“Ambivalent ‘Returns’: High-Skilled Migration and Social Change in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam”

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

(Sociology)

at

University of Wisconsin-Madison

2014

Date of final oral examination: 08/28/2013

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Under the Supervision of Professor Gay Seidman

University of Wisconsin-Madison

In “late-industrializing” Vietnam, the country from which their parents fled decades ago as refugees, many of the ‘returned’ children of refugees work as middle managers in the offices of multinational corporations, NGOs and international agencies, attracted to the growth of high-skilled jobs. Long-term ‘return’ migrants have altered Vietnam’s position on the economic world stage, serving as a complicated cultural bridge, aiding Vietnam’s social and economic development and modernization, and blurring global and local tensions and boundaries which arise as a result of Vietnam’s rapid economic changes.

This ethnographic study explores the myriad of social contradictions experienced by many of these “Viet Kieu” (Overseas Vietnamese). Within their social lives outside of work, they seek belonging among local Vietnamese, yet residentially most live alongside foreign expatriates and Viet Kieu who have similar incomes to them in residential high-rises. With their extended families still remaining in Vietnam, many contribute money and gifts, yet most also set boundaries by masking their own privilege and experience class guilt for their family’s success after migration. At work, many Viet

Kieu also find themselves negotiating complicated terrain. Within companies and organizations, they navigate tensions between their global knowledge and lack of local know-how, leading to complicated racialized and gendered office dynamics. Most Viet Kieu view their sojourn in Vietnam as a kind of temporary stage in a professional career, as elite Vietnamese locals who also hold MBAs and JDs from foreign universities begin to assume equivalent jobs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have inspired and helped to shape the project. Without a doubt, Gay Seidman, my adviser, has closely read each version of every chapter of the dissertation, making sure I had both theoretical significance in mind to balance out rich ethnographic detail. Gay is generous with her time and mentors and supports her students, taking a vital interest in the well-being of her many graduate students both in their school and personal lives. For many years of the project proposal and writing stages, Gay baked cookies and sweet treats and invited students to her house to share our writing and to get feedback. She is an adviser who builds community. Myra Marx Ferree generously gave critical feedback at nearly every stage and welcomed me into her gender writing group. I knew that regardless of how busy Myra and Gay were, they always made time for me.

Mara Loveman offered an intellectual home in the rich field of comparative race, ethnicity, and nationalism research through seminars and her guidance through the racial and ethnic studies preliminary written exams. Cindy I-Fen Cheng and I discussed Asian American Studies readings independently in her office every week for an entire semester and inspired me to see my work as able to make crucial interventions in both the field of Asian and Asian American Studies. Sida Liu and Mark Sidel joined my committee during the post-fieldwork writing stages and provided the perspective of Sociology and Legal Studies through deep knowledge of China and Southeast Asia, respectively.

Apart from my committee members, many sociology friends and colleagues both in Madison and elsewhere gave significant input to the dissertation. There are many

people who you meet in graduate school with whom you become close friends but few that you can say also became your housemate, conference buddy, writing group mate, wedding organizer, baby shower co-coordinator, and quasi-life coach. Laura Heideman, I honestly could not have made it through graduate school without you. Hae Yeon Choo is another friend who has helped me at multiple stages of hoops and hurdles; Hae Yeon encouraged me to get creative with assembling the data. Kimberly Hoang contributed significant input during my fieldwork and on a journal manuscript which formed the basis for the chapter on extended family relations. Joseph Harris and Oriol Mirosa have provided incisive comments and friendship from start to finish. Myra's gender writing group has been another intellectual home and I must acknowledge the supportive feedback from multiple participants in different years, including Ayesha Khurshid, Nicole Kaufman, Sarah Bruch, Nicole Butkovich Kraus, Celeste Benson, Susan Rottman, and Chaitanya Lakimsetta. John Zinda and Rodolfo Ebert have provided many fruitful suggestions during a multi-year writing group we formed immediately after our data collection.

Elsewhere at the UW, I have the Wisconsin Migration Research group to thank for mutual support and feedback, including Ted Gerber, Jenna Nobles, Katrina King, David Ranquel, Armando Meijia, Julie Keller, Pilar Gonalons-Pons, and Lily Liang. Pamela Oliver, Michelle Robinson, Julia McReynold, Alex Hanna, and Casey Stocktill have listened attentively to various paper presentations I have given and helped push my ideas further. Aline Lo and I have been friends since arriving to the UW together, she polished multiple chapters with great attention to detail. Ernesto Martinez, Andrew Pham, and Sarah Groeneveld have also given written feedback and given me new ideas to

work with. Friends Jill Bowdon, Tamara Feinstein, and Richard Aviles have given vital emotional support as fellow graduate students in the journey. Stacy Heideman provided a lot of support as an avid babysitter (for my daughter) and occasional soup provider.

My Vietnam Studies “imagined” community has no borders. Natalie Newton, Phi Su, and Mitch Aso gave crucial feedback on different sections. Kristy Kelly, Ivan Small, and Viet Le helped me establish research connections during early stages of fieldwork in Vietnam. Nguyen Van Hue at the Vietnam National University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City provided affiliation without hesitation. Our affiliation was made possible through the introduction from my beloved Vietnamese language instructor Thuan Nguyen, who is based in Hanoi and comes to Madison each summer to teach at the Southeast Asian Summer Studies Institute (SEASSI). There are other faculty, staff, and administration who have given input to the project including Kris Olds, Michael Cullinane, Mary Jo Wilson, and Larry Ashmun, all of whom are also affiliated with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

My Madison-based friendships and cheerleading team guided me through the transition of being a first-generation college student in the Midwest so I never felt isolated from the larger community. Through the Association for Asian American Graduate Students and allies of the student organization, I got to know Linda Park, Nancy Nguyen, Natalie Tran, Ray Hsu, Jackie Nguyen, Anthony Yuen, Yer Vang, Vanessa Merina, Chong Moua, Nira Ly, Kong Vang, Liz Thao, Nancy Vue, Hong Tran, and Emily Yu. Many late-nights were spent together at the library during those AAAGS years.

I grew up, attended college, and worked summer internships in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the friendships I developed with Jason dela Cruz, Viet Huong Nguyen, Be Huynh, Theary Meng, and Marcus Ayala remind me of who I am. Unika Laset, my oldest friend since middle school with a generous spirit, copyedited multiple drafts of the dissertation.

My mentors during my twenties have helped to remind me through demonstration about the relationship between the life of the mind and public policy, so thank you to Rand Quinn, Jere Takahashi, Mary Lai, and Betsy Keenan for these vital messages.

The writing of this dissertation was supported by grants from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Southeast Asian Studies, the American Sociological Association Minority Fellowship (Cohort 38), the Mellon Wisconsin Summer Fellowship, Center for World Affairs and the Global Economy: Remaking the Developmental State Grant, and mini-grants from Sociology and the Graduate School.

My family has provided endless support. I gave birth to two “projects” in graduate school, the second one was my daughter Nora who was born during the most crucial writing phase of the dissertation. My husband Arash has been nothing but supportive, motivating me to “get it done” during this transformative adjustment to parenthood. My mother in-law Wanda Akbar and father in law Mohammed Akbar made the 5 hour drives from Indiana to help watch our daughter on many weekends while I had to write, teach, and catch up on sleep. I want to thank my sister An Nguyen, mother Hanh Lam, and adopted father Phong Do for being supportive of my decision to leave California to do

my doctoral studies. My mother's courage is what allowed me to take a leap of faith on this intellectual journey.

There are many people whose stories are in this project. I wish to thank each of them for their trust and generosity in opening up their lives to me. I am unable to acknowledge them by their real names, but I hope this account provides some nuance and richness to their adventures in the "motherland".

PSEUDONYMS

All names used in this research are pseudonyms based on common Vietnamese and Western names to protect privacy and confidentiality. If individuals had Vietnamese given names at birth, they were assigned Vietnamese pseudonyms. If participants had non-Vietnamese names or underwent legal name changes in the US as part of the citizenship naturalization process, they were assigned "Western" names.

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GLOSSARY

Key Terms, Vocabulary, and Abbreviations

COV: Committee on Overseas Vietnamese advises the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on matters concerning the Vietnamese diaspora who are now living in 104 countries outside of Vietnam.

Doi Moi: Means "renovation." A policy adopted by the Sixth National Congress of the Vietnamese Socialist government in 1986 to help Vietnam move towards a form of "market socialism with state guidance."

Expatriate: A foreign worker placed in an overseas branch of a global corporation or non-governmental organization. Also referred to as "expat."

ODP: Orderly Departure Program created in 1979 to permit Vietnamese refugees to immigrate to the United States under the auspices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Saigon: Former name of the capitol of pre-1975 South Vietnam, today known as Ho Chi Minh City, the commercial hub of Vietnam. Saigon is still the affectionate name of the city, and often refers to the downtown/Central Business District

Viet Kieu: Refers to Overseas Vietnamese and their descendants. "Kieu" means overseas. See Chapter 1 for full definition.

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CHAPTER 1

The Global Production of Privilege and Otherness

Global economic changes and Vietnam's adoption of *Doi Moi* policies[1] beginning in 1986 – a move towards being a "socialist market economy under state guidance" – increased the need for high-skilled labor within internationalizing domestic-owned firms and global firms hoping to expand in Vietnam and the region. Vietnam has been repositioning itself on the economic world stage through greater regional and global cooperation and integration over the past decade; indicators of this include its signing on to the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement in 2002 (BTA), accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007, and increased cooperation through ASEAN trade relations. Many of these economic changes broadly coincided with the Vietnamese state's attempts to attract many Overseas Vietnamese, and their children – particularly those with bicultural fluency and human capital – to 'return' to Vietnam.[2]

The Vietnamese diaspora today, nearly four decades later, amounts to an overseas population of nearly four million Vietnamese and their children who are scattered in 104 countries, many of whom were resettled to the United States, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. This population has hardly been static, as many of the

[1] At its Sixth National Congress in December 1986, Vietnam's Communist Party made a decisive step to abandon the central planning model of socialism and to adopt a market-oriented socialist economy under state guidance also known as Doi Moi (Renovation). See Melanie Beresford, "Doi Moi in Review: The Challenges of Building Market Socialism in Vietnam." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, No. 38, 2: 221-243.

[2] The term "Viet Kieu" has been used in government documents dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. In the early 1950s, the Viet Minh worked hard to attract Viet Kieu from France to fight against the French in Vietnam.

Overseas Vietnamese population have obtained legal citizenship or permanent residence outside of Asia, raised children in major cities, and have become integrated in both global cosmopolitan communities and their communities of origin. Many transnational ties have been maintained through direct contact with surviving family members through handwritten letters, emails, gifts, and monetary remittances.

Known in Vietnam as Người Việt Hải Ngoại, or the *Viet Kieu* – the Overseas Vietnamese – these individuals were desired both by multinational corporations and the Vietnamese state in its attempts to become more economically integrated in both the Asia Pacific Region and the world. While first-generation Viet Kieu refugees have been more reluctant to 'return', many children of Viet Kieu, the 1.5 and second generation of post-1975 refugees, are 'returning' to Vietnam for long-term work opportunities. However, they 'returned' with a sense of ambivalence about their place and identity in Vietnam, with many recognizing after their 'return' that gradually, companies and organizations would hire native-born workers with technical expertise or shift towards localized strategies to recruit the small but growing numbers of post-war baby boomer study-abroad Vietnamese elites to meet growing demand for skilled workers. The ambiguity for the Viet Kieu did not end there – they 'returned' to Vietnam ambivalent about their sense of belonging in Ho Chi Minh City's foreign expatriate communities, in their extended families who remained in Vietnam after the American withdrawal, and in their multinational workplace.

This dissertation, based upon eight months of ethnographic observations spread across Vietnam's recent market transition and restructuring, in 2004, 2008, and 2010, provides an account of the ambivalent experiences of the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu diasporic 'returnees' to Ho Chi Minh City (still known as Saigon colloquially), Vietnam.

The diasporic 'returnees' experiences are part of a global pattern: many college graduates and high-skilled professionals with the resources to travel are finding work opportunities in the developing countries of the Global South as these late industrializing countries become more integrated into the international economy. US 'return' migration of South Asian Americans to Mumbai in India (Jain, 2013) and Chinese and Chinese Americans to Shanghai in China (Obuhkova, 2009) present contemporary parallels of professional migration. Meanwhile, labor markets in respective home countries in North America and Western Europe are characterized by increasing competition for middle class jobs in a post-industrialized hourglass economy. For the adult children of immigrants, classified as the 1.5 and second-generation, who may have the resources and mobility to do so, it seems natural to look toward their parents' ancestral homeland for middle management and skilled jobs. Though the US government does not keep statistics on Americans going to Vietnam by racial and ethnic categories, a Consulate official suggested to me over official email in 2010 that about 60 to 80 percent of US individuals serviced at the US Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the largest local and foreign staffed consulates in the State department, would be classified as Viet Kieu.

What happens when the 1.5 and second-generation children of Vietnamese refugees 'return' for long-term work opportunities in their parents' ancestral homeland? In the era of economic globalization and rapid development unfolding in "late developing" countries throughout Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa, the diasporic 'return' migration of educated and skilled workers has prompted researchers to consider a wide range of consequences of these encounters, the returnees' civic engagement with local people and places, and the forging of multi-generational, transnational social ties over time and across multiple spaces. My study of diasporic 'returnees' makes an empirical and theoretical contribution to past

studies of migrant transnationalism and migration's impact on sending-country life between Asia and Asian American communities. The questions it raises also challenges conventional notions about the assimilation of US immigrants into host countries by examining how identity and privilege cross territorial and political borders. Moreover, at the level of state policy, diasporic return migration, particularly in late industrializing contexts, has often been viewed as a short to medium-term solution to reversing 'brain drain' emigration and for meeting social and economic development goals. I show how this labor strategy looks from the perspectives of the migrants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing from sociology and the transnational overlap between Asia and Asian American Studies, my dissertation asks these overarching questions:

1. How do ethnic 'returnees' construct their "in between" identities as middle managers and workers at multinational companies and organizations? Or as Americans with extended family ties and personal connections to Vietnam?
2. Does this "in between" identity management create tensions as they navigate family, work, and urban Ho Chi Minh City, and if so, how do they navigate these tensions?

I address these questions through the lens of global changes in the political economies of both host and home countries of the 'returnees' as they play out in the everyday lives of these high-skilled workers in globalizing Vietnam. At the level of interpersonal and group relations, the data highlights the blurriness of social boundaries between high-skilled migrants and native groups who look ethnically the same and whose cultural capital is shaped by the differences and mutual dependence between national economies.

This work also shows the many ways privilege and otherness gets socially constructed across national borders in socio-historical context. In Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Kieu possess

forms of cultural capital that make them desirable to the state, multinational companies, and nongovernmental organizations. Viet Kieu metaphorically are perceived as a neoliberal capitalist bridge across the Asia Pacific. Racialized and ethnicized phenotypical characteristics can also allow Viet Kieu to physically “pass” as Vietnamese nationals, while class markers of difference, such as clothing labels, English fluency, lack of Vietnamese fluency, posture, and material artifacts such as motorbike, and cellular phone brand betray their sense of belonging to a place. Cultural capital becomes an asset to the Viet Kieu, defined according to Bourdieu, as “socially valued knowledge, tastes, and dispositions, styles, and other acquired and inherited social and physical characteristics” (Bourdieu 1984; Carruthers, 2002: 427). The label of “ethnic American,” an identity loaded with US racial and ethnic hierarchies that carry different meanings at different times and places (Omi and Winant, 1994), gets transformed in the act of ‘returning’ into social and cultural capital.

We know relatively little about the experience of the 1.5 and second generation Vietnamese Americans in Vietnam, including what social interactions with each other and other English-speaking expatriates they have in the ancestral homeland. Moreover, how does their ambivalence in the ancestral homeland extend into relations with extended family and relations with subordinate co-workers in the multinational or nongovernmental organizational workplace? What direct and intentional roles have the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu played in Vietnam’s economic and social development? These are empirical questions my research tackles by advancing Viet Kieu Studies.

Terminology: Viet Kieu and the 1.5 and Second Generation

Viet Kieu motivations for ‘return’ must be understood within the social context of outmigration and, for many, family history of displacement after the Vietnam War. The term

Viet Kieu is popularly used by local Vietnamese to designate the Overseas Vietnamese population, otherwise known as the *Nguoi Viet o Nuoc Ngoai* (NVNN). Although as Small (2012) mentions, the modifier *Kieu*, from the Chinese root word Qiao meaning sojourning overseas, is often rejected among resettled Vietnamese immigrants abroad, it is more generally adopted by returnees or transnationals who have chosen to 'return' to Vietnam from the West for long-term employment or resettlement. Many refer to themselves and others in the abbreviated form as "VKs" to demarcate that they are neither Western "expats" nor Vietnamese locals.[3] On top of this, many Viet Kieu described their social networks as located within the "expat community," using a vernacular short hand for describing Westernized English-speaking foreign workers.

Intergenerational differences between the first generation in the US and the 1.5 and second generation of Vietnamese Americans play a key role in shaping the political willingness on the part of many refugee communities to engage with the homeland, with the first generation often resistant and younger generations, born outside the homeland, more apt to make the diasporic return to the place their parents fled. The term "1.5 generation" refers to immigrants who come at a young age and retain their ability to speak, if not always to read and write, the ancestral language as well as values and norms transmitted from the previous generation (Chan, 2006: xiv). In *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation* (2006), Sucheng Chan writes that the 1.5 generation "often act as cultural brokers, regardless of whether they wish to do so, between

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[3] The word Viet Kieu is also a homonym for bridge (Kieu, Qiao or Cau) identically spelled in Romanized *quoc ngu* although the words are not necessarily directly etymologically related: '*Kieu Bao* [Bao means womb] suggests therefore an agenda of constructing diasporic subjectivities intimately linked with the nation, or 'homeland'. Overseas Vietnamese subjecthood is metaphorically constructed as a bridge always linking them to their primordial origins, even in a globalized era of widespread long-distance mobility and outmigration' (Small, 2012: 238-239).

their grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, on the one hand, and the younger, usually American-born members of their family, on the other hand." The majority of Viet Kieu 'returnees' came on 30-day tourist provisional tourist visas and located work from within Vietnam, and then adjusted their legal status once a job was secured to a work visa. For many Viet Kieu, diasporic return – without the use of quotation marks – is an imperfect term often used to describe a longer-term stay after multiple family and tourist related visits to Vietnam. Many of the second-generation Viet Kieu born and raised in the US may not have ever stepped foot on Vietnamese territory prior to their short visits. Hence, they were not returning per se, and I use sneer quotes around 'returnees' to set them apart. [4]

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the time of my fieldwork, studies of Asian American experiences suggested that transnational ties exist, particularly with more recent post-1965 immigration waves, but that the struggles of the community were focused on exclusion from the nation, local place-making, and grappling with how to manage multicultural lives in the US. Much of the research focusing on Asia and high-skilled return migrants was mainly focused upon transnational remittances and development and heavily emphasized macro-level processes, with little attention paid to the transnational circuits of migration between countries until more recently and limited attention to the social ambivalences of return migration. My project recognizes that migration is produced by inequalities in the world system, yet within the realm of political economy, migrants make decisions about jobs and seek personal satisfaction with increasingly more options in today's

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[4] Other terms that might not capture the same designated population include "Vietnamese American expatriates" or ethnic 'returnees,' which do not recognize the shared sense of community and experiences with Australian and European Viet Kieu.

global economy, where social media platforms and transportation costs have made communication and travel more efficient and lower-cost. In the same vein, studies of transnational migration requires a deep investigation of the migrants' lives prior to migration and in the host country context.

Ambivalent Cultural Citizenship and Global Modernity

Migrants, particularly those for whom 'return' migration provides a boost in socioeconomic status and privilege, have been relatively understudied. My study illustrates their elite ambivalence with crossing borders. Rather than traveling as purely economic actors, the Viet Kieu seek multiple modes of belonging in "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1980) across state boundaries, within extended relatives separated by oceans, and amongst other global elites across different organizational environments.

Rather than depicting the Viet Kieu as rootless global cosmopolitans, I want to present a nuanced portrait of how the Viet Kieu are grounded in localized understandings of belonging, and to go so far as to show how they go to great lengths to appear and sound like local Vietnamese in some aspects of their public lives, while also being ambivalent about their place as elite migrants in Vietnam. This study falls in line with Mitchell (2004), a geographer, who calls for increased attention to elite migrants:

> while the growing body of research has aided our understanding of the transnational lives of migrant laborers, there is less scholarly output on the movements of transnational entrepreneurs and executives (15).
>
> Members of the transnational laboring class have relatively little choice with respect to the site of either their productive activity or their reproductive 'home', but this is not the case for transnational elites, who are often able to strategically manipulate or evade the regulatory systems of state borders and systems of governance, and who also are, more often than not, able to purchase citizenship in more than one locale (15).

Social science debates interpreting the diaspora as purely agents of economic development must take into consideration extra-territorial cultural citizenship – that is, the deterritorialization of nationalism shaping the lives of today's globally interconnected skilled workforce. The latter statements by Mitchell (2004), in particular about human agency and the capabilities of transnational entrepreneurs and executives to strategically manipulate regulatory systems of state borders, are crucial to understand how the Viet Kieu ambiguously try to do this, but are held to a separate set of 'returnee' expectations. The migration of highly-educated and skilled Viet Kieu as a subgroup with transnational capabilities – shuttling between the US and Vietnam for work opportunities and benefitting from the protections of US citizenship gets juxtaposed with the ebb and flow of their many times privileged, other times unwelcome, distinction of being Viet Kieu.[5]

Aiwha Ong (1998) is the exception, portraying in her situated ethnography of the transnational practices of Hong Kong businessmen who migrate in anticipation of the political handover of Hong Kong to mainland China, paying close attention to how regimes of gender, family, state, and capitalist accumulation discipline such practices. Analytically, Ong (1999) is

[5] As the following chapter will discuss, the Viet Kieu have more legal benefits gradually being rolled out to them by the state than those conferred to other Western foreigners, but less legal demands and state control imposed upon them than Vietnamese citizens.

concerned with transnationality, defined as "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space," which has intensified under late capitalism. Ong (1999) uses *transnationalism* to refer to the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of culture (4). "Flexible citizenship" gives meaning to the "cultural logic of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions …"

> In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes (6).

Such an approach, according to Ong, gives human agency to the over-deterministic world systems-based accounts of globalization. To a limited extent, the 'return' migration of the adult children of Viet Kieu can be interpreted as "flexible citizenship" – a case where "passports [are] less and less attestations of citizenship, let alone of loyalty to a protective nation-state, than of claims to participate in labor markets" (Ong, 1999: 2). My study aims to show how even elites still become structured by receiving states and seek to embed themselves amongst local institutional actors.

Living Between the 'Global' and 'Local'

Appadurai (1996) suggests that articulations between both the global and the local – often construed as the opposition between universalizing capitalist forces and local cultures – produce "multiple modernities" in different parts of the world. Appadurai (1996) asserts that the twin forces of migration and media form two interconnected "diacritics" (typically construed as linguistic markers) that determine "communities of imagination" that cut across conventional political and social boundaries. Appadurai's project probes diasporic attachment and allegiance

to the nation-state in the hypothetical absence of rootedness to place. He argues that such a 'global production of locality' happens because transnational flows of people, goods, and knowledge become 'imaginative resources' for creating communities and 'virtual' neighborhoods. In essence, the particularistic forces of ethnonationalist allegiance will increase, not diffuse, from the homogenizing pressures of globalization, and attachments to an "imagined community" (Anderson), and will be buttressed by global media and migration.[6]

Multiple Modes of Belonging: Strategic Nationality and Identity

Migration across borders prompts us to consider the possibility of multiple modes of attachment and belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) writes that "if *citizenship* relates to the participatory dimension of belonging, *identity* relates to the ways in which people define themselves and each other" and "belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' and … about feeling 'safe'"(2) [author's italics]. According to Hedetoft and Hjort (2002), some people may feel that they have

> several belongings, several places and cultures they belong to and that determine their identity as multiple, nested, situational, or fluid, whereas others react to the uncertainties and erosions of belonging following either from nomadic existences in the global village or from the impact of globalizing forces on the handed down sites of loyalty by developing new attachments, to belongings (in the sense of material possessions), familiar surroundings, closeknit localities, or the intimacy of personal relationships (ix).

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[6] Though somewhat abstract, other critics of Appadurai such as Mitchell (2004) fault Appadurai for "framing the disjunctures of late modernity in terms of deterritorialization, a view which neglects the ways that processes of reterritorialization nearly always occurs in conjunction with deterritorialization … the generally celebratory tone he employs throughout *Modernity at Large* indicates the desire to herald these deterritorializing disjunctures as the premier sites of resistance in a post-national era." Ong (1999) challenges Appadurai's view, suggesting that his vision of the global as macro-political economic and the local as situated "does not quite capture the horizontal and relational nature of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural processes that stream across spaces."

These multiple modes of belonging speak to the issues that the subgroup of Viet Kieu experience in this study, and their identities are "multiple, nested, situational, and fluid." Their story, rather than being one about deterritorialization (Appadurai) is one about forming attachments to more than one territory. Though the Viet Kieu 'returnees' have access to legal citizenship conferred by their home countries, their movement between the US (or elsewhere) and the imagined homeland, Vietnam, contributes to an ongoing construction of their "in between" sense of cosmopolitan identity and belonging.

Within the context of migrant returns, ethnic, national, and diasporic "in between" affiliations get used strategically by overseas returnee populations and factors into the social construction of globally embedded workplace hierarchies in the Global South. The instrumental assertion of diasporic "in between" identities has been studied in the past. Ashley Carruthers (2002) has interviewed Australians of Vietnamese ancestry who worked in Ho Chi Minh City for extended periods of time for multinational corporations. Retrospective interviews with these individuals and their Ho Chi Minh City work counterparts revealed an intentional asserting of their "Australian" and "Vietnamese" in-between-ness and bi-cultural competence in the success of their corporate working life: the ability to navigate and be a bridge between Vietnamese and foreign expatriate co-workers. Carruthers found that Vietnamese Australians in Vietnam were secure in their hyphenated identities, especially in comparison to their parents, who experienced downward social mobility, deskilling, racial exclusion, and material deprivation in the diasporic host countries (Carruthers, 2002). Carruthers' study of diasporic 'return' migration prompts questions about the 1.5 and second generation of the Viet Kieu who are transnationally embedded in many places and who can activate their legal citizenship in one place, and access

their cultural citizenship and status as children of the Viet Kieu elsewhere, similar in fashion to the Hong Kong businessmen in Ong (1999)'s study.

Finding One's Roots in the Age of Multicultural Politics

An examination of transnational racial and ethnic identity of young adult 'returnees' – many of whom have never stepped foot in Vietnam – raises questions about a US-centric discourse of finding one's identity and belonging and its increasing salience, even in the age of transnational migration. The Viet Kieu confront a complicated and layered negotiation of US multicultural identity politics; this leads them to associate their long-term search for work in the ancestral homeland as a "journey to find their roots." Louie in *Chineseness Across Borders* (2003) writes that within the identity politics of U.S. multiculturalism, identity is viewed as something "out there waiting to be discovered" – in the case of the Viet Kieu, an objectified fixity attached to a territorialized sense of Vietnamese culture and identity. "Such portrayals of identity" Louie writes, "are disturbing in a sense because they imply that one cannot form a complete identity without going [abroad], and that the identity that one has discovered through going there is somehow final" (96). In her writing on Chinese American root journey narratives, Louie finds the politics of US multiculturalism both excludes these young people from cultural citizenship in the US and associates them, willingly or not, with their ancestral homeland. Their relationship to China and their understanding of Chinese culture in the context of the US are therefore complex and often somewhat ambivalent. Louie (2003) furthermore argues: "China is simultaneously an unknown entity filtered through an orientalist lens and a place to which Chinese Americans are involuntarily and inextricably attached" (96). Quoting Dirlik (1996): "The problem faced

by Asian Americans thus is one of the difficulty of comfortably claiming either Asian or American roots … 'To the extent that trans-Pacific ties of Asian Americans have been recognized within the dominant culture, therefore, this recognition has served primarily to deny their 'Americanness' – and their history" (1998: 294 quoted in Louie, 2003: 100).

In line with Louie's assessment of these transnational questions of identity, my study recognized, at the outset, that the Viet Kieu were ambivalent about trips to Vietnam, where they are part of the visible majority. Nevertheless, the Viet Kieu are also frequently reminded by locals in their parents' ancestral homeland of how "un-Vietnamese" they are, having been raised as Americans, yet deemed as not authentically American enough by locals because they are not White. These questions about identity, moral belonging to a specific place, and authenticity get raised by participants in my study in many facets of their return journey.

Transnational Social Field

To understand transnational migration, with 'return' migration as a subcategory of this, we must also take into account the relations of the migrant with non-migrating actors/institutions. Fouron (2000) and Ashley Carruthers (2002) have suggested the term "transnational social field" to encapsulate how "the transnational subject actualizes his or her citizenship in a transborder social field that comprises a 'combination of virtual and actual 'social spaces' or habitats that span and connect the social and political terrains of the [host nation] and those of the homeland" (Carruthers, 2002: 426). One of the improvements this term makes is that non-migrating individuals such as many of the relatives of the Viet Kieu can still belong to a transnational social field through the social and virtual spaces that they inhabit beyond the territorial nation-

state apparatus. Many scholars have shown how migrants are embedded within a transnational social field (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Sazanton-Blanck 1994), a domain created by the social relationships of persons who move back and forth in their country of origin and persons who remain connected even if they themselves do not move (Fouron and Glick-Schiller in Levitt and Waters, 2002: 172). This also facilitates the analysis that immigrants and their descendants can continue to be part of a fabric of daily life in their home state, including its political processes, while they simultaneously engage in activities in the new country, at their jobs, in their neighborhoods, as citizens participating in the political process – but in particular, as active participants in their families spread across multiple nation-states.

Diasporic 'Return' Migration

Diasporic return migration from the Global North to destination countries in the Global South can reveal how geopolitics and the global economic order not only filter down to the individual level, but are also instrumental role in the acceptance of these diasporic subjects by residents and state governments in less affluent host countries. Research on contemporary diasporic return migration (Lesser, 2003; Long, 2004; Tsuda, 2009; Lee, diss., 2009) suggests that changes in the global economy are shifting the classic migration story, from the assumption that migrants move from poor to rich countries and stay there permanently, towards one where migrants and their children move between their countries of legal citizenship and their ancestral homeland throughout the course of their lives (Levitt, 2002; Smith, 2006). Diasporic return migration to the parental ancestral homeland has been shown to occur for both ethnic and economic motives, with ethnic 'return' migrants defined as the "later-generation descendants of

diasporic peoples who 'return' to their countries of ancestral origin after living outside their ethnic homelands for generations" (Tsuda, 2009:1).[7]

Past studies of the Viet Kieu have suggested that they play a modest role in the economic and cultural globalization of Vietnam through shorter return visits and economic remittances sent from abroad, but few acknowledge the key role they play in facilitating changes through more permanent returns. Dang Nguyen Anh (2005), head of the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi, and one of a handful of US-trained Vietnam sociologists, focuses upon the emergence of high skilled return migrants in a large-scale survey analysis (n=100). His survey covers a different population of Viet Kieu, for instance, almost 80 percent of his sample reported going abroad to study as their reason (Anh, 2005: 144).[8]

I also differentiate my study of social relations from past studies emphasizing the measurable philanthropic and economic impacts of the Viet Kieu on Vietnam. Sidel (2007) examines the philanthropic efforts of the Vietnamese American community giving back to Vietnam, calling attention to the role Overseas Vietnamese associations and networks play in facilitating the contributions of the Viet Kieu. Pham (2010: 5) assesses the economic

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[7] Though my data relies primarily on observations and interviews from Vietnamese Americans, Viet Kieu returnees who originate from Australia, Canada, and Western Europe can be included in the "Vietnamese diaspora" because of the shared history and legacy of post-1975 refugee outmigration that characterized the majority of migratory flows from the homeland. Apart from being bilingual English and Vietnamese speakers, the diasporic Vietnamese Americans and Australians, in particular, share more commonalities, as Carruthers (2008:71) suggests that they share roughly the "same vision of diasporic identity and participate in the same public sphere, for instance over the Internet, in popular cultural products such as music videos produced in California"; a further similarity between the two is that they both were "situated in multicultural settlers nations opposed to Ho Chi Minh in the Vietnam War/American War."

[8] Only a small proportion, 7.1 percent of interviewees, said that the purpose of going abroad was to be reunited with their family – presumably, other outmigrants – or they were forced to go as refugees after the war ended in 1995. This latter detail reveals that my study participants differ in (a) their family history of migratory departure and (b) in age, especially in relation to the second generation Viet Kieu I recruited.

contributions of the Viet Kieu in Vietnam's development through foreign direct investment (FDI) projects, monetary remittances, gifts, and other forms of direct monetary support to Vietnam, but does this primarily through macro-level, aggregate economic data.

Scholars have attempted to examine return experiences during earlier periods in Vietnam's growth trajectory when the Viet Kieu were fewer in number and visibility than they are currently, in the tens of thousands. During the 1990s, a period "when investment was booming and demand for Viet Kieu professionals was at its zenith", Ashley Carruthers (2002: 424) addresses national belonging in transnational fields of Australian Viet Kieu diasporic 'returnees' based upon retrospective interviews and participant observations with the 'returnees' who have gone 'back' to Sydney and interviews of co-workers at multinational corporations in Ho Chi Minh City. His accounts reference a time period in the late 1990s when Viet Kieu were highly desired by global firms, in contrast to the last decade, when the Viet Kieu have received a mixed reception as a group and on an interpersonal level.[9]

Brain Circulation and Transnational Migration in the World System

[9] More recent ethnographic works have emphasized how gender relations between locals and migrants – through marriage and sex work patronage – have changed through the presence of the Viet Kieu in Vietnam. Thai (2008) examines arranged international marriages between first generation Viet Kieu men and local Vietnamese women. Thai describes how the earnings differentials between the two countries help satisfy the marriage gradient norm of women marrying up. Highly educated women in Vietnam find their status match in Viet Kieu men, who, despite earning low incomes in the US, command a high status in Vietnam due to their purchasing ability, displayed through extravagant consumption during visits. Though many first-generation Viet Kieu men have been motivated to return to Vietnam for marital partners, assorted mating cannot explain the large numbers of both Viet Kieu men and women going to Ho Chi Minh City for reasons I believe have to do with both economic and ethnic motives. Hoang (dissertation 2011) does not address migration motives, but addresses, in part, the ways that businessmen hire sex workers and hostesses as part of complex and closed door afterhours deals and negotiations about important financial and investment projects. Both Thai (2008) and Hoang (2011) interrogate masculinity from the lens of gender, race, nationality, and class, and how these different interactions further the globalization project in late-developer Vietnam. My exploration of how the Viet Kieu "transnationalizes" as well as gets "Vietnam-ized" by local actors speaks to the gap in past studies of this 'return' population.

This study probes the effects of the policy-driven belief that high skilled migrant 'returnees' can help generate "brain circulation" seamlessly and without problems arising in the receiving country or organizational environment. The International Organization for Migration suggested that diasporas can play a key role in fostering development. The 2005 report entitled "Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers" offers the following policy relevant statements:

> There is increasing awareness among countries of their own "diasporas" and their potential for poverty reduction, development and economic growth. This has triggered initiatives to collect data, to reach out to diaspora groups, to advocate dual citizenship and to positively influence the images and perceptions of expatriates in home and host countries. The multiplication of organized diaspora initiatives corresponds to the affirmation of the civil society as a major development player and the increase in grass-root initiatives.[10]

Diasporic entrepreneurial networks, particularly those with high levels of human capital, have been increasingly viewed in recent decades as an asset for late developing states to "catch up." Vietnam, classified by the World Bank as a "lower middle income country," in its efforts to try to "catch up" as a "late-developer" (Gerskenkron) also has latecomer advantages in industrialization,[11] including its ability to leverage state policies to attract more skilled migrants to aid in its development. What policymakers fail to recognize in the recruitment of high-skilled diasporic returnees is that: (1) the migrants' return journeys are marked by economic and cultural ambivalence; (2) the returnees' transmission of skills and knowledge also produces and transmits

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[10] Available online at http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/serial_publications/mrs26%20interior.pdf

[11] See Gerschenkron, Alexander (1962), *Economic backwardness in historical perspective, a book of essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

a particular form of global expertise within localities, often without the local knowledge necessary to meet long-term goals; and (3) the migration histories of the 'returnees' must also be understood. Some individuals and their families departed for political reasons, hence, affecting their insertion in the recruiting host country.

Though not entirely explaining the bridging capabilities of the Viet Kieu, past studies of diasporic "brain re-circulation" have given a romanticized portrayal of diasporas in creating economic growth between industries in the developed and developing countries they are tied to. Saxenian (2006) argues that 'brain circulation' – a two-way flow of skills, technology and capital through the migration of high skilled diasporic elites – in the case of Taiwanese, Chinese, and Indian entrepreneurs, actually helped boost complementary industries in their home country markets. According to Saxenian (2006):

> traditional theories of economic development assume that new products and technologies emerge in industrialized nations that can combine sophisticated skills and research capabilities with large, high income markets, and the mass production is shifted to less costly locations once the product is standardized and the manufacturing process has matured. In this view, success in the periphery builds on the success of more advanced economies: late developers are destined to remain followers because leading edge skills and technology reside in the corporate research labs and universities in the core (4).

However, Saxenian (2006) shows that neither policymakers nor multinational corporations can act in isolation; she suggests that the key players for late developers are actually "communities of technically-skilled immigrants with work experience and connections to Silicon Valley and related American technology centers." These are first-generation immigrants like the Chinese and Indian engineers in Silicon Valley who have the necessary language, cultural, and technical skills to function well in the U.S. as well as in their home markets have a commanding professional advantage" (5). These new migrant returnees are undermining the old pattern of

one-way flows of technology and capital from the core to the periphery, creating far more complex and decentralized two-way flows of skill, capital, and technology (Saxenian, 2006: 6).

The Viet Kieu 1.5 and second generation differ from the first generation Indian, Chinese, and Taiwanese entrepreneurs described by Saxenian (2006), as they were raised in the US and have legal citizenship there. However, they are not merely going to Vietnam for entrepreneurial ventures; many see themselves as going 'back' to explore their cultural heritage and see this as a chance to deepen their ancestral ties. This is due to growing up in an American society where, in spite of defining itself as a multicultural salad bowl, many Asian Americans are still perceived as "forever foreigners" (Tuan, 1998) – their assimilability is deemed as an inverse function of their ties to ancestral roots, heritage, language, and other cultural customs of their ancestry.

