberation

serves as the precondition for communism, but only communism is the precondition for long-lasting freedom (Nguyen & Ha, 2020; Vu, 2015).

If Vietnam detested the nationalist doctrine during the post-war national reconstruction and development, how does it understand and practice proletarian internationalism? The PAV claims that historically, the Vietnamese communist revolutionary path went through two stages: the people's democratic revolution ("cách mạng tư sản dân quyền") and the land revolution ("cách mạng thổ địa") (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). The first stage was concerned with resolving the national liberation struggle, and the second stage aimed to address imperialist social structures. Founded after World War II and advanced by China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the people's democratic revolution was a Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework and form of government that stood against fascism and supported multi-party democracy (Lukács & Miller, 2013). During the First and Second Indochina War, the CPV embraced the theoretical conceptualization of the role of the proletariat in socialism while downplaying the multi-party element of the people's democratic revolution. After claiming independence in 1975, Vietnam entered its second stage—that of the land revolution (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). This proletariat movement dominated the discourse of the Bao Cấp period (1975–1986), in which the communist state redistributed lands and properties that once were owned by the French imperialists to the poor, reduced tax, and invested in agriculture (Nguyen, 2010). The PAV explicitly states that nationalism was merely a tool to organize the proletariat during the war and has no role in a post-war Vietnam, when the country has achieved peace and shifted it focus to state development.

Neoliberalism

The discourse of neoliberalism first emerged in the late 1930s with the establishment of the Colloque Walter Lippmann, a group of 26 liberal thinkers who came up with the term "neoliberalism" to describe a new philosophy of liberalism they developed (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). This doctrine, which I will discuss in greater detail below, gained wide public attention in the 1970s after an oil crisis severely impacted the economy of many countries in both the Global North and the Global South (Springer, 2010). Many politicians, particularly those in the Global North, pointed to reduced state regulations and more market freedom as solutions to the 1970s financial crisis. Across Europe and North America in the 1980s, different forms of neoliberalism (e.g. Thatcherism, Reaganomics, etc.) emerged to capture the spirit of capitalist development (Peck et al., 2012; Springer, 2010). After the 2008 global financial crisis, many politicians and scholars are on record as arguing that the neoliberal era would soon be ending (Comaroff, 2011). Yet the question of whether neoliberalism has actually collapsed or remains alive today, even as the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic has provoked a wave of nationalistic "inwardness" in many countries across the globe (Šumonja, 2020).

Definitions and characteristics of neoliberalism

Scholte (2005) and Tekinirk (2020) define neoliberalism as a transnational marketization process and ideology based on principles of privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and globalization. Although neoliberalism is generally understood as an economic term, it should not be conceptually reduced to a homogenous economic doctrine (Marttila, 2018). Globalization also involves a spatial transformation that is "tightly interconnected with culture, economy, politics, psychology and ecology" (Scholte, 2005, p. 3), while privatization, marketization, liberalization,

and deregulation refer to different policy frameworks. Consequently, neoliberalism exists across the nation-state borders and intertwines with various social, political, cultural, educational, and economic phenomena (Kester, 2017; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005; Shdaimah et al., 2011).

The core elements of neoliberalism are individualism, universalism, and meliorism (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Individualism depicts human beings as independent and rational decision-makers who value private controls of economic enterprises and engage in democratic participations (Byrne & Thiessen, 2020; Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). This ideology is fundamental to the rise of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation in many dimensions of the society, from the economy to healthcare and education (Dueck-Read, 2020; Scholte, 2005). The second element of neoliberalism is universalism. Universalism legitimizes and encourages globalization by justifying the development of a global market as necessary to create an environment where countries in the Global North and the Global South can equally thrive (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Shdaimah et al., 2011). The third element is meliorism, an ideology holding that the world is made better by human efforts. Meliorism urges the Global South to globalize and follow neoliberal economic reforms in order to avoid staying behind other the Global North in terms of economic development (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Meliorism convinces these countries that economic development offers the solution to humans suffering from poverty, hunger, and violence. In joining force together, individualism, universalism, and meliorism brings to the world this Western invention of neoliberalism—a powerful doctrine that is capable of infiltrating through the nation-state borders, connecting previously unconnected zones, and manifesting across different social, political, cultural, educational, and economic spaces of many societies (Chen, 2010).

Neoliberalism and development

Various scholars associate neoliberalism with unsustainable development and inequalities. Dumenil and Lévy (2004) connects neoliberalism with neocapitalism. Likewise, Eagleton-Pierce (2016) calls neoliberalism the spirit of capitalism that is justified by a long history of class and social struggle. The neoliberal ideology of modern society promotes a false equal-opportunity concept according to which people at the top of the societal, economic, and political structure are seen as fundamentally more deserving people, and thus entitled to increased wealth, power, and privilege (Galtung, 1990). This mindset legitimizes structural violence and shifts the blame for social injustices and economic disparities toward people from marginalized backgrounds.

In post-war countries, neoliberal economic development and liberal nation-building comprise neoliberal peacebuilding (Thiessen, 2011). Thiessen (2011) believes neoliberal peacebuilding is a form of "neo-colonialism or liberal imperialism" (p. 117) with an agenda to establish a global capitalist infrastructure (Byrne & Thiessen, 2020). This approach necessitates intensive state development projects while undermining grassroots voices and neglecting reconciliation processes intended to move a country recently marked by conflict toward healing and sustainable peacebuilding (Thiessen, 2011). Neoliberal societies organized around a Western consumerist rationale are likely not to perceive peace as a "continual process" but as a product of human manipulation (Galtung & Udayakumar, 2013, p. 118). As a result, such societies are more likely to experience cycles of conflict and violence without ever developing a long-term strategy for achieving sustainable, positive peace.

Galtung and Udayakumar (2013) introduce the term the term "economicolonialism" to describe the phenomenon through which neoliberal economic development and nation-building

become projects of neocolonialism (p. 123). Under the justification that economic growth may eradicate poverty and inequalities, these projects paradoxically exploit resources, dehumanize people, reinforce structural violence (systemic oppression and injustices), direct violence (i.e., wars, armed conflicts, etc.), and cultural violence (i.e., stereotypes, racism, etc.) (Galtung, 1990). They firmly believe that neoliberal economic development contributes to a culture of violence. When state development is understood largely in terms of modernization, the focus of the state is to eradicate poverty and inequality by being more developed. This kind of development requires resource exploitation as well as an excessive consumption of resources to justify a "never-ending growth" (Galtung & Udayakumar, 2013, p.121).

Neoliberalism in education

Neoliberalism is embedded in education systems in various forms and through various means, such as privatization, globalization, and internationalization (Fazal, 2017; Kamola, 2014; Kandiko, 2010). Each neoliberal education project manifests differently and serves different purposes, but all share in common the core logics of neoliberalism—individualism, universalism, and meliorism (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Neoliberalism influences not only educational governance and resource allocation in education, but also how individuals and institutions conceptualize the role and purpose of education, particularly public education.

To begin with, neoliberalism manifests itself in education through ideologies and processes of internationalization. Knight (2004) describes internationalization of education as a process in which multicultural and international perspectives become embedded not only in the delivery of education but also in ideas about its purpose and function—e.g. forming partnerships with international educational institutions, promoting globalism and diversity in the curriculum,

or increasing the recruitment of international students, faculty, and staff (Buckner & Stein, 2020). According to Stein et al. (2016), there are four main articulations of the internationalization of education: (1) internationalization for the global knowledge economy; (2) internationalization for the global public good; (2) anti-oppressive internationalization; and (4) relational translocalism. Perhaps the most dominant of these discourses is internationalization for the global knowledge economy, which perceives education as a cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2006) needed to support a neoliberal world order. This perception often frames Eurocentric epistemological standards and systems as positive or even superior (Stein et al., 2016), which leads to a larger problem arising concerning the coloniality of knowledge according to which Indigenous and local knowledges are devalued, erased, and replaced with Western knowledge and knowledge systems. Overall, the internationalization of education seems most likely to create a transnational capitalist class through practices and policies of spatial and segregation of students from elite schools (Page & Chahboun, 2019).

In the Global South, the internationalization of education often takes the form of the Westernization of the curriculum and the promotion of teaching English as a second language (Fazal, 2017; Sayer, 2015; Tarc & Tarc, 2015). On the one hand, integrating Western cultures into the curriculum introduces students to perspectives different from their own. On the other hand, the assumption of Western culture and epistemology as superior is problematic. Kester (2017) criticizes the Westernization of education in countries of the Global South as a gateway to yet another form of inferiority and dependence, potentially leading to the loss of Indigenous languages and cultures (Stein et al., 2019). There is also an assumption that English is a superior language based on its economic power in a globalized world. Within the logic of neoliberalism, education in general and the English language specifically is understood as a valuable

commodity that contribute to the world's order, knowledge systems, and economic structure. The result of this perception is that many Global South countries have started importing Eurocentric models of education instead of looking to other countries in the Global South as points of reference and partners in mutual learning and the exchange of ideas (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Overall, various studies scholars agree that neoliberal education tends to rely on established hierarchies of political power and class structures that in turn replicate traditional forms of privilege and lead to more inequalities and social injustice, locally and globally (Windle, 2019; Yoon, 2016).

Summary

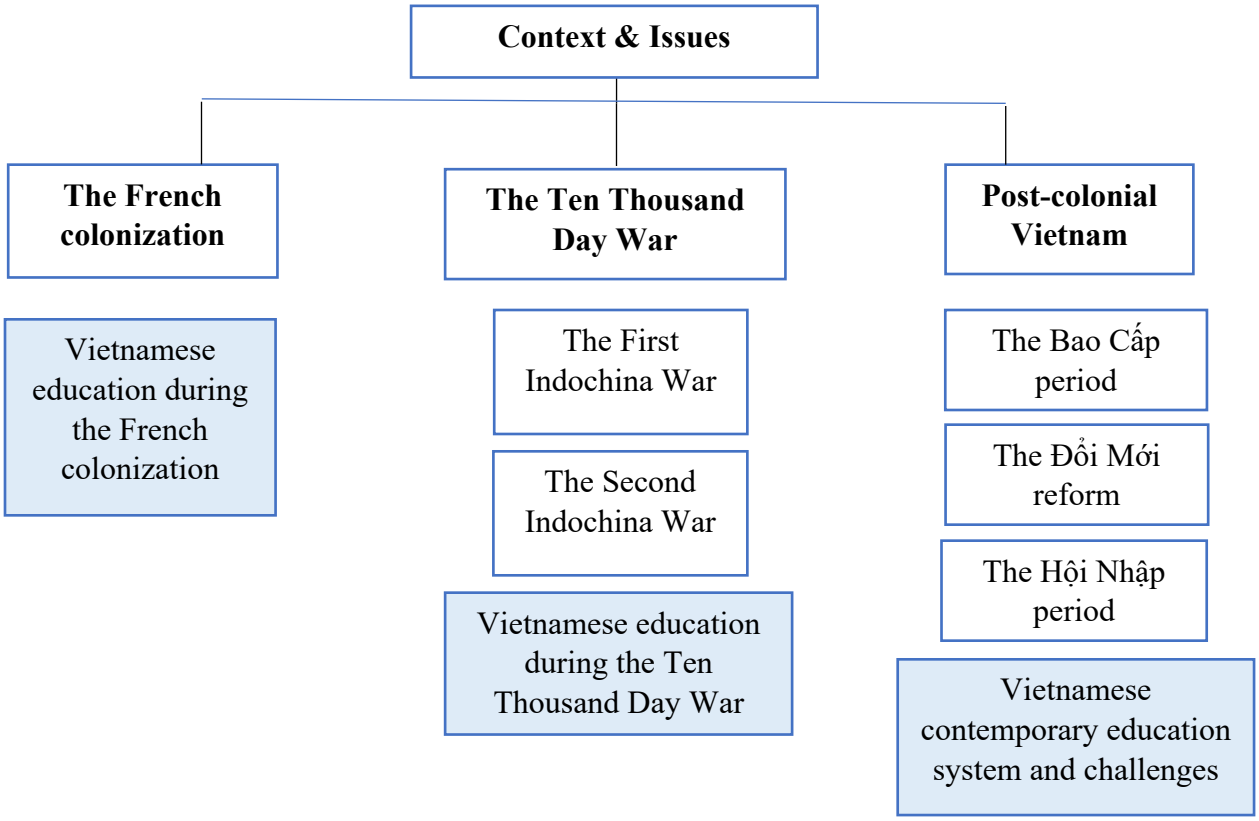
The Introduction section is written to provide some contexts for my research. This research is situated in my decolonial desires to gain a critical understanding of my country's colonial past and neoliberal present so that I can ask different/further questions on how Vietnam's contemporary education system can be transformed to become a part of an infrastructure to build and sustain peace in Vietnam. I begin by describing the original curiosities behind my research, my primary objectives of doing this research and the research questions, as well as the postcolonial lens that shape how I construct my research questions and how I look at different ways to answer them. I explain my method of analysis (critical discourse analysis and the positioning theory) and why using these methods is appropriate given that my research deals with topics that are generally not being discussed in public discourses. I then provide definitions of key terms used in this research, starting with documenting the understanding of peace in Vietnam through times as well as the Vietnamese government's concept of peace and its attitude toward nationalism in post-war Vietnam—which are foundational to my future exploration of the

intersection between education and peacebuilding. To provide contexts and literature review for my research, I describe different definitions and characteristics of nationalism and neoliberalism, particularly within educational contexts. Now that I have become clear in my research purposes, strategies of inquiry, and contexts, I will go forward with an open mind and open heart as I take on this research journey to explore education and peacebuilding in Vietnam.

Chapter One: Mapping the Evolution of Vietnamese Education Throughout Vietnam's Contemporary History

Since the government of Vietnam believes one of the main purposes of language and literature education at public schools is to inform younger generations about the history of Vietnam (MET, 2018), the curriculum has been designed so that core readings walk students through this history. Each reading serves as a puzzle piece, and together they create a larger picture of how the communist government understands this history. A nuanced understanding of Vietnamese history from various perspectives is essential for this research's analytical process, particularly in the second stage of analysis that links textual analysis with the social, cultural, and political contexts that produced and gave meaning to the texts.

Figure 1. *A literature review map of research's context and issues*



French Colonization (1862–1954)

Different documents note different years for when the period of the French colonization of Vietnam began. In my research, I use the year 1862, based on the establishment of the 1862 Hòa ước Nhâm tuất, also known as the Treaty of Saigon, which officially marked the French colonization of Indochina (today's Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) (McLeod, 1993). Most documents agree that the French colonial empire in Southeast Asia died after French forces were defeated by North Vietnam at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 (Brocheux & Hémery, 2011). Declassified documents from the government of the United States show that France was interested in Indochina for not only their natural and human resources but also their strategic location in Asia, in which Indochina was a bridge between East and South Asian countries (e.g., Japan, China, and India) and other island countries in the Pacific (e.g., the Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia)

(*[Part V. B. 2. a] Justification of the War*, n.d.). Politically, France controlled Vietnam but maintained the Nguyễn dynasty as a government with no actual authority in order to keep peace with the local Vietnamese people. According to a declassified top-secret document of the United States regarding the First Indochina War (*[Part II]*, 2011), Nguyễn's was a "virtually puppet government" (p. xv) that was "little more than an instrument of French colonial policy," "neither popular nor efficient" with a "powerless" army (p. A-5, p. A-1).

