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10 Vietnamese Transnational Religions: The Cold War Polarities of Temples in "Little Hanois" and "Little Saigons"

On certain rare occasions, history provides us with a sequence of events that seem to mimic the protocols of a social science experiment. Imagine a population of several million people abruptly displaced from the same homeland during the same decade – some of them having fled illegally on boats or crossed borders through third countries to capitalist nations and been classified as refugees, a number of the others having been sent to socialist nations under state-sponsored labour exchanges and classified as contract workers. Then imagine that these socialist nations suddenly transformed into market economies at the end of that first decade and many of these guest workers transformed themselves into small-scale entrepreneurs, showing a talent for market transactions and building transnational networks across the former socialist world. Only then would the two diasporas – the refugees in the capitalist world and the contract workers in the former socialist world – come back into contact with each other and find not only that the formerly divided halves of their own homeland had been reunified but also that one of the largest host lands – Germany – was also reunified, and countries like the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland were now part of the European Union.

These people, of course, are the Vietnamese, and this imaginative exercise describes a real sequence of events, taking place over the 1980s and 1990s and providing the background for the divergent histories of two very different overseas Vietnamese communities. It would be possible to call these two communities the "capitalist refugees" versus the "formerly socialist workers", but these categories are somewhat misleading, since it is the formerly socialist workers who have shown themselves to be successful business entrepreneurs in establishing wholesale markets in eastern European capitals, and it is capitalist refugees who have instead invested in education and professional careers for their second generation. We prefer to call them "Little Hanois" and "Little Saigons", since these are both labels that have been embraced by the communities themselves in many

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different international locations.[1] They refer to the rival capitals of the war-torn nation of Vietnam – a nation that never accepted its supposedly temporary division into north and south – but both of them also carry conceptual and cultural significance that should be explained. They each represent loyalties to cities and regions that are not limited to the political entities that they were attached to for a quarter century. These two names have symbolic meanings for the home land that they left, as well as political connotations. They are abbreviated by overseas Vietnamese in many different countries as the "Red Flags" and the "Yellow Flags" (although in fact both flags contain both colours, with the Hanoi flag having a yellow star on a red background and the Saigon flag having red and yellow stripes).

"Little Saigon" is, after all, an idea as well as a place, and it is because it is an idea that it can be transplanted, to some extent, to California or to some other location. When the newly reunited Socialist Republic of Vietnam decided to change the official name of that city to Ho Chi Minh City, the baptizing of Vietnamese enclave communities as "Little Saigons" took on the political flavour of defying the new government. Saigon, famous for its entrepreneurial energy and playful lifestyle, is often visually represented by the central Bến Thành market, and in southern California the "Little Saigon" in Garden Grove is represented by the Asian Garden Mall (known in Vietnamese by the names of the three statues representing Happiness, Wealth, and Longevity) which flies the yellow and red striped flag that no longer has a country, but is seen as a symbol of heritage and – for some people – "freedom", in contrast to Hanoi's red flag with a yellow star.

"Little Hanoi", in contrast, is represented not only by its red flag but also by the many monuments to Hồ Chí Minh in the former socialist world – including a huge square named after Hồ Chí Minh in Moscow (where his face is four storeys high), busts of Hồ Chí Minh in government-funded cultural centres, and his fire-damaged portrait (Figure 10.1) in the offices of the Union Générale des

1 The label "Little Saigon" has been officially adopted by California cities like Westminster and Garden Grove (both in Orange County) and is used more loosely for communities in San Jose, Houston (Texas), Falls Church (Virginia), New Orleans (Louisiana), and the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas. "Little Hanoi" is not used as often on signs to designate neighbourhoods, but we did hear it used descriptively to designate communities of workers who came to eastern Europe and the USSR from the north or emigrated after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 to historically communist nations. The recent Czech film called "Miss Hanoi" (https://www.filmcenter.cz/en/czech-films-people/466-miss-hanoi [accessed 15 April 2019]) both echoes the American musical titled "Miss Saigon" and affirms the ways in which Vietnamese-Czech people define themselves in relation to the northern capital city.