As the Viet Kieu act in the interests of multiple social actors, including their companies and their US nuclear families and Vietnam extended families, this produces multiple strains placed upon the idealized diasporic "bridge." A unique subset within this group wanted to work for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) by doing development work, while others saw 'return' as a strategic use of their bicultural identity as a safety net from the recession in the Global North. Because many of the Viet Kieu came from refugee families, the relations of mutual hostility between the diaspora and the Vietnamese state since 1975 have also influenced their political perceptions of Vietnam. This historically tense relationship, which is continually marked by social ambivalence about returning, is an aspect not explored because of the economic motives of the ethnic returnees in Saxenian (2006).

Vietnam is not the only country that has attracted an educated diasporic workforce to new economic opportunities. Ó Riain (2004) posits that Ireland's high tech industry benefited from

the return of Irish software and engineering emigrants in the 1990s. More than 50 percent of émigrés with skills and credentials had fled during the mid-1980s due to economic conditions at home and abroad. Many of these workers considered themselves a part of an international labor market and sought more challenging experiences in places such as the United Kingdom, US, and Germany. These émigrés formed Irish formal and informal networks abroad, but by the early 1990s, more than 150,000 emigrants, disproportionately professionals, returned to Ireland. Through the state's efforts to promote the software industry, thereby attracting its emigrants back, the Irish software industry's globally integrated technology-product firms and technical communities have been central to the developmental network state strategy in Ireland. In both the Irish and Vietnamese case, government has taken proactive measures to attract the diaspora. The Viet Kieu 'returnees' are unlike the Irish returnees in Ó Riain (2004) – though they are in Vietnam to advance their own careers, they are not going "home" per se, as most were born or raised in the US. Like the Irish émigrés, however, Viet Kieu 'returnees' could draw upon their college and MBA alumni networks in Ho Chi Minh City, making it possible to establish industry partnerships and supply chains between the US and Vietnam, in a manner similar to Saxenian's transmigrants who create mini-Silicon Valleys as a consequence of their returns.

To explain the changing norms of work culture and friction between global and local customs, I found the idea of "social remittances" useful. Levitt (1998) illustrates the social impact of international migration between Boston and the Dominican Republic, which suggests a different contribution by diasporas to development. Dominican transnational migration between Boston and Miraflores, in the Dominican Republic, emphasizes the spread of social remittances, defined as "a local-level, migration driven form of cultural diffusion … the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending country communities" (Levitt,

1998: 926-927). Social remittances can serve as a potential development aid: "because they travel through identifiable pathways to specific audiences, policymakers and planners can channel certain kinds of information to particular groups with positive results" (927). How does the Viet Kieu presence affect workplace culture in Ho Chi Minh City's globalizing businesses?

Diasporic 'return' migration to Vietnam is also tied to Vietnam's position in the international division of labor, with Vietnam poised to be the world's assembly line for light manufacturing and natural resource extraction. Post-Fordist models of flexible production have prompted the relocation of factories and distribution chains to lower-cost regions in the countries of the Global South, where culturally informed middle managers are sought to manage the complex cultural shifts in global assemblages and distribution centers. Here, the Viet Kieu fill that valuable intermediary role as cultural foot soldiers. Vietnam's relatively recent integration into the global economy through it greater ties with partnering countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)[12] and its WTO accession in 2007 signal its readiness to be a part of the global commodity chain in the manufacturing and distribution of retail goods, particularly those requiring low-cost labor. Chen (1994) analyzes the spatial division of labor and commodity chains in the Greater South China Economic Region (GSCER) during the 1980s period of economic cooperation between China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. According to Chen, the comparative advantages in each country at the time were as follows: China's cheap land, raw materials, and labor; Hong Kong's links to world markets and international finance; and

[12] According to the Office of the US Trade Representative, in November 2012, President Obama and the ten ASEAN Leaders welcomed the launch of the U.S.-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) initiative, a new framework for economic cooperation designed to promote closer economic cooperation between ASEAN and the United States. Vietnam and US bilateral ties is predicted to increase, particularly as US companies such as Walmart and Lowes try to boost their supply chain in Southeast Asia and the Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations of the Free Trade Agreement occur later this year.

Taiwan's capital, manufacturing technology, and management expertise (Gerreffi and Korzeniewicz, eds., 1994: 166). In Vietnam's commercial hub, Ho Chi Minh City, a metropolis where 'return' migrant high-skilled workers – the Viet Kieu – interface with an increasing urbanized workforce[13] in order to meet the goals of rapid latecomer industrialization, one can observe the Viet Kieu as ambivalent economic and cultural bridge workers.

Transnational Families

Research on transnational families has primarily emphasized the relationships between nuclear family members – children, parents, siblings – yet the intergenerational ties between the offspring of migrants and their grandparents, aunt, uncles, and cousins are less understood. In particular, the context of family separation for refugee families has intra-family political consequences distinguishing them from families separated for purely economic migration. Glick-Schiller and Fouron (2001) found that for many Haitians, patterns of obligation and family comprised a claim to political membership in a community that stretches beyond the territorial borders of a homeland (4, 61). Such loose ties are important between highly unequal developing countries where remittances are heavily relied upon and kinship networks beyond the nuclear family are central to household and village economic survival strategies. Small (2012) shows that Viet Kieu remittances have been exacted as a moral duty, helping as well as straining the maintenance of Vietnamese family networks across nation-state borders. However, Small (2012) emphasizes the impact on Vietnamese fishing villages transformed by remittances such as Quy Nhon, where as many as 60 percent of the population identify having a relative living abroad.

[13] According to Hy V. Luong (2008), editor of *Urbanization, Migration, and Poverty in a Vietamese Metropolis: Ho Chi Minh City in Comparative Perspectives*, "The contribution of migration to urban growth was greatest for Ho Chi Minh City, where 50.8 percent of the growth was attributed to migration (368).

Sociologists have shown how family members who outmigrate send back monetary remittances, symbolic gifts, letters, cards, and photographs to loved ones in their sending country, and are able to maintain these relationships through phone calls, return visits, and even through second-hand information and gossip (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Parrenas 2001; Levitt and Waters, eds., 2002; Parrenas 2005; Thai 2006, 2012; Dreby, 2009). These remittances have the potential to shape power within family relationships.

Family separation has also reshaped varieties of care and compensation in the absence of the migrant. Parreñas (2001) describes financial support and material goods sent to children as a means of overcompensating for the physical absence of the mother and a symbolic penance to purify their consciousness of a sense of guilt (Skrbis, 2008: 238). However, studies have not explored the emotional consequences of separation (or reunification) on other family members such as aunts and uncles, grandmothers, and cousins, who are often viewed as members of the immediate household.

Scholars have noted three principal types of care practices: 1) routine care, day to day care; 2) ritual care, marking special events like birthdays and anniversaries, and 3) crisis care, key event caring, involving unexpected and unanticipated events or times of increased need (Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding, 2007). Money is typically a currency of care (Zelizer, 1989) and a demonstration of filial piety in the maintenance of family relations, especially for families separated across nation states (Thai, 2002). Migrants' burden of obligation can strain relations with family in the ancestral homeland, and the unequal distribution of remittances and gifts can create enmity between relatives who receive support and those who do not (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001: 84-85). These studies stress the emotional consequences of outmigration on both migrants and stayers.

For refugees, whose families have been separated by the aftermath of war and political unrest, persecution, and exile, monetary overcompensation can become a means to make up for survivor guilt, a theme seldom discussed in sociological research. The psychological literature suggests that unconscious processes are at least partially involved in the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1997), suggesting that survivor parents may "transmit emotional messages concerning the history and fate of relatives" and that children of survivors may "share an anguished collective memory reflective of their parents' traumatic experience" (360). In a focus group study conducted by Baldassar, Baldock, and Lange (1999) of 23 migrants in Australia, extreme financial burden reflected strongly-felt moral obligations to provide substantial financial support to family back in their sending countries, even if the migrants were unemployed. Baldassar et al found that "the moral obligation to care was compounded for those who had come to Australia as refugees." Are the experiences of Viet Kieu shaped by similar psychological desires to overcompensate for absence through material support? What role, if any, does survivor guilt play in the ritual and crisis support and gift giving practices of the Viet Kieu, some of whom experience survivor guilt transmitted from their parents? In Chapter 4, I show that status, lifestyle, and class guilt contribute to these feelings of survivor guilt as multiple driving forces underpinning the psychological desire to mask wealth yet give monetary support to non-migrating relatives.

In spite of the prediction that more permanent 'returns' were unlikely for most Viet Kieu, even as recent as the 1990s, many did 'return'. The study by Espiritu and Tran (2002) based on a sample of 114 Vietnamese American second generation college

students living in San Diego suggested that the second generation would have few if any transnational familial ties with Vietnam in the long-term even though, in 1998, the authors reported that 87 percent of respondents still had living grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in Vietnam (387). The authors cited generational differences in level of contact with extended relatives: while 95 percent of Espiritu and Tran's (2002) respondents reported their parents telephoned or wrote to relatives in Vietnam, two-thirds of the 1.5 generation continued to keep in touch, but only one-fifth of the second generation did. A handful of these 1.5 and second generation Vietnamese Americans who are now transitioned to post-college and the workforce – many who even share similar demographic characteristics to participants in Espiritu and Tran's 1998 study – have been drawn to work opportunities in their parents' ancestral homeland. Longer-term 'returns' raise questions about the face-to-face level of encounters and the durability of transnational ties.

Expatriate Studies: A Different Kind of Migrant

Overall, my study of the Viet Kieu frames them as two types of voluntary migrants: as 'ethnicized' expatriate workers in multinational spaces in developing countries and as transnational migrants embedded in family networks. These dual roles contribute to the 'returnee' sense of ambivalence and dislocation, as they are self-interested in advancing their global careers, yet are also expected to be virtuous and philanthropic nieces and nephews, grandchildren, and cousins.

Worldwide, cadres of foreign service diplomats, Peace Corps volunteers, international non-governmental organization staff, English language teachers, multinational corporation

employees, and trailing spouses and children comprise an expatriate community, with inner circles of more tightly knit and networked professional and interest group networks (see Cohen, 1977; Knowles and Harper, 2009). In addition, expatriate populations overlap with tourists, backpackers, and short-term visitors who are there more temporarily. The presence of a pool of cosmopolitan knowledge workers, mentioned previously, and their families living abroad in increasingly larger numbers throughout the Asia Pacific, reflects changing economic conditions in both the originating and destination countries. In the Global South, particularly in Vietnam, the term "expat" has become an umbrella term to refer to a particular type of transnational migrant: American nationals, those of European ancestry and East Asian tourists, businesspeople, and INGO development workers – in addition to referring to internally hired salaried multinational corporate or NGO attaches. As of 2010, there were 80,000 thousand non-nationals, including tourists, at any given time in Ho Chi Minh City. The US government estimates that there were 3 to 6 million Americans working and living overseas at any given time, and that one third of that figure is Asian Americans.

The work lives of high-skilled expatriates working abroad has been relatively understudied, as more scholarly attention has been paid to the globalization of low-wage immigrant workers, such as domestic servants (the majority of which are females) from the Global South (Parrenas, 2001), and high technology H1B visa immigrants from South Asia entering the US (Banerjee, 2012, dissertation). Sprague (2005) notes in an edited collection on feminist methodologies that, "in general, social researchers tend to 'study down', that is, direct their attention to those who have less power. Anthropologist Laura Nader observed that books on American society through the 1960s 'made no mention of the advertising, insurance, banking, realty, or automobile industries, which most people on street know have played a major role in

forming modern American society'" (1969: 292). In recent years, there have been studies of the racialized power dynamics between majority "foreigners" and minority indigenous emirates within expatriate majority societies such as the United Arab Emirates (Schellenberg, 2012 work in progress); less sociological research has interrogated expatriates' social lives and methodologically, fewer studies have been conducted using ethnographic methods.

Beaverstock (2002) in a study of the working, social, and cultural knowledge networks and practices of British expatriates in Singapore, argues that expatriates are major agents in the accumulation and transfer of financial knowledge in international financial centers, and that such processes are undertaken through expatriate global-local knowledge networks and other social practices. Beaverstock (2002) concludes that "while these transnational elites were deeply embedded in global-local relations in the workplace and the business/social sphere through interaction with local 'western educated/experienced' Singaporeans, they were disembedded from the local in the home or other household social spaces due to the invisibility of local populations in their interactions. Unlike the British and mostly white male expatriates that Beaverstock was referring to, the Viet Kieu were not entirely disembedded from Vietnamese localities – local extended family ties and obligations give them a multifaceted perspective on living in Ho Chi Minh City.

In the past, Knowles and Harper (2009) characterize the daily lives of Hong Kong-based British expatriates living in what they characterize as a diverse, yet socially insular and class homogeneous environment: "We're in our own little bubble here, you know: an international community of us Westerners. You know the odd Chinese person … we go to our international school … and that's it, whereas there is a whole other life in Hong Kong, which is very different from ours.'" Their subjects acknowledge that life

"inside the expatriate lifestyle bubble is comfortable if lonely. Internal networks are drawn to prioritize forms of similarity and difference" (p. 51). This edited anthology on Hong Kong, which mentions expatriate communities in passing, signaled a pattern in Ho Chi Minh City that I had observed as a more widespread phenomenon of highly stratified cosmopolitan cities in the Global South – where physical and social spaces evolved to become more welcoming towards local elites and those individuals who have transnational social capital, global connections, and in particular, a foreign passport.

Global companies continue to cross national boundaries with the avowed purpose of expanding market penetration, and their need to hire employees who can navigate the ins and outs of the company and the new cultural and legal environment – especially in a transitioning socialist economy with inconsistent legal transparency and enforcement – is paramount. The expatriate and business management literatures tended to discuss these matters in functional terms. Jack and Stage (Sept 2005), expatriate relocation coaches, assert in their mini-article titled, "Success Strategies for Expats," that "expatriates must demonstrate flexibility in adapting their leadership style to the new environment and be perceptive enough to pick out different communication cues when reading people." One of the challenges they pinpoint is adjusting to the new work environment: "in addition to work style adaptation issues, expatriates and their families are pushed to make their own lifestyle and cultural adjustments to survive or thrive in a foreign country." Au and Fukuda (2002) conclude in their mailed out survey of 232 Hong Kong-based expatriates that expatriates provide benefits to multinational corporations when they enact boundary spanning roles, defined as "the amount of cross-boundary information that managers exchange." Their findings suggest that local experience and the diversity of social

networks were conducive to the boundary spanning activities of expatriates, and engaging in boundary spanning activities helped expatriates to feel less role ambiguity and gain role benefits, and were more eager to use the resources that were found within different communities of the host country.

Vietnam's integration into the global economy has placed new demands upon foreign and local managers.[14] Neupert, Baughn, and Dao (2005) conducted their qualitative study of expatriate managers in Vietnam, and found that many local managers did not have the necessary skills and support to compete in the increasingly competitive global marketplace (p.167), a finding which would build a case for "importing" high skilled ethnic workers for whom the Vietnamese state can claim blood and ancestry ties.

These past studies of expatriates, which take a more pragmatic approach, prompts the more in-depth interrogation of the intersections of nationality, gender, and ethnicity, and geographic place-making. These are aspects that shape the experiences of Viet Kieu diasporic 'returnees' and their insertion into Westernized English speaking communities of Ho Chi Minh City.[15]

[14] Vincent Edwards and Anh Phan (2012) in their book *Managers and Management in Vietnam* (Routledge) emphasize the range of enterprises in the Vietnamese economy, which, until 1986, was dominated by large state-owned enterprises and Soviet-style central economic planning, and where there is now a much greater variety, with a mix of privatised state-owned enterprises, foreign-owned companies, joint ventures and a very large number of relatively small private companies, all operating in a social market economy where Party ideology emphasises a balance between economic growth and workers' rights. The book demonstrates how the tensions arising from this economic landscape are reflected in the views and actions of managers as they balance economic and social goals in their work, and how their activities are constrained further by the enduring influence of local culture which is not always amenable to imported ideas and methods.

[15] The role of Vietnamese-speaking expatriates who are not Viet Kieu will be understated in this dissertation, as I did not observe that many during my fieldwork.

Lastly, my study has benefitted from postcolonial studies. Content analyses of archived diaries and letters written during European colonial settlement in South Africa during the 19th century (McClintock, 1999) and studies of mixed race identity of descendants of European colonizers in French Indochine (Stoler, 1998) present insights with which to examine Viet Kieu as expatriate migrants. This can be done through the lens of capitalism, race, class, gender, and empire. The zones of contact between local and transnational elites in Vietnam's moment of rapidly unfolding industrialization are new areas where this postcolonial production of differences get reproduced and reified.

My dissertation questions drew from those past studies on transnational families and transnational high-skilled expatriates, illustrating how these key nodes of family and work are crucial to understanding the logic of cultural globalization. By delving into these key identities and sites of 'return', scholars can begin to see how skilled 'return' migrations both magnify and increase cultural and economic ambivalences and ambiguities of being "in between". Such an exploration and investigation of these instances of ambivalence and ambiguity must be done through a global ethnography of the extended case of migrant 'returns'.

HO CHI MINH CITY AS THE SITE OF 'RETURN'

I chose Ho Chi Minh City, which generates 40 percent of Vietnam's GDP, as an important hub for examining US diasporic 'returnees'.[16] It has a sprawling greater metropolitan area population of nine million registered inhabitants, or 11 million including unregistered inhabitants. Harms (2001), author of a recent urban ethnography

[16] The "greater metropolitan area," which consists of Hồ Chí Minh City metro area, Thủ Dầu Một, Di An, Bien Hoa and surrounding towns, is 9 million people. By 2020, the population of the "Greater HCM City Metropolitan Area," also known as the "Southern Key Economic Region" is projected to reach 20 million.

about Ho Chi Minh City, underscores its geographic importance as next in line as the world's leading manufacturing assembly line:

> Both local Vietnamese and international investors commonly describe Ho Chi Minh City as a new economic frontier, using a spatial metaphor that really hinges on ideological changes in the orientation of the Vietnamese Communist Party toward the economy. Although the geographic position of Ho Chi Minh City has not changed, its emergence as a new market and a new source of cheap labor has certainly changed its position within the political and economic geography of world finance, industrial production, and commercial exchange. (*Saigon's Edge*, Harms, 2011: 49)

Like Harms (2011), previous scholars, including Sassen (2000) have called for a detailed examination of the "activities, firms, markets, and physical infrastructure involved in globalization, and concentrated in cities, allows us to see the actual role played by cities in a global economy" (1-2).

The movement of high-skilled workers across national borders functions as global conduits of expertise and resources in and out of commercial hubs. While these movements are not on the scale of global cities such as Tokyo, London, or New York City, similar processes are unfolding in "internationalizing" Ho Chi Minh City. Nearly four decades after widespread refugee outmigration and resettlement to Western countries, the 'returning' population was comprised of influxes of highly educated white-collar professionals, distinct from their Vietnam-born parents who for the most part lacked college credentials and English language fluency. Ho Chi Minh City is the largest and fastest growing city, with more than two-thirds of Vietnam's international flight arrivals and departures, 80 percent of container shipments, 75 percent of consumption of steel products, and together with neighboring provinces in Southern Key Economic Region, account for nearly 40 percent of Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product.

Foreign direct investment, remittance dollars sent back, and the return of the Viet Kieu have transformed the cultural and built environment of Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City's transformation through foreign investment projects, including the construction of the Bitexco Highrise Tower in District 1 and neighboring Binh Thanh District, and the density of expatriate communities in District 7, Saigon South, and District 2, Thao Dien, that I witnessed over time between my fieldwork trips suggested that rapid and visible global changes were unfolding. These meso-level transformations could be witnessed by the visible increase in Highlands Coffee shops, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Burger King, and Starbucks (opened in 2012), and more recently, McDonald's (2013); foreign manufacturing plants for global apparel and textile labels such as Nike, Gap, North Face, and so on in the Special Economic Zones in the Ho Chi Minh City periphery; and the proliferation of multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations locating themselves in Vietnam, with business offices in Ho Chi Minh City. Saigon exists in permanent flux: seldom back in the late 1990s did anyone encounter an actual car, only motorbikes and jingling bicycles, and now cars, taxi cabs, and semi-trucks dominate the metropolitan roadways and urban-rural liminal spaces.

Ho Chi Minh City has an expatriate community on a smaller scale than more globalizing cities throughout the Asia Pacific such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Mumbai, and Bangkok.[17] Hoang (2011) characterizes Ho Chi Minh City as an "emergent

[17] Hong Kong work visa statistics: During the decade, total work visas issued annually under the government's General Employment Scheme grew 65 per cent from 18,520 to 30,557 last year [2012]. *The Telegraph*, 15 March 2013. Online at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/expat-money/9380817/Booming-Hong-

international city" rather than a new global city (Sassen 2001) as it is "part of the peripheral zone in the global capitalist market, where processes of transnationalism from above and practices of transnationalism from below shape the socioeconomic structure of the city" (Hoang, 2011: 369).

THE POLITICIZED CONTEXT OF 'RETURN': HOW HISTORY MATTERS

Unlike other return migrant flows to Asia, the Vietnamese American first generations' engagement with homeland oriented politics shapes diasporic relations with their former homeland. Though unique to the Viet Kieu, this is not limited just to the now aging Vietnamese refugee community: Cuban, Iranian, and Nicaraguan refugee communities across the US share similar anxieties about their children's return, wary of the political tensions that led to their forced departure.[18] Anti-communist-leaning refugees see Vietnam as a Communist-led developing country ravaged by poverty and social inequality, pollution and environmental protections, corruption, and authoritarianism. But diasporic 'return' holds the potential for building alliances rather than escalate tensions. A 1998 survey (Espiritu and Tran, 2002) found that stories told to the second generation by their parents and by other Vietnamese also constructed Vietnam inadvertently as a poor, dirty, and even dangerous Third World country (p.

Kong-lures-record-number-of-expat-workers.html. Foreign nationals comprise 6.4% of 7.07 million people in 2011 according to http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/facts.htm.

[18] See, for instance, the work of Susan Eckstein (2009), *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the US and their Homeland.* Immigration cohort, pre-immigration past, and age of migration matter. The Viet Kieu diasporic 'return' migration was similar to later wave Cuban Americans going back to Havana, facing mutual suspicion and hostility that had marked foreign relations between the diaspora and the sending state (see Eckstein, 2009). Cuban Americans and their pre-immigration past also shaped their engagement levels with the homeland. Eckstein (2009: 232) writes that "US-born and immigrant children who spent some of their formative years away from the Exiles' social world, and who therefore had more varied experiences to draw on, were less hardline, more eclectic in their views, and more open to reflection, compromise, and change in views."

392). Though transparency in both the economy and socialist state has notably improved in the 38 years since the massive refugee outmigration, many first generation refugees still constructed their identity and justification for leaving the US as tied to the pursuit of freedom and democracy.

US scholars have suggested that anti-communism discourse in the Vietnamese American community is not merely political: its performance is also culturally tied to educating and parenting of the second generation.[19] This anti-communism stance, for some, was an educational and cultural platform for bringing up the 1.5 and second generation children who primarily were raised in the diaspora. Symbolically, the younger generation Viet Kieu returnee ran the risk of being viewed by their parents and immediate relatives in the US as involuntary liberal capitalist agents in the on-going ideological anti-Communist struggles of the first-generation immigrants/refugees in the United States (Espiritu, 2006), nearly four decades after the "Fall of Saigon." Moreover, "first-generation Vietnamese Americans have historically hinged their construction of community upon a vigilant stance against Vietnam's communist regime – a stance that privileges exilic longing and the Fall of Saigon as the original moment of loss, furthering an anti-communist political stance as cultural preservation work" (69). My study subjects' more permanent 'returns' prove that this uncritical, anti-Communist stance from the vocal minority within the first-generation of Vietnamese American refugees was not enough to

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[19] See, for instance, Thuy Vo Dang (2005), "The Cultural Work of Anti-Communism in the San Diego Vietnamese American Community," Amerasia Journal 31:2 (2005): 65-86. Dang (2005), for instance, writes: "What we have come to recognize as 'Vietnamese American anti-communism' cannot be contained within a political realm and is certainly not only manifest in political protests, boycotts and demonstrations" (68).

deter the 1.5 and second generation, who were further removed from the homeland-oriented politics.

Valverde (2012) in *Transnationalizing Vietnam* provides a contemporary backdrop to the Vietnamese American political fragmentation across generations with a focus on key turning events in the Northern and Southern California communities. This work underscores the importance of understanding the political tensions between the Vietnamese diaspora and its struggles to represent the Vietnamese community both domestically and abroad, as the Vietnamese diaspora is experiencing generational shifts in the ideology and stance of Vietnamese Americans towards Vietnam, in addition to changes happening internally in Vietnamese society.[20] Because of the politics of representing Vietnam, which is also fraught with identity-work and access to symbolic power to represent the authentic Vietnam within the community of memory, the decision for the 1.5 and second generation to 'return' for long-term work opportunities encounters a broad measure of resistance from parents and extended relatives in the US.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis Strategy

This dissertation was based upon eight cumulative months of ethnographic data collected in Ho Chi Minh City in the summers of 2004 and 2008 and fall 2010,

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[20] Valverde (2012) argues that "the many local, national, and international obstacles and tensions arising from these sites of contention create complex diasporic subjects able to maneuver through difficulties and carve their own cultural and political identities" (25). Valverde (2012) thus reveals how conditions in Vietnam and abroad influenced the production, dissemination, and consumption of contemporary popular Vietnamese music; the development of virtual community forums that engage in transnational political struggles surrounding labor; and struggles within the Vietnamese American community for political and cultural representation.

supplemented with semi-structured interviews in 2010 obtained with the written consent of 70 participants, including the Viet Kieu, English-language expatriates, local Vietnamese elites, regional and national government officials, and human resources/hiring managers. These semi-structured interviews, mostly in English, lasted between one to three hours and were tape recorded and transcribed. Only two potential interviewees declined, both of whom will be mentioned in Chapter 5 in reference to those who opt in and out of Ho Chi Minh City's Viet Kieu communities. In addition to in-depth interviews, often conducted at workplaces, individual's homes, or at cafes and restaurants, I spent long hours engaged in in-depth participatory observations at business and NGO networking mixers, private parties, and bar or café hopping in both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Most people agreed to be interviewed when I asked them, particularly if an introduction was made through a mutual acquaintance in the Viet Kieu community.

Methodologically, ethnographic studies of second generation migration between host and home have expanded studies of migration beyond a nation-state territorial framework towards a transnational and multi-sited ethnographic approach. They have also allowed for the agency of social actors at the margins in shaping the networks and flows themselves (Gille and O Riain, 2002: 275). The 1.5 and second generation Vietnamese American 'returnees' share traits with other diasporic populations, including many Mexican American second generation youth. In *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants,* Robert Courtney Smith (2006) shows how Mexican immigrants to the US participate in forming political community, negotiate gender, and simultaneously incorporate a second generation into a transnational social space between the boroughs of New York City and Ticuani, Mexico. Like Smith (2006), I also

embedded myself in Viet Kieu social and work spaces across different longitudinal time periods to understand the varied experiences of Viet Kieu across different moments in Vietnam's development trajectory.

It has been said that ethnographers, "by locating themselves firmly within the time and space of social actors" – in this case, these actors being the Viet Kieu who are 'living the global,' by shuttling between the US and Vietnam – can "reveal how global processes are collectively and politically constructed, demonstrating the variety of ways in which globalization is grounded in the local" (Gilles and O'Riain, 2002: 271). I conducted participant observations and had more informal conversations with Viet Kieu at large and semi-private gatherings of Viet Kieu including business mixers, house parties, restaurants, coffee shops, and for a subgroup, during their extended family visits.

During the course of fieldwork, I made two trips to Hanoi in 2008 and 2010 and two trips to Central Vietnam in 2010. These trips allowed me to observe the Viet Kieu while they traveled for work, family visits, and leisure and to interview government officials, government data experts, and Vietnamese academic researchers outside of my main study site. My trips to both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi confirmed my expectations that there was a smaller and less visible Viet Kieu presence in the North. Differences in perceived hospitableness for return migrants from the US had to do with historical reasons related to South Vietnam being the region where most refugees fled starting in the 1970s, and hence, where many felt more welcomed as 'returnees'.[21]

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[21] Hanoi had return migrants who has spent significant time periods in France, Eastern Europe, and East Germany. They outmigrated for different reasons from the Viet Kieu in my study.

I was based in one of Ho Chi Minh City's newest luxury high-rise compounds, adjacent to another major real estate development, in order to gain access to the same living spaces inhabited by many corporate Viet Kieu. I also purchased membership to and regularly exercised at two state of the art gyms within these luxury high-rise apartments where I frequently encountered some of my study participants and informants. I also sat at these high-rise restaurants and cafes, frequently observing and writing notes about people's "back stage" daily lives beyond their "front stage" work identities, and observing how they interacted with taxicab drivers, apartment administrative staff, and doormen (Goffman).

My analysis was based upon the emergent patterns in my ethnographic field notes (Emerson). This influenced my open and focused coding of both fieldnotes and interview transcripts. I used NVIVO qualitative software to code for nodes and sub-node themes. I intend to longitudinally follow the population of 44 Viet Kieu who participated in this study in subsequent iterations of this project.

The Extended Case Method

I relied upon the extended case method to reconstruct theories of diasporic 'return' migration. According to Burawoy (1991), in order to reconstruct theories, one must "highlight the particularity of a social situation, self-consciously and deliberately draw on existing knowledge to constitute the situation as abnormal or anomalous." I began by trying to lay out as coherently as possible what I expected to find before entering the field, the belief that the Viet Kieu were an anomalous case study of migrant returns because of their varied political family histories of refugee departure and anti-

communist ideologies. When my expectations were violated, discovering what was not anticipated – that many of their ambivalences revolved around economics and personal circumstances – I then turned to existing bodies of academic theory that might cast light upon the Viet Kieu as an anomalous case study. Here, I turned to what theory failed to explain: the Viet Kieu ambivalence about being in Vietnam in the first place.

Researcher Reflexivity and Situated Ethnography

I am a 1.5 generation Viet Kieu child of refugees, close in age to my research participants, and was raised in a bi-cultural Vietnamese household in the US. My identity as a Viet Kieu female researcher from the US facilitated the network sample for my in-depth semi-structured interviews through word of mouth referrals. However, as Vo (2000) points out doing community ethnography, while being North American Vietnamese may have afforded me *entré* to diasporic networks, this social location did not guarantee instant researcher rapport. Ho Chi Minh City's intimate social arena for younger Viet Kieu offered a space where gossip could quickly spread; thus, I had to demonstrate I would protect informants' privacy and anonymity. All names and places used in this study are pseudonyms, with Vietnamese and Anglo-American names chosen appropriately. I was also attentive to the tendency, on multiple occasions, for Viet Kieu to conveniently justify their 'return' in order to make an altruistic contribution to Vietnam. This type of response was in part because interview participants were well aware of the types of motivations that a fellow American Viet Kieu would likely regard in a favorable light.

To avoid letting my experiences shape all of my research, in addition to my research field notes, I kept a personal journal about my own family visits. Because I also had local extended family in Ho Chi Minh City, the patterns which I uncovered while doing fieldwork about the lives of other Overseas Vietnamese embedded in familial networks became a part of an iterative process of fieldwork, self-discovery, and theory. I made significant efforts to listen to respondents and to question my own conclusions, to avoid analytic blocks rooted in my own experiences.

Being embedded within Viet Kieu networks and feeling a shared sense of connection with the participants in this study was a challenge of being on the 'inside'. My considerable 'access' was a double-edged sword: many ethnographers write about immigrants and are not, themselves, immigrants, others write about race and ethnic relations within the 'ghetto' from a secure distance, never again having to confront or be accountable to the people they study. Throughout the writing process, I felt ambivalent about my privileged vantage point studying this unique subset of Viet Kieu and my ability to get in the last word about how to portray their lives. For most in this study, our paths have and will continue to cross multiple times in both North America and Southeast Asia, perhaps throughout the course of our lives.

Demographic Profile of the Viet Kieu in this Study

My Viet Kieu research participants were evenly split between male and female; the majority had legal US citizenship, but a small segment held passports from Australia, France, Germany, and Holland. A handful of US and French participants were multi-racial, often with a Vietnamese mother; they reported that their phenotype sometimes but

not always affected their visibility as foreigners in Vietnam. The 1.5 and second generation have high levels of human capital, as demonstrated through years of schooling, professional credentials and certifications, and for the 1.5 generation Viet Kieu, who came back older than the second generation, more years of work experience. Half held graduate and technical degrees including JDs and MBAs or BS degrees in business/accounting. NGO mid-level Viet Kieu staff frequently held Masters degrees in Public Administration, Foreign Affairs, or had liberal arts BA degrees.

Figure 1.1: Nationality and Ethnic Ancestry of the Viet Kieu in my Study

National Passports		Ancestry	
US	68% (30)	Both parents Vietnamese	38
Australia	18% (8)	Ethnic Chinese Vietnamese	3
Western Europe	9% (4)	Multi-racial/ethnic	3
Canada	4% (2)		
TOTAL:	100% (44)		

Figure 1.2 shows the breakdown of the occupations held by the Viet Kieu in Ho Chi Minh City that I encountered during my 2010 fieldwork. These occupations are categorized into four categories, based on the character of the employers.

Figure 1.2 Occupations held by Viet Kieu.

Corporate	INGO	Arts/Entertainment	Other
Director of an American investment firm	Development manager at a major INGO	Actress/ Celebrity Ambassador	Independent Realtor

<table>
<tr>
<td>Program Manager, Expatriate re-location service and overseas moving firm

Advertising manager

Garment sourcing manager for a major clothing label

General partner at a multi-million dollar American venture capital firm

Director, Global governance compliance at a “Big Four” service firm

Lawyer, Mergers and Acquisitions

Trainer, IT business process outsourcing

Human resources manager at a “Big 4” firm

Senior officer at a joint stock securities firm

Fund Manager of a major foreign securities fund

Chief financial officer, multinational hotel group

Senior officer at a trade organization</td>
<td>Country Director of an American NGO

NGO volunteer paid by a foreign government

Program Manager at an Australian INGO

English teacher with an INGO</td>
<td>Actor, action films

Partner at a film product placement company

Assistant Director of Film

Art gallery owner

Freelance Photographer

Painter

Filmmaker</td>
<td>PhD student

Trade specialist for a foreign government

Furniture importer/exporter to the US

Full-time poker player

Restaurant owner

Unemployed, looking for work and found it six months later

English teacher</td>
</tr>
</table>

In the US, they lived on the West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast, with many having attended college and moved for career-related reasons within the US. These participants reported economic reasons as well as a desire to reconnect with the country of their parents' birth as motivations for their long-term stay in Vietnam. They worked in middle-management positions at transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and media/arts jobs; they visited extended families to whom their parents may have sent remittances; and lived and socialized within the rapidly-changing cosmopolitan 'bubble' of Ho Chi Minh City. Most were post-1975 South Vietnamese refugee and made no overt references to Vietnamese politics. Unlike many of their aging parents, they have no direct memory of the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

Half my interviewees were born in Vietnam and left at an early age as refugees and boatpeople, placing them in the "1.5" generation, as defined in previous sections. Most were in their early thirties to early forties. A younger subsample was in their mid-twenties who would be "second generation." They were all born while their parents were still outside the US and were then admitted and resettled as refugees under programs including the Orderly Departure Program (ODP).

Even though I divided my time equally recruiting interviewees at business, arts, and NGO events, the number of Viet Kieu working as corporate employees in my sample far outnumbered those in the arts/entertainment industry and the INGO sector. The number of individuals in my study who worked for non-governmental organizations comprised the smallest group, less than individuals who worked as artists or who worked in the private sector. There was also some overlap, as many artists were also working in

other sectors, including the NGO sector and teaching at the local universities. I conducted in-depth observations at two major INGO offices and conducted participant observations at NGO networking functions, hoping that would compensate for the limited interactions with NGO staff.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

My first empirical chapter lays the context of state policy and economic history in contemporary Vietnam. It discusses state policies set forth by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in attracting Overseas Vietnamese 'returnees' as well as the legal aspects of being a 'returnee'. This chapter distinguishes flows of diasporic 'return' originating from North America, Australia, and Western Europe from other return migratory flows, based upon macro-level indicators of migratory remittances, annual return visits, and other secondary data sources.

My second empirical chapter explores the structures and motivations that prompted Viet Kieu in the 1.5 and second generation to seek work in Vietnam, and the role they play in a rapidly-globalizing city. These motivations also affected their social insertion into the expatriate communities where most of them lived and socialized. In Ho Chi Minh City, the commercial hub of private sector jobs and capital investment, I found that many of the Viet Kieu individuals' experiences were strongly influenced by economic and ethnic motivations and expectations prior to migration, and by the advantages their nationality and higher purchasing power bring in the marketplace. While most reported that they came to Vietnam to learn more about their ethnic heritage, family history, and to make a contribution to Vietnam's economy, most stayed because they found professional opportunities and career advancement they felt they could not have achieved in the US.

My third empirical chapter describes the Viet Kieu construction of their identity whilst navigating expatriate and foreign communities of Ho Chi Minh City – a space of ambivalent global and local encounters. I explore the social integration of the Viet Kieu into the English speaking cosmopolitan communities abroad, focusing on how the experiences of Viet Kieu men and women in these communities are shaped by dynamics of race and gender. Life in their imagined ancestral homeland forced the Viet Kieu to renegotiate a sense of identity and belonging, and to question the authenticity and legitimacy of their Westernized Viet Kieu peers to be 'returnees' in Vietnam. Many Viet Kieu felt most at home in the transnational social field of younger Viet Kieus from many Western nationalities. Money and global class advantage also determined with whom they socialized, formed friendships and alliances. As a result of a sense of purpose and attachment to Vietnam that their non-Viet Kieu expatriate counterparts rarely shared,many said they felt they had a greater role to play in Vietnam's economic and social transformation – hence claiming greater legitimacy as diasporic 'return' migrants than non-Viet Kieu who came there for non-work related reasons.

In my fourth chapter, I examine transnational family relations. It explores the tensions of class and money that Viet Kieu experienced after reuniting with extended relatives who never left Vietnam, looking at how the war's legacy combined with social class differences drive a wedge between many Viet Kieu and their relatives. Although the Vietnamese economy was spurred by diasporic remittances, a tense history and marked income inequality created new tensions between Vietnamese 'returnees' and their local extended relatives. Viet Kieu expressed discomfort at being expected to shoulder the brunt of money and gifts, filial expectations, and care. Over time, tension over the Viet Kieu relative affluence and guilt often create social and increased geographic distance. While some Viet Kieu saw their role as building a historical

bridge conveying some of the realities of economic and racialized hardship after migration to the US, others reduced their visits to family, reporting that they felt less in common with their relatives than with their expatriate counterparts.

