Forms of Anxiety

How to Worry

Bác Lan's kitchen did not have any windows. It was tucked in the back of the ground floor of her narrow four-story house in downtown Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, so the only light came from fluorescent tubes overhead and a television's blue-tinted glare that bounced off the room's cool, sterile surfaces: all tile, metal, glass, and plastic. Still, the room felt oddly comforting to me. Most Vietnamese kitchens are spotlessly utilitarian, with little decoration or personal ornamentation, but this one featured a breakfast nook framed underneath recessed walls and built-in shelves. On the shelves were figurines of Phúc Lộc Thọ (the trio of East Asian deities associated with prosperity, status, and longevity) and various Disney characters as well as framed photographs of Bác Lan, her husband Vũ, and their daughter "Mimi" (a family nickname). The biggest picture was of Bác Lan, smiling in front of a Cartier boutique in Paris during a trip to visit her sister. Of course, much of why I was drawn to this kitchen was due to Bác Lan herself, a cheerful fifty-nine-year-old who was always ready to receive unannounced visitors with mangos, lychees, dragonfruit, or whatever was in season. Because she was one of the few people in Ho Chi Minh City I knew who was actually born and raised there, I occasionally stopped by her home to ask her how the house, neighborhood, and city had changed.

Born into a wealthy family in what was then French colonial Saigon, Bác Lan grew up in the house with the windowless kitchen, but its layout was much different then. Commissioned by her grandfather, the house was built on a spacious plot on a wide, bustling boulevard. Even against the backdrop of the Second Indochina War—more commonly known outside of Vietnam as the "Vietnam War" but what most Vietnamese call the "American War"—Bác Lan had, by her account, a happy childhood spent playing with numerous cousins and schoolmates. Indeed, many native Saigonese recall the war as a time when the American presence brought an influx of capital into the city and describe it as a happy (*sung sướng*)[1] one. This characterization of the war era is no doubt a reaction to the one that followed,

which many people, including Bác Lan, said was the most difficult period of their life. After the war ended in 1975, the state sought to improve all aspects of life in a newly reunified Vietnam through socialist transformation. However, Ho Chi Minh City residents' recollection of the following ten years emphasize the suffering (*đau khổ*) endured as a result of an oftentimes punitive regime change, government mismanagement, domestic economic stagnation, and chronic shortages of essential goods. Poverty, hunger, and malnutrition—already rampant from thirty years of war—worsened somehow. Bác Lan's father had walls built to divide the house into three separate units and sold the flanking residences to sustain the family through the transition of a newly reunified Vietnam.

"*Nghịch lý*," Vũ chimed in. A paradox! Himself a rumored supporter of the new regime, he went on to say that everything that the Saigonese had known until then was suddenly turned upside down. Streets once bustling with social and commercial activity became eerily calm. The poor were rewarded for their status as the proletariat, while Saigon's elite were punished as bourgeoisie sympathizers. The youthful Communist vanguard became more powerful than their elders, now vilified as feudal and superstitious. Parents were afraid of their children, not the other way around. Profound economic scarcity led to suspicion and distrust where there had once been generosity and fellowship. Many of the people I spoke with during my research insisted to me that because of the war and its aftermath the Vietnamese had known more suffering than anyone else on the planet. Furthermore, Bác Lan and Vũ insisted that the Saigonese—or at least those who profited from an inflated wartime economy—suffered the most during that time because they had the steepest decline in quality of life. Everyone else in the country was used to hardship. For Bác Lan, the worst part was simply not knowing what would happen each day. Such uncertainty makes adequate planning for the future an impossibility, yet her every waking moment was still spent figuring out how to survive.

In 1986, a series of neoliberal reforms known as *đổi mới* (renovation) began to be gradually rolled out; by the early 1990s, signs of the country's economic revitalization were obvious. This process entailed the "normalization" (*bình thường hoá*) of Vietnam's relations with its former adversary the United States, but Bác Lan usually used the word *bình thường lại*, or "renormalize," to describe the era and the city's return to form. By now the owner of the house, Bác Lan rented out her front room to a photocopier repair shop, earning enough income for her and Vũ to retire comfortably and send Mimi to university. (It was around this time that she remodeled her kitchen.) With more and more storefronts and restaurants opening across the city, the street outside her house became busy "just like before," except that all the bicycles were replaced with motorbikes. Surely this was evidence, not only that life had become normal again, but that significant progress was happening.

Some nights, though, in the last moments before Bác Lan drifted to sleep, she would be dropped wide awake in a familiar feeling. It is some time between 1981 and 1985, and she is thinking about what to do next.

I discovered late into my initial fieldwork that Bác Lan's kitchen was designed by an American-trained architect. No wonder I felt at home there. Yet this unconscious reminder of home when I was far from it was unnerving. A few years later, the kitchen was torn down along with the walls that divided the ground floors of the three residences, reunited as a gleaming white car dealership.

HOW TO WORRY

Bác Lan is hardly alone in her worries. Insecurity of all stripes makes headlines around the world. For example, economic volatility in a globalized marketplace now has worldwide effects. As precarity becomes the rule rather than the exception, once stable political orders buckle under austerity measures and the rise of antiestablishment political movements, giving lie to the idea that they were even stable to begin with. We have yet to see the worst of global climate change, but we know it is coming and perhaps has already begun. The fact that most of us cannot fathom what "it" will look like makes the associated uncertainty that much more disquieting. Of course, these persistent problems have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which on our physical and mental health are persistent yet still unclear. Anxiety and stress disorders are the most common types of mental illness in the world and are the sixth leading cause of disability (Baxter et al. 2014b). At any given moment, one in fourteen people on the planet suffer from an anxiety disorder (Baxter et al. 2013). In the United States, that figure is one in four (WHO World Mental Health Survey Consortium 2004), representing a twentyfold increase since the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition* (*DSM-III*) standardized the diagnosis of anxiety disorders almost fifty years ago.[2] It should be little surprise that anxiety is trending on and off social media platforms. The number of people who Googled anxiety has doubled in less than a decade, and the hashtag #ThisIsWhatAnxietyFeelsLike has millions of posts on Twitter (Williams 2017). Social media campaigns by various mental health collectives, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, advocate that "it's OK to not be OK" in an attempt to destigmatize discussion of one's mental health problems. Being OK with not being OK has become not just a mantra of the times but a structure of feeling as well (Williams 1977).

Anxiety is the general apprehension of threats to what we hold as essential to our being and its flourishing. As an anthropologist, I focus on its relational dimensions. Indeed, anxiety can itself be considered a kind of relationship between the self and a world of uncertainty. An unfortunate turn of events may provoke a wide range of emotional reactions, but what distinguishes anxiety from those other

feelings is that it revolves around what might happen, not just an existing danger. It is a register of lived experience that invokes questions of meaning and deadlines, headaches and being-in-the-world; these questions are usually "what if?" questions. Anxiety ranges and cycles from the catastrophic to moments of indecision and a "sense of dull disquiet" (O'Gorman 2015, 25). Circumstances that have not yet come to pass and exist because we imagine them as a possibility may be more pressing—even more real—than what is already over and done with. Worse yet, at times we do not know what we are afraid of, and this suggests that what is so troubling about anxiety is rooted not in a particular object of fear but in something about ourselves and our ability to respond to the unknown. Anxieties are a part of us yet lie beyond our ability to know, let alone control, them. "What is there so fearful as the expectation of evil tidings delayed?" the nineteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley wrote. "For then the heart no longer sickens with disappointed hope." The answer to her question may be found in her most famous work, *Frankenstein* (1818), with its themes of alienation, ambition, and the unanticipated consequences of scientific progress.

Based on ethnographic research conducted during the periods 2007–09, 2015–16, and 2019–20, with several summers of fieldwork in between, *A Life of Worry* is a cultural biography of the anxieties that take on a life of their own in Ho Chi Minh City.[3] Biographies of noted individuals suggest formative narratives of identity. As a genre, they typically frame their subject as an autonomous protagonist to speak truth to power. However, as I loosely conceive it, the cultural biography is neither a hero's journey nor a cautionary tale. Applying a biographical lens to anxiety, stress, and worry focuses less on the individuals who experience them—though certainly those individuals populate the study that follows. It places anxiety just outside of the context of an individual's psyche to examine its own agentive force and how it is sustained by social relationships and institutions. Following Fassin and Rechtman's (2009) analysis of trauma's hold on the medical, legal, and public imagination, this book traces the epistemologies and discourses of new scientific paradigms and a shifting moral economy. But I also explore how worries can take on a life of their own as they travel in and out of the clinic as well as between individuals. People often know that they worry needlessly and return to those worries compulsively, unable to either avoid future suffering or stop themselves from the torment of anxiety. These feelings do more than embellish moments in people's lives. They have far-reaching social repercussions that move across social relationships and institutions. Anxiety can define the subject but can also exceed it.