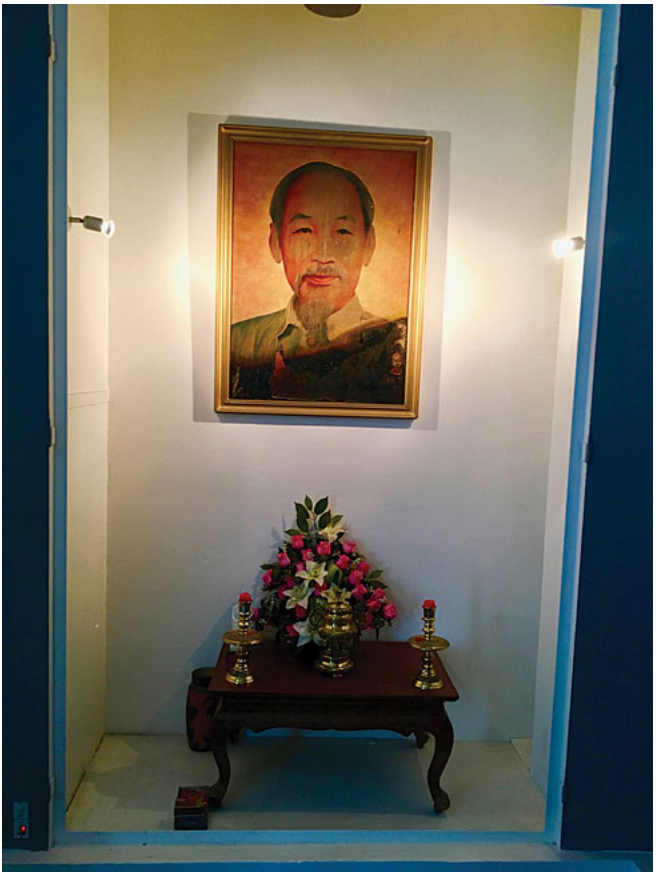

Figure 10.1: The fire-damaged portrait of Hồ Chí Minh hanging in the Paris offices of the Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France (Photograph by Janet Hoskins).

Vietnamiens de France,[2] an organization of students and workers founded by Hồ Chí Minh in Paris in 1919. It is also often represented by the eleventh-century One Pillar Pagoda, which stands close to the Hồ Chí Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi, and now also has copies in front of the Hanoi-Moscow shopping centre in Moscow and the Linh Thứu Buddhist temple in the Berlin suburb of Spandau. People who group themselves in "Little Hanois" are proud of their victory in the extended

2 The bottom edge of this portrait was burned in a fire caused by a Molotov cocktail tossed into the Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France offices on 30 April 1975, when Saigon fell to the victorious communist forces. The UDVF decided to continue to display this "wounded" portrait as a symbol of the suffering and divisions of that day (Figure 10.1).

civil war and celebrate their ties to the current government. Most of them also proudly identify with their past as workers, even if many now own their own businesses and are deeply involved in the new market economy.

Our theoretical approach to the study of these diasporas is not simply comparative, in the anthropological sense of the analysis of cultural patterns to explain differences and similarities among societies, but relational – in Édouard Glissant's sense of looking at the system of relations where identities are constructed in relation to others and not in isolation.[3] While both refugees and contract workers were Vietnamese, there were already important cultural differences between southern Vietnam – the seat of an eclectic, modernist, and entrepreneurial population before 1975 – and northern Vietnam, which was more communitarian, deferential to authority, and collectively oriented even before the victory of the Communist Party. And the relational dynamics of scattered refugee resettlement in western countries versus workers housed collectively in factory dormitories separated from the local population in socialist nations have also created different experiences of exile. One thing that has been shared by both groups is precarity, dangerous displacements, and memories of trauma and suffering.

