Land Politics and Livelihoods on the Margins of Hanoi, 1920-2010

DANIELLE LABBÉ

Contents

Introduction

Hòa Mục is a small village located about six kilometres west of the historic centre of Hà Nội, the capital city of Việt Nam (Figure 1). Although quite close to the urban core, this area still corresponded to Hà Nội's rural-urban interface less than a decade ago. The village is located across the Tô Lịch River, outside the old Đại La Thành dike – a natural element and a built structure that long served as the administrative threshold between the so-called inner *(nội thành)* and outer city *(ngoại thành)*. Throughout the twentieth century, the river and the dike acted as an imaginary belt, in effect restraining the urban footprint of Hà Nội from spreading into the pastoral landscape of villages and paddy fields surrounding it.

In the late 1990s, planning authorities enlarged the urban territory of Hà Nội by pushing this imaginary line between city and country several kilometres westward. Vast expanses of erstwhile rural territory were thus absorbed into the urban administrative space. Despite living under the influence of Hà Nội's economy and way of life for several decades, dozens of rural settlements located in the newly designated urban territory witnessed an acceleration of urbanization. In the course of a few years, the city's economy, built forms, population dynamics, and governing practices had altered this area so dramatically that it is now difficult to discern traces of its still recent rural past.
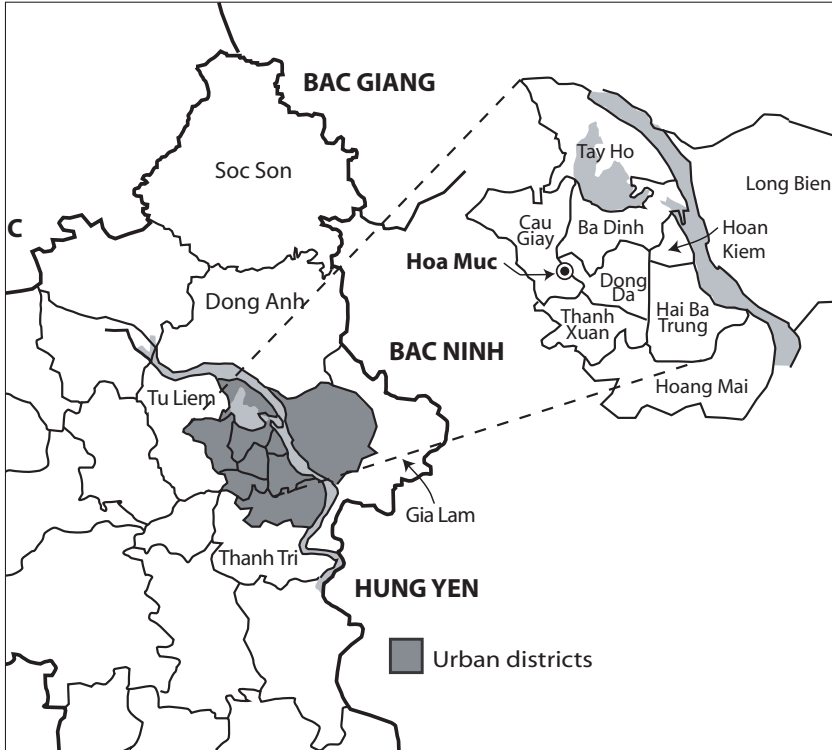
1 Location of Hòa Mục in the province of Hà Nội.

Hòa Mục is among those formerly rural villages whose past has been effaced. Apart from a handful of ritual buildings tucked into the urban fabric, few things recall its rural roots. Walking inside the old settlement area, one sees instead a busy streetscape of eclectic, multi-storey row houses very similar to those found in inner-city neighbourhoods. Only a handful of traditional one-storey rural houses with gardens and outbuildings surrounded by walls remind the visitor of this place's origins. As material artifacts, these few ancient houses may not long survive their passage into the urban world and the demolition and reconstruction plans of their current occupants.

Outside the old village's limits, the agricultural landscape of oxen and rice paddies – perhaps unchanged for hundreds of years – has also given way to a new urban landscape. This occurred slowly during the 1960s and 1970s, as the state recovered small tracts of land and

2 View of the New Urban Area bordering Hòa Mục. *Source:* Author, 2009.

redeveloped them for urban functions. The pace of change greatly ac-
celerated in the 2000s, following the designation of this zone as an
urban administrative district. Soon new bridges were built and large
avenues penetrated ever deeper into the city's western hinterland. The
provincial authorities then expropriated all that remained of the farm-
land that the villagers and their ancestors had cared for and tilled for
countless generations. In accordance with the capital's master plan,
the rice fields were levelled, the irrigation canals filled, and the site was
redeveloped into large avenues flanked by residential towers, big-box
stores, and office buildings (Figure 2).