This book offers a conceptual approach to anxiety that is different from how we are often trained to think about it. The dominant perspectives from philosophy, psychology, and, increasingly, neuroscience frame anxiety as an emotional state, a pathological symptom, a biochemical process, or an existential condition. By individualizing and universalizing the experience of anxiety, these conceptualizations

obscure the critical role of anxiety's social context. Thus, I conceptualize anxiety as a practice—something we do and perform in addition to feel and experience—that creates and sustains social relationships. And as with all social practices, anxiety is not entirely innate. The process of worry entails caring about an object and imagining a future that threatens that object, actions that are profoundly shaped by social and political forces. Put simply, we learn how to worry. Thus, I examine the cultural and personal patterning of mundane and extraordinary, as well as normative and pathological, forms of anxiety and how local systems of knowledge, relationships, and practices inform and are informed by anxiety. If we pay attention to how people in Vietnam confide their own specific anxieties to their families, friends, colleagues, doctors, counselors, and the occasional anthropologist, we can also glean their attempts to articulate new ways of living in a rapidly changing society. Going beyond what people say about their worries to the social and institutional construction of anxiety requires attending to multiple levels of analysis and the resonances between them. As a phenomenological study of anxiety and global capitalism in Ho Chi Minh City, this book analyzes that feeling akin to when you trip and "the ground is rushing up at you before you land" (Solomon 2001) and situates it in the broader context of the ground that shifted beneath your feet in the first place. If emotions are interpretations of problems, then examining the state construction of affect reveals how the historical, ideological, and embodied registers of those problems connect each other (Jenkins 1991; Ngai 2007).

Despite their global prevalence, anxiety and anxiety disorders have received sporadic anthropological attention.[4] This is all the more striking given the extensive literature within medical anthropology on other forms of mental health concerns stemming from the dangers of social experience (Kleinman et al. 1997). These studies examine the continuum between normal and pathological forms of emotional experience and the medical and political process of setting a boundary between them. While people with depression (Kitanaka 2011), trauma (Daniel 1996; Jenkins and Cofresi 1998; Lester 2013), and substance abuse (Garcia 2010; Bartlett 2020) often focus on coming to terms with the past, anxiety is primarily oriented toward the future. The unknowability of what lies ahead is not anxiety's only source of ambiguity. In today's transnational capitalism, the nature of the sociopolitical itself cultivates more ambient feelings that are perhaps less forceful than the political passions of fear and anger but no less effective (Virno 2004; Ngai 2007). Anxiety draws our attention to the precarity of everyday experiences and how it is linked to relations of gendered care, classed aspirations, and moral selfhood.

A Life of Worry opens in Bác Lan's kitchen because anxiety does not need the darkest recesses of the soul to take root, though a dimly lit room does not hurt. After all, Bác Lan is not a particularly nervous person. Yet the potential for anxiety surrounds her. The states of her mind, house, and hometown intersect to blur the boundaries between past and present, as well as between self and other.

FIGURE 1. A popular way to unwind in the early 2000s, *đi chơi* (to go play) entails cruising through the city on motorbikes with friends.

These convergences, which register alternately as dissociation or signs of economic progress, may appear to be unrelated, but anxiety can arise from seemingly innocuous and chance circumstances. It is not the sole product of individual-level factors because it does not reside within individuals. Rather, much like selfhood, anxiety exists somewhere between individuals and the world, demonstrating that the self does not exist independently of its relation to the world. In anxiety, people find themselves "thrown" from the familiar, suddenly not at home in the world (Heidegger 1962). Though Bác Lan is thrown back to the 1980s for only a second, the effect lingers. The paradox of the postwar lean years that Vũ describes and the post-reform return to "normal" question what all that suffering was for. This question starkly contrasts with the official narrative of personal sacrifices made for the benefit of a Communist victory (Shohet 2013). Furthermore, the return of something—whether it is the postwar lean years (if just for a moment), the ground floor of a house, or a capitalist economy—is uncanny because it brings the familiar to an unfamiliar context (Freud 1919). Although Bác Lan and her contemporaries are still trying to determine the meaning of Vietnam's traumatic history, it is important for us to avoid explaining away the confusion of anxiety. Liberal discourses of the emotions privilege them as the site of intimate self-knowledge, but anxiety alienates us from the world to reveal the self faced with its own indeterminacy.

Saigon and Ho Chi Minh City

A woman on the cusp of a promising career comes under increasing pressure from her parents to abandon it in order to marry and have children. A market vendor struggles to find the money to pay her child's tuition. A student crams for finals; his classmate is concerned that he has not felt the urge to study all semester. A patient at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital who has just been diagnosed with depression wonders how she will pay for her medication, how she will manage her work and family obligations with an illness, and whether or not she will one day "go crazy" (*bị điên*). That the set of concerns that preoccupy Ho Chi Minh City residents—financial woes, work pressures, and family tensions—may seem so familiar or exceedingly ordinary to many of us is, in and of itself, remarkable given the tumult of Vietnam's recent history. For most people outside of the country, "Vietnam" has become synonymous with the "Vietnam War," oversimplifying both the country's past and its present. Although this book does not focus on that war, understanding its themes requires proper contextualization of the war and its legacy. Here, I briefly set the historical context of Ho Chi Minh City before I delve into the effects of specific policies in the following sections.

Then an outpost of the Khmer empire called Prey Nokor, Saigon came under jurisdiction of Vietnam in 1698 as part of its Southward March (Nam Tiến) from Hanoi during the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries. Near the fertile Mekong Delta, it quickly expanded under Vietnamese rule and developed a national reputation as a place of relative wealth, ease, and leisure that it maintains to this day. When the French colony of Indochina (encompassing present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and eventually Laos) was established in 1887, Saigon was named its first capital and has since borne the strongest Western influence in the region. On September 2, 1945, the Communist revolutionary Hồ Chí Minh read the Proclamation of Independence to a crowd of thousands at Ba Đình Square in Hanoi to announce the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and Vietnam's independence from France. The ensuing First Indochina War was fought between the Viet Minh (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh, League for the Independence of Vietnam), led by Hồ Chí Minh, and French and pro–French Vietnamese forces. The Geneva Conventions of 1954 ended the war with the partitioning of Vietnam into the DRV in the North and the State of Vietnam, renamed the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) a year later, in the South. Over the next year, nearly one million political refugees, known as the '54 Northerners (*Bắc 54*), relocated from the North to the South.

The Second Indochina War set the DRV, the southern-based National Liberation Front with their military wing the Viet Cong (Việt Nam Cộng Sản, Vietnamese Communists), and Communist supporters, including the Soviet Union and China, against the ROV and the United States with additional support from South Korea, Australia, and other anticommunist allies. During the twenty years

of this undeclared war, over three million Vietnamese combatants and civilians were killed, and tens of thousands more died after the war due to unexploded ordnance or the chemical defoliant known as Agent Orange. Moreover, millions in Cambodia and Laos were killed during and after the war. Vietnam was "reunified" when North Vietnam took Saigon, the southern capital, on April 30, 1975, and thereby ended one of the twentieth century's most controversial and devastating wars. However, as Viet Thanh Nguyen (2016, 4) writes, "all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." A year later, Saigon was officially renamed Ho Chi Minh City, but most people in the country still refer to it informally as Saigon.

For many in Ho Chi Minh City, the immediate postwar period was worse than the conflict. What is described in state discourse as the liberation (*giải phóng*) of South Vietnam from foreign occupation was interpreted by many southerners as its defeat. This period was hardly a time of peace, as Vietnam invaded and eventually occupied Cambodia in 1978 (i.e., the Third Indochina War) and fought a brief but intense border conflict with China in 1979. Meanwhile, attempts to reconstruct the war-torn landscape, infrastructure, and economy were hampered by punitive international policies and trade embargoes designed to isolate the newly formed Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Many Ho Chi Minh City residents found that the biggest threats, however, came not from forces outside of the country but from within. The new regime sent some three hundred thousand ROV supporters, including soldiers and civil servants, to reeducation camps (*trại học tập cải tạo*), where sentences often lasted three to ten years. Devised to develop the hinterlands, collectivist farms in New Economic Zones were staffed with representatives of the old order (such as capitalists and Catholic priests), social undesirables (such as drug addicts and commercial sex workers), and urbanites who were displaced by the one million '75 Northerners (*Bắc 75*) who took high-ranking positions in the South soon after reunification.

Already implemented gradually in the (more collectively oriented) North, command-economy socialism was abruptly imposed on the South. The cosmopolitan modernity that Saigon evoked as the "Paris of the Orient" vanished overnight under a northern ethos of austerity. For the South's urban elite, a socialist future was "a regression to a premodern state bereft of the civilizing influence of middle-class education, manners, and respectability" (Leshkowich 2014a, 14). The new regime replaced private enterprise with a much-hated system of subsidies and vouchers that came to symbolize the failures and horrors of state-mandated collectivism. In the process, the much-vaunted entrepreneurial spirit of the Saigonese became delegitimized. With no more legal marketplaces or storefronts, long queues formed for basic necessities that were rationed out by the government. Waiting half a day for cooking oil, with no assurances there would be any left by the time one got to the head of the line, left people unsure whether to laugh or cry (*dở khóc dở cười*; MacLean 2008). This system was so poorly managed

that poverty, famine, and material scarcity became widespread. Already on the brink from three decades of war, Vietnam's poverty worsened as a result of mismanagement, natural disasters, and punitive international sanctions. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled political persecution and economic deprivation with the hope of resettling permanently in the West. These attempts to escape, often on small boats built only for short fishing expeditions, were themselves dangerous. Some estimate that for each person who arrived at a refugee camp in Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, or Singapore, another died at sea (Osborne 1980).