The phenomenon of the "boat people" (*thuyền nhân* or *người vượt biên*) who crossed dangerous seas, were attacked by Thai pirates, and risked dying before they were washed up on the shores of Thailand or Malaysia or rescued by Western boats has its parallel in what are sometimes called the "truck people" (*người xe tải*) or the "forest people" (*người rừng*) – Vietnamese in eastern Europe who also crossed dangerous borders illegally, endured long journeys hidden in the back of trucks underneath other merchandise, and wandered through frozen forests to reach their new homes.[4] The sufferings of the refugees to escape and "attain freedom" are extensively documented by refugee writers and are also linked to a common idea of the "debt of freedom" owed to the new host land.[5] But the sufferings

3 E. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, B. Wing (trans.), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

4 USC doctoral scholar Anh Thang Dao has detailed the very cold and perilous journey that her family made to Poland in the 1980s (A.T. Dao, "Song for A Lost Home", in: I.T. Pelaud et al. [eds.]), *Troubling Borders: An Anthology of Art and Literature by Southeast Asian Women in the Diaspora*, Seattle: University of Washington Press 2013, pp. 79–89. Another woman, who travelled to Germany through the Ukraine with her husband and two small children, described "walking by night through dark forests and crossing rivers", with several members of her group dying along the way (G. Hüwelmeier, "Socialist Cosmopolitans in Postsocialist Europe: Transnational Ties among Vietnamese in the Cold War Period and Thereafter", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 [2017] 1, pp. 130–158, at 146).

5 See M.T. Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt and Other Refugee Passages*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

of contract workers without citizen status, and more recent undocumented immigrants to Europe were also great, and subject to a similar and more enduring precarity due to their undocumented status. So, it seems worthwhile to tell a "tale of two exported simulated cities" – both the "Little Hanois" and the "Little Saigons" – and to look at the debts and obligations that each has entailed.

Both sets of communities have developed new symbolic icons and spiritual practices which fuse religion and politics. In Little Saigons, the refugee experience and its trauma has been subject to religious interpretation. One example is the Caodai doctrine that the Vietnamese are "God's chosen people", who had to suffer the Fall of Saigon in order to globalize.[6] Another is the Catholic diasporic cult of an ethnically Vietnamese Virgin Mary, "Our Lady of La Vang", described as appearing to comfort her persecuted followers, whose worship has now spread from the diaspora to Vietnam itself.[7] Activist Buddhist refugee monks associated with the United Buddhist Church (now banned in Vietnam) lead demonstrations they see as defending religious freedom and protesting the policies of the current government. In Little Hanois, the performance of patriotism at Buddhist temples is a well-regulated expression of diasporic identity (supported by the Vietnamese government). But there are also less regulated phenomena, such as the worship of Hồ Chí Minh not only as a national hero but as a healing spirit, perhaps even the Jade Buddha, who can be channelled by spirit mediums.[8] While Vietnamese Buddhists as individuals are welcome to worship

6 See J.A. Hoskins, *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015; J.A. Hoskins, "God's Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina", Asia Research Institute working paper series, no. 189, National University of Singapore, September 2012.

7 Catholics and Caodaists in the diaspora have coordinated their efforts with those of Buddhists since May 1992, when the Pope invited two hundred Vietnamese religious leaders to Rome for a "Prayer Day for Peace in Vietnam". This event precipitated the formation of a Vietnamese Interfaith Council (Hội Đồng Liên Tôn), which has become one of the most influential political advocacy groups in the diaspora. It has run voters' drives and endorsed political candidates in the US, and raised funds for humanitarian social causes. See T.H. Ninh, *Race, Religion and Gender in the Vietnamese Diaspora: The New Chosen People*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 197.

