CONSTRUCTING VIETNAMESE WOMANHOOD AND THE PROBLEMATISATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN VIETNAM

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Xuan Hien Nguyen

Date: 20 October 2020

Abstract

Since becoming a communist state under a socialist government, Vietnam has promoted principles of gender equality and called for the abolition of gender practices that are considered backward and feudal. This effort to achieve gender equality takes a Marxist and socialist feminist focus on organisation of labour and the public sphere. It is also closely governed by the state, using emulation campaigns run by the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) as a tool to promote certain state constructions of what it means to be a Vietnamese woman. Often, these constructions focus on women demonstrating their success in productive labour as well as their ability to perform their essentialised role of wife and mother. While this approach resulted in certain improvements in Vietnamese women's access to the labour market and representation in politics, it fails to address structural gender inequality, women's multiple labours, and issues of violence against women such as domestic violence.

Drawing on Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" policy analysis, this thesis examines the effects that this approach where the state governs national constructions of womanhood has on the way domestic violence is problematised in Vietnam. It finds that domestic violence is often not acknowledged as a product of structural gender inequality and unequal relations between men and women. Rather, justifications, such as a man has the right to punish his wife when she does something wrong, or a woman must have done something to deserve getting hit, are often used when discussing domestic violence. This representation of domestic violence contributes to the acceptance of the idea that women, as a good wife, should have the capacity to manage family relationships to create a happy, harmonious family atmosphere, which would contribute to preventing domestic violence. What results from this problematisation of domestic violence is that women are held accountable for the violence they suffer and become responsible for preventing domestic violence against themselves.

The “Five No’s and Three Cleans” campaign, an emulation campaign run by the VWU, represents the state’s significant role in supporting this representation of domestic violence, as well as promoting a construction of Vietnamese womanhood that emphasises, rather than challenges, the perception that women are responsible for domestic duties in the private sphere. With the VWU acting as the leading organisation on women’s issues in Vietnam, this representation of domestic violence dominates Vietnamese society despite contestations from feminist civil society organisations, resulting in the perpetuation of women’s triple burden of productive, reproductive and community labours. Meanwhile, limited engagement of men may bar men from understanding the harms that gender inequality in general, and domestic violence in particular, can have on them, while exacerbating risks of violence against women as a result of men’s resistance to change. This research concludes that these issues currently left undiscussed by gender discourse in Vietnam must be addressed in order for domestic violence prevention efforts to be truly effective and sustainable.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Term
2010 National Study	2010 National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women
2020 National Study	2020 National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women
5N3C Campaign	Five No's and Three Cleans Campaign
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	civil society organisation
DV	domestic violence
DVPC Law	Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control
GAD	gender and development
GSO	General Statistics Office
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
INGO	international non-government organisation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NAoV	National Assembly of Vietnam
NCFAW	National Committee for the Advancement of Women
NGO	non-government organisation
NTPSP	National Targeted Programs for New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction Support Program
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WEE	women's economic empowerment
WHO	World Health Organization
WPR	What's the problem represented to be?
WU	Women's Union

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

There is a saying in Vietnamese, “men build houses, women build homes” (*đàn ông xây nhà, đàn bà xây tổ ấm*[1]). It succinctly conveys the gendered expectations that dominate Vietnamese society regarding the roles of men and women the family. In building houses, men are taking charge of the labour-intensive job which demands physical strength and financial resources. Meanwhile, the word used to mean ‘home’ (*tổ ấm)* is, in fact, a metaphor, literally meaning ‘warm nest’. It implies that, in contrast to men’s duties which require external interactions with society, women are responsible for domestic tasks and the emotional labour of maintaining the fire in the hearth of the family (Ngo 2004). Unmarried people are referred to as ‘not yet having a family’ (*chưa có gia đình*), implying that they will eventually get married (Bélanger & Khuat 2002, p. 310). Men and women’s relationship with the home, and with each other, as implicitly contained in this language, tie them strongly to the institution of heterosexual marriage consisting of husband, wife and children (Vu et al. 2014, p. 638). Thus, marriage and motherhood, in that order, is the accepted universal lifepath for Vietnamese women, and deviations from this family structure is often socially viewed as a personal shortcoming or failure (Bélanger 2004; Bélanger & Khuat 2002).

These phrases, taken for granted in the Vietnamese language, cast the home as a safe place of refuge for members of the family, though this is far from reality. The second and latest National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women published in 2020 shows that nearly 63 per cent of Vietnamese women experience some form of physical, sexual or emotional violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and 90 per cent

[1] In this thesis, I will be using full Vietnamese diacritics when referring to Vietnamese terms for clarity. However, names of Vietnamese authors will be referenced without diacritics as this is how they are often credited when publishing internationally and, as a consequence, the specific diacritics of their names are not always obviously clear.

of these women never report the violence to the authorities or seek help from formal services (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020). Both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from this National Study suggest that domestic violence (DV) against women in Vietnam is widespread, normalised, unreported and largely undiscussed as an issue of gender-based violence or gender inequality (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020).

In the last two decades, Vietnam's social development has seen greater attention and resources devoted to addressing issues of violence against women, including domestic violence. While DV can refer to violence perpetrated by any member of the family against another (WHO 2012), in the context of combatting violence against women in Vietnam, the aspects of DV most commonly targeted are physical, sexual and psychological violence that causes harm to women and occurs within the home, usually between spouses or intimate partners (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, pp. 2-3). As a member state of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in an effort to meet first Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and then Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Vietnam established the 2006 Law on Gender Equality, the 2007 Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (DVPC Law), and amended other existing laws to ensure gender mainstreaming (United Nations CEDAW Committee 2014, p. 10). Despite this, a comparison of findings between the 2020 National Study and the first National Study reported in 2010 shows that, over the last decade, the prevalence of DV and the rate of non-disclosure of women experiencing DV remain virtually unchanged. This suggests that implementing these laws and other development strategies aimed at addressing DV still encounters significant challenges.

Research on gender and DV in Vietnam (e.g. Pells, Wilson & Nguyen 2016; Pettus 2003a; Vu et al. 2014) suggests that this is partly because the efforts to address DV do not always recognise it as an issue due to systematic gender inequality. Gender oppression, including DV, is often approached from a cultural perspective rather than a

feminist one (Scott & Truong 2007), following a cultural construction of gender that essentialises women as mothers and wives, and limits women to their traditional roles in the domestic sphere. This approach emphasises, rather than challenges, women's subordinate position to men (Schuler et al. 2006). Meanwhile, the family is sanctified as an important pillar upholding Vietnamese society, and it is widely considered a woman's main responsibility as wife and mother to maintain the happiness of the family, or at least the public appearance of a happy family. This means she should raise the children well, take care of the family, and exert all efforts to keep the family together, even if that is at her own expense by not exposing any sign of vice or unhappiness, such as the occurrence of DV (Rydstrøm 2017; Vu 2008).

Though these gender norms based on patriarchal values do not go unchallenged in today's society, this thesis will explore the way in which they nevertheless continue to be supported and governed by the party-state[2], through the use of emulation campaigns run by the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU). Emulation campaigns are a political tool that create incentives for citizens to follow certain directives or policies of the state (Homutová 2018), and VWU emulation campaigns promote a construction of womanhood that is considered the model all Vietnamese women should follow, requiring them to demonstrate high achievements both in their public and private lives (Hoang 2020; Rydstrøm 2016; Schuler et al. 2006). One of the results of this governing of women's behaviour is that women become overburdened with multiple expectations and labours. Moreover, the resulting perception of women's gendered success with its emphasis on accomplishments they should achieve for the collective good of their family, community and country implicitly included in these emulation campaigns has a direct impact on the way issues of violence against women, particularly DV, are represented by the Vietnamese party-state and in

[2] The institution of state in Vietnam comprises of a complex relationship between the Vietnamese Communist Party and state administrative bodies. Consequently, it is common to refer to the collective "party-state" when discussing the governing powers in Vietnam (London 2014).

society. It results in DV being framed as an issue that women themselves should solve through their own erudition and diligence, and by changing their own behaviour, thus creating enormous pressure on women to tolerate and stay silent about DV.

1.2 Research question, aim and objective

Research Question: "How does the construction of womanhood contribute to the way domestic violence is being problematised in Vietnam?"

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between the Vietnamese cultural and historical constructions of gender and what it means to be a woman, and the way in which domestic violence is problematised as an issue of gender-based violence in Vietnam.

The first objective of this research is to explore how these constructions of gender have formed the current social and state understanding of women's role and responsibilities, particularly in the private sphere. This will provide insight into how this understanding contributes to the accepted notion that women are responsible for managing family relationships and maintaining family harmony and happiness. The second objective of the research is to examine the way in which the social and state constructions of womanhood and women's role exacerbate women's triple burden and creates a problematisation of DV that holds women accountable and responsible for the violence imposed on them. This problem representation limits the understanding of DV and does not acknowledge it as an issue of gender-based violence that results from gender inequality, and structural and systematic oppression of women; this, in turn, affects the method and effectiveness of addressing DV in Vietnam. Carol Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) policy analysis approach will be applied to a current VWU emulation campaign to illustrate this relationship between gender construction and the problematisation of DV in Vietnam.

1.3 Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach

When seeking to address social issues, a government or organisation puts in place a policy or program, which can be understood as a course of actions meant to enact a desired change (Bacchi 2009, p. ix). There are three main assumptions behind the existence of any policy: 1) that a problem exists and needs to be changed, 2) actions can be taken to make this change, and 3) the proposed policy is expected to achieve the change, thereby solving the problem (Bacchi 2009, p. ix). However, problems do not independently exist outside of societal consciousness, and human understanding and interpretation of the world. Problems are called such because people *problematise* an issue or occurrence into something to be changed. In other words, problems are constructed and shaped by the very policies designed to solve them. Both the construction of problems and the solution are driven by the cultural, political and social knowledges and contexts implicitly accepted as true by the person or organisation deciding on the problem representation (Bacchi 2009, p. x). The WPR approach tries to make the implicit explicit by seeking to identify, understand and question these unspoken contexts and assumptions behind a problem representation and the policy intended to address it (Bacchi 2009, p. x). It does this by posing the following six questions to a given policy or program:

1. What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi 2009, p. xii)

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is structured to answer the questions of the WPR approach with regards to domestic violence in Vietnam. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 first provides an overview of the literature examining the relationship between DV and patriarchal constructions of gender and gender roles. This chapter argues that the gender-based division of labour confines women to the private sphere and contributes to perpetuating and normalising the existence of DV. Chapter 3 examines the cultural norms and values informing the Vietnamese social attitudes and understanding of DV. It finds that despite increased attention paid to addressing DV in recent years, it is nevertheless a persistent occurrence in Vietnamese women's lives, endangering their safety and wellbeing. This is due to the fact that DV is not addressed as a women's rights issue and Vietnamese society has yet to shake many myths that result in victim-blaming attitudes about DV. By examining the cultural assumptions that underpin this attitude, Chapter 3 partially addresses Question 1 and 2 of the WPR approach.

Chapter 4 answers Question 3 of the WPR approach regarding how this representation of DV came about by examining the historical contexts that informed the party-state's representation and governing of gender equality, women's role, and the way in which DV is contextualised within this representation. This chapter also explores the first half of Question 6 of the WPR approach regarding the way the problem is disseminated and defended, which Bacchi writes, concerns the "means through which particular problem representations…achieve legitimacy" (Bacchi 2009, p. 19). Here, the role of the VWU as an organisation representing the interests of Vietnamese women, and its relationship to the party-state and civil society, are explored. Chapter 5 acts as a case study and poses Questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the WPR approach to the "Five No's and Three Cleans" emulation campaign, critically examining how this campaign represents DV as a

result of the state construction and governing of womanhood, and the effects and silences produced by this representation.

It is important to note that the WPR approach is a tool reminding policy-makers to acknowledge that problematisations are constructed, thus limited by the lens through which we view them (Bacchi 2009, p. 263). This does not mean that problematisations, once examined and deconstructed, are necessarily false or invalid. Given finite resources and time, policy-makers need to pick one particular problem representation to address in order to achieve any change at all. What follows is the acknowledgement that issues such as DV are complex and multifaceted, and a given policy or program may only be equipped to address one aspect of it. Any other issues left unproblematic in this particular representation may be tackled by subsequent policies or by different actors. Question 6 of the WPR approach challenges the current problem representation and acknowledges alternative problematisations, such as systematic gender inequality being a root cause of DV. This alternative problem representation is present in Vietnam and being utilised by non-government actors such as NGOs and international donors in their work on domestic violence, but it is still sidelined in the state's approach to addressing DV. Consequently, the concluding Chapter 6 will discuss opportunities for further research which may identify how these alternative problematisations and approaches may be better reflected in future policies.

Chapter 2. Gender Roles and Domestic Violence

This chapter draws from gender scholarship and examines the relationship between the social construction of gender roles, unequal gender relations and the prevalence of domestic violence against women in patriarchal society. The chapter will also discuss some development approaches that may be employed when seeking to challenge these gender constructions and how they could be utilised to ensure sustained social change. These concepts will guide the following chapters of the thesis, which will examine this relationship in Vietnam's context.

2.1 Domestic violence and patriarchal construction of gender

Throughout history, in patriarchal societies where women occupied an inferior position to men, and wives were considered to be the property of their husbands, wife-beating was accepted as a husband's legal right over his wife and existed as a common feature of family life (Bograd 1990, p. 50; Dobash & Dobash 1979). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, British and American suffragettes adopted wife-beating as an early campaign platform, advocating for changing the traditional status of women and challenging patriarchal legal and social systems which prevented women from attaining economic independence from their husbands (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 3). This led to limited legal reforms in the late 19th and early 20th century in these countries, providing women small protections under the law against severe violence from husbands (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 5). However, these issues were soon sidelined within the suffragette movement in favour of a greater focus on the right to vote, which was seen as the means of obtaining the political power to solve the remaining problems negatively affecting women (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 5).

It was not until the second wave of feminism starting in the 1960s, which focused on unpacking the gender relations between men and women, that the issue of husbands'

violence against wives gained significant social attention (Bograd 1990; Walker 1990). The 1970s saw civil society groups and community organisations establishing the first women's shelters and support groups in Europe and North America, providing women with spaces to convene and discuss their specific problems, including DV (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Walker 1990). Sympathetic media attention contributed greatly to raising greater public awareness of DV and intimate partner violence, and bringing society's attention to the prevalence of men's violence against intimate partners (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 2). Information gathered by the shelters provided entry points for academic research and better understanding of DV as a form of abuse women experience due to their socially inferior position to men (Walker 1990, p. 24).