However, fates changed in 1986 when neoliberal reforms known as *đổi mới* (renovation) introduced a "market economy with socialist orientations" (*kinh tế thị trường với hướng dẫn chủ nghĩa xã hội*), or market socialism. Thirty years of rapid economic growth—after a long civil war and a decade of socialist collectivization with disastrous results—has made Vietnam one of late capitalism's most celebrated success stories. For example, 70 percent of Vietnamese lived below the official poverty line at the end of the war in 1975. By 1992, when the early effects of *đổi mới* became broadly evident to Ho Chi Minh City residents, 58 percent were in poverty. Today, only 3 percent are (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam 2016). (However, much of the poverty is concentrated in ethnic minority communities, a reflection of the persistent disparities throughout the country.) The general reduction in poverty had the World Bank reclassify Vietnam as a middle-income country in 2010, a remarkable achievement for a country that was, in living memory, one of the poorest in the world. These economic changes provide Ho Chi Minh City residents with opportunities to reimagine Vietnam's place in the global capitalist economy and envision its next steps toward global modernity (Hoang 2015). The national story that many Vietnamese tell themselves about themselves is one of optimism, development, and prosperity.

Nowhere is this narrative of national progress more salient than in the country's financial center of Ho Chi Minh City. With over thirteen million residents, the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the country was already primed to reenter the global economy and, for many, has come to symbolize Vietnam's bright future under neoliberal policies (Drummond 2000). The city that I arrived in to conduct my initial research from 2007 to 2009 was in perpetual motion. Almost every street I turned down was choked with construction crews and waves of motorbikes, and people in the midst of some urgent activity seemed to be everywhere. They sold cigarettes and rain ponchos from sidewalk carts and baguettes from bicycles, cracked bricks of ice to fit in glasses of sodas and coffee, wrapped *bánh mì* sandwiches in newspaper, and fanned the smoke of grilling pork into traffic. Storefronts for local boutiques and global chains, restaurants, and cafés were constantly opening, closing, and being replaced with something new to try. The return of capitalism to Ho Chi Minh City is bittersweet: sweet because it significantly raises living standards for everyone (even if some receive more of those benefits than

others), bitter because it reminds people of what they had been missing during the subsidy era and all that could have been if the war had ended differently.[5] Indeed, *đổi mới* is haunted by the "uncanny specter of an alternative [and reascendant] South Vietnamese modernity preceding and perhaps succeeding socialism" (Small 2018, 21; Taylor 2001; Leshkowich 2014a).

The Subject of Anxiety

Yet all is not well in these boom times. Runaway inflation forces Ho Chi Minh City residents to work harder, with less to show for their efforts. Contending with urban decay, traffic congestion, and environmental pollutants on a daily and intimate basis further saps their physical and mental reserves. After *đổi mới* eased foreign media restrictions, allowing the publication of Western popular psychology pieces in newspapers, magazines, and self-help books, the concept of stress (*strés*) became trendy among urbanites. However, *strés* is not just a new label for familiar experiences. Rather, according to popular media accounts (Lam 2005), the Vietnamese are becoming "stressed" for the first time. But this is decidedly not the stress that comes with deprivation. Instead, now the province of the upwardly mobile, *strés* suggests the anxieties of overwhelming choice and multitasking. Thus, while *stress* may, ostensibly, refer to many difficult circumstances, in Vietnam its closest associations lie with the lifestyles of the purportedly modern middle class. Furthermore, rates of anxiety disorders throughout the country have risen steadily in recent years, with the National Association of Psychiatry warning that these figures likely underestimate the severity of a growing mental health crisis (Thuý Hạnh 2015). In recent years, Vietnamese youth have become increasingly open about their own struggles with everyday anxieties on social media platforms as they seek to destigmatize mental health problems. In a single generation, Ho Chi Minh City residents have gone from fearing war, famine, and poverty to worrying about sending children overseas to college, choosing the right cell phone, and maintaining their health into old age. Clearly, this represents an improvement in people's fates, but such profound changes, even ones for the better, can be difficult to adjust to. As much as people marvel at the speed of change under *đổi mới*, many struggle to understand it. Of course, uncertainties also accompanied the militaristic destruction and authoritarian rule of the past. Thus, the issue is not change itself but rather the particular quality of change of the post-reform era and, just as critically, how it alters the relationship between the self and the social.

What is distinct about anxiety's outlines in Ho Chi Minh City is how it has been transformed and redefined as an explicit problem in several domains of contemporary Vietnamese society. Many of the people I spoke with in Ho Chi Minh City reflected on the present by comparing it to the social and economic upheavals of the past. According to many of them, now that the country is modernizing so quickly, they have a greater amount of things to worry about than they did in the

past. That is, the Vietnamese are more anxious now than ever before. To be sure, not all Ho Chi Minh City residents agreed with this statement, but enough of them did to make me pay attention to this purported "age of anxiety." I am less interested in verifying the accuracy of this claim than in following the logic behind it. What accounts for the simultaneous and seemingly paradoxical increase of economic prosperity, on one hand, and anxiety, worry, and stress on the other? How do people adapt to their new economic reality? Why does the country's transition to a market economy become understood through the lens of worry and embodied in an anxious register? Cultural commentators such as my interlocutors in Vietnam often seem to find themselves in a new age of anxiety because, after all, every historical moment is its own age of anxiety. Societies vary in their orientation to risk, fear, and anxiety, and different objects of concern may come to define a historical moment.[6] The phrase *age of anxiety* typically refers to the modern world and its perils. If, indeed, today's stakes are not as high as they used to be, they are at least more ambiguous. The notion that Vietnam's current historical moment is an age of anxiety reflects not so much a quantitative change in anxiety but instead its redefinition as it gets linked to new forms of insecurity.

What people fear and how they express and act upon that fear is, in some important way, constitutive of who they are, and Ho Chi Minh City's new worries take us across some of Vietnam's most critical social changes. How much worry one can or should endure is at the heart of ongoing debates over what constitutes a good life and a moral person in Ho Chi Minh City. I trace these debates across various settings to examine the diverse ways that people negotiate and transform their worries. Chief among these are the therapeutic contexts, such as psychiatric clinics and counseling centers, where the most intense struggles over the new meaning of worry take root. The psychological and medical sciences have become the primary wellspring of those technologies of the self that are used to adapt to emerging demands for the self. These means of imbuing anxiety with personal meaning and individual purpose both complement and contradict each other, but all of them are marshalled as evidence of the triumphs and failures of development.

The psychic and social foundations of anxiety in Vietnam have been laid by the history of the medical and psychological sciences, emerging forms of global capitalism, and new ways of setting the boundary between self and society. The process of self-discovery does not simply uncover an enduring and essential component of oneself but rather articulates it in publicly accessible forms. As people become subject to more sources and forms of anxiety, they must learn how to cope with them. However, in the process of learning how to worry in culturally specific ways, they also adopt new conventions of personhood. The subject of anxiety is the self oriented toward a future through technologies of the self designed to cope with insecurity and precarity. The rise of anxiety as a widespread social condition is the product of these new ways of relating to the self, others, and the world.

ANXIETIES ABOUT ANXIETIES

The paradoxes of Vietnam's age of anxiety make it clear that the severity of threats to a person's physical safety, self-esteem, or social status cannot adequately predict their level of anxiety. This suggests that anxiety is not merely a proportional outcome of potential stressors. Rather, it is the result of how people relate to an uncertain world. Thus, an ethnographic framework for anxiety should account for not just the level of danger or the fortitude of the self but also the way they interface with each other. Cross-cultural research on the emotions emphasizes their variation, construction, and regulation through cultural discourses, roles, and institutions (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). More recently, scholars have called for greater attention to the sensory dimensions of affects that circulate throughout communities, as opposed to the language-bound study of the emotions (Seigworth and Gregg 2010).[7] Attending to how affective processes take form and, in turn, shape and exceed their surroundings is especially critical in the case of anxiety because it thrives in between established categories of experience. Thus, this book explores how selfhood is made and remade, how uncertainty is structured in a population, and how people interpret and respond to their anxieties. Here, drawing on some of the most influential theories of anxiety, I outline a conceptualization of anxiety in relation to a shifting cultural politics of the self. In the following sections, I will address the questions of the structure of uncertainty ("the age of anxiety" and "middle-class aspirations and moralities") and people's reactions to it ("the psy-turn").

We often imagine anxiety to be a universal problem—something that afflicts people no matter their historical or cultural context. However, an examination of the relatively recent history of the academic study of anxiety reveals a broad range of ways of grappling with it (May 1950). For example, anxiety was an intellectual problem for Enlightenment thinkers, a spiritual one for existentialists, and a libidinal and sexual one for psychoanalysts. Early twentieth-century physicians argued that excessive anxiety was a stress response to the rise of modern lifestyles and environments (Lutz 1991). The biochemical frameworks of the early twenty-first century, with their emphasis on nature over nurture, are evidence of an increasingly individualistic worldview (Horwitz 2013). Despite their many differences, philosophical, psychological, and medical approaches to anxiety have resulted in a diverse category of experience that, while awkward, nevertheless rings familiar to us. Does this familiarity, however, suggest universality, or is it the result of imposing our own ideas about anxiety onto the cultural particularities that most of these theories disregard? The extent to which anxiety is shared around the world depends on how it is defined. While some fear-based affective response to uncertainty is likely universal, the focus on anxiety's broadly shared features within the dominant paradigms has reproduced distinctly Western assumptions about emotion, selfhood, and risk. Indeed, much of how we understand anxiety is the

product of both a prevailing state of scientific knowledge and particular configurations of self and society.