Returning to the issue of work, my fifth chapter explores how Viet Kieu negotiate their identities at work, focusing on how micro-level interactions affect institutional norms at the expatriate offices of non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations. I interviewed and observed high-skilled managers in finance and technology start-ups and Fortune 500 companies, artists and managers in media and film/entertainment sectors, and managers at international non-governmental organizations geared towards health inequality and poverty alleviation. Viet Kieu describe challenges that they felt their white, economically more privileged, expatriate co-workers did not face, and noted their problems navigating cultural expectations when interacting with older local Vietnamese co-workers. My interviewees reported challenging bureaucratic, institutional norms at work but also revealed frustration with intersectional relations of power and invisibility. Viet Kieu reported that their 'success' in Vietnam required the ability to negotiate an "in between" identity, navigating office politics within a broader transnational vision. Some local Vietnamese expressed resentment at the presence of the Viet Kieu. For the handful of local managers I interviewed, Viet Kieu served as an unwelcome but necessary modernizing presence that came with Vietnam's rapid integration into the global economy post-World Trade Organization accession. Some viewed the Viet Kieu presence as providing role models, mentors, partners, and investors for entrepreneurs in their home countries – just as earlier generations of immigrants did for more recent arrivals in Silicon Valley. The Viet Kieu engage policymakers on policies to improve the local environment for entrepreneurship; they emphatically reject the familial, opaque, and frequently corrupt business

practices that dominate in many developing countries' economies. In short, they transfer institutional know-how as well as technological capital, and contacts to their home country, but stir up tensions in the process of altering workplace norms.

In my conclusion, I revisit notions of cultural globalization, diasporas and development, situating the experiences of the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu in Ho Chi Minh City within broader migration patterns from the Global North to the Global South.

CONCLUSION

My study speaks to the way current patterns of high skilled migration are changing and being changed by globalizing cities of the historically underdeveloped South. As governments try to use diasporic migrants for economic and social development, a fine-grained, ethnographic portrait of how this looks "on the ground" reveals the complexities and ambivalences of their incorporation process. While diasporic migrations to the ancestral homeland may have the potential to bridge multiple worlds, actual patterns of incorporation and exclusion do not fit perfectly in the idealized bridging metaphor. The norms and behaviors that Viet Kieu and other North to South migrants bring to and take from their experience of trying to "go home" should be examined within a broader interpretation of macro-social and economic changes both locally and across the globe.

CHAPTER 2

The Political Economic Context of Diasporic 'Return' Migration

The Overseas Vietnamese 'returnee' presence from the US coincides with noticeable changes in state-diasporic relations, political and economic reforms in Vietnam, and changing perceptions of what it means to go back for long-term work within the diaspora. Their 'return' marks a shift in diasporic relations between the US and Vietnam, which were previously characterized by significant flows of cash remittances and gifts in the direction of affluent to developing country economy. The 'return' of 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu to Vietnam occurs amidst Vietnam's rapidly restructuring economy under a socialist regime that has begun to welcome not only migrant dollars, but the returnees and their descendants who represent significant sources of human capital in Vietnam's attempts to rapidly modernize. This chapter sets the stage for understanding the attitudes and motivations of the Viet Kieu to 'return' to Ho Chi Minh City that will be interpreted in the coming chapter.

The historical events known within the Vietnamese diaspora as the "Fall of Saigon" on April 30, 1975 triggered a mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees now scattered around the world to nearly 104 nations and resulted in a loss of human capital or "brain drain" of individuals with technical skills and knowledge.[22] There were three historical

[22] More recently, the Vietnamese State is aware that it needs to do a more effective job at retaining its Overseas Vietnamese returnees in regards to the Saigon High Technology Research

waves of Vietnamese refugee outmigration to the US, beginning with those who had ties to the US government and were in immediate danger of persecution who left in 1975; the boatpeople exodus of the 1980s; and the refugees and their children who qualified for the Orderly Departure Program during the early 1990s. A newly reunified Vietnam after 1975 was recovering from the post civil war devastation, high poverty, famine, flooding, and drought. Vietnam was seen by the US as a country closed off to Western trading partners for nearly two decades. Much of this changed with the re-establishment of US normalized relations with Vietnam beginning in the 1990s.

The Legacy of Doi Moi policies

The Vietnamese government's 1986 adoption of "*Doi Moi*" policies of economic change and restructuring had steadily moved the country from a socialist to market-oriented economy.[23] Recognizing the problems with central planning and large-scale production, the Sixth Party Congress agreed to abolish the system of bureaucratic centralized management based on state subsidies, and to move to a multi-sector, market-oriented economy with a role for the private sector to compete with the state in non-strategic sectors. Limited investment resources were to be directed towards three main

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Park: http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/science-it/67914/hcm-city-struggles-to-stem--brain-drain-.html. March 6, 2011.

[23] For further in-depth discussion of Vietnam's transition to market capitalism, see Martin Gainsborough (2010), *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*; Adam Fforde (2007) *Vietnamese state industry and the political economy of commercial renaissance: dragon's tooth or curate's egg*?; Stephanie Balme and Mark Sidel (2007), eds., *Vietnam's New Order: International Perspectives on the State and Reform in Vietnam.*

objectives, namely the development of agriculture, the expansion of consumer goods production, and the expansion of trade and foreign investment relations.[24]

The Viet Kieu "Bridge" Between the US and Vietnam

A frequent metaphor used for describing the Viet Kieu is the diasporic "bridge" – *cau noi* – in the context of both business and diplomacy. The Viet Kieu are both seen as a bridge between multiple economic markets as well as a bridge between former Vietnam War-time enemies. For instance, at an environmental conference I attended in November 2010 organized by the Ho Chi Minh City branch of the Committee on Overseas Vietnamese, the Vice Chairman stated that the country was trying to attract more PhD degree holders from abroad in order to help Vietnam address its environmental and pollution issues, in particular Viet Kieu who might be knowledgeable about electric cars. The 'bridging' became critical in the search for new markets and ventures, and continued straight throughout the global recession in 2008 as companies were trying to do business in Asia's emerging markets and coveted these cultural foot soldiers on the ground who could negotiate cultures on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

The younger generations of Viet Kieu also hold the potential for bridging past hostilities between first generation Viet Kieu refugee populations and the Vietnamese state. Most of the Viet Kieu in this study encountered initial resistance from their family members with their decision to go to Vietnam for longer-term work, but instances of support and encouragement also emerged. Increasingly, the anti-Communist sentiments

[24] Vietnam: The Transition Tiger? The Implementation of Doi Moi. http://press.anu.edu.au//wp-content/uploads/2011/02/ch0611.pdf

of the Vietnamese American refugee community, especially in Orange County, home to the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans and any Vietnamese descendants living abroad, has retreated in its militancy and the younger generation born abroad with US citizenship has a greater willingness to learn about Vietnam with some measure of emotional distance, which sets the stage for a sub-segment in possession of linguistic, cultural, and monetary resources to work in Vietnam.

Many Viet Kieu 'returnees' who went back to Vietnam did not grow up around large Vietnamese American ethnic communities and did not face the same levels of resistance as those who would have grown up near the anti-communist metropoles.[25] Amongst the aging first generation refugees, yet a smaller, determined vocal minority have been involved in voicing their anti-communist political views through Vietnamese diasporic print and online media and by holding protests, rallies, and vigils on matters pertaining to anti-Socialist post-1975 flag demonstrations, human rights violations in Vietnam, and on Vietnam's jostling of foreign relations with China to maintain sovereignty over the Spratley Islands.[26]

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[25] There were exceptions to the anti-communist stance and the parents of two Viet Kieu were, on the contrary, supportive of their child's decision to move to Vietnam, in both cases endorsing their child's decision to work in the INGO and non-profit sector.

[26] San Juan Aguilar (2009) writes that for many Vietnamese first generation refugees, "their longing for *que huong* – which loosely translates as 'homeland' – is so deep that life in the US often feels more like a dream, or a nightmare, than a reality. To say, as sociologist Gina Masequesmay does, that Vietnamese America is a 'community of memory' is to pinpoint the integral role of memory in the Vietnamese American experience" (p. 128). Moreover, "strategic memory projects involving protests, monuments, and flags should be understood not so much as purposeful efforts to construct and produce memory in such a way as to reinforce the long-term boundaries of the community – social, political, and spatial" (131). This frames the social and cultural millieu against which 1.5 and 2nd generation Viet Kieu must make their decisions to return to Vietnam, which is not the Vietnam of their parents' memory – they wanted to discover Vietnam on their own terms, separate from the memories of their parents.

Most of the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieus I interviewed did not share their parents' memories of the war, hostility or apprehension towards returning to Vietnam or towards seeking long-term employment there. For Henry Hoang Nguyen,[27] a general manager at IDGVV, a venture capital fund, being a generation removed from the war allowed him to appreciate Vietnam without the painful memories still in the minds of previous generations:

> I don't carry any burdens or feelings of negativity [unlike the previous generation]… I just feel a real strong attachment and patriotism for Vietnam (*San Jose Mercury News*, 2010).

The son of post-1975 South Vietnamese refugees, Henry married Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Dan Tung's daughter, Phuong, a financial investor, a marriage that garnered diasporic media attention in both home and host countries. This union of households has symbolically brought together these two families. The next generation, mostly born or raised abroad who have little or no memory of the older generation's "Vietnam" has witnessed an intergenerational transformation of the first-generation dominated political views.[28]

Migratory Flows

Vietnam, today a country of 86 million people, has historically been better known as a sender of forced migration, starting with the post-1975 exodus of refugees, rather

[27] Henry was also interviewed in a *USA Today* article on a similar topic and in Bill Hayton's *Vietnam: Rising Tiger*, 2010. The information I convey in this paper about him is publicly available.

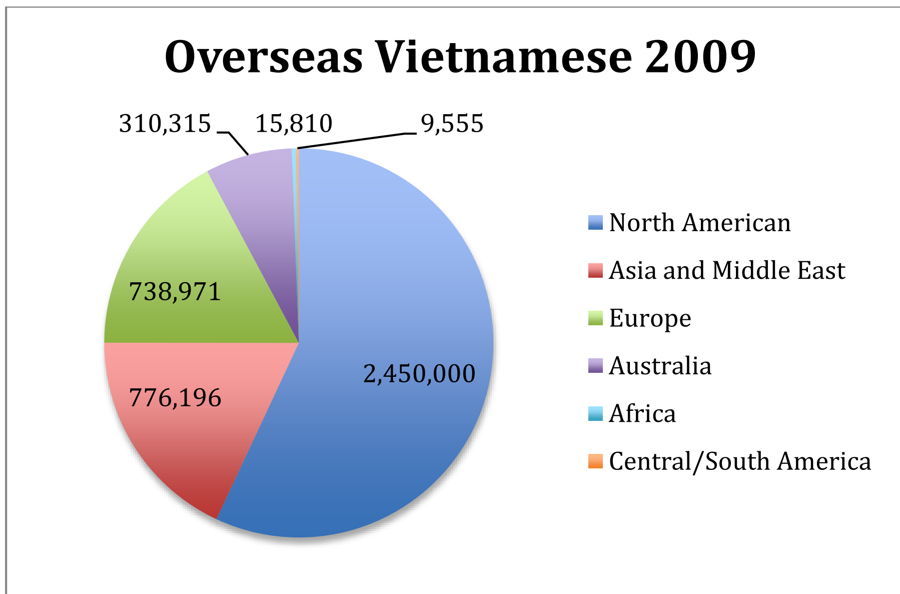
[28] Jennifer Huynh and Jessica Yiu, "Breaking Blocked Transnationalism: Intergenerational Change in Homeland Ties" (Working Paper, Princeton: 2012) refers to the process of "blocked transnationalism" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006) in the case of the Vietnamese diaspora's limited engagement with the homeland.

than as a host country. In the US, Vietnamese Americans are the fourth largest Asian American ethnic group and approximately 64 percent are foreign-born. According to 2010 US Census figures, there are 1,737,433 Vietnamese in the US. The Vietnamese Socialist Government appointed Committee on Overseas Vietnamese (COV) estimates there are 2.2 million Vietnamese Americans; this figure possibly includes the US-born second and subsequent generations born to immigrants and refugees. The latter suggests that nearly two thirds of the Vietnamese American population was born in Vietnam, and hence, would be considered among the first generation or "1.5" generation.

US foreign and economic relations with Vietnam explain the numbers of Overseas Vietnamese around the world. The COV, a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), estimates that there are four million Viet Kieu scattered across 104 countries, most of whom left during the 1970s-1990s due to the Vietnam War and its aftermath. The government also is quick to note in many reports that the Viet Kieu population abroad includes more than 400,000 scientists and other experts working in research institutes and universities in developed nations, perhaps justifying their recruitment of the diaspora for development goals. The top countries with a large Overseas Vietnamese population included the countries that resettled large numbers of refugees after the 1975 Fall of Saigon, such as the US, Australia, France, Canada, Germany, and other Western European countries. Migrant workers were sent abroad during the 1980s and 1990s to the Socialist countries of Russia, East Germany, and the Czech Republic. Russia witnessed a significant drop in its Overseas Vietnamese population from 100,000 to 60,000 between 2007 and 2009.

In recent years, Vietnamese migrants have also been “exported” to work in low-skilled temporary jobs in Malaysia, Thailand, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and other parts of the Middle East, with the expectation that most of these latter workers will return, with 500,000 Vietnamese guestworkers living abroad at any given time.[29] Recent waves of mostly female Vietnamese migrants have concentrated in the East Asian countries of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, many through marriage and family migration.

Figure 2.1: Overseas Vietnamese in 2009



[29] Article about remittances and guestworkers, http://vietnamnews.vn/economy/248629/vietnamese-remittances-to-reach-106bn-this-year.html.

Figure 2.2: Viet Kieu populations listed by continent

North America	2,450,000
Asia and the Middle East	776,196
Europe	738,971
Australia	310,315
Africa	15,810
Central/South America	9,555
TOTAL Viet Kieu	4,300,847

Figure 2.3: Top Countries with Large Populations of Viet Kieu

Top Countries	Overseas Vietnamese
US	2,200,000
France	300,000
Australia	300,000
Canada	250,000
Taiwan	200,000
Germany	120,000
Cambodia	156,000
Malaysia	104,000
Thailand	100,000
Korea	90,000
Czech Republic	61,820
Russia	60,000
United Kingdom	40,000
Japan	37,000
Holland	19,000
Denmark	14,000

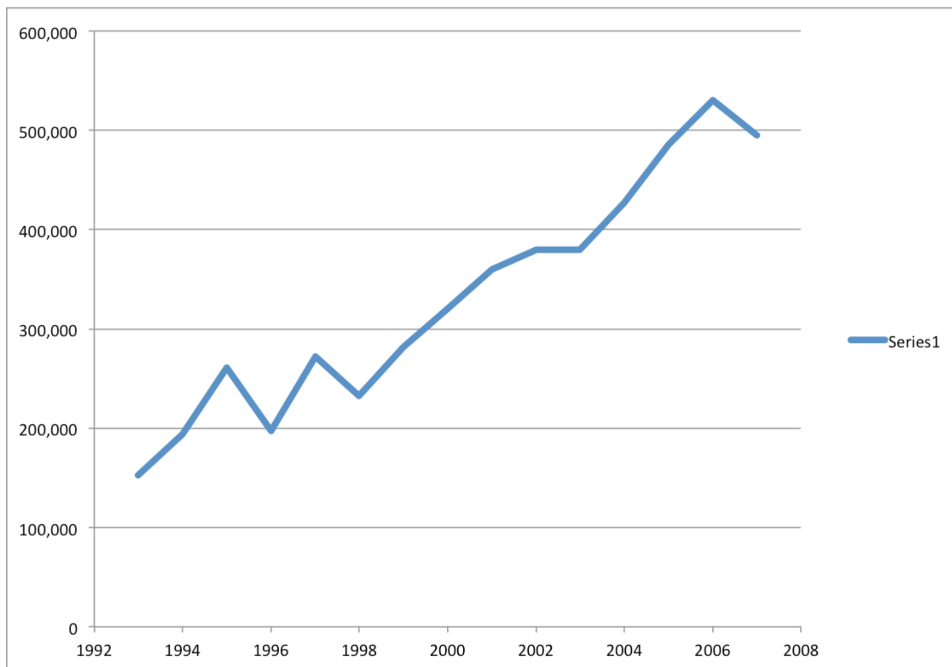
A statistical portrait of the Viet Kieu reveals the steady increase of the ‘returnee’ population. According to figures issued by the Committee of Overseas Vietnamese based

upon data from the Immigration Police, Viet Kieu ‘return’ migration between 1993 to 2010 occurred as follows:

Figure 2.4: Table and Graph of Years of Viet Kieu Arrivals

Year	**Population Returning**
1993	152,672
1994	194,055
1995	261,300
1996	196,907
1997	272,157
1998	232,211
1999	281,692
2000	320,000
2001	360,000
2002	380,000
2003	380,000
2004	426,780
2005	485,194
2006	**530,000**
2007	495,000

Figure 2.5: Graphic Depiction of the steady increase over time of the annual numbers of Viet Kieu 'returnees' arrivals from any country (not just the US) who went to Vietnam for tourism, family visits, business, and other reasons.



In 1994, the normalization of US-Vietnam relations allowed for more Viet Kieu from the US to visit their families in Vietnam on short trips. Though these return visits began as a trickle with the *Doi Moi* economic liberalization policies of the late 1980s, gradually, more Overseas Vietnamese have returned: 152,672 in 1993; 380,000 in 2003; 430,000 in 2004; 485,194 in 2005; and 500,000 in 2010. Many of the Viet Kieu visitors arrive each year during the Tet Lunar New Year's Festivities. The majority of these individuals are US citizens who visited Vietnam, but not all of those who are American actually register with the US Embassy or Consulate. Most of the Viet Kieu initially went to Vietnam for family visits, tourism, and subsequently, a sub-segment 'returned' for

high skilled work.[30] Figure 1.6 and Figure 1.7 show the number of Viet Kieu entries. They do not disaggregate by repeat entries or distinguish by purpose of visits – whether for tourism, family visits, work, or other. They also do not show length of stay, posing another challenge for researchers studying the Overseas Vietnamese. These figures also do not show the breakdown between first generation, 1.5, or second generation visitors.

In Vietnam, the government estimates for 2010 were that 300 to 450 Viet Kieu were "work permit" holders, but lawyers, many of whom specialize in commercial law, mergers and acquisitions, in particular, did not fall under this category, instead falling under a separate work category of "expert license to practice". Even a broad range of statistics on how many Viet Kieu were permanently residing in Ho Chi Minh City at any given time were unavailable, but my informal guess is that this figure is at least in the thousands and growing each year.

Investment and Monetary Remittances

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, relations between the Viet Kieu diaspora and the Vietnamese state have shifted from mutual hostility and suspicion towards strategic engagement on the part of the Vietnamese government to attract remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI), and now, skilled labor in order to fill short-term middle-level management and executive staff shortages. Monetarily, Viet Kieu comprise a significant source of remittances from the US to Vietnam: in 2010, they sent home US$8.6 billion (Tuoi Tre News, Nov 2, 2011), $9.4 billion in 2011, and in the first

[30] The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism estimates that Vietnam received 6.847 million international tourists in 2012 – the General Statistics Office counts them all as "foreign travelers".

eight months of 2012, remittances totaled over US$6 billion. Remittance of overseas earnings averages 10 to 15 percent of GDP per year. The figures were: US$ 6.7 billion in 2007; US$ 7.4 billion in 2008; US$6.8 billion in 2009; $8.6 billion in 2010 (*Tuoi Tre* Nov 11, 2011). Migration researchers agree that most official remittance statistics – what Durand (1988) refers to as 'migradollars' – underreport the true amount, since they do not include clandestine or in-kind transfers, which field studies have shown to be substantial (Lozano and Ascencio, 1993; Massey and Parrado, 1994). There have been more than 3,200 overseas Vietnamese-invested projects in Vietnam, with a total investment capital of US$5.7 billion. Nguyen Thanh Son, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese, publicly stated that these figures show the significant contribution made by the community to their fatherland, adding it was an "important resource" for the country's development (Vietnam News English Daily, Oct 9, 2012). Clearly, international remittances have shown the potential to have a significant effect on Vietnam's national development and policymakers and Communist Party elites are well aware that the monetary resources of the Viet Kieu living abroad could serve as a significant source of future income and investment for the country.

Legal Changes: 5-year visa exemption and dual citizenship

State policies have been coordinated to attract and retain the Viet Kieu, including the creation of the Committee of Overseas Vietnamese, a visa exemption for Viet Kieu, and the extension of dual citizenship for Viet Kieu and their spouses and descendants. In 2004, the Vietnamese Communist Party established a coordinated strategy towards Viet

Kieu living abroad and for integrating Viet Kieu who have returned, spelled out in subsequent revisions to Resolution NQ-36/2004.[31]

The Committee of Overseas Vietnamese aims to develop and maintain networks with the Overseas Vietnamese. Some might say, arguably, the Committee monitors the activities and whereabouts of anti-Communist diasporic communities and political dissidents. As of 2010, only 400,000 overseas Vietnamese had taken advantage of using the Vietnamese visa exemption, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Thanh Son. In 2007, most Viet Kieu were eligible and able to apply for the Viet Kieu visa exemption, created through Prime Ministerial Decision 135/2007/QD-TTg, which allowed overseas Vietnamese to enter Vietnam visa-free for 90 days per visit for five years per exemption. As of 2010, 200,000 Viet Kieu visa exemption certificates have been granted (COV 2010). In 2008, dual citizenship for foreigners and the descendants of Viet Kieu living overseas became legal, although during my fieldwork, I did not locate any cases of dual citizenship amongst my interviewees, perhaps due to a legacy of government mistrust.

For the past ten years, the Vietnamese government has also hosted a three-week long summer youth camp intended to educate the second and third generations of the Overseas Vietnamese about Vietnamese culture, language, and society. In summer 2013, for instance, the 200 youth participants took part in activities that included offering

[31] See the full Vietnamese text and other news about overseas Vietnamese from a Vietnamese government perspective at: http://quehuongonline.vn/VietNam/Home/Uy-ban-Nha-nuoc-ve-nguoi-Viet-Nam-o-nuoc-ngoai. According to a summer camp held for a different group, the nationalities of the Overseas Vietnamese youths originated from Laos, Thailand, Russia, Bulgaria, Slovakia and France. http://english.vov.vn/Overseas-Vietnamese/OV-youths-join-summer-camp-in-HCM-City/262875.vov

incense to the Hung Kings in Phu To Province, visiting the Ho Chi Minh City Mausoleum in Hanoi, taking part in youth exchanges with the young people in Ha Giang Province, and commemorating "war martyrs." Deputy Foreign Minister and Head of the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs Nguyen Thanh Son said that joining the summer camp, young Vietnamese living overseas would have a chance to learn more about the history and culture of their homeland: 'They will also take part in activities in southernmost Ca Mau Province where they can learn about the country's struggle against foreign aggressors,' he said."[32] This last point relates to the overall desire from the state to recruit patriotic Viet Kieu 'returnees.'[33] Most of the Viet Kieu in this study, because they were post-college aged, had not heard of the youth camps, and even if they wanted to participate, many would confront staunch opposition from their refugee parents in participating in these heritage tours that present a mostly pro-North Vietnamese version of Vietnamese history.

Political and Economic Changes

Changes in US and Vietnam foreign policy relations and trade created the growth of private enterprises and hence, the possibility for younger generations of Viet Kieu to locate career enhancing jobs in greater numbers. Figure 2.8 is a selective timeline of

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[32] See Vietnam News Service article, "Bright, young Viet kieu to return for Summer Camp 2013" http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/78606/bright--young-viet-kieu-to-return-for-summer-camp-2013.html. Accessed on July 15, 2013.

[33] This is an image promoted by the Vietnamese State: one of desirable Viet Kieu who contribute to the economic and social development of the country or who have the potential to do so through their achievements in their countries of settlement. There is a 966-page book issued in 2006 by the Committee on Overseas Vietnamese, titled "*Kieu Bao va Que Huong*" which profiles the successful achievements of the Viet Kieu in places such as Vientiane, Tokyo, and Cologne.

significant political and economic policy turning points in Vietnam and US foreign relations. In 1994, the US and Vietnam began to normalize foreign policy relations and the number of returnees was a trickle. For instance, a first generation Viet Kieu named Binh Nguyen, who licensed FedEx in April 1994,[34] became one of the first US companies in Vietnam soon after the normalization of trade relations. David Thai, who came 'back' from Seattle in 1996 to study Vietnamese, was among another set of Viet Kieu 'firsts,' registering Highlands Coffee, a Vietnamese private company in 1998.[35]

After the 2001 implementation of the Bilateral Trade Agreement and the 2007 accession of Vietnam to the World Trade Organization (WTO), even more significant numbers of Viet Kieu recognized the potential for long-term career opportunities, especially as foreign direct investment expanded in Vietnam. According to Mazyrin (2007: 90), Vietnam's international market access for its main manufacturers, including textile, clothes, footwear, electronics, ceramics, and plastic goods stood to benefit from Vietnam's accession to the WTO, due to its comparative advantage in cheap, primarily rural, labor. Full WTO membership was also expected "to increase trading partners' trust in Vietnam, improve the overall foreign trade regime, stabilize and expand markets and sales, and help to ensure quality for local commodities" (Mazyrin, 2007: 91). Lastly, entrance to the WTO helped make Vietnam more attractive for investors in manufacturing and services, giving Vietnam better access to international capital as it accepts transparent rules and norms of global trade. This would help provide greater

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[34] See PBS Perspectives, online at http://www.pbs.org/vietnampassage/perspectives/perspectives.business.html.

[35] See the Highlands Coffee 'About Us' webpage: http://www.highlandscoffee.com.vn/aboutus_history.html.

foreign capital to local export manufacturers (Mazyrin, 2007: 92). Many Viet Kieu arrived during and after Vietnam's accession to the WTO, and several who worked in the financial sector also named this moment in trade history as the precise reason they considered working in Vietnam (see table below).

Figure 2.8: Timeline of Economic and Political Events, 2000-2010

Year	Event
2000	The Enterprise Law was implemented, allowing private enterprises to register.
	Vietnam's Central Committee agreed to the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement.
2004	Communist Party strategy towards the Overseas Vietnamese (36-NQ/TW)
2004	First Vietnam summer camp for the children of Viet Kieu living abroad – 150 youths participated
2005	Law on the Regulation of Investment activities of Viet Kieu amended rights to investment expanded for all foreigners. Foreign arbitration allowed (59/2005/QH11)
2005	Of 200 biggest firms in Vietnam, 122 are still state-owned
2007	Vietnam gained accession to the **WTO**
	On March 12, 2007, the VNI, the mainshare index on the Ho Chi Minh City Stock Exchange, hit a record high of 1,170 points
2007	Regulation on Visa Exemption – Viet Kieu could enter visa free for 5 years (135/2007/QD-TTG)
2008	VNI fell by a full 70 percent, and inflation rose to 30 percent.
2009	Viet Kieu dual citizenship law went into effect
2010	Land and Housing Law made more transparent for Viet Kieu who kept their citizenship. Viet Kieu could own a house or property that they reside in, but they cannot buy empty plots of land (Decree 71/2010/ND-CP)[36]
	Overseas Vietnamese Assistance Center opens its doors in Ho Chi Minh City– staffed by the Fatherland Front.[37]
	November 4 - Hanoi conference held by the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs (COVA) to review the 6-year implementation of the Political Bureau Resolution No. 36 on Overseas Vietnamese affairs.

Both companies and the Vietnamese government officials saw the Viet Kieu as economically desirable migrants, especially in light of their high levels of human capital.

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[36] The previous decree on the implementation of the Land and Housing Law gave unlimited property ownership to selected groups of overseas Vietnamese. Those groups included: overseas Vietnamese who made direct investments in the country; those who were recognized as contributing to national development; scientists and cultural experts; those who were invited to work in Vietnam because of their distinct skills; and those who were married to Vietnamese citizens living in Vietnam.

[37] Association for Liaison with Overseas Vietnamese (ALOV Centers) headed by a French Viet Kieu in HCMC and a Vanuatu Viet Kieu in Hanoi, both are women.

The highly educated profile of this unique subset of Viet Kieu in my study lend support to the claim that they were desired for their potential to bridge economic ties between multiple countries (Saxenian, 2006).

The state saw the return of the Viet Kieu as a reversal to the “brain drain” that occurred in the mid-1970s. Committee on Overseas Vietnamese authorities are quick to point out that 400,000 Viet Kieu individuals living abroad hold at least a Bachelors degree and present a talent pool of untapped potential. State officials have tried to court high profile Overseas Vietnamese such as renowned mathematician Ngo Bao Chau, winner of the Fields Medal in 2010. The Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan visited Chau when he spent his sabbatical year with his family in Hanoi, urging Chau to join a national program meant to turn Vietnam into an expert math nation by 2030 (*Toui Tre*, 10 Aug 2010).

Part of the attraction of Viet Kieu skills and credentials stems from the structural context of higher education in Vietnam and the country’s reliance upon foreign-educated high skilled migrants and ‘returnees’ to fill a labor shortage created by its more immediate plans for economic growth in the early 2000s. Structurally, Vietnam’s higher education system had been facing strong pressures to “modernize,” following neighboring Singapore, Thailand, and China. Meanwhile, its indigenous university graduates were unable to fill shortages in middle management in global firms. In 2005, the Vietnamese government adopted Resolution 14 (14/2005/NQ-CP), calling for the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of higher education. In the preamble, the resolution acknowledged that Vietnamese higher education was failing to fulfill the demands of industrialization and modernization of the country, the need of the people to

study, and the demands of a new phase of international integration. A report by Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) titled "Vietnamese Higher Education: Crisis and Response" showed that Vietnamese universities were not producing the educated workforce that Vietnam's globalizing economy and society demanded. The report cites Intel Corporation's past struggles to hire engineers to staff its manufacturing facility in Ho Chi Minh City: when the company administered a standardized assessment test to 2,000 Vietnamese IT students, only 90 candidates, or 5 percent, passed, and of this group only 40 individuals were considered sufficiently proficient in English to be hired.

In interviews with two headhunting staff, one based at Vietnam Online Network, a job placement firm, and another at Bo Le Associates, which conducts executive searches throughout major cities in Asia, both complained that Vietnam's higher education infrastructure was not equipped to educate and train enough college graduates with both the technical and "soft skills" qualifications needed to problem solve in the multinational corporate work environment.

Why would multinational companies look towards the diaspora as the answer to their hiring needs? According to Shay and Tracy (1997), expatriate positions have a high failure rate of retention, amounting to as much as 25 to 40 percent in a developed nation and 70 percent in a developing nation. Expatriate recruitment and retention could be expensive, so many multinational corporations initially thought that Viet Kieu could bridge the cultural adjustment barrier. Jos Langens, the head of VN Recruitment, a private recruiting firm stated that "[Viet Kieu] can implement Western values and ways of working." Rather than recruiting expatriates, which often requires expensive

relocation packages, many companies hoped to tap into Viet Kieu 'returnees' already in the country at the time of hiring.

Private Sector

The expansion of opportunities for Viet Kieu in the private sector and in international non-governmental organizations is evident in the growth of firms and organizations licensed to operate in Vietnam. According to the Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2011 Report, between 2005 and 2010, the number of totally foreign owned enterprises nearly doubled. Below is a table showing the total numbers of 100% foreign capital enterprises as compared to the smaller total numbers of joint ventures, which had also grown steadily in the recent decade. In 2005, 122 of the 200 biggest firms in Vietnam were state-owned (Hayton, 2010: 16).

Figure 2.9: Total number of private and joint enterprises registered as of Dec 31 each year. Vietnamese Statistical Yearbook, 2011.

Year	**2005**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
100% Foreign Capital Enterprises	2852	4018	4612	5412	5995
Joint Ventures	845	943	1014	1134	1259

International NGO's

As of 2012, there were about 900 international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) operating in Vietnam, according to sources from the Vietnam Union of

Friendship Organizations (VUFO) and the Ho Chi Minh City-based representatives of the People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM). There are 150 licensed INGOs in HCMC, and even though many were headquartered in Hanoi, they had offices in Ho Chi Minh City in order to fundraise.[38] The numbers of American Viet Kieu whom I could identify working in Vietnam-based INGOs was small, three individuals, so I also supplemented my interviews with Australian Viet Kieu to provide a richer account of daily life working in those sectors.

Arts/Entertainment Industry

There was also a growing number of Vietnamese diaporic 'returnees' who are actors and actresses, filmmakers, directors and associate directors who found more work in Vietnam's growing film industry than they could find at home. Among these higher profile individuals were actors Charlie Nguyen and Dustin Nguyen (famous for his role in the television series *21 Jump Street*) and actresses Ngo Thanh Van and Cathy Nguyen.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the multi-level, macro-sociological context for why many Viet Kieu 'returned' to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Those levels included the détente of Vietnamese foreign relations with its Overseas Vietnamese. Moreover, generational differences within the Viet Kieu meant that hostility towards the Vietnamese government was not a major barrier to engagement between state and diaspora. The Viet Kieu first

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[38] The website also provides a downloadable, detailed list of the 150 licensed INGOs, including the date their current license is set to expire: http://www.hufo.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/web/guest/cac-to-chuc-pcpnn2. Thanks to Dana Doan, of the LIN NGO Resource Center, for answering my query on the Vietnam Studies Group listserve on April 9, 2013.

generation, which fled Vietnam starting in the mid-1970s, was more resistant to engagement than the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu, which was more inclined to seeking work abroad.

In many ways, the issuing of a 5-year visa exemption towards the Viet Kieu and the extension of dual citizenship were not major enticements for the Viet Kieu as much as the broader changes in state and market relations that unfolded in Vietnam's post-Doi Moi era. Moreover, Vietnam's increased global integration was a signal to the adult children of the Vietnamese refugees that job opportunities would follow after these economic changes were underway. With respect to development and aid work, opportunities for the Viet Kieu to work in international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as a means to contribute to the creation of a civil society also became more readily available. These legal, political, and economic changes set the stage for individuals to see Vietnam as a rewarding post-college destination to advance their careers, as I discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Becoming a 'Bigger Fish in a Smaller Pond': The Motives of the 1.5 and Second Generation

Vietnamese American narratives of 'return,' at face value, include personal and economic motives based upon a perceived sense of more rapid career advancement and a boost to lifestyle. At the same time, many Viet Kieu stated their desire to explore their ancestral roots in their parental ancestral homeland and to make what they perceive as a productive contribution to Vietnam's social and economic development. Desired by both the Vietnamese state and multinational firms and INGOs, many Viet Kieu 'return' to Vietnam for long-term work opportunities in middle to upper management jobs. Based upon ethnographic data across multiple time periods over the past decade, I argue that the Viet Kieu were ambivalent about their 'return' experiences at different stages, with many climbing career ladders in finance, law, business, INGO, and media/entertainment much quicker than in the US, but also aware of their foreigner status as intermediary high-skilled workers, eventually to be replaced by local elites. The presence of these flows of 'return' migrants, concentrated in high-skilled management positions in Ho Chi Minh City, set the stage for understanding how the Viet Kieu have become embedded in the process of Vietnam's rapid economic change and restructuring. We must recognize that these Viet Kieu are deeply embedded within the global division of labor and in the channeling of trade products and flows of monetary finance and foreign direct investment (FDI); many of their companies based their production and corporate offices in Ho Chi Minh City to gain greater access to "frontier" labor and production markets in Southeast

Asia. To achieve optimal outcomes, many companies wanted the Viet Kieu to be their cultural foot soldiers to interface with markets between the US and Asia. Based upon ethnographic data across multiple time periods over the past decade, I argue that the Viet Kieu were ambivalent about their 'return' experiences at different stages, with many climbing career ladders in finance, law, business, INGO, and media/entertainment much quicker than in the US, but also aware of their foreigner status as intermediary high-skilled workers, eventually to be replaced by local elites.

Figure 3.1: Photograph in the *Los Angeles Times Online*, 11/24/2008.

The Accumulation of Past Visits

Some found jobs through alumni referrals; others took a gamble, paid their own way, and went to Vietnam for interviews. For most, the gateway to their interest in

seeking employment in Vietnam was the accumulation of multiple previous visits, making the migration an educated and premeditated decision, rather than a post-college spur of the moment decision. Unlike their parents, who departed Vietnam as refugees and political exiles, they came 'back' to Vietnam with significant preparation, yet unaware of the trials and tribulations they would later face as workers and migrants with local family connections.

Most Viet Kieu have maintained transnational ties with Vietnam throughout their lives, even if they have not traveled extensively to Vietnam. Half the Viet Kieu in this study were born in Vietnam and arrived to the US at an early age, locating them as "1.5" generation immigrant Americans. After the normalization of diplomatic relations between the US and Vietnam in 1994, many Viet Kieu began to travel to Vietnam for family visits and vacation tourism; however, most did not arrive to Vietnam on these visits with the initial intent to stay more permanently. Most Viet Kieu employed in private enterprise came 'back' more permanently after 2006, the year Vietnam was granted Most Favored Nation Status by the US and 2007, when Vietnam was granted accession into the WTO. However, according to a reputable Asia expatriate relocation firm executive I interviewed in 2010, Viet Kieu represented only 2 percent of total cases of expatriate relocations to Vietnam, but this figure was increasing. The few who managed to secure expatriate jobs obtained them internally through multinational corporations, including the Chief Financial Officer of a global hotel chain and a Country Manager of a global garment sourcing company.

Younger and less financially resourced Viet Kieu, oftentimes fresh out of college and without relevant work experience, came to Vietnam without a job offer. They often

lived with their extended relatives or rented cheap furnished rooms on a weekly or monthly payment agreement while they looked for work. Many of these second generation Viet Kieu held bachelors degrees and hoped to gain valuable work experience before returning to the US for graduate and professional studies.

Many Viet Kieu, as these next sections will demonstrate, had made educated and calculated decisions to 'return' to Vietnam as long-term migrants after previous visits, having traveled there for one or more family visits and vacation tourism. Few reported that this migration was their first time being in Vietnam; indeed, one Viet Kieu reported having made 20 'return' trips prior with his family. In most cases, two or three prior visits for each individual and job referrals from college and graduate/professional school alumni networks helped secure employment in Vietnam.

The Bilateral Trade Agreement: The 'Made in Vietnam' Label

Changes in the macro economy altered Viet Kieu perceptions and willingness to go 'back' to Vietnam. Macro-level changes in the political economy, from Vietnam's economic integration, beginning with the signing of the Bilateral Trade Agreement in 2000, to accession to the World Trade Organization in 2007, propelled the migration of many Viet Kieu to 'return' to Vietnam for long-term work in middle to upper management jobs.

Judy, a Viet Kieu in her 40s, was associate vice president and country director of a garment sourcing company with corporate headquarters in Vietnam; the company owned and operated over 4,000 specialty retail stores in the US under other retail store

brands.[39] Judy left Vietnam at age 14 with her family. She and her siblings grew up in Los Angeles in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood. Against her father's wishes, Judy dropped out of an engineering program at UCLA, instead earning an Associates degree in fashion. In 2002, Judy worked arduously to convince her company to open up corporate offices in Vietnam. Today, Judy works in Ho Chi Minh City in an executive level position, with bicultural and bilingual fluency.