Subsequent research into DV has identified many theoretical perspectives, providing biological, psychopathological or even evolutionary explanations why both men and women might inflict violence on their intimate partners (Resko 2010). Researchers disagree on the degree to which DV affects men and women differently, with some arguing that it is mostly a form of men's control that causes more harm to women (Dobash et al. 1992; Stark 2007), others asserting that men and women are as likely to be violent against each other (Graham-Kevan 2007; Hamel 2009; Straus 2011), or that some combination of both arguments is true (Johnson 2006). Walby and Towers (2017, 2018) argue that when British data on DV is observed through the combined dimensions of the sex of the victim and the perpetrator, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, and whether there is a sexual aspect to the relationship or a gendered motivation to the abuse, it becomes clear that women are indeed more likely to be victims of DV and suffer greater injuries more frequently (see also Kimmel 2002). WHO reports similar observations, adding that women experience higher risks of violence from a male intimate partner than any other source (Krug et al. 2002, p. 89). This suggests that DV is an issue that affects women disproportionately, and that it is a form of gender-based violence, or violence

directed at a woman because of her gender, and due to patriarchal social structures which perpetuate unequal gender relations between men and women (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 3). While Walby and Towers' method through which they draw the above assessment has been critiqued for overlooking experiences of women in same-sex relationship or those of transgender women (Donovan & Barnes 2019), the observation is nevertheless relevant to Vietnam's context, where binary construction of gender still dominates and DV is primarily approached as an issue that affects women. Hence, women are the subjects of the two National Studies on DV discussed in Chapter 3 (General Statistics Office [GSO] 2010; MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020).

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics, traits and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity, and patriarchy is a social arrangement based on the acceptance of gendered differences between men and women (Holmes 2007, p. 2). Pease (2010, pp. 93-4) identifies the patriarchy as being driven and maintained by three main characteristics:

- male-dominated: men traditionally hold authority and control over all social, political, religious, legal and military institutions. Patriarchal societies are structurally set up to be hierarchical, and to exclude or be oppressive to women.
- male-identified: cultural ideals about what is good and desirable are usually expressed in male terms whereas traits associated with women are perceived more negatively.
- male-centred: men's experiences are considered to be the default representation of overall human experience.

Although it is important to acknowledge that patriarchy is not a fixed, monolithic entity constant throughout history, these three pillars are helpful in illustrating the common characteristics of patriarchal societies (Pease 2010, p. 94). Notably, a male-identified and male-centred worldview plays an important role in shaping different constructions of

masculinities, or what it socially means to be a man (Pease 2010, p. 88). Among these is hegemonic masculinity, which “values all forms of masculinity over femininity”, sees men as having the right to exercise authority and control over women and advocates for both structural and ideological patriarchal domination of women (Pease 2019, p. 66). In societies where hegemonic masculinity dominates, men are seen as having social power and authority over women and the right to exercise this authority in the form of violence.

In intimate relationships where a man exercises this authority against his wife through violence frequently and routinely, violence becomes a form of coercive control (Stark 2007). This control is maintained through the threat of force (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 21), and the fear of violence is often enough to deter women from challenging or leaving their subordinated position (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 9). Similarly, Stark (2007, p. 12) posits that for women in abusive relationships, “violence wasn’t the worst part” as the threat of physical and sexual abuse takes an even greater psychological toll. Women may also remain in abusive relationships due to a lack of financial independence or to protect their children (Pells, Wilson & Nguyen 2016). These factors make up men’s coercive control of women, psychologically entrapping them in abusive relationships, as defiance or leaving may bring retributions to not only themselves but also others around them (Stark 2007). Findings from the two National Studies discussed in Chapter 3 will demonstrate the way in which coercive control presents itself in the experiences of Vietnamese women and how principles of hegemonic masculinity influence the discourse of DV in Vietnam.

2.2 Women’s triple roles and the private sphere

Violence, or fear of violence on women’s part, are not the only factors which maintain the unequal relations between men and women in patriarchal society. The gender-based division of labour also play an important part. Traditionally, men, perceived as the physically stronger of the two genders, are assigned to be the breadwinner working

outside the home, while women are assigned the role of child and family care, and maintaining community relationships (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 20). This division of labour has been rationalised as women and men coming together to meet shared material needs of food and shelter (Holmes 2007, p. 2), and make use of the labours in which they have comparative advantage to maximise household efficiency and welfare (Becker 1993). It implies is that market labour and household labour are equally valued, and all resources would be pooled and redistributed equally.

However, in male-identified societies, these assumptions often do not hold true. As women physically bear children, they are assigned the reproductive work of raising them; when this is combined with the other domestic tasks necessary to care for the whole family, Moser (1993, p. 29) suggests this reproductive labour broadly equates to women doing unpaid work to maintain the current (husband and family members) and future workforce (children). This responsibility is considered natural and effortless for women, so it is not recognised as being demanding on women's time and physical strength like waged labour (Moser 1993, p. 30). Consequently, women's domestic work is attributed less value than men's work, resulting in an imbalance of power between men and women. The power imbalance reinforces the notion that women are subordinate to men and should be subject to the rule of men. As the gender-based division of labour does not associate paid work with women, when women do undertake paid work, their earnings are considered "subsidiary" to men's (Kabeer 1994b, p. 267), even though in today's reality, women are just as likely to work as much as men. As men have greater social power, women's resources are often appropriated by men, who control their use in ways that disadvantage women and children (Kabeer 1994a).

While these deep-seated notions of gender-based division of labour are being heavily challenged and changing slowly, their influence still permeates social attitudes in Vietnam, where women spend on average three times more hours than men on unpaid

domestic work, with the burden being higher for women in rural areas and women aged over 60 (ActionAid 2017). The latter is likely due to multiple generations residing together and the practice of retired grandparents contributing to caring for young children (Truong 2009). Overall, this negatively impacts women's ability to access education and employment opportunities. This demonstrates one of the ways that male-dominated social systems create invisible barriers to women and prevent them from accessing equal employment opportunities or pay as men (Connell & Pearse 2015, p. 7). What ensues is a self-sustaining cycle where, because women earn less than men, they are pressured to specialise in domestic work, which perpetuates men's domination of the labour market (Kabeer 1994a, p. 105). This maintains men's superior and women's subordinate positions both at home and in society, supports perceptions of men's authority over women, and prevents women from having the material means to leave abusive relationships. In Vietnam, DV strategies address this issue by focusing on increasing women's income with hope that this increases their relative power in the household. However, as Chapter 5 will show, only addressing the economic aspect of DV without tackling also institutionalised patriarchal beliefs, norms and practices does not necessarily create lasting social transformations.

Meanwhile, women are also engaged in (often unpaid) community work outside the home to manage shared resources such as water, community health and education (Moser 1993, p. 34). Development programs often attract women's participation by promoting the idea that women can take it into their own hands to improve their community (Kabeer 1994b). However, this depends on the essentialised preconception that women are naturally altruistic, always willing to work for the benefits of the collective, and the assumption that engaging in community work has no opportunity cost for women. Women are thus cast as "all-powerful mothers" driving community welfare (Kabeer 1994b, p. 269). Far from being empowering, the effect of this approach is that women become

overburdened with the triple roles in productive, reproductive and community work that they are expected to fulfil, while also being identified only through their essentialised roles of wife, mother, carer and community fixer. Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss the way in which this reality still dominates Vietnamese women's lives in a manner that is supported by the party-state.

The imposition of triple burden on women additionally maintains restrictive beliefs in gender roles based on biological essentialism, reinforcing the idea women are responsible for the private and personal domestic sphere, while men are responsible for the public political sphere (Holmes 2007, p. 94). This separation of the two spheres promotes a social belief in protecting personal privacy and the rejection of external interventions, particularly intervention from the state, to private, domestic issues (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 22). Inequalities are often more visible and considered more serious when they occur in public, whereas private inequalities are given minimum attention (Holmes 2007, p. 18). Hence, when intimate partners hit each other, it is considered part of the private and personal conflict between different personalities within the family. This use of physical force is not considered violence on the same scale as that which occurs in the public sphere as it is presumed to come from a place of affection and love (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 7). DV thus become trivialised, and repeated trivialisation makes it more easily dismissed as an unserious issue. The effect is that women internalise this normalisation and become conditioned to stay silent about their experiences with DV.

Another source of pressure for women to remain silent about DV is the social sanctification of family and the prevalence of myth of the home as a safe haven where women and children are protected (Stanko 1990). Protecting that domain, and the institution of the family, becomes part of women's assigned role (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 21). Meanwhile, research on crimes often imply that the greatest dangers of violence come from external sources, feeding into the common perception that women

are more at risk of assaults in dark alleys by strangers than in the safety of their homes (Bograd 1990; Stanko 1990). Despite research in recent years demonstrating that women experience greatest risks of violence from acquaintances, family members and intimate partners rather than strangers (Krug et al. 2002), Wendt and Zannettino (2015) suggest that the myth of the home as a safe haven persists, and to protect the privacy of the home as well as the construction of the family become synonymous with protecting women themselves. Women are socially conditioned to view outsiders with suspicion and discouraged from sharing their negative experiences at home with people outside their family. This means women cannot seek external support or validation for their experiences (Wendt & Zannettino 2015, p. 21). As will be shown in Chapter 3, this pressure to remain silent about DV experienced by Vietnamese women is further compounded by the fact that family reputation plays an important role in social relations. To speak out about negative private issues is not only considered going against the social norms but also an embarrassing loss of face for both the woman and her family (Nguyen 2015).

2.3 Social change using a gender and development approach

When social changes caused by the rise of feminism challenge the legitimacy of men's power and impose shifts in gender relations, the effects have been directly felt by women as it afforded them greater freedom and provided them entry to question their traditionally subordinate position. Men may perceive these disruptions of the social order as a challenge to their power, and in resisting the challenge, they resort to violence to re-exert their dominance (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 11). According to Pease (2010), this kind of defensive actions is typical when dominant groups are confronted and challenged about their privileges. Since men have been socialised from birth to believe and internalise the ways society's construction of gender roles give them more power and benefits than women, when this distribution of power shifts, they tend to focus on benefits they might lose rather than what both men and women might gain from a balancing of power (Pease

2010). This latter perspective views patriarchal division of roles and labour as social constructions that are also harmful to men.

Recognising this, the gender and development (GAD) approach makes greater references to engaging men's participation and their role in challenging gender inequalities (see Chant & Gutmann 2000; Connell 2003; Flood 2004). According to the GAD approach, gender roles, responsibilities and expectations assigned to men and women are socially constructed and unequal gender relations are formed by this construction (Rathgeber 1990, p. 494). Therefore, men are not simply generic perpetuators of oppression of women because it is in their nature, but are gendered individuals unavoidably participating in, and being affected by, the social construction of gender (Flood 2004, p. 27). Furthermore, GAD suggests that not acknowledging this construction is part of the reason why previous women-focused development approaches have had limited impact on challenging unequal gender relations and addressing the more systematic reasons gender inequality persist (Chant & Gutmann 2000, p. 4). Connell (2003, p. 4) likewise argues that "men and boys…are the gatekeepers for gender equality", because they are part of society and it is impossible to create lasting social change without their consensus. Consequently, engaging men's participation in programs and policies addressing issues concerning women is vital to create sustained gender transformations, including in the efforts to end domestic violence.

Engaging men also brings attention to the negative impacts that gender inequality in general, and DV in particular, have on men. This includes recognising the costs that injuries resulting from DV suffered by women have on the income and wellbeing of the family (Bui, Hoang & Le 2018), or the fact that the social pressure of acting according to a certain perception of masculinity, including being the sole breadwinner, is also harmful to men's mental and physical health (Flood 2004, p. 27). It also recognises that men are capable of being active agents of change and allies to women, rather than casting them

as simply perpetrators of violence and women as victims (Jewkes, Flood & Lang 2015, p. 1581). Moreover, cooperation between men and women on solving gender issues lessen the perception that their interests are competing (Connell 2003, p. 6). This allows men and society as a whole to recognise the benefits that disruptions to gender inequality can bring, and prevents male hostility and resistance to change (Chant & Gutmann 2000, p. 25).

In Vietnam, the DVPC Law calls for the mainstreaming of men's participation in the efforts to prevent DV, but decentralised implementation based on the privatisation of responsibility has yielded limited results (Le et al. 2019). Privatisation of responsibility can be understood as the way in which governments employ neoliberal principles to mobilise individual citizens to solve certain social issues (Ilcan 2009). In fact, the separation of public and private spheres along with gender-based division of labour, with the state having limited presence in the private sphere, can be seen as a form of privatising responsibility (Ilcan 2009, p. 210). The principle posits that as long as individuals in society actively assume accountability for their own welfare, then the state's burden of welfare provision is reduced. The ensuing effect of shifting the risks associated with solving social problems to the citizen is often overlooked in favour of a perception of agency, where individuals take charge of their own lives rather than being ruled (Ilcan 2009, p. 221). The state nevertheless still governs behaviour through policies which shape citizens' responsibilities in a certain manner, and sells this by representing the relationship between the governing state and those being governed as working towards a common goal (Li 2019, p. 33). This delegation of responsibility and governing of behaviour can be seen in the way the Vietnamese party-state addresses gender inequality and DV, and will be discussed in greater details in the upcoming chapters. Chapter 4 will review the way the party-state historically governed women's behaviour by assigning them national and familial responsibilities, framing them as empowerment. This indirect governing continues

to this day and results in women being held accountable for preventing DV, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

2.4 Chapter summary

While there were feminist efforts to challenge women's subordinate position in patriarchal societies since the late 1800s/early 1900s, it took until the 1970s for domestic violence to be widely recognised as a form of violence against women in the West. This led to advocacy against DV by civil society groups and greater academic scholarship into the issue. Since then, many theoretical perspectives have ensued seeking to explain why DV occurs. One of these perspectives represents DV as a manifestation of the unequal gender relations between men and women in a patriarchal society, which is structurally set up to favour men and oppress women. This provides men with social power and belief that they are entitled to enforcing authority on their wives through violence or other forms of non-physical abuse. Gender-based divisions of labour play a significant role in maintaining this unequal gender relations between men and women. The separation of the public and private spheres makes DV prone to being overlooked or normalised due to the social perception of the home as a safe location where people, especially women and children, are protected. Women are encouraged to protect the family structure even at the expense of their own wellbeing or personal safety. When seeking to create sustained social change to address these issues of unequal gender relations causing DV to disproportionately affect women, a GAD approach should be employed. This includes challenging the ways in which women have been assigned the subordinate position and engaging men to disrupt the hierarchical relationship between men and women that equips men with the power to abuse and control women.

Chapter 3. Domestic Violence and Gender Construction in Vietnam

This chapter discusses the findings from the 2010 and 2020 National Studies on Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam, which report that domestic violence is widespread and underreported in Vietnam. These National Studies provide important insights into the social attitudes towards DV and the causes thereof in Vietnam. A discussion of these social attitudes will address Questions 1 and 2 of Bacchi's WPR approach regarding how DV is problematised in Vietnam, and the cultural assumptions that underpin this problematisation. This provides the context necessary to understanding the party-state's construction of womanhood that contributed to this problematisation, discussed in Chapter 4.