Initial theories of anxiety reflect their disciplinary origins in the tumult of the nineteenth century that gave rise to modernity in the West and its means of relating to the world, each other, and our selves. The emerging scientific, philosophical, and political ideals of the Enlightenment celebrated individual rights over communal-based obligations, and Cartesian dichotomies between the mind and the body led to a preoccupation with rational, mechanical phenomena. The technological advances of the Industrial Revolution yielded economic growth as well as new social formations as people moved away from established support systems and encountered new uncertainties. Indeed, the early twentieth-century social psychologist R. R. Willoughby famously described anxiety as "the most prominent characteristic of Occidental civilization." To this day, anxiety and modern lifestyles and identities retain a powerful association.

The earliest modern efforts to theorize anxiety, primarily within Euro-American philosophy and psychology, reacted against the rise of the technocratic, bureaucratic, and secular that turned virtually every aspect of life into something to calculate, compartmentalize, and control. Instead, they focused on the whole individual as a feeling and acting agent and highlighted the fundamentally emotional nature of human existence. For example, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1884) called anxiety the "dizziness of freedom" because it results from an awareness that the ability to make one's own decisions creates different possibilities for oneself. Existential anxiety can happen to anyone as a normal event. It can even be morally valuable if one's response to it is personal growth and not retreat. For existentialists, anxiety is the key to deciphering the human condition yet also the central domain of male intellectuals (Ngai 2007). The broader question of who has access to the opportunities and resources needed to make their own decisions in order to achieve that growth is never addressed, however.

Conversely, Sigmund Freud (1936) focused on the pathological dimensions of anxiety as a foundational concept in psychoanalysis. For him, anxiety is the clinical manifestation of intrapsychic and unconscious conflicts and repressed demands. These so-called neurotic anxieties are not realistic assessments of one's own powerlessness or an outside threat but rather a flight from the libido's own demands.[8] Not all conflicts provoke neurotic anxiety. This is not to say that neurotic anxiety or repression may not be at play among the case studies in this book. Although I avoid applying wholesale the master discourse of psychoanalysis to my ethnographic data, I do attend to classically psychodynamic phenomena such as conflicting impulses that have no socially acceptable outlets. However, because this book is more concerned with anxiety's role in the intersubjective experience of social relationships than with the psychodynamic emphasis on the inner workings of the mind, I draw mainly from existentialism's close cousin phenomenology.

Philosophy's and psychology's intense focus on the nonconscious aspects of individual subjectivity overshadows the interpersonal dimensions of our emotional lives. To recover the significance of social processes in anxiety, we need an approach to selfhood that centers our capacity to form social relationships. Following Csordas (1994), I conceptualize selfhood as a process of orienting and becoming oriented to the world. Integral to this study is the insight that the self is not a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action" (Geertz 1979, 229), as is commonly assumed in the West. Rather, it requires an Other, such as other people, material objects, or cultural values and ideologies, to orient toward in an ongoing process of becoming and possibility (Parish 2008). This framework for self-society relations is informed by phenomenological approaches to anthropology that complicate our understandings of the textures of subjective experience (Csordas 1990; Desjarlais 1992). Rather than taking people's lived experience at face value, these approaches interrogate how it unfolds and comes to be taken for granted (Csordas 1994). Focusing on how people engage with their social and physical environments as a contingent process sheds light on how experience may or may not achieve a meaningful and definite form through linguistic, symbolic, and embodied measures (Crapanzano 2004; Throop 2010). Emphasizing the coherent meanings that people ascribe to their experiences glosses over the ambiguities and ambivalences that are so characteristic of anxiety. From a phenomenological perspective, emotional states are much more than an adornment on an intrinsically rational agent. Rather, they reveal the fundamental ways people relate to the world, and perhaps none does so as sharply as anxiety (Heidegger 1962).

I argue that the development and experience of anxiety is inextricable from configurations of selfhood. Anxiety is unique among the emotions because it lacks an object (Barlow 2002). While people are happy to see a friend or jealous of someone else's good fortune, they are often unsure of why they feel anxious. Instead, they are only aware that they are afraid. If the self is produced and reproduced through engaging with an object, what happens in the absence of one? To answer this question, it is instructive to examine Kierkegaard's (1884) classic distinction between fear and anxiety. The difference between them is that between being acutely afraid of falling when you stand at a cliff's edge and experiencing the vague impulse to throw yourself off it. Because fear has a specific and immediate reason, attention becomes trained on the threatening object. People are able to reason a cogent explanation for their terror, orient themselves to the fear object, and mobilize for an appropriate fight-or-flight response. Their fright decreases when the object of fear is removed through concrete action.

Conversely, anxiety is the expectation of a threat when the danger is unknown. Jacques Lacan (2016) described anxiety as being trapped in a room with a three-meter-tall praying mantis while you are wearing a mask that you cannot see. How do you react to the giant insect when you do not know whether you look

like its next meal or not? The absence of a fear object to orient toward makes the process of identifying and acting upon threats more fraught. Unsure of what one is afraid of, there is nothing to fight and nowhere to flee from as anxiety attacks from multiple directions. Because anxiety is a more generalized state of apprehension, the object is ignored in favor of the subjective condition (Freud 1952). Subsequently, it is felt as a cosmic experience that penetrates entire subjective universes. The diffuse apprehension and helplessness associated with it refers not only to its generalized physical sensations. After all, other emotions such as fear or anger are capable of saturating the body. Rather, anxiety's undifferentiated quality refers to an undermining of some foundational level of a person—their self-esteem or their experience of the self as a person (Bloch 1995). While fear can be mediated by establishing a security pattern to confront or avoid the object, in anxiety this security pattern may itself be under threat (Sullivan 1948). That is, not only is one compromised by a threat, but also the patterns of coping with it are under attack. People can neither objectify the threat nor separate themselves from it because the means to do so have been compromised by anxiety. Indeed, "the very perception with which we look will also be invited by anxiety" (May 1950, 191). Focused less on a threat than on the anticipated fragmentation of the self, anxiety faces the self with its own indeterminacy.

The notion that anxiety lacks an object runs counter to the way many people around the world have lately come to talk about their worries. For example, I have noticed in recent years that my own students and, increasingly, my colleagues refer to their "anxiety levels" as a way to gauge their mental health according to a metric. Contradicting Freud's (1952) claim that people have fears but are anxious, this reflects a growing vigilance over our emotional states and added pressure to conform to a new norm of mental health and wellness. Rather than dismiss this as an incorrect application of philosophical and psychoanalytic concepts, we should put popular notions and academic theories of anxiety in conversation with each other. The distinct objectless-ness of anxiety provides anthropologists with insights into the everyday making and unmaking of the self and prompts new questions about anxiety's role in social institutions. What kinds of social resources are used to channel unfocused fear into something more manageable, and to whom are they available? How can anxiety be converted into fear by identifying a threatening object? What gets left out in the process, and what happens if this process fails? How do cultural models of the self mediate anxiety? Is the fragmentation of selfhood experienced as an interruption or a continuation?[9] Moreover, the study of the intimate construction of selfhood need not be limited to the study of individual subjectivity. Indeed, a critical phenomenology that examines lived experience in relation to social and economic inequality has been used to shed light on immigration (Willen 2019), disasters and humanitarianism (Seale-Feldman 2020), and the war on drugs (Zigon 2019). Next, I examine how anxiety reflects the subjective experience of Vietnam's ongoing transition to a market economy. The freedom to

imagine, choose, and navigate the possibilities of economic growth comes with a dizzying price.

THE AGE OF ANXIETY

Over a dinner of stir-fried beef and squash blossoms and a seafood hot pot, the Phạm siblings were trying to remember how their cousin had died. Yến, the fifty-five-year-old middle sister who was hosting us in her house, thought that he was picked off by a Cambodian sniper during the Third Indochina War in 1978. According to the oldest brother, Kiệt, sixty-eight, the cousin perished in a reeducation camp, an ordeal that Kiệt, a pilot in the ROV Air Force, had survived. The debate was never settled, however, because it led to more questions about the fates of other distant relatives or childhood friends and neighbors during the final days of the Second Indochina War and its chaotic aftermath. The answers to who had died, escaped, and were separated or reunited were told in spare but still gutting details. As Kiệt and his brothers and sisters raced to tell me story after story about the sacrifices made for and because of the nation's goal of mass collectivization, I could hear in the next room this family's next generation, most of whom were too young to remember much of the subsidy era. They were watching the latest American pop-culture phenomenon to make its way to Vietnam, the Disney Channel TV movie *High School Musical*. The film's message of being true to yourself celebrates individualism, but it ends with an upbeat song titled "We're All in This Together."

Six years later, in 2013, I visited Kiệt at his home—a platform raised halfway up from an apartment building's garage—and immediately noticed, but did not say, that he had become worrisomely gaunt. At one point, a young man with a shaggy beard climbed up the ladder and greeted me. "You don't recognize him, do you?" Kiệt said. It was his now twenty-two-year-old son Nam. I asked Nam what he had been doing since I last saw him with his cousins, but like many family elders in Vietnam, Kiệt took the liberty of answering the question for him. Nam had studied management at university and took additional Korean language classes, hoping to eventually find a job that would involve overseas travel. Upon graduating with high marks, Nam received job offers from several South Korean companies in Vietnam, but he wanted a career in a more creative field and so took a lucrative position as an events planner. Patting Nam's belly, Kiệt said the son had gotten fat while the father became thinner. Obviously proud of his son, Kiệt emphasized Nam's optimistic future. Nam would certainly rise from his family's poverty and maybe bring them out of it in the process. Conversely, Kiệt grew up in an affluent family and had hoped to become a lawyer one day. However, after reunification, his house and finances were seized by the new regime, and upon his release from the reeducation camp he worked as a barber (which is how I met him) because no formally recognized work was available for former ROV officers. Kiệt told me this in the same manner of detached bemusement with which he recounted his

cousin's death. When I asked if this still upset him, he replied that initially he was furious but now the only thing he could do was to accept (*chịu*) his fate. At least Nam's generation, Kiệt said, can choose whatever they want to do.