Changes can be observed in other spheres of Hòa Mục's life. Com-
pared with about a decade ago, the village's population is larger, denser,
and socio-economically more diverse. Between 1997 and 2009, the
population of the ward of Trung Hòa (to which Hòa Mục belongs)

grew from 14,000 to 27,000 people. Two-thirds of these new residents are migrants. The newcomers include a mix of well-off people from neighbouring provinces, including many retired bureaucrats who relocated to facilitate their children's access to Hà Nội's job market and educational opportunities. A few years later, a much less affluent group of students and workers began moving into the village on seasonal and temporary bases. They stayed in so-called lodgings *(nhà trọ)* that villagers have been building next to their houses since the early 2000s – a cheap form of accommodation outside the unaffordable urban core, yet at commuting distance to the city's universities and its blue-collar and informal job markets.

Although now occurring at an unprecedented pace, the socio-spatial integration of formerly rural places, such as Hòa Mục, into Hà Nội is not a new phenomenon. A tight network of densely settled villages has long characterized the capital region's geography. Corollary to this is the fact that, since at least the early twentieth century, the city has progressively absorbed periurban villages as it expanded into its rural hinterland. Nevertheless, maps produced since the colonial era indicate that the urban expansion process rarely wiped a pre-existing village off the map. Rather, the city expanded around these nucleated villages, embedding them one by one within its built fabric (Figure 3).

Today the city's growth continues to *encompass* rather than *obliterate* periurban villages. The urban agglomeration that results from this long incorporation process is, as can be observed in other East and Southeast Asian contexts, a mosaic of planned redevelopment zones and spontaneous neighbourhoods that evolved from former rural villages. This latter element in Hà Nội's urban formation process is reflected in the local language by the expression *làng giữa phố* (literally, "villages in the city") used to refer to the many neighbourhoods formed out of rural settlements weaved into the city's built fabric.

The integration of Hòa Mục into the city's physical and administrative space, the penetration of new urban built forms, the end of farming activities, and the arrival of a large migrant population all suggest that this village has completed the historical shift from rural to urban. Yet, for a whole segment of the population, this place is still very much a village *(làng),* their homeland *(quê hương),* and the land of their

Village

Urbanized area (circa 2005)
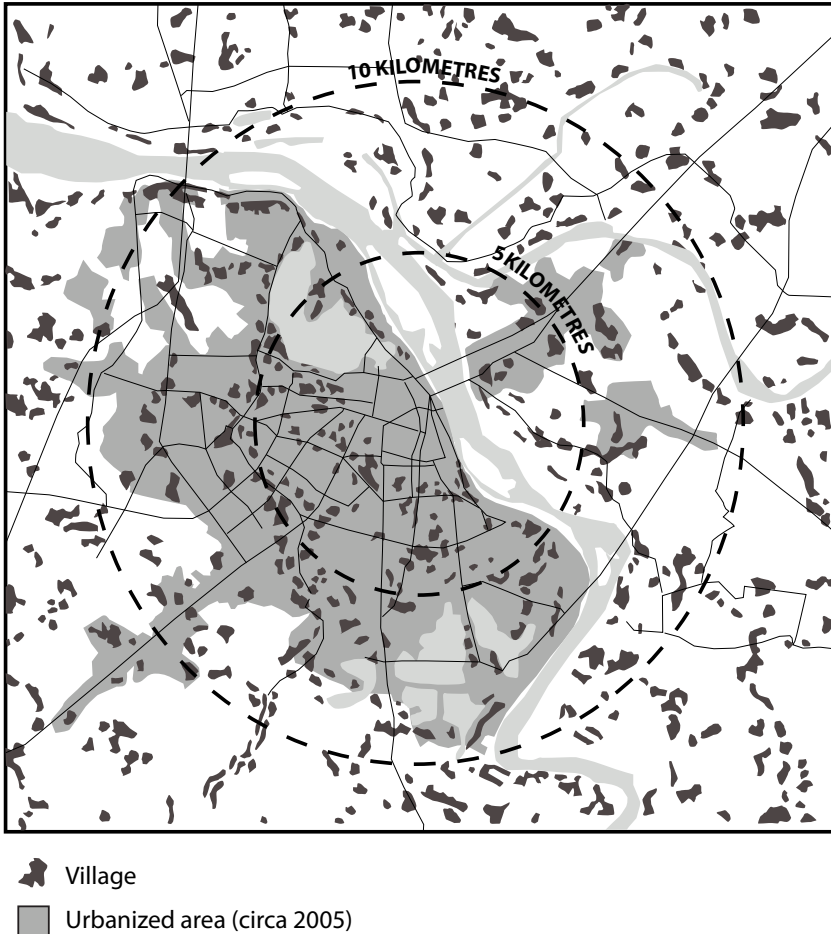
3 Villages absorbed into Hà Nội's built fabric (1935-2005). *Source:* Adapted from Service de Géographique de l'Indochine 1935.

ancestors. This sense of place comes up very rapidly in discussions with native residents. It is also visible in how these people try to maintain and transmit to their heirs ritual practices and communal values inherited from earlier times.

