

Market Shrines and Urban Renewal in Hanoi

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Drawing on ideas of a “clean and green city”, recent municipal development policies in Hanoi have resulted in the demolition of a number of traditional marketplaces in favour of high-rise buildings. In its efforts to implement environmentalist policies, the city government and investors find themselves confronted with agentic forces of spirits and other non-humans, which play a significant role in negotiating and protecting urban space in a society increasingly characterized by the manifold dynamics of market socialism. An approach referring to the ecologies of urbanism permits examination of encounters between urban renewal and the spirit world.

Keywords: market shrines, environment, female traders, urban renewal, urban ecologies, Hanoi, Vietnam.

To understand a city, one needs to grasp the broader social, spiritual and environmental ecologies within which political economic processes play out. This is, in particular, true with regard to urban development and urban renewal in a number of cities in Southeast Asia, where urban ghosts are assumed to inhabit the material infrastructure of cities (Johnson 2014, p. 1; Johnson 2015, p. 294; Schwenkel 2017, p. 414). Stories about the urban uncanny and urban ghosts in Hanoi, imagined as negative forces, and assumed to reside in abandoned high-rise buildings and in levelled city cemeteries, circulate widely among city residents. In contrast, protective entities, such as animated trees and market deities seem to be at work as well: urban spirits are considered to be inhabiting market shrines and small altars, that are established in shops, restaurants, soup kitchens and marketplaces (Hüwelmeier 2008, p. 136; Wilson 2008, p. 631;

Leshkovich 2014, p. 159), safeguarding the site from misfortune and harm. In contrast to the demolition of some of the urban markets, the Hòm/Đức Viên market, one of the most famous marketplaces in Vietnam's capital, has miraculously survived. According to residents' stories, to be described below in more detail, it did so because of the spirits' intervention. Thus, the entanglement between the spirit world and urban planning in Vietnam's capital, as Ngo Tam T.T. (2015, p. 187) has suggested, challenges ideas about the demise of religious beliefs and practices in this communist country and points to the significance of sacred geographies in Hanoi's urban space.

This article shows how the emerging research paradigm of "ecologies of urbanism" can be read in a broad and expansive sense to include spiritual beings and their agentive forces. The "ecologies of urbanism" approach identifies "the multiple forms of nature — in biophysical, cultural, and political terms — that have discernible impact on power relations and human social action" (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2017, pp. 3–4). With respect to urban environmental change, the multiplicity of ecologies may encompass competing worldviews, thereby involving a variety of actors, including spirits and other non-humans. An urban ecologies framework refers to all aspects of urban environments and covers human social issues encountered within urban landscapes, the diversity of ecosystems, animals, trees, urban climate, green spaces, cemeteries, parks and rivers. Moreover, it encompasses people's use of the environment, urban housing, city planning, management and policymaking. Quite important in the exploration of "the urban" and its relation to the environment are sacred places such as temples, pagodas and shrines, as well as spiritual entities like gods, spirits, and ghosts, assumed to inhabit these sites. To date, the ecologies of urbanism approach has rarely taken into account the multitude of spiritual beings in Southeast Asian cities, although people's narratives about wandering ghosts, local spirits and other-than-human beings intervening in their daily lives circulate widely. This is particularly the case when spiritual beings feel disturbed by urban renewal: rumours of ghosts and spirits play an important role in new gated communities as well as in abandoned high-rise

buildings. Certain spirits in Vietnam resemble local supernatural beings, such as the “Lady Mother” which was the spirit of a cobra killed by a team of engineers building a road in Bangkok (Johnson 2015, p. 294). Different from Malaysia, where foreign gods and deities such as the Hindu saint Satya Sai Baba are included in the Buddhist-Taoist pantheon (Lee 1986, p. 199), the multitude of deities in Vietnam comprise local, regional and national spirits, not foreign ones such as those described for Thailand (Morris 2000, p. 164) or spirits of aeroplanes and engines, which have been documented for Central Africa (Behrend and Luig 1999, p. xiii). Likewise, the Holy Spirit of global Christianity is identified as “foreign religion” by government officials in Vietnam, but is assumed by believers to journey with Vietnamese migrants moving from Vietnam to other countries and back home, and is therefore considered as travelling between continents (Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010, p. 3). In Vietnam, a multiplicity of spirits seems to be at work in many places (Taylor 2007, p. 15). Local spirits and the haunting of infrastructure, as Schwenkel (2017, p. 414) has illustrated with regard to the City of Vinh, Vietnam, have served to obstruct the state’s efforts to realize its plans for urban development, in particular with respect to the ruins of a pagoda targeted for “renewal” (Schwenkel 2017, p. 415). Thus, the spirit world, the establishment of shrines and altars in the city, the emergence of cults in metropolises, and the performance of religious practices, for instance donating food, fruit and paper votive offerings, are crucial to urban life (Hüwelmeier 2016a, p. 297), not just in Vietnam but also in its diasporas (Hüwelmeier 2016b, p. 9). Likewise, as will be discussed here, spirits inhabiting the shrine in the Hôm/Đức Viên Market have contributed to the withdrawal of a group of investors who were intending to destroy the site in accordance with policies of making the city “green, clean, and beautiful” (diGregorio, Rambo, and Masayaki Yanagi 2003, p. 171). Hence, spirits and their agentive forces, their dwelling places and encroachments need to be taken into account when exploring urban renewal and development.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over more than ten years in urban Hanoi, I carried out participant observation and