The expansion of Nam's choices is largely credited to the *đổi mới* policies that, over the past three decades, have produced one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, second only to Vietnam's giant neighbor to the north, China. Indeed, neoliberalism, as both ideology and economic policy, promises freedom from constraints on growth and self-expression in the global marketplace, through individual freedom and choice (Harvey 2007). By the end of the 1980s, *đổi mới* had dismantled the unpopular rationing system of the subsidy period and established further engagement with the global economy and an "open door" (*mở cửa*) policy toward foreign direct investment (Beresford 2008). As in the former Soviet Bloc and across late-socialist Asia, private enterprise has since eclipsed the command economy as state-owned enterprises laid off most of their employees, once championed as the foundation of a socialist utopia (Yan 2010; Makovicky 2014). For example, under Maoism many Chinese were individuated by dismantling traditional kin and village organizations in order to foster allegiance toward the state (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Furthermore, the implementation of neoliberal reforms disembedded people from state collectives used to define them in relation to the state (Yan 2010). Meanwhile, opportunities for work in Vietnam's informal sector became more plentiful as the United States lifted its trade embargo and normalized diplomatic relations in the 1990s. Marking the transition away from an agriculturally based economy, real estate development and construction, manufacturing, and more recently software development have brought significant amounts of speculation into the economy.

However, the Vietnamese Communist Party has deployed neoliberal principles in strategically uneven ways. For example, the decreased public presence of the state and increased volatility of the market have not come at the expense of socialist governance but rather reinforce state sovereignty (Nguyễn-Võ 2008). Thus, like so many other neoliberal projects throughout the region, the very incompleteness of *đổi mới* suggests that neoliberalism is best viewed not as a monolithic and autonomous entity but rather as a historically contingent set of divergent practices and institutions that stem from and encourage the deregulation of formerly public domains (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012). Given the irregular distribution of *đổi mới*, access to neoliberal ideals and practices varies by gender, class, generation, and regional background, resulting in fluid and hybridized political subjectivities (Pashigian 2012). Thus, rather than debating whether East and Southeast Asia can rightly be characterized as neoliberal or not, scholars should focus on how social and political actors navigate and adapt neoliberal principles for their own purposes.

The key to neoliberalism's mode of production may lie precisely in its ability to dominate through insecurity and precarity (Bourdieu 2003). Anticipation has

become key to managing the risks of the *đổi mới* economy (Dao 2020). In a capitalist labor market, job requirements constantly change, and fears of being left behind prime people to reconfigure themselves according to market demands. As Marx observed of the origins of capitalism, people become alienated not only from others but also from themselves as a result of economic competition. That is, people's relationships to each other both reflect and become their attitudes toward themselves; alienation from others eventually becomes a form of self-alienation (May 1950). The affective milieu of contemporary global capitalism has become more diffuse and ambiguous than the political passions of fear and anger that characterize Hobbesian theories of modern sovereignty. Rather, the ambient flatness of the "sentiments of disenchantment" like anxiety, cynicism, and distraction have become integral to capitalist modes of production (Virno 2004).

To investigate the affective implications of neoliberal policies for self and personhood, anthropologists have turned to Michel Foucault's notion of the technologies of the self, or the tools people use to transform their own conduct, bodies, and minds so as to achieve "a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988, 18). How people submit to neoliberal regimes and are themselves changed in the process is guided by a set of discourses that promotes a sense of reflexivity, most notably about the self, at all levels of society. Neoliberal reforms demand and rely on cultivating a new type of citizen who can cope with the withdrawal of the state from public life: someone who is flexible, autonomous, and oriented to an ethics of personal responsibility (Rose 1999; Brown 2003). "Neoliberal selfways" promote an ongoing project of self-entrepreneurialism, personal growth, and fulfillment as the basis for well-being, and a "freedom from constraint that affords an experience of radical abstraction from context" (Adams et al. 2019, 191). With social and personal identities now less fixed by long-standing norms, people become entrepreneurs of their own selves: objects to be manipulated to suit the demands of the capitalist marketplace (Giddens 1991). As both the seller and the commodity to be sold on the market, they are put into conflict over their own inner values of themselves and develop a sense of self-worth that depends on forces beyond their own control (Illouz 2007). Furthermore, not only do people learn new occupational skills to become upwardly mobile, but they must also apply these principles to their inner self; the accumulation of capital becomes not an end but a means of reinventing the self (Freeman 2014).

However, the Foucauldian emphasis on often abstract discourses yields a passive figure that seems wholly saturated by market principles. Here, people have virtually no choice but to become ideal neoliberal subjects. Focusing on the hybrid assemblages that result from encounters with demands for self-responsibility and autonomy works against a monolithically "neoliberal self" (Ong and Zhang 2008; Freeman 2014), and documenting the specificities of Vietnam's historical and cultural context in addition to *đổi mới*'s effects on personhood avoids overreaching with any claims of a "neoliberal self" (Leshkowich 2014b). Because purported

neoliberal traits break considerably from the traits of collectivism that Vietnamese often use to describe themselves as a nation (see chapters 2 and 3), many people struggle with how to adopt them. Indeed, while Ho Chi Minh City residents engage with neoliberal discourses of the self, this process is neither straightforward nor inevitable. Close attention to ethnographic and historical detail reveals that qualities that may coincide with neoliberal imperatives are, in fact, supported by socialist and Confucian regimes of selfhood.

Ethnographic analyses of neoliberalism need not stop at documenting the cultural and historical differences in personhood that conflict and interfere with ideals related to self-determination. Attention to the subjective experience of subject formation reveals that neoliberal self-making projects can never be complete because they rest on a fundamental lack. The new demands of the subject are articulated not as a positive determination but rather as an open injunction. While the Communist Party in Vietnam provides concrete directions on how to be a good socialist—remember the fatherland, have no more than two children, and so on—no clear guide exists for neoliberal selfhood. Rather, as Žižek (1989) notes, neoliberal imperatives are framed as open injunctions to be free (e.g., "Just be yourself"). However, the differences between these ideals and how people live up to them can be stark. People know they must determine themselves and their happiness on their own, but there is no explicit way for them to do so. With an unclear objective, the self is oriented to a lack with no object to fill it. People have many more options in choosing their own social roles and identities, but this is itself an anxiety-inducing process (Fromm 1941).

Anxiety, then, is what people "feel when the world reveals itself to be caught up in the space between two frames" (Weber 1991, 167). Because these projects rest on a self that requires an object for definition, they are doomed to fail. In turn, this triggers a spiral of worry that people manage by producing industrious subjects and collectives. Neoliberalism thrives on this failure. Because the drive for self-realization has become a responsibility, failure brings not just social disapproval but also self-contempt. In this light, anxiety is both a social practice for becoming a rational, autonomous, and self-governed subject but also evidence of the failure to become that subject. The recursivity of this anxiety plays a powerful role in the production and reproduction of neoliberal subjectivities. Uncertainty about the future may produce intense anxiety, but the future is more ominous still from a perspective that itself is not secure.

Hương, a forty-five-year-old woman, could probably relate to Kiệt's situation in one key way despite her politically favorable family history (lý lịch) and, thus, much different postwar trajectory. The daughter of a high-ranking Party member from Hanoi, she was among the first Vietnamese college students to study in the United States after the normalization of diplomatic relations. Now working in the upper management of a German corporation's offices in Ho Chi Minh City, she and her two children lived in a newly constructed high-rise apartment popular

with foreigners (where one of her neighbors was an American psychotherapist, discussed in chapter 5). Yet even with her family connections, she remembered her ten-year-old self constantly scheming to secure basic necessities during the subsidy era. "I had to think (*suy nghĩ*) about [how to do] everything," Hương said, adding in English that "you had to fight tooth and nail just to survive." Conversely, her fourteen-year-old son Quý, who was then vacationing with his cousins in Australia, could not do anything on his own. "No street smarts," she laughed.

Both Hương and Kiệt found it difficult to reconcile the gulf between their and their children's experiences and expectations, and they were not alone. Throughout my fieldwork, members of multiple generations commented on the differences between those who came of age before and after the growth of Vietnam's economy. Of course, people's particular class, age, gender, political affiliation, and family history shape their vantage points on the generation gaps and continue to inflect the course of their lives. Despite the vast array of their perspectives, conversations with Ho Chi Minh City residents often drifted to how older generations managed to sacrifice for the younger ones. Certainly, Hương and Kiệt were grateful that their children would likely never face as much suffering as they had or have to accept such bitter fates. Yet the contemporary promise to determine one's future comes with strings attached. Nam, Quý, and their contemporaries indeed have more options than ever before, but caught between multiple frames they are forced into making more decisions with fewer givens to rely upon, more ambiguous criteria, and less stability and support.