This does not mean, however, that villagers attempt to live in the past. Rather, Hòa Mục residents perpetuate their attachment to the village's history and values while practising urban occupations, living in urban-styled homes, enjoying new cell phones and satellite TV

dishes, and encouraging their children to learn foreign languages. As their parents and grandparents did throughout the last century, the villagers of today are selectively adopting, maintaining, and rejecting both elements of the new urban economy and culture and more traditional aspects of the rural community and ritual life.

This book explores the long process of adaptation and hybridization that has underpinned Hòa Mục's shift from rural village to "village in the city." Based on a year and a half of fieldwork, these chapters tell the story of the "becoming urban" of a small periurban place and its community against the backdrop of the tumultuous contemporary history of northern Việt Nam, a history marked by colonial domination, struggles for independence, postwar reconstruction, socialist transformations, and market reforms.[1] The point of taking the reader on this long historical journey is not simply to provide descriptions of demographic, economic, or built-form changes over time. My primary aim is rather to identify the origins and transformations of the practices and rules that structured particular territorial orders on the outskirts of the Vietnamese capital from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the present. In doing so, I seek to identify who participates in the production and reproduction of socio-spatial arrangements on the periurban edge of Hà Nội, and the means they use to do so. I also explore the degree of control or power that these actors have over the resources and institutions shaping the urbanization process, and the motivations (if any) for their actions.

I explore these questions through an avowedly interdisciplinary approach, selectively borrowing ideas and concepts that, I believe, facilitate an understanding of the fluid combination of changes characteristic of territorial formation on the urban edge. The resulting analytical framework integrates elements from the fields of human geography, social history, comparative politics, and urban planning. The ultimate objective of this conceptual collage is to help us understand how individuals and social groups meet and experiment – in more or less organized and coordinated fashions – with the restructuring of institutional arrangements, market relations, spatial practices, and other phenomena responsible for the periurbanization process.

Before and Beyond *Đổi Mới:* Revisiting the Urban Transition in Việt Nam
This book challenges prevailing notions of the urban transition in Việt Nam. In its most familiar form, this phenomenon refers to the shift from a society defined by a largely agricultural population to one in which an urban population predominates (Ginsburg 1990). Assessed from the vantage point of this basic definition, this transition appears to be just beginning in Việt Nam. In 2009, official government data reported just over 26 million urban dwellers out of a total population of 85.8 million (Báo Xây Dựng 2009).[2] Although this corresponds to a twofold increase in the proportion of urban population compared with that of 1950, it still represents only 30 percent of today's Vietnamese national population. Demographic projections indicate that this upward trend is likely to continue in the coming decades, with half of the Vietnamese population expected to be classified as urban within about twenty-five years (United Nations 2009).

The urban transition involves more than a redistribution of the population from rural to urban places, however. Indeed, the process by which a country urbanizes consists of a dynamic matrix of administrative, economic, physical, socio-cultural, and political changes. One of the basic challenges in studying the urban transition is to characterize how this complex process alters the fabric of predominantly agrarian societies. Beyond such characterization, the study of the urban transition also calls for understanding the patterns underlying urban and regional transformations. This entails identifying the set of forces (both past and present) and actors (both endogenous and exogenous to the urbanizing territory and society) and determining how they interact to shape the conditions, processes, and outcomes of urbanization.

Previous scholarship on the urban transition in Việt Nam has assigned considerable power to the state and, in particular, to policies it promulgated as part of the country's ongoing transition from a Soviet-style, command-and-control economy to a so-called socialist market economy under state guidance. An appreciation of this reality is the point of departure for this work. The shift from plan to market refers to a series of socio-economic reforms adopted since the early 1980s and referred to by the global term *Đổi mới* (literally, "renewal"; sometimes

also translated as "renovation"). These purportedly state-led reforms have recast the model of centralized planning that defined Việt Nam's socio-economic system since the 1960s. They did so by giving market mechanisms a much greater role in the allocation of goods and services, yet within an economic system still officially defined as socialist in orientation.

Students of the urban transition in Việt Nam have placed the *Đổi mới* reforms at the centre of their explanatory frameworks to account for a variety of urban phenomena. These include changes in the socio-economic and population structures of Vietnamese cities, rural-to-urban migrations, transformations in the production and expression of the built environment, and changes in municipal administration and governance (see, for instance, Forbes and Le Hong Ke 1996; Trinh Duy Luan 1996; Gubry et al. 2002; Nguyen Quang and Kammeir 2002). This approach is sensible: both the academic and journalistic literature on the post-reform period suggest that recent transformations of the country's socio-economic system affected virtually all spheres of Vietnamese society in one way or another. The urbanization process is certainly no exception to this rule.