3.1 Domestic violence in Vietnam: Findings from the National Studies

In 2009, the United Nations-Government of Vietnam Joint Programme on Gender Equality, with technical support from the WHO, conducted a National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam, the results of which was reported in 2010 (GSO 2010). This was the first study to provide national data on DV and brought to the government's attention the widespread prevalence of DV in Vietnam, highlighting the extent to which it is silenced and normalised. The 2010 National Study contributed to reinforcing the government's efforts to implement the Gender Equality and DVPC Laws, raising public awareness on both DV and the need to provide services for survivors (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. x). A follow-up study was conducted in 2018 and 2019, with the results published in July 2020 (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020). Tables 1 and 2 below provide a summary of the National Studies and their results.

Table 1. Key information about the 2010 and 2020 National Studies on Domestic Violence Against Women

	2010	2020
Data gathering period	2009-2010	2018-2019
Publication of results	December 2010	July 2020
Safe name (to prevent risks of exacerbating violence against respondents)	National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences	
Quantitative data		
Number of women surveyed	4,838 women	5,976 women
Age range of women surveyed	18 - 60	15 - 64
Qualitative data		
Number of in-depth interviews	30 survivors, VWU officials, community leaders, community men and women	Combination of in-depth interview and focus groups with 269 participants and 11 key informants
Focus group	4 in each province, 2 with women and 2 with men	

Source: GSO (2010); MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA (2020)

Table 2. Summary of findings from 2010 and 2020 National Studies on Domestic Violence Against Women

Indicator	2010 (GSO 2010)	2020 (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020)
Women's lifetime experience with DV		
Lifetime experience of at least one form of DV	*58.0%*	*62.9%*
Physical abuse	32.0%	26.1%
Sexual abuse	10.0%	13.3%
Emotional abuse	54.0%	47.0%
Controlling behaviour	33.3%	27.3%
Economic abuse	9.0%	20.6%

Women's recent experience with DV (within 12 months prior to data-gathering period)		
Recent experience of at least one form of DV	*27.0%*	*31.6%*
Physical abuse	6.0%	4.6%
Sexual abuse	4.0%	5.7%
Emotional abuse	25.0%	19.3%
Controlling behaviour	Not disaggregated	12.9%
Economic abuse	Not disaggregated	11.5%
Injuries resulting from DV		
Physical injuries (a)	26.0%	23.3%
Of (a), % of women injured more than once	60.0%	"most"
Of (a), % of women injured many times	17.0%	21.8%
Response to violence		
Never told anyone	50.0%	49.6%
Never sought help from services/authority	87.0%	90.4%
Never fought back	87.4%	80.8%
Left home at least once	20.0%	19.3%

Source: GSO (2010); MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA (2020)

The findings show that the overall prevalence rate of domestic violence is higher in 2020 (62.9%) compared to 2010 (58%). However, this could partly be due to the age range of women surveyed having been widened from 18-60 to 15-64[3] (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 9) and the use of a more comprehensive definition for economic abuse[4] (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 12). The fact that the prevalence of most individual forms of violence has decreased slightly between the two studies might indicate that the DVPC Law has made some impact since being approved in 2007. Discussions in the 2020 report states that the fact that the rate of lifetime sexual abuse has increased (10% in 2010 and

[3] Life expectancy at birth for Vietnamese women is 79 (World Bank n.d.-a), so this age range still leaves the oldest generation unaccounted for.

[4] Whereas the 2010 National Study only identified economic abuse as men taking away money women earned or refusing to give women money, the 2020 National Study expanded the definition to include prohibiting women from taking employment or earning money, taking money "against her will", refusing to give women money for necessary household expenses even when men would spend that money on things such as alcohol, expecting women to ask permission before buying anything, and expecting women to be financially responsible for the family (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 12).

13.3% in 2020) should not necessarily cause alarm, as it may reflect a change in social attitude, with women becoming more willing to discuss sexual matters and disclose sexual violence (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. xxi). What should be cause for concern, however, is the fact that despite efforts to raise awareness about DV over the last decade, the overall rate of disclosure remains virtually the same. Half of women experiencing DV still do not share their experience with anyone, even family and close friends, and the overwhelming majority do not seek support from services or authorities. The belief that "violence was normal or not serious" was the reason given by nearly half of women who never discussed their experiences or sought help (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. xix).

An improvement in methodology between the 2010 and 2020 National Studies is the fact that the latter provides disaggregated data for women from ethnic minority groups and women with disability. Regarding ethnic minority women, there is a caution that, as they collectively only make up 17% of the total sample[5], the sample size may not be sufficiently large to provide representative data for individual ethnic groups (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 49). However, the finding to note is that the prevalence of DV among ethnic minority groups in Vietnam is influenced by whether they are a patrilineal or matrilineal society. Matrilineal societies such as the Cham see women having much more power and control in the family and women are not considered subordinate to men, thus they are less likely to experience DV from men (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 50). Meanwhile, disaggregated data shows women with disability experiencing higher rates of DV compared to women without disability. Women with disability in Vietnam experience more difficulties than men with disability in finding relationships or getting married, and they are more likely to marry men with disability. This means that women with disability often find it more difficult to be believed when disclosing their experiences with DV due to

[5] This is proportionate to the overall ethnic minority population in Vietnam, where the ethnic majority (Kinh) make up 85.3% of the total population and the rest are people from 53 other ethnic minority groups (UNFPA 2019).

societal ableism about the possibility of men with disability to cause harm. Women with disability are also more likely to tolerate violence to maintain their marriage or relationship (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 71).

Figure 1. Prevalence of women's lifetime experience with violence, by disability status

[This image has been removed due to copyright restriction. Available online from https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/publications/national-study-violence-against-women-viet-nam-2019]

Source: MOLISA, GSO and UNFPA (2020, p. 70)

The consequences of DV on women in Vietnam include injuries, poor physical and mental health, negative impacts on maternal health, loss of employment and income due to incapacitation, and increased isolation. DV causes behavioural problems or psychological distress in children, the majority (60%) of whom witness violence between their parents (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. xix). Many women who left home due to violence return either for their children, or because their husbands asked them to return (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. xix).

Both National Studies find that different forms of violence often occur together, demonstrating a pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling women. About one third of women experience both physical and sexual violence (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 40), and in these cases, the physical violence was often more severe (GSO 2010, p. 50). Emotionally violent behaviour, such as cursing and threatening, often occurs multiple times (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 43) or accompanies physical and/or sexual violence, and women report that the emotional violence is often more traumatising than the physical or sexual (GSO 2010, p. 60). Other forms of emotional violence that respondents identified included insults, belittling talks, public humiliation, threatening

loved ones, threatening or actually throwing them out of the house. However, not all of these acts were recognised as abuse or violence by all women. An important finding discussed in the 2010 National Study is that women's awareness of emotional abuse is linked to receiving support. Women who have access to support services such as counselling or shelters are more likely to understand that the emotional threats and other controlling behaviours or economic abuse are all different forms of DV. Thus, they recognise that it does not require actual physical violations to be considered DV (GSO 2010, p. 62). This suggests that it is extremely important that support services are available and accessible to all women.

3.2 Gender construction and attitudes about domestic violence in Vietnam

Prior to the 20th century, Vietnamese society experienced the strong influence of Confucian patriarchy as a result of several long periods under Chinese rule. The coming to power of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) starting in 1930, introduced Marxist ideas of gender equality which called on society to leave behind these "feudal" (*phong kiến*) and "backward" (*lạc hậu*) Confucian patriarchal values that are oppressive to women (discussed further in Chapter 4). In more recent years, the Gender Equality Law has been introduced, guaranteeing the legal equal rights of men and women in all aspects of society (National Assembly of Vietnam [NAoV] 2006). The Marriage and Family Law similarly calls for "equality between husband and wife" and the sharing of family responsibilities (NAoV 2014) and the DVPC Law exists to "prevent domestic violence" as well as "provide support and protection for victims of domestic violence" (NAoV 2007). These laws and other policy reforms have indeed paved the way for certain improvements in the social status and legal rights of women, as well as shifts in general attitudes about gender roles across different generations. This can be demonstrated by the 2020 National Study, which finds that younger women are less likely to tolerate DV and agree with statements regarding the absolute rule of men in the family and society (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. xxii).

Nevertheless, binary beliefs about the different natures of men and women persist, manifesting in harmful attitudes about DV being perpetuated in society. This includes a particular Confucian hierarchical construction of society that groups different family members into two distinct "upper" or "lower" categories. Elder family members, men, particularly husbands, are considered the upper category, to the lower category of younger people, women, and wives. The additional assumption is that upper family members have the responsibility to take care of, and educate, the lower, while the lower owes respect and obedience to the upper (Le 1996; Rydstrøm & Drummond 2004). This idea is reflected in a Vietnamese saying, which states that "you should teach children while they are still young and teach your wife when she first joins the family" (*dạy con từ thủa còn thơ, dạy vợ từ thủa bơ vơ mới về*).

Publicly, many people might deride the second clause of this saying for its "backwardness" and contradiction of socialist equality, but findings from the National Studies demonstrate that the concept of "teaching your wife" is still considered valid in many Vietnamese people's subconsciousness. In-depth interviews show that men and women consider it appropriate for a man to discipline or "educate" his wife when she displeases, challenges, or embarrasses him and causes him to lose face with other family members or in public (GSO 2010, p. 74). Half of the women interviewed in the 2020 National Study said that if a woman is unfaithful or does not take care of the children, she is a bad wife and therefore "deserves" to be beaten as punishment (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 74). By contrast, almost no respondent said that a man deserves to be punished if he is unfaithful, because men having extramarital affairs is "normal" (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 75). If he is a bad husband (e.g. failing to provide for the family), the wife is expected to be patient and advise him to become better (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 72). If she does not successfully advise him, her husband's vices would "drive her family to disintegration and her children to degradation", which is a poor

reflection of her ability to be a devoted wife and mother (Ngo 2004, p. 51). Chapter 5 will show how this social assumption that a wife is responsible for influencing her husband into good behaviour extends to actual DV prevention strategies.

These double standards are the results of a cultural belief in the difference between men and women's biological characters (*tính cách*). In Vietnam, it is said that men have "hot character" or "hot blood" (*máu nóng*), which, when provoked, can "boil" into violence (Rydstrøm 2003). Additionally, it is also perceived that some men have genes which makes their blood hotter than others, thus they are more likely to commit violence (GSO 2010, p. 75). By contrast, women are said to have naturally "cool character" (Rydstrøm 2003). This notion that male and female characters can be categorised into two opposing concepts such as "hot" and "cool" derives from the Taoist construct of balancing opposite forces *âm-dương* (*yin-yang* in Chinese*).* Rydstrøm (2004, pp. 75-6) describes this as follows:

> *"Females and their bodies are associated with the forces of* âm *(*yin *in Chinese), which accord with categories such as the moon, earth, water, rest, cold, passivity, responsiveness, darkness, inwardness, inferiority, decrease, downwards, negativity, a centrifugal force, the North, right and even numbers, while males and their bodies are linked with the forces of* dương *(*yang *in Chinese), which correlate with categories such as the sun, heaven, fire, movement, heat, activity, stimulation, lightness, outwards, exteriority/superiority, increase, upwards, positivity, a centripetal force, the South, left and odd numbers. Together these two complementary forces are said to stimulate the maintenance of "harmony" (hòa thuận) at both a local and universal level."*

On the one hand, the relations between *âm* and *dương* are not meant to be interpreted as hierarchical in nature; instead they are "opposite but related and interdependent", and one cannot exist without the other and one should not exist more

than the other (Wang 2012, p. 3). However, when combined with patriarchal values, this paradigm of viewing the world does become interpreted as hierarchical and results in an essentialising understanding of how men and women should act. As Rydstrøm (2004) explains, boys are (or should be) associated with characteristics such as mischievous, naughty and enjoying active play, while girls are considered to be gentle, obedient and preferring passive pursuits. This carries over into adulthood, where it is considered that men should act with assertiveness and women with reticence. This belief that men and women have distinct natural characteristics means that the notion that they should also assume "different but equal" responsibilities within the family (Moser 1993, p. 28), with men being the breadwinner and women the homemaker, is well entrenched in Vietnamese society, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5.

This distinction enforces the perception that men's violence at home may be interpreted an assertion of his role as head of the family, while women should obey him even if she does not agree, because challenging him is against her passive and receptive nature (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 98). Moreover, when a man is angry, there is an excess of *dương* force in the relationship, so his wife, acting complementarily, must endure and not react in any way that stokes further anger, so that the *âm* force of her calmness can cool his anger and restore harmonic balance between them (Rydstrøm 2003). The 2020 National Study indicates that these attitudes are increasingly being challenged, especially by young, educated, urban women, but overall societal change is still slow, particularly in rural areas or among women with lower levels of education (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 72). These attitudes are among the reasons why Vietnamese women do not speak about DV, because to speak out is to expose embarrassing family conflict which may provoke further anger from husbands while women's priority should be to keep the peace. Internalising this, women resort to avoidance tactics and sweet-talking to prevent their husbands from being violent

(MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 99). Many women in the 2010 National Study also report that even their closest family members such as their parents would often encourage them to keep silent about their experiences with DV, in order to preserve the appearance of harmony in the family (GSO 2010, pp. 91-3).

3.3 Family as a social duty

"Families are the cells that make up society", reads the preamble to Vietnam's 2000 Marriage and Family Law (NAoV 2000). When the Law was revised in 2014 to ensure cohesion with the 2007 Gender Equality Law and to decriminalise same-sex marriage, the preamble with this rhetoric was removed, presumably because "families" implies heterosexual families only. However, the strength of its message undoubtedly remains. In Vietnamese society, where man and woman are considered complementary halves, their coming together in a traditional heterosexual marriage is consequently considered "a natural step in the life-course, not a matter of reflection" (Bélanger & Khuat 2002, p. 93). Motherhood is often expected to follow marriage (Bélanger 2004), and even gender scholars in Vietnam can be quick to stress that childbearing is a special biological function and duty of girls and women (Rydstrøm 2004). Bearing children is so commonly considered women's "Heaven-mandated vocation" (*thiên chức*) that adolescent girls and young women are encouraged to "identify themselves with future motherhood regardless of the consequences this might have on their access to the workforce or government goals of 'equality between men and women'" (Rydstrøm 2004, p. 78). The 2014 Marriage and Family Law reinforces this by referencing the state's responsibility to assist women to "fulfil the noble function of being mothers" (NAoV 2014). The Prime Minister of Vietnam (2020) recently approved the plan for a new population policy which aims to "encourage" men and women in regions with low birth-rate "to marry before age 30, to not marry late and to have children early, with women [being encouraged] to have two children by age 35". This

type of directive shows that at least at the government level, it is still widely accepted that marriage precedes childbirth, and childbirth naturally follows marriage.