> I have always traveled extensively for my work, but I had never resided in the country of production. I was looking at Vietnam and the opportunity here … it was really considered the last frontier for the garment industry. And at that time, there was somehow in our industry in fashion retail a belief that if garments had the label 'Made in Vietnam', consumers won't buy them because of the memory of the Vietnam War. But someone actually had the nerve to say that, and I thought it was ludicrous. That sentence was repeated so often … it took me two years to set up corporate offices in Vietnam.

Though opposition from Judy's company to enter Vietnam seems outlandish in today's economy, we might be more sympathetic to the companies that today are hesitant to invest in post-war economies such as Afghanistan or Iraq, but might be more willing if diasporic bridge workers were leading the campaign to open offices. The apparel sourcing company she worked for waited until the US and Vietnam signed the Bilateral Trade Agreement in 2000, granting Vietnam "Most Favored Nation Status" before reassigning her to Vietnam.[40] During our interview, when asked what Judy expected as one of the earlier returnees to work in Ho Chi Minh City, she replied:

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[39] At the time of my fieldwork, Vietnam was one of the world's top five garment exporters (but the only country that did not produce its own material inputs).

[40] In 2003, the two countries signed the Bilateral Textile Agreement allowing the two trading partners to agree upon trading quotas for textiles. Today, many clothing and footwear manufacturers are based in Vietnam, including the Gap, Northface, Land's End, and Nike. The

> I expected the country was growing fast. I expected a lot of bureaucracy, but it was worse than I expected. At the time, I had helped to create awareness and partnerships for many of my colleagues and acquaintances that helped Vietnam's industry to get even stronger.
>
> Those who came in 2002 were mostly Asian … there were hardly any Americans, and no Vietnamese Americans period. Besides me was one lady who had a small business on her own, nothing like a big conglomerate. I was the only Vietnamese American running a Fortune 500 company.

So few Viet Kieu were in Vietnam at the time because so few private companies were investing in Vietnam until the BTA was implemented, and hence, fewer jobs with benefits were available. The partnerships which Judy refers suggests that Saxenian's (2006) Argonaut thesis of creating regional economic advantage for Vietnam, in a way that is mutually beneficial to the US clothing retail industry, can partly explain the role Viet Kieu play in Vietnam's subsequent internationalizing economy half a decade later. Viet Kieu would become the cultural foot soldiers on the ground that multinational corporations could rely upon to shift the flexible production process toward newer, low-cost labor markets. Vietnam became the new global assembly line in the production of many labor-intensive goods and services, with the Viet Kieu as managerial brokers to connect the US with the Asia Pacific Region. Judy was among the earlier waves of Viet Kieu multinational corporate employees paving the way for subsequent waves to seek

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"Made in Vietnam" source label has not deterred many companies' brand marketing strategies. Many companies based in the Greater South China Economic Region (GSCER) during the 1980s migrated their production to lower-cost countries, including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Industrialization on a world scale has undergone significant shifts during the past four decades. According to sociologists who have studied the textile and garment industry in the GSCER during the 1980s, "the capacity to produce and export manufactured goods has been dispersed to an ever expanding network of peripheral and core nations alike … In today's factory, the production of a single commodity often spans many countries, with each nation performing tasks in which it has a cost advantage" (Gereffi and M. Korzeniewicz, 1994). For further background on the Bilateral Textile Agreement, please refer to these Library of Congress Congressional Research Service policy archives: http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/1445.

long-term career opportunities in Ho Chi Minh City, but she recognizes that her return is not a smooth process both culturally and economically. She refers to Vietnam as her homeland, but she also calls the US 'home' where she has a large extended family – everyone on her maternal side migrated to the US in 1975 or shortly thereafter. In spite of her relative success and permanence there, Judy feels like a "stranger" in her ancestral homeland –unable to relate to Vietnamese society, since it has changed since her teenage years of departure, and not fully accepted culturally as Vietnamese by locals, either (discussed further in Chapter 4).

After WTO Accession: "In Vietnam, a lot of us can't think beyond one year."

Hue, a 32-year old Viet Kieu who is the director of a multinational finance and equity group, saw Vietnam as an opportunity to build her career. She was born in 1978 in Ho Chi Minh City and left with her parents in 1979 during the persecution and expulsion of ethnic Chinese Vietnamese by the socialist Vietnamese government. Her family were among the refugees known as the 'boatpeople', passing through a Malaysian refugee camp before they were resettled, eventually, in Philadelphia, where Hue lived until she went to an elite college in New England. Though Hue majored in visual arts, she spent four years after college working as a management consultant, and then later earned her MBA at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. Hue moved to Vietnam in the summer of 2007, when she believed that "Vietnam's stock market was beginning to peak, and the US economic crisis began to take shape, but no major downturns had occurred to push her out of the US":

> I wanted to join a private equity firm and wanted to do investment, so when the opportunity came up at [this firm], I applied and decided to go here.
>
> Before going to business school, I backpacked across Southeast Asia. That was the first time I was in Vietnam since my family left, and it was a really good experience, and I was open to coming back. At the time, I was just a tourist and didn't realize there was a business community. It wasn't until I moved to China that I realized Vietnam had just joined the WTO. I thought 'Wow, there's actually a possibility of moving to Vietnam' – that's when I took it more seriously.

Vietnam's accession to the WTO was what made a finance career in Vietnam a more realistic endeavor for individuals like Hue who had global MBA connections to tap into. Once Hue settled into her job at the private equity firm, she referred two more Viet Kieu classmates at Wharton to the firm: "The Wharton Global Forum was here in 2008, so there's about half a dozen Wharton people here from undergrad and grad school living in Saigon long-term. A few more visit and come in and out." Hue would not be considered a cultural foot soldier, as overcoming language barriers in Vietnam was a crucial hurdle for Hue. Unlike many Vietnamese Americans who grew up speaking mostly if not entirely in Vietnamese in the family home, Hue had to learn the language and "practically started with zero" knowledge of the Vietnamese vocabulary.

> It was easier adjusting to Vietnam than it was in China – it's much easier to read a Western-based alphabet language. When I arrived, I didn't speak any Vietnamese, so I had to take lessons … I don't speak Viet with my family, but they speak some with each other. I had some working affinity for Vietnamese without knowing any vocabulary. There's kind of a Viet community in Philadelphia, but I wasn't a big part of it. It was mainly language barriers that I had to overcome.

Hue came back to Vietnam to further her professional career; she did not portray her time in Vietnam as a journey of self-discovery or exploration. More than 500,000 Americans, including tourists, visit Ho Chi Minh City each year, but for many with a historical

connection to Vietnam, this was the gateway activity for considering other emerging market opportunities. For those with the technical skills and credentials, such as a Western country MBA degree, it was a career opportunity that many Viet Kieu more seriously contemplated with Vietnam's accession to the WTO in 2007. Nevertheless, like many other Viet Kieu at the time, she had ambivalence in seeing herself as a long-term resident in Vietnam.

> In Vietnam, a lot of people come here [to work] for emotional reasons – they are Viet Kieu or were born here, and they don't know if it's stable enough. In China, it is stable. In Vietnam, a lot of us can't think beyond one year.

Hue echoed the prevailing sentiment voiced by many if not most of the Viet Kieu in this study – that political and economic stability were key to their considerations about long-term rootedness to a career in Vietnam. For the majority, the US remained their embodiment of home, but for now, the Viet Kieu were not as concerned about planting roots, preferring to rent their apartment in Vietnam, living as Western expatriates in a place their parents formerly called home, with one foot in Vietnam and the other in the US. Many, including Hue, who had business and technical skills, landed jobs before the Great Recession. In part, this was because they were still young and seeking a new experience; additionally, they were certain that if they needed to leave Vietnam, they could return to the US at any moment.

For at least five of the Viet Kieu in this study and many others I encountered, teaching English was an entry-level way to earn money while building a career in Vietnam. Even one woman, Kate, with a JD and years of previous US federal government experience had to start out by teaching English while paying a corporate

headhunter to find her a job as a mergers and acquisitions attorney. Kate now works for a British multinational firm. In Vietnam, foreign corporate attorneys, certified public accountants, and doctors can practice with a "license to practice" permit. Foreign accredited attorneys were restricted to practicing only commercial law.

Other Viet Kieu who were not initially attracted to Ho Chi Minh City eventually migrated there from regional South Vietnam and Hanoi. There were two Viet Kieu who were full-time English teachers in outer-lying provinces of South Vietnam; after several years, they wanted to be around more cosmopolitan Viet Kieu communities in Ho Chi Minh City. After graduating from UC Berkeley with a degree in Ethnic Studies, Jamie found a job in Hanoi in 2006 as a full-time English teacher. The payrate, at $23 per hour, was high by Vietnam standards, as Jamie got his foot in the door teaching English at a good time when there was less competition for such jobs.[41] More Viet Kieu had gone 'back' to teach English in Ho Chi Minh City and saturated the teaching market there, but fewer had gone to teach in Hanoi. After being in Hanoi for four years, Jamie relocated in 2010 to Ho Chi Minh City, which for him had meant being around a more bustling Viet Kieu community. Before relocating from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, he had secured his now full-time job as an Educational Trainer at a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) agency helping US companies to outsource their IT services to Vietnamese staff. Jamie's educational connections helped him land his second job in Vietnam, as the referral came from a fellow UC Berkeley alumnus working in the BPO industry. Jamie's dense alma mater connections helped him to locate a job in Ho Chi

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[41] It was less likely in Ho Chi Minh City, where teaching English was a highly competitive and sought-after stepping stone job for backpackers who wanted to remain in Vietnam, and equivalent jobs in subsequent years commanded lower wages, starting at $8 to $15.

Minh City. For those Viet Kieu whose work kept them in Hanoi, including Tommy, age 30, an INGO manager, and Peter, age 32, a start-up entrepreneur, frequent trips to Ho Chi Minh City compensated for the relative sense of there being a lack of Viet Kieu communities in Hanoi.

Expatriate Relocation: "they hired me without an interview"

Michael, age 42, found his chief of financial operations (CFO) position at a multinational hotel chain through his intra-company network in their human resources system, where he uploaded his resume into a database and set the criteria to "Asia Pacific" region. Michael was one of the few Viet Kieu who would be formally considered a corporate "expatriate" hire within his multinational company.

> I received several emails with opportunities in the region but this [Vietnam posting] was the only one I was interested in. The process is an interview with senior managers in the region. First the HR director and General Manager of this operation, then senior management at the regional team, and then my application is sent to the owners, and they have the option of approving me through an interview. But based on the feedback they received from the hotel and regional team, they hired me without an interview. Within five or six weeks, I packed up and moved to Vietnam.

Michael grew up in a small town in Connecticut and had eventually moved to California after college. He is the child of a Filipino American father who was a civilian engineer in Vietnam during the Vietnam War and a Vietnamese mother – his parents met in Vietnam while his father was serving in the military. He spoke relatively good Vietnamese, since his mother spoke mostly Vietnamese to him while he was growing up. Since Michael had a wife and children, he did not think it would be possible to go to Vietnam without securing a good job beforehand. Going to Vietnam for him was about career ambition,

wanting to make a significant contribution to his birth country, and his desire to connect with his ancestral roots.

> What was even more important was finding a company that was expanding here in Southeast Asia so that I could have an opportunity. Income was important, because with that, I could contribute more to society or charitable organizations, I would be part of a solution. That was always the game plan. I work for an international hotel company so that's been helpful. There was a lot of talk about hotel expansion in Asia Pacific, but in the past five years, the growth has been massive. Growth in Thailand, China, and India is another example of development in these huge markets. There is exponential growth positively affecting these countries in the next five years. And it was just logical that Vietnam was next in line. In this country, there will be another four to five hotels opening in the next few years.

Economic growth throughout the Asia Pacific Region was on the rise, but Michael had his sights on Vietnam for personal reasons – it was where he was born.

For Judy, Hue, and Michael, who each work for US multinational corporations, the surge of economic opportunities was what brought them to Vietnam in the first place, but unlike the Argonaut migrants in Saxenian (2006), they are in Vietnam for career advancement as well as reasons having to do with their ethnic identity in the US as Vietnamese Americans. Some found jobs through alumni referrals, others took a gamble, paid their own way, and went to Vietnam for interviews. For most, the gateway to their interest in seeking employment in Vietnam was the accumulation of multiple previous visits, making the migration an educated and premeditated decision, rather than a post-college spur of the moment decision. Unlike their parents, who departed Vietnam as refugees and political exiles, they came 'back' to Vietnam with significant preparation, yet unaware of the trials and tribulations they would later face as workers and migrants with local family connections.

In Search of a Better Quality of Life

On a broad scale, many graduates were faced with the prospect of unemployment and student loan debt during the global financial recession. For some Viet Kieu, finding work experience in Vietnam was a logical solution to this post-recession job market. We often hear about immigrates moving to the US in search of a better quality of life, but the Viet Kieu case challenges these assumptions, demonstrating how emigration was a means for them to escape financial and family burdens, unaware of the new extended family demands and expectations they would encounter in Vietnam. Others found that they could achieve a better quality of life in their INGO and arts careers in Vietnam when taking into consideration the lowered cost of living and childcare.

Economic factors in the US played an instrumental role in decisions for the Viet Kieu to go to Vietnam, including the financial recession. Robert, age 34, was working in ethnic media in the US in 2008. Many corporate advertisers had slashed their budgets during the start of the recession and ethnic media outlets that advertised to non-English speaking readers suffered a severe hit. Saddled with credit card debt, Robert and his wife, who was a Vietnamese national studying abroad in the US, decided to begin their married lives together in Ho Chi Minh City. Hanh, his Vietnamese wife, was recruited to head a global insurance company's expansion in Asia; Robert started a joint venture firm with his wife that provided product placement services in Vietnamese media. One example of his service was negotiating the placement of a white Bentley luxury car in an action-suspense film that was released in Vietnamese cinemas in 2010.

Robert moved to Vietnam in 2008 and convinced his younger brother, Vincent, age 32, to go join him two years later, when Vincent's struggling chicken wing business in Northern California went out of business. The two brothers quickly found many small business opportunities in Ho Chi Minh City. Robert and Vincent also pooled their resources to renovate a failing bar and restaurant in the heart of downtown Ho Chi Minh City, and Vincent operated a start-up real estate referral business for expatriates. In 2012, Vincent wrote to me, saying: "Right now, Ho Chi Minh City is my homebase. I'll probably go back and visit the States later this year."[42]

Christine P. Tran, in her early 30s, had completed her University of Hawaii Executive MBA in Vietnam.[43] She was based out of Ho Chi Minh City, where she had worked for a U.S.-based e-commerce firm. In 2008, Christine was completing her studies and getting ready to move back to the US, which she considered her permanent home. Christine had published an editorial in *Bloomberg Business Week* titled, "Go Overseas, Young Jobless MBA" (May 7, 2009), to encourage unemployed MBA graduates to consider opportunities abroad for career advancement and personal growth.

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[42] Moving to find a better way of life was a part of their refuge family history: their father was a police officer in the South Vietnamese regime; he and their entire family fled Vietnam in 1980 because of the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Going further back, in 1954, his entire father's family had migrated from Northern Vietnam to then, Saigon, after the 1954 Geneva Accord partition, giving their diasporic Vietnamese accent a Northern twang, "Bac '54" or 1954 Northerners was how their family identified. The father and their entire family were resettled as refugees in a small town in Michigan. After college, the brothers moved to California, and when business struggled there, they moved to Texas.

[43] Other globally expanding higher education programs exist as part of the broader efforts in higher education to boost experiential learning and increase enrollments. Another example is Australia-based Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Saigon South (District 7) which has this satellite campus to attract Vietnam's local elites.

> 'During my time [in Vietnam], I've developed skills in a second language and learned how to communicate and motivate in a cross-cultural environment. I've gained immeasurable skills working in a dispersed team and have seen firsthand the impact of globalization and digitization on an emerging economy … Outside of work, I connected with a burgeoning community of young technology enthusiasts, most under the age of 25 . . . During holidays, I traveled to far-flung tropical paradises by bus, train, ferry, and boat. Most important, I've enjoyed innumerable experiences with neighbors, co-workers, and new friends … On top of all this, I've enjoyed the perks of living in a country with an extremely low cost of living. I've saved enough money to pay off a sizable portion of my undergraduate student loans and credit-card debt'.

For individuals like Christine, who had grown up in the US and was raised in bicultural immigrant and refugee households, seeking work abroad for several years was an ideal solution to the competition and high levels of unemployment facing many MBA graduates. It was an attractive next step for someone relatively young, unattached, and with cultural and family ties in Vietnam, especially in the aftermath of the US financial recession.

Migration decisions, even though made by individuals, often lead to subsequent waves of chain migration of family members, business colleagues, and students (Massey et al, 2005) and they also have spillover effects. Moreover, the political and economic circumstances of both host and home enabled these resourced migrants, in possession of social and cultural capital, to migrate as a social safety net against the global financial crisis.

Faster Career and Social Advancement

There were multiple economic advantages for Viet Kieu who found long-term work in Vietnam, including prospects for career advancement occurring on a faster

timeline than parallel jobs in the US. Viet Kieu diasporic 'returnees' in Vietnam benefitted from rapid advancement in disparate career fields such as banking, finance, law, and filmmaking, as this section will demonstrate, compared to slower advancement and promotion in companies based in the more developed Global North. The 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu came back to Vietnam to engage in the culture and history of their parents' homeland – this is how they became interested in Vietnam – but they were also attracted by what they saw as better occupational advancement in a relatively shorter period of time in a transitioning economy than they expect in the US, where they feel like "smaller fish in a big pond" as many describe.

Standing out is mentioned as a reason that the Viet Kieu feel as though they were better valued and could make a more significant impact in their careers in Vietnam. For instance, Chris Tran, who is in his early 30s, said that a large part of his success in Vietnam is that he stands out as an American: "Here, I can be noticed because I read stuff in the U.S. faster, and then I can adapt it here and say, 'Okay, in America they're doing this, and this is how it applies in Vietnam,' and that's a big part of what my career has been in Vietnam. It's like creating opportunities versus copying opportunities. It's almost how I would categorize it here."[44] I encountered Chris through multiple social groups that were overlapping with my other study participants, and later on noticed that Chris was featured in many media articles. In part, because he worked in marketing, Chris had access many local media editors. Chris stood out socially once an article in the English-

[44] *With Reverse Migration, Children of Immigrants Chase 'American Dream' Abroad*. KCET Southern California, January 16, 2013. http://www.kcet.org/shows/socal_connected/content/economy/with-reverse-migration-children-of-immigrants-chase-american-dream-abroad.html.

language magazine *The Word* featured him as one of Saigon's Most Eligible in 2009 (see cover below).

Figure 3.2: Chris Tran, listed among Saigon's most eligible in The Word, and English-language entertainment magazine in Vietnam. Cover provided by Chris Tran.

Lan, a senior financial analyst, believed it would have taken ten additional years of work experience in New York City to obtain her current position, and in San Francisco, "maybe 5 to 6 years to make it." Another Viet Kieu reported that he was in Vietnam to try to get a job for a multinational law firm in Vietnam that would be too hard

to get into in the US, since the economy was doing poorly in the US: “At least here, I can network and stand out more.”

My-Anh, 32, who has a master’s degree in social sciences, works on the fundraising team of a large INGO based in Ho Chi Minh City that is a major beneficiary of the development aid funds allocated by the World Bank. She bluntly said that career advancement came very quickly in her line of work – by the time she reached her fourth year on the job, she had worked her way up from being an intern to being Business Development Manager. Comparable nonprofit career advancement in the US would not afford her to do development work without being in-country, and according to her, she wanted to have significant responsibility in a short period of time. My-Anh says:

> Advancement comes quickly in Vietnam. You really *can* do anything you want to, and this isn’t a sign of mediocrity. As a Viet Kieu, you need to absorb all the opportunities thrown your way, especially in the NGO sector where expat turnover is high by definition because the work needs to eventually transition over to locals. [45]

My-Anh moved to Ho Chi Minh City in 2007 with her white American spouse, although they later divorced. She went to the US only for major family events or professional trainings through her INGO employer, headquartered in the US. Only a few years after working at a major NGO in Vietnam, her local Vietnamese employees looked to her for managerial mentorship and she had been asked by local Vietnamese business organizations to give workshops on the art of networking.

[45] During the four months I had observed My-Anh, one local water engineer was poached by a private enterprise, the organization was recruiting for a new project manager, and their New Zealand-originated Engineers Without Borders volunteer on their clean water project was finishing up his one-year stint in Vietnam.

Viet Kieu artists comprised members of a small but visible and growing Ho Chi Minh City diasporic and international arts community. Most of the Viet Kieu artists I met were younger than the corporate Viet Kieus and were in earlier stages of their career; fewer also had advanced graduate degrees. The arts community came 'back' in later waves than the earlier business-minded Viet Kieu, perhaps less motivated by economic changes in the business environment of Vietnam. I encountered a handful of Viet Kieu artists in Ho Chi Minh City who were establishing international and diasporic links between Vietnamese and other artists and industries throughout the Asia Pacific Region. Jenni Trang Le, a Viet Kieu age 30, jumpstarted her career in filmmaking in Vietnam. Born in Houston, she graduated from UCLA with a major in anthropology. Though her residence was in Ho Chi Minh City, Jenni frequently traveled all over Vietnam to film for weeks at a time. Though Jenni began her film career in Los Angeles, it was not until coming to Vietnam that she got to work on four feature films between 2009 and 2010. Jenni worked as Assistant Director, a job that involves handling every managerial aspect of a film, including interfacing with the actors. Climbing the Hollywood entertainment industry corporate ladder was highly competitive without the crucial industry networks, but in Vietnam, Jenni had become well networked in less than three years, starting with the time I met her in 2008 at a Vietnamese coffeeshop as she was still deciding whether to make the move 'back'. By 2010, Jenni had more film job offers than she could accept from Viet Kieu and Vietnamese filmmakers. She had gotten into the Vietnamese film industry during a time when films produced in Vietnam were beginning to get marketed to the Vietnamese diasporic audiences in greater numbers, and her US and Vietnam

transnational ties made her a more effective film industry bridge between these two worlds.

Though these Viet Kieu sound like success stories, some ‘failed’ attempts to build careers and social lives had occurred, emerging in the several years after my fieldwork. One Viet Kieu, Aidan, got laid off three times from his IT job in Saigon, having worked for a variety of start-ups that were not financially solvent and had gone bankrupt and did not bother to pay the staff for services rendered. Aidan felt like a failure, particularly relative to his “successful” Viet Kieu peers who had “made it” in Saigon, which reproduced his sense of marginality over having been a defense IT contractor in the Metro-Washington, D.C. area when his peers’ parents had bragged to his own parents that their children were now living the American Dream as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. He hid during our interview the fact that his marriage to a local Vietnamese woman had also ended in divorce – I later learned from another Viet Kieu of the news.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle was also of increasing concern for these adult children of refugees and immigrants. My-Anh was receiving a staff salary of US $1,800 per month, and shared a three-bedroom apartment with two other Viet Kieu women after her divorce. That was half the salary of her Viet Kieu Australian roommate, who earned an average salary for expatriates at a “Big Four” services accounting firm. For My-Anh as an INGO worker, this was sufficient for her to live comfortably and make frequent leisure vacations throughout Southeast Asia and to eat out every night of the week. Compared to her U.S. peers who work in the nonprofit sector in large urban cities, My-Anh is able to make her

salary stretch further by consuming more with less in US dollars and she has more responsibility and better career advancement in Vietnam's INGO context.

Lan said that in Vietnam, Viet Kieu reported long work hours, especially for corporate attorneys and sales/marketing staff, but their cost of living and food consumption overhead was low and those paid in US dollars could have savings. For women pursuing a family with kids, the cost of hiring a full time or even live in nanny to take care of kids was relatively low, as some reported the wages being about US$100 to $150 per month, compared to the cost of a full time nanny in a region such as Los Angeles, which ranged between US$1,000 to $2,500 per month, taxes and benefits not included yet.

For Viet Kieu women who wanted to have children while juggling a career, being in Vietnam made a work life balance more attainable, financially. Kate, a "1.5" generation Viet Kieu who holds a JD from the US Pacific Northwest, compares her experiences working as a Washington, DC, attorney at the Securities and Exchanges Commission to her management job at a British multinational financial institution in Ho Chi Minh City: "Here, I can work with CEOs and access the top people." Kate was at home in her poolside apartment balcony for our interview. Family formation decisions also factored into why coming to Vietnam was an attractive career move. "I knew I wanted to have children right away. I saw some of my friends in the US have small children and also juggle working. Here your maid is so cheap."[46]

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[46] Kate had hired one after another maid/nanny, and dismissed about 14 others, some who were alleged to mistreat her children – neighbors saw the kids being reprimanded physically beside the pool. Her latest maid was a plain looking female in her early twenties from the countryside. Some Viet Kieu women had deliberately chosen elderly "grandmother" types of domestic

Professionals and managers, according to Acker (2002), work long hours [in the US] and often are evaluated on their "face time" at work and their willingness to put work and the organization before family and friends (Hoschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Such often excessive or unpredictable demands are easier to meet for those without daily family responsibilities. Whereas formal exclusion of women on the grounds that they may have babies and leave the job was not legal, informal exclusion and unspoken denigration are still widespread and difficult to document and confront (Acker, 2002: 459). The informal exclusion of career women from advancement when they decide to have families is, thus, an invisible driving force for women to remain in Vietnam, where due to reduced childcare expenses, having a career and family was more attainable.

For Tara, age 25, working in Vietnam offered her the chance to work as an artist and to live relatively comfortably because of her position as a concepts manager for a Singapore home décor company so that she could do her passion off hours, make art. Tara arrived in 2007 on an educational scholarship to study art at the Ho Chi Minh City National University Visual Arts campus. During her time living in Vietnam, she has

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servants because they did not want their local Vietnamese husbands to have a wandering gaze. I was surprised that Kate had a younger female nanny which seemed to be an outlier. For a discussion of research on the lives of Filipina domestic servants in other global cities and emotional carework with attention to the dynamics of race, class, and immigrant status, see Parreñas (2001). In my casual conversations with maids and taxi drivers of many stripes and regional backgrounds, most preferred Viet Kieu bosses to Vietnamese local bosses, because they were treated better, according to them. Vietnamese bosses were stereotyped as meaner and more demanding, and more likely to assert class differences and regional dialect distinctions as socio-cultural differences. This, however, contradicts my findings in Chapter 5 about relations between upper management Viet Kieu and their Vietnamese staff, who experience resentment and at times, hostility. Another Viet Kieu suggested the possibility that the preference for Viet Kieu bosses by domestic workers and nannies had to do with the Viet Kieu experience of growing up having witnessed their parents' downward class mobility once they became refugees in the US workforce – hence, forging a shared sense of working class solidarity with domestic servants.

exhibited many of her installations at a French-themed coffeehouse in downtown Saigon. The ongoing US financial recession made remaining in Ho Chi Minh City beyond her intended one year even more attractive.

> I have a job here. I have money. I can afford to make my art here, and I can make bigger art here. I have more time. My 9 to 5 job here is really more like 10 to 3. If you combine all these, and I'm not bored here yet, than why not [stay in Vietnam longer]?

Moreover, those interested in the arts experienced a significant boost to their lifestyle in Vietnam compared to their artist counterparts in the US. According to Tara, she did not have to live the stereotypical "starving artist" lifestyle led by her peers still living in the US; when in Vietnam, she could live well and do what she loved – and also thrive in an intimate internationalizing Viet Kieu arts scene. Tara continued to stay in Vietnam because she could earn enough money working flexible hours as a concepts manager, a job which allowed her to devote enough hours to her passion after work hours as an exhibiting artist. I met her in 2008, one year fresh out of college and ambitious about her bright future as a diasporic artist living in Vietnam. By 2010, she was more realistic about her options: stay in Vietnam and continue to be able to finance her passion to produce artwork, or return to the US and brave the challenges of finding work during a period of relatively higher unemployment. The process of making lifestyle and salary comparisons between Vietnam and the US was a privilege that the Viet Kieu were equipped to do, leveraging their "in between" identities as US citizens and Vietnamese diasporic subjects.

"I came here in part to escape my problems back at home."

For some young Viet Kieu, 'returning' to Vietnam was a means to escape problems back home. Thu, age 27, was born in Vietnam in 1984 and left at age 13, arriving to the US during the early 1990s as part of the third wave of refugees who were admitted through the family reunification process. Thu's father was granted permission to migrate under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), having been imprisoned in Central Vietnam re-education camps after the war. Thu went to college in the US, and after several years working grueling hours as a financial consultant at a "Big Four" auditing firm, in 2010, Thu got recruited by a US entrepreneur to work in human resources for a US high tech start up company in Ho Chi Minh City. Months later, Thu then recruited her good friend, another Viet Kieu, from the same college to join her as staff at the Ho Chi Minh City start up company.

During a third follow up interview with Thu, she confided in me that apart from coming back to Vietnam to work in a high tech start up and to rekindle her Vietnam study abroad connections, she stated: "I came here in part to escape my problems back at home." Thu had many family problems back in the US, enough that Thu declared that "being in Vietnam helps [her] to get away." As a form of emotional escapism, Thu created distance with them by accepting the job in Ho Chi Minh City. Her parents' battled money problems, financially in part because her mother earned a minimum wage and suffered from loneliness. Thu stated: "My mother doesn't have anyone to talk with … since age 12, I have been my mothers' sole confidant." As a result of her mother's social isolation as an immigrant and refugee, Thu was also emotionally weighed down by

her responsibility to guard her mother's emotional well-being.[47] To add to this, Thu's younger brother faced many acculturation problems in school and was unable to finish community college and would get into verbal fights with her. In Chapter 4, I show how Thu's escape from family problems in the US were replaced by onerous obligations and stressors with extended family in Vietnam.

The Imagined Homeland: US Multicultural Identity Politics and Diasporic Politics

Another set of motivations for 'return' had to do with belonging to the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1980) of Overseas Vietnamese. The search for belonging, processing one's bicultural identity as Vietnamese American, and immersing oneself in Vietnamese culture and language was part of the journey of exploring one's roots in Vietnam. But getting in touch with those ancestral roots was often a more complicated process than enrolling in Vietnamese language courses and finding Vietnamese social networks; creating an even deeper sense of ambivalence for Vietnamese American 'returnees' who felt neither American or Vietnamese enough in both countries. While Viet Kieu were not doing overtly political work to transform Vietnam from within its borders, given the concern from many Viet Kieu about surveillance and the authoritarian censorship arm of the state, many were carrying out work that their first generation

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[47] This manifestation of "reverse parentification" asserts many pressures on immigrant youths at an early age, forcing them to assume adult roles at an early age to compensate for their parents' lack of English skills or knowledge of how to navigate the US system of paperwork and applications or tasks as simple as paying a phone bill. For the mechanisms of reverse-parentification and its detrimental effects on Southeast Asian refugee youths, see the work of Choi, Yoonsun, Michael He, and Tracy W Harachi. "Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance, Parent-Child Conflict and Bonding, and Youth Problem Behaviors among Vietnamese and Cambodian Immigrant Families." *Journal of Youth Adolescence* 37, (2008): 85-96.

refugee parents were unable to do while abroad such as poverty alleviation and development programs.

Varied Levels of Family and Community Support

One unique feature of Viet Kieu diasporic 'return' had to do with varied levels of resistance towards their decision to 'return'. Many 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu individuals in Ho Chi Minh City were grappling with ways to reconcile first generation resistance to their long-term settlement in Vietnam. One such individual was Nam. After graduating from college, Nam a Viet Kieu age 39, went backpacking throughout Southeast Asia and knew that one day, he would return to Vietnam for a longer period of time, perhaps for work. In 2007, he paid his own way to get to Vietnam and spent two weeks interviewing with 10 companies, received four job offers, and started working four months after he accepted an offer. Nam had extensive business marketing experience in the US, including having worked in New York City.

> I told my parents I was going to Vietnam [in 2007] and they said 'Absolutely not.'
>
> Regardless of their warnings, I came here, and then I pushed it to another level and told them I wanted to live here. They told me stories about how hard it was for my grandparents to live [there] in the post-1975 period after the war and the hardships they had to face when the [Vietnamese Communist] government took away their liberties, livelihoods, homes, and their money. In the mid-1990s, when my Aunts and Uncles came to Vietnam to visit, there was a lot of bribing going on of customs officials. Regardless of all that, I still took a chance. (Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City, 2010)

Nam's parents and relatives proactively discouraged him from permanently looking for work in Ho Chi Minh City, even though he had visited on shorter tourist excursions several years prior, which were approved by his parents. Many first generation Viet

Kieus such as Nam's parents mistrusted the political situation, fearing for the safety and well-being of their children once they were back. Nam's family was among the early wave of 1975 South Vietnamese refugees with ties to the overthrown government, and their forced migration experience shaped ongoing perceptions of Vietnam. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these concerns were legitimate: according to David Lamb, an American journalist, the Hanoi government did track Viet Kieu through pervasive security agents and everyone who visited became suspect. Visitors including the Viet Kieu were charged foreigners' rates for hotels, transportation, and communications.[48] Chris Tran's mother, Phuong Tran, said in an interview about her son's 'return' to Vietnam: "When I left Vietnam, I never thought I could come back and visit. I thought, 'That's it.' A lot of us were crying, thinking we can never go back to Vietnam to visit. So I never imagine my son would go to Vietnam and live there and work there."

Mary, a Viet Kieu age 25, who managed an education abroad program, confronted a similar challenge from her parents in Orange County, the geographic center of anti-communist diasporic politics in the Vietnamese refugee community.[49] Living, studying, and working in the cities of Shanghai and Beijing in Communist China were activities deemed acceptable by her family, which Mary did throughout her

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[48] For a discussion of this, see David Lamb, "The Viet Kieu" in *Vietnam, Now* (2003).

[49] Even outside of Orange County in place like Olympia, Washington, where the diasporic community is more sparse, the resurgence of anti-communist opinions have influenced US life for many refugee aging leaders: 'Communist' Is Still a Dirty Word in Vietnamese Immigrant Enclaves, by Kirk Johnson. www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/us/communist-is-still-a-dirty-word-in-vietnamese-immigrant-enclaves.html?emc=eta1&_r=0&pagewanted=print

undergraduate and graduate degrees at elite private schools. However, a transfer within her study abroad company from Socialist China to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, garnered a lot of her parents' disapproval; so many of her Vietnamese relatives in Orange County told her she was "making a huge mistake".[50]

Some parents were supportive, such as the notable case of Donna. Prior to her move to Vietnam, Donna, who holds a Masters in Public Administration from the East Coast, was recruited by a start-up health INGO. She had been working in Vietnam for the past four years, having arrived in 2006. She had already secured a position working for New York City government, when she decided to make a switch.

> I started my job working for the City, and I felt restless all at once because my love was international development. I decided I wanted to move abroad again, and I want to go where I would be useful so I was thinking briefly about going to French speaking Africa, since I speak fluent French, but I did not know how much of an impact I'll have there as compared to elsewhere, like Vietnam. *In addition, living and working in Vietnam gives me the chance to really explore my roots and my family's footsteps throughout the country.*

Donna grew up in a small town in the Midwest, where there were few Vietnamese families except for hers, yet her family insisted that they retain their Vietnamese heritage, including speaking only Vietnamese in the home. Unlike many Viet Kieu 'returnees', Donna's father, a US-trained flight surgeon and chief medical officer for the South Vietnamese Air Force, was supportive and encouraged her decision to seek work in Vietnam.

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[50] For additional discussion about Vietnamese diasporic politics, see Dorais (Summer 2010); Aguilar-San Juan (2009).

> My dad, ever since I was in grad school, would ask me, 'Why don't you think about going to Vietnam?' … So in May 2006, I decided I would move to Vietnam, but I decided I would not move there without a job, and I'm not going to be an English teacher – I wanted to make a meaningful contribution. I sent my resume to a cousin [who has a lot of international contacts in the INGO world], asking her to send it out to all her contacts. She sent it out to all her other contacts, and two weeks later, I get an email from the Executive Director [of the INGO I eventually got hired at] and he emailed me just two sentences: "Dear Donna, are you available to move to Vietnam immediately? If yes, please get in touch and we'll talk."

Donna and her father are rare exceptions to the predominant pattern of parental resistance to long-term settlement for careers in Vietnam amongst the South Vietnamese post-1975 refugees in the US. In many respects, Donna feels that her 'return' was a contribution to a country her parents had to abandon.

Many younger Viet Kieu who had less direct memories of the Vietnam War were more inclined to override their parents' resistance to them going back to work in Vietnam, and if they had to return, Ho Chi Minh City in the South was more acceptable for many refugee parents than a return to the North because of how the two country partitions embodied ideologies during wartime. Though the long-term residential decision was discouraged by US family members, short visits with extended relatives was more accepted by the anti-communist leaning first generation and eventually family members became acclimated to the Viet Kieu decision to return or gave up protesting the decision.

In search of culture

Nam said that he came back "to improve [his] Vietnamese and also to learn about Vietnamese culture." He sought an idealized version of going back to "Vietnam" – his birthplace – looking for cultural immersion and ethnic replenishment.

> I came to Vietnam [in 2007] to improve my Vietnamese and also to learn about my Vietnamese culture. I had been on prior vacation here and I enjoyed the two times I'd been here. These vacations were five years ago, in 2005. I traveled quite a bit in college and a few years after college – South America, Central Europe.
>
> The first year, I didn't believe I had satisfied that purpose. For instance, learning Vietnamese did not happen because I did not have time. Even a social life, in my first five months, work just engrossed me. Yeah, I thought I was working more than I was in NYC. I was working 7 days per week. This was good and bad.

What started as the search for "one's roots" may have motivated the diasporic return at some critical stages of the return journey, yet that purpose often became submerged in day to day concerns once in Vietnam. Three years after going to Vietnam, Nam felt as though he had not yet met his goal of speaking Vietnamese more fluently or learning more about the culture: he had failed to meet a broad network of local Vietnamese individuals his age and his work hours did not give him sufficient time to enroll in a language class. When he eventually did meet more Vietnamese people his age through his elite gym membership, it was a rather exclusive and class homogeneous group of young Vietnamese professionals, including local Vietnamese who had been educated in the US and who could comfortably switch back and forth between English and Vietnamese. Others reported similar problems. My-Anh had gone to Vietnam in the years 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005 for three to four week stretches at a time and her Vietnamese language was elementary. Once she was in Vietnam, she stated that "I [had] been meaning to improve my language skills better, but I just don't have the time to get the tutoring [while working here]."

Nam and My-Anh were not alone. Many of my interviewees claimed the return was prompted by a desire to "get back in touch with their roots" and in order to pragmatically do this, they first looked for work in Vietnam. Michael, age 39, like the majority of others in this study, came back to Vietnam as a Viet Kieu to seek out his roots and reunite with the culture that he left behind at 7 years old to migrate with his family to the US East Coast.