MIDDLE-CLASS ASPIRATIONS AND MORALITIES

With the fastest-growing middle class in Southeast Asia, Vietnam aims to achieve high-middle-income status by 2035, when half its population will have joined the global middle class (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam 2016). Party officials see the path to their ambitious economic target through expanding and supporting an urbanizing middle-class society. Since I began my research, Ho Chi Minh City residents have learned to occupy new spaces of consumerism with greater confidence. Clothing brands and smartphones that seemed out of reach for most of the people I knew ten years ago are now commonplace. Charmingly dilapidated apartment buildings and maze-like alleyways have become crammed with craft beer and cocktail bars, sushi and ramen restaurants, and (of course) cafés that rely more on social media presence than on visibility from the street to attract their clientele. A rumor spread that all buildings under four stories on Thanh Đa, a five-hundred-hectare island in the Saigon River, would be demolished to make way for luxury high-rises, state-of-the-art schools, a new metro line, and even a well-manicured dog park. For many Vietnamese, the rise of the country's middle class is a sign of economic progress but also of widening inequality and environmental degradation (Hansen 2017).

   While the impact of the middle class on Ho Chi Minh City's landscape is obvious, defining Vietnam's middle class has proved to be notoriously difficult. Developed for Western populations, standard economic criteria such as household income ignore critical nuances of class formation throughout Southeast Asia (Bélanger et al. 2012). Thus, following Bourdieu (1984), ethnographic analyses of the Vietnamese middle class go beyond purely economic and materialist readings of class to take into account the clusters of practices, aesthetics, and affects that stem from self-consciously middle-class citizenship and lifestyles. For example, the construction of a Vietnamese middle-class identity occurs in relation to creative practices (Taylor 2012; Peters 2012), gender and family (Hoang 2015; Shohet 2017), transportation (Hansen 2017; Earl 2020), and beauty, health, and fitness (Leshkowich 2012; Nguyen Tu 2021), among others. The individuals taking part in them vary widely in terms of standard class markers such as occupation, education, or even income. Thus, the middle class in Ho Chi Minh City is less a distinct segment of the population than a cultural project and negotiation over what it means to be a modern and, increasingly, global citizen (Higgins 2008).[10] This project is rooted in economic trends that have sweeping implications for much of the country, but it is most accessible to those with the skills and technologies to take part in middle-class practices.

   The relative economic comfort of the global middle class does not simply shield people from anxiety. Indeed, the construction of the middle class may create new forms of insecurity for Ho Chi Minh City residents. The contemporary abundance of choices, consumer and otherwise, is a distinct break from the subsidy era, when the state supplied people with few options for their daily goods. Today's supermarkets and retail stores give customers dozens of brands to select from and express themselves with. As in reform-era China (McGrath 2008), the everyday imperative to choose confronts people with the fact that their decisions change the future. This, in turn, emphasizes how everyday life is contingent on people's choices and their own responsibility in managing it.[11] The personal stakes of everyday decisions are higher when people believe that they have the ability to fulfill their own desires through a rational assessment of future possibilities. The freedoms and choices made available under *đổi mới* create the conditions for anxiety as individuals must carry "the widespread and unforeseeable implications of one's decision upon [their] shoulders" (Wicks 2009, 211).

   New goods and leisure activities may simply pass the time, but they also introduce people to new ideas about personal taste and the difference between the good life and a meaningful one. Ambitions for a particular lifestyle become a project for a desired future self (Elinoff 2012). With so many more options, people both raise their expectations and compare their own selections with those of others. Consumer practices, in turn, become fraught with anxiety over the cultivation of an appropriate taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013). The expansion of "aspirational horizons" may result in profound anxieties about the good life and what

needs to be done in order to attain one (Chua 2014). Furthermore, because the promise and threat of upward and downward mobility, respectively, exist alongside each other for the middle class, people face new insecurities related to the "longing to secure" an increasingly precarious social position (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012; Stewart 2010). Since Asia's new middle class is legally and economically less protected than the established elite, their economic resources are insufficient to guarantee a respectable place in society (Zhang 2012). The broadening of social practices in constructing middle-classness opens debate on who can legitimately claim a particular status. Hence, the management of middle-class subjectivity across cultural and national boundaries requires constant monitoring and maintenance of one's class identity through the navigation of social boundaries and moral dilemmas.

Moreover, the *đổi mới* reforms have not erased socialist ideals that hold wealth in suspicion. Its critics charge that the market economy encourages selfish and greedy accumulation and that open-door policies expose the population to Western ideas that undermine long-standing values and relationships (Leshkowich 2014a). Thus, new consumer products and services are the source of both new-found pleasures and an ethical ambivalence about them (Jellema 2005). Many Ho Chi Minh City residents accuse Vietnam's new superrich of attaining their extravagant wealth through corruption and exploitation. Conversely, the middle class balance their new lifestyles with prudent morality—at least according to those who consider themselves to be in their ranks. The pressure to maintain one's own moral standing in ethically ambiguous terrain often leads people to reaffirm gender and family norms that are foundational to moral personhood in Vietnam (Trinh 2022). Of course, Ho Chi Minh City's middle class does not hold a monopoly on anxiety, as worries about appropriate consumption, underachievement, and missed opportunities also extend beyond the fringes of the middle class. Perhaps what most characterizes the anxieties of the upwardly mobile, then, is how they emerge in relation to aspirations toward particular ways of being in the world associated with middle-class lifestyles. Working toward them becomes a project of self and class-making that increasingly rely on skills and technologies associated with the psy-disciplines.

BEYOND THE CLINIC

During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when much of the world was in lockdown and people with shortened attention spans sought out both distraction and mental health support, therapist influencers gained a foothold across social media platforms. Following the mold of wellness influencers who dispense advice on diet and exercise, these famous-on-the-internet psychotherapists promote a kind of emotional fitness. Due to the successful containment of the coronavirus, Vietnam enjoyed a relative degree of normality during the first

eighteen months of the pandemic, but the arrival of the more infectious Delta variant in the spring of 2021 sent much of the country into lockdown. Popular interest in mental health, especially among young people, soared. The most well known of Vietnam's therapist influencers is a twenty-three-year-old teacher and counselor at an international school in Hanoi[12] named Đinh Ngọc Bình, who operates under the username @ngocbinhtamly (Ngọc Bình Psychology) and boasts more than 260,000 followers on TikTok, a short-form video sharing app. Sporting his trademark oversized eyeglasses and a pearl necklace, he addresses a wide range of mental health topics of interest to his fellow "Gen Zers" (people born between the late 1990s and the 2010s), including emotional intelligence (*trí tuệ cảm xúc*), parental conflicts and pressures, toxic relationships (*MQH* [*mối quan hệ*] *toxic*), and career paths in psychology.

In most of his posts, Ngọc Bình speaks directly into the camera as if the viewer were one of his clients. For a video on how to reduce stress (*strés* or *căng thẳng*), he suggests concentrating on your bodily sensations, breathing, and footsteps.[13] These tips are derived from the mindfulness meditation practices made famous in the West by the Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, but no reference to their Buddhist origins is made in the video. Ngọc Bình's final suggestion for decreasing tension—reserving time to do something you like—coincides with footage of him shopping for brand-name basketball shoes. Another TikTok is set to the trending sound of a selection from the song "Choices (Yup)" by the American West Coast rapper E-40.[14] As in other video posts with the same audio track, Ngọc Bình points to text appearing on screen, nodding his head in disapproval or smiling and giving a thumbs up to the words *nope* and *yup*, in time with the music. This video, in particular, is on the "do's and don'ts" of depression. The "nopes" to avoid include drinking alcohol, pretending to be optimistic, and diagnosing yourself with depression, among other maladaptive strategies. The "yups" are writing down one's sorrow, accepting one's sadness, and talking about it with a close friend or a professional. The warning about self-diagnosing and the prompt to consult a psychotherapist underscore the field's professional expertise. A major theme throughout his posts is the importance of embracing all of the emotions in life, not just the positive, prosocial ones. As an unofficial ambassador of psychotherapy in Vietnam, Ngọc Bình raises awareness of the intellectual and emotional tools of psychology that help people understand not just themselves but others as well (Chi Mai 2022).

Ngọc Bình's rise to fame is part of an emerging "psycho-boom" (Kleinman 2010) across East and Southeast Asia. Popular interest not just in psychiatry and psychotherapy but also in self-help literature, lifestyle coaching, and inspirational videos, memes, and marketing campaigns shared on social media reflects a growing industry of self-interest (Yang 2014; Zhang 2014). Mental health workers have grown in force: school counselors, speech and language pathologists, and advanced behavioral analysts, in addition to psychotherapists and psychiatrists.

The vocabulary of madness (điên rồ), too, has proliferated to include biomedical terms such as *stress* (*strés*), *depression* (*trầm cảm*), and *autism* (*tự kỷ*).[15] The new understandings of the inner self that are being used by many people—not just mental health professionals—as the basis for reimagining one's self and its place in the world are critical to the psycho-boom's market in Vietnam (Tran 2017). The cultivation and aesthetic appreciation of one's own interiority constructs the self as a modern individual (i.e., one who self-consciously defies feudal traditions and collective definitions of the self in favor of self-determination). Once deemed too abstract, psychological concepts about emotion, self-esteem, and unconscious desires have seeped into everyday conversation. Advocates of the turn toward the psychological claim that it is only to be expected. Echoing Maslow's hierarchy of needs,[16] their argument posits that the relative ease with which people's physical needs are fulfilled in the reform era allows them to focus their energies on their emotional ones.