As it is commonly accepted that the intrinsic duties of men and women to society is to marry and have children, to protect the institution of family becomes pivotal and “anyone who breaks up the family is blamed” (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. 76). Barring very serious injuries caused, when women report incidents of DV to the local police or other authorities, they are often sent home without support except being instructed to resolve the family matter privately in order to keep the marriage intact (Rydstrøm 2003). If the violence causes visible injuries or persists in a public manner for a prolonged period, “reconciliation groups”, consisting of local VWU officials and community leaders, may step in to educate the husband on why he should not hit his wife (Luke et al. 2007; Rydstrøm 2003). These groups exist because the Marriage and Family Law and DVPC Law place considerable emphasis on reconciliation at the local level as the first step in dealing with family conflicts (NAoV 2007, 2014). Consequently, women face great pressure to return to, or continue with, the marriage if the man promises to cease the violence. What these women usually find is that the violence will increase in frequency and severity, because the husband feels that he has lost face with the community and needs to compensate for it by exerting further control and violence (Rydstrøm 2003).

When women file for divorce citing DV, the whole process is extremely bureaucratic and discouraging, and the first step taken by the court is also to attempt reconciliation (Vu et al. 2014). This strong emphasis on reconciliation, even in cases where it goes against women’s wishes, not only undermines their agency but also contradicts the very first line of the DVPC Law, which states as one of its purposes to support victims of DV (NAoV 2007). The reason often given is that divorce negatively impacts children and causes behavioural problems (Krantz et al. 2005, p. 1052). This justification is often given in isolation without consideration for the negative impacts that witnessing violence between

parents have on children's physical and mental wellbeing (Bui, Hoang & Le 2018), and the fact that violence is a learned behaviour, and children growing up in violent households are at higher risks of accepting or committing violence themselves (MOLISA, GSO & UNFPA 2020, p. x).

To explain this, Werner (2004) suggests that there exists a dissonance between the "public" and "private" perspectives that Vietnamese people employ when discussing gender equality. As the 2010 National Study discovers, the majority of Vietnamese people will declare rhetorically that "women and men are equal", "women have rights to speak their opinions", men should share in household duties and DV is wrong (GSO 2010, p. 73). However, when it comes to discussing specific scenarios, both men and women revert to myths and traditions to excuse or justify men's behaviour that might be violent or oppressive to women. This includes the above-mentioned double standards regarding women deserving to be hit for being a bad wife, but men should be patiently cajoled into being a good husband. Another justification is that violence committed when men are drunk should be excused, because they are not in control of their faculties (GSO 2010, p. 73). Alternatively, men are naturally possessive, so they commit violence when they are jealous because they love their wives too much. This is often used to excuse emotional manipulations or abuse, which is seen as "not as serious" because it does not cause injuries (GSO 2010, pp. 73-4). These justifications are still so pervasive that most women stay silent about DV, as demonstrated by the number of respondents in the National Studies who indicated that they have never told anyone about their experiences nor sought help from any services. This silence makes it easier for society to dismiss and normalise DV as minor conflicts between husband and wife, and the full extent of the negative impacts of DV on women is not acknowledged.

3.4 Chapter summary

The 2010 and 2020 National Studies on Domestic Violence show that DV is a prevalent issue affecting nearly two-thirds of Vietnamese women. Despite the existence of the DVPC Law and efforts to address DV, little has changed in DV statistics in the decade between these two studies. Cultural assumptions about the unequal relationship between men and women have contributed to double standards and victim-blaming attitudes that posit DV is sometimes justifiable if a woman does something to deserve punishment from her husband. This problematises DV into an issue of individuals' behaviour, not structural gender inequality, and implies women can prevent DV by acting in ways that do not provoke their husbands' anger. Though laws against DV exist, reconciliation is still the preferred approach to addressing DV to preserve the institution of family. This exerts pressure on women to remain silent about DV, causing DV to become normalised and remain largely unaddressed.

Chapter 4. Vietnam Women's Union

This chapter concerns the Vietnam Women's Union as an organisation representing the rights and advancement of Vietnamese women. The first part of the chapter accounts for how the VWU, through its relationship with the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), promoted a Vietnamese brand of socialist feminism to gather women's support for national liberation from feudalism and colonisation in the 20th century. The chapter also examines the VWU's operations in contemporary time as an organisation tasked with representing both the party-state and Vietnamese women, and how it fits into Vietnam's efforts to achieve gender equality today.

The chapter provides an understanding of the VWU's historical and current role in manufacturing or maintaining many of the social constructions about gender and womanhood presented in the previous chapter. This addresses Question 3 of the WPR approach regarding how the problematisation of domestic violence as an issue for which women should be accountable came about, and part of Question 6 of the WPR approach regarding how this problem representation has been disseminated and defended. This also provides the background necessary for the case study analysis in the next chapter.

4.1 Overview of women's movements in Vietnam

While the essentialisation of women as mothers and wives mentioned in the previous chapter is not unique to Vietnam, the tie between womanhood and motherhood in Vietnamese culture is particularly strong, as can be observed in the creation myth of the Vietnamese people. In Vietnamese mythology, Âu Cơ was an immortal fairy who married Lạc Long Quân, a dragon god, and gave birth to a hundred children. However, as Âu Cơ was from the mountain and Lạc Long Quân was from the sea, they could not live together and decided to separate, each taking fifty children with them. Âu Cơ settled in the mountains that is the north of Vietnam today, and one of her sons became the first Hùng

King, considered to be the first ruler of Vietnamese people, all descended from Âu Cơ's children. The myth of Âu Cơ as the mother of Vietnamese people, and the later history of the Trưng sisters and Lady Triệu leading revolts against Chinese invasions in the first and third centuries BCE respectively, have been used to support the argument that early Vietnamese people lived in matriarchal societies where women were public leaders (Chiricosta 2010, p. 125). Hitchcox (1993, p. 146) similarly notes, the fact that Âu Cơ and Lạc Long Quân separated but vowed to support each other suggests that the ancient ideal relations between Vietnamese men and women was one of equality and partnership.

This equality came into decline when Confucian patriarchy was adopted as state doctrine in the 10th century (Chiricosta 2010, p. 126). On women, Confucianism imposed the doctrine of Three Submissions (*tam tòng*)[6], dictating their submission to the rule of men (Hitchcox 1993, p. 145). Nonetheless, Confucianism was also adapted to fit Vietnam's context, so until the 19th century, Vietnamese law stipulated a woman's rights to inheritance, protection from forced marriage, husband abandonment and unfair divorce, as long as she performed the duties of a good wife by bearing children and obeying her husband and in-laws (Chiricosta 2010, p. 126; Hitchcox 1993, p. 147). Therefore, after the introduction of Confucianism, Vietnamese women still enjoyed a certain degree of control and authority in the private sphere, even though Confucian values cemented their subordinate positions to men and halted their traditional participation in public leadership and affairs. Chiricosta (2010, p. 133) suggests that the party-state later uses this transition from ancient matriarchy to modern patriarchy to demonstrate Vietnam's progression through the Marxist stages of development: ancient society, feudalism, capitalism (under French colonisation) and finally socialism (Willis 2010, p. 71).

[6] Three Submissions: an unmarried girl should submit to the wishes of her father, a married woman to those of her husband, and a widow to those of her son.

The French occupation of Vietnam in the late 19th and early 20th century brought new ideas of women's emancipation, but initially this had varying effects for different women. While elite women enjoyed the benefits of increased access to education, the ill effects of colonisation were acutely felt by women of the lower classes (Chiricosta 2010, pp. 127-8). Even for the elite, French education operated under the colonial assumption of Vietnamese inferiority (Chiricosta 2010, p. 128). However, exposure to French ideas of equality enabled a Vietnamese women's liberation movement to form in the 1920s (Rydstrøm & Drummond 2004, p. 2). Feminists among the bourgeois class questioned Confucian principles of male superiority, and a sub-group of these women later critiqued the elitism of French feminism in exploration of the conditions of working-class women exploited by colonisation (Chiricosta 2010, p. 129). Other Vietnamese women who had internalised ideas of French superiority were criticised for supporting colonialism with their lifestyles which ignored and exacerbated the suffering of their poorer sisters (Chiricosta 2010, p. 130).

When the Vietnamese Communist Party was established in February 1930, it contributed the Marxist feminist idea that gender inequality was a form of feudal class oppression being exploited and multiplied by Western capitalism and colonisation. The VCP gathered support from Vietnamese women in the 1930s by framing women's emancipation as part of a broader struggle for socialism and independence from feudalism and colonialism (Pettus 2003b, p. 27; VWU n.d.-b). This "marriage of feminism with socialism" drew on the histories of the Trưng sisters and Lady Triệu to liken Vietnamese women to patriotic heroines fighting for freedom and representing the "model of female devotion and self-sacrifice" (Chiricosta 2010, pp. 131-2). These traits would continue to this day to be attributed to women and contribute to the construction of Vietnamese womanhood promoted by the VWU.

4.2 Constructing womanhood through wartime emulation campaigns

The VWU was established in October 1930 as an organisation operating under the leadership of the VCP representing the interest of Vietnamese women (VWU 2020). It underwent several name changes between 1930 and 1950 before adopting its current name, Vietnam Women's Union, in 1950 (VWU n.d.-b). Throughout the decades of the French (1946-54) and American (1955-75) Wars, the VWU played a major role promoting the party-state's construction of Vietnamese socialist womanhood through the use of emulation campaigns.

Socialist emulation is a political tool that originated from Soviet Russia, where it was used as method to increase labour productivity and drive modernisation, and was considered a direct contrast to capitalist competition (Scherrer 2014). Socialist emulation posits that while workers under capitalism compete for individual profit and in doing so "[play] into the hands of corporate financial interests", socialist workers work to ensure the greatest outcome for the collective (Miklóssy & Ilic 2014, p. 1). However, socialist workers still need an incentive to maximise their productivity, so Soviet emulation campaigns are large-scale movements with collective production goals and everyone voluntarily contribute to achieving these goals. In the process, "the talented will stand out" as figures to emulate, which encourage others to raise their own individual productivity, thereby meeting the needs of the collective (Homutová 2018, p. 55). In Vietnam, the concept of emulation (*thi đua*) was expanded to include "patriotic emulation" (*thi đua yêu nước)*, or calling for participation in the resistance against poverty, illiteracy and colonialism, seen as the major challenges faced by Vietnam after declaring independence in 1945 (Homutová 2018, p. 73). Consequently, emulation campaigns in Vietnam tend to consist of slogans depicting goals of production and social advancements, representing the party-state's call on individuals to do their part in driving national growth and modernisation.

These emulation campaigns could thus be understood as a way socialist states drive the privatisation of responsibility discussed in Chapter 1.

The VWU began running emulation campaigns specifically targeted at women in 1961, emphasising the importance of women's participation in both agricultural and industrial production, and in politics, to the national modernisation process (Chiricosta 2010, pp. 133-4). These emulation campaigns paint a picture of ideal womanhood that all women should emulate, and though the specific focus of this picture changed depending on the political landscape of the period, they can be summarised as calling on women to "do all things, and do all things well" (Chiricosta 2010, p. 133). In particular, the first VWU emulation campaign, the "Five Goods" campaign (*Năm tốt)*, called on women to actively participate in production, follow state laws and policies, devote time towards intellectual self-improvement so that they could better participate in leadership, and raise their family and educate the children (Chiricosta 2010, p. 134).

This campaign reflected the party-state's ideal Vietnamese woman in the years immediately following the fall of French colonialism in 1954. During this period, women were celebrated for their diligent production in local cooperatives for communal consumption, thus rejecting capitalist principles of private property and ownership, and their openness to self-improvement which helps them participate in leadership and contribute to driving national modernisation (Pettus 2003b, pp. 39-40). Given that this campaign serviced the strengthening of socialist rule in the early years, Pettus (2003b, p. 38) proposes that the promotion of women's duty to raise family and educate children was less about personal satisfaction, which was construed as selfish and egotistical, therefore lacking "revolutionary morality". Instead, women should bear children for the good of the nation to counteract human losses in war (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 96), and educate their children to become effective workers who contribute to improving the country (Pettus 2003b, p. 38). Thus, women's efforts towards their reproductive labour could be said to

reflect the way the industriousness and selflessness they exhibit in production carries over in their homelife.

The “Five Goods” campaign’s focus on women’s participation in the workforce reflects the Marxist feminist position that women’s oppression is a dimension of class power and the result of their being confined to reproductive work within the capitalist gender division of labour (Beasley 1999, p. 60). Women’s emancipation therefore means that they should be liberated from reproductive work and participate equally with men in production (Waibel & Glück 2013, p. 245). This viewpoint assumes that only productive work in the public sphere was work, and fails to acknowledge that reproductive work nevertheless continues to exist. Instead of renegotiating gender roles so that men and women share reproductive work, the “Five Goods” campaign continues to allocate the responsibility of reproductive work to women, in addition to productive work. This had the impact of making many women feel overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy when they could not achieve all five campaign criteria, and they often sacrificed goals that directly benefited them, such as education for self-improvement and participation in leadership, in order to focus on their children and family (Pettus 2003b, p. 40). The “Five Goods” campaign therefore contributed to perpetuating, rather than acknowledging or challenging, women’s multiple labours.

Another campaign, “Three Responsibilities” (*Ba đảm đang*), operated during the American War and called on women to take charge of production and manage family affairs while men went to war, and take up arms themselves when necessary (VWU n.d.-b). This period saw Vietnamese women acquiring technical skills to make up for the shortage of male labour (Chiricosta 2010, p. 136) and taking leadership positions in the National Liberation Front managing the women’s war efforts in the home front (Taylor 1999, p. 18). The “Three Responsibilities” campaign promoted womanhood through the lenses of selflessness, joyful sacrifice and maternalism, extolling mothers who encourage

all their sons to fight for the country, young nurses who leave home to care for soldiers at the front, and wives who stay faithful while their husbands fought (Pettus 2003b, p. 43). Though the state praised their revolutionary spirit during the war, after the war, many of these "long-haired warriors" and "Heroic Vietnamese Mothers"[7], if they survived, would live in poverty and received only a small pension and occasional token government recognition for their maternal patriotism (Pettus 2003b, p. 50). Many women who held leadership positions during the war found that their political positions after the war reverted to being one of token female presentation with little actual power or did not live up to revolutionary ideals (Taylor 1999, p. 127). This suggests that the "Three Responsibilities" campaign only promoted women pushing boundaries and participating in leadership in order to gain their support in the war effort, rather than to redefine gender roles and power structures.

Release from the hardship of war caused the state to struggle to maintain the image of the industrious socialist woman in the years following the 1975 reunification. Marketisation in the mid-1980s saw a decline in the previous era's production cooperatives (Pettus 2003b, p. 81), and introduced new lifestyles which eventually led to a "moral backlash against the overly liberated young woman" (Pettus 2003b, p. 57). Women had perhaps become too comfortable with the masculine tasks of fighting and leading that were expected of them during the war, so in the 1980s, VWU-affiliated newspapers and magazines criticised women and girls who act without feminine grace or neglect household responsibilities. They called for a return to traditional femininity, where women and girls should act according to female attributes like modesty, humility and gentleness, and study things that were not too demanding or technical, deemed unsuitable

[7] "Heroic Vietnamese Mother" is a title of honour awarded by the Vietnamese Government to women whose husband *and* child, or multiple children, died in the line of duty during the French and American Wars. The title can be posthumously awarded to women who had a husband and child who died in the line of duty, *and* who herself also died in the line of duty (Government of Vietnam 1994).

to their feminine nature and might interfere with their future roles as wife and mother (Chiricosta 2010, p. 138).