8 See C.V. Hoang, "'Following Uncle Hồ to save the nation': Empowerment, Legitimacy and Nationalistic Aspirations in a Vietnamese New Religious Movement", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47 (2016) 2, pp. 234–254; H.T. Ho Tai, "Female Spirit Mediums and the Cult of 'Uncle Ho' in Today's Vietnam", seminar paper presented at the Center for Transpacific Studies, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 6 April 2016. For an account of spirit writing connected to the worship of Hồ Chí Minh, see G. Hüwelmeier, "Spirit Writing in Vietnam: Political Lessons from the Beyond", *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20 (2019) 3, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14442213.2019.1603250.

at all temples in Europe, two rival Vietnamese Buddhist organizations with very different political agendas present a spectacle of continuing conflict with no formal contact or organizational collaboration. The religious arena is still marked by Cold War polarizations which are much less evident in many other domains. Rather than being a terrain of reconciliation, Buddhist temples and the sacralization of flags as symbols remain at the root of deep cultural differences.

In order to examine the idea of separate diasporic religious expressions among Vietnamese refugees and immigrants, we will (1) outline how and when these different groups arrived. The conditions they met in their new host countries were quite different, but they also built on different cultural and political orientations clearly defined before their departure. Then (2) we will examine how these communities come together at churches, temples, and pagodas, and also at shopping malls, wholesale markets, and places of commerce. Finally (3) we will focus on the particular symbolism of the flag and why it has become so important to both diasporic communities, who remain polarized and divided more than 40 years after the end of the war, when these ideological oppositions are said to have disappeared in most places in the world. We will also note the importance of other religiously imbued cultural figures like the Hung Kings, Hồ Chí Minh, and the Catholic "Our Lady of La Vang", who have all been the subject of veneration in Vietnamese communities in Europe.

Arrivals and Departures: "Little Hanois" vs. "Little Saigons"

Our research began with the "Little Saigons" of California and the famous concentrations of Vietnamese businesses and cultural centres in the Orange County of southern California and the San Jose area of northern California. In 2016, the US Census Bureau estimated the total population of Vietnamese Americans was 2,067,527. California and Texas had the largest populations of Vietnamese Americans, with 40 and 12 per cent of the total population, respectively. Other states with many Vietnamese Americans were Washington, Florida, and Virginia. The largest number of Vietnamese outside Vietnam is in Orange County, California (184,153), and about 41 per cent of the Vietnamese immigrant population lives in five major metropolitan areas: in descending order, Los Angeles, San Jose, Houston, San Francisco, and Dallas-Fort Worth. The next largest population of former refugees is in France (an estimated 350,000), followed by Australia (294,000) and Canada (157,000). Almost all of the Vietnamese who came as

refugees between 1975 and 1995 to these various host lands are now citizens of their country of residence.[9]

The story is very different for those Vietnamese who came to eastern Europe during the same decades. After Hanoi's victory in 1975, the country was devastated by the long years of war, and other socialist countries proposed to help rebuild Vietnam (and bolster their own manufacturing sector) by importing workers for factories in eastern Europe, with the understanding that a significant percentage of their salaries would go directly to the Vietnamese government. Much of the rest of their salaries, of course, was sent back to relatives in Vietnam, usually in the form of export goods, which the families kept for their daily use or could resell on the market after arrival.[10]

Refugees and former workers came to the divided Germany at the time when Cold War divisions were at their strongest: 35,000 refugees arrived in West Germany starting in 1979, and about 70,000 contract workers began to arrive in East Germany in 1980. The two migration streams brought refugees from the former South Vietnam and students and contract workers from the former North Vietnam. The 2016 census estimated that 176,000 people of Vietnamese origin lived in Germany, two-thirds of them being foreign-born migrants. Almost half of them (85,000) still had a Vietnamese passport.[11] Other countries which received many Vietnamese contract workers were the Czech Republic (83,000), Poland (52,000), and Russia (35,000), out of a total of more than 200,000 Vietnamese workers sent to eastern Europe from 1981 to 1990.