> There has always been a part of me that has wanted to travel, but there was always a part of me that wanted to come back to Vietnam to seek out my roots and reunite with the culture… I still have memories of my childhood up to 7 years old in Vietnam. I have always wanted to come back and reconnect with those memories. It's always been with me. So when I had the opportunity to work here, I jumped at it (Interviewed Dec 2010 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam).

However, like in Nam's case, getting in touch with one's figurative roots became displaced by daily concerns of living in Vietnam. In Michael's case, Western expatriate enclaves and social groups was easier and allow him to avoid revisiting the political history of the country.

Productive Contribution

The 'contribution to the homeland' narrative served the purpose of justifying the migration to Vietnam to family members who discourage the Viet Kieu from establishing a long-term residence in the ancestral homeland. Making a contribution is a significant feature of career satisfaction, and for the experiences of the Viet Kieu, a salient factor in making the decision to 'return' to Vietnam.[51] Isolating the "contributions" narrative from

[51] In a news story a foreign hiring manager suggested that "although salaries [in Vietnam] tend to be lower … many young Vietnamese Americans are inspired to be a part of their adopted country's development … in the U.S., they are one of many, like little wheels in a big machine,

the Viet Kieu motivations for their diasporic 'return' to Vietnam adds a discursive dimension to previous studies of diasporic philanthropy, often but not always written about through the lens of remittances sent from abroad, social and business entrepreneurship, and national development.[52] The possibility of contributing to Vietnam as a noble working professional from within the diaspora separates them from those who make a less productive contribution to Vietnam, hence, enforcing moral boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate motives for asserting their belonging to Vietnam, as I discuss further in Chapter 4.[53] Hang, a Viet Kieu age 25, was critical of Viet Kieu who went 'back' to Vietnam to get in touch with their roots yet did little to accomplish their stated goal. Hang complained about how many people say they are coming back to get in touch with their roots, but "they don't really mean it, a lot of people just hang out in the English speaking expat community and don't really make an active attempt to make local ties that are lasting, beyond just the nightlife."

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but in Vietnam, they can really help a company or partner or field to develop and expand" (*LA Times* 24 Nov 2008).

[52] For a broadened discussion on Vietnamese American diasporic philanthropy, see the work of Sidel, Mark. "Vietnamese American Diaspora Philanthropy in Vietnam." In *The Philanthropic Initiative, Inc. and The Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University*. Cambride, MA, 2007 and Truong thi Kim Chuyen, Ivan Small & Diep Vuong. "Diasporic Giving: An Agent of Change in Asia Pacific Communities? Vietnam." (2008).

[53] Though the Western expatriates who were not Viet Kieu also reported wanting to make a contribution to Vietnam, their motivations on aggregate were not layered in these complex embedded networks of family, the political history of the Vietnam War and family separation, and a sense of diasporic nostalgia and longing for the homeland that was never theirs. For instance, Barnie, whose father was a veteran of the Vietnam War, also does not have family ties, even though he said that he came to Vietnam in part because of his father's war-time connection to the place.

Viet Kieu working in the INGO sector can help shed light on this contributions narrative. In 2010, I observed two Viet Kieu "development managers" in Ho Chi Minh City, their work entailed leading a fundraising team and writing grants to major donors, such as the World Bank and Atlantic Philanthropies.[54] My-Anh stated: "I wanted to come back to Vietnam in some way, shape or form after my visits. Coming back to Vietnam (as opposed to elsewhere in Asia, like China) was relevant for me as a career path since I wanted to do NGO work. I applied to get a PhD in social sciences, but didn't get into a program, so I came to Vietnam wanting one year of experience on the ground, but I really like NGO work and I wasn't convinced that a PhD was what I wanted to do anymore so I just stayed here out of interest."

Prior to this, My-Anh was working for a human rights advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C., but the pay did not go as far as her take home earnings in her current job in Ho Chi Minh City. My-Anh felt as though she could contribute more in her job in Vietnam, and career advancement came quick especially in Vietnam's INGO sector. My-Anh, age 32, had been born and raised in a suburb of a Midwestern metropolis without many Vietnamese immigrants around: "I didn't have any Vietnamese friends until I participated in a summer intensive language program offered at the university."

Many Viet Kieu commented on their desire to make a contribution – towards loftier achievements such as through large-scale NGO poverty alleviation programs or by investing in entrepreneurial ventures and on a smaller, individual scale such as supporting

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[54] At the time, most of my INGO interviewees, both Viet Kieu and non-Viet Kieu, were involved in the Alice in Wonderland themed charity banquet that charged US$90 per ticket. Many of my corporate interviewees were attendees, as this was an event to be seen at.

local extended relatives through monetary gifts and mentoring cousins in English language classes. This altruistic sense of wanting to make a contribution to Vietnam's social or economic development – more often worded in economic than in political/democratic transformative terms – was expressed by both business, arts/entertainment, and nongovernmental organization staff.

The US Consul General, An T. Le, age 56, a first generation Viet Kieu, wanted to encourage social and cultural engagement, rather than disengagement with Vietnam, the message of segments of the anti-Communist Overseas Vietnamese community. Le encouraged anti-Communist protestors who want to overthrow the Communist regime to let go of past hostilities, and to consider other activities such as INGO work, helping Vietnamese youths, and the South Vietnamese military veterans who are still here in Vietnam, with ageing and health related concerns.

Jim, a Viet Kieu age 34, said that his motivation for seeking employment in Vietnam was two-fold: one the one hand, he picked Vietnam for "personal growth" to become more "worldly" and on the other hand, he wanted to "aid in the development of Vietnam as a country."[55] Jim made an initial return trip to Vietnam in 2004 and interviewed for jobs to "test his marketability" in Ho Chi Minh City. He was born in Vietnam and left at age 10, placing him in the 1.5 generation. At the start of 2007, after Jim had completed his MBA, he accepted an investment banking position for a Japanese multinational corporate hedge fund. As someone who was single with no dependents,

[55] One colleague who read this data section asked whether the Viet Kieu contributions narrative represents a form of Western imperialism of Viet Kieu believing that they are swooping in from abroad to alleviate or "save" some of Vietnam's third world developing country problems. This was an interesting question to raise, but not one that I had initially been prepared to address using the current data.

Jim was ready to further his finance career abroad, and his compensation did not take a terrible dip, either: Jim was one of the top earning Viet Kieu in my study, working in finance, which, at the time, commanded a base starting salary of 80 to 90 percent of what his entry-level US for investment banker counterparts were making, at US$100,000 per year or more. The language of identity and contributions was convenient, and blurred the benefits to self of the 'return'. Many Viet Kieu believe genuinely that they were going 'back' to Vietnam to help in Vietnam's social and economic development, firmly believing they play a role as a global bridge between economies and societies.

Migration motives were mixed and hard to disentangle. The help narratives and success/career advancement narratives were intertwined within the 'return' journey narratives of the Viet Kieu. This subset of Viet Kieu distinguished themselves from those who decided *not* to 'return' at all within the total possible 'returnee' population of 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu. They were mobile and relatively unattached risk-takers who were more inclined than others in their age group to return based upon existing familial and socio-cultural connections to Vietnam.

Conclusion: the Revolving Door of Viet Kieu Migration

So far, I have shown that some Viet Kieu individuals were highly motivated to 'return' to Vietnam and most were under the perception that working in Vietnam afforded quicker advancement in their ideal careers; add to that, the lower cost of living while being paid in US dollars allowed them to lead a comfortable, American consumer-

driven way of life. This was coupled with the stated desire to make a “contribution” to Vietnam.

During my initial follow up with interviewees in the one to two year period after I had exited the field, I discovered the fact that more than half of the Viet Kieu in my study had left Vietnam. They had a myriad of private reasons: one man in his late 30s decided that he wanted to return to the US to be closer to his aging Vietnamese parents on the West Coast. One female in her mid-30s left her finance job to work in Singapore. An artist left her job after four years in Ho Chi Minh City to begin a humanities graduate degree in the US. A German Viet Kieu in the securities trade got fed up with his job in Vietnam because of the lack of business transparency and returned to Germany, likely to re-enter the NGO sector he had left before going to Ho Chi Minh City. Given all the reasons for going and staying, why did many decide to leave Vietnam to go back to their country of citizenship?

Beyond personal reasons, changes in structure and mobility opportunities in the local labor market may have also played a role in the desire to exit Vietnam. By 2010, many companies had shifted their hiring strategy, from proactive recruitment of Viet Kieu, towards favoring young, local Vietnamese elites who had been educated in Western countries and had a clearer intention to stay in Vietnam. This latter group with overseas qualifications was gradually growing, and many cohorts were now returning home to assume managerial and leadership positions in Vietnam.

For younger second generation Viet Kieu who arrived in later cohorts of ‘returnees’, economic structural factors meant there were fewer opportunities. As a cost

saving strategy, many resorted to staying with their local Vietnamese extended relatives with whom their parents had kept in touch. These more recent arrivals came during a time when Vietnam's currency was depreciating relative to the US dollar, and many private companies were less willing to hire inexperienced new college graduates. Younger Viet Kieu with bachelor's degrees, particularly in non-technical fields, had to search longer for paid work outside the already saturated English teaching field. One Viet Kieu who had been working in the field of finance in Vietnam for the past decade had this to say:

> Ten to 15 years ago, there was a lack of people with English language skills. So you could get a job very easy in jobs that require English. But now, unless you want to be here for personal reasons, you can live on teaching English – backpackers do that. But beyond that, to find a job at an office, yeah … it's tough. You're competing with the local middle class now who have work experience, strong [English] language skills, and a strong commitment to staying here. So, if you want to just be here, and maybe make just US$1,000 per month – it's good, you can spend a few years here in Vietnam, and then go to graduate school [in the US] and get a *real* job.

Viet Kieu women who left Ho Chi Minh City to return to the US often cited gendered reasons: they felt discriminated against at the office and excluded in the dating scene by heterosexual white Western, local Vietnamese, and Viet Kieu men. At work, several mid-career women described being patronized by their male colleagues, excluded from the after hours "beer om" (hugging bars) business settings where crucial deals were made.

This chapter illustrated the various subtypes of economic motives for migration. It also presented "in search of roots" motives that prompted the search for economic options to pursue a career in Vietnam. For some Viet Kieu, diasporic "return" migration

to Vietnam was intermittent and cyclical. Less than a year after my fieldwork ended, some Viet Kieu left their jobs and lives in Ho Chi Minh City to return permanently to their homes in the US. Nam, who worked in marketing, and Tara, who worked as a manager, in spite of their respective career advancements in Vietnam, both eventually exited permanently to return to the US. Career satisfaction was not enough. The fantasy that the Viet Kieu created of Vietnam before they went back – a place where they hoped to gain cultural legitimacy as diasporic Vietnamese and to seek an authentic experience – was upended by the reality of working in Vietnam, riddled by everyday challenges of working in a developing country, including being overcharged for cab rides and prolonged exposure to motorbike pollution, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4. The Viet Kieu had the option to return to the US, having always kept a foot in the US. These transnational practices of keeping employment options available in many locations revealed that going to Vietnam for individuals like Nam and Tara were not merely about going to the "homeland" (*que huong*) but about constructing a transnational sense of belonging.

The act of going to Vietnam and then leaving to return to the US constructed, reinforced, or emphasized to them what it meant to be American for these Viet Kieu. Sometimes, this occurred through alienation from other Vietnamese and at other times, it was refashioned through solidarities experienced with fellow Americans, both Viet Kieu and non-Vietnamese descendants. The Viet Kieu were also economically posited as an intermediary labor force that was gradually being replaced by local elites who sent their children to study abroad in Western countries – these Vietnamese were increasingly learning English, obtaining bachelors and postgraduate credentials, and becoming key

players in Vietnam's integration into the global economy. The idealized return experience did not match the everyday realities of being Viet Kieu in Saigon.

The Viet Kieu in my study constitute a generation of cosmopolitan individuals who, through dense networks and interconnections with each other and others in both home and host, sought out high skilled work opportunities in Vietnam. These motives for going to and remaining as permanent migrants in Vietnam cannot fully be captured through merely the lens of work opportunities. In subsequent chapters, I clarify the negotiation of identity in the social lives of the Viet Kieu within expatriate networks and extended family relationships, and explore aspects of their social and cultural ambivalence towards their diasporic homeland.

CHAPTER 4

Social Boundaries in Expatriate Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Although the expatriate community often seems isolated from the life of the city, many Viet Kieu (Overseas Vietnamese) in this study retain links and networks outside the circumference of a perceived expatriate bubble. Early in my fieldwork, I began to hear parts of Ho Chi Minh City be referred to as an "expat bubble," both as a physical and social metaphor of situated belonging, though in truth, "expatriate communities" and "expatriate networks" conjured a closer image of the permeability of cultural membership and spaces of flows. Some Viet Kieu referred to the many new luxury residential high-rises, bars and restaurants that catered to foreigners, tourists, and local elites as "expat" spaces. Bars and restaurants were far too expensive for locals, averaging between US$10 and US$40 per meal.

In this chapter, I argue that *where* the Viet Kieu lived and *who* they interacted revealed their social construction of identity as fitting "in between" and being ambivalent about their belonging to multiple social worlds between local and 'expat' communities within Ho Chi Minh City. The Viet Kieu constructed boundaries of inclusion and exclusion through their own impression management in public and within Viet Kieu social groups. Many Viet Kieu welcomed Americans while excluding local Vietnamese from their social activities. Issues surrounding gendered moral behavior in public, belonging, and authentic claims to doing "productive" work in Vietnam formed the basis

for drawing attention to differences within the Viet Kieu community, between the Viet Kieu and local elites, and between the Viet Kieu and other Western expatriates in Ho Chi Minh City.

Residential decisions at various stages of their long-term stay in Vietnam had consequences for how the Viet Kieu "entered" the expatriate world. Over time, they chose to live in expatriate residential enclaves and mixed areas, rather than in local middle class Vietnamese districts and neighborhoods. Taken together, this ethnographic data about the Viet Kieu revealed how the Viet Kieu as Western expatriates and skilled 'return' migrants negotiated their sense of identity and belonging within the the social and physical spaces of globalizing Ho Chi Minh City.

Expatriate Ho Chi Minh City

Expatriate employment and social life was concentrated in District 1 and to some extent, District 3, with residences popping up in the form of new high rises in Binh Thanh district and expatriate mega houses in District 2/Thao Dien that was formerly part of the urban edge (see Harms, 2011), and Saigon South/District 7. Though the Saigon metropolis was vast with a population of 9 million officially registered and 11 million unofficially, the number of cafes, bars, and restaurants that expatriates frequented was limited. It was commonplace to encounter people I have previously interviewed as I wandered the downtown coffee shops and restaurants.

Figure 4.1: *Ho Chi Minh City, D1 and D3, where many expatriates reside.*

A handful of Viet Kieu, mostly newer entrants to Vietnam, described expatriate Saigon as feeling so small, some likened being in Ho Chi Minh City as a foreigner to it "feeling like college all over again" – with the parties, socializing, and frequent encounters throughout the workday in bustling District 1. Gossip and social networks were dense and inner twined, such that one British national at a major INGO said that there's a "big fish, small pond mentality in Saigon –it's so much reliant upon who you know – almost everyone you meet has an indirect connection to your job working in business development."

Socializing within the expat community was initially exciting for one Viet Kieu because a fresh crop of new expatriates was constantly entering and leaving Ho Chi Minh City, but it was emotionally exhausting for those who invested in their friendships with those who were there for a shorter period of time than them. Due to the high turnover within the expatriate population, there were frequent social gatherings, birthday parties, farewell parties, and welcoming parties of people visiting from the US; those who remained in Ho Chi Minh City for longer periods of time often became more closed off to meeting newer people and sought more stable and fewer friendships, rather than forging newer and more dispersed friendships.

The expatriate scene had a lot to offer newcomers, including frequent gatherings for Western expatriates, mostly those who were young and unattached singles who could opt in whenever they felt the need to be around others like themselves. Among my informants, it was not uncommon for single and unattached individuals to feel the need to go out on the town every night, coming home at bar closing time, and spending more money on liquor than they had anticipated, sometimes for the first six to twelve months living in the expatriate bubble.

Rising Inequality in Ho Chi Minh City

Money and access to a foreign passport afforded many the ability to consume in different spaces from local middle class Vietnamese. This portrait of foreigner life was similar to other highly unequal urban metropoles in the Global South: expatriates could hire live-in nannies to care for their children, full-time maids from the countryside villages, hire private drivers (since the rich do not drive their own cars), have high quality

suit tailors, such as the one made for the Vietnamese Prime Minister, and send their children to the Saigon International School.

Particularly within the goods and services sector catering to foreigners, the global wage gap seemed to deter local Vietnamese who do not speak fluent English and who did not have much money from patronizing expatriate bars, nightclubs, and restaurants on their civil servant income. This was most notable within the cosmopolitan spaces of downtown Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Quan Nhat, or District 1. Ho Chi Minh City was a sprawling metropolis with a borderland for different residents shaped by economics, culture, and immigration status. Among Vietnamese nationals, Saigonese residents include rural migrants who live on the outskirts of town or crowd into shared multiple family households in the inner city. These individuals may not have all the necessary paperwork within the *ho khau* household registration system (which some argue is on par with the levels of mobility restrictiveness as China) that grants them the necessary legal protections. At the other end of the socioeconomic continuum were high-skilled migrants who occupy the skyscraper office towers and residential 5-star high-rises in downtown/District 1 (referred to also as Saigon), Saigon South/District 7, and the new urban developments in District 2. Within District 1, there was a clearly defined tourist and backpacker community known as Pham Ngu Lao, in Ho Chi Minh City, where overseas tourists go to find travel information or to find low-budget accommodation.

Within Ho Chi Minh City, where high-rise edifices and makeshift, tin, and thatched roof shantytowns exist side by side, such as in Binh Thanh District, income segregation occurs not just in terms of the architecture of neighborhoods, but also through the limited social exposure individuals have to people outside their income and nationality.

Metaphorically speaking, the social walls of the city were in some ways harder to surmount than the physical walls that fortify the premiere high-rises that dot the cityscape.[56] Local Vietnamese I spoke with who lived in District 10, which borders District 1, based on the French colonial district numbering system, would seldom venture into the central business area of District 1, due to their perception that they would not be able to afford the cost of food at the indoor, air conditioned restaurants, bars, and cafes that cater to foreigners and the local elites. A couple who were both schoolteachers in District 10, for instance, earning average civil servant incomes, had not gone to the commercial and cosmopolitan parts of District 1 in over a decade, and their most recent trip was only to accompany their Viet Kieu visiting relatives. Likewise, there were foreigners, expatriates included, who would not venture into District 10's outdoor fish and vegetable wet markets or consume the bountiful and cheaper street vendor food due to concerns about food-born illnesses, handling of food, or sanitation.

The growing inequality in Greater Ho Chi Minh City reflected growth at both ends of the socioeconomic continuum: regional migration, including the influx of poorer countryside migrants who live undocumented in the city on the one hand and the arrival

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[56] For a discussion of fortified enclaves and urban segregation in the developing country context, see Chapter 6 of Teresa Caldeira's *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in Sao Paolo*. University of California Press, 2001.

of professional including multinational expatriates on the other hand. Motorbike drivers, who stood on each corner waiting for customers, earned US$2 dollars per day (or $60 per month). Multinational workers might earn US$3,000 per month, while the very affluent children of Hanoi nouveau riche families had villas in Ho Chi Minh City and attended shopping excursions in Singapore to purchase US$2,000 handbags.[57] This inequality formed the backdrop for understanding how spatial living arrangements shaped the many-stranded social worlds that Viet Kieu straddled as part of a bi-cultural globalized workforce.

Daily Viet Kieu and "Passing" as Locals

The Viet Kieu strategies for mitigating the daily challenges of living in Vietnam included trying to emphasize how 'Vietnamese' the Viet Kieu were and how unlike other foreigners they were. The Viet Kieu who were living in Ho Chi Minh City frequently cited daily complaints also mentioned by many tourists and foreigners. These included being overcharged for retail items at corner vendors and taxi cab rides, air pollution, being cut in front of while standing in lines, and seasonal flooding during monsoon rainy season.[58] For instance, Nam reported:

> After 11 months here, I wanted to quit and leave Vietnam. I really wanted to go back to America permanently, because little things added up. Challenges such as driving – you know, it's crazy driving. People cut you

[57] Elsewhere, I talk about rent prices, which were roughly between US$200 (a room rental with full laundry and cleaning service), US $650 for luxury two bedroom in a highrise, to US$3,000 for a house in a secluded neighborhood of mostly foreigners. There was a lot of variation in rental prices.

[58] Broader institutional challenges such as political censorship and a lack of business and government transparency also factored into daily challenges.

> off.
>
> The heat, there's only two seasons, wet or not wet. It's always hot. Garbage trucks backing up into you.
>
> Things like cutting in line – you're at a movie theater, and all of a sudden, four people cut in line. In America, there's no cutting in line. Spitting on the ground … I was about to leave, and I said, let's take a break and go somewhere outside of Saigon, such as Singapore. Maybe I just missed the "civilized world." There's no trash, so maybe I just needed a sterile environment. That gave me a break and I was able to continue on. I also missed my family [in the US] as well. (Nam, Viet Kieu, age 39)

Non-Viet Kieu reported these issues as part of their daily frustrations living as expats in Saigon. For Nam, his weekend trips to Singapore were a means to cope with the challenges of developing country problems in Vietnam. Thi complained that she got frustrated with constantly having to be "on her guard" with regard to haggling prices for items such as clothing and motorbike *xe om* rides (motorbike cabbies for hire), out of fear for being overcharged. Thi complained that being in Vietnam made her anxious and made her *du qua*, which translates loosely to "very hard". The more cautious, risk adverse Viet Kieu stopped riding motorbikes and decided to only ride taxicabs to get around Ho Chi Minh City, to minimize their exposure to motorbike accidents.[59] Flooding near the Binh Thanh District luxury high-rises could cause traffic delays getting to and from places, a result of an urban sewer system in disrepair that was unable to handle monsoon rains during Southeast Asia's tropical wet season. Flooding meant that

[59] Vietnam has a very high traffic death toll rate, though just exactly how many traffic-related deaths there are is difficult to know as reliable data remains scarce. The Ministry of Public Security reported over 11,000 deaths in 2010; but the Ministry of Health registry – usually collected via the hospital system — lists 15,464 deaths. These numbers may grossly understate the extent of the problem. Some believe that official data underestimates the number of traffic deaths by as many as 30%. *The Diplomat*, 28 Aug 2012. Online at http://thediplomat.com/2012/08/28/traffic-vietnams-silent-killer/.

few could leave their apartments without car and motorbike failure, but this was a part of the reality of living in a less developed country.

Beyond their daily sources of frustration from living in Vietnam, for many Viet Kieu, trying to "pass" as a local Vietnamese individual factored into everyday decisions about how to carry one self and how to dress so that they would not stick out too much -- a common foreigner challenge. In order to protect themselves from being perceived as foreign, the Viet Kieu tried their best to assume Vietnamese local customs and characteristics, even trying to minimize physical differences that called their identity into question. Viet Kieu having their Vietnamese authenticity being called into question had the potential to become a source of anxiety, and frequently, became a motivating factor in trying to blend in or pass as locals. Their attempts to blend in and "pass" for locals challenges the attention drawn by locals to perceived differences mentioned between overseas and non-overseas Vietnamese corporeality (Carruthers, 2002), in which the idea of the Viet Kieu as being plumper than domestic Vietnamese was deployed by locals as a physical sign of moral decay and of an assimilation to Western physiques and lifestyles (Carruthers, 2002; Mandy Thomas, 1999: 31).

Nam tried to blend in as a local Vietnamese man to avoid getting overcharged at tourist/Westerner (nguoi tay) prices:

> Sometimes I try to be Vietnamese and speak Vietnamese with my best Vietnamese accent. You can't have a backpack, you have to wear jeans or long pants, not in shorts – and then maybe you can get away with it.

Though cargo pants and a backpack can be a giveaway that one does not quite belong, other physical indicators included posture, facial expressions, hand and skin tone, skincare and hair care, and hand gestures. The Viet Kieu who seemed to "pass" as locals not only spoke Vietnamese fluently; they also blended in with clothing and a myriad of physical attributes that translated into "body capital" Carruthers (2002) – thereby upping one's perceived sense of accumulation of local and national belonging in Vietnam. Some Viet Kieu assimilated into the Vietnamese wardrobe: Sue, a Viet Kieu age 26, wore her long straight hair down, wire framed eyeglasses, a collared shirt, dark pants, sandals, and carried a schoolgirl knapsack. She looked no different from other women her age at the coffeeshop where we met for the first time – in fact, I did not initially recognize her as being a Viet Kieu, biased by my own prior assumptions about how Viet Kieu carried themselves. Manh, a Viet Kieu age 28, wore dark polyester slacks (quan tay), rubber flip flop sandals (dep), and a collar shirt (ao xe mi), which his Viet Kieu peers teased him about, accusing him of dressing like a local villager. Only his perfect, unaccented English, which he spoke with his fellow Viet Kieu friends gave his true identity away. The convergence of Western style dress between local Vietnamese and the Viet Kieu as Vietnam's economy became more open and restructured made it harder for many on the street to pick out Viet Kieu from other local Vietnamese, and as the middle class in Vietnam began to accumulate and spend more money on material goods, name brand clothing, cell phones, watches, purses or wallets, and motorbikes were no longer a reliable way to spot these familiar 'foreigners' from the locals.

Physical Space

Living in the Hem (Alleyways)

Many of the Viet Kieu who were attracted to 'return' to Vietnam for career advancement rather than for kinship networks had to decide whether they would live with or nearby extended relatives during their initial period of settlement. It was considered an insult to local family if they did not have a ready excuse for not living with family. Many Viet Kieu had extended family, but decide not to live with their extended relatives when they returned to Ho Chi Minh City, even if their relatives had the space. Many stated that they lived on their own in to avoid the family restrictions imposed upon them, especially for females (discussed in-depth in Chapter 5). Few elected to live with their local Vietnamese relatives because of the perceived pressure to obey local Vietnamese customs, the lack of private space, lack of doors that lock, or lack of access to modern flushing toilets – all amenities that existed in the new high rises and expatriate enclaves.

Many Viet Kieu lived apart from their relatives in the local neighborhoods and alleyways of Ho Chi Minh City called the "*hem*," the densely populated residential alleyways off major streets, renting a room or apartment next to other Vietnamese families and storefronts. Living in the bustling *hem* alleyways offered a different way of living within more outwardly authentic Vietnamese neighborhoods: proximity to open-air fresh fish and meat markets which opened before sunrise and contributed to the early morning raucous, streetfood vendors (which were banned in the Old Quarter of Hanoi), the ubiquitous sounds of motorbike horns honking at missed bike accidents, and the bustling chatter of gossiping neighbors who monitored the whereabouts of their neighbors' private affairs. This was the ground floor view of local city life in Vietnam, dotted by neighborhoods that were gradually being transformed by signs of cultural and

economic globalization, including the outmigration of family members who later remit money to contribute to ad hoc home upgrades and building improvements.

Some who rented in the *hem* alleyways encountered complicated landlord relations, partly due to the lack of formal tenant rights and rental agreements. Sue, who went by her Vietnamese name Huong at work, was program director of a U.S.-based education program, and lived in a rented room with a Vietnamese family. Sue enjoyed buying food from the street vendors and did not stay out too late because her local Vietnamese homestay family landlords would need to wake up late at night to open the outside gate and the inside door padlocks to let her in "after hours". Sue lived in an alleyway known for its rentals for foreign study abroad students. Renting there meant having a private bathroom and maid cleaning service at US $230 per month with electricity, considerably less than expatriate housing.

But an incident turned Sue away from ever living in the *hem* alleyways again. After an extended "home leave" to visit her family in the US, Sue returned to find a stranger sleeping in her bed while she was away. Sue's Vietnamese landlord, whom she had grown to trust, charged double rent, subletting to a new tenant while she was away. Technically speaking, this was not illegal, as there were no clearly defined or enforced rental agreements. Disenchanted with the living arrangement, Sue left her homestay to live in a private apartment rental with another Viet Kieu friend.

Escape to the High-rises

While the Vietnamese government had hoped that the Viet Kieu would help bridge foreigner and local markets, cultural differences, even amongst those who

possessed high levels of language fluency and awareness of Vietnamese customs, created the context for many to seek expatriate friendly areas which provided the modern conveniences of a more developed country. This included the high-rises, which were vastly different from the hem alleyways. The residential decision was just one of many other facets of the Viet Kieu living more permanently in Saigon: they sought out expatriate community for belonging and camaraderie, setting the stage for unanticipated manifestations of Viet Kieu 'returnee' identity politics.

Most Viet Kieu who had secured jobs prior to arriving went straight into the highrises or exclusive home rentals in secluded villas and neighborhoods. Nevertheless, some Viet Kieu who tried life in the *hem* alleyway living situations opted to move to the high-rises for security, for respite from the chaos of living in Ho Chi Minh City, for cleanliness and amenities, and, for some, for privacy from obtrusive local Vietnamese family. For instance, Thi, who now lived at the Jasmine Towers,[60] had initially moved to District 3 in a *hem* at the beginning of her time living in Vietnam. Thi's rental situation frequently involved unplanned power outages, noisy and gossipy neighbors, and local relatives frequently coming by to ask for favors. Family favors included babysitting younger cousins; bigger favors included asking for money. When she moved to the newly built Jasmine Tower high-rises, relatives could no longer casually drop by because security guards and video cameras screened guests. Viet Kieu who worked in corporate law, in particular, reported that stressful jobs made the serenity and security of living in the high-rise a crucial aspect of retention in Vietnam.

[60] This is a fictitious name. I resided in the towers to gain access to individuals on the extreme end of the continuum of those who chose to residentially seclude themselves in the highrises.

Residential decisions for the Viet Kieu had consequences for everyday life in Ho Chi Minh City. Residential decisions impacted the subsequent ways that Viet Kieu cultivated stronger relationships and networks with English speaking Western expats than with local Vietnamese. [61] In *AsiaLifeHCMC*, one of the most circulated expat magazines in Ho Chi Minh City, a writer on strategies for expatriate survival told readers "where you live and who you socialize with is often closely associated with similar cultural backgrounds and employment" (Davis, 2011: 26). While many Viet Kieu criticized insular expatriate behavior, most found more camaraderie with English-speaking expatriates from North American, Europe, and Australia than with local Vietnamese peers.

Many Viet Kieu worked long hours, including corporate attorneys, fundraising development managers, investment bankers, and start-up entrepreneurs. Many chose to live in newly built high rise apartments or in expatriate priced housing, some which cost US$550 to 650 for modest amenities, and some which could cost their companies upwards of $2,500 per month to rent, equivalent to the cost of renting an apartment in a major US rental market. The work hours and residential location amongst pockets of expatriate families made the initially stated goal of "exploring one's roots" less attainable

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[61] Though I don't adopt a global comparative approach, it is worth noting that context matters for how residentially segregated returnees in other diasporic populations might live. For instance, Viet Kieu 'returnees' seem to hold substantially more social status in Vietnam than Japanese Brazilian 'returnees' in Japan. In both cases, a visible amount of residential segregation existed. A good number of Japanese Brazilians lived in apartments where a notable portion of the residents were other Nikkeijin. According to a recent research survey, 44.3 percent of the Japanese Brazilians report that they have almost no social contact with the Japanese and 15.8 percent have only minimal contact. Only 14.5 percent have active relationships with the Japanese (Kitagawa, 1996 cited in Tsuda, 2003, in Lesser, ed.: 124).

during the initial year of relocating in Vietnam, and made “boundary crossing activities” (Au and Fukuda, 2002) outside of work less likely to occur.

The residential decision of where to live as a Viet Kieu separated those who lived in expatriate friendly high rises from those who decided to live in the “hem”. The Viet Kieu who had multinational corporate jobs in my study disproportionately chose the high-rise apartments or private homes in the expatriate friendly districts and suburbs, such as Saigon South – three Viet Kieu actually lived in penthouse suites in premiere hotels. One real estate informant told me he had rented out more than 60 percent of their units to foreign expatriates, presumably those who earned their salary in foreign currency. Here, Westerners, including Viet Kieu, were preferred as residents to so-called “local” renters. There were palm tree lined cobblestone driveways, underground automobile and motorbike parking with 24-hour surveillance, mechanically operated elevators, air conditioning, fresh flowers in the lobby, doormen and front desk staff, and taxi cab stands. The majority of these high-rise dwellers employed domestic workers or live-in nannies to care for their children. The lobby restaurant, which listed drink and meal prices that were at least double the cost of meals that locals would pay at less cosmopolitan venues, connected directly to a newly built luxury outdoor pool. While this snapshot of high rise living resembled the manicured high rises in other developing countries such as Brazil, India, China, the high rise real estate construction boom occurred more recently in Vietnam, where both foreign and domestic real estate investment projects skyrocketed after Vietnam’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2007.

But not everyone who lived in a high rise desired to remain there. On one occasion, Vincent, a Viet Kieu age 32, who lived at the Jasmine Towers, remarked that he disliked living in the high-rises because he paid for expensive food in the restaurant and 24-hour convenience store which catered to Westerners in the lobby, and on the whole, he was eager to move out of the high-rises, but did not actually put much effort into leaving. Also, there did not appear to be cases of Viet Kieu moving from a high rise back to a hem, suggesting that it was more likely that Viet Kieu would move to the high rises rather than to the hem after living in Vietnam for an extended period of time.

Nevertheless, insularity had its perks. On any typical work day in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Thi, age 30, wakes up beside her partner, Timmy, 32, at 7:00am, on 6 hours of sleep and a dull hangover from the previous night's work related after hours event, where wine and canopes were involved. Heavy, high-end alcohol consumption in the Vietnam "after hours" work context was something I observed amongst more than half the Viet Kieu. Hoang (2011 and 2013) names heavy alcohol consumption and the frequenting of hostess bars as sites for examining practices of masculinity whereby, coincidentally, many of Vietnam's informal negotiations and client relationships can be cultivated.

Both Thi and Timmy are Viet Kieu: Thi was born in a refugee camp and Timmy was born in Canada. Thi barely has time for breakfast, leaves instructions for the full-time elderly maid on which of her tailored suits to launder and iron, and gets picked up by her private driver at 7:30am, when many Vietnamese are also on their way to work because of the tropical humidity and heat setting in by mid-morning. They live in the 5-star luxury Jasmine Tower high rise apartments lined with palm trees and cobblestone

streets; the complex has an indoor gym and an outdoor swimming pool and is located one mile from her downtown Ho Chi Minh City high rise office complex. After work, Thi will attend one of the many different Chamber of Commerce monthly mixers to bring in new clients, and will go home to her partner close to 9:00pm.

Only a small number of Viet Kieu businessmen and women had housing packages, expatriate relocation assistance, and subsidies provided for them. Michael, a Viet Kieu age 42, Chief Financial Officer of a historical hotel purchased in recent years by a major multi-national hotel chain. Michael lived with his spouse and small children in the suite of the hotel where he oversaw finance and banking operations. He and his family had maids, room service, easy access to taxi cabs, and all the other amenities of a luxurious star hotel. Michael stated:

> The transition has been pretty easy. We don't have to drive and we live in District 1 – we actually live here in the hotel. [Gestures] You see this dome here, above this hotel restaurant? That's where I live. The hotel is pretty nice, it's a two-bedroom suite, a lot of space. More than I anticipated.

Though Michael hoped to get back in touch with his roots, and he visited his cousin in Can Tho Province a few times at the start of his expatriate contract, his work hours constrained his ability to pursue those personal goals. In the first eight months that he relocated to work in Ho Chi Minh City, he worked until 8 or 9pm each night. His trailing spouse, who was not a Viet Kieu, stayed home to take care of their children, and found social connections with a group of women, mainly individuals who were in Vietnam trailing their expatriate husbands. These instances highlight the contradictions between motivations of 'return' and the reality of managing a corporate hotel in the interests of

foreign shareholders, which requires many hours and an adoption of a certain expatriate way of life.

Social Life

For many business Viet Kieu, social networks revolved around global ties of college alumni networks. Hue, a financial manager, indicated that she mainly socialized with individuals she met on the job, and apart from that, she socialized with individuals who were part of her US alumni MBA networks:

> My routine revolves around work. Most of my friends – locals and expats are from work. Other friends are from school networks – ivy league people. Not a really strong Harvard alumni group – but we have an MBA drinks network ... I meet people from Harvard and Stanford. We have similar work and academic backgrounds. My local friends introduce me to people who also study at the ivy leagues. I guess I mostly hang out with people who have similar academic backgrounds like I have. It's a lot easier and we have some common ground, we can talk about intellectual things.

Alumni groups were key to Viet Kieu lives, revealing the Viet Kieu strategies for career advancement abroad. Other top-tier colleges also had an emerging alumni presence in Ho Chi Minh City, such as Yale, UC Berkeley, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Washington, where informal dinner gatherings were frequently organized over email by Viet Kieu.

In Ho Chi Minh City, social gatherings of expatriates to train for marathons, organize charity balls, and to eat "daring" street food helped to build community, particularly for those undergoing culture shock in the initial first six months of living in a less developed country. I watched holiday parties, business networking mixers, dinner parties, bar social gatherings, nightclub dance parties, farewell dinners, welcome back to

town parties, shopping, job shadowing, and on vacations outside the city. In Ho Chi Minh City, anyone could find US holiday parties by inquiring within expatriate business and diplomatic networks: the American Chambers of Commerce or the US Consulate organized the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas activities for US citizens, though these require a steep cost of admission. Canadians could likewise meet other Canadians through the Canadian Chamber of Commerce Thanksgiving.

Ambivalent Belonging, Differentiated Foreignness

The Viet Kieu in this study imagined that going to Vietnam for long-term job opportunities would pose less challenges of integration than going to another country where they had less familial ties and cultural affinities. Instead, what they found was a sense of ambivalent and stratified belonging – caused by emotional and structural factors that had to do with legacies of refugee departure and the changing economic and racial order of Vietnamese local elites. Though many recognized that they were foreigners, they also differentiated "foreign behavior" amongst their own social groups of Viet Kieu. This led to a stratification of foreignness and degrees of belonging that were both asserted and assigned by members of the group to each other and socially constructed about those who were truly foreign: Western expatriates who had no cultural or familial ties to Vietnam.

Expat Gossip and Keeping Your Nose Clean

Some Viet Kieu avoided the expatriate social spaces or felt that being amongst English speaking expatriates for most of the time was not an 'authentic' means of being in Vietnam. Who accessed these cultural resources deemed as authentic varied, and this

had implications for interrogating the boundaries of who belonged and did not belong as 'returnees' and expatriates. One was a Viet Kieu attorney from Australia who declined an interview with me, despite an introduction from a close friend. He said his job as a corporate attorney was fairly demanding and that he preferred to remain low key. Although this Viet Kieu attorney's professional merit was praised by his expat co-workers, he kept to himself, and was integrated more heavily with Vietnamese locals.