Since the VCP's endorsement of women's liberation has arguably been only in service of establishing and strengthening socialism, and support for the wars against imperialism, this shift back to so-called traditional femininity is not surprising. As Pistor and Le (2013, p. 96) argue, the inclusion of women's liberation into the socialist liberation movement failed to recognise that women's rights and gender equality are human right issues. Accordingly, the VCP did not promote gender equality because it is what women are entitled to as human beings and patriarchy is harmful to women, but because it served ideological and material objectives. According to Molyneux (1984), this is a common outcome of socialist revolutions that mobilise women's support through promise of emancipation. Women's emancipation is only pursued when it contributes to other social goals. At the end of the war, Vietnamese women found that the emancipation they have been promised is yet to be delivered while society reverts to a status quo with men in the position of power. Women's resistance to this move was perceived by the party-state as an ideological threat, prompting it to focus on "traditions" to establish control over the nation-building process after the war. It is clear that, having supported women entering positions traditionally dominated by men during the war, in peace time, the VCP feared that women were

> *"wrongly embracing…gender equality as a source of personal freedom from the demands and expectations of patriarchal family culture rather than as a component of collective national service"* (Pettus 2003b, p. 60).

The VWU's role in promoting this return to tradition reflects the way its function as a representative of women has become appropriated as a disciplinary and governing tool to maintain constructions of womanhood that supported the party-state's ideologies (Hoang 2020). While it is true that some elite women may benefit from this structure, and

there might indeed be some limited improvements, such as in legal rights and employment opportunities, there is usually little effort paid to the individual subjectivities of diverse women (Molyneux 1984, p. 61). With the VWU so focused on governing women's gendered lives through emulation campaigns, it also leaves untouched "other mechanisms through which women's subordination per se is reproduced in the economy and in society, and men's privileges over women" (Molyneux 1984, p. 60).

As gender equality is implicitly included in socialist ideologies, the Vietnamese party-state supports the VWU and the idea of women's rights in the general sense. However, what aspect of women's rights the VWU is permitted or willing to promote shifts according to the political aims of the VCP. Through emulation campaigns, the VWU continues to set unfailingly high expectations for women's achievements in both the public and private spheres, which tends to create impacts counteractive to challenging unequal gender relations and oppression of women. The case study of the 5N3C campaign in the next chapter will demonstrate this in greater details. However, before doing so, additional context is required to understand the position of the VWU in Vietnam today.

4.3 VWU and governing gender in the post-"*Đổi Mới*" era

The *Đổi Mới* Policy introduced in 1986 saw Vietnam becoming a socialist-oriented market economy, which also introduced many social changes as a result. However, the VWU continues to be the "most powerful institution focused on women in the country", due to its existing vast network of over ten thousand local units reaching even the smallest villages (Hoang 2020, p. 300). It exercises great influence on rural women who depend on its practical services and have little access to alternative perspectives on women's issues. The need to cooperate with international donors in the 1990s led the VWU to rebrand itself as no longer a party-state apparatus but the voice of the grassroots (Rydstrøm 2016, p. 225). This means that it is sometimes cautiously considered by

international donors to be a type of civil society organisation (CSO) (Norlund 2007, p. 22), but this categorisation is highly contested (Pistor & Le 2013; Wischermann 2011).

Before examining this contestation, understanding civil society in the context of Vietnam is in order. It is important to acknowledge that the Western "normative ideal" of civil society is guided by assumptions of democracy and liberal individualism that are not necessarily present in Vietnam (Bui 2013, p. 78). Originating from ancient Greek political ideology (Edwards 2011, p. 3), civil society is generally understood as a space for individuals to meet, exchange political thoughts, and engage with the state and "undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes, relatively independent of government and the market" (Walzer 1998, pp. 123-4). Civil society acts as a voice of citizens to the state that is alternative to their formal representatives in state institutions (Bui 2013, p. 78). The relationship between the state and civil society should be one of cooperation, partnership, and contestation if necessary, where civil society provides a check on the power of the state to promote good governance and drive social and economic change (Edwards 2011, p. 5). In states where the legal order protects the civil liberty, freedom of action, speech and association of citizens, participation in civil society represents citizens asserting their rights to political participation (Bach 2013, p. 41; Bui 2013, p. 81).

As the concept of civil society spreads across the world, the values, beliefs and practices of CSOs shift and change as they encounter different cultures and political structures (Ogawa 2017). The relationship between the state and civil society varies across countries, and one-party states such as Vietnam are usually considered to be "unconducive to the germination and development of civil society and [CSOs]" (Wischermann & Dang 2017, p. 129). Indeed, socialist ideology dictates that "the state is the only legitimate representative of the whole society's interests" (Bui 2013, p. 79) and civil society, therefore, represents a threat to this ideology (Wischermann & Dang 2017,

p. 132). Consequently, in the years immediately following reunification, the party-state resisted recognising civil society as a concept and a social actor in Vietnam, adopting an "exclusionary strategy" against civil society in order to exert state control over society as a whole (Bui 2013, p. 79).

This started to change when socio-economic reforms brought in by *Đổi Mới* led to the formation and development of many new associations, organisations and networks of varying formality that could be viewed as CSOs (Wischermann & Dang 2017, p. 129). International development donors and INGOs, which prior to the 1990s were not present in Vietnam, supported this by promoting the idea that cooperation between three cornerstones of the state, the market and civil society was a key to development (Bui 2013, p. 79). This has resulted in a recent and very gradual shift in the attitude of the state regarding civil society. On the one hand, the state does now recognise, tolerate and sometimes even endorse the activities and services of organisations in the non-state, non-market scene (Bui 2013, p. 80). On the other, 'civil society' and 'civil society organisation' (*xã hội dân sự* and *tổ chức xã hội dân sự*, respectively) are still considered sensitive terms, "with contested denotations and diverse connotations", rarely and reluctantly used by the state (Bui 2013, p. 80). They are translated directly from English without a clear academic or legal definition for the Vietnamese context, and, when used, are understood in literal sense of organisations representing and working for the interests of a certain group of citizens by negotiating with the state, without any political references to greater democratisation or state accountability (Wischermann & Dang 2017, p. 132).

The lack of formal recognition and definition of civil society means that no legal framework exists to categorise, guide or protect the rights of NGOs and other CSO-like organisations in Vietnam (Bui 2013, p. 80). NGOs in Vietnam are usually registered as research institutes or not-for-profit organisations, dependent on having government connections to operate, and many are headed by ex-government employees

(Wischermann & Dang 2017, p. 136). They tend to adopt non-confrontational approaches to dealing with the state, focusing on welfare provision rather than "articulating critique and offering alternatives" to government policies (Wischermann, Bui & Dang 2016, p. 79). These organisations act within the constraints of Vietnam's political context to provide services to stigmatised groups and enhance the state's responsiveness to topical social issues, even if not all organisations necessarily drive democratisation and some may even act to prevent it (Wischermann, Bui & Dang 2016). Given that civil society is still a contested concept, in her study on civil societies in Vietnam for UNDP, Norlund (2007, p. 22) suggests that "the dynamics of [Vietnamese] civil society cannot be seen primarily as the state versus civil society", and it is important to acknowledge and accept the overlap between the operations of state, party, and civil society.

The complex nature of civil society in Vietnam is part of the reason why it is difficult to determine what kind of organisation the VWU is. The VWU calls itself a "socio-political organisation" in Vietnamese (*tổ chức chính trị - xã hội*) (VWU n.d.-a), however this simply denotes its function of representing women as a sector of society and being affiliated with the state without being a legislative body. Norlund (2007, p. 22) includes the VWU and other state-affiliated mass organisations in the category of CSO using an "inclusive perspective of civil society", but this is done in the context of a study assessing the access, strengths and weaknesses of civil society in Vietnam. Their inclusion is for the purposes of understanding how non-state, non-market organisations function rather than making a statement about their ability to challenge the state or keep it in check. Recognising this, others have simply resorted to describing the VWU's dual representation by calling it a "semi-state, semi-civil society" organisation (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 93).

Figure 2. Organisational structure of the Vietnam Women's Union

[This image has been removed due to copyright restriction. Available online from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.1080/13552074.2013.802148?scroll=top&needAccess=true]

Source: Waibel and Glück (2013, p. 349)

VWU operates at four administrative levels: central headed by the Executive Committee, provincial/municipal, district, and commune (see Figure 2). The grassroot levels enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and thus can act according to the interest and needs of their locality, while the central level provides top-down planning and is the bridge with other government agencies (Rydstrøm 2016, p. 212). With membership of 17 million women[8] in 2017 (VWU n.d.-b), the VWU is a large organisation. Waibel and Glück (2013, p. 345) report that this makes Vietnam the country with the "highest membership in women's groups worldwide". However, as Norlund (2007, p. 1) notes, large membership in mass organisations in Vietnam does not necessarily translate into quality or engaged membership. The charter of the VWU states that membership to the Union is compulsory for women working in state agencies, the military, police and Labour Union (Waibel & Glück 2013, p. 346). Though the authors point out that this requirement is not always enforced, it is not unreasonable to suppose that many women in the public sector nevertheless feel compelled to join the VWU. Membership can only help their career path, in the same way that membership to the VCP is considered necessary for career advancement in the public sector for both women and men (Markussena & Ngo 2019). This structure of effectively involuntary membership is also one of the reasons why many dispute the categorisation of the VWU as part of civil society.

[8] Out of a total population of 94 million – 2017 (World Bank n.d.-b)

Another significant way that the VWU differs from the Western conception of CSOs is in its funding sources. The VWU receives part of its funding from the state, with the rest coming from donors, INGOs and development partnerships (Norlund 2007, p. 9). While the state exercises influence on the VWU through funding, it also has a say on internal operations of the VWU. VCP leaders can provide input on the appointment of VWU central leadership positions (Wischermann, Bui & Dang 2016, p. 67), which translates into influence on the activities the VWU undertakes on its own, or in cooperation with external donors. Instead of allowing alternative women's movements to form as a result of new ideas introduced under the new market economy, the way the VCP continues to exert influence on the VWU, and thus women's movements in Vietnam, demonstrates that women's rights are now being pursued through state feminism, or the idea that "the state can and should improve women's social, economic, and political status" (Scott & Truong 2007, p. 244). The lack of alternative representatives on the same scale means that the VWU is still considered the organisation in charge of women's issues and acts as the voice of government policies on gender equality. The VWU must be consulted on all policies and legislations concerning women and children (Waibel & Glück 2013, p. 347) and may also be consulted on policies on so-called "traditional women's issues" such as health and education (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 104). The president of the VWU chairs the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW), founded in 1993 to advise the Prime Minister and support the achievement of gender equality (NCFAW n.d.).

Nevertheless, the roles of the NCFAW and VWU in the greater state machinery are limited to being advisory and recommending bodies with little legislative or decision-making power (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 97). The state agency tasked with governing the progress of gender equality in Vietnam is the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Through its subdivision, the Gender Equality Department established in 2007, MOLISA manages the implementation of the Gender Equality Law, facilitates CEDAW

activities and reporting, and coordinates other ministries and ministry-level agencies to work on gender issues relevant to specific sectors (United Nations CEDAW Committee 2014, p. 17). Meanwhile, despite the fact that the 2010 and 2020 National Studies were conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Investment and MOLISA, the DVPC Law is implemented under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, a placement which reflects the state's "mixed feelings" about the issue (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 99). It implies that domestic violence is an issue of cultural behaviour rather than gender inequality, thus should be addressed from a culturalist perspective, not a feminist one, and this often results in cultural justifications for the existence of DV (Scott & Truong 2007, p. 245).

The fact that different legislations are spread out among different line ministries, with the VWU and NFCAW acting vaguely as bridges between them, drives one of the major criticisms of how promotion of women's rights works in Vietnam. This complex yet scattered bureaucratic arrangement results in gender equality, women's advancement and DV being treated as separate and discrete. This creates ineffective implementation of laws and policies due to lacking a common understanding how these different gender issues interconnect, while overabundance of bureaucratic barriers in the administrative and legal processes weakens accountability (United Nations CEDAW Committee 2015, p. 3). Another impact of this structure is that gender equality becomes conflated with women's position in the workplace and does not address systematic gender inequality and women's reproductive responsibilities. Lack of recognition of women's right as human rights reinforces the perception that women are disadvantaged because they are biologically different than men. It permits discriminatory laws such as the legal age for marriage being 18 for women and 20 for men (NAoV 2014), or the retirement age being 55 for women and 60 for men, adjusting to 60 and 62 respectively by 2035 (NAoV 2019). These laws violate the Gender Equality Law, under which "discrimination between men

and women is strictly prohibited" (NAoV 2006), however they persist because they are perceived as preferential accommodation for women and their biological difference.

Notably, the difference in retirement age is seen as giving women more time to focus on their health and family. In reality, since retirement is compulsory in the public sector, women stop receiving career development and promotions at an earlier age than men, and after retirement, often they are confined to unpaid domestic work such as taking care of grandchildren (Pistor & Le 2013, p. 98). Moreover, this "preferential" treatment of women does not extend to transforming power structures. For example, the Gender Equality Department is currently headed by a man (MOLISA n.d.) who holds the authority to influence and potentially overrule women deputies. This undermines basic gender mainstreaming principles of prioritising women's perspectives and women's representation in decision-making positions, especially in areas that directly concern them (Booth & Bennett 2002). It suggests that understanding gender equity and mainstreaming is still limited and is selectively adopted by the party-state.

4.4 Chapter summary

The VWU was established as an organisation operating under the leadership of the VCP. Prior to the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the VWU's efforts to achieve gender equality was directly tied to the socialist political ideology of the party-state. Emulation campaigns are the VWU's means to promote national constructions of womanhood that encouraged women to participate in production but also reinforced traditional gender roles based on cisgender and heterosexual normative experiences. In recent years, the emphasis of the VWU's duties is on representing the interests of Vietnamese women and issues affecting them. However, addressing gender issues in Vietnam is being constrained by a complex structure of bureaucracy with narrow and inconsistent understandings of gender inequality and its sources. In this structure, the VWU still predominantly acts as an instrument of the party-state, governing and regulating

women's behaviour and their gendered lives through the continuation of emulation campaigns, which often has counterproductive impacts on women. The next chapter will analyse the current "Five No's and Three Cleans" campaign and demonstrate that though one of the campaign aims is to prevent domestic violence, this aim is ultimately overshadowed in the overall effort to promote an overambitious construction of Vietnamese womanhood where women must excel both in their public and private lives.