Yet, in trying to explain Việt Nam's urban transition based on the reforms as a central explanatory factor, most studies build on what I believe is a problematic and somewhat misleading assumption: they presuppose that the changes observed in and around Vietnamese cities since the 1990s (rural-to-urban migration, development of an urban-oriented economy, urban physical expansion, etc.) are essentially an outcome of the *Đổi mới* reforms. Implicitly or explicitly, these studies argue that urbanization phenomena observed over the last two decades could not have happened prior to the changes brought about by the reforms. These reforms are understood as having "liberated" urbanization forces previously constrained under the plan. In other words, the phenomena characteristic of the urban transition in Việt Nam are seen as a societal response to state-led policy changes.

This assumption stems from a conception of the relationship between reform policies and social change that emphasizes the Vietnamese state's control over its various arms and, more generally, over the society and territory it governs. It builds on the idea that an

authoritarian state rules the national territory and dominates society. In this view, the *Đổi mới* is understood as top-down adjustments of the national economy through macro-structural policies stipulated by the party and enacted by the state apparatus since the early 1980s. It is further assumed that the state has the capacity to effectively impose its governing rules and norms on society through the powerful and pervasive Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP).[3]

An alternative conception of state/society relations in Việt Nam underpins this study. Recently, scholars have enlarged the focus of research on the socialist transition beyond official policies to include the actual, everyday practices of people and the governing strategies of state officials under the plan and during the reform (e.g., Thrift and Forbes 1986; Beresford 1988; Fforde 1989; Koh 2006). The following chapters build on a conceptualization of state/society relations that stems from this shift in focus. More specifically, I borrow the idea, proposed by Benedict Kerkvliet (1995a, 1995b, 2005) in his analysis of everyday politics in rural northern Vietnam. Kerkvliet argues that the state in Việt Nam does not unilaterally dominate society, but rather has a dynamic and mutually transformative relationship with it. I use this view as an alternative lens to examine urbanization mechanisms on the outskirts of Hà Nội. As will be further elaborated below, this opens the door to an understanding of socio-spatial changes not only as driven by centrally devised policies but also as the result of ad hoc adaptations of the state's rules and programs due to pressure from the grassroots and from other parts of society, including parts of the state itself.

This interpretation has important methodological and analytical implications. First, it confers recognition on the role that pre-reform circumstances and practices play today. As discussed above, a majority of authors concerned with the ongoing urbanization process in Việt Nam assume that the urbanization practices observed in recent years were generated *de novo* in the present period as a result of state-led reform policies. These studies thus describe ongoing urbanization practices as unprecedented. When authors refer to the pre-reform period in order to explain recent changes, they generally depict an urban Việt Nam under the plan, which, I presume, has more to do with the ideal,

typical model of socialist urban and regional development than with actual historical reality. This assumption is somewhat surprising, considering that very few urban and planning studies have paid attention to changes occurring in and around Vietnamese cities prior to the 1990s.

Inspired by the work of Janet Abu-Lughod (1996, 1999) on urban formations in both the developed and developing worlds, I believe that we need to take a longer perspective in the study of contemporary urban and planning changes in Việt Nam. In taking this approach, this work intentionally lets go of the prevailing assumption that practices observed in recent years are merely responses to state-led policies, and that they have no historical precedents. By placing socio-spatial transformations in a longer historical context, and by focusing on everyday practices, institutional evolution, and shifts in governing practices, my analysis also consciously departs from stereotypical portraits of peri-urban places. By extending the framework of research on the urban transition backward in time to include the pre-reform period, I instead show that many contemporary urbanization practices, even those that appear to have emerged because of the new market environment (real estate transactions, housing construction and rentals, industry, and commerce), have their roots in the pre-reform era.

Emphasizing mutual influences between state and society has a second major implication: it draws attention to the role of popular agency. In this book, I define agency as *the socio-culturally mediated capacity of individuals and groups to act.* This conceptualization draws heavily on Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration and on the theory of practice proposed by Sherry Ortner. In line with Giddens's work (1979, 1984), the above definition highlights the idea that people's actions are shaped (in both constraining and enabling ways) by the very social structures that those actions then serve to reinforce or re-configure. While acknowledging the pervasive influence of structural forces (including culture) on human intentions, beliefs, and actions, this understanding of agency differs from ideas of free will and routinized practice. It instead embraces Ortner's view (2006) and posits that agency involves some degree of intentionality. An agent is thus understood as someone who intervenes in the world with "something in mind (or in heart)" (Ortner 2006, 136).