However, changing economic tides cannot wholly account for the inward turn that has become a hallmark of neoliberal economies. Self-discovery is not a natural process, but rather must be learned. Increasingly, people are taught to discover themselves with conceptual tools from the professional fields of knowledge related to the workings of the mind that Nikolas Rose terms the *psy-disciplines*. In the West, the psy-disciplines compel individuals to make everyday life a project of the self and give them the tools to reinvent the self. People are meant to work on their emotions, spousal relations, and affective labor in the workplace and cultivate a lifestyle that maximizes their own existence to themselves (Rose 1992). The late-capitalist demand for soft skills depends on forms of psychological expertise in school and workplace environments, and increasingly those skills are being taken home (Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2008). Furthermore, methods to maximize self-efficiency draw from psychotherapeutic techniques. For example, in addition to private psychotherapy sessions, many counseling centers in Vietnam offer seminars on conflict resolution to teams at businesses and schools. Together, therapeutic culture and neoliberal entrepreneurialism posit the individual as the site of healing and self-making as well as of economic development and personal alienation (Freeman 2014; Duncan 2018).

Perhaps nowhere are the characteristics of the self-sufficient, individuated neoliberal subject cultivated and naturalized so well as in the clinic (Rose 2006; Furedi 2004), and critics of biomedical psychiatry and its global spread charge that the field naturalizes neoliberal ideas of selfhood under the guise of healing. Indeed, psychological research that focuses on psychological phenomena independent of their cultural and historical context both reflects and reinforces neoliberal ideals that posit a radical distinction between self and society (Adams et al. 2019). The Western discourse of psychiatry is not only used to introduce new ideas about feelings and behavior but also to regulate them for political and economic gain

(Ecks 2016). For example, the recent movement for global mental health has largely gained traction by highlighting the negative impacts of psychiatric distress on economic productivity, not just physical health (Patel 2014). The Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development (Patel et al. 2018) estimated that the global mental health crisis will cost $16 trillion by 2030. Mental health concerns have also taken center stage in recent years at the World Bank, the United Nations General Assembly, and the Davos Forum. Public health-oriented research on the burden of mental illness in non-Western contexts often addresses the lack of proper mental health literacy among the most vulnerable of populations and the need to educate health care workers and patients about proper mental health care. However, to what end would addressing the "mental health gap" between those who need treatment and those who receive it actually benefit people in the Global South (Rose 2019)? Has the rise of biomedical psychiatry, often at the expense of local ways of understanding and treating mental illness, led to a new form of medical imperialism (Summerfield 2008)?

While the conceptual framework of neoliberal subject formation does have considerable explanatory power, it does not adequately account for the ambivalences and contradictions that psy-discipline's advocates—experts and laypersons alike—often experience with these new technologies of the self. Despite the power of global mental health's new ways of imagining the self, they do not replace local understandings of moral selfhood. After all, Ngọc Bình's videos stress the use of emotional intelligence in service of understanding oneself and others. Cường, a twenty-four-year-old graduate student, was drawn to clinical psychology because, according to him, he struggled to understand himself and communicate with his family. He found in his studies the means to get into another person's perspective, which he would need to bridge the gap in experience and perspective between him and his parents, who suffered staggering family losses and personal injuries during and after the war. According to Cường, their conception of a good life emphasizes stability and safety over the meaning and passion he desired for his own career. For him, psychology is a tool for better enacting filial piety. The desire to communicate himself better to his parents reflects a need for their validation, which runs against neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency and autonomy. Indeed, emerging forms of psychiatric practice may also generate therapeutic sites of sociality, not just individuality, to contest such projects and comment on their failures (Duncan 2017).

The concept of psy-sociality frames global mental health practices as a means of governance and healing (Duncan 2017; Matza 2018). New individual identities and social formations have emerged from an expertise of the mind and a community of emotional pain (Duncan 2018). Psy-sociality foregrounds the social connections that are remade in the wake of the neoliberalization of everyday life. Despite the glaring hegemonic imposition of Western concepts of personhood

and emotion implied in the globalization of biomedical psychiatry, patients and practitioners alike find that much of these regimes of knowledge resonates with their own experiences. In spaces of conflict and contradiction, people transform both themselves and these technologies of the self as they negotiate competing visions of a good and moral life. Imagining new potentials and limits for one's life requires a realignment of existing ones, and attending to this process provides insight into the pleasures and perils of the psy-disciplines.

Although the psychotherapeutic turn may seem limited to a small but growing community of disciples, it has far-reaching implications for contemporary Vietnamese society. If new landscapes of the psychological alter the horizon of the political (Matza 2018), shifting configurations of the mind and heart shape ongoing debates over not just what it means to be happy and healthy, but also what it means to be true to yourself or to be a Vietnamese citizen. Ho Chi Minh City residents use the psy-disciplines to make sense of not only themselves but also the current historical moment. Since ideas about the self are intertwined with different forms of anxiety, new models of the self occasion new forms of anxiety. *A Life of Worry* takes the presence of anxiety as something that is not simply good or bad, normal or abnormal, or healthy or pathological. Dichotomies that implicitly frame anxiety as something that prevents well-being rely on a medicalized logic of self-maximization. Rather, anxiety is evidence of people's struggles with reconciling the conflicting demands of the individual and the social.

THE BEST-LAID PLANS

On January 1, 2007, I arrived in Ho Chi Minh City to study the long-term impacts of war on mental health with several topics to explore and methods to deploy, very few of which would actually prove useful. One of these was to construct a cultural taxonomy of emotions. Doing so would identify the dominant feelings of the reform era and allow for comparisons across historical periods. Research participants would be asked to do a pile sort exercise in which they read through a list of items and then group them into categories. Thus, the first step of my data collection was to generate an inventory of different emotions (*cảm xúc*, a term I explore further in chapter 3). My plan was to simply ask a wide range of people to name various examples of emotions. How hard could it be?

Several months and bureaucratic hurdles later, my research assistant Vững and I, guided by representatives from a local ward's people's committee, finally set out with pen and paper to conduct a free list exercise. When Vững asked if we should collect data only from people with a college degree, he explained that only the most educated people would be able to complete the activity. I dismissed his concern. Why would people with less education be unable to identify various feelings? Given that educational levels are often used as a proxy for socioeconomic status in Vietnam, focusing only on college graduates would skew the sample to

the upper class. Of course, Vũng's prediction was right. College graduates seemed to enjoy the task. I often noted a wry smile on their faces as they came up with items for the free list: happiness (*vui*) and satisfaction (*hài lòng*), sadness/boredom (*buồn*) and gloominess (*u sầu*), anger (*giận dữ*) and jealousy (*ghen tuông*), lovestruck (*phải lòng*) and lovesick (*thất tình*), and maudlin (*ướt át*). One of my favorite entries, *phê*, from the word *cà phê* (coffee), refers to a state of passion and flow when engrossed by a new work of art or a favorite pastime and physiologically resembles the buzz of caffeine. Meanwhile, people with less education often struggled to produce more than a handful of examples. Many were confused by the term *emotions*, so we tried a number of synonyms—including "psychological sentiments" (*tình cảm tâm lý*), "joys and sorrows" (*vui buồn*), and the classifiers for negative and positive emotions (*nỗi niềm*)—to little avail. Others wrote down types of relationships, such as wife and husband (*vợ chồng*) or mother and child (*má con*). What began as an attempt to identify the range of emotions that epitomizes the contemporary moment instead found that perhaps the very concept of emotion itself is indicative of an emergent subjectivity.

Clearly, I had to go back to the drawing board. During these long stretches of free time at the beginning of fieldwork, I frequented a sidewalk café consisting of plastic tables and stools that were moved throughout the day to follow the shade of my apartment complex. Each time I went there, I resolved not to go back upstairs until I had thought through a logistical challenge in my research or at least reached some new insight into it, sometimes ordering a second cup of *cà phê sữa đá* (iced coffee with condensed milk) to keep me alert. The more I did this, however, the worse my problems seemed to get, and I often found myself in a panic—heart racing, hands shaking, thinking catastrophic—over my research. This was not the *phê* of an intellectual breakthrough. I did not realize at the time that a *cà phê sữa đá* is much stronger than the brewed coffee I drank in the United States—the robusta beans grown in Vietnam have twice as much caffeine as the arabica beans that are more common in the rest of the world. Did I panic because of a genuine concern over my research or because of a *cà phê sữa đá*? Of course, both factors played a role at the sidewalk café. Anthropologists have long been drawn to the study of emotion because of this interplay between the embodied and the interpretive. Robert Levy (1984) argued that emotions are a subset of physical feelings that are attributed to causes external to the body. When people believe that these sensations come from within the body, they often label them as some form of illness. Thus, when I assumed that my heartbeat and thoughts were racing because of fieldwork problems, I labeled them anxiety—which I tried to overcome by persevering with more coffee. When I belatedly realized I was also ingesting unhealthy amounts of caffeine, the same problem had the opposite solution. This book is less invested in the question of whether or not my alarm—or anyone else's—was "real" than in exploring how people determine the presence of anxiety when they experience it themselves or encounter it among others. As my

changing interpretations of those bouts of panic demonstrate, emotions are partly constructed by how they are perceived. Bated breath, dilated pupils, and a rapid heartbeat are signs of anxiety in relation to an expected outcome that is bleak, but those same bodily states can be experienced as excitement in a more optimistic mode. The manner in which Ho Chi Minh City residents come to classify physical, mental, and social states as one emotion or another impacts their understanding and experience of themselves as emotional beings.