Chapter 5. Five No's and Three Cleans Campaign

The 2010-2020 National Targeted Programs for New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction Support Program (NTPSP) was initiated by the Vietnamese government in 2009 as a development strategy to eliminate poverty, drive the economic development and modernisation of rural areas while also "preserving cultural identity and ecology" (Nguyen & Bui 2015, p. 43). To help achieve NTPSP targets, the VWU launched the "Building Families with Five No's and Three Cleans" emulation campaign (*Năm không ba sạch*, hereafter abbreviated as 5N3C campaign) in 2010 to promote women's awareness, participation and accountability in the NTPSP (VWU Executive Committee 2018, p. 1). Though this campaign is aimed at all women, as the NTPSP is a rural development program, the VWU's promotion of the 5N3C campaign focused on key target rural provinces under the NTPSP (VWU Executive Committee 2018, p. 1), and participation is consequently strongest among rural women.

VWU members register to participate in this campaign through their local Women's Unions (WU). According to the VWU Executive Committee (2018, p. 1), through receiving technical or financial assistance and attending WU-facilitated activities, women strive to achieve the following eight criteria:

- Five No's:
    1. No poverty
    2. No member of the family participates in crime or 'social evils'
    3. No domestic violence
    4. No more than two children per married couple
    5. No child with malnutrition or drops out of school
- Three Cleans
    1. Clean house

2. Clean kitchen
3. Clean street

These criteria reflect their family's economic and social development progress. In this chapter, I will explore the way the 5N3C campaign supports the state construction of womanhood which perpetuates women's triple burden, and contributes to domestic violence being problematised as private conflicts that women should be responsible for preventing, rather than an issue of systematic gender oppression. This is achieved by analysing VWU documents on the 5N3C campaign and news articles reporting on campaign activities and results.

Due to limited use of e-government in Vietnam, only a small number official VWU policy documents, activity designs and reports are available on the VWU official website since 2018. The websites of a few provincial- and district-level WUs provide some earlier documents, but there is no consistent source to track the implementation and progress of the 5N3C campaign from its initiation in 2010. Campaign activities are reported to the public through articles on the websites of the VWU or its branches, or in government-owned newspapers and online news sites. While privately-owned media content does exist online in Vietnam, they do not tend to cover the political operations of state agencies or state-affiliated agencies such as the VWU. Therefore, my analysis of the 5N3C campaign draws from available official VWU documents and selected online articles from government-owned news sites, whose reporting can be interpreted as disseminating government-approved messages regarding the campaign.

5.1 Overview of 5N3C campaign

In choosing documents for my analysis, I searched the VWU's website for 5N3C campaign official policy design documents and news articles and conducted an internet search for the campaign name in Vietnamese, to find articles from local WU branches and

online newspapers. I chose fifteen articles with sufficient meaningful content on which to base my analysis, broken down by source and type in Table 3. Appendix 1 provides the summary of their contents. The majority of the articles are in Vietnamese, with three articles (H. Q. 2015; Huynh 2016; Thu Thao 2014) available in English, translated by the publishing newspaper from an original Vietnamese article. When quoting from articles only available in Vietnamese, I will translate the quoted sections into English myself.

Table 3. Summary of documents and articles to be analysed, by source and type

Article source	News article	Official document	Public communications material	Total
VWU (Central)	1	2		**3**
Provincial WU	1			**1**
Municipal WU		1		**1**
District WU			2	**2**
State-owned newspaper	2			**2**
Provincial newspaper	6			**6**
Total	**10**	**3**	**2**	**15**

Source: Table compiled by author according to Cu Chi District Women's Union (2018); Danang City Women's Union (2013); Dieu Hao (2014); District 1 Women's Union (2017); H. Q. (2015); Huynh (2016); Lan Huong (2017); Mai An (2020); Mai Lien (2016); Nguyen Anh (2020); Nguyen Phuong (2011); Quynh Ngoc (2019); Thu Thao (2014); VWU Executive Committee (2014, 2018)

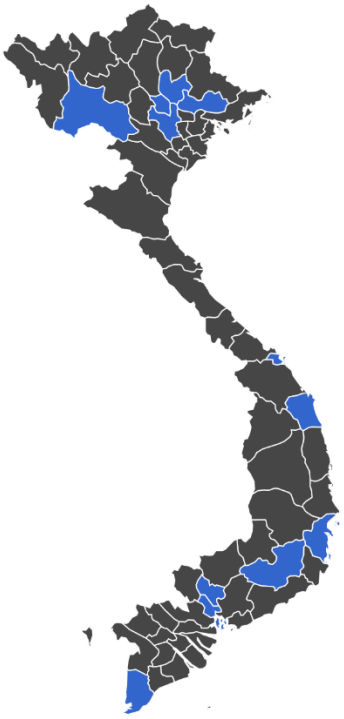
The two official documents from VWU central leadership are policy guidelines and provides information regarding the VWU's model for implementing the campaign passed down to the lower branches. The remaining 13 articles provide plans or progress reports of how the campaign is run in specific provinces. In these articles, a mix of rural and urban women from a diverse range of locations in Vietnam, including the three largest urban cities Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Danang, are targeted, or are subjects of progress reports. This is illustrated by Table 4 and Figure 4 below.

Table 4. Rural-urban breakdown of subjects in chosen articles where location is specified

Article source	Rural women	Urban women	Both rural and urban women	Total
VWU (Central)	1			**1**
Provincial WU	1			**1**
Municipal WU		1		**1**
District WU	1	1		**2**
State-owned newspaper	1		1	**2**
Provincial newspaper	3		3	**6**
Total	**7**	**2**	**4**	**13**

Source: Table compiled by author according to Cu Chi District Women's Union (2018); Danang City Women's Union (2013); Dieu Hao (2014); District 1 Women's Union (2017); H. Q. (2015); Huynh (2016); Lan Huong (2017); Mai An (2020); Mai Lien (2016); Nguyen Anh (2020); Nguyen Phuong (2011); Quynh Ngoc (2019); Thu Thao (2014)

Figure 3. Geographic spread of provinces covered by chosen articles



Source: Map generated by author via Piktochart.com according to information from Cu Chi District Women's Union (2018); Danang City Women's Union (2013); Dieu Hao (2014); District 1 Women's Union (2017); H. Q. (2015); Huynh (2016); Lan Huong (2017); Mai An (2020); Mai Lien (2016); Nguyen Anh (2020); Nguyen Phuong (2011); Quynh Ngoc (2019); Thu Thao (2014)

My analysis focuses on the way that the articles represent the roles of men and women, as well as the extent to which DV is discussed, or not discussed, and how it is discussed. This will address Questions 1 and 2 of the WPR approach regarding how DV is problematised within the 5N3C campaign, and the way in which this problematisation is shaped by certain assumptions about gender roles. I will also discuss the issues left undiscussed and effects produced by this problematisation of DV, thus answering Questions 4 and 5 of the WPR approach with respect to the 5N3C campaign.

The operation of the 5N3C campaign reflects the structural hierarchy of the VWU. The VWU Executive Committee issues campaign directions, including targets, implementation guidelines and training, to provincial WUs, who then communicate this to

WU branches at district and commune levels. These grassroot levels then recruit the participation of local WU members and assist them in achieving campaign criteria by organising activities and trainings according to local needs (VWU Executive Committee 2014; see Appendix 2 for summary of activities mentioned in selected articles). Progress is reported in terms of the number of households achieving all campaign criteria in a year and the percentage increase compared to previous years (VWU Executive Committee 2014). According to the campaign design, by achieving the eight criteria, women are achieving gender equality by playing their part contributing to alleviating multidimensional poverty in a sustainable manner that also protects the local environment (VWU Executive Committee 2018). This should mean that all eight campaign criteria are of equal importance and receive equal attention in planning, implementation and reporting. However, as Table 5 shows, aside from the two VWU policy documents, the remaining articles do not discuss all eight campaign criteria in equal measure (see also Appendix 2).

Table 5. Breakdown of article content by campaign criteria

Campaign criteria discussed	Number of articles	Percentage
No poverty	9	69%
No participation in crimes or social evils	6	46%
No domestic violence	7	54%
No more than two children	4	31%
No child with malnutrition or drops out of school	6	46%
Clean house	5	38%
Clean kitchen	5	38%
Clean street	9	69%

Source: Table compiled by author according to Cu Chi District Women's Union (2018); Danang City Women's Union (2013); Dieu Hao (2014); District 1 Women's Union (2017); H. Q. (2015); Huynh (2016); Lan Huong (2017); Mai An (2020); Mai Lien (2016); Nguyen Anh (2020); Nguyen Phuong (2011); Quynh Ngoc (2019); Thu Thao (2014); VWU Executive Committee (2014, 2018)

5.2 Women's economic empowerment as gender equality

Since the 5N3C campaign is designed to contribute to a national poverty reduction program, the fact that the majority of campaign articles focus on discussing the "No poverty" criterion is unsurprising. It is important, nevertheless, to examine the way in which the campaign utilises principles of women's economic empowerment (WEE) to achieve "No poverty". The assumption expressed by a provincial newspaper is that WEE is crucial to achieving the remaining seven criteria (Huynh 2016). In particular, as poverty is considered one of the reasons causing family unhappiness and therefore a risk factor of domestic violence, elimination of poverty increases the welfare and happiness of the family, thereby reducing women's risks of experiencing DV (Mai An 2020). Consequently, when women have an income and use it to raise their family from poverty, they are directly contributing to eliminating DV and solving gender inequality, and this contribution is empowering (District 1 Women's Union 2017). This logic drives the 5N3C campaign's strong focus on achieving the "No poverty" criteria by helping women increase their income through small businesses or expanding agricultural production.

This approach to addressing gender inequality by increasing women's productive work indicates that, according to the 5N3C campaign, gender inequality is caused by the fact that women do not have the same income opportunities as men, and this confines them to unpaid domestic work in the private sphere where they have limited power. Consequently, increasing women's participation in production will redress gender inequality as it allows them to contribute to family income and increase their voice in the household. This problem-solution representation suggests the campaign does not recognise the reproductive work that women already do as having the same value as wage work. This unequal attribution of value reflects assessments made by Moser (1993) and Kabeer (1994b) regarding the social perceptions of productive and reproductive work covered in Chapter 2. The 5N3C campaign also fails to address the fact that reproductive

work exists regardless of women's participation in productive work and when traditional gender roles are unchallenged, women are burdened with both types of work. Walby (1986, p. 36) argues that unless reproductive labour is given an economic value and women are paid accordingly, gender inequality will persist even when women have access to the labour market, because they are simultaneously expected to do additional unpaid reproductive work at home (see also Delphy 1984). Not acknowledging the value of women's unpaid reproductive labour also puts them at risk of different forms of economic exploitation, as observed by the 2020 National Study, and related violence.

The WEE strategies proposed by the 5N3C campaign such as increasing agricultural yield (Lan Huong 2017) or establishing small businesses (Nguyen Anh 2020) are also limited to women's production around the home. There is little discussion of providing women with resources and skills to work in fields traditionally dominated by men, or indeed, encouraging them to work outside the home at all, presumably because this would prevent them from performing their domestic duties. Only one article (Mai An 2020) references supporting women applying for jobs with local businesses. Walby (1997, p. 121) posits that this restriction of women's opportunities in the labour market, confining them to domestic and near-domestic work, supports men's positions of power over women. Though the 5N3C campaign aims to reduce women's poverty, which is good for national economic development, it nonetheless fails to propose strategies which would strategically transform their traditional roles in the private sphere or subordinate position to men. This follows the party-state's position that while women participating in production should be encouraged as a socialist ideology, giving women too much power to challenge traditional patriarchal values and family structures is undesirable.

The concept of WEE has also been criticised for failing to challenge gender oppression and structural disadvantages women face in the labour market, such as the gender pay gap (Caron & Margolin 2015; Chant 2016; Koffman & Gill 2013). Instead, WEE

principles imply that women's worth is dependent on their ability to generate income, and this income will magically overturn structural gender inequality (Koffman & Gill 2013, p. 90). Gender equality, even if it can be achieved in this way, becomes a prize that women earn through their ability to generate economic value rather than a right, and women become instruments of development (Caron & Margolin 2015, p. 891). So even when WEE-orientated programs may indeed succeed in increasing women's income (as reported by Huynh 2016; Mai An 2020; Nguyen Anh 2020; Quynh Ngoc 2019), their ability to actually empower women in transformative and meaningful ways is usually limited.

Furthermore, the 5N3C campaign assumes that if women contribute their productive labour to the household, they will gain power to negotiate the use of the resulting income to their benefit (Lan Huong 2017; Mai An 2020). In theory, this includes using that income to leave abusive marriages if necessary. In reality, women are not paid for agricultural labour performed in the family, and instead, men, as the assumed head of the family and authority of decision-making, control the exchange of women's production in the market (Waring 1988, p. 42). Kabeer (1994a) argues that unless this existing power structure is challenged through changing men and women's mindsets about gender roles, women will not be given any control of shared household income. Consequently, the WEE assumptions embraced by the 5N3C campaign that contributing productive labour empowers women and achieves gender equality in the household is flawed. The Women's Empowerment Framework (Longwe 1991, pp. 151-2) identifies five levels of gender equality, which are hierarchical in nature and the higher levels must be achieved for women to be truly empowered:

1. provision of material **welfare**
2. women's **access** to factors of production
3. recognition that women's problems result from structural and institutional gender inequality/discrimination (**conscientisation**)

4. women's **participation** in decision-making
5. power balance between men and women, giving women **control** over their lives and in society

Focusing on women's production, the 5N3C campaign only addresses women's welfare and access, and of the latter, only partially, assuming that participation and control will automatically follow. However, achieving participation and control requires actively challenging structural gender inequality, and this requires conscientisation. Without this awareness, both men and women may continue to perceive traditional gender roles and relations as natural (Longwe 1991). This, and the non-acknowledgement that increased household production means more work for women, results in women's triple burden and time poverty increasing while their income is appropriated by men. Simultaneously, women's risks of experiencing DV may even increase if men feel threatened that their traditional position of breadwinner is challenged and consequently lash out at their wives (Chant 2016, p. 5).

5.3 Domestic violence and "happy civilised families"

Beside poverty reduction, another major goal of the 5N3C campaign is to promote the building of "civilised urban and new rural areas" (VWU Executive Committee 2014) and "happy civilised families" (District 1 Women's Union 2017). The concept of "civility" (*văn minh*) in the Vietnamese socialist discourse can be summarised as achieving economic prosperity through "party-controlled capitalism" while upholding revitalised traditional moral values interpreted through a state-guided lens of modernity (Pettus 2003a, p. 81). The concept is often tied to the institution of family, and being a "happy civilised family" means

> *"treating your wife with respect and understanding, respecting your parents, …obeying government laws, living in harmony with your neighbours, having a clean and tidy home and practicing family planning"* (Pettus 2003a, p. 81).