This is not to say, however, that agency is a straightforward synonym for resistance. By focusing essentially on oppositions, we are indeed missing out on collaborative forms that agency can take, and ways in which agents can and do bridge power differentials. Thus, the urban and planning literature on Việt Nam often neglects the role that *both* confrontational *and* collaborative forms of popular agency play in the urbanization process. This scholarship tends to depict rapidly urbanizing territories and their people as victims of the urban transition who essentially deploy defensive and adaptive tactics in the face of changes driven by external forces and state-led policies. This study nuances such portrayals by focusing on the everyday, human aspect of urbanization at the local level. By attending to the everyday practices of peri-urban residents, I show that communities, households, and their members participate in a complex process of change, and that they play a role in shaping the urban transition through individual or collective decisions and actions.

Thus far, only a handful of studies have looked at aspects of the urbanization process in Việt Nam through the lenses of history and popular agency (e.g., Thrift and Forbes 1986; DiGregorio 2001; Hardy 2003). While limited, this scholarship interrogates the assumption that state-led reforms have a unidirectional relationship with societal practices. Similarly, this book questions the actual power of state policy to effect social change in Việt Nam. Like the authors listed above, I contend that whenever policies devised at the central level do not fit local needs, values, and practices, various societal groups – including those evolving within the state apparatus – have some room to manoeuvre in which they can ignore, circumvent, or adapt official norms and rules. This promotes a more complex understanding of the shifting relationships between structural conditions and forces, central-state plans and policies, customary rules and moral norms held by local communities, and the actual everyday practices of both state agents and populations in shaping the urbanization process.

This emerging scholarship on state/society relations in Việt Nam further informed the organization of this book around two major conceptual themes. First is a conceptualization of the periurban as a zone of encounter where institutional arrangements, practices, and

forms from the past are constantly redeployed and reinvented in the present. Second is the importance of regulatory informality as a process where new or hybrid socio-spatial practices regularly arise that appear to contradict the directives or values of the central state, and yet continue to exist alongside the purportedly official way of doing things. I now review each of these conceptual orientations in turn.

The Periurban as Assemblage

The urban transition in developing Southeast Asia is experienced unevenly across national territories, with perhaps the greatest effects found in the expanding spatial zones surrounding the largest cities. The literature describes these transitional zones between country and city as a theatre of rapid changes operating simultaneously at the spatial, functional, environmental, institutional, and human levels. Capturing and making sense of these transformations is a major research challenge. Nonetheless, it is worth tackling because it is through the fluid character of the periurban that we come to see the true nature of the urban transition in the Southeast Asian region (Webster 2011).

Although it enjoys increasingly important currency in the literature, the term "periurban" remains ill-defined. At the mere etymological level, this expression refers to areas around (peri-) the city (urban). Beyond this basic definition, however, debates go on as to whether the periurban corresponds to a discrete spatial zone that can be precisely delineated on a map, or whether it consists of a combination of features and phenomena. Either way, questions are raised regarding what characterizes periurban spaces or processes, how we can identify them as periurban (or not), and why such categorization matters (see, for instance, Adell 1999).

Attempts to generalize about the periurban struggle to account for the situated characteristics of this phenomenon, which are no less varied across national settings than they are within single metropolitan regions (e.g., Simon 2008). I do not think, however, that the multiplicity of features and processes underlying the periurban and its various forms across time and space mean that this concept should be dispensed with entirely. Nor does it mean that the phenomenon should be reduced to a set of particular conditions that must be closely documented,

enumerated, and subjected to the operations of taxonomy. However conceptually incomplete or vague the current definitions of the peri-urban, and however limited the spatial and temporal foci of most case studies detailing its modus operandi, the burgeoning literature attests to the worldwide scope of this phenomenon. In my view, the diversity of its manifestations does not make the periurban a less valuable con-cept, but rather indicates the need for a greater degree of conceptual flexibility.

I am therefore not attempting to define here the periurban as an ideal, typical territorial form or geographical space identifiable by a specific combination of socio-spatial characteristics (population com-position, employment structure, land use, etc.) or processes (livelihood diversification, migratory patterns, market relations, built-environment mutations, etc.). Instead, this book adopts a process-oriented con-ceptualization, underlining the fragmented, unfinished, and unstable character of the periurban. This invites narratives about the fluidity of changes as social agents experiment in new ways with economic op-portunities, the material environment, or institutional arrangements. It is a claim that, in periurban areas, the territorial formation process has not yet arrived "at the end," and that being unfinished matters analytically and politically.

This echoes Leaf's conceptualization (2008) of the periurban in Southeast Asia as "new urban frontiers." Through the metaphor of the frontier, Leaf emphasizes the idea of a "place of encounter, of inter-action and contestation between disparate groups, with the potential for new forms of social mixing" (8). He draws attention to the institu-tional gaps and the administrative and regulatory ambiguities that characterize the periurban. These characteristics make periurban zones geopolitical sites where everyday grassroots practices meet, interact, and sometimes clash with the state's intentionalities and with new market relationships.