The French colonists brought into Indochina the concepts of modernity and the modern state as an excuse to violently repress and erase local cultures and histories (Brocheux & Hémery, 2011). Many Vietnamese, especially those in the South, learned to speak French. In particular, the wealthiest boys and men received French education to "help the French rule [Vietnam]" (Ladenburg, 2007). This assimilation strategy later became troublesome during the First Indochina War and the Second Indochina War when many South Vietnamese leaders struggled to gain popular support largely because they were out of touch with the everyday life of the working class.

Vietnamese education during the French colonial period

> School is the strongest and most effective and convincing tool… If we want to exercise our influence in these countries, to draw Indochinese people to follow our way, to liberate them and raise their spirit, we should deliver our ideas to them and teach them our language… starting from the school (Dumoutier, as cited in Vu, 2012).

One of the most prominent colonial strategies involves erasing Indigenous languages (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Under French colonization, Vietnam's education system and curricula went through some significant changes, starting with the French government's attempt to eradicate the use of Chinese characters and the Vietnamese Nôm characters by replacing them with quốc ngữ,

the Latinized alphabet (Dror, 2018; M. Vu, 2012). In the southern part of Vietnam, France established bilingual schools that taught French and Vietnamese (Kelly, 1977). Indigenous schools were replaced by French-administered schools teaching Vietnamese using only quốc ngữ. France also introduced quốc ngữ to the north and central regions of Vietnam. However, since it had less control over these regions, France still allowed schools to retain some teachings using Nôm characters. Overall, the mandate to learn quốc ngữ led to the loss of the Nôm characters; hence, most Vietnamese students could not understand pre-colonial texts without translations (Dror, 2018).

Moreover, France imported ideas of modernization into Vietnam, spreading the assumption that Western epistemology was superior. Teachings at French-administered schools focused on Western ways of knowing while undervaluing Indigenous wisdom and local knowledge, perceiving the Vietnamese traditional system of writing (chữ Nôm) as "vulgar" in comparison to the Latin alphabet (Nguyen, 1959, p. 270). In fact, Henri Maspéro (1924), a prominent French sinologist, disregarded oral literature about the history of Văn Lang, the first Vietnamese kingdom, declaring that Vietnamese founding myths were nothing but recording errors (Nguyen, 2013). Under the new education system, schools no longer focused on teaching Chinese classic texts, although Taoist and Confucian teachings (i.e. loyalty, benevolence, trustworthiness, etc.) still maintained a strong influence in the society.

Meanwhile, anti-colonial Vietnamese scholars and revolutionists looked to other education systems to foster new educational development (A. N. Trinh, 2018). Between 1914 and 1945, there were several impactful patriotic education projects (L. T. Tran et al., 2014). Phan Bội Châu, a renowned scholar who is often regarded as the pioneer of nationalism in Vietnam during the period of French colonization, launched *Đông du* (Eastward Travel) to send talented

Vietnamese students to study in Japan (L. T. Tran et al., 2014). This project was short-lived as Japan was itself a colonizer. The next two significant education projects were *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tokin Free School) and *Truyền bá Chữ Quốc ngữ* (Promotion of the National Characters) with aims to help preserve the Vietnamese language and local cultures (L. T. Tran et al., 2014). The teaching of the quốc ngữ (national characters and language) to everyday people served as a major political tool by North Vietnam to unite people from different regions and cultures, so that an anti-colonial force was born out of a desire for equality, justice, liberation, and independence (L. T. Tran et al., 2014).

The Ten Thousand Days War

This research borrows the term *Ten thousand day war* from Maclear's (1982) book titled *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* to bring out the complexities and interconnectedness of the First Indochina War and the Second Indochina War. In my research I will also purposefully refer to the Vietnam War as the Second Indochina War to emphasize the role and impacts of colonial powers, especially the United States, in this conflict. The name "Vietnam War" originated in Western politics, particularly the United States, to imply that this was a civil war between the Vietnamese people, and the United States' involvement was to support North and South Vietnam in achieving democracy. However, there have been various scholars who argue the "Vietnam War" should be titled the "Second Indochina War" to fully capture the United States' involvement in Asia after World War II (Miller & Vu, 2009; N. M. A. Trinh et al., 2016; Turley, 1986). Maclear (1982) used the term the Second Indochina War because after reviewing records from multiple sources in both the United States and Vietnam, he found that the war started long before 1954, going back to when the United States supported French efforts to

recolonize Southeast Asia at the end of World War II. In the Pentagon Papers, a collection of numerous volumes of declassified top-secret documents on the United States' participation in the Indochinese conflicts, governmental records reveals that as of early 1954, the United States had already financed 78% of the cost of the war in Indochina with strategic plans of creating a strong American presence across different regions in Asia (*[Part II]*, 2011, p. A-2).

The First Indochina War (1945–1954)

The First Indochina War, known in Vietnam as Kháng chiến Chống Pháp (the Resistance war against France), was a conflict between the Associated States of Indochina (today Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and France between 1945 and 1954. While France was fighting a costly war in Europe during World War II, in May 1941, Hồ Chí Minh established the Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội, or Viet Minh for short, as a rebel force against the French colonialism (Nish & Allen, 2011). The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) was stablished on August 8, 1945, and Hồ Chí Minh declared Vietnamese independence from France on September 2, 1945. Around this time, the end of World War II had ushered in drastic political and ideological changes around the world, and most colonial governments started facing rising resistance from their colonies (Hulbert, 2011). In Indochina, after losing Vietnam to Japan between 1940 and 1945, France desired to recolonize Vietnam but was challenged by Vietnamese nationalists and anti-colonialists receiving support from the Soviet Union and Communist China.

France attempted to gain the trust of local Vietnamese by proclaiming the state of Vietnam within the French Union in 1949, under Bảo Đại—the last Emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty whom many people and states referred to as a French puppet (*[Part V. B. 2. a]*

Justification of the War, n.d.). Unfortunately, this colonial strategy was so ineffective that by 1950, the United States had to publicly provide military and economic assistance to France. The United States' internal records reveal that America was fully aware that its military assistance did not provide any internal security for Indochina because most local people hated France's outrageous colonial policies and desired peace and sovereignty (*[Part V. B. 2. b.] Justification of the War*, n.d.). The United States did not offer any supports to the local people although admitted France was "a colonial power seeking to reimpose its overseas rule, out of tune with Vietnamese nationalism" (Bundy, 1965).

On March 13, 1954, the Viet Minh launched a devastating attack on French troops in Điện Biên Phủ, leading to the defeat of the French on May 7, 1954. The battle of Điện Biên Phủ was significant for not only Vietnam but other French colonies at the time who perceived this as a victory for the colonized and a motivation for them to increase their resistance against France (Fanon, 1963). A ceasefire agreement was signed by the French and the Viet Minh representatives in Geneva on July 21, 1954. The war resulted in the death of approximately 400,000 people (including 125,000 civilians) and a massive population displacement in both North and South Vietnam (Clodfelter, 1992; Thakur, 1984).

The Second Indochina War (1955–1975)

The Second Indochina War was a conflict in Vietnam taking place from November 1, 1955 to April 30, 1975. The name "the Vietnam War" reflects how the United States positions the war as a divisive conflict between South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam) and North Vietnam (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam). In Vietnam, the war is called Chiến tranh chống Mỹ/ Kháng chiến chống Mỹ (the Resistance war against America), which demonstrates the

CPV's perspective about the war. The PCV positions this war as a just war in which the Vietnamese people fought against the Western imperialists to re-unite the nation. Gurtov (2010) states, "From Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower to Richard Nixon, every U.S. administration tried and failed to push the South Vietnamese leaders to "reform" so as to counter the enemy's appeal" (p. 52). By "enemy's appeal," Gurtov (2010) points to the communist's nationalist agenda stemming from the local people's desire for self-government and peace after a long history of colonialism and wars.

After France lost at Điện Biên Phủ, a decision was made at the 1954 Geneva Conference to divide Vietnam into a northern regime and a southern regime that would be eventually unified under one government after elections (*U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War*, 2016). The northern regime fell under the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh and the communist party, receiving support primarily from China and the Soviet Union. The southern regime was led by Ngô Đình Diệm, a Vietnamese elite supported by the United States and France since the First Indochina War. However, Ngô Đình Diệm failed to capture popular support in South Vietnam, and the government of South Vietnam was "plagued by corruption, political intrigues, and constant internal squabbling" (Prados, 2003). Ngô's wife, Ngô Đình Nhu, employed vicious violence against Vietnamese Buddhists who disapproved of the war, which caused international attention and raised serious concerns within the Kennedy Administration (Prados, 2003). Eventually, Ngô Đình Diệm was assassinated by his own generals on November 2, 1963. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy three weeks later deteriorated the situation in Vietnam and ended the United States' state-building approach to the war (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997).

The United States' involvement in the Second Indochina War escalated after the Gulf of Tokin incidents (Khan, 2012). Approximately 200 declassified documents from the National

Security Agency in 2005 and 2006 revealed that there was actually no attack on a second destroyer as initially reported (Paterson, 2008). Yet, the Johnson Administration went with a false report to increase the legitimacy of their claim on the urgency of the White House having freedom of action in the war (Prados, 2005). On August 7, 1964, the Congress passed the Gulf of Tokin Resolution, which brought the legitimate and legal justification for the Johnson and Nixon administrations to intensify the involvement of the United States in Vietnam (*U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War,* 2016).

From 1955 to 1975, the United States went through four different presidential administrations with different war strategies. The Eisenhower Administration depended on "big bombs" to fight against Communist forces in the north, while the Kennedy Administration relied heavily on technology due to a shortage of manpower (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997, p. 190). The Kennedy Administration also focused on state-building to help the Republic of Vietnam develop political reforms, acting as "a liberal middle ground between colonialism and Communism" (p. 191). Yet the Kennedy Administration was nowhere near winning the war. This burden was carried over to the Johnson administration, whose policy was to go all-out to protect South Vietnam and leave North Vietnam to the communists.

In 1968, Richard Nixon became president and introduced the Vietnamization program. The objectives of Vietnamization were to gradually withdraw American troops from Vietnam and build South Vietnam into a democratic, American-friendly state (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997). Declassified documents from the United States government point out that the United States wanted not only Vietnam but also other Asian countries to develop a tied relationship with its military so as to increase the United States' present and power in Asia, amidst the rising influence of the Soviet Union and their communist doctrine (*[Part V. B. 2. b.]*, 2011). This plan

required the United States to secretly expand the war into Laos and Cambodia to eradicate any Viet Cong bases and general communist influence (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997; Khan, 2012). Vietnamization was not an attempt to abandon the American presence in Asia but rather a new approach to expand its power (N. D. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). This new program resulted in massive bombing and the use of herbicide to terminate the Hồ Chí Minh trail, which ran across the Trường Sơn mountain range and served as the major communist route for transporting sources of (re)supply and reinforcement from North to South Vietnam (N. D. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Guilmartin Jr. (1991) writes, "Seldom if ever in the annals of warfare has so much firepower been expended in so concentrated and sustained a fashion against purely military targets—to the extent that targets can be so categorized—than in the U.S. interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail" (p. 5). Nonetheless, North Vietnam successfully utilized its knowledge of the Trường Sơn mountain range to take advantage of the natural environment and counterattacked the U.S. military's bombing campaigns. During this period, thanh niên xung phong (youth volunteers) became a powerful communist force who were tasked to locate bombing sites and dispose unexploded ordinance along the Hồ Chí Minh trail, helping North Vietnam to maintain its strategic route to the south (Son Hai, 2021).

By 1973, South Vietnam, under the leadership of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, had the fourth-largest military in the world and yet still lost more territory to North Vietnam (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997). In the last two years of the war, the Nixon Administration carried out an air offensive campaign in North Vietnam, primarily in the city of Hanoi (Guilmartin Jr, 1991). The 1972 Operation Linebacker II was considered the biggest bombing campaign by American B-52 aircrafts, in which the United States "dropped at least 20,000 tonnes of explosives on North Vietnam, mostly Hanoi" (Kesby, 2012). Despite Nixon's claim that the bombing campaign

worked in the American favor, the campaign failed to result in any significant changes (Ambrose & Brinkley, 1997). The next two years came with Nixon announcing to the American public that the United States had won the war and would gradually withdraw troops out of Vietnam. By March 1975, all United States troops had left Vietnam. April 30, 1975 marked the end of the Second Indochina War with the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam under the communist party (Khan, 2012).

The Second Indochina War had a devastating, long-lasting impact on both the people and the environment of Vietnam. In ten years from 1961 to 1971, to help increase visibility in aid of bombing, the United States and South Vietnam used more than 20.2 million gallons of military herbicides in South Vietnam (Stellman & Stellman, 2018). Beside massive environmental destruction, between 2.1 million and 4.8 million people were directly sprayed by toxic chemicals and it is suspected that a high rate of birth defects in post-war Vietnam may be attributable to American herbicides (Stellman & Stellman, 2018). Between 1965 and 1975, the United States dropped three times more tons of bombs on Vietnam than the Allies dropped in total during World War II (Miguel & Roland, 2005). Estimates on the amount of unexploded ordnance in Vietnam vary between 350,000 to 800,000 tons, and these weapons have led to at least 105,000 people being injured or killed since the end of the war (Martin et al., 2019). Moreover, there have been approximately two million Vietnamese people who became political refugees in various third countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, France, among others (N. L. H. Nguyen, 2019). Intergenerational trauma and identity politics continue fueling tensions between the Vietnamese diasporas, particularly those in the United States, and the Vietnamese community in Vietnam (D. J. Nguyen et al., 2018). Although the war ended almost half a century ago, its impacts and legacies continue to be present beyond Vietnam's borders.

Vietnamese education during the Ten Thousand Day War

After Vietnam claimed independence from France in 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) launched its first educational reform in 1950, replacing French pedagogy with a Vietnamese curriculum that encouraged anti-colonial, nationalist, and revolutionary spirits (Dror, 2018). Education was no longer perceived as the personal investment it was during the Chinese imperial period; rather it was seen as a necessary weapon to defend the nation and a tool to spread socialism.

In 1945, North Vietnam established the *bình dân học vụ* campaign—an effort to erase illiteracy in the north by teaching quốc ngữ characters to the working class, particularly poor farmers who previously had no access to education. Many schools taught Russian instead of French because of the alliance between the Soviet Union and the Vietnamese communist party (Hoang, 2018). In 1946, the Constitution of Vietnam officially made Vietnamese the national language of Vietnam (Lewis, 2021; Phan et al., 2014), marking a significant decolonial effort in education.

Between 1950 and 1954, North Vietnam released a series of major educational reforms. According to the MET, these reforms "fundamentally changed the old colonial education system and built the foundation for a new education system that is: nationalist, scientific, and popular" (*Tóm lược Lịch sử*, 2016). It is important to take note that in the quote above, one of the key words is "dân tộc," which literally means ethnicity. However, in the case of Vietnam where the government promotes the myth of all 54 Vietnamese ethnic groups as descendants of the goddess Âu Cơ and the dragon lord Lạc Long Quân, the difference between ethnicity and nation is rather blurry. The term *Chủ nghĩa dân tộc* in Vietnamese refers to nationalism, not ethnicism. Based on

those grounds and the historical context of the time, it is most accurate to translate that nationalism was key to the new education system developed at the end of the First Indochina War.