In theory, *văn minh* would indeed be achieved if all criteria of the 5N3C campaign could be met, and this would contribute to the campaign's remaining goal of promoting gender equality (Mai An 2020). The above understanding of "happy civilised family" additionally implies men should take the initiative to challenge their own biases and treat their wives with more respect, and not committing DV should be the most basic form of respect. Nevertheless, an obvious contradiction is observed in the 5N3C campaign operations, as shown in Table 6 below, as many of the strategies to achieve "No domestic violence" are targeted instead at women, with limited engagement of men.

Table 6. Strategies used by WUs to achieve "No domestic violence" criterion

Strategy	Number of articles*
Women's support group/"Happy Family Clubs"	6
Information sessions on Gender Equality and DVPC Laws for women only	3
Information sessions on Gender Equality and DVPC Laws for women and men	2
Community intervention when domestic violence is reported	1
Community investment in women's shelter	1
Does not discuss strategy to achieve "No domestic violence"	8

* some articles may discuss more than one strategy

Source: Table compiled by author according to Cu Chi District Women's Union (2018); Danang City Women's Union (2013); Dieu Hao (2014); District 1 Women's Union (2017); H. Q. (2015); Huynh (2016); Lan Huong (2017); Mai An (2020); Mai Lien (2016); Nguyen Anh (2020); Nguyen Phuong (2011); Quynh Ngoc (2019); Thu Thao (2014); VWU Executive Committee (2014, 2018)

The first strategy that WUs gravitate towards to achieve the "No domestic violence" criterion is holding information sessions to spread awareness among women about the content and importance of Gender Equality and DVPC Laws (Danang City Women's Union 2013; District 1 Women's Union 2017; VWU Executive Committee 2014, 2018). The use of this presumably one-way, top-down mode of communication turns DV into a problem of

awareness rather than systematic oppression of women. That is, the 5N3C campaign suggests DV occurs because people are not aware that it is lawfully wrong. In turn, this implies that DV is morally unacceptable because it is not legal, or because it impedes the state's development goal thus harming the collective good, not because it, per se, causes physical and psychological harm to individual women and violates their human rights.

The fact that these information sessions only occasionally include men (Danang City Women's Union 2013; H. Q. 2015) is significant. It reflects the lack of meaningful engagement with men in the whole campaign, which is also evident in Figure 3, depicting women at the front and centre. A reason given by some VWU officials for the focus on women is that, since the VWU's function is to represent women, they experience difficulty engaging men due to the perception that they (should) only work with women (Rahm 2020, p. 274). This reflects an inefficiency in the VWU's current structure, and reinforces the view that the responsibility to achieve campaign criteria, and most particularly, to prevent DV, rests with women. Indeed, some articles explicitly reference that women should take initiative in preventing DV by teaching family members, including their husbands, about the harms of DV (Cu Chi District Women's Union 2018) and cultivating good relationships between family members to create family harmony (Thu Thao 2014). This implies that a harmonious family atmosphere is less likely to provoke men's hot temper and violence. To service this, local WUs establish "Happy Family Clubs" or similar social clubs, which help achieve multiple campaign criteria by "helping women understand their role in the family" (Huynh 2016), providing space to "share experiences regarding childcare, taking care of family" (H. Q. 2015) and ways to manage family behaviour, relationships and conflicts in order to prevent DV (Nguyen Phuong 2011).

"Happy Family Clubs" illustrate the socially-constructed and state-perpetuated belief that women should have the ability to persuade and influence adult family members, particularly their husbands, into good behaviour, previously introduced in Chapter 3. This

belief results from the essentialising perception that women are naturally nurturing, gentle, and patient, thus suitable to undertake this emotional labour (Rydstrøm 2004), and the expectations placed on women to ensure the collective benefits of the family and nation (Schuler et al. 2006, p. 385). This tendency to hold women to account for behaviours clearly outside their control creates direct dangers to women when applied to discussions of DV. Women may face behaviours that should only not be handled privately, but require external intervention such as violent tendencies or substance abuse and related violence. However, fear of stigmatisation and the social expectation that they should be able to manage these family issues to project the image of a “happy civilised family” means that women may be deterred from seeking help, preferring to avoid exposing family embarrassments. This allows DV to exist unacknowledged and become normalised. When violence escalates to the point that it can no longer be ignored, women are often blamed, even by those representing their interest such as their local WU, as it is assumed that the violence only occurred because they did something to provoke their husband, or failed to be gentle and loving enough to dissuade their husband from vices (Schuler et al. 2006, p. 387).

According to Moser (1993, p. 41), when addressing problems affecting women, it is important to ensure that policies meet both women’s practical and strategic needs for transformative change to occur. Practical needs refer to “immediate perceived necessity” of women that fit within their traditional gender roles, while meeting strategic needs requires directly challenging gender roles and systematic oppression of women (Moser 1993, pp. 39-40). “Happy Family Clubs” only address the immediate practical needs of women for social connection and support, but neglects the strategic opportunity for women to come together to challenge structural gender inequality, and to engage men into this effort. The way “Happy Family Clubs” operate under the guidance of the local WUs may actually contribute to reinforcing the idea of holding women accountable for their family’s

behaviour. Though the VWU does operate a women's shelter (Centre for Women and Development n.d.), only one article references this service as a possible method to strategically address DV (Dieu Hao 2014). When both the law and society accept that reconciliation should be the first step to dealing with DV (Vu et al. 2014), it results in a system which discourages women from leaving violent relationships to preserve the so-called "happy civilised family".

As women face these heavy expectations to manage their household, the 5N3C campaign also comes with additional requirements of unpaid community service to fulfil the "Three Cleans" criteria, especially "Clean Street". Nine out of thirteen articles discuss or feature images of women sweeping local streets or planting trees and flowers in community areas. The campaign recruits women by establishing "women-managed streets" (Lan Huong 2017; Nguyen Anh 2020) and women's environmental clubs (Thu Thao 2014) to raise awareness about the importance of environmental protection, suggesting these activities empower women. Community work is assumed to be done voluntarily by women in their "free" time (Moser 1993, p. 34), but when this work becomes an expectation by a state-affiliated body, the time is effectively no longer free nor the work voluntary. While some articles do specify that the whole community, including men, should be involved in protecting the environment (Mai An 2020; Nguyen Anh 2020), the fact that these streets are called "women-managed streets" essentially allocates these tasks only to women. As Moser (1993, p. 35) observes, while men also do community work, types of work allocated to men and women are extensions of their positions at home. Since men are the authority at home, in public, they often engage in paid managerial community work and in politics. Meanwhile, women extend their domestic tasks in the private sphere to the public sphere; in the case of the 5N3C campaign, this means unpaid community environmental clean-ups.

Despite the enormous expectations the 5N3C campaign places on women, some rural communes can report a participation rate of 80 to 100 per cent of local WU members (Dieu Hao 2014; Lan Huong 2017; Quynh Ngoc 2019). Although its grassroots operations are designed to account for the context of local women, the 5N3C campaign is directed in a top-down manner from VWU central leadership, and at its core, its aim is to meet national development targets. The articles, though covering many locations, describe similar activities closely following the model of operation issued by the VWU Executive Committee (2018). Given that the VWU's approach to women's representation has been criticised for being based on hegemony of the majority and heteronormativity (Rydstrøm 2016), the question of what "context" is truly considered at the local level should be raised, and whether the intersecting needs of women of diverse ages, abilities, sexualities, who are ethnic minorities or gender non-conforming, are taken into account. Overall, the fact that different locations carry out the same kinds of activities according to guidance from VWU leadership suggests that the 5N3C campaign is ultimately governing how women should live their lives according to a standard formula set by the party-state with limited consideration for their individual needs.

5.4 Chapter summary

While the National Targeted Programs for New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction Support Program drive development of the whole country, the 5N3C campaign is a specialised movement for women to contribute towards development at household and community levels. Analysis of the fifteen chosen campaign articles shows that the 5N3C campaign reinforces the party-state's position that responsibilities in the private sphere belong to women. Like previous VWU emulation campaigns, 5N3C campaign overlooks the diverse needs of different groups of women in order to promote a national construction of womanhood and understanding of gender equality that narrowly fulfils the party-state's development goals. The campaign imposes

a specific brand of state-constructed triple burden on Vietnamese women that perpetuates the perception that they should work selflessly to ensure the welfare of their family and community (and by extension, the nation). In the name of gender equality, women contribute to national economic development, but also perform reproductive and community work which reinforce their traditional subordinate position in the patriarchal family structure.

This results in the campaign problematising domestic violence as a symptom of an unhappy family, rather than the cause of it. DV is represented as an issue that women should be able to eliminate themselves if they are industrious enough to ensure their family's welfare, are nurturing and gentle enough to manage family relationships and influence family members into moral and legal behaviours, and keeping their family happy overall by fulfilling all campaign criteria. The lack of meaningful engagement with men imply they play a minimal role in building this happy family. This contributes to the campaign failing to enable women to recognise that DV is an issue of gender oppression that cannot just be eliminated merely when they work harder and are more selfless, but must be addressed by challenging traditional gender roles and patriarchal family structures. This effect of this is that the campaign places the burden of DV prevention on women, and blames them when DV does occur, because this is seen as the result of women failing to fulfil the duties expected of them. It also homogenises all Vietnamese women and does not recognise the different experiences of diverse women.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis examined the construction of womanhood and its effects on the way domestic violence is problematised in Vietnam. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, throughout the 20th century, the promotion of gender equality in Vietnam was largely employed to integrate women into efforts of national liberation from French colonisation and American imperialism. Under the leadership of the VCP and through the use of emulation campaigns, the VWU promoted state constructions of womanhood that essentialised women's participation in the workforce as selflessly contributing to socialist development while also lauding women for fulfilling their traditional domestic role as wife and mother. During this period, issues of rights which affect women's wellbeing such as women's domestic duties and traditionally subordinate position, sexuality, and gender-based violence, including DV, were minimally addressed. In other words, the Vietnamese party-state historically promoted a limited interpretation of gender equality that served its political and material objectives, rather than challenging and transforming gender norms that are damaging to women. In the process, the VWU was instrumentalised as a tool to govern women's behaviour despite its function to represent their interest.

Greater global integration in the open-door era since the mid-1980s has introduced greater external pressures for Vietnam to address a wider array of women's rights issues, including gender-based violence and DV. Vietnam's commitment to international conventions and development goals such as CEDAW, MDGs and SDGs led to the development of the Gender Equality Law and Domestic Violence Prevention and Control Law in Vietnam. The 2010 National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women discussed in Chapter 3 first brought to national attention the prevalence of DV as an issue negatively affecting the majority of Vietnamese women that is still routinely silenced. Limited improvements observed by the follow-up 2020 National Study indicate that implementation of the DVPC Law still faces many hurdles. Chapter 5 argued that this is

partly due to the fact that emulation campaigns continue to be used by the VWU as a yardstick for measuring successful womanhood, now with preventing DV added on as yet another achievement for which women must take responsibility. This demonstrates that the party-state's limited interpretation of gender inequality extends to its approach to DV, which is problematised as an issue of individuals committing bad behaviour, and that this can be tackled through governing of individual behaviour and women's performance of femininity, rather than recognising it as a problem of unequal power between men and women. In order to more effective address domestic violence against women and gender-based violence, Vietnam must recognise structural gender inequality as a major cause of these issues, and exert more active efforts to challenge binary and stereotypical views about the roles of men and women that are still so ingrained in society.

The focus of recent emulation campaigns, such as the 5N3C campaign, on women taking the main responsibility to prevent DV, by acting according to their gender roles and be good examples of moral behaviour within their family, additionally results in the implication that men do not play a role in this effort. As discussed in Chapter 2, this lack of recognition of men's role in preventing DV not only puts the onus on women, it is also harmful to men. It undermines men by not acknowledging that their behaviour is within their own control and does not allow them to take responsibility for their own actions (Flood 2004). It also prevents men from recognising the ways that causing physical and psychological harm to their wives also has negative impacts on them and create intergenerational trauma to their children (Jewkes, Flood & Lang 2015). Moreover, by not acknowledging that men are capable of changing their behaviour, this construction overlooks the contribution of men who do actively challenge their own male privileges and are allies for women, and may alienate those who wish to contribute more to the effort for gender equality (Cleaver 2002).

Chapter 4 showed that, given the constraints presented by the VWU's in-between position as a state-affiliated mass organisation, it could be argued that emulation campaigns such as the 5N3C campaign, analysed in Chapter 5, are designed to meet only the immediate practical needs of women such as facilitating their greater contribution to production within the limits of their existing domestic duties. In theory, the VWU's relationship with the party-state affords it some influence to affect institutional change, and its work with external donors could be used as the conduit to introduce more transformative gender values to the party-state. However, this will only happen if the VWU recognises that its current function as an instrument of governing women's gendered lives limits its ability to engage "effectively and meaningfully with its female constituency", and creates changes to its current method of representation to recognise the diverse subjectivities and needs of different women (Hoang 2020, p. 309).

Nevertheless, as the VWU operates in a hierarchical structure with the leadership enjoying a certain level of political power, it is possible that the elite women at the VWU's central level find that it brings them greater benefits to uphold the party-state's construction of womanhood rather than advocating for the needs of the grassroots. As long as civil society remains restricted, preventing the free exchange of political thoughts and allowing for organisations other than the VWU to thrive, the VWU will continue to exist as the largest and arguably only influential champion for women's issues. This will continue to perpetuate the domination of state-approved constructions of womanhood and governing approaches to addressing women's issues and overlook alternative approaches.

With international aid and development programs expected to slowly retreat from Vietnam in the coming years as result of becoming a middle-income country, the lack of alternative voices regarding transformative approaches to gender equality may result in additional challenges. The external pressure to tackle issues such as gender-based violence and DV may be lost if there is no other alternative Vietnamese organisation or

movement to fill the gap. This presents opportunities for further research to explore how and by whom alternative representations of DV could be introduced and promoted given Vietnam's political and social contexts, or how the issue could alternatively be addressed in a way that transforms traditional gender norms while engaging men and holding them accountable. It would be useful to explore how smaller NGOs or grassroots organisations do, or could, work with the VWU to utilise its influence while also overcoming challenges presented by its relationship with, and obligations to, the party-state.

