

Friday Forum – April 2025

Post-Traumatic Growth: 50 Years since the Vietnam War

Chaired by Dr Mary Tomsic

Friday 11 April 2025, 3.30-5pm AEST

To be held online via Teams



ABOUT THIS FRIDAY FORUM

On the 30th of April 1975, the Vietnam War ended with the evacuation of U.S. and allied forces, including Australian military personnel, in what the Western media called “The Fall of Saigon.” The immediate chaos and trauma post-war were captured in a Vietnamese saying: “*If the lamp-post could go, it too would leave.*” Over 80,000 Vietnamese refugees arrived in Australia within the decade after 1975, with about 50,000 resettling by 1981.

In 2025, Vietnamese-born people represent the sixth-largest migrant community in Australia, with the surname “Nguyen” being the second most common in Melbourne and third in Sydney. Vietnamese migrants are one of the most studied groups in post-war trauma and histories.

This seminar explores the long-term impacts of post-war trauma and growth for war veterans, Vietnamese refugees, and adoptees. Nearly 50 years since the war, how have their lived experiences informed our perspectives on the Vietnam War and its consequences?

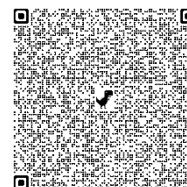
Join us as scholars discuss **post-traumatic growth after the Vietnam War** and its role in shaping Australian life, history and politics.

Image: Vietnamese Refugee Children on an Operation Babylift Flight arriving at San Francisco international airport, 5 April 1975. National Archives and Records Administration. Gerald R. Ford Library (Ann Arbor, MI)

SPEAKERS

Dr Anh Nguyen Austen
Dr Mia Martin Hobbs
Dr Indigo Willing
Dr Mary Tomsic - chair

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ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

[Dr Anh Nguyen Austen](#) is a Vietnamese refugee, scholar, and advocate for the post-traumatic growth and flourishing of refugees and migrants in Australia. Prior to becoming a research lecturer, she worked in public health, was legal aid advocate for Asian migrants in Boston, and paralegal for native title in Victoria. She is currently the founding editor of the Digital Diaspora Book Series with Routledge and specialises in research and community engagement projects with refugee and migrant groups, including VietSpeak, Free to Feed, Rural Australians for Refugees, Kids' Own Publishing, and Viet Nam Family Search. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College and Harvard Divinity School where she was awarded a fellowship year in Australia in 2001, and later completed her PhD at the University of Melbourne in 2020.



[Dr Mia Martin Hobbs](#) is an oral historian of war and conflict. Her research interests include the Vietnam War, the War on Terror, memory, trauma, place, gender, peace, and security. Mia completed her PhD in History at the University of Melbourne in 2018. Her first book, *Return to Vietnam: An Oral History of American and Australian Veterans' Journeys* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) won the Oral History Australia Book Award for 2022 and was shortlisted for the Memory Studies Association First Book Award in 2023. She has published on Vietnam veteran experiences in *Journal of American History*, *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, and *The Oral History Review*. Mia is currently undertaking a new oral history project with women and minorities who served in the British, American, and Australian armed forces in the so-called War on Terror.

[Dr Indigo Willing](#) is a war orphan, skateboarder, has a PhD, and is the co-chair of [Skateistan](#) International Advisory Board, who make skating and education accessible for children and others, particularly from war and conflict zones, in partnership with local skate groups from around the globe (Skateistan are also featured in a [documentary](#) which won an Academy Award in 2021). Being unstoppably dedicated to removing social barriers shapes her life's work and pathways. Her activities reflect her diverse background and lived experiences as a Vietnam War orphan and adoptee, an Asian Australian, sociologist, and skateboarder involved with award-winning and internationally recognized community projects. In Gadigal Country, Sydney, NSW she is a [Visiting Fellow](#) at the Social Science and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC) at The University of Sydney and a [NSW Winston Churchill Fellow](#). In Magandjin, Brisbane, QLD she is an Adjunct [Research Fellow](#) at the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research at Griffith University and a [John Oxley Library Hon. Fellow](#) at QLD State Library.



ABOUT THE CHAIR

[Dr Mary Tomsic](#) is a Senior Lecturer in the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at ACU. She is a cultural historian with experience in migration history, film history and gender history. Her current research examines visual representations of child refugees, children's voices in refugee literature and refugee boat journeys.