The expatriate community was an intense social monitoring arena where gossip and rumors could spread rapidly, particularly negative news, yet many Viet Kieu remained integrated into these pockets of community to commiserate about everyday challenges. In a study of transnational gossip and social monitoring of men and women in the Mexican community, Dreby (2009) states that "whether a form of entertainment, information, or influence, the consequences of gossip can be either cooperative, in that gossip bolsters community members' sense of solidarity, or divisive, in that gossip may criticize those perceived to deviate from group norms" (Dreby, 2009: 35). As Dreby (2009) further noted, "On the one hand, through gossip individuals may learn to act in socially acceptable ways. On the other hand, the threat of gossip may curtail individuals' behaviors, working as an informal sanction against those who violate norms. Gossip may cause conflict for deviant individuals or families" (Dreby, 2009: 37).

Even though the numbers of restaurants, bars, and dance clubs in Ho Chi Minh City which catered to foreigners has proliferated, many Viet Kieu frequently ran into acquaintances and friends because preferences on where to go converged over time. This meant that those who cared about their reputation needed to "keep their noses clean",

according to one Viet Kieu woman who chose not to attend the frequent gatherings of expat nightlife.

Social life and monitoring had an explicitly gendered aspect. Viet Kieu single men, some who reported juggling multiple dates, were quickly judged by other Viet Kieu women associates and friends. A Viet Kieu male said that he avoided the "typical" expatriate spaces in District 1 when he wanted to meet his female friends one on one because rumors quickly would spread: these spaces guaranteed he would bump into other members in his intimate Viet Kieu and Westerner circles. One 30-year old Viet Kieu woman declared that she chose not to go out much, and was deemed by friends as a "home body" who typically kept to herself and her family. She pointed to examples of other women who got drunk, "made out" with strangers, and engaged in "bad behavior" as reasons for why she did not want to be around expatriates outside of her required work time.

Maintaining a virtuous reputation did not go unnoticed. "In Saigon, everybody knows your business," a Viet Kieu investment banker told me, and hence, he liked to keep a very low profile. In the case of Viet Kieu, gossip promoted a sense of solidarity and identity by reaffirming their reasons for being in Vietnam (as distinct from ordinary foreigners) and fostered a sense of cultural divisiveness within Viet Kieu groups surrounding ideas about who was more legitimate as a diasporic 'returnee'. These moral claims about authenticity and belonging further constructed a boundary of legitimacy amongst and across Viet Kieu groups.

Making Categories

Moral judgments on why certain Viet Kieu were in Vietnam and how they led their daily life frequently came up in interviews. During casual conversations with Viet Kieu women, males were evaluated harshly for wanting to be in Vietnam because of the widespread stereotype that Viet Kieu men were "players."[62] Other Viet Kieu career women negatively judged non-Viet Kieu women who were not there to work or to make a contribution to Vietnam, but were there as trailing spouses.[63] My-Anh, a Viet Kieu female NGO manager, age 32, expressed an abiding resentment for a certain group of Western expatriate wives who got together, because she felt that they sat around sipping tea and eating cookies but did not contribute a lot during their time living in Vietnam. Viet Kieu women often made the distinction between females who were in Vietnam to tag along as expatriate wives of leisure and "career women" (a 1950s-esque framing of modern women) who were making a contribution to Vietnam. Thus, women who joined groups such as these expat wives clubs were deemed as Westernized spouses of expatriates who lived inside a 'bubble' in Ho Chi Minh City (implying they were not really living an authentic Vietnam experience), whereas expatriate working women in the

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[62] For a journalistic account of the Viet Kieu player phenomenon in the ancestral homeland, see "Vietnamese American women place strict rules on men returning to homeland" in San Jose Mercury News Online, 6 Nov 2011. http://www.mercurynews.com/business/ci_19275809.

[63] According to Wang (2013), in "Gender, Globalization, and Volunteer Work of Expatriate Wives in China," women's relocation to China for men's careers required them to withdraw from the workforce and become stay-at-home wives and mothers. This trend permeated amongst trailing spouses of expatriates I encountered, and the NGO sector frequently benefitted from their presence as volunteers – two American white women that I formally interviewed were hired on as permanent staff.

INGO and corporate sectors who had made an independent decision to come to Vietnam were seen as doing more important work.[64]

Viet Kieu at times referred to non-Viet Kieu Westerners who were not in "good jobs" in Ho Chi Minh City as "losers back home" (LBHs): "There's also a lot of people who wouldn't have been successful in the States but they are successful here," Tommy, a 32-year-old INGO Country Director, said. This statement reflects his perception of his own contributing role in Vietnam, as opposed to the Viet Kieu who were now coming to Vietnam and whom he saw as able to advance more rapidly in spite of their shortcomings, many of whom were mentioned in the previous chapter. There was a perception among younger Viet Kieu that white expatriates who frequented a certain bar named after a Vietnam War action film late at night were trolling for prostitutes or escorts, and were labeled "sexpats." These Viet Kieu felt that they, by contrast, were working professionals there to make a productive contribution to the country.

Authenticity and 'Going Native'

The boundary making activities through implied moral evaluations of the authenticity of one's peer group as more or less Vietnamese was more of a political statement about one's identity than the actual object of peer critiques. Three Viet Kieu women named the same Viet Kieu resident, whom I'll refer to as 'Rosie Ngo,' called "the least authentic Viet Kieu in Saigon" for frequently complaining about having to live in Vietnam, about how dirty the country was, about how she frequently got cheated by

[64] Wang (2013) writes about the logic of carework in volunteering at orphanages performed by Western expatriate housewives in China, focusing on first-world women who migrate into developing countries and engage with local dynamics of care through volunteer work.

unscrupulous cab drivers who take her for the run around, and so on. Many Viet Kieu described these daily frustrations, but Rosie voiced her opinion openly, rather than trying to seem as though she was blending in. Thu said that she "always felt bad after hanging out with Rosie", who was married to a white Western expatriate. Rosie and her husband both lived in one of the premiere high-rises, but while her husband loved his "elite" lifestyle, Rosie hated living in Vietnam, "barely able to speak the language even though she was a Viet Kieu" another critic remarked. Donna, age 32, said that she had met very few people in Vietnam who were like Rosie; "there isn't even a shred of 'Vietnameseness' in her body. Rosie was born in the US, raised there and was married to a white man. She didn't even come to Vietnam because she wanted to, it was her husband who brought her here." The desire to return to one's ancestral homeland was an important motivating factor for the interviewees mentioned in Chapter 3, hence, Rosie was a deviation from that sub-set.

After the widespread gossip circulating about Rosie's identity and authenticity, I tried to interview her. However, Rosie declined, stating that she was afraid that I, too, would judge and criticize her responses. These moral judgments about Rosie's authenticity illustrate the way many Viet Kieu held themselves and each other to high standards for living authentic lifestyles in Vietnam, however subjective that definition was. Several Viet Kieu had adopted the abbreviation TLV – "Then Leave Vietnam", in response to those who complained about being in Vietnam, Dina said: "If you always complain about Vietnam, then leave here. It's an emerging market, and people are poor. That's why there's still opportunities here."

Viet Kieu as Double Agent

One Viet Kieu woman, Tara, an artist age 26, felt she belonged more than other Viet Kieu who had recently gone back to Vietnam for work. Tara claimed that

> Vietnamese comes really naturally. You know, like [going to the bathroom without using] toilet paper … It takes practice [said in a really confident voice]. And like, you know, sleeping on a mat instead of a mattress. Little things like that. The best approach was just to kick it [here] – that was the most deep way you can take on a culture, just to chill in there and take it all in …Vietnamese local artists identify with me because I am similar aged, I am dating a local, I can speak Vietnamese really well, and I don't use toilet paper. I like playing double agent, I like being able to access that other place, which I know many foreigners can't access ... But even if you were a VK … My Viet Kieu close friend could just never access that. She just couldn't.

Tara's comments suggest the possibility that a Viet Kieu could "go native". Her narrative of authenticity of living like other Vietnamese helped her define her own identity of being Vietnamese American and emphasized the ability to access various spaces that her counterparts could not. These things matter because identity was bounded up in her ability to cross social and cultural boundaries that she saw as fixed between Viet Kieu, local Vietnamese, and white foreigners (of many nationalities). Her ability to play 'double agent' involved a delicate performance that she did not think all Viet Kieu were capable of doing. For Tara, her sense of belonging was about being able to "fit in" in multiple geographic settings as well as lifestyles.

By contrast, a different process of identity construction occurred in the reverse direction: for some Viet Kieu in my study, being in Vietnam revealed the salience of their American, not their hyphenated identities. This was different from Tara's construction of her identity as 'double agent'. Judy, a Viet Kieu, voiced a sense of cultural alienation and displacement as a 'returnee' in spite of having been born a Vietnamese national:

> Deep down, I have a lot of uncertainties because I don't share the same culture anymore. I understand it, but don't necessarily share the same point of views [as other Vietnamese]. I came back and I am a stranger in my homeland.

Judy spoke near perfect Vietnamese, having grown up in Vietnam up until migrating at age 14 to Orange County in the U.S. As a 1.5 generation Vietnamese American, however, she felt like a "stranger in [my] homeland" challenging the rosy expectation that growing up in a Vietnamese bi-cultural household would translate to cultural familiarity and would facilitate a smooth insertion into Vietnamese society. This instance of alienation during the diasporic return echoes previous research findings on other populations that sought belonging while abroad in the diasporic homeland, including the experience of Chinese American youths going to Beijing for cultural immersion (Louie, 2007), the experience of Korean Americans going to Seoul (Kim, 2007), and Japanese Americans in Tokyo (Yamashiro, 2011). While these experiences might be "transnational" instances of active ethnic and national identity re-negotiation, my ethnographic data reaffirmed that for many, morality, identity, and authentic claims to a territorial place still mattered among transnational, cosmopolitan migrant elites.

Did some believe the term Viet Kieu would some day become an irrelevant marker? A business Viet Kieu who had been living in Vietnam on and off for the past 17 years told me that he hoped that one day the term "Viet Kieu" would no longer be necessary because Vietnamese culture would begin to adapt to and incorporate these "familiar strangers" and just accept them as part of their own cultural fabric. However, illustrating his ambivalence about where home was, in his next sentence, he suggested that he still felt different as a Viet Kieu who has lived abroad and strongly identified as

Australian (or Western) and that he and his parents still considered Sydney, Australia, as their home.

Conclusion

In this chapter, many Viet Kieu redefined their sense of belonging while living in Vietnam – some with the consequence of staying close to Western expatriate enclaves through the residential, consumption, and social lifestyle decisions they made. Contradictions abounded: many Viet Kieu went abroad to Vietnam for personal and economic motives, only to find themselves in an evolving expatriate micro-cosm. Many Viet Kieu were ambivalent about their sense of belonging – among each other and their co-national expatriate peers – a reflection of their uneven juggling of “multiple social worlds” prior to their diasporic ‘return’ migration as Vietnamese Americans in the US.

Within the Viet Kieu social networks, those who came back to Vietnam to work for an NGO or to become entrepreneurs asserted a sense of greater legitimacy to belong than the trailing spouses whom some asserted did not “contribute” to Vietnam or male tourists who came back to find a wife or just for paid sex. For some Viet Kieu, everyday life in Ho Chi Minh City was one of recreating and actively seeking out American and other Westernized lifestyles, and spaces of belonging and commiserating as foreigners in Asia. However, some who were more culturally “in-between” tried living and or socializing in both environments, could comfortably navigate life inside and outside an imaginary expat community. For the Viet Kieu, who might be both expatriates and at times treated as “cultural insiders,” their social location within the expatriate physical and social spaces were fluid and a process of active renegotiation.

Diasporic ‘return’ migration to Ho Chi Minh City for Viet Kieu did not mean a smooth integration into the parental ancestral homeland – it was most aptly summarized as ambivalent. The Viet Kieu were ambivalent about their sense of belonging as diasporic ‘return’ migrants, and to cope with that ambiguity, they stayed mostly within the English-speaking cosmopolitan expatriate Ho Chi Minh City; some had one foot in broader Vietnamese society to which they were tied by ethnic ancestry and in most cases, extended family relations. The Viet Kieu were foreign yet also familiar in multifaceted ways as they began to establish social ties in Ho Chi Minh City. Daily life for the Viet Kieu ‘returnees’ in Ho Chi Minh City was marked by an ambivalent sense of belonging amongst both English-speaking expatriate and Vietnamese local communities – they were “in between”, forging pockets of communities with each other while actively re-negotiating their identity within expatriate communities and urban spaces.

CHAPTER 5

The Tensions of Money and Class in the Transnational Family[65]

The children of Viet Kieu in my study inhabited multiple social worlds: once settled in Ho Chi Minh City as diasporic returnees, many worked and socialized with different nationalities within cosmopolitan expatriate "bubbles", and during holidays and weekends, shared traditional Vietnamese family meals with their extended relatives either in Ho Chi Minh City or regionally in South and Central Vietnam. Many had experienced a similar dualism during their adolescence growing up in the US; as second generation youths, they had to negotiate private Vietnamese family obligations, while attending school and juggling other facets of public life in America (Zhou and Bankstown, III., 1998; Pyke and Dang, 2003). But once they arrived in Vietnam, competing family expectations magnified the tensions between individuality, emphasized by American society and the collectivism of Vietnamese family survival strategies after refugee resettlement. Vietnamese families were transformed by migration to the US, and new experiences created tensions over a Western emphasis on self-reliance and more egalitarian relationships within the family between older and younger family members and male and female. This was according to the more traditional Confucian models, formerly characterized by the assertion that the family is the fundamental unit of

[65] A more expanded version of this chapter appears in the author's article: Nguyen-Akbar, Mytoan, "The Tensions of Diasporic 'Return' Migration in the Transnational Family," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, April 2014, 43(20): 176-201.

Vietnamese society, which stresses family institutions and kinship networks as central to individuals' lives and the foundations for the entire society (Barbieri and Melanger, 2009: 10-11). The concept of filial piety, the respect owed to one's parents and ancestors, continued to be a central virtue instilled amongst Vietnamese American youths. Pyke (2000: 249) found in a study of both Korean and Vietnamese second generation youths that with regard to the issue of filial care, most respondents positively evaluated their family's collectivist commitment to care and expected to begin financially supporting their parents prior to their elderly years; others expected to live nearby them.

In many societies, traditional kinship ties act as a social welfare safety net in developing countries with weakened healthcare and social security programs (Haney, 2003). Haney suggests that "families in Vietnam have developed alternative strategies of elderly support in response to their changing environment, in keeping with firmly rooted values of elderly care by their immediate family. When still young, and presumably healthy enough, ageing parents follow or join their adult children moving out. For those who are too old or fragile to follow their migrant children and especially those left without co-residing children, intergenerational support takes the form of remittances" (Barbieri and Belanger, eds., 2009: 159). These forms of intergenerational and cross-national extended family survival strategy in developing countries whose residents are grappling with economic restructuring and the effects of globalization may not be entirely dissimilar to the 1970s strategies of urban African American families struggling to make ends meet who must help out their even more destitute relatives living in the Flats (Stack, 1974). Stack's anthropological work was, in part, inspired by the classic interpretation of gift exchange in developing countries: "The trading of goods and services among the

poor in complex industrial societies bears a striking resemblance to patterns of exchange organized around reciprocal gift giving in nonwestern societies" (38). A key contribution my study makes is by inserting the reality of families whose ties have been reshaped by exile, war, and very different life chances. These were not immigrants just seeking to send back remittances to non-migrating families. These circumstances are laid bare by the Viet Kieu asserting limits upon the burden of obligation to remit money and other currencies of care. This experience does not apply to Western expatriates who do not have kinship ties in Vietnam. Kirk, who is an American, but is not Viet Kieu, said that unlike his Viet Kieu friends who are "inhibited by their family duties" and expectations in Vietnam, he does not have any and feels freer to do what he wants. My research extends the research on transnational families within the Vietnamese diaspora, adding to it the context of 'return' migration from the Global North to the Global South marked by strained negotiations of familial obligations across space and time amongst the 1.5 and second generation. This transnational research agenda required a methodology that paid attention to informal conversations about the burden of filial obligations, a global ethnography of family tensions.[66]

[66] In addition to my research fieldnotes, I kept a personal journal about my family visits which I maintained separately during my research visits. Because I also had local extended relatives in Ho Chi Minh City, the patterns which I uncovered while doing fieldwork about the lives of other Overseas Vietnamese embedded in familial networks became a part of an iterative process of fieldwork, self-discovery, and theory. For instance, I was subject to impression managing between my mother and my maternal Aunt and Uncles who lived in the sprawling metropolitan outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta region. I conveyed information between my mother in the US, as well as messages and news "on the ground" about everyday life from my relatives to my mother, who had sent regular remittances to all our living relatives since emigration beginning in the early 1980s. Some of these interactions, though not most, involved

How the Legacy of Refugee Departure Shaped Present-Day Money, Gifts and Visits

Viet Kieu often wrestled with expectations over how much to give, how gifts were conferred, and the performance of hospitality for rural countryside dwelling relatives.

The ritual support for grandmothers was a crucial anchor in the transnational family, and so was survivor guilt as the logic for unquestioned infusions of cash and gifts in the care chain. Grandmothers are leading the recipients of gifts and money; they are often the matriarchs who knit together transnational family relations for the Viet Kieu. Beyond the show of filial piety, most Viet Kieu know that a weakened and fragile social welfare system in post-Doi Moi era Vietnam meant that families privately had to shoulder the burden of the elderly and retirees' living and healthcare necessities. Tuan, a Viet Kieu age 39 said: "when my grandmother was alive, I saw [my relatives] a lot more. I saw her a lot more. After my grandmother passed away, I still saw my Aunts but not very regularly. There's sort of a disconnect. I don't feel as much connected to them." Vincent, age 32, did not see his relatives regularly, but made it a point to give his

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monetary and gift transfers. During weekly online Skype phone calls with my mother in Northern California, I was delicately advised to impression manage my relations with my uncles and aunts: "Be careful that if you give away your electric bike [used for fieldwork] to your youngest cousin in Cai Be, that you don't tell Fifth Uncle, since he and his children might be jealous that you are giving it to your Aunt's family." My mother wanted to give the appearance that resources from the Viet Kieu family were being evenly distributed, so as not to give the impression that she was favoring any siblings' family over another branch of extended relatives, even though the distribution of monetary remittances and gifts was in fact skewed towards those who she had maintained better relations with. Many conversations I had with research participants and informants reflected similar experiences. Being the transnational family "interlocutor" to my extended relatives made me sensitive to the social milieu within which other Viet Kieu were operated.

grandmother US$100 at least twice a year. When his 100-year old grandmother in Cam Ranh, an 8-hour bus ride from Ho Chi Minh City, broke her hip during a fall in 2010, the year he moved to Vietnam, Vincent was the first American relative to be called. Vincent immediately took the next available regional long-distance bus out to Cam Ranh, sacrificing a day's work. Vincent's mother in the US had not even been notified, and he did not tell her until he visited his injured grandmother. At that point, he had assumed a crisis caretaker role, a duty beyond being a mere family interlocutor. Even though he was not close to his Vietnamese cousins, taking care of his elderly grandmother in Vietnam was a demonstration of filial piety – a role that Viet Kieu migrants often assumed.

On her maternal side, Thu, A 26-year old Viet Kieu, would give US $200 per month, split US$100 each way to her maternal and paternal grandparents: "This was when my grandmother on my maternal side was still alive. When she passed away while I was in Vietnam, I spent nearly US $2,000 to pay for part of her Catholic burial plot and tomb. This doesn't include the expenses I would incur when I would travel to Central Vietnam. The flight there was cheap, but these gifts made the travel much more expensive." The care for grandparents, including monetary care, and the funds in contributing to the passing away of grandparents, especially for Catholic Viet Kieu, was part of helping families that were poor.

Many Viet Kieu noticed that amongst their parents' generation, younger aunts and uncles were expected to accept money and gifts. Bearing witness to the interplay of money and family politics was another aspect of being a younger generation Viet Kieu caught in the middle of US parents and Vietnamese local family discord. My-Anh, age

32, had relatives who accepted cash but who did not seem to need contributions from her parents in the US. About one third of my interview participants said that extended relatives were upwardly mobile civil servants, but nevertheless, who had benefitted from migrant remittances. Her émigré parents sent a lot of money home from the US over the course of three decades, and in return for the generosity, her mother expected her siblings to listen to her. In practice, however, this did not always happen. Acceptance of cash transfers led to arguments between local relatives and her parents over power and decision-making within the transnational family, with My-Anh caught in the middle; her parents' bumpy ties with her mother's relatives in Ho Chi Minh City was a constant source of intra-family tension related, most of the time, to money and the micro-family politics of age hierarchical sibling influence. My-Anh's local family had attained what My-Anh proclaimed as a level of self-sufficiency and middle class status she described as "doing pretty well for themselves"; her local extended relatives accept the money with the strings attached out of deference to the older Viet Kieu sibling. For some families affected by transnational migration, there needed to be an active renegotiation of power and status differences between family members in order for "norms of bounded solidarity and enforceable trust" to "hold sway across borders" (Levitt, 2001: 201). In the absence of this, there remains an imbalance of power and status, typically leaning in the direction of the migrants.

The extended local family were not merely passive recipients of money, either. Viet Kieu were offered guidance by family members from being "ripped off" at the wet markets, as they were easy targets of the dual economy of price inflation for foreigners and less effective in haggling down prices. In addition, some Viet Kieu learned an

alternate account of their family history and reported being given original, sepia-tone portraits of their family during pre-war days including pictures of their grandparents and other relatives (if deceased) and given heirloom documents such as birth certificates. Through family dinners on special occasions, these younger generation Viet Kieu were reminded about Vietnamese cultural practices and customs, particularly during the Lunar New Year and Autumn festivities, when it was expected that younger Vietnamese return to their ancestral village to pay their respects. These more nuanced, non-monetary relations counter the frame that non-migrating relatives were merely passive recipients of money and gifts – they, too, asserted their agency in structuring the transnational family network.

When asked about life abroad, many of the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu also painted a less romantic portrait of their family life in the US than their first generation Vietnamese parents conveyed in letters and telephone calls home to relatives during the earlier years of refugee resettlement. This countered the belief by local Vietnamese families of emigres that their Viet Kieu relatives abroad were living affluent, comfortable lives in the US. These assumptions might have been generated by photographs and letters sent in the early years of refugee resettlement, sent by first-generation refugees to show their upward mobility, often masking the challenges of occupational downgrading, acceptance of welfare and government assistance, and, for some, racial discrimination and hostility directed towards Southeast Asian Cold War refugees after the US withdrew from its military involvement.

Survivor guilt was named as well as talked about implicitly. Some Viet Kieu expressed a sense of their connectedness to the legacy of war and refugee outmigration as

a matter of circumstance. Hung, age 33, a Viet Kieu from Germany, helped his cousin who lived in a rural village with hospitalization fees; the cost was US $3,000. In justifying this large expense, he had a different mindset: "I always wondered what would have happened had I stayed behind. It's a small price to pay." Hung felt that his nuclear family and him were in the "right time and place" to make their escape decades before, and their outmigration allowed them to lead upwardly mobile lives in Germany. Helping out served eased their guilt for their improved lifestyle obtained after migration (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1997).

Thu stated: "Had I remained in Vietnam, I would have been in poverty, married younger, etc." However, she framed things in terms of class differences by suggesting that her guilt also had to do with her relative earnings being so much higher than her local Vietnamese family's earnings:

> I feel guilty that I make so much compared to them. A meal at Sushi Bito in Saigon would be $50 and it's a drop in the bucket for me, but a lot for them. I also felt guilty that I would spend $100 per night on an elegant hotel when I went out to visit my relatives.

What seems to be named as class guilt where Thu contrasted her life with those of her relatives is actually a recognition of social inequality and different opportunities between her immediate family and the lives of her non-migrating relatives. Yet the decision to eat lavishly and stay in upscale accommodations was a decision Thu had control over, discussed in the next section.

A handful of Viet Kieu I interviewed wanted to help alleviate disparities between urban and rural areas and to do development work as non-governmental organization (NGO) staff. Many preferred to help out through more institutionalized channels to

adhoc, person-to-person forms of assistance. Thanh, a Viet Kieu venture capitalist from Holland, believed in purchasing gifts for his family that would create new opportunities such as giving cousins educational scholarships, rather than merely cash and consumer electronics.

Viet Kieu articulated different ideologies in philanthropy. Some link their ideas to filial piety, others about duty and overcompensation for absence, and still others wanted to have broader impact beyond a one-time enjoyment of a gift or experience, which might also reflect their underlying perceptions of income distribution and development. Gifts and money were remitted in different forms. In contrast to Thanh's approach to giving, Vincent knew from experience that relatives would physically save up cash in a secure location of the house – typically not in a bank, due to institutional mistrust and concerns about local currency exchange rate fluctuations – so instead, he chose to treat them out to a nice meal at an air-conditioned, dine-in restaurant. When he factored in the cost of cases of beer and bottles of hard liquor consumed by his male relatives during this "treating", it typically amounted to several hundred US dollars. Some meals came to more than one million Vietnamese *dong* (in other words, close to one month of paid work in the rural villages). "This way, [by treating them to an experience], they can have a good time and enjoy your hospitality [instead of saving it for the future]" explained Vincent. Vincent's logic of "treating" his family to lavish meals involved a display of masculinity through footing the bill. This dovetailed with an unwritten norm that the emigrant had the resources to pay for everything, even if this was not true. Especially in the case of Viet Kieu males, Vincent's payment had to do with "saving face" as well as abiding by patriarchal cultural norms in Vietnam. Though

money and gifts were crucial to maintaining kinship ties for the 'return' migrant, the symbolism behind the manner of the transfer of resources conveyed economic, cultural, and even political significance across the generations.

The Burden of Obligation: Concealing, Compartmentalizing, Distancing

Viet Kieu wrestled with the social meaning of giving money and gifts beyond their dollar value – the giving conveyed respect, carework, and constituted a means of maintaining family relations. But many Viet Kieu who arrive expecting to help out their extended relatives as part of their filial duty, over time, became less engaged with their Vietnamese extended relatives. Money, gifts, and excessive helping out became a source of anxiety that led some Viet Kieu to shield their assets and/or to distance themselves from relatives in Vietnam. For some, this had to do with guilt over class differences, for others, this had to do with not wanting to be socially monitored and evaluated by relatives. These tensions also revealed the struggle between what relative wealth was for different family members, as some poorer relatives thought the Viet Kieu had a lot to spare, while the Viet Kieu believed their salaries were not that great. Most Viet Kieu who reported hiding certain aspects of their material assets did not feel wealthy by comparison to their American peers, as the majority in my study earned less than US$36,000 to $48,000 per year. Nonetheless, this was far more than most of their rural dwelling relatives could earn.

Residential Distance

While many Viet Kieu were uncomfortable about the contrast between their relatively comfortable circumstances and those of poor local relatives, some local families were well-off – a situation that sometimes created a different kind of tension. Tara, a Viet Kieu, age 25, eventually had to move out of her Vietnamese Aunt's home because this relative, who was relatively affluent, imposed a curfew and was overprotective. Tara stated:

> When I first came here, I started living with my local aunt. My parents were mad worried that I was coming to Vietnam. I wasn't allowed to ride a motorbike. I had a motorbike chauffeur. It was just the worse.
>
> I had two maids [in that] huge house. My family is very elitist. They aren't like a poor Vietnamese family. They are very French influenced, they are kind of colonial. The maids are basically like slaves. There was this one night [my Aunt] was throwing knives at the younger maids … I had a horrible time living in that house, I had to be home by like 10.
>
> It was already hard growing up in [a big city in the US] with a strict Vietnamese family, but this was ridiculous. I don't think it's ridiculous for Vietnamese standards, *but I'm not even Vietnamese in that kind of way*. It was tough to live like that up until [I went to college out of state], where I just let out and became who I am today … And it's really hard to listen to elders when you think they are ignorant. It's hard to accept someone who hasn't been anywhere, and *I'm very impressed with Vietnamese kids who can just listen and not argue*.
>
> She [my aunt] was just the devil. She was so difficult. And she was gossipy. [author's italics]

Tara's case illustrated the cultural expectations of being home by 10pm as a young, unmarried female, and restrictions on her mobility to transport herself made staying with this particular local relative even more limiting on her independence. Moreover, Tara saw her aunt's mistreatment of paid domestic servants as a remnant of Vietnam's French colonial influence. Lastly, Tara's negative reaction toward her aunt's rigidness and strictness reminded her of her parents' strictness growing up on the West Coast and

perhaps of gendered differences in her childhood. The hospitality of Tara's aunt produced friction instead of intimacy.

Most Viet Kieu spent their first few weeks during shorter visits with a local extended relative, but most Viet Kieu who came 'back' for longer-term work opportunities moved out to a place of their own in Ho Chi Minh City. As a strategy for maintaining peaceful family relations, Vincent lived in the Jasmine Towers. The living space that many Viet Kieu who elected to live in high-rises constituted a protective, Westernized residential bubble that was, for the most part, foreign to their local extended relatives.

Vincent rarely invited his relatives to visit his apartment in the high-rises: "If I take them here, they'll assume that I do really well." Vincent was renting a two-bedroom unit for US$800, paid each month in crisp US dollars, since merchants only accepted new or unworn currency. His desire to conceal this residential lifestyle from his relatives because it might give the impression that he was "doing really well," and if that truly were the case, it would also signal that he was not being a good cousin or grandchild because he was not "helping out enough." Vincent was acutely aware that relatives might expect help, saying "once you start giving too much then they start demanding a lot."

Other Viet Kieu also shared stories about selectively revealing their living arrangements and salaries. Thi, an Australian Viet Kieu, age 30, who also lived at the Jasmine Towers, made up a story about her decision to move to a high rise when her non-migrating relatives asked her how much she paid for rent. "My company pays for this,"

she replied, masking the fact that she had a choice in the matter. The monthly rent for her apartment was nearly double the amount that the average Vietnamese civil servant family earned in a month, and she did not want to feel guilty about her lifestyle choices when she had chosen a modest two bedroom apartment at the Jasmine Towers, rather than the more luxurious options she could have rented on her expatriate salary.

For both Vincent and Thi, the desire to conceal their physical living space amenities revealed a mismatch between wanting to "help out" versus the desire to avoid being taxed by family obligations and demands. On the one hand, they experienced guilt living in a third world country where they provided care and could in practice do more to help out their relatives; however, they had drawn the line in terms of how much of themselves and their resources they surrendered to be virtuous in order to secure their own version of upward mobility and middle class standing. These individuals faced a delicate balance of competing goals – of wanting to get in touch with their family history and ancestral roots, and concerns such as wanting to accumulate personal savings and career advancement.

Ambivalent Hospitality

The topic of hosting extended relatives often became a window into dealing with complicated tensions of intra-family class divisions. Sharing candid details about my personal experiences with extended family with my Viet Kieu research subjects prompted several threads of unanticipated perspectives about micro-level strategies to negotiate relationships with local extended Vietnamese family. A Viet Kieu, Thu, age 27, her co-worker from Hanoi, Hoa-Anh, age 25, and another Viet Kieu co-worker Thuy Anh, age

27, and I were sharing a meal together, when I mentioned that I would be hosting my maternal Aunt, age 37, and male cousin, age 11, from the Mekong Delta, for the weekend in Ho Chi Minh City. The topic of hosting extended relatives triggered a variety of opinions. We spent the afternoon interpreting how our actions had the potential to offend or be culturally inappropriate. Putting herself in my extended relatives' position, Thu pointed out that that my actions to host family in my high-rise apartment could trigger unfavorable reactions rather than establish good will:

> If you showed them the Jasmine Towers where you live, then they might be very reluctant and feel very out of place and uncomfortable, mainly because they are very poor, and the expat areas [such as where you live] are spaces they would feel inferior and low class at.
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> However, your decision to have them stay there in your home in Ho Chi Minh City would also raise questions about how rich or poor you actually are – if you've been staying there this entire time, *why couldn't you help out even more*?
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> At the same time, in choosing food venues, if you choose a street food place, then they might determine that you're not treating them very well when they came all the way out there [from the outer lying provinces] to spend time with you. *In the end, it's not a win-win situation at all.* In fact, it's not a healthy dynamic. [my italics]

The thorny issue of hosting rural Vietnamese relatives in Ho Chi Minh City elicited another response from other 1.5 generation Viet Kieu: "Why don't you put them up in a hotel?" one asked me. Her rationale was that separating your living space from visiting relatives could raise less questions about lifestyle differences. Thu's advice mirrored the sentiments of others with regard to masking living standards and living space and warding off future demands. These sentiments gave the impression that the personal boundaries were intended to minimize the material artifacts of class and social differences between the Viet Kieu themselves and their relatives. Thu's advice urged me to *shield* the details of my high-rise apartment living experience, to avert any possible

misunderstandings or suspicions that I could more generously provide for my local relatives than I had.

Certainly even my urban relatives who lived in Ho Chi Minh City's outer lying District 10 and District 11 did not seem to feel comfortable in my secured and slightly sterile high-rise neighborhood with swimming pool, gym, elevators, doormen, and 24-hour corporate taxi cab stands. As civil servant workers and state-owned enterprise employees, my aunt's and uncle's income paralleled my rent. Our monthly salaries, once converted into US dollars, were vastly different. Compared to Fifth Uncle's household monthly income of USD $400 as Vice President of a joint venture Taiwanese light manufacturing facility, my US graduate fellowship stipend meant that I was living very well compared to his family.

They were not poor – in fact, they were part of the Vietnamese middle-middle class – but they lived different amenities and customs: sleeping on bamboo mats on cool tiled floors, an upgraded house that they had lived in for nearly 50 years but that still lacked screened in windows despite mosquitoes swarming around the house, and electric fans, rather than air conditioning, for cooling. The unreliable flushing toilets they installed were a 2002 addition, an upgrade paid for by my mother's remittances. At night, it was not uncommon for rats to scurry about across their living room floor, and the sounds of the neighborhood could be heard in every direction because homes lacked glass-paneled windows, metal gates for external protection from invaders, nevertheless lacked insulation from the harsh dialogue of husbands and wives arguing vigorously next door. These lifestyle differences magnified perceived class differences, which made

hospitality decisions a source of stress for many Viet Kieu.

Less Visits

Over time, some Viet Kieu visited their relatives less or chose not to visit them at all, due to legacies of the Vietnam War and their family's pre-migration history. Thu returnee experience was unique because she came to the US later than other 1.5 generation Viet Kieu in my study did – in the early 1990s – as a teenager. Thu had direct memories and experiences of living through this family betrayal. She remembered how poor her mother and father were in the 1980s as she was growing up in Central Vietnam. Typically, children of South Vietnam collaborators and officials did not get to attend university easily. Thu's paternal grandmother had two sons, and one was a Communist Party official, which had driven a wedge in the family; the paternal grandmother tried to report Thu's father, a former South Vietnamese official. Her father was, like many other South Vietnamese officials, forced into reeducation camps after reunification.[67]

In 2010, Thu returned to Vietnam to work at a US technology start-up company based in Ho Chi Minh City. Thu would pay visits to her maternal grandmother's family home in Central Vietnam at least once every two months, yet these visits had more to do with wanting to visit the Central Highlands as a place, rather than her relatives per se.

> I've done [the trip] by myself once during the two years I lived in Vietnam, but it was only for one day. I am not comfortable with going there or visiting relatives by myself. I just don't know what to do, what my roles are, and my purpose in being there. I also don't like hearing all the

[67] For a more extended discussion of Vietnam reeducation camps, refer to Stephen B. Young, Fall 1979, "The Legality of Vietnamese Re-education Camps".

family drama that goes on and I get fed up to my ears.

When Thu was asked to elaborate upon why she decided not to visit her paternal relatives after her return to Vietnam, she responded:

> Everyone on my Dad's side was either a communist or leaning towards communism or too young to make a decision and my Dad was the only person who didn't believe that [communism] would work. Everyone on my mom's side was anti-communist. He, and in turn my family, endured a lot of hostility from his family for his decision [to migrate]. From my mom's stories, our immediate family was often treated poorly after the war at family events, treated like second-class citizens. I felt it when I was there among my cousins of the same age.
>
> It was only after we left to go to the US and had that door open for us, and returned [to Vietnam], that it was different and we were treated better. I guess this is one of the important reasons for why I am not comfortable visiting my Dad's relatives. I know and remember how they treated us [prior to migration]. [my italics]

Thu remembered vividly how her nuclear family in Vietnam was very poor and maintained their distance from that side of the family after the family betrayal: "If we were to look at this politically, then the reason why our family was so poor [in Vietnam] was because after my dad got back from 7 years of reeducation camp, he was shunned from Vietnamese society and legally prohibited from having a position in society." When Thu's father left prisoner reeducation camp, his livelihood comprised of taking photographs of foreign tourists in historic landmarks of the Central Highlands for US $1 per photograph. Her father finally got approval by the Humanitarian Orderly Departure Program managed by the US government to safely leave Vietnam, and brought his wife and two children to the US with him. In the US, her parents battled to raise the family. Thu explained that part of why she was so proud was because in the US, she and her parents, who were low-wage workers, had always been poor while she was growing up

and they lived in places that Thu described were "like the projects in the US." Though Thu identified feelings of class guilt when she ate at fancy sushi restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City, as mentioned previously, she also wanted to justify her family's outmigration. Her re-encounters with family were colored by bitter memories of mistreatment by extended relatives. Her family's changed class position before and after migration made her diasporic return with more economic and cultural capital a source of validation; she would boast explicitly about her comfortable lifestyle both in the US and her new lifestyle in Vietnam, where she earned a comfortable $3,000 per month, paid US $500 for a two bedroom apartment in Saigon, and could afford to travel extensively to domestic tourist sites and other parts of Southeast Asia. Thu rejoiced: "I'm very proud of my achievements, and maybe sometimes, I sound a bit more arrogant [than I should]." Her economic mobility after migration was intentionally put on display during some family visits, to make relatives who mistreated her family jealous. However, she concealed her assets and understated her success to other relatives in order to protect herself from having them meddle in her personal affairs and judging or socially monitoring her lifestyle and spreading vicious and gendered gossip.[68]

Other explanations for fewer visits did not have a direct tie to the war. Political differences were not the only cause of tensions between Viet Kieu and local relatives. Vincent said at the onset of our interview that he was not necessarily close to his uncles and cousins. I asked how often Vincent saw his local Vietnamese relatives – grandma,

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[68] During one trip when I accompanied Thu, there were clear gendered and age hierarchies at a large family gathering where young women sat with their children at one table, and senior elderly men would drink hard liquor and eat together at another table. The rest of the younger men sat next to a table beside the senior men, and women would congregate and gossip in the kitchen while preparing large quantities of traditional Vietnamese dishes.

aunts, and uncles – in Cam Ranh and he responded, “I don’t communicate with them often.”