The Vietnamese education system continued to evolve throughout the Second Indochina War. In the south, France and the United States had a much stronger influence on the education system. Between 1950 and 1952, there are declassified reports by the United States documenting the U.S. efforts to develop "information and education program" to lead "the Vietnamese toward the western democracies and the US" (*[Part V. B. 2. a.],* p. 149, n.d). Meanwhile, North Vietnam focused on (re)building educational infrastructure in the north while encouraging students from the south to come to the north for education (*Tóm lược Lịch sử*, 2016). In the nearly ten years between the end of 1964 and early 1973, under the United States' numerous campaigns to bomb North Vietnam the country's education system went through an intricate process of decentralization since the bombing destroyed most existing education infrastructure and forced students to evacuate from urban to rural areas (Dror, 2018). Consequently, schools were built not only in big cities but also rural areas. To preserve Vietnamese language and cultures and educate youth about communist, nationalist, and anti-colonial ideologies, North Vietnam actively promoted the teaching of literature and language education throughout the country by transferring textbooks and other educational materials to the south (Dror, 2018). Anti-war and propaganda literature lionizing the heroism of communist soldiers and youth volunteers became powerful art-based tools to encourage a nationalist spirit among the younger generations and the working class.

Post-war Vietnam

The end of the Second Indochina War was immediately followed by the Bao Cấp period, an era of national (re)building characterized by extreme poverty and a closed-market economy. The next period began with the establishment of the Đổi Mới Reform that significantly transformed many aspects of Vietnam, from economic, social, cultural, political, to educational. There are debates on when this period ended, but most agree that by the mid-2000s, Vietnam had fully opened its economy to the global world and entered what the government refers to as an era of integration—a period of globalization and modernization with myriad neoliberal national building projects. The discourse of neoliberalism also infiltrates Vietnamese education and creates a dynamic education system filled with conflicting values of nationalism and neoliberalism.

The Bao Cấp period (1976–1986)

From 1976 to 1985, Vietnam experienced profound social and cultural changes. Post-war Vietnam quickly learned that the end of war does not necessarily equal to peace as Vietnam entered a period of high poverty level, corruption, and chronic food shortage (Pham et al., 2020). During the Bao Cấp period ("subsidy"), Vietnam employed a centrally planned economic structure with limited foreign trades, resulting in a stagnant economic growth (Were, 2007).

With the end of the war, Vietnamese people were confronted with complicated questions regarding the country's development directions as well as their relations with other nations (H. T. D. Nguyen, 2010). While the wounds caused by the recent wars remained fresh, Vietnam was immediately tasked with constructing a national narrative about the wars and strengthening collective identity as a newly independent, unified nation state. Geopolitically, in the late 1990s

and 1980s, there were two waves of Vietnamese people fleeing the country after the Second Indochina War to seek refuge in other countries, especially the United States (N. L. H. Nguyen, 2019). Yet official national discourses, including those in the state curriculum, downplayed the violence and traumatic events caused by both sides during the Second Indochina War and instead promoted the benefits of improved U.S.–Vietnam relations so as to focus on post-war economic development, which required Vietnam to be on good terms with the United States (Pham et al., 2020).

The ten years of the Bao Cấp is sometimes referred to as a "missing decade" due to its absence from Vietnam's national meta-narratives (MacLean, 2008, p. 285), which possibly because the PCV wanted to invisibilize a period that was filled with inequalities and injustices resulted from ineffective economic policies. On the other hand, previous research also points out that hardship during this period fostered collective resiliency and individual creativity that prepared Vietnam to go through a collection of drastic changes after 1986 (MacLean, 2008).

The Đổi Mới reform (1986–mid-2000s)

The next period began with the Đổi Mới reform, an economic and political reform movement that transformed Vietnam from one of the world's poorest countries with a centrally planned economy into an emerging socialist-oriented market economy experiencing rapid growth (Vanham, 2018). Under this reform, the country liberalized the economy by encouraging private investments and foreign trades (Herr et al., 2006). In 1995, U.S. President Bill Clinton announced the formal normalization of bilateral relations between the United States and Vietnam (B. N. Nguyen & Stover, 1995). This decision opened opportunities for the United States to re-introduce its presence in Vietnam, where both governments actively convinced their citizens to

move on from the war in order to enter a new era of friendship. Most concerns for post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma, including intergenerational trauma, are largely ignored by the Vietnamese government and are further downplayed by a lack of awareness regarding metal health in Vietnam. As a result, despite painful memories of the Second Indochina War, many Vietnamese people developed positive feelings toward the United States, believing the United States has created "an idealistic bar for a democracy and a civilised society that Vietnamese youth are yearning for" (Luong, 2017). Gradually, the United States has become a standard of success for not only the economic system but also the education system in Vietnam.

The Hội Nhập period (mid-2000s–present)

Following the Đổi Mới reform period, Vietnam has firmly invested in a neoliberal economic structure, moving toward an era of international integration. From 1996 to the early 2000s, Vietnam joined numerous transnational economic organizations, including the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which enables Vietnam to get funding for different developmental projects in various areas, such as poverty reduction, sustainable economic development, gender equality promotion, etc. Within the education system, neoliberalism is deeply entangled with the discourses of nationalism and socialism (Ngo, 2020). The Vietnamese government continues facing tremendous challenges of how to balance between promoting nationalist values to strengthen the national identity and globalizing to build a reputable position in the world economic market.

Vietnamese contemporary education system

The Vietnamese government considers education to be an essential tool for rebuilding the nation after the wars of the twentieth century, and schools are the most fundamental sites of mass indoctrination (Salomon & Vu, 2007). After 1975, Vietnam's education system went through a series of reforms in order to increase the literacy rate and innovate the curriculum (Lattman, 2013). According to the Ministry of Education and Training (MET), the focus of Vietnamese education system is to support economic and social development as well as nation building and national security, with "hiện đại hóa" (modernization) and "hợp tác quốc tế" (international collaboration) being the foundation of the new system (*Tóm lược Lịch sử*, 2016). In 1975, from a 10-year system, Vietnam's education became a 12-year system, encompassing students of age six to eighteen. Formal education includes 12 years of compulsory education—primary school (grade 1 – 5), lower secondary school (grade 6 – 9), upper secondary school/high school (grade 10 – 12). Pre-school and higher education are parts of the education system but are not considered compulsory. In 1990, the MET was established to administer the state-run public education system with some regulations regarding private K–12 schools and higher education institutions. By 2012, Vietnam had made primary to upper secondary school education (grade 1 to 12) universal.

Vietnamese public schools use national curricula that are developed by the MET (Salomon & Vu, 2007). Besides language and literature education (Ngữ văn) and math as the two core subjects, all students must learn 11 to 13 additional subjects per semester depending on their level of education. These subjects are science (physics, biology, chemistry, and geography), English or another foreign language (e.g. French, Chinese, Russian, etc.), history, art, crafts, music, information and communication technology, physical education, citizenship education,

and national defence and security (Thuy Linh, 2017). Students do not have an option to choose which subjects to take because all are mandatory. From the lower secondary school level within the public education system, there are schools that are called “schools for the gifted” (trường chuyên) that allow students to specialize in a subject. Depending on their specialization, students get to have reduced course loads in other subjects in exchange for an increase in hours of learning their specialized subject. These trường chuyên often receive more resources to support student development and provide students more access to educational opportunities (Long, 2019), such as student clubs and academic teams competing at the regional and national level. These schools are considered prestigious and, thus, admission can be extremely competitive and expensive.

The education system is structured in ways that ensure top and privileged students have more access to reputable high schools and universities. Students with high academic achievements at trường chuyên are eligible to complete in academic contests (thi học sinh giỏi) at school, district, city, and national levels. Achieving a high score in the national contests gives students a significant advantage in their college applications. Consequently, there is incredible pressure placed on students to compete against one another to get into a trường chuyên and subsequently a reputable university (Thuy Nga, 2021a). Many parents pay large amounts of money to bribe school leaders and teachers to enroll their children in private learning centres (Thanh Mai, 2005). Additionally, there is a general perception that students cannot mess up any of their semesters or it would result in a serious negative consequence when they apply for university. Many students start going to private learning centres in addition to their schools beginning in elementary school, just to ensure that they can get to a specialized class (lớp chọn) at trường chuyên. In the last few years, there are increasing discussions among the general public

as well as educational researchers regarding inequalities in Vietnamese education and how the current public education is failing to empower students from diverse backgrounds (G. N. H. Le, 2019).

Given the incredible stress and financial burden that the public education system puts on both students and parents, private schools and universities have become an increasingly popular option for those who prefer learning an international curriculum, or those with financial means. However, quality assurance regarding private schools is rather lacking. It was not until late 2019, when there were several cases of young students who died because of negligence at private schools, that the government published a list of registered private education institutions (Dung Hoa, 2019). The government also acknowledges that there has not been a system to categorize these private schools, which resulted in many parents paying an incredible amount of money only to enroll their children in unsafe or low quality schools (Dung Hoa, 2019). In fact, tuition and fees at international high schools can get up to $34,000 USD per year in Hanoi (Thuy Nga, 2021b) and $32,500 USD per year in Ho Chi Minh City (Manh Tung & Thu Huong, 2022). Unfortunately, the government has not offered any concrete solutions and suggestions to address these issues.

Vietnamese language education

Language education plays a significant role in constructing the national identity as well as public discourse about colonialism and wars in Vietnam (Dror, 2018). The teaching of Vietnamese as well as foreign languages has changed over time to reflect the changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural landscape of the nation.

Following the end of the Second Indochina War, English lost popularity in Vietnam, while Russian gained prominence throughout the country (Hoang, 2018). Part of this shift was due to the lingering effect of the war in combination with the tensions in the United States and Vietnam's political and trade relations. During this period, French and English were perceived by the general public as languages of colonizers and so tools of colonialism (N. Nguyen, 2012). However, after the fall of the Soviet Union and a period with a stagnant economy, Vietnam gradually opened the country to the global economy and accepted French and English again. English rose in popularity and was perceived as an essential tool to strengthen international relations and trade deals. By 1982, English replaced Russian to become the most common foreign language in Vietnam. In the early 1990s, the government made English a national compulsory subject at the lower secondary school level (grade 6 to 9) across the country (Hoang, 2018; N. Nguyen, 2012). In 1994, the government issued the Instructions 1994 no. 422-TTg as a guideline for government agencies at state, regional, and local levels to start investing in teaching foreign language to all public servants. Although not specifically stated in the guideline, because of the economic context of Vietnam at the time in which Vietnam started to apply for membership with international and transnational organizations, English naturally became the most common language chosen by government officers (N. Nguyen, 2012). In 2008, the Vietnamese government launched an ambitious project titled the National Foreign Languages Project with the aim of implementing teaching English as a second language nationwide from the elementary school level (Thuy, 2016). By 2016, the MET acknowledged the project failed without stating any details on the matter; still, the government has not abandoned its dream of popularizing English in Vietnam. Today, more and more public and private educational institutions teach English on the ground that English is a necessity in a globalized world. Overall,

the evolvement of language education in Vietnam reflects the country's attitudes toward decolonization and globalization, embracing both nationalist and neoliberal discourses.

Along with the rise in popularity of English as a second language, the teaching of Vietnamese continues holding an important place in the nation's building agenda. The Vietnamese Constitution of 1946 and 1992 respect the right of ethnic minority people to maintain their native languages at schools (*Hiến pháp*, 1992), but with textbooks written in Vietnamese, all students from ethnic minority backgrounds need to learn Vietnamese to receive education. The quốc ngữ is also recognized as the modern writing system of Vietnamese. Despite the fact that this Latinized alphabet was introduced to Vietnam by European Christian missionaries and popularized by French colonists, the CPV promotes the quốc ngữ as a creation of Vietnamese scholars with support from foreign scholars (Quoc Phuong, 2017). Arguably, although it is true that Vietnamese scholars contributed to the completion of the modern Vietnamese writing system, the state's re-telling of the development of the quốc ngữ characters demonstrates a nationalist agenda and denial of the impacts and legacies of colonialism in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese traditional system of writing only exists in records as the current education system does not teach or promote the teaching of this old system.

On the other hand, the normalization of English and English education problematizes the government's nationalist agendas. As more wealthy Vietnamese students attending private schools teaching international curriculum fully or partially in English, many of them become more comfortable speaking in English than in Vietnamese; some cannot even speak Vietnamese (Ha Binh, 2014). In July 2019, the MET established a new policy that demands all international schools, including those teaching fully in English, to ensure that Vietnamese students obtain a certain number of hours learning Vietnamese (Duong Tam, 2019). The new policy is arguably

founded on a larger concern regarding the ideological and cultural orientation of the next generation of Vietnamese, particularly elites.

In the last decade, there have been various efforts by the government to transform the education system and tackle inequalities in education. Unfortunately, a majority of those efforts are cookie cutter and fail to address root causes. For example, every year, there are new changes in policy regarding the structure and the assessment of the national high school graduation and college entrance exams (Anh Tu, 2018; Bich Ha & Duy Thien, 2020; Hong Hanh, 2016; Luu Ly, 2018). Some of these changes are supposed to be minor, such as changing how students rank their school priority in their college application, or how and when to submit their college application. Yet, these frequent and seemingly minor changes often lead to more confusions for students and parents (T. Nguyen, 2020). The struggle to create an equitable and fair access to public university contributes to the rise of private higher education institutions whose college admission typically prioritizes students with international standardized test scores (i.e., SAT, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS). This trend also affects admission policies of other public universities who turn to these expensive tests as a way to measure students' capacity to learn (Truong, 2022), despite the fact that many of the tests are designed for different purposes (e.g., the TOEFL and the IELTS tests students' mastery of the English language). At the end, students and family from marginalized backgrounds continue to suffer from inequitable access to quality education while the elites receive more and more privileges.

Neoliberalism and Vietnamization approaches to educational changes

In this section, the concept of Vietnamization is not to be mistaken with the political strategy used by the Nixon administration during the Second Indochina War. Vietnamization is a

term used by Tibbetts (2007) to describe the habit of and capability to adapt ideologies from other nations to fit the Vietnamese context. During the war, Vietnamization was a key political strategy and educational practice supporting Vietnam in resisting colonial strategies of cultural erasure while nurturing nationalist forces to fight for national independence. However, in recent years, this concept has been problematized out of concerns for neocolonialism. Le (2020) calls the practice of policy borrowing in education "a manifestation of coloniality" (p. 457). The Vietnamese government continuously adopts new policies and programs that it learns from other more developed countries without a critical and holistic consideration for the influence of Western-centric modes of education on Vietnamese society and economy.