conducted interviews in marketplaces at the end of 2012 and early 2013 over a period of five months. As a number of traditional marketplaces had already been destroyed in previous years, I was interested in the consequences of the demolition of trading sites, in moving bazaars, and in changing trader-client relationships (Hüwelmeier 2018a, p. 128) as well as in religious practices performed at market shrines. During the period of fieldwork and throughout subsequent visits, I talked to the management of markets, to traders, clients, security guards and cleaning personnel as well as to people living in the neighbourhood. I noticed shrines in a number of markets, either on the roof or in remote niches of the hustling and bustling life of urban markets. Market shrines are therefore part of the sacred geography of the city and play a crucial role in the daily life of people earning their livelihood in these particular urban places.

Starting with some background information about the state's efforts to realize its vision about the future of the socialist city and the subsequent demolition of a number of marketplaces in urban Hanoi, this article proceeds by focusing on city residents' ideas about the real owners of the earth — namely, gods and spirits — inhabiting trees and small shrines in shops and government offices. In the following section I will describe shrines in some of Hanoi's marketplaces, emphasizing the spatialization of the urban sacred more generally. Next, I shall take a closer look at the shrine in the Hô/Đức Viên market by focusing on the sacred place, consisting of monks' graves, animated trees, a market deity, the god of the earth and the god of wealth, which together are perceived as having prevented the place from being demolished. I conclude with some remarks on the role and functioning of overlapping networks of humans and spirits within key public sites in processes of urban transformation.

The Demolition of Marketplaces in Urban Hanoi

Developments in Vietnam's capital, not least resulting from the economic transition known as market socialism, point to the fact

that Vietnam's central government and the municipal authorities in Hanoi aim to create an economic hub in order to transform the capital into a "more civilized and modern place" (*VietnamNet*, 3 August 2008; quoted in Turner and Schoenberger 2012, p. 1029). The development policy draws on ideas about the "clean and green city" (Robert 2016), which include reducing traffic chaos, eliminating indiscriminate parking, and ensuring that pavements are free of informal street vendors. One main element of urban development policies is market redevelopment. As Geertman (2011, p. 28) has shown,¹ in the capital the Hanoi People's Committee has started implementing this policy by replacing traditional fresh markets with supermarkets and hypermarkets. The Hàng Da market, located near the ancient quarter, was demolished in 2008 (Endres 2014, p. 98). For decades, a thriving market existed here, but over the past few years this site, as well as a number of similar markets described by the authorities as "chaotic" (Drummond 2012, p. 79), have been completely destroyed or renovated. This policy has presented street vendors and small traders in local fresh markets with great challenges in regard to their ability to conduct business (Bonnin and Turner 2014, p. 322; Endres and Leshkovich 2018, p. 3). As a result, marketplaces and traders are on the move, as the government is relocating some of the demolished open-air markets to other sites temporarily. Many years later, after the high-rise buildings were completed, the traders were permitted to return to their original trading places. Unfortunately, they often found themselves in the underground basement of high-rise buildings, with no windows and in air-conditioned spaces, having lost most of their clients, as I have examined with regard to the Mờ market. This situation has given rise to the term "ghost markets" among urbanites to describe these almost empty places (Hüwelmeier 2018a, p. 131).

Urban renewal in Hanoi is part of the multiple dynamics of market socialism and state efforts to implement "civilisation" (Schwenkel and Leshkovich 2012, p. 390). Like most cities across East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, the urban population is growing rapidly. As has been analysed with respect to Ho Chi Minh City,

the metropolis has become a “sidewalk city” (Kim 2015, p. 3) where business, such as running a soup kitchen, and social life, such as meeting friends, have always been conducted along main roads and sidewalks. Recently, however, as I observed in Hanoi in early 2017, the government has begun a major pavement clearance campaign in a number of cities in Vietnam, destroying thousands of illegally built steps to sit on while drinking coffee or displaying commodities.

Newly built high-rise buildings, cities within Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, represent the changing face of Vietnam’s metropolises. As symbols of Vietnam’s participation in the global world and of post-socialist economic reforms, multistorey buildings are also sites of contestation: land disputes, corruption and eviction (Harms 2016, p. 2011). This development is due not least to rural-to-urban migration, as has also been highlighted with respect to Hanoi (Agergaard and Vu Thi Thao 2011, p. 408; Nguyen Minh 2016, p. 116). Meanwhile, over 45 per cent of Southeast Asia’s population is considered urban, according to a United Nations report from 2012 (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2017, p. 3). However, while this number indicates the rapid transformation of cities, it does not provide any information about the political circumstances, migration processes, spatial configurations, and social experiences of city dwellers, or of the negotiation processes of the manifold power dynamics and conflicts among various actors. At the same time, it does not tell us anything about the agentive forces of non-humans in the city, such as plants, trees, animals and spirits, all of which are likewise affected by demolition, pollution, destruction, and disturbances.