Since arriving in early 2010, Vincent stated that he visits them less than he did during his prior and multiple family return visits. The initial display of interest in maintaining connections with his extended relatives in those previous visits became displaced by his career aspirations in a start up businesses.

Vincent spent most of his free time with fellow Americans who lived in his residential high-rise tower, with other American Viet Kieu, or Vietnamese who were educated abroad (such as his sister-in-law). Vincent explained this choice by describing cultural differences between him and his relatives, including gender stereotypes, manner of dress, future aspirations, and different consumptions patterns. Those “cultural differences” were magnified by the social location that Vincent found himself occupying in relation to his extended relatives; Vincent’s US passport, foreign currency purchasing power, gender, and his decision to live in a 5-star luxury high rise in Ho Chi Minh City meant that social status differences separated his future from that of his extended relatives.

Ultimately, these social differences magnify the Viet Kieu’s realization that going ‘back’ to Vietnam was not about finding “home” and a sense of belonging. Returning to the ancestral homeland was marked by developed and developing country social worlds converging within extended families that once were separated by geographic distance and now co-located in a rapidly expanding urban space witnessing a greater class divide in Ho Chi Minh City (Luong, 2008). Younger generation Viet Kieu like Thi, Vincent, Thu,

and others were still grappling with identity politics and their social location as privileged Viet Kieu in a cosmopolitan expatriate community within a vastly unequal city, where boutique Louis Voutton and Chanel stores have sprouted up in downtown Saigon while in other areas, disabled South Vietnamese veterans and street children begged for money by selling lottery tickets for their sustenance (Luong, 2008; Hayton, 2010). Attending to the needs of even middle class extended relatives' was part of their dual-social worlds as Viet Kieu and a plight Viet Kieu managed from a protective emotional distance. There was extreme convergence in the matter of negotiating ways for maintaining social distance while not wanting to offend their relatives and the desire to impression manage on behalf of their US parents.[69]

CONCLUSION

In the era of increased labor mobility and trade integration, particularly between North America and the Asia Pacific, many college-educated Vietnamese diasporic populations have sought long-term skilled work in their ancestral homeland. This globalization of work opportunities helped to reunite families that had been geographically separated for decades, initially due to the aftermath of war and conflict. The social forces that brought together these families, including Vietnam's transition towards market capitalism, have also created a context for a mismatch of cultural expectations surrounding household economic survival strategies and their relationship to migrant remittances to absorb the effects of these structural inequalities. Even though

[69] Past studies of the Viet Kieu living abroad, specifically in Canada, where relatives live in the same region, reflect a diminishing of the frequency and intensity over time of extended family visits (Chan and Dorais, 1998: 293).

they have been able to foster long-distances ties, face-to-face encounters changed the quality of many kinship networks. This global ethnography elaborated the tenuous connections that the adult 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu maintained across space and time with their extended relatives in Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War. It illustrated the social problems of filial angst and communal expectations – typically relegated to the private familial sphere – and brought these issues into the public sphere for discussion.

For the subset of college-educated Viet Kieu who were returning to Ho Chi Minh City, being 1.5 and second generation meant they were poised to continue lines of care for their local extended relatives either through ritual support during weddings, funerals, holidays or crisis moments, such as health emergencies. The flows of monetary remittances that preceded them in the decades after family refugee departure embedded the Viet Kieu in pre-existing webs of mutual support and filial obligation which constituted a transnational social field. This obligation was embedded into the 1.5 and second generation's orientation towards maintaining family relationships; for gender and class reasons, some took critical strides to create a buffer of space – both physically and socially – from their extended relatives. For Viet Kieu such as Tara and Vincent, the journey of going back to Vietnam meant feeling culturally alienated from their local extended family, by whom they felt morally judged, monitored, and gossiped about, in similar ways they had experienced with nuclear family in the US. For Thu, the diasporic return was a reminder of legacies of intra-family hostility created by divergent political loyalties. For Thi and Vincent, a retreat to the fortress highrises was also a retreat from drop in visits and impromptu favors requested by relatives. Being in good standing with

relatives and maintaining privacy was a delicate balance that 1.5 and second generation youths had been groomed to navigate in the US. The tendency to shield or conceal lifestyle, income, expenditures, and material assets by the select group of Viet Kieu in this study treats concealment and masking wealth and privilege (Pittelman, 2013) within families as a relatively unexamined phenomenon in studies of migration and social class. This shifts the focus away from the first generation towards the adult children of refugees and shows how return visits, facilitated by global economic conditions, can reveal cultural fissures in the transnational family produced by growing up on different continents can magnify. In the same vein, this chapter does not call for a normative vision of the ideal transnational family marked by internal divisions of class, gender, migration status, age and generational hierarchy, space and place.

CHAPTER 6

Gendered and Racialized Stratification in the Multinational Workplace[70]

This chapter reveals the unique and changing position of Viet Kieu 'returnees' within a globalized labor hierarchy through an analysis of the racialized and gendered dilemmas they face in their everyday work lives. Viet Kieu managers in my study often distinguish themselves from local Vietnamese staff, pointing to differences in cultural work ethics and training between locals and foreigners. At other times, they identify gender and racial differences as being the cause of their marginality at the workplace. They try to reform the corporate structure and culture in global firms, but sometimes fail to do so due to local resistance. As Liu (2008) suggests, it is a false assumption that all social actors seek to distinguish themselves from other actors, and in reality, interactions between social actors often take the form of boundary blurring, in which "one actor or both seek to mimic the other and blur the spatial or cultural boundary between them." (774). How did the Viet Kieu 'returnees' interpret tensions and conflict at the workplace? In what ways are these tensions significant for understanding Vietnam's broader market transitions from a socialist to market-oriented economy? Both global and local tensions in workplace social interactions reveal the contentious processes of rapid globalization unfolding on the ground in Vietnam as its workforce grapples with pressures to modernize and integrate into the global economy. What global and local challenges did Viet Kieu workers face? How did they address those challenges,

[70] Many were chartered in third party countries with tax shelters, such as the British Virgin Islands.

particularly those involving workplace tensions over culture and communication? How did the Viet Kieu negotiate race, nationality, and gender identity politics in the workplace?

Among these changes were altered cultural norms at the workplace, pressures within management to adapt and modernize work practices, and hence, blurring the global and local professional and cultural boundaries of the office setting. Some would suggest that the movement of Viet Kieu professionals and managers between the US and Vietnam and between cultures contributes to the internationalization of the professional managerial stratum (Dirlik quoting Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, 1994: 13), which in turn internationalizes the people and places they manage.

The Viet Kieu were mostly not hired on as “expatriates” for foreign companies, which would entail a spouse and family international relocation package, subsidized housing, and other benefits (sometimes international schooling for young children). Among the jobs that Viet Kieu were hired into included mid-tier to upper management positions, such as Chief Financial Officer, Country Director (of an INGO), Business Development Manager, Program Manger (for a study abroad program), Concepts Manager, and Senior Financial Analyst (see Chapter 1 for a list of occupations in this dissertation). This section does not include the experiences of unemployed Viet Kieu ‘returnees’ who were seeking employment, as much of the data is based upon retrospective, semi-structured interviews. In addition to interviews conducted at corporations, non-governmental organizations, and media/entertainment firms, many observations originated from in-depth office “job shadowing” I did at five organizations. I interned voluntarily at two of these organizations.

A study of Viet Kieu work experiences demonstrates how these unique cultural brokers mediate between global institutions and local practice. For the construction of a global market, the "process of boundary blurring is particularly salient because by definition, globalization implies the gradual convergence between national and transnational institutions and normative orders." (Liu, 2008: 774).

The second purpose of this chapter is to assess the unintended consequences of "brain re-circulation" – the idea that the transfer of knowledge and social resources between actors in mature and evolving industries can lead to international development (Obukhova, Working Paper 2009; Saxenian, 2006). One stream of research suggests that these transfers of knowledge and social resources across organizational environments are not seamless or cost-free to the receiving organization. Obukhova (Working Paper, 2009: 3) goes even further to suggest that "because of the differences in the environments between mature and emergent clusters, it is plausible that high-skilled migrants are only partially able to transfer their skills and social resources and that these transfers are actually harmful for receiving firms." Though my study does not assess the harm to firms and NGOs through the presence of the Viet Kieu, it suggests the areas where tensions would arise that could impact employee cohesiveness and the frictions preventing knowledge and resource transfer across cultures within the organization. Lastly, my work addresses the notion that skilled migrants impart "social remittances" – "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities" (Levitt, 1998) and which can have mixed effects to the receiving organization/firm.

The Frictions of Being In-Between

The Viet Kieu confront daily frustrations with work practices statically deemed by multiple actors as the 'Vietnamese way'. They navigate identity politics and implement changes in the corporate culture of the multinational firm or organization. Workplace identity politics are significant, as many Viet Kieu in this study have assumed the ranks of middle managers, at times leading a diverse team of 50 Vietnamese nationals and multinational expatriates. Viet Kieu and other expatriates were challenging the so-called "Vietnamese way" – understood as a set of local work practices that they interpreted as going against global norms of efficiency and modernization. In response to such localized practices, some Viet Kieu enforced work practices that they considered to be more enlightened American work practices, which faced steady opposition. In contrast, some Viet Kieu expressed a desire to adapt – some asserted their more hybridized forms of strategic identity as "in between" Westerners and Vietnamese managers and workers. Carruthers (2002) argues that national belonging is a persisting form of cultural capital that enables transmigrants to reap the benefits of mobility. Carruthers notes that "the highest gains come from being able to play *the space in between card* and those who play the game of passing truly well are able to modulate their performances of Vietnameseness to suit the occasion" (431). In other words, those who can be strategic and navigate their cultural fluidity as both Vietnamese and American (or other nationality) to meet the needs of the situation stand to gain the most and to acclimate as Viet Kieu in Vietnam, and this has consequences for benefitting themselves and their co-workers.

Viet Kieu confronted structural challenges: they filled the labor market niche of being culturally "in between" local Vietnamese business elites and Western foreigners. Countless hiring managers, corporate executive headhunters, and the Viet Kieu, themselves, indicated that their sense of their own market desirability was short-term; Vietnam was in need of more high skilled workers and the growing numbers of Vietnamese nationals studying at Universities abroad in Western countries was a strategy for meeting the medium-term needs of state and economic development. These study abroad global elites would eventually return and fill middle management jobs that would help advance Vietnam's globalization project.[71]

Local Practices, The 'Vietnamese Way'

Viet Kieu who worked in middle and upper management confront daily challenges including cultural misunderstandings about local practices, labor market discrimination and workplace essentialism. Many Viet Kieu managers were told on a daily basis by their subordinate staff that they were not doing things according to the 'Vietnamese way,' understood by Viet Kieu managers as a subjective set of work practices that were distinctly rooted in national and even perceived East-West differences in the way businesses and organizations operated. Many Viet Kieu and expatriate managers told me repeatedly about their frustrations with the so-called "Vietnamese

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[71] For recent coverage of Vietnam's economy, see "In Vietnam, Growing Fears of an Economic Meltdown" available online at *New York Times* Online, August 22, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/business/global/23iht-vietnam23.html?_r=1. Bill Hayton discusses the political economic underpinnings of the Vietnam's high growth and instability in Chapter 1, "The Communist Capitalist Playground," *Vietnam: Dragon Rising* (2010).

way" of working, such as a tendency to value loyalty and obedience to the collective, not drawing attention to mistakes of one's peers and those higher up in the chain of command in order to save "face", and accepting assignments and tasks without fully understanding how to follow through, and related to this, not acknowledging professional or personal weaknesses. In Vietnamese and other Asian cultures, the conventions of "saving face" has been known to lead to confrontation not being handled directly; rather, private actions save others and self from mất mặt which translates from Vietnamese into "losing face" (as opposed to "saving face").[72]

Some of the Viet Kieu understandings of the 'Vietnamese way' involved cultural norms of relationship building during a business meeting. One Viet Kieu noted that when "doing business in Vietnam, 56 of the 60 minutes will involve talk of personal life matters, then in the last 2 to 3 minutes, officials will want to discuss business. That is the *Vietnamese way* of doing business, and many expats here get frustrated by that."

In other settings, managers were told that they were not doing things 'the Vietnamese way', and local employee resistance to Viet Kieu managers was typically verbalized casually. For instance, Hue, a Viet Kieu financial analyst, was delicately

[72] According to Kim and Nam (1998: 523) in "The Concept and Dynamics of Face: Implications for Organizational Behavior in Asia," the concept of face is a powerful concept that may help account for much of the distinctive yet misunderstood organizational behavior in Asian cultures. Although face may not be a concept unique to Asian cultures (Brown 1977, Goffman 1955, Ho 1976, Hsu 1983), scholars have consistently pointed out that concern for face is of utmost importance in most Asian cultures (Bond 1991, Ho 1976, Hu 1944, Redding and Ng 1982, Reeder 1987, Stover and Stover 1976). In fact, the concept of face has been employed to explain the behavior of individuals from China (Ho 1976, Hu 1944, Yang 1945), Japan (Akamatsu 1993, Benedict 1946, Dale 1992, Holtzman et al. 1991, Nakane 1970), Korea (Choi 1976, Yoon 1980), Hong Kong (Bond and Lee 1981, Redding and Ng 1982, Chiu et al. 1987), Singapore (Bloodworth 1980, Cunningham 1995), the Philippines (Reeder 1987), and Vietnam (Smith and Pham 1996).

informed by some of her Vietnamese staff, 'you don't know Vietnam,' or 'you have to do things that way' … Hue said that "one of the challenges was being told by our Viet staff that 'this is the Vietnamese way' … we're asking them to do something that's too hard, they resist, and sometimes we have to let them go." I asked Hue to define what she meant by the 'Vietnamese way' in a business setting. In dealing with her business clients, Hue thinks that it means

> You can't ask for too many terms when you do the investment. You have to give them bargaining power. And they say we ask for too many protections, it's unsustainable … or they say we're too strict about the investment process or we don't give into their demands. Vietnamese change their plans at the last minute or there are changes in the company's performance or operations.
>
> We say, you told us this would happen a month ago, and we say that's not acceptable. They say, 'it's Vietnam, you have to go with the flow.' We have to walk away from the deal.

Indeed, many Viet Kieu did initially "go with the flow" because it was Vietnam and things happened less predictably in the emerging market economy.

Bureaucratic Constraints and Strategies for Dealing with Corruption

Viet Kieu over the course of their stay in Vietnam were less willing to adopt this 'go with the flow' approach and would become impatient with red tape and lack of transparency, and in particular, with regard to corrupt practices. Red tape and corruption were things that every Viet Kieu had to encounter at various stages, depending on how long he or she had been there; businesses factored the so-called "envelope fees" into the cost of doing business. Vietnam remained a regulatory challenge for new entrants to the marketplace, as the laws for property acquisition, business and joint venture legal title

were still evolving. The red stamp of approval on official letterhead was necessary at each step of paperwork, and rules were constantly changing or not yet enforced – these issues were major challenges to being an entrepreneur or manager of a multinational business or INGO. According to Transparency International, which ranks 178 countries using a corruption and accountability perceptions index,[73] Vietnam was given a measure of 2.7 in the year 2010. This low measure of transparency, accountability, and corruption is even lower than China, which was 3.5, but more transparent than war-torn countries that are rebuilding their democracies after conflict, such as Iraq (1.5) and Afghanistan (1.4). Though perception is not an entirely accurate measure, it is also fairly difficult to quantify in dollars or as a percentage of GDP how much corruption comprises as a share of the domestic economy.

Some Viet Kieu resisted buckling to localized practices of doing business, but others did adjust their practices to generate small business leads. One Viet Kieu covertly admitted that while looking for business leads and using informal streams of information to get clients, he gave out bribes or "tips" to private sector informants in the form of US $50 and $100 crisp bills. The interpretation and distinctions between gifts and bribes is blurry, as this list would suggest: non-monetary gifts to treat officials and clients or business partners were also used, such as high priced bottles of alcohol, including Cognac, XOXO, and Johnny Walker Blue Label, or "gifts" of an experience – private rooms for clients with hostess girl bars. Other relational aspects included the reciprocity of favors. Yet material costs of relationship building included expensive gifts, treats or experiences, or envelope fees, paid out to keep red tape to a minimum. Vincent told me

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[73] The Transparency International homepage is: http://www.transparency.org/cpi2010/results. Accessed online June 11, 2013.

that, during the course of his efforts to start up multiple joint ventures, he had paid a powerful Vietnamese businessman's daughter to get the "right" introductions made to someone who "knows how to get things done" – which implied many chains of informal bypassing of lower-level bureaucratic procedures. He slipped the door man of a high rise building US$50 to get the listing of all vacancies in a building because he wanted to earn commission on rental referrals to expatriates to rent out these properties, a part of his budding real estate side business.

However, many Viet Kieu staunchly rejected these localized practices of slipping government officials envelope fees to move things along faster in Vietnam. Judy, as the Country Manager of a multinational garment sourcing firm, manages 50 staff, 45 of whom are Vietnamese. She stated that her Vietnamese employees would not think twice about bribing a policeman to get out of a traffic citation: "for the people here, it's a fact of life. People viewed it as though it is necessary. So, it's interesting. For us, we would never even *consider* such a thing." Though Judy claims she and her peers would not consider bribing to ward off a traffic citation, another Viet Kieu reported having to do so, casually slipping a traffic policeman VN $200.00 (roughly US$10 at the time) to turn the other way when she forgot to wear her motorbike helmet. Paying the fine was only slightly higher, but would inconvenience her schedule to pay the citation in person.

The lack of regulatory transparency and the slow pace of government bureaucracy in Vietnam posed a daily challenge for Viet Kieu in businesses and those managing international non-governmental organizations. Judy, in her insistence on not doing things the 'Vietnamese way' said:

> Being an American, when I run into issues, I go through the front door, not the back door. Taking the back door might help you do things more

> easily, but in the long-term it might make you a "*con tin*" – you become a hostage to that system, once you get in, you can never get out. And being an American company, that is definitely not something we do.

Judy reflected that outside of the office, she thought it was "absurd that some first generation Vietnamese Americans who go back to Vietnam still slipped crisp US $5 or $10 bills into their passports at Vietnamese customs" to facilitate their entry. In the 1990s, this was more of a widespread practice, but now, the Vietnamese government was discouraging this monetary bribery, concerned with its image to the outside world. Judy was adamant that doing things the American way was more effective than to follow the Vietnamese private strategy of giving out bribes to ensure fair or preferential treatment.[74] Other Viet Kieu who were also morally against bribes and 'backdoor' strategies for closing deals in Vietnam were bothered by these practices, and many, in the end, left their jobs in Vietnam because of this. A German Viet Kieu in securities and exchanges for a globalizing Vietnamese company left his job after one year, citing that he did not want to deal with these practices.

When Global Viet Kieu Managers Change Local Practices

Viet Kieu managers implemented changes in workplace practices at their company. Tam was a 28-year old Viet Kieu general manager at a global expatriate

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[74] US multinational firms are not entirely guilt free when it comes to bribery, demonstrated by the case of Walmart and Tyson bribes to government officials in Mexico. "Since 2008, the US has resolved 50 corporate foreign bribery cases, costing companies $3.9 billion in fines and penalties. None of the top 10 cases involved voluntary disclosures, including those against Siemens AG, Europe's largest engineering firm; Kellogg Brown & Root LLC, which was spun off in 2007 from Houston-based Halliburton Co., the oilfield services company; and Daimler AG, the maker of Mercedes-Benz cars and trucks." Source: Thanh Nien News Online at http://www.thanhniennews.com/index/pages/20120519-wal-mart-not-alone-in-reluctance-to-reveal-bribery-probe.aspx.

relocation firm owned by another American Viet Kieu. Tam reported that it was common amongst different types of workers, from Vietnamese office workers to day laborers, to leave a pillow at work in order to nap at their desks or on the floor, a midday respite from the tropical heat and humidity of Southeast Asia. Tam, in her efforts to represent American corporate practices in Vietnam, claimed that the company "does not promote naps, but we don't stop our staff from taking naps … our senior managers do not take naps and usually their staff will follow the practice, therefore, we have fewer staff taking naps than in the past." Tam followed up with a broader statement about openness at her office that she felt was lacking in many other Vietnamese offices: "We operate in an open office environment and encourage our staff to challenge their colleagues and managers if they feel that they have a valid point. I often tell my staff to 'state their claim and defend it' and if they win, we'll do it their way. This improves efficiency in the office as staff are empowered to make their own decisions, rather than waiting around for a superior to make the decision for them." These gradual modifications, albeit small, to workplace norms and culture made the Vietnamese workplace more like a Western firm with Western work practices, rather than embracing previous local work norms of allowing an extended lunch and siesta nap period.[75] The exception was that wearing the traditional "ao dai" for women was still permitted at work, even though most women wore Western looking office clothing. Though few would be admonished for napping, upper level managers did not follow these practices and those who did would stick out. The act of napping at the workplace in Vietnam was by no means under immediate threat of extinction – this scenario was merely one instance of many broader changes being

[75] Wearing the traditional "ao dai" was still permitted at work, even though most women wore Western looking office clothing.

introduced by foreign and Viet Kieu managers, slowly adopted and gradually earning traction among elites.

A handful of Viet Kieu managers also revealed how the communication of culturally embedded concepts about consumer culture and the acquisition of soft skills were a challenge in manager-to-employee workplace relations, beyond purely linguistic matters. Michael, CFO of a hotel in downtown Saigon, talked about how many of his hospitality employees were "technically very strong," but who were "missing 'soft skills'" defined by experts as the "skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior, rather than formal knowledge or technical knowledge" (Moss and Tilly, 1996: 253). Michael mentioned that his subordinate hotel managers "understand Vietnamese accounting very well, but [were] lacking in soft skills on the management side, partly due to the lack of opportunities outside of this country, or lack of exposure to other cultures." For instance, with regard to the service and hospitality industry, Michael elaborated that here at this hotel restaurant,

You get what you order, but there is no upselling or savvy service. I was a waiter for many years throughout college, so I understand the service industry.

This lack of exposure was frequently discussed by all Viet Kieu managers and human resources staff in Vietnam. Within the hospitality industry, which is just one sector among many that are globalizing rapidly, Michael ruled that "in general, the customer service skills is non existent." He elaborated in significant detail below:

It's very hard to get local people trained to the standard levels that you want them to be at and share the same vision as you, because technically, they've never seen it and *it's hard to take an experience that they have never seen and train them to achieve those levels.*

It is the same in the finance discipline. My managers can crunch numbers all day long but they don't place any value on associate development, improving morale or recognition. There is no development plan for any of the finance associates. Last year's evaluations were just cut and paste comments with ratings that appear to be subjective. This approach will not recognize strong performers and will hinder the team's growth with under-performers being ignored and not being placed on an improvement plan.

In order to get my assistant ready for a promotion, I would need to send him to hotels in other countries so that he can be exposed to other cultures and different management styles. That would help him be better informed and more knowledgeable on different management skills.

Many readers may be struck by the arrogance of this statement and wonder how locals may experience this kind of elitism. Many expatriate managers would not hear resistance directly, but Michael did encounter resistance to changes he wanted to implement in accounting and hospitality, particularly older employees above the age of 40.

The "lack of international exposure" referenced by Michael illustrates the cultural tensions of being a manager in a rapidly changing economic environment and their perception of staffing challenges hindered by local know-how. Though foreign managers may acknowledge a lack of workers with the global repertoire of skills needed to manage a globalizing hotel that is being incorporated by a major hotel conglomerate, the inability to recognize and appreciate local know-how may have also hindered Michael's experience in gaining complete loyalty, in spite of his fluent Vietnamese language skills which in theory, should make cultural communication slightly easier. Instead, many long-time employees, who were mostly male and above 40 years of age, were resistant to Michael's ideas – he suggested that the newer and younger hires, who were mostly in their mid-twenties and early 30s, local Vietnamese, were eager to learn about American

hospitality practices and referred to him enthusiastically as "teacher" from time to time. It is possible that employees over 40 years of age in the hospitality industry have developed a specialized set of skill sets embedded in local practices which have aided the hotel in maintaining a stable and loyal customer base.

Michael said that this has turned him into a bigger micro-manager in Vietnam than what he would have been like in the US. Yet, "what's keeping me going is that little changes are becoming noticeable. I also know I can't make everybody happy as changes are being implemented, but at least in this hotel, I know there are a lot of people who want to learn and make improvements to existing processes and procedures. This hotel is 16 years old; there are a lot of charter members here. They have been here since the beginning, so there is a lot of legacy in this building. Getting these folks to change is very difficult. They have seen managers like me come and go within a few years. I can't tell whether they think I'm here just for a few years so they'll put up with me, or they just don't want to change and ignore instructions. I'm trying to work through that. But the good news is there is a small population that wants to learn." Two years after Michael was interviewed, he had left his posting in Vietnam and transferred internally to Singapore and Thailand. It was unclear whether he had left because of being promoted, because of his frustrations with and nonconformity to local practices and the slow pace of change and employee resistance, or whether he was pushed out by local employee unrest by these collisions of ideas and male egos. INGO managers, non-Viet Kieu Westerners included, mentioned that they, too, encountered resistance to their authority more from older employees, rather than younger ones. Younger Vietnamese staff were eager and more open to internationalization, believing that outsiders held the expert solutions.

Unfortunately, the high staff turnover in the INGO sector, after a stint of between 1-2 years, which occurs for various reasons, means that these expert solutions are not necessarily implemented well or sufficiently evaluated.

The topic of branding concepts arose with Tara, a 25-year old Viet Kieu concepts manager for a Singapore luxury ceramics tile firm. Tara mentioned her significant responsibility at work for someone with her level of inexperience, having gone straight from college to Vietnam on a postgraduate fellowship. She described every day as "weightlifting with my brain" where explaining complex work concepts to her Vietnamese employees posed a challenge lost in cultural translation. Tara described a typical scenario:

> My company is like Neanderthals. I shouldn't say that. They just haven't been exposed. It's really hard to communicate the big picture.
>
> So, that means our prices are higher, right? But luxury has many shades of grey. There's Gucci, then there's Marc Jacobs, and Alexander McQueen, and Vera Wang. There's all these shades, and it's all expensive. But to Vietnamese people, their perception of luxury is very gaudy.
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> The [Singaporean] CEO's message is that it's not that kind of a luxury. It's the kind of luxury you get from listening to Khanh Ly [a folk artist], but to them, that's not luxury, that's Vietnamese tradition. But that's where they miss the boat. My job with the company is to communicate 'luxury is this other thing going on.' So, anyways, we're talking about Neanderthals. So it's really hard to communicate the vision of the CEO.

Tara's frustrated, yet candid remarks about her subordinates being 'Neanderthals' overlooks the complexity of marketing socially embedded concepts such as luxury to an emerging economy of nouveau riche consumers, or moreover, teaching her staff to market these concepts where the concept of luxury is constantly evolving and influenced by globalized, imported interpretations of luxury. Tara's staff, who are mostly local

Vietnamese and who have never traveled beyond Ho Chi Minh City, needless to say outside of Vietnam, have different understandings of what constitutes luxury. These remarks reflected the dilemmas of foreign companies that were trying to capture market share in emerging market Vietnam – companies that tried to wholesale import ideas about lifestyle, and who relied upon sometimes inexperienced Viet Kieu managers to broker these messages, and who were not necessarily going about this the right way. Because Tara is a manager, her globalized knowledge runs the potential to command more credibility from co-workers, clients, and others over those who possess more localized forms of knowledge production.

Local Resentment of the Viet Kieu

Stylistically, Tara's statement reminded me of the handful of remarks that local Vietnamese would say about the arrogance of the Viet Kieu, who acted like they knew more than locals. The local Vietnamese sales manager of a German grocery multinational chain who earned an economics Masters degree from the US expressed disdain for his only Viet Kieu co-worker from France because the young Viet Kieu had a "chip on his shoulder" and behaved as though he knew more than the local sales staff: "Nobody liked this type of Viet Kieu at the office." Resentment of Viet Kieu, told to me second-hand by the Viet Kieu I interviewed, was observed as being more blatantly verbalized than the resentment towards other foreigners in the workplace.

There was some consensus amongst many of my Viet Kieu interviewees that fewer misunderstandings on the job would arise if their identity were anything rather than Viet Kieu. For instance, the Viet Kieu with any linguistic ability to understand

Vietnamese at the office seemed commonplace, since oftentimes native-level Vietnamese fluency was demanded or expected from local Vietnamese bosses or co-workers; however, any low-level of fluency demonstrated by White Westerners would garner praise and astonishment. For most of the workplaces I observed, English was the official language of the office, so linguistic communication was not supposed to be an issue. However, Vietnamese co-workers primarily spoke to one another in Vietnamese and that was the de facto language of conversation, which excluded some Viet Kieu who had limited fluency because they were raised in the US. These findings resonate with past studies of the Viet Kieu conducted by Carruthers (2002: 441): "One finds in Vietnam resentment among local staff directed at overpaid White managers, but with nothing like the vehemence reserved for Viet Kieu who are perceived to replace or disbar local Vietnamese from access to corporate power."

But resentment or even worse, discrimination, was not just the doing of locals. A large British headed financial firm was believed by many reputable Viet Kieu to refuse hiring Viet Kieu because the CEO believed that their presence confused cultural politics in the workplace – they were not perceived by clients as "Vietnamese enough" because many did not speak perfect Vietnamese and they were not part of the racial majority of nationals from Western countries such as the US, Australia, France, and Germany. Three managers told me the same thing, and named the CEO as being the one to uphold this stance on hiring. The head of this international firm was a European male who was also rumored to be amongst the few foreigners with fluency in Vietnamese. Though systematic discrimination against the Viet Kieu was hard to prove, it was clear when I made a casual phone call to the office receptionist that they did not and had never hired

any Western Viet Kieu. Moreover, their company website's "About Us" section highlighted biographical information about mostly male Vietnamese managers who had been educated in Eastern Europe and or were White-European or North American employees. The widespread belief by Viet Kieu gossip circles was that many international firms did not see the Viet Kieu staff as fully integrated into the expatriate community. An INGO expat who was not Viet Kieu also informed me that at her office of roughly 40 staff that does development work, when the question was posed to local staff whether to hire foreigners (non-Viet Kieu) or Viet Kieu (at the time, a few were contracting to the organization) the majority Vietnamese staff requested to have foreigners; the way she understood it, their excuse was that "it reduced the level of conflict", said quite blatantly.

In 2007, English language media announced that Vietnam was facing a serious high skilled labor shortage; hiring managers and headhunters scurried to recruit Viet Kieu and other expatriates. This process has gradually slowed down, and even reversed in some hiring contexts. A number of Viet Kieu working at transnational corporations reported that over the past few years since they arrived, they had witnessed a gradual slowdown in the aggressiveness of companies trying to court Viet Kieu to work for them, as they shifted towards preferring local Vietnamese professionals educated abroad, often in Western countries, rather than hiring the Viet Kieu with a foreign college degree. This made sense from a cost savings standpoint. The "local" Vietnamese who were college and graduate school educated abroad would typically demand half to one third of an expatriate salary – most Viet Kieu earned less than salaried expatriates, but still earned more than local staff at equivalent occupations. A locally recruited Vietnamese job

candidate would not require expatriate relocation packages that included housing subsidies, movers, and family relocation costs.[76] Hiring managers were becoming more targeted in their preferences; from 2008 the global recession that prompted many transnational corporations to seek out new markets in Asia/Vietnam also prompted these companies to think more long-term about the tradeoffs of hiring a Viet Kieu – those with an ethnic face but who were still culturally foreign – as opposed to local Vietnamese with similar credentials who had more local knowledge. The increased presence of Western-educated Vietnamese has blurred some previously clear social boundaries between Viet Kieu-ness and Vietnamese middle class elites educated abroad. This suggests that the Viet Kieu diaspora—valued for their bi-cultural and multi-lingual skills and versatile enough to function as a capitalist bridge between Asia and the West— were temporary and intermediary high skilled migrants ready to meet the short-term needs of a rapidly restructuring Vietnamese economy.

Being in Between: Language, Culture, and the Legacy of the Vietnam War

What are the set of work practices or actions taken by Viet Kieu who play to their "in between" identities? Viet Kieu such as Michael were aware of the need for strong Vietnamese language skills and the need to adapt to local culture: "I heard stories of Viet

[76] Local and expat wages are not always this unequal, depending on the size of the firm and the qualifications of the expat being hired. This proportion was obtained by triangulating information about salaries from expat investment bankers, who earn about 80-90% of their US peers in the six figure range or roughly 10-40 times what their local counterparts would earn, to human resources managers at big four service and accounting firms who earn about double the amount. I also asked two major headhunters and staffing firms to provide figures of salaries to see if what I heard during interviews was vaguely true. English teachers salaries are worth noting because of the disparate wages based on perceived authenticity of the teacher's fluency associated with racial phenotype.

Kieu and other expat managers failing miserably because of not knowing the Vietnamese language and not being able to adapt to the local culture. I think it's important to be humble, accept and adapt to any culture if you want to be successful working in the international markets." In some ways, however, being 'in between' put the Viet Kieu in precarious and ambivalent situations where they had to tread carefully because of their awareness and family connections to Vietnamese language, culture, and history—more specifically, the Vietnam War.

Tommy, age 30, the country manager of an INGO, recognized that Viet Kieu had to fulfill a double set of expectations when he was recruited in 2006 by a major US-based foundation to manage the Vietnam division. Each day, he concentrated on learning new sophisticated Vietnamese work related vocabulary, and felt that he had to work harder than his white male colleagues to get access to, earn the trust of, and respect from high-level Vietnamese government officials.

Matters having to do with the Vietnam War were sensitive, and it was important for 'returnees' to establish their political identities as being separate from their refugee parents' hard stance on communism as post-1975 war refugees. Tommy did not grow up around many Vietnamese Americans in the US, but his "1975 Northern Vietnamese" accented Vietnamese language pronunciation was fluent, and he could rattle off jokes in Vietnamese slang like a native. Tommy stated:

> We're *guests* here [in Vietnam]; we're not *from* here. When you come back here, you have to prove yourself moreso than other foreigners [who aren't Viet Kieu].

Tommy did this by declaring at meetings in fluent Vietnamese that he was Viet Kieu, but that he was born of a younger generation that had decided to “put politics [of the Vietnam War] aside in order to get his work done in Vietnam.”

War-time legacies complicate the role of diasporic returnees to be bridge builders at work, but not always. In Judy’s corporate office local Vietnamese staff had a broad diversity of political histories. One of her employees had a father die in a political re-education camp, fighting for the South (US-backed) regime. Another staff member had parents whose South Vietnamese parents fled to the North in support of Ho Chi Minh, and returned to the South after 1975. There was also staff from the North whose parents moved to the South after 1975. According to Judy:

> You have a whole range of histories and conflicts of those years [of the Vietnam War] all in this office, they are all my younger staff … born in the 80s. And they are Northerners, but their parents after 1975 moved here to HCMC and created a home here, and became part of the Southern lifestyle. They speak with a Southern accent with us and with a Northern accent when they see their parents.
>
> And then sitting and having lunch and when we touch on that kind of stuff there are no tears, just a lot of laughing. Never hatred … never animosity. There was never sorrow.

Judy’s Vietnamese staff, with varied family political histories surrounding the Vietnam War, are not entirely protected from the legacies of historical and political tensions. However, like the 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu, who were a generation removed from their parents’ refugee struggles, the local Vietnamese staff were also, in large part, a generation removed from the other side of the war and wartime atrocities. Judy’s family history and experience of having grown up in a Vietnamese refugee household did influence her to discourage her Vietnamese local staff from migrating abroad:

> Even with the guy who lost his father in a re-education camp. His life story is quite interesting because his mom and him had always wanted to migrate to the US after his father died. They applied for the HO visa, for years and years, and they never heard anything. Then his mom died, so after his mom died, less than a year, US granted them a visa. And he came to me and asked, 'Should I go to the US?'
>
> I said to him, 'You always dreamed of the US, if you want to go, then go. If you go to the US, you will give up your own life or your children's life. You will not be a manager, you will change your career and go through a very difficult next fifteen years to start again. And all this during your fifties. I saw that happen to my parents.
>
> But I said, 'your kids will be guaranteed an education'.
>
> He responded to me, 'I work for XXX Industries, I can see myself making it here.'
>
> He's great. He sees his children's future can be guaranteed in Vietnam. For me, I'm more hopeful for Vietnam. This country needs more people like him, not people who leave. People who accept all the irregularities, all the unfairness, the educational system is going through changes, there's still a future."

What was more striking was Judy's influence on her staff's decision to give up the visa to migrate to the US, instead suggesting that remaining in Vietnam would be a patriotic decision and one that could help move the multinational garment sourcing company forward. Judy's parents' experiences of occupational downgrading was a powerful example for her Vietnamese employee, reminding him that immigration to the US was not the romanticized story of upward mobility and success that some might have envisioned.

Nevertheless, aside from Judy's overwhelmingly positive perception of closure, different perspectives on the Vietnam War still converge and escalate tensions. Outside of work, these tensions do not have much material consequence, but on the job, they suggest the need for more directly addressing these historical and political issues. The

post-War generation of Viet Kieu was better equipped to contribute to the Vietnamese economy than their parents because most did not experience the war directly, but on occasion, war politics did spill over into work politics. Sue, age 26, and manager of an educational study abroad program, could speak Vietnamese fluently, having grown up in Orange County, one of the most densely populated Vietnamese American enclaves in the U.S. Sue's Vietnamese language fluency positioned her to emcee events for the US Consulate. On a recent fieldtrip with her students – ten percent of whom were themselves Viet Kieu, with the remaining being White American college students – her family's political experience led to a precarious situation that almost got her into trouble. The Ben Tre People's Committee was telling stories about how they 'never killed any civilians during the American War.' In her Vietnamese-to-English translation for her American students, Sue made a side comment in English, which few elders understood on the Vietnam side, saying 'but they're wrong.' Later on, one of the Vietnamese students in the audience told her that if the Committee could understand English and know what she said, she could run the risk of being thrown in jail.

Patriarchal Gender and Racial Politics

Viet Kieu and non-Viet Kieu women confronted gendered cultural barriers that intersected with their age, nationality, and racialized identities. These challenges included patriarchal gender norms of "after hours" business, and changing daily work practices that were considered "Vietnamese". Though nationality was salient at the multinational workplace, gendered expectations and informal channels of exclusion for Viet Kieu women were notable. Many business deals in the Vietnamese financial sector

were conducted “after hours”. Lan, who had worked previously in a New York City investment bank, complained to me that she seldom got invited to “after hours” business negotiations as a finance manager in Vietnam. There, much of the discussions occurred while corporate employees entertained their mostly male clients at the “*beer om*” – translated loosely into hugging bars – where women were not typically invited. Lan, director of a real estate investment group of a major fund, did not entertain her clients after hours, as it was deemed not socially acceptable for a woman to be invited. Lan overheard a Vietnamese staff member of one of her bosses in this multinational company be advised to take a male client to a high-end escort service for entertaining. When I asked Lan how she manages these gendered forms of exclusion and overhearing these less than savory conversations, she responded that because this was such a common occurrence for Viet Kieu women managers, she did not mention this to her Viet Kieu and other expat female friends at their social dinner gatherings. Lan noted that their conversations quickly descended into what she described as major “bitch fests” about how unfair it was to be a female in Vietnam, regardless of nationality. Though Lan, who had earned a globally ranked MBA and had climbed the corporate ladder to her high level position, tried to resist local work practices of gender exclusion and domination at the after hours negotiations, she, herself, seemed to stop trying to circumvent such local exclusionary “old boy” practices.