To better explain the concept of Vietnamization in education, I will use the case of the 2015 Vietnam Escuela Nueva school project as an example. The Escuela Nueva school model is a Westernized educational model developed in Colombia. According to a Vietnamese senior project advisor who worked on this project, Vietnam desired to learn from Colombia how a developing country from the Global South might successfully adopt a Western curriculum model (M. H. Le, 2020). After seeing promotional videos of the Vietnam Escuela Nueva school project, many school leaders and parents expressed a strong desire to see Vietnamese children become more like Western children. In this case, Western modernity provided a positive reference point and benchmark of success for Vietnamese education. Ironically, this project also received tremendous critique from the Vietnamese general public who raised questions about why Vietnam was learning from other developing countries in the Global South, and not from developed countries in the Global North (M. H. Le, 2020). In reality, the Vietnam Escuela Nueva school model is a North–South knowledge transfer system masquerading as a South–South system of knowledge transfer (H. M. Le, 2018). There was a clear underlying assumption about

the superiority of Western education underlying the Escuela Nueva school model, which delegitimizes and stigmatizes other knowledge systems including the Vietnamese traditional epistemology.

In sum, neoliberalism has shaped Vietnamese contemporary education and educational philosophies by creating assumptions that Western educational models and neoliberal practices, such as private international schools and English standardized tests, are a necessity in a globalized world (M. H. Le, 2020). The continuous search for certainties and quick fixes has resulted in cookie-cutter approaches to Vietnamese educational reforms, which reproduce problematic and unsustainable policies, practices, and projects such as the 2015 Vietnam Escuela Nueva school model.

Chapter Two. Mapping the Nature and Scope of Nationalism and Neoliberalism In Vietnamese Education

This chapter contains findings relating to my critical discourse analysis of eight readings from Vietnamese language and literature education (LLE) textbooks and their associated teacher's guide, the state's guide to the LLE teaching and curriculum development, and the researcher's personal study guide to nineth grade LLE. I first lay out evidence of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system by mapping the evolution of these two discourses and their explicit and implicit effects in education. There will be references to the eight readings and other documents analyzed in my research. However, my focus is on the intersection between politics and education: on how the CPV utilizes LLE education to deliver its political agendas and assign civic duties to students. Following the trajectory of Vietnam's educational development—from colonialism, anti-colonialism, nationalism, to neoliberalism—the chapter ends with a discussion on post-colonialism in Vietnam in order to set up Chapter Three, in which I raise more questions so as to invite new imagined futures for Vietnam to transform its education system in ways that recognize the important role of education within an infrastructure for long-term peacebuilding.

The nature and scope of nationalism in Vietnamese education

Nationalist discourse evolves over time to reflect changes in the political, social, cultural, and economic landscapes in Vietnam. The LLE curriculum discloses this evolution, showing how people were united primarily by shared anti-colonial sentiments in the early 20th century and how communist forces increasingly invested in the concept of a unified national identity rooted in war memories, war trauma, and a sense of being Vietnamese based on ethnicity and political

affiliation. A critical discourse analysis of the state's guide, the teacher's guide, and the researcher's note further point out that public education is not apolitical. The government has been using education to assign students different citizenship duties to support its political purposes: from its anti-colonial propaganda in the early 1940s to its ambition of turning Vietnam into a powerful economy today.

During French colonization

During the period of French colonization, anti-colonialism gave birth to the desire for an independent Vietnamese nation. This desire for sovereignty, liberation, and equality was further strengthened with the introduction of proletarian internationalism—a vision for a global socialist structure introduced by Hồ Chí Minh. Grade eighth textbook features Hồ Chí Minh's "Thuế máu" (Original French title: "L'impôt du sang"; English translation: "Blood tax"), a text that has been promoted by the Vietnamese government as the foundational text of the country's Leninist path to national liberation (*Tác phẩm Bản án*, 2008). In this text, Hồ Chí Minh introduces the idea that all members of the proletariat across the world share similar experiences of being oppressed by the bourgeoisie (C. M. Ho, 2011). In this reading, Hồ Chí Minh links the suffering of people in Indochina with those in Africa, equating anti-blackness with colonialism in order to demonstrate the urgent need for the oppressed in all francophone colonies to rise and stand up against French colonizers. During this period, the idea of a Vietnamese nation and a unified Vietnamese national identity had not yet been clearly expressed, but anti-colonial resistance in Indochina gradually took on a nationalist aspect so as to further strengthen awareness of differences between the colonial French and Asian peoples.

Today, when teaching "Thuế máu," the teacher's guide emphasizes Hồ Chí Minh's observation of oppression across all colonies to justify the significance of proletarian internationalism, thereby avoiding dwelling on the idea of nationalism (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013). This tendency aligns with how the CPV denounces nationalism but claims its support for proletarian internationalism (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). Moreover, the teacher's guide requires teachers to ensure that students learn to "recognize the hypocrisy and brutality of the French imperial system in using the colonized people as scapegoats in unjust wars" and to "recognize the strong fighting spirit" of Hồ Chí Minh (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013, p. 86). Not only does the inclusion of this reading in the curriculum condemn colonialism but also praise Hồ Chí Minh and the communist party, which demonstrates the state's desires to use education as means to indoctrinate young students.

During the First Indochina War

In the early days of the war, North Vietnam was not yet a fully communist state (*[Part V. B. 2. a]*, 2011). It mainly took a stand on anti-colonialism rather than on communism so as to gather popular support from the general public. As the war intensified and communism gained more popular support in the late 1940s, the communist force (Viet Minh) eventually became fully established, shifting how ordinary people participated in the resistance war. The Viet Minh started promoting this sense of Vietnamese-ness by highlighting people's personal relationships to their quê hương. The term *quê hương* may be roughly translated into "homeland." However, in Vietnamese, this word contains a strong sense of pride, joy, love, belonging, and nostalgia. Within the curriculum, there is one common message embedded in many readings produced during this time. From the poem "Đồng chí" to the short story "Làng," the Vietnamese people's

love for their village and quê hương was perceived to be the foundation of their love for the nation (Chinh, 2011; Kim, 2011). Since villages were considered informal institutions and France depended on villages to govern locals, villages became a major source of Vietnamese local resistance to France (Dell et al., 2018).

On the other hand, readings like these also emphasize that when the country needs people to join the battle, their love of the nation must be larger than their love for their villages and homelands. Thus people were expected to be ready to leave home to join the Viet Minh or leave their village if the village did not support the communist forces. The teacher's guide clearly states that "the love for the village must be put into the context of the love for the nation, in unification with the fighting spirit when the country was being invaded, and the people were engaging in the resistance war" (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013b, p. 190). This reminder was essential during a time when the Viet Minh was significantly weaker than the French military. Connecting local identity to broader national identity was one of the Viet Minh's strategies to erase differences between the diverse communities in Vietnam in order to build a unifying Vietnamese nation.

Based on its anti-colonial stand, communist forces also focused on promoting the concept of proletarian soldiers so as to recruit people into military service. My research makes up the term "proletarian soldiers" to designate Vietnamese communist soldiers coming from working class backgrounds, primarily farmers, who joined the communists out of their desire for equality, justice, and independence from the colonial France. This term also reflects the anti-colonial nature of the Viet Minh at the time and its support for communism, specifically proletarian internationalism. In the LLE curriculum, "Đồng chí" and "Làng" are two outstanding readings in which the protagonists are farmers: young farmers who became communist soldiers, and old

farmers who could not fight but who continued showing support for communism by actively promoting Hồ Chí Minh. In "Làng," any Vietnamese persons, especially those from the elites, would be labeled "Việt gian" (a Vietnamese betrayal). "Làng" vividly portrays the communist force's attitude toward those who did not support it during the war. In the story, an unnamed woman loudly curses at other villagers who were believed to be French supporters, "Fuck them. If you are poor, you steal and get caught, at least people can feel for you. The Việt gian who sells the country deserves to be killed!" (Kim, 2011, p. 166) Similarly, when hearing the rumor that his village has betrayed the communists, the main character ông Hai, someone who is known for his pride in his village, publicly proclaims that "coming back home is to become slaves for the Westerners" (p. 169). Such strong statements demonstrate a dichotomy between Us (the proletariats) versus the Other (the bourgeois), whereby the discourses of nationalism and anti-colonialism gathered working-class people to shape their sense of belonging to the Vietnamese national identity and their desire for liberation.

Today, the curriculum teaches these two readings in order not only to shape students' understanding of the nature of the First Indochina War from the CPV's perspective, but also so as to strengthen their sense of national identity through the promotion of "làng quê Việt Nam" (Vietnamese villages). The creation and promotion of a standard image for Vietnamese villages as a representation of *quê hương* helps students feel a sense of belonging to Vietnam. Regardless of their geographical locations and cultures, students are taught that the village is a core unit of *quê hương*, and that they should feel a sense of nostalgia when thinking about this so-called common image of a village. As described in "Đồng chí" and many other works of patriotic literature, a common image for "làng quê Việt Nam" is a village with "giếng nước gốc đa" (the well and the banyan tree) (Chinh, 2011, p. 129). In reality, this kind of promotion neglects the

fact that village is a unit of administration common primarily in the delta region in northern Vietnam (Dell et al., 2018). Other regions and ethnic groups have different ways of organizing their groups. Similarly, the well and the banyan trees are common in delta villages of the Kinh ethic people in northern Vietnam and not anywhere else. In other words, the curriculum highlights one culture and represses others in order to strengthen in citizens a sense of belonging to the Vietnamese nation.

Additionally, the inclusion of these readings in the curriculum allows the communist party to transfer its doctrine to younger generations by nurturing a sense of pride and gratitude toward communist forces. In the teacher's guide, the first teaching requirement for "Đồng chí" demands teachers "help students understand the realistic and simple beauty of the comradeship and the image of the revolutionary soldiers described in the poem" (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013b, p. 137). These "người lính cách mạng" (revolutionary soldier) are described as farmers who "were willing to leave behind things that are precious and familiar in their lives in their homelands for the greater good" (p. 141). The word revolution here refers to the rise of communism and the proletarian internationalism movement in the mid-20th century. By reminding students that these soldiers were working toward a revolution that transformed Vietnam and the world at large, the curriculum celebrates the communist party and its role in the war.

During the Second Indochina War

The victory of North Vietnam over France brought in a new level of confidence that expanded the communist force's influence on South Vietnam. Now that North Vietnam was declared a fully liberated state, there were more literary works that incorporated Southern voices

and/or mentioned South Vietnam while expressing a desire for North-South reunification. The curriculum includes the short story “Chiếc lược ngà,” which centers around the topic of family separation dủing the war and situates in the context of the life of southern communist soldiers (Q. S. Nguyen, 2011). In “Chiếc lược ngà,” written by a southern Vietnamese author, the portrayal of communist soldiers who were farmers coming from South Vietnam conveyed to readers the idea that Vietnamese people across both North and South Vietnam supported the communist force’s vision of an independent, unified Vietnam. Similarly, the short story “Những ngôi sao xa xôi” focuses on northern communist youth volunteers and emphasizes the story that northern soldiers fought against the Americans to liberate the south (M. K. Le, 2011).

This storyline reflects political tensions at the time. With the government of South Vietnam gaining more power and support from mainly the United States, North Vietnam found a need to transform its recruitment policy. Instead of only recruiting working-class people from North Vietnam, communist forces called on everyone who identified as Vietnamese to join the military or become youth volunteers, as illustrated in the short story “Những ngôi sao xa xôi.” Although many youths and women did not work as frontline soldiers, they too worked for the communist military in different capacities. Turner and Phan (1998) claim that the victory of North Vietnam was inseparable from the great contribution of women. Both the Viet Minh (the North Vietnamese communist force) and the Viet Cong (the South Vietnamese communist guerrilla force supported by North Vietnam) depended on youth and women to successfully engage in guerilla warfare that enabled them to gain an upper hand against the much more powerful militaries of South Vietnam and the United States. Overall, literature works like “Chiếc lược ngà” and “Những ngôi sao xa xôi” were taught in public schools in North Vietnam and

transferred to South Vietnam so as to encourage a nationalist spirit among those of the younger generations.

Today, the inclusion of these readings in the curriculum teaches students about the Second Indochina War from the communist party's perspective while also reminding them of the traumatic events that Vietnam experienced. "Chiếc lược ngà" is a story that reminds people of the brutality of wars, in which families were separated and children grew up without a father figure. "Những ngôi sao xa xôi," which was published in 1971, is a powerful writing that evokes strong emotions and patriotism among young girls and women by recalling memories of a real-life tragedy. The passing of ten female youth volunteers in 1968 was so traumatic that the story has been named the Legend of the Đồng Lộc T-junction (Duc Hung, 2020). Over the years, the Vietnamese government has slowly turned the Đồng Lộc T-junction and various other historical sites on the Hồ Chí Minh trail into commemorative tourist destinations by adding sculptures as well as building monuments, cemetery, and temple (Duc Hung, 2020; Hoang Nga, 2014). Every year, during the month of July, particularly around the Vietnamese Veterans Day on July 27th, the Đồng Lộc T-junction historical site attracts more than 1,000 domestic tourists who visit to learn about the Second Indochina War and pay tribute to war veterans, especially the ten female youth volunteers who lost their lives (Hoang Nga, 2014). Provincial governments across the country also host public events, talk shows, and performances to celebrate and honour the Đồng Lộc T-junction legend, as well as the sacrifices of other war veterans. According to the official news of the Central Committee of the CPV, these yearly celebrations are "important" because the Vietnamese people "cannot ever forget the blood and bones that created the Nation" (Hanh Nguyen, 2014). The First Deputy Prime Minister Trương Hòa Bình further emphasizes that "the Đồng Lộc T-junction has forever become a beautiful symbol of the heroism of Vietnam's

revolution" (Duc Hung, 2020). Trương firmly believes the communist party and every Vietnamese persons have a "political mission" and "moral obligation" to "continue" remembering and paying tribute to these fallen heroes (Duc Hung, 2020). His statement demonstrates that Vietnam has turned the Đồng Lộc T-junction story into both a chosen trauma and chosen glory narrative that officially and unofficially teaches people collective war memories in order to strengthen and unify national identity in the post-conflict era.

During the Bao Cấp period

After the Second Indochina War ended in 1975, post-war Vietnam was immediately faced with the difficult task of re-building the country and at the same time nurturing the sense of a single, unified Vietnamese nation. The state's guide describes this context with much confidence and optimism:

> Đại thắng mùa xuân năm 1975, non sông liền một dải, đất nước chuyển sang một thời kì lịch sử phát triểm mới trong hòa bình. Nhiệm vụ chính trị hàng đầu từ đây là khôi phục, cải tạo và không ngừng phát triển kinh tế để xây dựng đất nước giàu mạnh, xã hội phồn vinh (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn,* 2018, p. 183).
> (After the great victory in the spring of 1975, the nation was unified, the country moved into a new historical period of development in peace. The top political task from here was to restore, renovate, and develop the economy to build a prosperous, strong country and a flourishing society.)