This article, therefore, seeks to better understand how urban renewal, environmental issues, and the “presence of religion in urban space” (Meyer 2016, p. 148), represented by material objects like shrines and deities, are negotiated by different groups and overlapping networks of humans and non-humans within key public sites such as markets. These complex processes are affected by spatial dynamics and by the situatedness of marketplaces in the fabric of urban life.

Employing an “ecologies of urbanism” framework (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2017, p. 3), I shall point to the manifold dimensions of urban change in Hanoi, emphasizing power conflicts over issues like land, livelihoods and property rights. Bringing urban political ecology (Rademacher 2015, p. 142) into dialogue with cosmologies (Descola 2013, p. 18; Århem and Sprenger 2016, p. 32), I draw attention to the agentive forces attributed to spiritual beings. Within the scope of plural ecologies, to be understood as ecologies in conflict, as outlined in the introduction to the thematic focus of this issue of *SOJOURN* (Sprenger and Großmann 2018), my ethnography illuminates the significance of market shrines assembled from sacred trees, a market deity and monks’ graves on the non-human side and their entanglement with representatives of market management, traders and security guards on the market side, and the state’s and investors’ efforts to realize the vision of a “green and clean” city.

Animated Trees and Gods of the Earth

In early 2016, when I revisited the Hôm/Đức Viên market, I noticed that a particular tree, situated opposite the entrance of the market and decorated with a small altar and offerings in preceding years, had disappeared.² The old man who used to sell tea in the house next to the tree, with whom I used to talk about the sacred tree and the surrounding territory, was not sitting there. His relatives told me he was ill. During our conversation in his tea shop in 2015, he recollected stories of the Japanese occupation of Vietnam during the Second World War, when an estimated two million people died of starvation.³ He had witnessed many carts with corpses in Hanoi’s streets and near his house. Bodies had been buried in mass graves in what is today the Hôm/Đức Viên market. For this reason, he continued, he had established an altar on the tree next to his house to honour the souls of the dead, who had no relatives to pray for them, as nobody knows exactly where the bodily remains had been buried. “If nobody takes care of the dead bodies”, the old man

said, “souls of dead people will afflict the living.”⁴ This affliction affects not only those whose relatives died due to starvation, but all descendants of Vietnamese who died an unnatural death, such as the war dead. As Kwon has suggested, “ghosts of war” (Kwon 2008, p. 2), whose bodily remains have never been found, are imagined as wandering spiritual entities.

When I asked the people in the tea shop about the missing tree, one woman recounted that it had fallen down because of an environmental disaster in the summer of 2015, when a huge storm uprooted many trees in the city.⁵ According to the people in the tea shop, the tree in front of their house was considered animated, and therefore it was very difficult to dispose of. The uprooted tree was considered sacred waste (Stengs 2014, p. 235) and thus had to be treated with caution. First, workers on behalf of local authorities attempted to saw through the sacred tree. They tried several times with different saws, but all the tools broke. The reason for this, the people argued, was the sacredness of the tree. Nobody then wanted to continue sawing, as all the workers were afraid of being afflicted by the tree’s spirit. Finally, they dug the tree and its roots out, transported it to another place and transplanted it far from Hanoi, in a forest in the north. People in the tea shop agreed that the tree near the entrance of the marketplace and its inhabiting spirits had protected not only that particular place but also the neighbouring city space, including the Hâm/Đức Viên market.

In the eyes of urban residents, certain trees form part of the sacred geography of the city. However, people’s ideas about the intervention of spiritual entities in Vietnam are generally connected to political circumstances. Mrs Thảo,⁶ living in the neighbourhood of the Hâm/Đức Viên market and a customer for decades, with whom I discussed the uprooting of the sacred tree, insisted that the big storm in summer 2015 had enormous powers. She claimed the storm was nature’s revenge for the tree-cutting activities of the local government that had taken place in spring 2015.⁷ The Hanoi People’s Committee had a project to cut down more than 6,000 old trees and to replace them with new ones. Based on decisions regulating

green spaces in Hanoi, which were not made public, the government cut down 10 per cent (600) of these old trees overnight in the city of Hanoi. This was part of the city's policy entitled "2015-Year of Urban Order and Civilisation" (Geertman and Boudreau 2018, p. 4), which fitted well with an overall plan to modernize cities in Vietnam. The cutting of trees was the starting point for a tree-hug movement in Hanoi, with a number of young people joining the movement, which was initiated via Facebook. Young protesters whom I saw peacefully walking around the Hoàn Kiếm Lake every Sunday after the tree-cutting activities in spring 2015 (Lê Quan 2015) even brought their children along.⁸ However, after young people received visits from local government officials at their homes (Geertman and Boudreau 2018, p. 19), which intimidated them and brought about the risk of conflict with their parents, the movement faded away. The city authorities recognized some mistakes in implementing the tree-cutting project, and eventually stopped cutting down trees.