Appendix 1: List of 5N3C campaign articles

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
1	Guidelines for Implementing “Building Families of Five No’s and Three Cleans” Campaign	Hướng dẫn Thực hiện Cuộc vận động “Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch”	21-Mar-14	Executive Committee VWU	VWU (Central)	Urban and rural
Full reference: VWU Executive Committee 2014, *Hướng dẫn Thực hiện Cuộc vận động “Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch” (Guidelines for Implementing “Building Families of Five No’s and Three Cleans” Campaign)*, Vietnam Women’s Union, Hanoi. **Content summary:** Guidelines from VWU Executive Committee to provincial WUs on how to implement the 5N3C campaign, including expectations on training, communications, targets and performance indicators.						
2	Plan to implement the resolution of the VWU Executive Committee to run the “Building Families of Five No’s and Three Cleans” Campaign (period 2013-2017)	Kế hoạch Triển khai Nghị quyết của BCH TW Hội LHPN VN Về đẩy mạnh thực hiện cuộc vận động xây dựng gia đình 5 không 3 sạch (giai đoạn 2013 – 2017)	3-Apr-13	Standing Committee Danang City WU	Municipal WU	Urban

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
Full reference: Danang City Women's Union 2013, *Kế hoạch Triển khai Nghị quyết của BCH TW Hội LHPN VN Về đẩy mạnh thực hiện cuộc vận động xây dựng gia đình 5 không 3 sạch (giai đoạn 2013 – 2017) (Plan to implement the resolution of the VWU Executive Committee to run the "Building Families of Five No's and Three Cleans" Campaign (period 2013-2017))*, Danang Women's Union, Danang. **Content summary:** Danang City WU's plan to implement the 5N3C campaign in Danang during the period 2013-2017. Danang is the third largest urban city in Vietnam, located in the central coast region.						
3	"Build families with 5 no's and 3 cleans" campaign	Cuộc vận động "Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch"	25-Jul-17	WU District 1, Ho Chi Minh City	District WU	Urban
Full reference: District 1 Women's Union 2017, *Cuộc vận động "Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch" ("Build families with 5 no's and 3 cleans" campaign)*, viewed 1 July 2020, <https://phunuq1.org.vn/cuoc-van-dong-xay-dung-gia-dinh-5-khong-3-sach/>. **Content summary:** Article and poster summarising 5N3C campaign criteria published on official website of Ho Chi Minh City's District 1 WU. HCMC is the largest city in Vietnam, located in the southern Mekong Delta region.						
4	Guidelines for Implementing "WU Divisions Achieving Five No's and Three Cleans	Hướng dẫn Mô hình "Chi hội phụ nữ 5 không, 3 sạch xây dựng nông thôn mới"	21-Mar-18	Executive Committee VWU	VWU (Central)	Urban and rural

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
	to Contribute to New Rural Development" Model					
Full reference: VWU Executive Committee 2018, *Mô hình "Chi hội phụ nữ 5 không, 3 sạch xây dựng nông thôn mới" (Model for "5 no's and 3 cleans to build new rural area" at the local level)*, Vietnam Women's Union, Hanoi. **Content summary:** Guidelines from VWU Executive Committee on implementing a model of activities designed to achieve 5N3C campaign criteria in key target provinces/regions of the NTPSP.						
5	Guidelines for implementing the "Building Families of Five No's and Three Cleans" Campaign to contribute to developing new-style rural area and urban civilisation (period 2018-2022)	Hướng dẫn thực hiện cuộc vận động "Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch" góp phần xây dựng nông thôn mới, đô thị văn minh (giai đoạn 2018-2022)	3-Nov-18	WU Cu Chi District, Ho Chi Minh City	District WU	Rural
Full reference: Cu Chi District Women's Union 2018, *Hướng dẫn thực hiện cuộc vận động "Xây dựng gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch" góp phần xây dựng nông thôn mới, đô thị văn minh (giai đoạn 2018-2022) (Guidelines for implementing the "Building Families of Five No's*						

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
and Three Cleans" Campaign to contribute to developing new-style rural area and urban civilisation (period 2018-2022)), viewed 1 July 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/1666683416695776/posts/2165490740148372/>. **Content summary:** Pamphlet to WU members explaining indicators used to measure the achievement of 5N3C campaign criteria, published on the official Facebook page of Ho Chi Minh City's Cu Chi District WU.						
6	The capital's women with the "Five No's and Three Cleans" campaign	Phụ nữ Thủ đô với phong trào "5 không, 3 sạch"	5-Mar-20	Nhan Dan Online Newspaper	State-owned newspaper	Urban and rural
Full reference: Nguyen Anh 2020, *Phụ nữ Thủ đô với phong trào "5 không, 3 sạch" (The capital's women with the "Five No's and Three Cleans" campaign)*, Nhan Dan Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <https://nhandan.com.vn/tranghanoi-tin-chung/phu-nu-thu-do-voi-phong-trao-5-khong-3-sach-451210/>. **Content summary:** News article on Nhan Dan Newspaper (People's Newspaper, official news outlet of the VCP) on various achievements of the 5N3C campaign in Hanoi. Hanoi is the capital and second largest city in Vietnam, located in the northern Red River Delta region. Article focuses on how the campaign helped women escape poverty and encouraged women to clean up their local streets.						
7	Helping women build families with "Five No's, Three Cleans"	Hỗ trợ phụ nữ xây dựng gia đình "5 không, 3 sạch"	9-Apr-20	Thai Nguyen Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Rural

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
Full reference: Mai An 2020, *Hỗ trợ phụ nữ xây dựng gia đình "5 không, 3 sạch" (Helping women build families with "Five No's, Three Cleans")*, Thai Nguyen Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://baothainguyen.vn/tin-tuc/xa-hoi/ho-tro-phu-nu-xay-dung-gia-dinh-%E2%80%9C5-khong-3-sach%E2%80%9D-270367-85.html>. **Content summary:** News article on Thai Nguyen Newspaper, official news outlet of Thai Nguyen provincial branch of VCP, on progress of the 5N3C campaign in Dong Hy District, Thai Nguyen Province since 2012. Thai Nguyen is a mountainous province in northeast Vietnam.						
8	Bac Giang Province celebrates Vietnamese Day of the Family 28 June	Bắc Giang: Kỷ niệm Ngày Gia đình Việt Nam 28/6	22-Jun-11	VWU	VWU (Central)	Rural
Full reference: Nguyen Phuong 2011, *Bắc Giang: Kỷ niệm Ngày Gia đình Việt Nam 28/6 (Bac Giang Province celebrates Vietnamese Day of the Family 28 June)*, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://hoilhpn.org.vn/web/guest/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/bac-giang-ky-niem-ngay-gia-%C4%91inh-viet-nam-28-6-16865-1.html>. **Content summary:** Article on the VWU website on the progress of the 5N3C campaign in Bac Giang, a north-eastern rural province, focusing on the establishment of "Happy Family Clubs".						

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
9	Women participate in emulation campaign “Five No’s, Three Cleans” to build new-style rural area	Phụ nữ thi đua ‘5 không, 3 sạch’, góp sức xây NTM	25-Aug-17	Vietnamnet	State-owned newspaper	Rural
Full reference: Lan Huong 2017, *Phụ nữ thi đua ‘5 không, 3 sạch’, góp sức xây NTM (Women participate in emulation campaign “Five No’s, Three Cleans” to build new-style rural area)*, Vietnamnet, viewed 1 July 2020, <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/doi-song/phu-nu-thi-dua-5-khong-3-sach-gop-suc-xay-ntm-399493.html>. **Content summary:** News article from a state-owned newspaper discussing how the 5N3C campaign has helped women of Ca Mau and Lam Dong provinces escape poverty. Both provinces are mostly rural and have high levels of poverty, with Ca Mau being located in the southern region of Vietnam, and Lam Dong located in the Central Highlands region.						
10	Quang Ngai Province WU on the implementation of “Building Families of Five No’s and Three Cleans” Campaign	Hội LHPN tỉnh Quảng Ngãi với việc thực hiện Cuộc vận động “Xây dựng Gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch”	14-Jul-14	WU Quang Ngai Province	Provincial WU	Rural

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
Full reference: Dieu Hao 2014, *Hội LHPN tỉnh Quảng Ngãi với việc thực hiện Cuộc vận động "Xây dựng Gia đình 5 không, 3 sạch" (Quang Ngai Province WU on the implementation of "Building Families of Five No's and Three Cleans" Campaign)*, viewed 1 July 2020, <https://hoiphunu.quangngai.gov.vn/i653-hoi-lhpn-tinh-quang-ngai--voi-viec-thuc-hien-cuoc-van-dong--%E2%80%9Cxay-dung-gia-dinh-5-khong,-3-sach%E2%80%9D.aspx>. **Content summary:** News article on website of Quang Ngai provincial WU reporting on 5N3C campaign achievements in the province from the period 2011-2014. Quang Ngai is a central province in Vietnam.						
11	"Five No's and Three Cleans" of city women	"5 không, 3 sạch" của phụ nữ Thành phố	24-Sep-19	Son La Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Rural
Full reference: Quynh Ngoc 2019, *"5 không, 3 sạch" của phụ nữ Thành phố ("Five No's and Three Cleans" of city women)*, Son La Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://www.baosonla.org.vn/vi/bai-viet/5-khong-3-sach-cua-phu-nu-thanh-pho-25877>. **Content summary:** News article on Son La Newspaper, official news outlet of Son La provincial branch of VCP, reporting on campaign progress in the various rural districts of Son La City. Son La City is the capital city of Son La province, one of the poorest provinces of Vietnam located in the north-western mountainous region.						
12	"Five No's and Three Cleans" campaign contributes to building new-style rural area	Cuộc vận động "... 5 không, 3 sạch" góp phần xây dựng nông thôn mới	14-Jul-16	Vinh Phuc Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Rural

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
Full reference: Mai Lien 2016, *Cuộc vận động "... 5 không, 3 sạch" góp phần xây dựng nông thôn mới ("Five No's and Three Cleans" campaign contributes to building new-style rural area)*, Vinh Phuc Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://baovinhphuc.com.vn/xay-dung-nong-thon-moi/31925/cuoc-van-dong-%E2%80%9C-5-khong-3-sach%E2%80%9D-gop-phan-xay-dung-nong-thon-moi.html>. **Content summary:** News article on Vinh Phuc Newspaper, official news outlet of Vinh Phuc provincial branch of VCP, reporting on campaign progress in the province for period 2011-2015. Vinh Phuc is a province in the Red River Delta region in the north of Vietnam.						
13	Efficiency from "five Nos, three Cleans" campaign	--	3-Oct-16	Binh Duong Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Urban and rural
Full reference: Huynh, T 2016, *Efficiency from "five Nos, three Cleans" campaign*, Binh Duong Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://baobinhduong.vn/en/efficiency-from-five-nos-three-cleans-campaign-a149787.html>. **Content summary:** News article on Binh Duong Newspaper, official news outlet of Binh Duong provincial branch of VCP, reporting on campaign progress in the province. Binh Duong is a province in the southern region of Vietnam, and is considered the gateway to Ho Chi Minh City, the commercial centre of Vietnam.						
14	Provincial Women's Unions at all levels make	--	1-Apr-14	Binh Duong Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Urban and rural

	Title (English)	Title (Vietnamese)	Date published	Organisation	Organisation type	Primary target (rural/urban women, both)
	contributions to new rural construction					
Full reference: Thu Thao 2014, *Provincial Women's Unions at all levels make contributions to new rural construction*, Binh Duong Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <http://baobinhduong.vn/en/provincial-women-s-unions-at-all-levels-make-contributions-to-new-rural-construction-a72644.html>. **Content summary:** News article on Binh Duong Newspaper, official news outlet of Binh Duong provincial branch of VCP, reporting on campaign progress in the province.						
15	Child care and education awareness raised	--	30-Oct-15	Khanh Hoa Online Newspaper	Provincial newspaper	Urban and rural
Full reference: H. Q. 2015, *Child care and education awareness raised*, Khanh Hoa Online Newspaper, viewed 1 July 2020, <https://baokhanhhoa.vn/english/socio_politic/201510/child-care-and-education-awareness-raised-2412931/>. **Content summary:** News article on Khanh Hoa Newspaper, official news outlet of Khanh Hoa provincial branch of VCP, reporting on campaign progress in Nha Trang City, capital city of Khanh Hoa, a province in the central coast region of Vietnam.						

Appendix 2: Examples of activities run by local Women's Unions to achieve 5N3C campaign criteria

Activity	Description of activity	Targeted campaign criteria
Assist women starting small businesses/ expanding agricultural production	- Counsel and guide women applying for microcredit to establish small businesses or expand agricultural production (VWU Executive Committee 2014) - Communications campaigns to encourage women to create savings (Danang City Women's Union 2013) - Raise community funds to provide loans to poor women (Mai Lien 2016)	- No poverty
Technical/vocational training	- Cooperate with other sector agencies to provide technical or vocational training to help women establish small business, expand agricultural production or apply for jobs (VWU Executive Committee 2014)	- No poverty
Support local businesses	- Encourage women to buy from local businesses, especially women-owned businesses (VWU Executive Committee 2014) - Awards/commendations for successful local women-owned businesses (VWU Executive Committee 2014)	- No poverty
Women's economic support groups	- Social club to provide mutual support, share employment opportunities, establish networks (Nguyen Anh 2020)	- No poverty

Social clubs for women including "Happy Family Clubs" and support groups for mothers	- Women meet to discuss and provide support on managing family relationships and conflicts, caring for family and raising children (Mai An 2020; Thu Thao 2014) - Training from local health professionals to mothers on proper childcare (VWU Executive Committee 2018) - Social clubs increase accountability on commitment to only having two children (Mai Lien 2016) - Promote state policies on population planning, gender equality and domestic violence prevention (Thu Thao 2014)	- No crime/social evil - No domestic violence - No more than two children - No child with malnutrition or drops out of school
Information sessions on state laws and policies	- Sessions on criminal law or laws related to social evils targeted at both men and women (Cu Chi District Women's Union 2018) - Sessions on population planning targeted at women, sometimes men (Cu Chi District Women's Union 2018; VWU Executive Committee 2018) - Sessions on gender equality and domestic violence prevention laws primarily targeted at women (Cu Chi District Women's Union 2018; Mai An 2020; VWU Executive Committee 2018)	- No crime/social evil - No more than two children - No domestic violence
Scholarship funds	- Raise funds from local community to provide scholarship to children from poor families (Huynh 2016)	- No child with malnutrition or drops out of school
Support on hygiene and waste management	- Provide women with training on hygiene, including food hygiene, and waste management (Mai An 2020)	- Clean house - Clean kitchen

	- Provide technical and financial support to help families build proper hygiene facilities (VWU Executive Committee 2018)	- Clean street
Community clean-up activities	- Establish women's environmental clubs to raise awareness about protecting local environment (Thu Thao 2014) - Recruit women to participate in cleaning up community areas, planting trees and flowers on weekends - Establishing "women-managed streets" where women volunteer to become responsible for keeping these streets clean (Quynh Ngoc 2019)	- Clean street

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[i] In Vietnamese naming conventions, the surname precedes the given names. Most people have two or three given names, sometimes distinguished as given name and middle name(s) under Western naming convention. This often creates inconsistency in name order when Vietnamese authors publish internationally and/or are cited in international literature: surname sometimes appear first, sometimes last, and middle name(s) may be omitted. As the surnames of Vietnamese authors cited in this thesis are identifiable to me as a Vietnamese speaker, I have standardised the naming order in the reference list to ensure that authors are consistently cited in the text by their surnames. One particular author, Song Ha VU, has several works published under different name orders, so I have also standardised their name order across these works in order to cite them as the same person.