Though it was rare for women to be invited, Thi, age 30, was indeed invited to a *beer om* (hugging beer bars) with a set of local Vietnamese government delegates. Thi had to mask her discomfort at seeing the Vietnamese female hugging bar workers being touched and having to please male clients for tips. Later, Thi, who was not new to

understanding the nuances of what went on behind these closed door deals, was furious at her own reticence and desire to not want to "rock the boat" within her highly patriarchal work environment.

Strategies of negotiating gender identity politics included "dealing with it" rather than challenging these social norms because they saw the system as being so deeply embedded within Asia-based business practices. Patterns of gendered resistance, followed by the stage of silent acceptance of these practices as "when in Vietnam, do as the locals do" became a dominant pattern of ways Viet Kieu women maintained their high level positions. Many compartmentalized their Western feminist standpoint; they adopted a mix of gendered practices of public obedience and private resistance. Perhapsthis was also linked to how they saw their permanence in Vietnam – if they were only there to gain valuable work experience, it was not a stretch to turn a blind eye to these practices in order to continue advancing up the career ladder.

Racialized complaints from Viet Kieu that their white male counterparts received better treatment from local staff than them intersected with patriarchal gender politics in the workplace. Many Viet Kieu felt as though Whites – translated as "nguoi tay" or Westerners – regardless of their country of origin, received deference and a higher level of respect from local Vietnamese staff. Thi complained that in a board room comprised of Vietnamese government delegates and her lower-ranked Vietnamese and white male staff, the government officials 100 percent of the time would hand their business cards with both hands grasping the edge of the card to her white male colleague, even though she was the senior most ranked person in the room. The predominantly Vietnamese male government officials usual mistook her slender, attractive figure and sharp business attire

for being the office administrative assistant. In fact, it was not uncommon in Vietnam for secretaries and front desk receptionists to apply for jobs that required them to include a photograph attached with their resume.

White privilege worked to the benefit of many White Americans I encountered, some of whom I interviewed. According to Ollie, a white male in his mid-twenties who worked at an investment group, when he goes to the local major bookstore chain, his local Vietnamese friends have to lock up their bookbags, whereas he never gets asked. He also reported that he "could just walk into any luxury five-star place [such as a hotel bar] and not seem like he does not belong there, whereas local Vietnamese have to prove they can afford these places."

Another white male, Kirk, a 27 year-old photographer working long-term in Vietnam, stated that he "has it easier than Viet Kieu living in Vietnam." When this photographer would travel with his Viet Kieu girlfriend, however, she would be the one to get mistreated, since local Vietnamese observing the couple would assume that his well-dressed girlfriend was a prostitute. During another occasion, Kirk felt like he got better treatment than his Viet Kieu girlfriend: during his girlfriend's job interview for an English teaching position in Saigon[77] that he accompanied her on, even though his girlfriend was the applicant, the local Vietnamese employer kept nudging him to take the

[77] On the subject of English language jobs, different Viet Kieu had competing interpretations of whether or not they felt wage discrimination in the highly competitive English language teaching market of Ho Chi Minh City, the gateway for many backpackers to earn a living and hang out in Vietnam temporarily, or what others described as a "stepping stone job" to make a partial commitment to living in Vietnam. These jobs entailed teaching Vietnamese corporate employees English in classes and one-on-one. One Viet Kieu woman complained that she earned $8 per hour teaching English, whereas her white American and white British counterparts who also had the same bachelors degree qualifications earned $10-$15 per hour.

job and never looked his girlfriend in the eye during the interview. His girlfriend was furious by this job favoritism shown towards blond haired, light skinned men.[78]

Though Viet Kieu confronted business practices such as corruption, they were less adamant about challenging gendered hierarchies and practices that seemed deeply embedded within the workplace culture. In response to those cases, many of the Viet Kieu accepted it as part of the daily struggles of working in Vietnam. Some Viet Kieu learned to adapt in their role as cultural brokers in many globalizing institutions of private firms and INGOs in Ho Chi Minh City. Though met with some forms of resistance, many local and eager young staff were receptive to Viet Kieu implementation of Westernized corporate practices. However, the Viet Kieu also struggled to adapt to the local know-how and expertise of their Vietnamese staff and encountered frustrations, at times with racial, national, and gender politics. For instance, Michael decided that to account for the perceived lack of soft skills in the Vietnamese workforce at his firm, he adopted micro-managerial practices. Other managers I spoke with arrived at the same set of conclusions. John, a white American who has a small furniture business, said that he had to fire his Vietnamese assistant because "each day it seemed as though she was starting her job for the first time; she constantly had to be micro-managed and told what to do." Yet micro-managing as a response to the perception that some Vietnamese workers were not thinking creatively enough, not thinking sufficiently out of the box, or

[78] The three white American women I interviewed about their experiences as expats in Saigon did not feel as though they were privileged but they also did not feel challenged; one woman who worked for an NGO said that her American identity stifled people from opening up to her, at times garnering suspicion about her motives for being in Vietnam.

not self-directed enough seemed counterproductive to resolving the broader critique of deficits in the workforce.

Tara encountered frustrations with translating concepts of luxury to her staff, a critique of their lack of global knowledge about the product they were trying to sell to a burgeoning middle and upper class in Vietnam. Some locals did not try to mask their resentment toward the Viet Kieu, citing instances of arrogance on the job and their unwillingness to adapt to local forms of knowledge, and their privileging of their Western training above the expertise of local staff. Past sociological studies have observed how powerful and affluent Vietnamese men try to prove their superiority over Viet Kieu men when it came to the hugging bars, often trying to outdrink foreign and Viet Kieu men, and making exorbitant purchases to prove their economic standing (Hoang, diss, 2011). This resentment was not limited to the workplace, and the stratified economic order was reshuffling whites, Viet Kieu, and local elites amidst Vietnam's rapidly restructuring economy, creating a class of nouveau riche in Vietnam who were rising through the business ranks.

Globalized notions of gender equality were also colliding with patriarchal forms of "old boys" style socializing amongst Vietnamese businessmen and government officials. Viet Kieu pass normative judgments about gender relations, but also have yet to demonstrate they are challenging the status quo within institutions of labor. Many of these micro-level instances of global expertise colliding with local forms of knowledge and practices are a part of the process of Vietnam's rapidly modernizing economy. It was unclear whether, across longer periods of observation, push back would emerge from

Viet Kieu women to protest informal labor market inequality within these hierarchical and patriarchical finance firms.

The New 'Returnee' Replacements: Vietnamese Study Abroad Elites

During the time many lived in Vietnam, the Viet Kieu also witnessed a shift in their intermediary position in Vietnam's globalized racial and ethnic hierarchy, from being highly desired to being valuable but expendable educated workers, whom the globalization of Vietnam's middle class workforce would gradually displace. During my fieldwork in 2010, I witnessed a preference toward hiring locals who were educated abroad, were fluent English speakers, who would cost less to hire than expatriates or Viet Kieu, and were more likely to remain in the country. Many global firms recognized the increasing numbers of Vietnam's study abroad elites returning from Western countries with bachelors and post-graduate degrees. By 2012, less experienced Viet Kieu trying to enter the labor market in Vietnam found that seeking work took months rather than weeks, and that expatriate contracts were not renewed as frequently as they had been.[79] The 2008 Global Recession had set many of these hiring preferences in motion; Vietnam has more recently faced economic stagnation, surrounding the three areas of high fiscal deficit, slow progress in banking sector reform, and limited progress on restructuring inefficient state-owned enterprises. These concerns factor into hiring decisions.

Much of the reason for these growing numbers of Vietnamese study abroad elites has to do with Vietnam's gradual restructuring of its higher education infrastructure and

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[79] Christopher Beam in "Looking to Get Ahead? China Doesn't Want You," June 8, 2012, *Bloomberg Business Weekly* describes a similar process of reshuffling of hierarchies of hiring preference which may have occurred in China, affecting both ethnic Chinese descendants and White Western expatriates who sought work in China: "Even if you have a marketable skill and speak perfect Mandarin, nothing is guaranteed. Lurie first moved to China in 2003 to study Mandarin, returned in 2005 after getting his MBA at the University of California at Los Angeles, and signed up with a top China private equity firm. In 2008 he was asked to leave and was replaced with a native Chinese. It was a matter of supply and demand, he says: "There was a time people had to be convinced to invest in China. Now people are lining up to give them money. So my value decreased."

heavier reliance upon sending its high school elites abroad for college and graduate school. At the time of my study, the US Consul General An T. Le, himself a Viet Kieu, suggested that only an estimated 16 percent of all college bound students would end up matriculating in a Vietnamese indigenous university (Interview, December 2010). There are an estimated 450 to 470 Vietnamese universities[80] for a country of over 86 million people, as compared to the US, where there are at least 30,000 universities for a population of 300 million people. Many Vietnamese high school students in the near future would be unable to obtain a spot in a major public Vietnamese university.

In 2005, the Vietnamese government adopted Resolution 14 (14/2005/NQ-CP), which called for the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of higher education. In the preamble, the resolution acknowledged that Vietnamese higher education was failing to fulfill the demands of industrialization and modernization of the country, the need of the people to study, and the demands of international integration in the new phase. As Vietnam began to send more students abroad, the globalization of an elite local Vietnamese workforce meant that newer Viet Kieu entrants to the Ho Chi Minh City labor market found it harder to find work if they had not secured a job prior to migration; for those already in Vietnam, some individuals already quit their jobs in Ho Chi Minh City to ‘return’ to their permanent homes in the US or elsewhere. These outcomes were in part due to corporate and state authorities seeing the Overseas Vietnamese ‘returning’ population as a crucial intermediary labor supply wedged between foreign expatriates, who were costly, and local educated elites, who were fluent in English and Vietnamese.

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[80] Critics say this figure is a conservative estimate because new universities and junior colleges are opening each year. http://english.vietnamnet.vn/en/education/13792/vietnam-has-too-many-universities.html.

Both of these latter groups lacked, for the most part, the bicultural skills that the Viet Kieu could provide as interlocutors, until more recently, when a larger abundance of Western educated children of local Vietnamese elites came back from their studies abroad to fill middle-management positions previously occupied by the Viet Kieu and foreign expatriates.

Each year, there has been a significant growth in the numbers of Vietnamese nationals attending undergraduate, graduate school, and community college in the US, totaling 13,112 students in 2009-2010. Vietnamese people have studied abroad in increasingly large numbers since 1986.[81] Many affluent Vietnamese families, particularly those with ties to the Hanoi government, send their children to the US and elsewhere for high school so they can learn English well enough to enter universities and community colleges.[82] My participant observations at Chamber of Commerce mixers revealed that many local attendees were Vietnamese study abroad returnees working in the private sector who had attended community college or university in the US, Australia, and Singapore. Some had even attended non-accredited US colleges, which in Vietnam, still commanded prestige of having received a foreign credential.

[81] In the early years of *Doi Moi*, most studied abroad through bi- and multilateral scholarship programs such as the Fulbright program, the World Bank program, and others. As segments of Vietnamese society have grown wealthier, Vietnamese families have begun to self-finance their children's education. Recent years have witnessed an especially rapid rise in students going to the US; according to the Institute for International Education, Vietnam ranks among the top twenty country sending students to the US (Vallely and Wilkinson, 2008: 5).

[82] One such example is Carroll University, a small liberal arts college located in a suburb of Milwaukee, which hosts 20-50 students each summer from top Hanoi high schools to learn English and coaches them on how to apply to college. This arrangement helps both parties meet their goal of diversifying and globalizing their enrollees.

According to the Institute of International Education, the number of Vietnamese students in U.S is as follow,

Year	Undergraduate	Graduate	Other	TOTAL
2009-2010				13,112
2008-2009	8694	2411	1718	12,823
2007-2008	5945	1648	1176	8,769
2006-2007	4092	1135	809	6,036
2005-2006	3043	1287	267	4,597
2004-2005	2429	815	124	3,670
2003-2004	2226	815	124	3,165
2002-2003	1924	649	149	2,722
2001-2002	1852	563	115	2,531
2000-2001	1424	488	113	2,022

Figure 6.1: Vietnamese nationals studying abroad in the US.

The phenomenon of study abroad as a surrogate for producing an educated workforce ready to meet the demands of a globalizing, English-speaking workforce are also unfolding in many other countries in the Global South. For instance, international student outflows from India have been growing rapidly. Data from the Indian government indicate that more than a quarter million Indian students were studying abroad in 2008 to 2009.[83] Moreover, many of these study abroad students, rather than returning to their rural villages or towns, get hired by multinational corporations, international NGOs and state-owned enterprises in urban centers, and hence, producing cadres of new transnational elites (Robinson, 2004).

If expatriates or Viet Kieu were deemed too expensive in the long-run to hire, some multinational human resources managers looked for Vietnamese who are either

[83] Kapur, Devash. "Indian Higher Education," *American Universities in a Global Market*. Edited by Charles T. Clotfelter, University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 326.

educated abroad or studying with foreign campuses based locally, such as the Royal Melbourne Institute for Technology (RMIT) satellite branch in District 7/Saigon South. The globalization of campuses to increase enrollments has resulted in a new tier of graduates: those who are semi-qualified or hesitant to send their children abroad for a college education, but who want a Westernized college credential. The issue of local managers replacing expats is a global trend. This is primarily for economic reasons, with locals being cheaper, but it also shows the growing importance of local social capital and "localized expertise" (Liu 2008) in the global economy. The Viet Kieu are at a disadvantage in this growing trend, and in order to adapt, they must develop localized expertise in the future.

Conclusion

As Saxenian (2006) points out in her discussion of transnational entrepreneurial migrants in the high technology sector, migrants such as the bicultural Viet Kieu are thought to be most equipped at navigating and communicating global changes on the ground in their professional capacity as workers and managers. My study shows how these changes unfold at the micro-level of workplace interactions and attitudes across groups. The 'brain re-circulation' of Western managerial principles does not occur seamlessly: though welcomed by Vietnam's growing and demographically young workforce, many practices are also resented by displaced local Vietnamese elites. The rapid development of Vietnam's manufacturing sectors has also led to a reversal of its many decades of 'brain drain' – as demonstrated by Judy and her subordinate's decision to remain in Vietnam - caused by the post-War time reconstruction and economic

shrinkage. The economic globalization of Vietnam during the recent past decade has coincided with an influx of high skilled migrant 'returnees' who were thought to be the cultural brokers on the ground. Scholars of international development and migration are mostly positive about the diffusion of social remittances – there needs to be a greater awareness about the local-level social costs of non-native managers directing local, native staff within globally restructuring firms and INGOs. As Obukhova (2009) demonstrates within one industry sector in one locality – the semi-conductor industry of Shanghai – "the transfer of skills and social resources across organizational environments can be costly and even sometimes harmful to the receiving organization … individuals moving between different environments need to create new locally appropriate skills and social resources."

This chapter focused upon cultural communication, social resources and managerial style, and not the other crucial factors such as financial and technological transfers of knowledge, which further studies can also take into account. By 2010, the hiring dynamics for Viet Kieu in the private sector had changed, and many companies were shifting their strategies towards a preference for local Vietnamese who had studied abroad. These changes reflected a slowdown in foreign investment and annual growth in Vietnam's economy in industries such as legal service, financial consulting, IT, and personal banking.

CHAPTER 7

Diasporic 'Return' Migration and Global Capitalism in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Though the Viet Kieu (Overseas Vietnamese) are, at multiple levels, the focus of Vietnam's rapidly unfolding cultural and economic globalization, their transnational lives are fraught with tensions and ambivalence about where they belong. They confront daily challenges of residing in their "imagined" home in Vietnam, whilst maintaining social ties with their previous home, with many recognizing that "home" will always be in the US. The Viet Kieu are located in a structurally contradictory position. The 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu are simultaneously Vietnamese and Western, drawn to and repelled from each of these worlds. Their families fled the country when they were young (or not even born), but now they are returning in search of their roots. They are assigned an important role in the country's economic development by its leaders, but they work for companies or organizations with agendas that do not necessarily prioritize the official Vietnamese interests. Toward their distant relations in Vietnam they have contradictory family connections: though they expect to be welcomed home and perhaps need help from family as they integrate into their new residence, they are potential sources of revenue and assistance to be exploited. Socially, they have a lot in common with the other Western expatriates with whom they identify; yet their Vietnamese parental origins draw them to seek integration with the local upper middle class societal customs, norms, and appearances.

The movement of ethnic and diasporic return migrants from the developed countries of the Global North to ancestral homelands in the developing countries in the Global South is a process fraught with cultural, emotional, and economic ambivalences that are nested within the economic and power inequalities between regions.[84] The expansion of global capitalism, foreign direct investment into developing countries, and the privatization of goods and services and rapid process of deregulation of domestic industries in developing countries create a niche filled by global knowledge workers with local know-how to broker relationships between the state, multinationals, and civil society. Given the complexities of these arrangements, the invisible and sometimes temporary brokering of these economic relations are filled by people like the younger generations of Viet Kieu who move past political hostilities but retain their ethnic heritage. These processes will continue to reproduce stratification in the multinational workplace, wherein those with Western credentials and a local ethnic phenotype are deemed as highly desirable, which makes the "in between" diasporic subject a seemingly natural cultural bridge between economies. This conclusion weaves together my findings, which illustrate the tenuousness and temporariness of the Viet Kieu within the overall trajectory of Vietnam's development, and how the Viet Kieu cultural ambivalence ties in with their economically ambivalent status as an intermediary labor force. In practice, the unrealistic expectation imposed upon the Viet Kieu to be the idealized global bridge was not as smooth as theories about a borderless and cosmopolitan post-national world would suggest.

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[84] Though the migrants are primarily going from West to East, this reference of North to South plays up economic differences between regions within the global world system.

My study began with this basic question, "What happens when the 1.5 and second generation children of Vietnamese American refugees 'return' for long-term work opportunities in their parents' ancestral homeland?" This question led to a nearly decade-long investigation of the way global economic changes in both host and home countries created the impetus for 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu migratory 'returns.' These globally-motivated 'return' experiences became fraught with tensions and ambivalence caused by racialized, stratified, and gendered hierarchies of privilege and otherness that the Viet Kieu experience locally. The social construction of these hierarchies were produced through a series of macro-level changes in Vietnam's workforce and the encounters produced by the transnational flows of the Viet Kieu between host and home country.

My findings suggest that sociological research that tries to interpret the experiences of these new labor migration patterns must be understood from a world systems theoretical framework in dialogue with a micro-level of analysis of what these global processes look like on the ground. When we pay attention to social relations on the ground, the dynamic interplay between negotiations of identity politics, belonging, and power becomes visible. Those social relations that are produced and complicated by the very structures of global capital mobility – at the level of multinational firms and organizations – that attracted some Viet Kieu to 'return' to Vietnam in the first place. The impact of macro-level transnational flows of people and goods across political borders understood through the lens of migrants' locally-based social interactions with non-migrants provides that nuance in the study of economic development and social change. The following sections outline the global motivations for diasporic 'return', the

discursive boundaries between local and foreign norms and mannerisms, the transnational family balance of obligations and emotions, gendered and racial stratification of work, and the return of Vietnamese local elites who will eventually be more highly sought after to access similar jobs and roles of the Viet Kieu.

The Ambivalence of Being "In Between" as Viet Kieu

Desired by the modernizing state yet resented by some native worker counterparts and subordinates, the Viet Kieu are emotionally and structurally ambivalent[85] about their 'return.' This of course varied for each individual by factors such as career and personal motivations for the 'return,' gender identity, and cultural fluency. They are ambivalent about negotiating relationships with extended relatives, shaped by the legacy of their family's departure as refugees during the Vietnam War and its immediate aftermath. Structurally, their return positions them as part of a social group of cosmopolitan elites who are phenotypically and ancestrally tied to the people and history of Vietnam. Yet as high-skilled workers, they fill an economic niche, which, during the earlier time period of their migratory arrival in the early 2000s, was not met by Vietnam's local elites. However, unlike non-Vietnamese Americans working as expatriates in Vietnam, the Viet Kieu are in close proximity to both Americans and Vietnamese, and thus have to navigate the complexities of being "in between."

[85] Robert Merton and Eleanor Barber elaborate upon the concept of status ambivalence in the context of science and knowledge: "a process through which social structures generate the circumstances in which ambivalence is embedded in particular statuses and status-sets together with their associated social roles" in "Sociological Ambivalence" in *On Social Structure and Science*, 1996, University of Chicago Press.

Expectations, Concerns, and Motivations for 'Return'

In order to interpret the complex motivations for 'return,' we must consider both economic and ethnic primordial ties that frame each migrants' narrative of 'return' at various stages of residence in Ho Chi Minh City. Prior to their 'returns,' many Viet Kieu 'returnees' went to Vietnam for high-skilled work and made lifestyle comparisons between pursuing careers in the US versus in Vietnam. These years coincided with the surge of foreign direct investment flowing into Vietnam's economy and increased labor demand for skills and expertise that could not be filled by the indigenous labor force in the short-run. On the US sending side, the broader sentiment of financial recession, spillover economic effects into the rest of the economy, and barriers to mid-level and advanced level careers for ethnic minorities and women meant that the job market would remain stagnant for new graduates. Already, many Americans were beginning to seek career opportunities in high growth parts of Asia and Latin America. The fact that the Viet Kieu were poised to tap into their ethnic and ancestral ties to travel to and look for work made Vietnam a desirable post-college destination. When the World Trade Organization granted Vietnam accession in 2006, this gave Vietnam the legitimacy that many of these hypermobile Viet Kieu needed to make a commitment to work there for years at a time. The intention for most Viet Kieu was never to make Vietnam their "home."

There was strident parental hesitance and community disapproval in the US about the Viet Kieu decision to 'return.' This was in part due to a legacy of first generation Vietnamese American refugees' mistrust of the Vietnamese government and the political environment that exiled them after the war. Many of the 1.5 and second generation in

my study were inclined to make the longer-term decision to work in Vietnam, but mostly in the South, which put their parents more at ease than if they had chosen the North. Many Viet Kieu had made prior trips for tourism and family visits; with economic conditions in Vietnam improving, many desired a longer length of stay on a more regular basis in a rapidly transitioning Ho Chi Minh City, the commercial hub that generates over 30 percent of Vietnam's GDP. Many located job referrals through their college alumni networks, particularly among MBA-credentialed job seekers. Lifestyle decisions also complemented their career aspirations, and many, including businesspersons, non-governmental organization staff, and artists/entertainers found that they could get hired, be promoted, and save more of their earnings while living comfortable, expat lifestyles in a developing country. Metaphors such as being a "bigger fish in a small pond" were used to characterize how they felt about their rapid advancement in their career ladders while working in Ho Chi Minh City. At the same time, many who were working in the business sector for global firms committed to between one to two years working in Vietnam, but they were uncertain about how long they would remain. Citing family reasons or the lack of a stable business and political environment, some Viet Kieu opted to return to their homes in the US, using their valuable work experience abroad to find new business opportunities or to return to enroll in graduate studies.

This suggests that the structure of some white collar jobs are no longer territorially restricted, given the nature of outsourcing and the need for culturally knowledgeable intermediaries to connect corporations residing in the Global North with services flexibly performed abroad in the Global South (where labor is cheaper). New patterns of work are now arising in this emergent economy, one that suggests a hybrid model of gaining

valuable work experience while enacting a pilgrimage to the ancestral homeland. This pattern favors the educated children of immigrants and refugees in the US who have maintained their parents' ethnic and cultural heritage and language.

The Boundaries between "Local" and Foreign

In essence, the Viet Kieu as workers were one outcome of rapidly unfolding processes of globalization, and yet, they felt out of place within those globally networked flows of people, money, organizations, and cultural exchanges because of their multiple social worlds of belonging. Some Viet Kieu might be more aptly labeled as "bifocal," where their multiple roles and social locations as workers, migrants, and family members enabled them to simultaneously view the world through different lenses (Levitt, 2001: 202; Rouse, 1991). For others, their split allegiances between self, social networks, family, and work colleagues contributed to the sense of ambivalence and feeling out of place – they acted in the interests of their global firms, yet were pressured to also care for and serve the interests of their own family members by providing for non-migrating family members who might be poorer.

The Viet Kieu tried to integrate themselves locally as Vietnamese, but their social networks steered them towards cosmopolitan-leaning, English-speaking expatriate communities. Viet Kieu are ambivalent about their identity and sense of belonging both within Western expatriate communities and amongst their local Vietnamese peers. Their decisions about where to live, in part, determine this – some reside in luxury apartment high-rises that rented, in some cases, more than 60 percent of their units to expatriates and foreigners. Others initially decide to live in the "*hem*" alleyways, the neighborhoods where more local Vietnamese live, but over time, relocated to live amongst other Viet

Kieu and expats. Efforts to minimize their "foreignness" through dressing or appearing more "local" or trying to speak Vietnamese fluently highlight the contradiction that even though some Viet Kieu want to live more authentically like locals, their social habits and residential preferences look more like privileged foreigners. This can be explained by examining the variation in career expectations and motivations for why they went back: though notable exceptions were raised, those who wanted to explore their ethnic roots tried at first to blend in, while those who were there under the pretext of economic and entrepreneurial gains became more or less integrated into the highly visible expatriate community.

Lastly, social gatherings such as holiday parties mimic ordinary life in the US and further solidified boundaries of solidarity between Americans, excluding local Vietnamese invitees who lacked social capital networks to foreigners or fluent English language skills. A social disconnect from Vietnamese government officials who tried to attract the Viet Kieu to their social and cultural events resulted in lackluster efforts to reach some, but not many 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu. The prevalence of gossip amongst Viet Kieu and assertion of moral judgment about which expats and Viet Kieu belong and do not belong led to an implied discourse about those who were legitimately in Vietnam to contribute significantly during their time there in Vietnam as compared to those who would otherwise be considered "losers back home." Some emphasize their sense of having gone culturally native, while others are fully aware – the longer they live in Vietnam – of their ambivalent reception by locals and their stronger sense of American identity and foreignness in their ancestral homeland.

Families Ties

My research points to the tensions that emerge within diasporic transnational families, with the Viet Kieu being ambivalent about the manner and form of giving money and gifts and hospitality with short and long-term visits. Though grandmothers are crucial to maintaining transnational family intimacy, their passing away is also linked with a decline in the frequency of visits with extended non-migrating relatives. Many Viet Kieu feel overburdened by demands placed upon them by relatives, with expectations to contribute money or favors. Others feel that sociocultural differences, money and lifestyle separate them from their relatives, even amongst relatives who have money. Still other Viet Kieu feel class guilt and the desire to contribute more money toward the betterment of their relatives. Family pre-migration history continues to affect the present day orientation of family members towards one another, considering they oftentimes were separated for over three decades by war and its aftermath. These family relations emerge in the shadow of the Vietnam War, which many Vietnamese have moved beyond, yet, for the Viet Kieu, this history is a legacy that frames return visits and residential permanence, and the personal remains politicized even for those Viet Kieu who were born after the war. For instance, the political divisions within one of my subjects' multigenerational family during the Vietnam War and in the aftermath of the war shaped how her family was negatively treated, and also shaped the extent to which she now bragged about how much better off her life was in the US. Some Viet Kieu choose to mask their earnings or assets, worried that their relatives would think negatively of how much they are willing to help out Vietnamese relatives. These findings suggest the tenuousness of intimate connections between family members across borders and question the durability of transnational family ties across generations of

immigrants and refugees.

Gendered and Racial Stratification of Work

For the Viet Kieu, the influence of social location extends beyond class and beyond the institution of the family. Though it is not surprising that many workplaces are gendered and racialized spaces, the global convergence of patriarchal and racial norms in the Vietnam-based multinational workplace is worth noting. For Vietnamese American women who seek rapid career advancement in the Vietnamese marketplace, the portrait of the glass ceiling is mixed. Some gendered aspects of working in Vietnam involve exclusion from after hours business negotiations and client relationship building at the beer oms (hugging bars) and being mistaken for a subordinate rather than a manager by virtue of being female. Yet they can juggle work and family by hiring nannies and domestic servants – assimilating to Vietnamese elite practices – and avoid working the "second shift" that many women endure in the US.

Many Viet Kieu who assume positions as global managers sometimes navigate challenges of local know-how amongst their subordinates. Some Viet Kieu managers attribute their challenging experiences working in Vietnam because of cultural miscommunication surrounding abstract concepts such as "luxury" in the marketing and design of upscale home furnishings. Other Viet Kieu managers believe that Vietnamese local work practices lack "soft skills" (such as customer service) that they attributed to a lack of global experience and worldly knowledge; in doing so, many Viet Kieu fail to recognize local know-how and, in some cases, trigger workplace resentment of the Viet Kieu. Those managers who deploy their "in between" Viet Kieu identities make it clear to their clients and business or NGO partners that they are aware that they are foreigners,

are a generation removed from the diasporic politics of the Vietnam War (concerning work matters, anyways), and are flexible about how to do things according to local customs. Many who embrace the challenges of working in the developing country context of Vietnam, where rules are still being written and regulations are not consistently enforced, perform better on their jobs. These tensions provide a nuanced understanding of how global Viet Kieu managers navigate identity politics that Western expatriates with no ancestral ties do not encounter.

The transfer of knowledge, resources, and networks from 'returnees' to their ancestral homeland is now broadly recognized as a bi-directional process affecting both host country and homeland: just as the Viet Kieu work in firms that have a presence in Ho Chi Minh City, they also bring new cultural and economic perspectives on Vietnam back to the US and establish new ventures between the two countries.[86] Future and complementary transnational studies can further enhance our understanding of how diasporas change relations between the US and Vietnam. For instance, studies of diasporic families can include the perceptions of local extended relatives toward the US and their ongoing communication with families in the sending countries, including how the diasporic 'return' migration of 1.5 and second generation migrants might facilitate their simultaneous incorporation in the cultural affairs and political participation of both sending and receiving countries.

[86] A *New York Times* article addressed the theme of brain circulation: "Some scholars and business leaders contend that this emigration does not necessarily bode ill for the United States. They say young entrepreneurs and highly educated professionals sow American knowledge and skills abroad. At the same time, these workers acquire experience overseas and build networks that they can carry back to the United States or elsewhere — a pattern known as 'brain circulation.'" See Kirk Semple, "Children of Immigrants Pursue American Dream Abroad", April 15, 2012.

Local Elites: The New Returnees

Though I do provide a lot of agency in the narrative of how the Viet Kieu are embedded in global economic changes underway in Vietnam, they were not, by any means, a major driving force behind Vietnam's rapid transition to being categorized by the World Bank as a "lower middle income" country. Following in the footsteps of other "late developing" countries, the Viet Kieu presence was desired by the state, which tried to project an image of reconciliation towards its former refugee/exiled émigrés and their descendants by extending visa exemptions and enacting dual citizenship legal rights. Viet Kieu diasporic 'return' migrants comprise an intermediary labor supply for Vietnam's transition to market-oriented socialism, and a "bridge" to expatriate communities, transnational families, and the transnational workplace.

Vietnam's socialist development goals and its steady post-Doi Moi policies (transformation) towards market liberalism continue to affect who is considered desirable for high-skilled jobs in the finance/banking, legal, information technology, and complementary sectors. This situation informs hiring preferences by recruitment managers and shapes the international orientation of companies who look for foreigners with Western credentials who can adapt swiftly and have a reason for staying in-country for the long-term.[87] This outward orientation is not stable, but rather in a constant state

[87] For instance, a local Vietnamese national who earns his MBA degree from the University of Missouri and who decides to return to Vietnam to work is more likely to stay in a multinational company that pays him less (than it would pay an American expatriate), and his local Vietnamese subordinates are more likely to communicate better with him than they would toward a Viet Kieu with similar credentials.

of flux, much like the workforce and development trajectories of India, China, and South Korea, other countries that have sought out foreign-skilled workers from the diaspora. [88]

Unlike other middle-income countries of East Asia and South Asia, however, Vietnam's indigenous education system is still being built up to meet regional standards. A new crop of global elites has emerged who resemble the Viet Kieu, but who are born and raised as Vietnamese nationals in Vietnam after the War; many entered the tertiary educational system and had the skills and resources to earn their degrees abroad in the US, Australia, and the UK. I met many of these individuals at business events, conferences, and on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. They speak accented English and are hired to perform the same duties for which the Viet Kieu were once sought after. They have bachelors degrees, JDs, and MBAs from many schools in the US that would be considered middle to lower-tiered rankings. These credentials sufficiently set them apart as global managerial material, and they have the social and political capital in Vietnam to quickly rise through the ranks of their companies.

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[88] At the time of this dissertation being prepared for submission in May 2014, I had presented these findings on a panel at the Association of Asian American Studies organized to reflect the changing patterns of return migration to Asia, which includes case studies of migration to China, South Korea, India, and Vietnam. Organized Panel, "Between 'Host' and 'Home': Asian American 'Return' Migration to Asia. Helene Lee, Dickinson College, "Making Hybridity Work: Diasporic Koreans in the South Korean labor market," Leslie Wang, University of Massachusetts, Boston, "'I Wish I Came Earlier': Return Migration of Second-Generation Chinese American Professionals to China," Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar, University of Wisconsin, Madison, "I'm a Bigger Fish in a Smaller Pond: the Ambivalent Motives of 1.5 and Second Generation Vietnamese American Skilled 'Return' Migrants to Vietnam," and Sonali Jain, University of North Carolina, Pembroke, "The 'return' of high-skilled, second-generation Indian Americans from the US to India." With Chair/Facilitator: Jane Yamashiro, University of Southern California.

The key difference is where their fates lie – unlike the Viet Kieu who feel like they are differentiated foreigners in Vietnam, these local Vietnamese elites are overwhelmingly committed to remaining in Vietnam. Very few Viet Kieu whom I interviewed can say that they plan to be in Vietnam for the long-term; instead, they plan to be traveling between "here" and "there" (the US) on a regular basis. Likewise, most have to renew their work visas or Viet Kieu visa-exemptions, but have not sought out the dual citizenship offered by the Vietnamese government.

The broader point is that my participant observations across the past decade remain relevant, but the fate of the Viet Kieu as high-skilled workers remains in limbo because of this steady emergence of a Vietnamese nouveau riche.[89] The global economic forces that attracted them are now diminishing those same career prospects for Viet Kieu newcomers to Vietnam. This has consequences for the Viet Kieu currently working in Vietnam and those who potentially had their post-college sights on working there. At least a third of my research subjects have left their jobs in Vietnam for elsewhere. Some of that "elsewhere" is to other emerging marketplaces in Asia, such as Mongolia and Burma, while others have their sights on working back in the US. The social patterns I observe for the Viet Kieu remain strong, yet the economic opportunities for newer 1.5 and second generation Viet Kieu entrants dwindle from when my research first began because the multinational managerial work would eventually be performed by those with local knowledge.

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[89] See, for instance, "Hanoi's billionaires spend money on seaside villas" July 5, 2012, VietnamNet, http://english.vietnamnet.vn/en/business/21906/hanoi-s-billionaires-spend-money-on-seaside-villas.html.

Simultaneous Privilege and Otherness

Racial and ethnic identity and national belonging are salient and altered by high-skilled labor migration to produce privilege and otherness, as the case of the Viet Kieu exemplifies. These migrants' emotional and structural ambivalences about belonging "in between" but never fully being in either the US nor Vietnam created these oscillations between privileged transnational elites and racially and culturally-othered Americans. They were privileged because of the state's economic expectations of them as bearers of social and economic ties and investment. They are in-between, but are also, themselves, bifurcated because of their status as "other" Americans, yet subject to the expectations of Vietnamese customs and norms. These localized instances of the social construction of class, racial, and national differences suggest a changing racial order between whites and Asian nationalities in Southeast Asia because of the economic currency that each group can spend and consume in the global market place.[90]

[90] These are not entirely new processes, as other scholars of Southeast Asia such as Anne Stoler (1992), Jean Gelman Taylor (1983), and John G. Butcher (1979) have found historical precedents for the reshuffling of social patterns in French colonial Indochine, Dutch Batavia, and British Malaya during various time periods, respectively. Contemporary research on Vietnam would support my findings about this changing racial order (Hoang, 2010; Newton, 2012, diss).

Conclusion

My findings might be more relevant to those who care about the lives of these 'returnees' and the individuals, communities, and organizations they encounter in the temporary host country, yet the processes of ethnic and diasporic return migration to Asia are unfolding elsewhere, and economically linking US immigrant communities with parts of Asia beyond the realm of the "imagined community" suggested by Benedict Anderson. Beyond the forces of the imagination, these ethnic migrations are reconnecting communities and hometowns because the transnational has become (or closely approximates) the local. The 1.5 and second generation children of immigrants are creating opportunities for investment and hometown-style development, which, though not the main focus of my research, still highlights the potential benefits of their reverse migration patterns. Economic forces that compel this generation to leave the US in order to seek career advancement and personal enrichment are also at work among other mostly young and unattached, single children of immigrants and refugees across the Global North including countries in Western Europe, Canada, and Australia. This creates new melting pots in Asia and alternative discourses about multiculturalism and hybrid identity that problematizes what it means to be authentically Vietnamese or American. From the perspective of migration research, the reverse migration patterns challenges the uni-directional assumptions about the processes of immigrant acculturation or assimilation. The study of these patterns will also require a new vocabulary to talk about issues of segmented cultural assimilation, immigrant generations, belonging, cultural habitus, and home. The increased length of stay in the US across the generations will no longer be the static determinant in the process of becoming more American, as American identities

continue to play out in other parts of the world.[91] This project documented the globalization of work opportunities, and suggested that the 'return' to an imagined ancestral homeland in pursuit of these high-skilled work opportunities is met with economic rewards and social privilege in tandem with the experiences of marginality and displacement. My research has captured a snapshot in time of the Viet Kieu 'return' migration to Vietnam, but their positionality is very much calibrated by the ebb and flow of the global forces of the market that enticed them to go there. In turn, many of the Viet Kieu 'returnees' in my study, recognizing these shifts and oscillations in the economy and their position within it – and acting as culturally-resourceful and networked individuals – negotiate identity and the localized reception towards them, recasting their sense of belonging as being "in between" both here and there.

[91] See Sam Sanders, "'Globals' Generation Focuses On Experience", NPR, July 10, 2012. http://www.npr.org/2012/07/10/156463825/globals-generation-focuses-on-experience

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