It is of course difficult to trace neat boundaries between the various areas that constitute the periurban, and to identify exactly where and when the frontiers described above are activated. Nevertheless, spatial-ity and time matter, and the periurbanization process in East and Southeast Asia is indeed modulated differently depending on where

we look. As McGee (1991) emphasized through his "extended metrop-olis" model, periurban change is experienced differently in the ad-ministratively expanding city core; in the intermediate periurban zone, where components of the built environment are penetrating into previously rural space; and in the outer hinterland of the city, where aspects of the urban "leapfrog" along transportation corridors. As will be shown in this book, time also matters. The periurbanization process evolves in successive stages, and different localities are distinct-ively impacted by these evolving economic and political climates, in-stitutional frameworks, population movements, cultural patterns, and so on.

The State-in-Society

One purpose of thinking about the periurban as multiple frontiers is to gain analytical and critical insight into the periurban as a "zone of encounter, conflict, and transformation surrounding large cities" (Friedmann 2011, 426). The orientation toward the contested and the contradictory, underlying the idea of frontiers, provides thinking space for the reconsideration of how territorial claims by various social group-ings interact with the state's planning function. This then calls for a conceptualization of the relationship between state and society in the Vietnamese context.

   Joel Migdal's state-in-society approach (2001) provides a useful start-ing point in analyzing the workings of the postcolonial, socialist state in Việt Nam and of its planning agencies. In his analysis of Third World states, Migdal emphasizes the contradictions that regularly arise be-tween the state's image of wholeness and the day-to-day governing practices of its various agents and institutions. This model introduces a dual view of the state, understood at once:

   (1) as the powerful image of a clearly bounded, unified organization that can be spoken of in singular terms ... as if it were a single, cen-trally motivated actor performing in an integrated manner to rule a clearly defined territory; and (2) as the practices of a heap of loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings inside and outside

> of official state borders and often promoting conflicting sets of
> rules with one another and with "official" Law. (Migdal 2001, 22)

By combining these two paradoxical sides of the state, Migdal questions the state's ability to turn rhetoric into effective policy. This draws attention to the cross-purpose activities of state agents and institutions. The state-in-society approach does not yet reduce the state to a mere collection of predatory officials seeking personal benefits through public functions. Rather, this conceptualization calls for heightened attention to situations where various parts of the state ally with one another and with groups outside to further their goals. From there, we can move on to explore what sets of rules are promoted through these coalitions and networks, and how these rules either reinforce or thwart official laws and regulations.

Another important dimension of the state-in-society approach is the way it highlights the interactions between social groupings and the state and the way each is influenced and shaped through interactions with the others. Migdal gives prominence to the dynamic evolution of social groupings located both within and outside the state apparatus. His model encourages the study of these groupings' behaviours, of the shifting alliances that they form with each other, and how these change over time. In this view, the state is not only a contradictory entity but also a social construct that entertains a mutually transformative relationship with society. In this contingent relationship, the state induces social changes while at the same time being transformed by society.

By drawing on Migdal's conceptualization of the state, I wish to emphasize the notion of planning in Việt Nam as a relational activity occurring on a level playing field. As will be made evident in the following chapters, the "planning" process (whether or not labelled as such) in the region of Hà Nội is not limited to this distinct arena within which state bureaucrats and experts seek to orient or manage the development of cities and regions. I will show how, as part of a complex ecology of actors, the people whom we conventionally call planners – those state agents in charge of carrying out public planning functions – operate in uneasy, unstable interrelationships with other actors and sources of societal power. Their actions and decisions are shaped by

the territorial claims of ordinary people, domestic and foreign enterprises, and various parts of the state apparatus. Planning actions and decisions are also influenced by various social groupings that penetrate the more porous reaches of the state bureaucracy and that pressure (through discourse or actions) political elites to orient territorial policies in specific directions.

This book explores these questions by tracking the changing possibilities and limitations of livelihood strategies and land practices afforded to the population of Hòa Mục in relation to the ebb and flow of state regulations over the last century. As succeeding chapters will show, livelihood and land are in fact interconnected, land having been one of the key resources underpinning subsistence activities of local populations on the edge of Hà Nội throughout the twentieth century. These two areas also provide a useful window through which to view state/society relations and processes of territorial formation. During the shift from rural village to urban neighbourhood, grassroots and state practices have repeatedly intersected at issues of local economic activities and land disposition practices.

This focus on the production and reproduction of livelihood and land practices in Hòa Mục illustrates how various social groups and forces actively shaped the territorialization of periurban Hà Nội since the beginning of the twentieth century. It highlights the encounter between local populations, political and economic elites, agents of the state operating at all levels (from the commune to the national level), and state-owned enterprises. Drawing on interviews, observations, and secondary literature, I demonstrate how these groups have relied on various sources of authority – from precolonial customs and traditions to discourses about national unity, progress, or modernity – to orient the urbanization process in often contradictory ways. The resulting story is that of the changing coalitions of interests between these various actors, of how these have shifted over time, and of the particular socio-spatial arrangements they created or supported along the way.