Besides certain trees which are considered sacred and hence safeguard urban places, many Vietnamese establish small altars near the entrance of their shops. Offering food, drinks, fruit and cigarettes, they ask spiritual entities for prosperity, benevolence, good health, and their business site to be protected (Hüwelmeier 2016a, p. 297). As the gods of the earth are imagined to be the real owners of the territory, rituals need to be performed whenever a new place is taken over by another person, a shop owner, a trader or a new owner of a house. In any case, one needs to ask the spirits for permission to use the place. As small altars are included in market shrines as well, the veneration of the gods of the earth needs to be embedded into the more encompassing framework of urban religious practices.

Creating sacred spaces and performing rituals in Asian cities is part of people's everyday lives (van der Veer 2015, p. 15). As Phillip Taylor (2007, p. 15) has argued with regard to Socialist Vietnam, performing religious practices (ancestor worship, mediumship, sacrifices, communal rituals) is intrinsic to the dramatic reshaping of Vietnam's cultural and social life. Anthropologists have pointed

to numerous popular rituals such as spirit possession (Fjelstad and Thi Hien Nguyen 2006, p. 7; Dror 2007, p. 2; Kendall et al. 2010, p. 62; Endres 2011, p. 1; Salemink 2015, p. 231), which were revitalized in the 1990s and flourished in the 2000s. In late 2016, spirit mediumship was recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO (Hüwelmeier 2018*b*, forthcoming), although considered superstitious by the government for decades. Even at market shrines, people may become possessed by spirits and fall into a trance.

Small shrines, generally established in Hanoi's shops and intended for the personal spiritual practice of vendors, are also to be found in government offices. More recently, it is said, politicians and high government officers have erected altars on the rooftops of their offices or in government departments, hidden from the public. According to a relative of a high-ranking officer, a number of government members and staff now seem to be fearful of what lies in their political future.⁹ Therefore, state officials pray at the local altar in the respective ministry while bringing offerings to the spirits of the place in order to be protected while going about their affairs. Venerating deities at spirit shrines and altars was condemned by the authorities for decades and considered superstitious and backward, but nowadays it seems to be expected that some superiors and employees of municipal authorities, ministries and banks will pray at these places.

Private shrines are located in many shops, and the spirits of the place are asked to protect the site, whether it is a ministry, a restaurant, a tourist office or a motorbike shop. Depending on the owner's personal view, he or she brings offerings every day, such as fruit, incense, alcohol, cigarettes, and flowers for the god of wealth Ông Thần Tài, and for the god of the place, Ông Địa (Hüwelmeier 2008, p. 140), represented by two figurines. Vendors believe that Ông Thần Tài will guarantee economic success, while Ông Địa will protect the territory. A trader with whom I spoke explained to me,

It is important to have these altars near the entrance of the shop, as the spirit of the place will prevent thieves from entering the

store. Both spirits will protect the health of the owners of the trading place. When I change my place of business, I will destroy the shrine, it cannot be transferred to the new locality.¹⁰

The disposal of altars is not unusual, and I noticed some of these material objects in the streets of Hanoi's inner city after shop owners had closed down a business or relocated elsewhere.¹¹ An inauguration ritual must be performed at the new altar when relocation takes place, as it is necessary to ask the spirit of the place for permission to use the space before moving in.

Market Shrines – The Spatialization of the Urban Sacred

Different from the small altars, dedicated to the gods of the earth, market shrines are composed of an assemblage of various objects or things considered to be connected with the otherworld. Referring to popular religious practices in Thailand, Peter Jackson suggested exploring “department stores, shopping malls and marketplaces, for it is these locations that contemporary forms of Thai religiosity are now vividly expressed, where popular Thai religion is commodified, packaged, marketed and consumed” (Jackson 1999, p. 509). In Bangkok, smaller, personal shrines erected by individual merchants as well as market shrines form part of the sacred geography of the city, as pointed out by Wilson, who, in her study of market shrines, emphasized the incorporation of “‘traditional’ elements, (e.g. animism)” into urban sacred spaces (Wilson 2008, p. 632). Market shrines in Bangkok include gods from Indian sources, the Chinese goddess Kuan Yin (Mahayana tradition), icons from Theravada Buddhist practice and the spiritual devotion to figures of the nation state such as Rama IX (King Bhumibol) (Wilson 2008, pp. 636–37). Likewise, market shrines are to be found in other parts of Asia as well. In early 2017, I visited the shrine next to the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo, a place brilliantly described by Bestor (2004, p. 93), who highlighted smaller and larger shrines inhabited by guardian gods of the marketplace and guardian deities protecting the Tsukiji neighbourhood.

Shrines devoted to the spirits of the place are located in many regions of Vietnam. In the southern part of the country, personal altars were also part of market stalls, as Leshkovich (2014, p. 159) observed during her fieldwork in the BẾN THÀNH market in Ho Chi Minh City. By contrast, in Hanoi the establishment of small altars is not allowed in market stalls, as there is a high risk of fire. Nevertheless, some old traders told me that such altars had been widely used in marketplaces in the past. However, with the introduction of economic reforms in 1986 and the resulting renovation of a number of markets in Hanoi in the late 1980s and early 1990s, local authorities began banning small altars in individual market stalls. In some cases, however, altars dedicated to the god of the earth and the god of wealth were integrated into market shrines.