In reality, a closed market, a centrally planned economy, and an unstainable subsidy system led to high levels of poverty, hunger, and corruption (Pham et al., 2020). This period was chaotic because now people across the newly unified nation had to shift their focus from fighting the war to re-building the country while also making sense of their new national identity (H. T. D. Nguyen, 2010). The ten years of the Bao Cấp period were so rough and devastating that the government often avoids talking about it (MacLean, 2008). Instead, the government focused on promoting literature and the arts to create a sense of hope while reminding people of their roots,

which include their love for quê hương, their traditional cultural practices, the land they grew up on, as well as their people and local communities. Within the national curriculum, the few texts that were produced during this period solely focus on the strengths and resilience of the Vietnamese people, perceiving these characteristics as part of a longer tradition. For example, the poem "Nói với con" promotes a sense of togetherness and encourages individuals to live courageously and ethically so that the whole nation could overcome this time of difficulty together (Y, 2011). In his poem, the author Y Phương gently reminds his child:

> Dẫu làm sao thì cha vẫn muốn
> Sống trên đá không chê đá gập ghềnh
> Sống trong thung không chê thung nghèo đói
> Sống như sông như suối
> Lên thác xuống ghềnh
> Không lo cực nhọc"
> ("No matter what happens, I still want
> Living on rock, do not criticize the rock for its roughness
> Living in valley, do not belittle the valley for its poverty and hunger
> Living like a river, like a stream
> Up the waterfall, down the rapids*
> Do not mind the hardship

To Y Phương, a *quê hương* is not simply a geographical place. *Quê hương* is built by the people and is the people, the land, the culture, and the traditions. By advising his child to never look down on their people even though they are poor, Y Phương reaffirms his pride, love, and loyalty for his homeland and his people. At the same time, he refers to any struggles happening during this period as life challenges that the country had to face on its path to rebuild and develop further. By calling injustices and difficulties during this period as unavoidable challenges in life, Y Phương shifted any blame away from the state and provoked people's patriotic spirits, so that people were called to work together to lift the country out of poverty. This very same message was carried out in other literature promoted by the government throughout this era.

Toward the end of the Bao Cấp period, amid high inflation, corruption, stagnant economic growth, and a food crisis, the CPV began to recognize the importance of individual incentives in increasing the efficiency of production (Kirk & Nguyen, 2009). The discourse of neoliberalism started to emerge in Vietnam, slowly introducing new economic and political concepts such as privatization, internationalization, market liberalization, individualized rights, land-use rights, input market, and entrepreneurship (Kirk & Nguyen, 2009). The new challenge for the communist party was to ensure that people did not turn down socialism as they learned to accept neoliberal ideologies containing various individualistic and imperialist concepts. Thus, the government promoted the idea that neoliberal economic practices were acts of patriotism, meaning Vietnamese people were encouraged to adopt new habits, programs, and practices to better contribute to the country. In the curriculum, the play "Tôi và chúng ta" successfully captures theses dynamics, uncertainties, and political changes (Luu, 2011). For example, when an antagonist criticizes protagonists for suggesting that the system and power structure at the factory must be transformed, he argues:

> Đã cũ kĩ lạc hậu. Không đâu! Cái cơ chế mà đồng chí mạt sát ấy tồn tại bền vững mấy chục năm nay. Nhờ nó mà chúng ta có hôm nay, có chủ nghĩa xã hội như ngày hôm nay, hạt gạo đồng chí ăn, cái áo đồng chí mặc và cả chính con người đồng chí nữa đã được rèn luyện và trưởng thành trong cơ chế ấy. Đừng vội vã phủ nhận! (Luu, 2011, p. 178).
> (Old, outdated. No! The system that you (comrade) murdered has existed strong for decades. Thanks to it, we have what we have today, have today's socialist society; the grain of rice you eat, the shirt you wear, and even you yourself have been nurtured and grown within that system. Don't be in such a hurry to deny it!)

This statement sends out a message that positions anyone who criticizes the government as an ungrateful person and a betrayal pf their Vietnamese identity. In response, the main character claims, "life does not stay in one place, there are thing that was right yesterday, today it is a barrier" (Luu, 2011, p. 178). He is defending the CPV and declaring his support for the party

by explaining that the existing policies were not necessarily wrong but simply outdated and needed to evolve to adapt to the continuously changing economic environment.

In addition to defending and praising the communist party for its contribution to the nation, literary works like this play need to be understood as important political tools that helped the party justify its adoption of neoliberal concepts to students and other people. In other writings produced during the First Indochina War and the Second Indochina War, such as "Làng," "Chiếc lược ngà," and "Những ngôi sao xa xôi," there is a common storyline that assigns individuals the duty of sacrificing their lives and happiness to fight for the nation, to contribute to the greater good. Vietnam in the Bao Cấp era also embraced a collectivist economy that only allowed communal farming, believing that individual modes of work would lead to greed and eventually a capitalist society. However, in "Tôi và chúng ta," for the first time, there is a mention of the individual, *tôi* ("I"). This *tôi* does not exist in separation to the world but in a close relationship with *chúng ta* (us/we)—the larger community, society, and nation. According to the editors' note in the textbook, "There is no vague collectivism. The *we* is created by the individuals. Therefore, [we] need to care about the life and the rights of each individual human being" (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013c, p. 183). As suggested in the CPV's slogan "Dân giàu, nước mạnh, dân chủ, công bằng, văn minh" (prosperous people, strong nation, democracy, equality, civilization), the new storyline believed that the purpose of socialism was to ensure all individuals enjoy a comfortable, joyful, and peaceful life (T. D. Nguyen, 2021). Neoliberal economic practices, such as personal wealth accumulation and internationalization, became each "an act of patriotism" (Paulicelli & Clark, 2009, p. 96). This reframing in turn encouraged the emergence of individualist discourse in such a way that it was not perceived as a harm to the collectivist society.

In general, the contemporary LLE curriculum in Vietnam contains very few readings about the Bao Cấp period. Those that do, such as the poem "Nói với con" and the play "Tôi và chúng ta," share a common message: individuals should not blame the government for what happened but focus on their moral development and work hard to contribute to the nation. Specifically, the teacher's guide for "Nói với con" asks teachers to teach students a new understanding of the Vietnamese national identity in the postwar era. The guide gestures toward this storyline of Vietnamese national identity as an intertwinement of deep relationships (with family, village/tribe, regional communities, the nation), all of which makes up Vietnamese collectivist culture (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2013c). Students are positioned to develop a pride for the nation and their identity as a Vietnamese person. The teacher's guide (p. 76) also states that the most important objective of teaching this poem is that students learn to "Cảm nhận được tình cảm thắm thiết của cha mẹ đối với con cái, tình yêu quê hương sâu nặng cùng niềm tự hào với sức sống mạnh mẽ, bền bỉ của dân tộc mình" (Feel the affection that parents for the children, a deep love for the homeland, and a pride in the strong and persistent vitality of their nation.)

This message reflects the Vietnamese government's effort to shape students' knowledge about the Bao Cấp period. The teaching does not touch on the ineffective economic development model and any failed governance policies but rather perceives any difficulties as natural, unavoidable life challenges. Consequently, instead of criticizing the state, students are positioned to adopt the ideology that any Vietnamese person is expected to be resilient and work together with others to overcome these challenges and move the country forward in the journey of building a strong, equitable, and prosperous nation.

During the Đổi Mới reform

Vietnam entered an era of significant transformation under the Đổi Mới reforms. Neoliberalism, which started off as an economic concept, started during this period to intertwine with other aspects of the society. By this time, the Vietnamese government already widely promoted the notion that personal wealth accumulation could be patriotic, calling on people to work hard so that the whole nation could become more prosperous. In the curriculum, the political essay "Chuẩn bị hành trang vào thế kỉ mới" clearly illustrates this ambition. In this text, the former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Vũ Khoan repeatedly mentioned the need for Vietnam to enter a knowledge economy, which demonstrated how the government perceived education as a commodity, a tool to gain power in the global market (K. Vu, 2011). To express the government's development goal, Vũ Khoan quotes Hồ Chí Minh's famous 1946 letter to the youth to emphasizes that Vietnamese youth must work hard to help the nation stands on the same level with other world powers ("Lời Bác", 2018). Neoliberalism did not simply impact the economic system but also shifted the government's ideas about education and the role of education.

Interestingly, at the lower secondary school level, the LLE curriculum contains very few readings about the Đổi Mới period. According to the state's guide, the Vietnamese government perceives public education as a journey, one in which younger students must learn the early history of Vietnam so as to build a strong foundation for their sense of belonging to the Vietnamese national identity (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018). Therefore, it is not until the upper secondary school level that students get to learn more contemporary literature works. Additionally, because the government relies on chosen people, chosen glory, and chosen trauma storylines to shape the younger generations' sense of national identity, even within the upper

secondary school level, the curriculum pays more attention to literature works produced during the First Indochina War and the Second Indochina War. Clearly, LLE education has been used as a political tool to not only influence students' knowledge of the country's history but also assign them civic duties supporting the government's political agendas—that is to demand students to study and become intellectuals who would use the knowledge to help Vietnam become an economic power in the global world market.

The Hội nhập period

Within the last 15 years or so, Vietnam has entered a new era called the Hội nhập (Intergration) period. This name was both formally and informally used by the Vietnamese government to express Vietnam's ambition of becoming a major economic power in the world. The state's guide reveals that neoliberalism has been deeply engraved into the Vietnamese education system and influenced how the government approaches curriculum design and educational reforms. The list of foreign literature in the state's guide shows that Vietnam largely looks toward more developed countries (specifically the United States, Denmark, England, and Japan) as points of reference and standards of success. The foreign reading list also contains East Asian and Indian literature, which reflects how Vietnam perceives East Asian countries and India as examples of successful cases of Asian countries that have turned into giant economic powers. This perception once again points to Vietnam's ambition to become a powerful state.

Meanwhile, the CPV repeatedly denounces any supports for nationalism, believing that nationalism hinders the country in its attempts to exert its communist influence on the global stage (Nguyen & Ha, 2020). However, a critical discourse analysis of the state's guide reveals that a majority of readings in the LLE curriculum contain chosen people, chosen glory, and

chosen trauma narratives. The state's guide discloses that the public curriculum and approaches to teaching continue to embrace a nationalist spirit for various reasons. Given how globalization erodes local cultures and languages and the ongoing territorial dispute with China, the CPV finds a need to ensure students are culturally and politically grounded (Bui, 2017; Cotillon, 2017). This also means that the government often attempts to connect students' postwar lives with the heroic war memories to continue maintaining a strong sense of patriotism and faith in communism and the communist party. For example, in the 2021 national high school entrance exam for the LLE subject, there was a question on the poem "Đồng chí" asking students to describe their understanding of "the beauty of Uncle Hồ's soldiers" (HHT, 2021). The CPV uses the term "bộ đội Cụ Hồ" (Uncle Hồ's soldiers) to not only describe communist soldiers who followed Hồ Chí Minh's ideology but also to imply that Hồ Chí Minh and communist soldiers were friendly, loving people who will always fight for Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. This is the only storyline in the curriculum, ignoring other perspectives from Vietnamese diasporas and those who suffered from violence caused by Viet Cong soldiers during the war. Interestingly, according to a state-run newspaper for youth, that exam question regarding "bộ đội Cụ Hồ" was "meaningful" and "relevant" to the students because it centers on the important role played by the military in helping the nation fight against COVID-19 (HHT, 2021). Since the beginning of the global pandemic in early 2020, the Vietnamese government has been primarily depending on the military to maintain public obedience and provide volunteer services, such as bringing foods and supplies to different neighbourhoods during the social quarantine period. By bringing the work of the military in recent years into a question about a poem written in the First Indochina War, the government can be seen reminding students of collective war memories as well as about the role of communism in the development of Vietnam in the past and in today's world.

For Vietnam, creating a single history is important to building a singular national identity among students, but ensuring students from different local cultures and ethnic backgrounds adopt this history is equally important, particularly since Vietnam was severely divided by the end of the Second Indochina War, with people from North Vietnam and South Vietnam having drastically different understanding of the justification for the war. To make certain that diverse students share one perspective on Vietnam's history, the Vietnamese government often promotes this image of Vietnam as a unified country embracing the beauty of diverse cultures. The state's guide requires teachers to teach at least one work written by an author from an ethnic minority background. In reality, such works are extremely rare in the LLE curriculum. Some famous works about ethnic minority groups, such as the poem "Khúc hát ru những em bé lớn trên lưng mẹ" by Nguyễn Khoa Điềm or the short story "Vợ chồng A Phủ" by Tô Hoài, are written by authors from the Kinh ethnic majority group. The few ethnic minority authors with works featured in national textbooks were former communist soldiers and government officials. As a result, their works illustrate a harmonious relationship between the Kinh people and other ethnic minority groups. The problematics of colonial history and ongoing social conflicts between different ethnic groups in the country, such as the history of South Vietnam invading the Kingdom of Champa, are absent from the curriculum, which enhances the chosen people mentality that Vietnam has always been oppressed while ignoring any mistakes and injustices.

On the other hand, the state's guide also demonstrates an effort by the government to increase diversity and inclusion in education by adding extra hours for ethnic minority students to learn their languages at select schools in remote areas of Vietnam. Unfortunately, not only was this policy not nation-wide (because not all schools are required to teach minority languages), but there was also no concrete strategy (i.e., plans for resource allocation, teacher education, etc.)

of how to apply this policy in real life. Another suggestion made by the state's guide is that teachers should develop lessons that teach students to "understand and respect the differences in languages of different regions" in Vietnam (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018, p. 47). In particular, the government makes it a requirement for the curriculum to teach students about meanings and usages of words from both diverse local dialects ("từ ngữ địa phương", or local terminology). The government recognizes Vietnam has more 90 languages, and even the Vietnamese language has multiple dialects reflecting the diverse cultures of Vietnam (Ta, 2014). Yet, the teaching of local languages and dialects in public schools presents unique challenges. In the state's guide (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018, p. 47), local dialects are said to be taught alongside words being used nationally ("từ ngữ toàn dân", national language/terminology). The term "toàn dân" literally means "all people." Which dialect is the national standard that should be used and understood by all Vietnamese persons? The government's answer is quite specific: the northern Vietnamese dialect spoken by people from Hanoi, the capital city and the political centre of the country. By reviewing the state's guide and selected texts from the national textbooks, I have found that textbooks are written with a preference for the northern Vietnamese dialect. One example of this preference may be found in the vocabulary/terminology section in textbooks, such as the ones for the reading "Nói với con" and "Chiếc lược ngà," that are included so as to explain words not as familiar for students from the delta region of northern Vietnam, but not vice versa. In other words, there is an assumption that all students studying the official textbooks should be able to understand the Hanoian dialect.

Finally, the state's guide offers strategies for internationalizing the curriculum, which primarily means teaching foreign literature. Interestingly, many of these foreign works, such as *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, *The Last Class* by Alphonse Daudet, and *Gu xiang*

(“Hometown”) by Lu Xun, focus primarily on concepts of good versus evil, anti-imperialism, class conflict, as well as patriotism. With this selection of foreign literature text, not only is the government able to claim that it is teaching students about diverse world cultures, but it can also ensure that these teachings support the government’s political agenda by cultivating patriotic feelings among the youth.

The nature and scope of neoliberalism in Vietnamese education

Neoliberal discourse on education usually perceives education as a commodity created to support economic development (Fazal, 2017; Marttila, 2018). Through a push for globalization and internationalization, neoliberal discourse advances colonial agendas that suppress and devalue local knowledge systems and presume the superiority of Western education (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Stein et al., 2016). According to the state’s guide, besides ensuring that students maintain their Vietnamese traditional cultures, the curriculum must also enable students to embrace the spirit of integration (“tinh thần hội nhập”) and a desire to become a global citizen (“công dân toàn cầu”) (p. 6). How would the education system help student to integrate and develop an ideology of global citizenship?