Planning and Regulatory Informality

In unpacking the coalitions of interests responsible for shifts in livelihood and land practice during the periurbanization process, this book

revisits the question of regulatory informality and the state's role in the production and reproduction of this phenomenon. The literature generally conceptualizes the informal in relation to the formal. From this viewpoint, the central feature of informal livelihood and land practices such as casual employment, land squatting, unrecorded land subdividing and transactions, and so on is their occurrence outside of formal institutional frameworks. These frameworks are those in which the state intervenes (or is supposed to) to regulate processes and outcomes according to a set of enforceable legal rules (see, for instance, Sanyal 1988; de Soto 1989, 2000; AlSayyad 2004).

This book calls for a reconsideration of this state/formality equation. Formal state institutions are in fact oblivious to the role that informality plays "formally." Supporting this view, recent studies have unearthed a variety of situations where states have benefited from governing practices that appear to contradict their regulatory function. These include the deliberate formulation of ambiguous regulatory frameworks, the temporary lifting of regulations, or the retreat of policing powers from specific economic sectors or geographic areas (Ho 2001; Ong 2006; Roy 2009a; Yiftachel 2009a, 2009b). As Ananya Roy (2009b, 826) remarks: "In many instances the state itself operates in informalized ways, thereby gaining a territorialized flexibility that it does not fully have with merely formal mechanisms of accumulation and legitimation."[4] To make sense of these governing practices, we need to move beyond attempts to identify whether particular practices are "legal violations" in the strict sense. A more productive approach might be to conceive of informal activities as expressions of social relations, and more specifically of state/society relations (Portes et al. 1989; Tabak and Crichlow 2000; Leaf 2005).

This book provides supporting evidence for the idea that states (including planning authorities) do not seek to extend the reaches of their formal regulatory authority at all times, across all sectors of the economy, or over all societal practices or geographical areas. I suggest that informality not only results from government tolerance to resolve potential social conflicts or to promote patronage but can also be an intrinsic element of local, urban governance cultures. In this view, urban informality is not necessarily a social process developing outside

the purview of the state, or else a form of popular resistance or insurgency against public powers. The conditions for the production or reproduction of informal practices are instead made possible by state interventions. It is in this sense that I understand urban informality as the expression of an alternative form of state control over territories and people.

In this book, I use two main concepts to shed light on urban informality as a mode of urban space production and as emanating from the state. The first is the idea of "zones of exception." Proposed by Aihwa Ong (1999, 2006) in her study of transnationalism, citizenship, and neoliberalism, this concept emphasizes spatial fragmentation as an instrument of territorial governance. Ong posits that, although competing with multiple sources of power, nation-states – with their supposed monopoly over spatial planning – do play important roles in structuring territorial orders. One of the ways in which this state control over space is exercised is through the creation of "a system of graduated spaces within which different populations are variously subjected to political control and to social regulation by state and non-state agencies" (Ong 1999, 219). Ong calls "zones of exception" these spaces where policies are unevenly enforced or where regulations are temporarily lifted.

The concept of "gray space" complements this analysis by making evident the state's flexible use of its regulatory power over time and across space. Developed by Oren Yiftachel with reference to the contemporary Israeli planning regime, gray spaces are defined as

> developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between the "lightness" of legality/approval/safety and the "darkness" of eviction/destruction/death. Gray spaces are neither integrated nor eliminated, forming pseudo-permanent margins of urban regions which exist partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans. (Yiftachel 2009b, 250)

This concept is closely associated with a governing practice that Yiftachel calls "gray spacing," which refers to the manipulation of plans, policies, and regulations by political and/or economic elites to "whiten" (legitimize/authorize) or, alternatively, to "blacken" (delegitimize/

criminalize) different spatial practices or configurations occurring in gray spaces.

In what follows, zones of exception and gray spaces serve to explain how, despite being fragmented, penetrated by private interests, and in competition with other sources of power, the state remains pivotal in shaping the periurbanization process in Hà Nội. I argue that this is not because the state is an authoritarian force that stands above society, or because it exercises its regulatory powers coercively – as most of the literature on urban planning in Việt Nam would lead one to believe. It is rather because the state is composed of agents who ally with one another as well as with societal groups to further their goals. It is through their embedding in such coalitions of interests that parts of the state can shift the rule of access and control over resources or sway the balance in favour of particular interests during the urbanization process. As will be illustrated in succeeding chapters, in some, but certainly not all, cases these interests happen to be synonymous with the public good.