Since the economic recovery of the 1990s and 2000s, market shrines representing various deities, gods and goddesses have become popular. The space for market shrines, whether on the rooftop or in a remote and quiet corner of different market localities, is provided by the market management. Market shrines are spatial forms of market spirituality and places of worship open to the public, compared to small altars in private shops in the busy streets of Hanoi. Female traders, as they form a majority in many marketplaces, perform prayers, donate money, and bring food offerings and flowers to the respective market shrine on a regular basis. Joined by people living nearby and by shop owners from the neighbourhood, market shrines are quite crowded on the first and fifteenth day of the month according to the lunar calendar, as these days are considered “lucky days”. The lunar calendar plays a crucial role in the everyday life of Vietnamese (Derks 2015, p. 1). It is important for planning dates for weddings or house construction, praying to the ancestors at the house altar, visiting the pagoda to bring offerings to Buddha and gods, and venerating deities and spirits at the market shrine.

While some of the market shrines are situated on the territory of the trading place, others are part of a nearby pagoda, due to lack of space in the market. In the nearby temple, market deities belong to the pantheon of gods and goddesses, mythical figures and heroes of the past considered to be inhabiting the sacred place. Traders

in Hanoi's most famous *Đông Xuân* market, for example, visit the *Huyền Thiên* pagoda, located just a few metres away, twice a month and bring offerings to the market goddess (*Bà Chúa Chợ*), while praying for prosperity and a happy family. Mrs Thủy, one of the many traders I spoke with in the *Đông Xuân* Market during my fieldwork,¹² not only visits the pagoda twice a month but whenever she felt the need to communicate with the spirit world, such as praying for a safe trip for her niece to travel abroad. The *Đông Xuân* Market was built by order of the French administration in 1889 on territory formerly used by two other markets, which were closed and replaced by the new market. Located in Hanoi's ancient quarter, the covered trading place is the most famous market in the city. The majority of traders in the marketplace are women, and market stalls are inherited from female kin in many cases. Family issues are included in the prayers at the shrine, as a Buddhist nun taking care of the *Huyền Thiên* pagoda told me:

Many traders visit this pagoda on a regular basis. In addition, numerous retailers from the surrounding neighbourhood come to pray in this place very often. Nearly all of them are female. They have a lot of difficulties, not just with their business, but also family problems, in particular with their husbands. Only in this place can they share their everyday experiences, by praying to the *Bà Chúa Chợ* (the market goddess), bringing offerings to the *bàn thờ* (altar), and asking for guidance and protection. I know this because they also talk to me about their sufferings and hard life.¹³

In contrast with the *Đông Xuân* market, where the market deity dwells in the nearby pagoda, the shrine in the *Long Biên* market, Hanoi's biggest fruit market near the famous *Long Biên* Bridge and close to the *Đông Xuân* market, is located in a remote corner of the busy site. Situated under a big tree, the shrine was only recently visually separated from the trading place by a partition. This was not the case in previous years, and provides more privacy during religious performances. In March 2016, I talked to three female traders cutting cane next to the shrine.¹⁴ I was interested in why the gym that had been located next to the shrine no longer existed. One

of the women told me that only a few traders had participated in the exercises after work and that there were hardly any customers from the nearby ancient area. Furthermore, one woman reported, the music of the fitness studio was excessively loud and may have disturbed the market goddess. While loudspeakers in Hanoi's streets are part of the everyday political experience in this communist country, sacred places in urban Hanoi are considered peaceful areas. For their part, the women liked the quiet atmosphere after the gym closed down. When I asked if they also brought offerings to the shrine on a regular basis, one woman explained, "We are Buddhists, we are from the countryside and we are poor. There is no need to bring so many offerings to the shrine, the only thing you need is an open heart."¹⁵ Although they indirectly criticized the exaggerated offerings to the market goddess, they were happy nonetheless to work near the sacred place, arguing that the proximity to the market goddess would protect them from evil forces. Several times a week they clean the space around the shrine by removing withered flowers and by sweeping the leaves of the old tree.

While the *Đông Xuân* market and the *Long Biên* market have existed for many decades, the recently redeveloped *Hàng Da* Galleria is no longer considered a traditional market, but a shopping mall. After the renovation of the place, which formed part of the plan to make Hanoi a "green and clean" city, business evaporated and this urban space is now perceived as a "ghost market" (Hüwelmeier 2018a, p. 131). The state exerted its power and demolished the traditional trading place, forcing many female traders to give up their businesses. A smaller number returned to the old place after some years of renovation only to realize that they had to sell their goods such as meat and fruit in the windowless basement of the market, all this while having lost nearly all their regular customers.

After the renovation, it had completely lost its character as a Vietnamese marketplace. When I revisited the site in early 2016, I joined a New Year ceremony at the market shrine on the rooftop of the building.¹⁶ This event was organized by the market management which was responsible for the administration of the trading place, and traders were invited to gather at the shrine on the rooftop, bringing

monetary donations and fruit offerings. As a gift, they received *xôi* (a special kind of rice, available at the time of the New Year Festival), distributed by the market management and considered to be blessed food (*lộc*). After conducting prayers, some traders burnt paper votive offerings for the spirits in an incinerator next to the shrine.