The discourse of neoliberalism is integrated in the curriculum in several ways, starting with the core readings that students must learn at schools. There is an attempt to integrate foreign literature into the national curriculum as a way to introduce students to diverse cultures in the world. However, the number of foreign texts in comparison to Vietnamese texts are minimal when compared to the number of available readings on the First Indochina War and the Second Indochina War, possibly because these two periods gave rise to anti-colonial and nationalist movements in Vietnam, providing the foundation for the birth of a communist Vietnam. The

state's guide specifically demands teachers select at least one reading from each of the eight following countries: England, France, the United States, Greece, Russia, Japan, China, and India (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018). The state's guide does not provide any explanation of why it is necessary to study literature from those countries, or how doing this learning supports the goal of turning Vietnamese students into global citizens. A deeper review of the curriculum and the economic, social, cultural, and political contexts offers some explanations of this policy.

A desire to build economic and political relationships with other countries is undoubtedly one of the biggest reasons for Vietnam to include foreign literature in its national curriculum. First, Vietnam was a partner of the Soviet Union during the Second Indochina War, and a bilateral relationship with Russia proved critical for post-war Vietnam (Tsvetov, 2018). Naturally, then, Russian literature has been a part of the Vietnamese national curriculum for awhile. At the same time, since the Đổi Mới reform in the late 1980s, Vietnam has moved to perceive France and the United States as trade partners, with attempts being made to build friendly relationships with the two powers that once were considered the colonizers and enemies of Vietnam (Anwar & Nguyen, 2011). While French literature has been included in the Vietnamese public education system since the French colonial period, it wasn't until the mid-1980s that American literature was also included at the upper secondary school level and, later, at the lower secondary school level as well. Works by authors such as Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and O. Henry are core readings intended to teach students "a profound love for all human beings, a hatred for the war, and a desire to live in stability" (Le, 2017, p. 73). According to Le (2017, p. 73), the inclusion of these specific texts was not simply to teach students about the cultures and histories of the United States, but rather it was a political attempt to gesture toward reconciliation between Vietnam and the United States. Yet, Vietnam fails to recognize

the colonial history of the United States and how colonial ideas are so engraved into the American education system that these so-called classic authors themselves could have a troubled history. For example, Ernest Hemingway was a plantation owner, and both Mark Twain and O. Henry had used racist terms in their writings.

In relation to other Asian countries on the foreign reading requirement list, Vietnam has often referred to Japan, China, and India as examples of Asian countries with rising economies. In "Chuẩn bị hành trang vào thế kỉ mới" ("Preparing tools to enter a new century"), the former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam believes that Vietnamese youth should learn from the Japanese and Chinese people certain habits and practices that would benefit the economic development of Vietnam (K. Vu, 2011). Despite the former colonial relationships with Japan and China as well as the ongoing territorial conflict with China, Vietnam is endeavoring to have a relationship with the two powers for economic purposes.

On the list of eight countries on the foreign reading requirement list, Greece and England have slightly different positions. Although Vietnam has been a good trade partner with England and Greece, the reason for Vietnam to include Western classics, such as Greek mythology and works by William Shakespeare, in the national curriculum is not straightforwardly an economic one. On the one hand, the MET believes that all foreign literature that were chosen to be included in the textbooks are not only culturally diverse but also teach about social issues in different countries and eras. On the other hand, teaching Western classics in non-Western countries often evokes memory of some of the more negative aspects of the history of colonialism and the impact of colonialism on the education system in those countries (Hardwick & Gillespie, 2010). It is difficult to ignore the fact that in Vietnam, there is an association of Western classics and Western cultures with wealth, power, and status. In the state's guide, the

government shows its economic interest in education by highlighting the need to learn from educational programs from more developed countries. The explicit demand for learning from predominantly Western economic powers also discloses how Vietnam undervalues other non-Western knowledge systems while assuming that Western education is not only a superior form of but also the benchmark and goal of good education. From this perspective, learning any Western classics in school is less about teaching the diversity of the world cultures and more about ensuring Vietnamese students can somehow become equal to white colonial intellectuals.

Lastly, besides literatures from the eight countries mentioned above, the curriculum also includes several texts from other countries on the More Developed Countries list, such as Denmark and Spain. Out of all the Western literature being taught in Vietnam, there are no works written by authors from marginalized backgrounds, such as Black and Indigenous authors. There is only one reading on the issue of environmental justice (supposedly produced by a Native American chief), but further research suggests that this particular text was most likely written by a non-Indigenous person (Clark, 1985). In general, the United States, with works that are considered American classics in the Vietnamese curriculum taken to be the single representative voice of literatures from cultures across the North and South American continents. There are also no literatures from Africa and other non-East Asian countries besides India included in the curriculum. Dr. Nguyen from the Hanoi National University of Education believes the reason why there are no readings from other countries included is because the curriculum does not provide enough hours for teaching world literature (L. C. Nguyen, 2020). While this observation is accurate, it still does not address the lack of diverse voices in the curriculum. The deeper issue is that many people in Vietnam have a vague understanding of American and European histories, particularly regarding how colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and

white supremacy are embedded in those societies and education systems. Out of all texts by foreign authors in Vietnam's K–12 curriculum, there are none written by non-male authors either. It is not that there are no talented authors of colour or female/nonbinary authors in the past whose works might be included; rather racism and heteropatriarchy have enabled white, male authors to be seen as producers of what are culturally accepted as classics, which are transmitted to other non-Western education systems as "the quintessence of human cultures" (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018, p. 80). Therefore, as Vietnam adopts a neoliberal approach to education, the country also accidently imports colonial values, ideas, and practices that are hard-wired to those other education systems.

Overall, the state's guide expresses the government's desire to be more inclusive by introducing students to diverse world cultures through selected foreign literature work. However, this selection implies more economic and political interests than educational interests. There is also an underlying colonial perception assuming the superiority of Western cultures and knowledge, which influences how Vietnam approaches educational changes and transformation.

The linkages between nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnamese education

While nationalist discourse urges students to develop a singular Vietnamese national identity undergirded by great pride in the country's history, neoliberalism motivates students to integrate into the global world economy. One discourse dwells on the past as it has been painted by memory politics; the other discourse commoditizes education. Nonetheless, in the state's guide and the national curriculum, these two seemingly contested ideologies paradoxically co-exist in harmony. What are the reasons, logic, and incentives behind the integration of these discourses?

According to the MET (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018), patriotism is the highest priority among the top five noble qualities or characteristics that LLE teaches students (the others are (1) humanity, (2) diligence, (3) honesty and responsibility, (4) spiritual development, and (5) individual personality development). The goal of highlighting patriotism in education is to train students to become "responsible citizenship," which is interpreted as:

> "… có ý thức về cội nguồn và bản sắc của dân tộc, góp phần giữ gìn, phát triển các giá trị văn hoá Việt Nam; có tinh thần tiếp thu tinh hoa văn hoá nhân loại và khả năng hội nhập quốc tế" (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018, p. 5).
> (… having a sense of the origin and national identity, contributing to preserving and developing Vietnamese cultural values; having the spirit of absorbing the quintessence of human cultures and the ability to integrate into the global world.)

Similarly, in another section of the state's guide, the government requests that teachers ensure their teaching enables students to:

> "…ý thức sẵn sàng thực hiện trách nhiệm công dân; biết giữ gìn tư cách, bản sắc của công dân Việt Nam; đồng thời, biết tiếp thu có chọn lọc tinh hoa văn hoá nhân loại để hội nhập quốc tế, trở thành công dân toàn cầu" (*Chương trình môn Ngữ văn*, 2018, p. 80).
> (… be consciously ready to perform civic responsibility; know how to preserve the characteristics and identity of Vietnamese citizens; at the same time, know how to selectively absorb the quintessence of human cultures for international integration and to become a global citizen.)

These statements demonstrate that the Vietnamese government understands the importance of educating youth not only to maintain a national identity but also out of a desire for international integration and globalization. The government perceives the purpose of integrating into the global world as enabling Vietnamese people to absorb the quintessence of human cultures, which in turn is believed to support the preservation and development of Vietnamese cultural values. In other words, the government justifies neoliberal educational practices, such as learning Western literatures or learning English, as a form of civic duty contributing to the larger political mission of transforming Vietnam into a giant global economic power. At the same time, the government recognizes globalization may erase local cultures and traditions, so the state's

guide highlights the importance of selective learning—choosing to learn only what is beneficial for the development of the nation. Nonetheless, there are no further details explaining what this selective learning entails. There is a lack of instructions on how teachers can teach in ways that both help students to maintain their cultural roots and remain open to learning about world cultures.

All in all, the Vietnamese government believes that international education and globalization will enable Vietnam to become a powerful state that is capable of influencing and supporting the development of other socialist nations (V. C. Ho, 2013). This vision aligns with Vietnam's support for proletarian internationalism—a desire for a global Marxist-Leninist socialist structure. The state's guide points to the fact that while neoliberalism entered Vietnam for economic reasons, it has stayed and now is co-existing with nationalism within the framework of the Vietnamese education system. The government believes that internationalizing the education system is necessary for Vietnam to compete in the neoliberal world economy, a crucial step if it is to achieve its vision of proletarian internationalism. However, there have not been concrete strategies developed to prepare students to navigate the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of an education imbued with both nationalism and neoliberalism in a world characterized by both local and global challenges.

Post-colonialism in Vietnamese education

The emergence of neocolonialism following neoliberalism

Many studies point out that neoliberal education could lead to neocolonialism, which means that an assumption of the superiority of Western cultures and epistemologies could gradually erode the local cultures and epistemologies of non-Western countries (Andreotti et al.,

2015; Stein et al., 2019). Within the field of education theory and practice, neocolonialism also looks like the adoption of Western knowledge without any critical analysis of the colonial histories of Western education systems. Although my analysis of the eight readings at the heart of this research do not point directly to neocolonialism, a broader review of the state's guide reveals how Vietnam unconsciously adopts false histories and colonial values through its importation of Western literature. While conducting a critical discourse analysis of the state's guide, I find that out of several texts representing American literature, there is only one reading that is supposedly written by a Native American author. However, the teaching of this reading is extremely problematic and deeply concerning. A closer look at the textbook's guide to this reading offers a better understanding of neocolonialism in Vietnamese education.

The sixth grade LLE textbook includes the reading titled "A letter from the red-skinned chief" which, according to the textbook, was created by Chief Seattle in response to U.S. president Franklin Pierce. However, information available through the U.S. National Archives reveals that this letter was most likely written by another person (Clark, 1985). If the Vietnamese education system desires to be more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, there are various well-known writings and speeches by Indigenous authors and leaders that could be chosen to teach students instead of one where the authorship is ambiguous. However, the goal of teaching this letter is clearly not about the inclusivity of Indigenous voices or decolonization, given that the teacher's guide solely focuses on a discussion of environmental justice without details on the United States' colonial history.

What more problematic about the selection of this letter in the curriculum is how the letter has been taught to students. The letter was taken from a document published in Vietnam in 1999, and regardless of decolonial movements happening in the United States in the last 20

years, the lesson provided by this text remains unchanged. Consequently, the Vietnamese textbook captures some colonial ideas from the United States through its adoption of educational and cultural materials from the United States. For example, the editors have only two short sentences about Indigenous history, which explain that after several hundred years of "being murdered and pushed to remote land there are not many Indigenous people left" (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2011, p. 138). There is no information on who the oppressor is, completely leaving out the fact that White colonial settlers committed what many scholars have termed a genocide against Indigenous peoples in the United States. The claim regarding the decreasing Indigenous population is also problematic and concerning, as it ignores the resilience of Indigenous peoples who are still residing on their original lands and fighting to decolonize the United States. Similarly, when explaining the term "bison," the editors note that the bison has largely disappeared in the United States but do not provide any information detailing how they were mass murdered by European settlers in an effort to cut off food supplies to Indigenous peoples by destroying their land to develop railroads. Following the definition of Indigenous peoples, the editors also explain the term "White people" as "Europeans who, when first arrived, invaded, explored and utilized the land in the America continent" (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2011, p. 138). The colonization process and the impact of colonization are minimized in this statement. The editors use the word "khai khẩn," a term referring to the act of discovering and utilizing the land previously untouched by humans. While the editors acknowledge that European settlers stole Indigenous land, they also buy into the notion that Indigenous peoples did not know how to use local natural resources until the Europeans came. Toward the end of the terminology section, the editors add that "the American land is so large that it required strong development of transportation, particularly the train" and thus, American leaders spent a significant amount of

money on building railroads and paying subsidies (K. P. Nguyen et al., 2011, p. 139). This statement contains false information and implicitly justifies the right of the United States government to confiscate traditional Indigenous lands, believing that the government has done enough in term of paying Indigenous peoples for the use of their territory.

In essence, Vietnam lacks a resource capable of providing an adequate understanding of the colonial roots of Western education systems. It is easy to not be aware of this dark history when countries like the United States are considered a More Developed Countries and Vietnam looks up to them aspirationally, as models for state development. There is also a larger concern, that movement(s) towards decolonization in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand often does not get transferred to other so-called Less Developed Countries which adopt MDC's educational contents and programs.

The nature and scope of post-colonialism in Vietnam

The realization that Vietnam has been adopting colonial values through the importation of Western(ized) education programs and contents leads to a deeper conversation regarding post-colonialism in Vietnam. What is the nature of post-colonialism in Vietnam? From anti-colonialism to nationalism and to neoliberalism, what is the trajectory of Vietnam's development and peacebuilding processes?

An examination of the state's guide demonstrates that Vietnam has not had a period in which the country has taken a step back, reflected on its past, and critically examined the impacts of colonial legacies and rising neocolonial influences on its society and education system. From the French colonization period to the end of the Second Indochina War, Vietnam consistently fought battle after battle. Literature produced during the First Indochina War shows how

Vietnam was aware of the impact of colonialism on the country. Perhaps, the victory over France left an impression that colonialism was over, but before people had a chance to properly conceptualize the impacts of the country's colonial legacies, Vietnam was already involved in a longer, more destructive war. The readings written during the period of the Second Indochina War that I discussed earlier reveal that as the war progressed, the discourse of anti-colonialism slowly disappeared from the communist force's propaganda and was replaced by the language of ethnic nationalism. This new storyline emphasized how North Vietnam was fully independent, having been transformed into a peaceful place that worth living. This kind of narrative required North Vietnam to buff up and act as if, because colonialism was "over," there were no lingering harms to deal with.