Organization of this Book

Although structured chronologically, this book does not follow the conventional periodization of Việt Nam's contemporary history. The successive time periods covered by the different chapters are instead determined by informants' recollection of the sequence of changes in the particular context where they live, and with particular regard to livelihood strategies and land practices. This localized and topical orientation of the book's chronology has the effect of de-emphasizing key moments in the history of northern Việt Nam, most notably the Anti-American Resistance War. Similarly, the book is not organized around years when important policies (land reforms, *Đổi mới,* etc.) were promulgated but rather around the often delayed moments when these changes impacted the everyday lives of villagers and state agents. In other words, the structure of this book – like the approach underpinning it – mirrors my primary interest in the actual, endogenous experience of the compressed sequence of socio-economic and political changes that characterized northern Việt Nam's twentieth-century history.

Chapter 1 commences this exploration by situating Hòa Mục in the broader history and geography of the Red River Delta. Based on available sources, I sketch a picture of the village's geography, demography, and institutional landscape as it stood during the colonial era. I then analyze a period of unprecedented socio-economic change that began in the late 1920s and ended during the early years of the anti-colonial war, in the 1940s. The village then witnessed the penetration of new market relations, which, in combination with local circumstances, fostered an occupational thickening process and the formation of new market linkages with the city. This transformative process challenges stereotypes of northern Vietnamese villagers as plain, straight, and conservative individuals, and challenges stereotypes of rural communities as essentially inward-looking and and hostile toward livelihood changes. It suggests instead that, at least in some places, rural people took advantage of new opportunities brought about by the colonial economy, and that this transformed villagers' relationships with each other, with the city, and with the outside world.

Chapter 2 analyzes the early years of the socialist transformation process (1940-65). I argue that a zone of exception emerged during this period through the localized implementation, in periurban zones, of three important policies: land reform, agricultural collectivization, and nationalization of industry. The discussion focuses on the flexible governing practices adopted by a newly independent Vietnamese state, which was still very much in the process of inventing itself. I discuss how this spatially uneven implementation of the socialist revolution shaped the development trajectory of Hòa Mục, and especially how it allowed villagers to carry into the socialist period some of the market relations and linkages forged with the city during the colonial era.

Chapter 3 (1965-80) explores the motives behind the livelihood and land practices that underpinned Hòa Mục's urbanization trajectory, and the mechanisms that allowed for their reproduction after the socialist revolutionary period and through the early years of the reforms. The focus on this period serves to uncover the pre-*Đổi mới* origins of urbanization practices. It also challenges the widely held view that the urban transition is first and foremost an outcome of the

shift from plan to market in Việt Nam. A detailed study of local practices in the decades preceding the reforms further seeks to understand the apparently high degree of autonomy and flexibility enjoyed by local villagers with regard to their access and use of residential village land. It allows a re-examination of the pivotal relationship between informality and the seeming absence of the state's regulatory controls.

Chapter 4 steps away from Hòa Mục to analyze the formulation of pro-urban orientations at the national and regional governmental levels during the reform period (1980-2010). I focus on the manifestations and impact of these new orientations with respect to new urban planning mechanisms, models of urban development, and legislation adopted during the 1990s. The discussion shows that throughout this transition, flexible use of regulatory powers remained an important element in the toolbox of state territorial governing practices. Nonetheless, I show that the new planning regime is also taking new forms and pursues somewhat contradictory directions. On the one hand, it seeks to delegitimize regulatory informality at the grassroots level. On the other hand, it supports regulatory exceptionalism in the management of developable periurban land, both to achieve state goals and for the benefit of private, real estate interests.

Chapter 5 returns to Hòa Mục to analyze how these changes unsettled the moral territorial order established during the pre-reform era and to look at villagers' responses to this. The discussion focuses on open forms of contestation. I argue that these forms of contestation result from a clash between the assemblage of social relations and state governing practices established since independence, and the territorialization project that municipal authorities and land developers have tried to impose on periurban populations beginning in the 1990s. Moving beyond economistic interpretations, I suggest that the protests of periurban villagers dispossessed of livelihoods and land need to be placed within the framework of "moral economies." In particular, I highlight villagers' deep concerns about the supersession, by a bureaucratic state and a commoditized land market, of older governing practices embedded in social relations and local traditions.

The Conclusion reconsiders some of the key conceptual issues that underpin this book and summarizes the main arguments. I emphasize

points of divergence with previous studies brought about by an historical, process-oriented, and agency-sensitive analysis of territorial formation processes in Hòa Mục. I argue that the only way to understand how this village "became urban" is to analyze the encounters of grassroots practices and expectations with local conditions and a state whose long-term territorial ambitions have regularly been undermined by more urgent needs to safeguard political legitimacy. Analyzing these factors and actors in their specificity, and in combination, raises questions about the legal-rational nature of public planning and provides ample evidence to justify skepticism about the leading role of formal policies in orienting socio-spatial changes on the edge of the capital city throughout the twentieth century.