The establishment of a market shrine in the renovated Hàng Da market highlights the efforts of the market management to propitiate female traders. According to the beliefs of traders and market staff I spoke with, market shrines and their inhabiting spirits are connected to the otherworld.¹⁷ Relationships between traders and the beyond are either mediated by representations of market deities considered to dwell in market shrines, located in pagodas, or of goddesses residing in shrines on the grounds of particular marketplaces. Responsibility for the maintenance of the market shrine on the grounds of the trading place is in the hands of the market management, but is in some markets delegated to members of the women's union, and sometimes to the market security staff, as in the case discussed below. Cooperation between market management, traders, and deities seems to be harmonious as long as the spirits are not disturbed by the turbulences of urban planning and subsequent urban renewal.

Monks' Tombs and Market Deities in the Hôm/Đức Viên Market

The Hôm/Đức Viên market, situated on the busy Huế street, close to the Hoàn Kiếm Lake, is considered a traditional marketplace and was, in former times, an open-air trading place with wooden pillars and a roof made from rice straw, according to Mrs Mai, a city resident now in her eighties.¹⁸ Similar trading places still exist in contemporary urban Hanoi, their roofs nowadays covered with plastic tarpaulin. In 1992, some years after the introduction of the economic reforms, the Hôm/Đức Viên market was rebuilt and turned into a three-storey building with a roof. In the Hôm market (*chợ Hôm*) customers buy textiles and shoes, among other products, while in the adjacent Đức Viên market (*chợ Đức Viên*), a local fresh market, vendors trade in fish, meat, vegetables and fruit.

Situated on a site used also as a parking lot for motorbikes, vehicles that are very much part of the everyday life in the city (Truitt 2008, p. 3), the shrine in the Hôm/Đức Viên market may not appear to be a sacred place at first glance. In order to guarantee privacy, the shrine is separated from the public motorbike parking area by a two-metre wall. The market shrine of the Hôm/Đức Viên market consists of these major elements: two graves of Buddhist monks surrounded by sacred trees, a statue representing the market deity, and an altar for venerating the god of wealth and the god of the earth. On the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month, traders visit the shrine, light incense sticks and bring offerings such as food and money. As part of their religious practice, they kneel on tiles and pray in the inner space of the shrine, which covers about ten square metres. On the right side is a table where worshippers prepare trays with food, chicken, fruit and flowers, all of which are placed on the altar to be blessed by the market deity and other spirits during prayer. Some women burn votive paper offerings in an incinerator next to the shrine. After having performed religious duties, they hurry back to their market stalls, as clients may be waiting. Later traders return to take the offerings back home as *lộc* (blessed food), which is distributed to family members.¹⁹

While the incense burns down, spirits will appear from the otherworld to smell and to see the food, as I was told by traders whom I met at the shrine. Spiritual beings will be pleased about the fresh food, the fragrant aroma and the delicious flavour of fruit, food and flowers.²⁰ Obviously, the spirits are imagined as possessing senses, at least visual and olfactory ones. Thus, not only the iconic representation of the deity but also other material objects mediate between this world and the other world. As Meyer has suggested, “religion can best be analyzed as a practice of mediation, to which media, as technologies of representation employed by human beings, are intrinsic” (Meyer 2009, p. 11). However, it is not only food, fruit and incense to be considered as media, but also the human body. During my visits to the Hôm/Đức Viên market, I noticed women praying intensely at the shrine, some even crying. My observations were confirmed by Mr Tuấn, the head of the security

staff, an employee hired by the market management for more than twenty years. In 2016, I met him at his workplace near the shrine, where he and his staff members sit on chairs to oversee the parking space.²¹ He recollected that several women became possessed and fell down while praying at the shrine. In these cases, the human body became a medium. Some of the traders, according to what Mr Tuấn and vendors told me, later became trance mediums and established spirit shrines in their homes to worship the deities of the mother goddess religion.²²

Most of the traders are in their fifties, but a number of them are younger, and a few are older than seventy. Mrs Hà, who is thirty-five years old, told me:

I inherited the stall from my mother. She traded here for decades. Now she is old and so I took over the business. Of course, I visit the shrine twice a month, I put money and some fruit there, I light incense sticks and I ask the market goddess for luck in business and also for family happiness and good health.²³

The majority of traders I spoke with pray for success in economic activities.²⁴ Good luck in trading is important, as in many cases women are the breadwinners. The war and the planned economy (until 1986 when economic reforms were introduced) loom large in the minds of the traders, and so they rely on spiritual protection to earn good money, as they cannot count on government support. The need to invest in houses and property applies not only to Vietnam but also to some parts of Eastern Europe, where bazaar pagodas (Hüwelmeier 2013, p. 76) were established on the grounds of marketplaces run by Vietnamese (Hüwelmeier 2016*b*, p. 10). Remittances are sent back to the country of origin to support ageing parents and left-behind children. In the Hộm/Duc Vien market, I met a number of female traders who had worked in Russia, Bulgaria and other former socialist countries for some years.²⁵ After these socialist cosmopolitans (Hüwelmeier 2017, p. 130) returned home, some invested in a stall in the Hộm/Duc Vien market or inherited a stall from their mothers.