The end of the Second Indochina War did not leave Vietnam a period to rest. Post-war Vietnam not only had to quickly re-build the country, it also needed to create a unified national identity. Hence, the discourse of nationalism continued dominating political discourse. The few literary works written during this time focused on calling people to unite to re-build the nation. Then followed a miraculous period during which Vietnam experienced significant economic, social, and cultural transformations. This period, characterized by the emergence of neoliberalism, required Vietnam to continuously improve, racing to catch up to or even exceed other international economies. The analysis of the reading "Tôi và chúng ta," which was produced at the end of the Bao Cấp period, illustrates how Vietnam has a toxic masculine attitude toward nation building. I intentionally refer to the term toxic masculinity—which describes how certain males develop a need to aggressively compete and dominate others to feel validated (Harrington, 2020)—to highlight Vietnam's resistance to healing. The country believes because it has archived a great victory, it can leave all of the pain and unhealed wounds behind

in order to immediately move into a new historical period of development in peace. Accordingly, all of society's top mission became to "restore, renovate, and develop the economy" (Chương trình môn Ngữ văn, 2018, p. 183). On the one hand, this "togetherness" attitude was useful in bringing a sense of optimism and unification to Vietnam, motivating people to move forward during a period of poverty and hunger. On the other hand, a neoliberal approach to economic development has meant that the country must work hard to support never-ending growth. This too is the attitude of Vietnam today, during the Hội nhập era. Basically, Vietnam is a country that never rests.

What is scope of post-colonialism in Vietnam? There have been efforts to decolonize Vietnam since the First Indochina War; however, these consideration of those efforts does not get to root-causes because Vietnam has not had a period where it critically and explicitly reflects on visible and latent effects of colonial domination and ongoing neocolonial influence on the education system and the wider society. Post-1946 Vietnam replaced French with the teaching of Vietnamese as a national language (*Tóm lược Lịch sử*, 2016), but then French, English, and Russian remained popular second languages throughout the liberation wars. Changes to the education system during this period was more about decentralising the system to ensure that learning did not get disrupted during the war, and less about healing colonization's wounds (i.e., intergenerational trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder from the wars, etc.) (Dror, 2018).

The analysis of war literature in the LLE curriculum demonstrates that anytime chosen trauma storylines are mentioned, chosen glory storylines immediately follow, and teaching shifts its focus to remind students to show gratitude for the communist party and communist soldiers. Throughout the state's guide, teacher's guide, and readings in textbooks, the government consistently declares that Vietnam emerged from both wars as a winner, and that the country had

moved on to a new period of development in peace. Having a masculine attitude toward nation building means that Vietnam is often reluctant to look at its unhealed wounds and mistakes. In terms of education, the system is governed by a resistance to uncertainties, contradictions, and complexities, and so approaches to educational changes are cookie-cutter and do not tackle root-causes of issues and injustices system-wide.

Chapter Three. Where Do We Go from Here?

In chapter two, I offered evidence of nationalism and neoliberalism emerging in the Vietnamese contemporary education system, illustrating the nature and scope of these two discourses and explaining how they have evolved throughout the contemporary history of Vietnam. The education system serves as a vessel for the CPV to deliver its political agendas, particularly teaching younger generations about the theory and practice of citizenship. At the same time, Vietnam struggles to navigate rising local and global challenges as neoliberalism trails neocolonialism in its wake. Concerns for an erasure of local languages and cultures conflict with Vietnam's desire to internationalize its curriculum. Vietnam and Vietnamese culture have demonstrated incredible resilience from the time of French colonization. What then is the trajectory of the country's development and movement towards peace? What lies beyond nationalism, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism?

While these questions are enormously important, they lie beyond the scope of this project. Instead of attempting to offer a quick one-size-fits-all solution to the issues I've been discussing, I propose a number of new questions that I believe will benefit the study and practice of decolonization in education and peacebuilding. These questions cannot be answered here. Instead my hope is that they direct readers of my work toward new imaginings of the future of education in Vietnam and other, similar contexts. At the end of this brief chapter, I discuss options for further study by those wanting to do more to understand and tackle the questions I have raised.

Infrastructure for peace

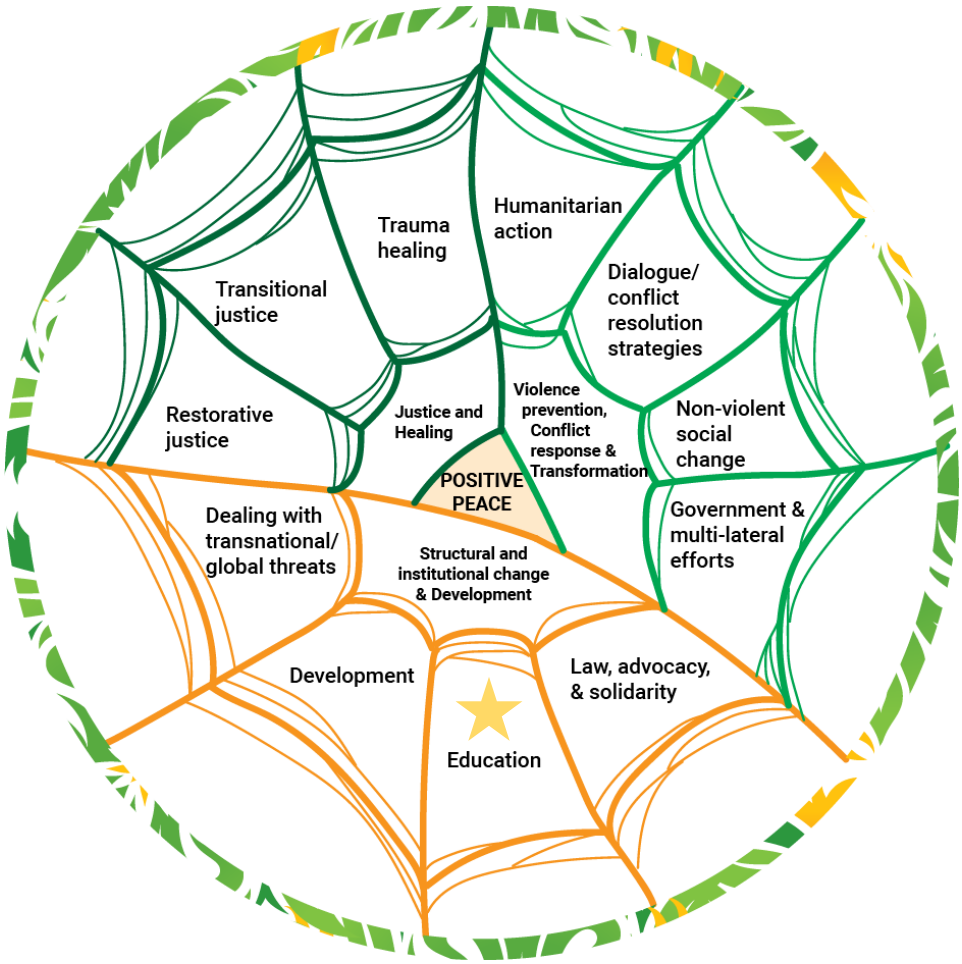
Various peace scholars have proposed the idea of an infrastructure for peace being essential to the building of positive peace (Galtung, 1969; Jeong, 2005; Lederach, 1997, 2012; Manojlovic, 2018). According to Lederach (1997), a peace infrastructure is a multi-generational vision that is built up over a span of years. Lederach (1997) uses a peacebuilding pyramid to visualize the collaborative nature of peacebuilding. He suggests three types of actors according to three levels of leadership. On the ground we find grassroots leadership, including local leaders, community organizers, local health officials, etc. The middle-range leadership consists of academics, humanitarian leaders, ethnic/religious leaders, and other prominent leaders in different sectors. The top leadership includes military, political, and religious/ethic leaders with high visibility. Each level of actors has their respective responsibilities, but they are interdependent of each other. The middle-range leaders play an important role as bridge builders connecting the grassroots level with the top level (Lawson, 2004; Lederach, 1997).

A pyramid is a useful visual aid that demonstrates the multiplicity of actors in peacebuilding, but it may also give a false perception that these actors are independent, and it may confuse understanding of the power hierarchy. Lederach acknowledges that peacebuilding processes typically suffer from a "vertical gap"—lacking connections and reciprocal relationships between different levels of the society, especially between the grassroots level and the top leadership level (Lederach, 2012, p.9). Later, Lederach (2005) uses a network or spiderweb to serve as a visual metaphor for a comprehensive approach to sustainable peacebuilding. This web approach embraces three principles: multiplicity, interdependency, and simultaneity. He argues peacebuilding should not be a linear process prompting a linear change. Similar to how spiders work together to weave intricate webs, multiple actors must work on

multiple processes at various levels and across various social spaces at the same time to build a sustainable infrastructure for peace.

Lederach's argument (2005) can be visualized as a wheel of diverse and interrelated peacebuilding activities (Lederach & Kate, 2010, as cited in Docherty & Lantz-Simmons, 2016). This graphic contains two layers: an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle represents three strategic areas of peacebuilding: structural and institutional change and development; justice and healing; violence prevention, conflict response and transformation (Lederach, 1995). The outer circle encompasses 11 sub-areas of practice and career supporting the three key areas: restorative justice; transitional justice; trauma healing; humanitarian action; government and multi-lateral efforts; non-violent social change; dialogue/conflict resolution strategies; education; development; dealing with transnational and global threats; law, advocacy, and solidarity. I re-create the graphic here in order to connect the idea of a peacebuilding wheel with Galtung (1969)'s concept of positive peace and Lederach (2005)'s spiderweb as it appears in his *The Moral Imagination.* This new graphic places positive peace at the centre of the spiderweb, illustrating that positive peace—that is the presence and active promotion of reciprocal relationship-building, equity, and compassion at all level of the society—should be the core vision and the holistic lens that actors should use to develop and evaluate peacebuilding strategies. The use of organic lines, instead of geometric shapes as in the original graphic, implies that peacebuilding activities are usually messy and not always straightforward, demanding flexibility, creativity, and a capacity to adapt to emerging challenges (Lederach, 1997, 2005). In the graphic, I also put a star on the education section to highlight the notion that Vietnamese education could be transformed to be part of a larger infrastructure to build and sustain peace.

Figure 2. *Education within a holistic approach to strategic peacebuilding. Adapted from Galtung, 1969 and Lederach & Kate, 2016.*



Making education part of an infrastructure for peace

Lederach (1995) cited Adam Curle's progression of conflict to point out that the first step to sustainable peace is education. Specifically, Lederach (1995) argues that to transform conflicts in society, states must invest in the kind of education that "is aimed at erasing ignorance" by including diverse different viewpoints and perspectives, so that people become aware of root-

causes of problems and start restoring "equity, as seen, of course, from the view of those experiencing the injustices" (p. 12). This research has pointed out that the contemporary education system in Vietnam was not designed for and has not been transformed to support the building of an infrastructure for peace. Rooted in anti-colonial resistance and the national liberation struggle, Vietnamese education has been evolving throughout the years to accommodate post-war neoliberal nation (re)building. Through my mapping of the emergence and impacts of the discourses of nationalism, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism in Vietnam's education system, I have built a foundation to place my questions about the future of peace in Vietnam further. Some of these questions appear below, and answers to each will as I say benefit from future research:

a. To move from negative peace to positive peace requires us to recognize that peace is not a predetermined future—that we cannot stop investing in peacebuilding because a war or a colonial period has ended. Ongoing injustices and emerging challenges require us to continuously (re)imagine and transform the ways we build peace.

   What kind of education would allow us to reframe peacebuilding not as a predetermined future but a long-term, continual commitment to build peace at all levels of the society? How might we resist our urge to find quick-stop solutions that are likely to lead us to cookie-cutter approach to peacebuilding?

b. If education contributes to an infrastructure for peace (Lederach, 2005), what knowledge, skills, and values must an education system deliver in order to prepare students for full participation in the nation's peacebuilding process?

What kind of curriculum or educational materials (e.g., textbooks) are needed to support this peace infrastructure?

c. If the current education system is being shaped solely by the government's idea of what education is and is supposed to do, how is it possible to transform the system in ways that allow other voices and visions to become part of it? Who should be at the decision-making table deciding how best to transform our practices and procedures through the production and mobilization of knowledge?

Education beyond colonialism, nationalism, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism

Without critical reflection on decolonization, the unavoidable developmental trajectory for former colonies will move from anti-colonialism to neocolonial imperialism as countries face increasing pressure to invest in never-ending economic growth so as to keep up with their former colonizers (Chen, 2010). Through this research, I have learned that the Vietnamese education system has not attempted to make sense of its colonial pasts and legacies. Moreover, Vietnam is currently importing more (neo)colonial ideas and values through the Westernization of education. This research has allowed me to look deeply into Vietnam's colonial past and our path to build peace, and now I want to move further along by asking questions intended to invite thinking on what lies beyond our current educational practices and structures:

a. How do decolonial efforts to educate in settler colonial states in the Global North (i.e., the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) translate and contribute to decolonization in the Global South, where governments and universities import many of their educational materials, programs, and policies?

Also, what is happening in the Global South in terms of decolonization that the Global North can learn from?

b. If colonial ideas and practices persist in Vietnam's education system, not because of lack of knowledge about colonialism but rather due to insecurities about facing up to past mistakes, as well as the uncertainties and complexities of the future, what will enable the Vietnamese to become courageous enough to start acknowledging their responsibility for (re)building reciprocal relationships and imagining different possible futures together? How can education equip the Vietnamese with the courage required to embrace drastic changes and work for transformations in the ways they are working to build peace? How would this kind of education include histories from the perspectives of different people and groups?

c. Is Vietnam only learning from the Global North because of a belief that the countries therein are the epitome of success, and so continuously investing in development without working to heal from past trauma? If so, what would prompt Vietnam to approach learning and being with generosity, curiosity, and a critical sensibility so that Vietnamese citizens become truly enlarged by learning from past mistakes and interrupting longstanding inclinations towards security and certainty that trap people in colonial habits of being and learning?

d. What would it take to build trust and relationships so that Vietnam can invite diverse people to learn about and accept the histories of the country's past and the realities of its present? What would it take to create spaces that welcome and inspire people begin to sit within the complexities and challenges of the education

system (and the larger society) without denying them a voice or using cookie-cutter approaches to solve problems? How can people come together in a shared space to (re)visit their Vietnamese roots and histories and be healed so that they can build futures together? In other words, what conflict resolution and peacaebuilding process is needed to achieve this vision.

e. So far, Vietnam's education system has largely addressed the state's concerns regarding national security and national development. However, what do different individuals and communities want from education? How have colonialism and also local resilience impacted these desires? What would enable the Vietnamese to expand their moral, political, social and economic imaginations regarding what education can (and must) be? Additionally, a technical question would be how can this information be obtained without harming the individuals and communities as well as benefiting the research participants?

f. Lastly, regarding concerns of neoliberalism and neocolonialism erasing local cultures and languages, how can we learn to appreciate and value the many distinctive and rich ways of being, learning, and teaching from different ethnic groups in Vietnam, and to come to understand Indigenous life as imbued with ecologies of knowledge that can open people up to different ways of making peace?

Toward new trajectories and new imaginaries for peace

> Those who have struggled and continue to wrestle with "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" nurture a sense of awe and connection… Approaching social change with awe and humility opens the way for the moral imagination. Social change without awe, struggle, and humility quickly becomes an exercise in engineering (Lederach, 2005, p. 108).