How people assess their anxiety is not just a theoretical question but a methodological one as well. Throughout the book, I chronicle how Ho Chi Minh City residents gauge, control, expel, avoid, sublimate, and give in to their anxieties. This documentation does not simply provide a voyeuristic perspective into the worried minds of the Vietnamese. Indeed, no objective method of collecting or analyzing data on anxiety (or anything else for that matter) exists in the anthropological tool kit. Because researchers' subject positions mediate their observations and interpretations, deep empathy is not enough to transcend the differences between various frameworks on anxiety. The analytical task at hand, then, is not to transcend these affective filters. Translating them has the benefit of contextualizing the emotions, but we should not be so naive as to believe that a translation thorough enough can yield mutual understanding. As biomedical theories of anxiety increasingly gain professional stature and widespread acceptance in Vietnam, the power differences between the various models of emotion, affect, and sentiment mask points of contention and conflict. I had to be highly aware of my own filters and biases through which I interpret anxiety, and I invite readers to do the same. Thus, this research and this book, the product of that research, is an intersubjective achievement (Throop 2010) in which we will encounter experiences that resonate with our own life story. Yet, like a certain kitchen half a world away, the context of these strangely familiar feelings is different, and that context makes all the difference.

Developing an interpersonal model of anxiety recognizes that relationships can be a powerful medium of anxiety. Ho Chi Minh City residents often process emotional experiences in a relational idiom (see chapters 2 and 3). For them, worry emerges from and functions as part of people's connections with family and friends, neighbors and fellow citizens, and a visiting anthropologist, among others. Indeed, how my interlocutors and I related to each other may have influenced their own reflections on the emotions. Interviewing techniques such as actively listening, probing, and following up coincide with expressions of concern that implicated me in the mutual relations of care that define worry in Vietnam. (Of course, these are not mutually exclusive!) In life history and person-centered ethnographic interviews with a wide range of Ho Chi Minh City residents, my interlocutors and I explored their emotional lives as I invited them to reflect on themselves. Some said they did not often get these opportunities, mentioning fear of judgment, gossip, or unsolicited advice from their usual social circles. They used

our conversations to mull over and experiment with emerging ideas about the emotions, mental health, and the good life.

Furthermore, relational components of ethnographic methods are tied to the researchers' own positionality. Calling for a reflexive dialogue about the racial, gender, and class dynamics that underpin research methodologies, Hoang (2015) notes that her identity as a Vietnamese American researcher gave her insider access on a temporary basis while marking her as a permanent outsider. Upon learning I was an American-born child of Vietnamese refugees, many Ho Chi Minh City residents told me that their "dream" (they used the English word) was to visit or even move to the United States. Many detailed, often with a bitter laugh, their failed attempts to "cross the sea" (*vượt biển*) during the subsidy era. The United States loomed large in their imagination as a proverbial land of milk and honey and the pinnacle of modernity to which they aspired. Responding to some of my questions and probes about their personal experiences, people occasionally asked me, in return, what an American would do in their situation, or framed their answers explicitly in apologetic and self-deprecating terms of how they understood the differences between Vietnamese and American culture. The self-Orientalizing manner in which my interlocutors dichotomized West from East, and modern from traditional, should not be taken at face value, but rather should be understood as a heuristic device for making sense of the changes in their own surroundings.

The clearest articulations of new ways of worrying in Ho Chi Minh City are to be found at the psychiatric clinic and, increasingly, in psychotherapeutic offices. My clinical ethnography was based at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital outpatient clinic as well as at Army Hospital 175 in Ho Chi Minh City and the National Psychiatric Hospital II in Biên Hoà in neighboring Đồng Nai Province. Most of my time was spent with patients as they made their way through the hospitals' complex bureaucratic system, but I also interviewed and observed doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators. During my initial research trips to Ho Chi Minh City, examining nonpharmaceutical treatments for mental health problems was difficult, given the dearth of psychotherapeutic services. The following decade, however, saw a burgeoning industry of private counseling centers that I documented by interviewing therapists and clients and attending training courses, workshops, and networking events for local and foreign psy-experts, including special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, and recent Vietnamese college graduates returning from their studies abroad with degrees in psychology that they hoped to parlay into careers in psychotherapy.

Tracing the extent of the reach of the psy-disciplines requires us to expand our analytical focus to everyday spaces of work and leisure in Ho Chi Minh City. To explore the less clearly demarcated area of the evolving emotional life of Ho Chi Minh City's middle class, I initially relied on snowball sampling from a small

number of research contacts. Eventually, this network expanded widely, as many of the participants generously facilitated the research because they found the topic to be *hay* (interesting). When possible, I met with people in their homes in order to observe the household dynamics. However, these dynamics also prevented insightful individual interviews, as multigenerational homes came with significant interruptions. Given that the city's public spaces provide more privacy than crowded households, individual interviews were usually conducted at cafés. Going to new cafés is a popular pastime in Ho Chi Minh City, which has a thriving café culture ranging from simple sidewalk cafés to brick-and-mortar establishments with opulent gardens and rooftop terraces. These "third spaces," separate from the home and the workplace, offer opportunities to explore new ideas and experiment with new identities. Here, the interviews could blend in with the social outings, business meetings, and study sessions happening around us. Critically, this anonymity allowed me to interview women, as meeting in a private home risks accusations of impropriety from ever-present neighbors.

Part 1 of this book examines the resources people use to make sense of anxious experiences. At the heart of why I had problems with the free-list exercise in the first place was my assumption that emotions were a category of everyday experience relevant to most Ho Chi Minh City residents. Indeed, as much as Westerners take the emotions as a bedrock of shared human experience, this notion varied in Vietnam. While every person I met in Ho Chi Minh City believed that some kind of affective process is critical to one's humanity in general as well as to one's identity in particular, what these processes look like and their implications for understanding anxiety differ along fault lines of class, gender, and generation. While this chapter provides an overview of academic theories of anxiety, chapter 2 explores how Ho Chi Minh City residents understand it. For them, anxiety and worry are forms of moral sentiment that connect people through gendered relations of care. (Notions of sentiment are predicated on ideals of a relational selfhood, hence the free-list entries of social relationships.) Worrying for someone puts an individual in a relationship marked by an acknowledgment of their vulnerability and a concern for their well-being. Chapter 3 explores an alternative discourse of emotion and selfhood emerging among Ho Chi Minh City's upwardly mobile. The categories of sentiment and emotion are not simply empty vessels of affective experience. The shape that people give to an amorphous experience like anxiety impacts how it is experienced, interpreted, and acted upon. Whether anxiety is interpreted through the lens of a moral sentiment or an emotion reflects a class position in the context of increasing economic inequality. Ho Chi Minh City's middle class has found in the emotions a new way of being-in-the-world. Together, chapters 2 and 3 document the perhaps futile attempts to pin down anxiety, that most inchoate and free-floating of experiences.

Part 2 focuses on one of anxiety's most extreme manifestations: mental illness. Critics of biomedical psychiatry argue that the clinic naturalizes the self-sufficient,

individuated neoliberal subject by medicalizing emotional distress. However, I disentangle this process by demonstrating that the medicalization (chapter 4) and psychologization (chapter 5) of anxiety are distinct processes in Vietnam. Whether people receive psychopharmaceutical or psychotherapeutic treatments, they are taught to focus on the problematic emotion itself instead of on the physical symptoms of mental illnesses or the social situations that give rise to them. Patients at the Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital are encouraged to identify anxiety as the ultimate target of intervention instead of the headaches and insomnia that brought them to the hospital, and clients undergoing cognitive behavioral therapy learn to identify triggering situations and label their reactions to them as anxiety. If new landscapes of the psychological alter the horizon of the political, shifting configurations of the mind and heart shape ongoing debates over not just what it means to be happy and healthy but also what it means to be your authentic self or a Vietnamese citizen.

However, part 2 also illuminates how engagement with biomedical treatments such as psychopharmaceuticals (chapter 4) and psychotherapy (chapter 5) may generate new forms of sociality, not just the turn inward that many critics predict. Although these treatments are designed to promote the neoliberal ideal of self-governance, the psy-turn also lays the foundation for alternative regimes of selfhood (Matza 2018; Duncan 2018; Zhang 2020). The experience of Ho Chi Minh City residents with the psy-disciplines cautions against dismissing them as altogether apolitical. Instead, these experiences shift the criteria of what counts as political. People use ideas rooted in psychotherapeutic models of anxiety to critique the limits placed on their lives and rethink the possibilities for themselves and their families (Pritzker and Duncan 2019). Indeed, new understandings of the emotions in general provide clients a third-person perspective on themselves, their loved ones, and their communities through richly embodied experiences of relating to others.

Part 3 inverts many of the themes of part 1. Instead of analyzing how anxiety is articulated by social roles, discourses, and institutions, these chapters focus on how anxiety itself is a socially productive force to be reckoned with. I return to the supposed futilities of understanding anxiety as sentiment or emotion to examine them not as limitations but rather as motivation for social action. Moving beyond the clinic, chapter 6 investigates what happens when Ho Chi Minh City residents apply new ideas about the self and emotion to their own lives. People are not always in control of the technologies of the self they use in their romantic self-making projects. Whether by choice or by force, people find themselves in predicaments that effectively shake the rug from underneath them. Figuring out the simple question of what they want out of life calls for a major reconsideration of their priorities. When it comes to matters of the heart, attempts to be a modern subject may create an anxiety about the self that gets (mis)labeled as love. Chapter 7 concludes the book by asking what Vietnam's age of anxiety has to teach us as

a new, global age of anxiety takes shape. I propose an agenda for ethnographic research on anxiety and anxiety disorders. Establishing a cross-cultural framework will help us better appreciate the workings of anxiety and social processes together. I focus most on anxiety's links between the personal and the political. A constant yet unidentifiable sense of unease is not an objective fact but rather something that is cultivated. However, anxiety does not just have dangers and vulnerabilities but also offers new potential for a different kind of politics based on care.