Mrs Phượng, a representative of the Hộm/Duc Vien market management, told me during my fieldwork in 2012–13,²⁶ that the

market shrine has existed for decades, but that she could not give precise information about the place of worship.²⁷ Female employees of the administration, sitting around with Mrs Phuong, confirmed that the management is in charge of maintaining the shrine, as it is located within the confines of the market.²⁸ Money donated by traders and shrine visitors is collected from the box every day and used to renovate the shrine on a regular basis, to provide offerings such as flowers and fruit, and, as Mrs Phuong said, “to make the shrine more beautiful”.²⁹ The management also performs ceremonies at the shrine four times a year, inviting all traders to welcome the new seasons. However, this could also be read as the efforts of state employees to secularize the place of worship. In the course of the celebrations, a ritual expert (*thầy cúng*) is invited to the shrine. In particular, the first gathering after the New Year Festival (Tết) is considered important with regard to having a successful business. While the market management expects all traders to participate in the shrine meetings, I also met traders who resist attending the event, which they considered as being organized from above. One trader argued that she does not like shrine gatherings performed by the authorities. In her eyes, sacred places should be localities where people communicate with gods and deities in a quiet atmosphere, not disturbed by speeches and mass gatherings.³⁰ Another trader, Mrs Hoa, commented that she does not like to attend these events;³¹ first, because she loses clients while attending the ceremony, and second because she prefers to pray on her own at the shrine. She added that it is not clear what the state employees do with the monetary donations. Such remarks indicate simmering tensions between some traders and the female market management board, whose members may have different ideas about what a proper shrine ritual should be. More generally, this example refers to the increasing efforts of state institutions to appropriate popular religious practices and places considered sacred by urban residents, as has been discussed with regard to the “heritagization” of popular religious practices such as spirit mediumship (Salemink 2016, p. 313; Hüwelmeier 2018*b*, forthcoming).

When I revisited the market and its shrine in 2016, I noticed that there was a new statue representing the market deity.³² I asked some of the market security staff about the new statue. Mr Tuấn, whom I mentioned earlier, the head of the security guard group, told me that an old female trader, who had died recently, had donated the statue to the shrine. When we were talking about the history of the shrine, it turned out that Mr Tuấn had some knowledge about the sacred place. He recounted what old traders had told him: the market shrine has existed on this site for decades. Nobody could provide exact information about the physical boundaries of the market and the formation of the shrine, but he assumed that the market had been established on the grounds of a pagoda and an adjacent cemetery. In the nineteenth century, he said, the Đức Viên pagoda, built on the grounds of the former marketplace, burnt down, and was relocated about a five-minute walk away from the Hôm/Đức Viên market.³³ Mr Tuấn introduced me to Mr Nguyễn, a fishmonger in the Đức Viên market, whose trading spot included a gravestone. Mr Nguyễn recollected that some years ago, some experts carried out archaeological studies and examined the gravestone.³⁴ For several days they worked on site to copy the foreign characters engraved on the stone. As evidence that the market was formerly a sacred place, he took me to a site near his stall and pointed to the ruins of the Đức Viên pagoda.³⁵ The bricks form a wall, which is the boundary of the market. Both Mr Nguyễn and Mr Tuấn claimed that similar gravestones had been discovered beneath the market shrine, indicating that the market was built on the grounds of a former cemetery, and part of the pagoda's territory. The period of anti-colonial resistance, Japanese occupation and later the war against America and the bombing of Hanoi notwithstanding, former sacred places are part of city residents' memories of the past and, therefore, the "sacred of the past is (in the) present" (Meyer 2016, p. 148). Referring to urban space, topographies of the sacred may be related to older and presumably more familiar religious markers, such as the monks' tombs and other gravestones in Hôm/Đức Viên market.

Two monk's graves, about four metres high and quite impressive, and old trees surrounding the tombs enclose the market shrine. "This is a sacred place", Mr Tuấn emphasized, "and nobody will ever be able to destroy it."³⁶ Other security guards confirmed this narrative about the sacredness of the place. Mr Hải, a staff member, recounted the story of a man who built a new house in the back of the market shrine on territory that does not belong to the market.³⁷ However, the long branches of the tree embracing the tombs, considered sacred by market staff, traders and visitors, hampered the construction work, and as a result the man cut off some of them. As soon as the house was finished, the man died. This, Mr Hải and other staff members affirmed,³⁸ happened due to the agentive forces of spirits inhabiting the market shrine: the spirit of the tree, the ancestor spirits of the monks, the market deity, the god of the earth and the god of wealth (Ông Địa and Ông Thần Tài) felt disturbed by the activities of the houseowner. In the eyes of the security staff, the spirits had punished the selfish behaviour of the houseowner.³⁹

Mr Tuấn then shared the story of a group of former high-ranking military personnel who wanted to purchase the land that the market stands on for investment purposes several years ago. They planned to demolish the marketplace and to construct high-rise buildings. However, after hearing about the market shrine and stories about the power of non-humans inhabiting this urban site, they were fearful of being haunted by spirits. As Mr Tuấn emphasized: "Everybody in Vietnam knows that those who destroy sacred places will experience harm, and misfortune will accompany the extended family for all future generations."⁴⁰ Finally, the investors gave up their plans, and, according to the security guards, Hôm/Đức Viên market survived thanks to the intervention of the spirits.⁴¹