What acts of the imagination support peacebuilding? Lederach (2005) describes his concept of moral imagination as the capacity to "imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles" (p. 29). A moral imagination does not seek prescribed solutions and singular answers but instead embraces risk and acknowledges complexities, contradictions, and curiosity as components of the journey toward the discovery of hitherto unknown alternative peacebuilding imaginaries. What strikes me the most about Lederach's concept of the moral imagination is his understanding of time—the past-present-future—as an integrated entity (Lederach, 2005). Time is not linear for Lederach but instead is comprised of multiple overlapping circles allowing the past, present, and future to intertwine. From this perspective, oral narratives of the distant past, remembered history, lived history, recent events, and the present connect to one another and gesture collectively toward the futures. In other words, when we imagine and construct our peaceable futures, we must allow our past and present to guide us.

My research has found that in order to transform the Vietnamese education system and enable the way citizens can learn to support long-term peacebuilding, Vietnam should begin to recognize people's need to heal from colonialism and to decolonize current educational structures. Future research must deal with questions regarding what this process of healing and decolonization should look like. Such research will benefit from knowledge co-production that links diverse Vietnamese individuals and communities inside and outside of Vietnam. To truly change an education system shaped by one singular voice one must include other voices, so that new and more diverse visions of education and its functions can coalesce and start to alter the

status quo. This process of coalescence first requires recognition of the important role of local agency in peace formation (Lee, 2020). Any approach to reform must therefore utilize "local-local complexities to inform a larger hybridity" wherein local, state, and international actors and agencies work together in a mutual, reciprocal ways to sustain peace at home and abroad (Fontan, 2012, p. 109). The inclusion of diverse voices in processes seeking to effect educational change also helps foreground resistance to authoritative knowledge. For those steeped in Western philosophy and metaphysics, is there only one kind of "truth"? Are only individuals who have been equipped with higher education to be understood as experts and the most authoritative producers of knowledge? An essential element of local peacebuilding is the fact that different individuals and communities possess different kinds of knowledge and expertise (Lederach, 1997).

To illustrate my points, I would like to provide a brief description of a research project that I recently joined as a Research Assistant. *The Hearts of Freedom* is a project to preserve and showcase the historical memories as well as personal stories of immigration and integration of refugees coming from countries of the former Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam) as they migrated to Canada after the Second Indochina War. Existing academic research tends to merge these diverse populations into one big category and undervalues their unique experiences and contributions to the society (McLean & Stobbe, 2019). As such, *the Hearts of Freedom* is a research project that attempts to not only listen to "unfamiliar" voices but also provides opportunities for new learnings that arise from the memories and stories of the people—the kind of knowledge that is largely undermined in many formal educational systems today. Within the context of Vietnam, as pointed out in this research, knowledge regarding the Second Indochina War has only been produced by one voice, which is the voice of the state. I believe there is

continue a need for research projects that are attentive to memories and stories of Vietnamese people living inside and outside of Vietnam—those who lived through the war, the second generation who has grown up with family's stories that are not being taught at schools, among many others. By resisting our tendency to conform to authoritative knowledge, we open the door for new knowledge and new ways of learning to emerge that would enrich how we foster relationships, reconcile, heal, and sustain peace. I am excited by the prospect of more research that looks for and into the unfamiliar voices or the unusual places when investigating decolonization and peacebuilding.

As Lederach (2005) emphasizes, a holistic approach to peacebuilding respects the temporal circle that connects the past, the present, and the future. This respect proves crucial to challenging assumptions of the superiority of Western ways of knowing, particularly the notion that only Western empirical studies can produce knowledge. For those who think this, what does it mean to honour oral histories and cultural wisdom? How should we go about showing that we value storytelling and respect the process of creating knowledge with communities, and the lived experiences of peoples? Minimally, we require relationality, reciprocity, and accountability to ensure the integrity of our peacebuilding frameworks and practices, and one of the means scholars attempt to work with integrity is through the selection of appropriate research topics, the selection of data sources, the processes of data collection and analysis, and knowledge mobilization (Wilson, 2008). All of these are easier said then done, especially as it often requires researchers to unlearn what they have been taught about doing research and re-learn how to do research. To make my points clear, I want to share my valuable learning from working on a recent research article that I co-authored with a group of Vietnamese graduate students and teachers—Ethan Trinh, Giang Le, Trang Tran, and Vuong Tran. In this paper, we experiment

with memory rewriting (writing from recollection of memories) as a method of inquiry to support collective healing and explore educational changes (E. Trinh et al., 2022). We insist on embracing a non-traditional way of doing research, which require us to think differently about data (memory as data), data collection (writing as inquiry), and data analysis and discussion (rewriting of memories and coming together). In this research, I also have learned to sit with the un-comfort of our refusal to follow the traditional qualitative research structure (e.g., we change "data" to "seed of inquiry" and "theoretical framework" to "thinking with thinkers," etc.). The creative and critical process of rewriting our stories with new messages of hope allows each of us to treat our traumatic memories with respect and kindness so that we become open to healing and think about changes we wish to see in the education systems. This example illustrates my understanding of decolonization in future research—it takes much courage, insecurities, and discomforts to do research differently. To respect relationality, reciprocity, and accountability in research, I do not mean a mere change in theoretical lens but a concrete effort in transforming how the research is conceptualized, produced, and mobilized. With future studies regarding decolonization in education and peacebuilding in Vietnam, I wish to think with the people, to embrace our unhealed wounds together, and to walk together on our healing journeys so that new imaginations for peacebuilding can emerge from being and learning together.

Lastly, I welcome future inclusive considerations of the importance of the land and other non-human creations (plants and animals) to peacebuilding. For many Indigenous cultures across the world, including those in Vietnam, land *is* culture since it contains important histories and teachings that help comprise a people as such (L. T. Smith et al., 2019; Wilson, 2008). In Vietnam, I grew up with stories of my people and our relationships to the land; yet, our education system either ignores these stories or teaches them as myths, telling students that these

stories reflect our ancestors' limited understanding of scientific phenomena. As a result, many Vietnamese students, particularly those in urban areas, are disconnected from cultural stories and the land and thus, develop an assumption that traditional knowledge systems are inferior to the Western ways of learning. I am curious to learn how many groups in Vietnam consider themselves Indigenous and practice traditional ways of life. Moreover, I am eager to learn from being in relationships with local communities and their collective stories, as well as the land and people's stories about the land. This study would not deny the value of Western education, though it would seek to pay long overdue respect to Vietnamese traditional knowledge systems and other Indigenous epistemologies, which I view as significant means for decolonizing the future of education and peacebuilding.

Summary

This chapter does not prescribe any step-by-step solutions capable of resolving the challenges discussed elsewhere in my thesis, such as how to disrupt nationalistic or neoliberal practices and presuppositions regarding education in Vietnam. However, based on my critical analysis of the discourses of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnamese education, I offer a range of questions for future research. Some questions aim to situate education within an infrastructure for peace, shifting the role of education from a commodity to support a global capitalist economy into a tool for healing and peacebuilding. The rest of the questions move toward imaging modes of education lying somehow beyond currently oppressive, inequitable ways of learning and being. These questions, in part, illustrate my ongoing curiosity notwithstanding (and in some ways resulting) from my findings in this research. Thus, I have concluded this chapter with suggestions for possible places or directions where future research

may take us in order to begin engaging with these questions. In particular, I have been concerned to emphasize the importance of local agents in peacebuilding, and I have called for more respect to be shown to traditional wisdom and knowledge systems that, properly understood, can help to initiate new processes of learning from/with diverse individuals, communities, and the land.

Conclusion

The story of how my thesis research came about is deeply rooted in my desire to (re)imagine how the Vietnamese education system could be transformed to support the development of an infrastructure that can build and sustain peace. This work of imagining, however, could not be properly undertaken without first obtaining a critical understanding of how Vietnam's colonial and military histories have affected its present, and continue to shape the country's future. For this reason, the document that has become my thesis exemplifies an important step on my journey to map the evolution of Vietnamese education and explore how the Vietnamese education system has become what it is today. My exploration has been guided by my desire to think about the potential of education to contribute to peacebuilding in Vietnam.

In this research, through the critical discourse analysis of official and unofficial educational materials, I track down evidence of nationalism and neoliberalism in Vietnam's contemporary education system. This cartography of discourses reveals not only how Vietnam used nationalism to build a collective national identity throughout the Ten Thousand Day War but also how the Communist Party of Vietnam connects war memories with political and economic agendas in post-war eras. I have learned that language and literature education is utilized by the government as a tool to convey its nationalist ideas of citizenship and neoliberal economic agendas to students.

During the period of French colonization, the concept of communism was gradually introduced to Vietnam through Hồ Chí Minh, who believed in Lenin's vision for a global socialist structure. Consequently, the ideology and practices of proletarian internationalism and anti-colonialism became the foundation of nationalism in Vietnam. Throughout the First Indochina War (1945–1954), anti-colonial resistance took a nationalist approach and slowly gave

birth to the concept of a unified Vietnamese national identity. Earlier in the war, Vietnamese nationhood largely hinged upon people's sense of belonging to their local quê hương (beloved homeland), whether it was their village or the region they grew up with. To evoke patriotic feelings and recruit people into joining the communist force, North Vietnam promoted the image of người nông dân mặc áo lính—soldiers from a working-class background, primarily farmers who left their quê hương to join the communist force to fight for national liberation. In my research, I use the term "proletarian soldiers" to highlight North Vietnam's support for proletarian internationalism. Literature produced during this era often embraces a storyline in which France was positioned as the colonial Other, and any Vietnamese people, particularly the elites, who supported France were labelled Việt gian (Vietnamese betrayals). By the Second Indochina War (1955–1975), although anti-colonialism continued to be important to the communist force's political agendas, the concept of Vietnamese versus Westerners gradually played a more significant role in unifying the general population and building a sense of a Vietnamese collective national identity. Literature produced during this period shows the communist force consistently positioned South Vietnam as a part of Vietnam that was invaded by the Western imperialists, and North Vietnam was righteously engaging in the war to unify the country. Today, Vietnamese students learn the same storylines at schools, which shows that the entanglement of memory politics and education in post-war Vietnam.

Coming out of two brutal wars that devasted its economy and infrastructure, Vietnam continued to struggle under the Bao Cấp period with a high level of poverty and corruption. By the mid-1980s, neoliberalism started to emerge in Vietnam as an economic doctrine that was believed by the state as a tool to bring about changes and innovation to the nation's stagnant economy. Literature produced during this time, such as the play "Tôi và chúng ta" by Lưu Quang

Vũ, describes the larger social, cultural, and political landscape at the time, in which the communist party was tasked to justify its adoption of neoliberal economic practices that once were deemed imperial and capitalist. One of my curiosities at the outset of my project concerned how the concept of neoliberalism, which seems very much to be at odds with Vietnam's promotion of (illiberal) communism, has become widely promoted in Vietnam. I have learned that the emergence of neoliberalism in Vietnam was made possible thanks to nationalism. When the Vietnamese government first introduced neoliberal practices such as internationalization and privatization to the Vietnamese people in an attempt to quickly lift the nation out of poverty after the Second Indochina War, these practices were presented as patriotic. As such, neoliberalism was not considered a betrayal of the state's communist vision but rather a necessity to ensure Vietnam's becoming a powerful nation state able to promote communism to the wider world. In other words, war legacies and political interests gave rise to the co-existence of nationalism and neoliberalism in the crucible of Vietnamese education.

By the Hội nhập era, neoliberalism has manifested in different aspects of the Vietnamese society. In education, the government promotes the concept of a global citizenship and shows its goal of becoming a powerful state as other More Developed Countries, such as the United States, the Great Britain, and Japan. It is difficult to recognize how neoliberalism influences the education system when the LLE textbooks have not gone through a significant change since it was first published in the 1980s. However, over the years, there have been multiple reforms, new programs, and new policies to internationalizing the education system. The recent state's guide lays out specific tasks for teachers to take in order to prepare students with intercultural knowledge to become global citizens in a knowledge economy. Clearly, the outdated LLE

textbooks do not match the expectations the state currently has for the teaching of language and literature in schools.

In this research, I also find that neoliberalism in Vietnam often takes the form of Western exceptionalism. Since economic standards are being used to determine the purpose of education, Vietnam looks toward More Developed Countries or other Less Developed Countries that have successfully adopted Western education programs and policies. The perception of Western literature as the quintessence of human cultures points to an assumption of the superiority of Western education and knowledge systems. Although the Ministry of Education claims that students must selectively learn from other countries so that they can still hold strong to their Vietnamese roots, it has not been able to put forward strategies and/or suggestions on how students can do so, or how teachers can teach in ways that support students to embrace a transcultural journey of learning.

At the beginning of my research, my literature review revealed that Vietnam engages in a cookie-cutter approach to educational reforms, in which the government tackles problems on the surface while missing out on developing holistic understandings of the root causes of problems. Though my research, I have come to realize that Vietnam has developed what I refer to as a "toxic masculine" attitude toward its colonial history, one according to which Vietnam vigorously denies the need for healing from war and colonial trauma by perceiving peace simply as the absence of war. The focus of the state has thus become primarily on economic development instead of healing, reconciliation, and decolonization. This toxic masculine, stoical attitude traps the Vietnamese education system in a false sense of security, making individuals fearful of uncertainties, changes, mistakes, and vulnerabilities. Like a cycle of violence, the

result is Vietnam becomes more and more comfortable with cookie-cutter approaches to educational changes.

In concluding this research, I would like to mention a critical challenge that I've encountered as I've worked on this thesis. In general, qualitative social sciences research tends to conclude with a list of recommendations or solutions to fix the problems discussed in the research. However, with this project, although I have learned about the missing voices and challenges in the curriculum, I do not find it is possible to make concrete suggestions regarding changes in policies or the curriculum. I believe such changes require much more than my own vision of what education is and should be. Therefore, in Chapter Three, I provide a list of questions that I think would be valuable for those undertaking future research or projects. As I write this conclusion, the whole Vietnamese nation is grieving the recent death of a high school student at a "school for the gifted" who committed suicide due to depression. Some younger educational thinkers have used social media as a tool for political advocacy and have voiced critiques and complaints about Vietnam's specialized school system (see my related remarks in Chapter One). This is a market-driven education system that, whatever else its merits, contributes to deepening resource disparity, puts tremendous pressure on students, and enables schools to disregard their duty to care for and protect students. Meanwhile, various educational leaders continue telling the public this is not a time to dwell on mistakes in the past but rather a time to think of (and work toward) a brighter future. When is a "good time" to critically reflect on what has happened? Without any acknowledgement of past mistakes and present injustices, how can we think of a different, brighter future together? The questions that I set forth in Chapter Three are not metaphors, nor are they merely theoretical and best considered in an academic setting like the Ivory Tower. These questions are intended to shake the Vietnamese educational system out

of its complacency by calling for transformative action and peacebuilding to take place at all levels of society.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. *Four major sources of data in this research*

Source of data	National LLE textbooks	The state guide to lesson plans for teachers	The state guide to curriculum development and teaching	Researcher's personal study guide
Details	• Eight selected readings • Visual images included selected readings • Associated lesson instructions and plans—including the textbooks' instructions, definitions of terms, questions for students, and highlighted notes from textbook editors			Covers executive summaries and key points from all readings in Grade 9th LLE textbooks
Note: I the research, I refer to the state guide to lesson plans for teacher's as "teacher's guide" and the state guide to curriculum development and teaching as "state guide."				