Conclusion

Since the implementation of the policies of a "green and clean" city in Hanoi, and in particular after the renewal or demolition of urban spaces, including traditional marketplaces, more people than ever before have become critical of the authorities' decision-making

processes with regard to the urban environment. For example, new protests emerged in 2016 in response to mass fish deaths on the shores of Vietnam and to mysterious fish deaths in Hanoi's famous West Lake that same year. For many Vietnamese, gods, deities and spiritual entities are the legitimate owners of the earth and, hence, to some extent, environmental protection intersects with the agency of non-humans. Spirits and other non-humans form part of the "political ecology of the city" (Rademacher 2015, p. 141) and are deemed powerful players. The spirit world forms part of people's everyday experience and plays a crucial role in investors' decision-making processes.

Anthropological research on market shrines, particular trees, graves and cemeteries, pagodas and temples in Hanoi contributes to the ecologies of urbanism framework by insisting on an expanded understanding of ecology that includes the natural environment but considers ecology in a broader sense. Competing discourses, multiple voices, (in)visible entities and various levels of political hierarchies in (post-)socialist Vietnam generate competing urban ecologies, conceptualized as encompassing all aspects of urban environments such as climate, pavements, parks, housing, marketplaces, and city planning. Agents in these processes are residents, urban activists, traders, planners and local authorities on the human side, and spirits inhabiting the urban infrastructure, including market shrines, on the non-human side.

Hanoi, the capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is littered with pagodas and temples, inhabited by gods, goddesses, princesses, and other historical and mythological figures. Likewise, market shrines are sacred places and have long been part of trade and commerce. Market goddesses (Bà Chúa chợ), monks' tombs and animated trees are considered guardians of trading places, protecting the territory from being demolished and enhancing spiritual security in a society undergoing an uneasy transformation from communist command economy to capitalist market economy. Hence, market shrines are key public sites where tensions and conflicts concerning urban renewal are negotiated and where overlapping networks of humans and spirits are involved in processes of rapid urban transformation.

Compared to the market management — the political domain governing the territory that represents the socialist state's concerns — the market deity and other non-humans inhabiting the market shrine are assumed to be powerful entities mediating between this world and the otherworld. Therefore, the market shrine may be considered the spiritual realm governing the marketplace and its environment. Against the background of economic crises and the uncertainty of market forces, on the one hand, and the unpredictability of urban planners' and local authorities' decision-making processes on the other, city residents, traders and market employees still rely on the agentic forces of spirits to prevent their trading places and livelihoods from being destroyed.

Since the implementation of economic reforms in Vietnam in 1986, the increasing power of the market economy, cross-border trade and informal economic practices have invigorated various spiritual practices associated with material interests and well-being. Although long condemned by the communist regime, these practices gradually gained popularity during the 1990s and spread in the 2000s. Hence, occult economies, part of the market economy and of processes of change in various regions around the world (Ong 1987, p. 1; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, p. 310; Rudnycky and Osella 2017, p. 3) are not only constitutive aspects of capitalism, but also intrinsic to market socialism. Connections between capitalism, prosperity religion and "religious commodification" in Asia (Kitiarsa 2007, p. 3) notwithstanding, I suggest that the performance of popular religious practices should not be reduced to instrumental practices. Apart from the particularistic interests of worshippers, as this paper has illustrated, market goddesses represent a kind of collective ideology of morality by contributing to the safeguarding of the market, the interests of the traders, the urban neighbourhood and the environment.

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NOTES

1. Also see Söderström and Geertman (2013).
2. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 5 March 2016.
3. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 10 March 2015.
4. Interview, Hanoi, 10 March 2015.
5. Interview, Hanoi, 5 March 2016.
6. The names of all people mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.
7. Interview, Hanoi, 2 April 2016.
8. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 22 March 2015.
9. Interview, Hanoi, 12 April 2016.
10. Interview, Hanoi, 22 November 2012.
11. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 4 December 2012.
12. Interview, Hanoi, 7 December 2012.
13. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 8 May 2015.
14. Interview, Hanoi, 1 March 2016.
15. Interview, Hanoi, 1 March 2016.
16. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 7 April 2016.
17. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 18 February 2013.
18. Interview, Hanoi, 5 November 2012.
19. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
20. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
21. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
22. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016. On spirit mediumship and the mother

- goddess religion in Vietnam, see, for example, Fjelstad and Nguyen (2006); Endres (2011); Hüwelmeier (2018b).
23. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 24. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 25. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 26. Interview, Hanoi, 20 February 2013.
 27. Interview, Hanoi, 20 February 2013.
 28. Interview, Hanoi, 20 February 2013.
 29. Interview, Hanoi, 20 February 2013.
 30. Interview, Hanoi, 2 May 2015.
 31. Interview, Hanoi, 2 May 2015.
 32. Fieldnotes, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 33. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 34. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 35. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 36. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 37. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 38. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 39. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 40. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.
 41. Interview, Hanoi, 15 April 2016.

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