The Living Conditions of Contract Workers

Vietnam was desperately poor in the 1980s and early 1990s, so there were many people who wanted to leave their country to earn a better living and enjoy a higher

9 See J.A. Hoskins, "Sacralizing the Diaspora: Cosmopolitan and Originalist Indigenous Religions", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2017) 2, pp. 108–140; J.A. Hoskins and T.H. Ninh, "Introduction: Globalizing Vietnamese Religions", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2017) 2, pp. 1–19.

10 See C. Schwenkel, "Rethinking Asian Mobilities: Socialist Migration and Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany", *Critical Asian Studies* 46 (2014) 2, pp. 235–258; Idem, "Socialist Mobilities: Crossing New Terrains in Vietnamese Migration Histories", *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 4 (2015) 1, pp. 13–25.

11 See F. Bosch and P.H. Su, "Invisible, Successful and Divided: Vietnamese in Germany since the late 1970s", United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, February 2018, p. 15.

quality of life in eastern Europe. The people who were assigned to be sent to Europe were selected because they were diligent workers, and some were prioritized as children of high-ranking Communist Party officers (*quan chức*). People with "suspect" family backgrounds or ties to the former regime of the south were not selected. Another stated goal of sending Vietnamese workers to other socialist countries was to train a more sophisticated workforce, allowing workers to eventually return from factories to train workers in Vietnam's newly industrialized sector. The officially led exchange of factory workers for revenue ended abruptly in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist governments in many eastern European countries, but the flow of immigrants from Vietnam did not.

Strictly controlled conditions were common for Vietnamese factory workers in Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. Their passports were taken away from them to keep them from escaping, and they were told not to socialize with local people or even workers of the opposite sex. Any woman found pregnant was sent back to Vietnam immediately, as was also true for women students sent to the Eastern European universities based on their high scores in university entrance exams. Housed in single-sex dormitories where they were closely surveilled by government-appointed managers, these workers contributed 12 per cent of their wages directly to the Vietnamese government in an effort to revive the planned economy after many years of war.[12]

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, most of the factories closed abruptly and about 70 per cent of all Vietnamese workers were literally thrown into the streets. Factory workers in Germany were paid to return home, receiving 3,000 German marks (about USD 1,800) and a free ticket to Vietnam.[13] About two-thirds of them, some 40,000 people, did return to Vietnam. But many of those who accepted the payment later travelled back to post-socialist Europe using a visitor's visa, staying illegally with their relatives or paying fees to a labour-exporting service, since they realized that they could make much more money in Europe and their children would have a brighter future.

12 G. Hüwelmeier, "Socialist Cosmopolitans", p. 145.

13 G. Hüwelmeier, "Spirits in the Marketplace: Transnational Networks of Vietnamese Migrants in Berlin", in: M.P. Smith and J. Eade (eds.), *Transnational Ties: Cities, Identities and Migrations* (Comparative Urban and Community Research, vol. 9), New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008, pp. 131–144, at 137; C. Schwenkel, "Socialist Mobilities: Crossing New Terrains in Vietnamese Migration Histories", *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 4 (2015) 1, pp. 13–25; Idem, "Vietnamese in Central Europe: An Unintended Diaspora", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2017) 1, pp. 1–9, at 5.

A "cigarette mafia" grew up, consisting of traders who paid protection money to Vietnamese gangs and often clashed with each other, with 35 cases of murder between rival Vietnamese gangs reported in Berlin in 1996 alone (see Figure 10.2).[14] The unsavoury reputation that became attached to certain border towns, however, did not apply to most Vietnamese vendors. A new government regulation during the transition to a market economy allowed Vietnamese people to become the owners of small shops and snack bars. Skills that workers in textile factories had developed to tailor jeans and shirts in their spare time were translated into lucrative small businesses.

Figure 10.2: A sign we photographed in Sapa Market, Prague says, "Erase your police record in Germany" (Photograph by Janet Hoskins).
The service is provided by an office that offers legal advice, ways to pay fines to remove the record of earlier infractions, and sometimes also ways to get "new papers" in order to be able to establish a legitimate business.

14 Hüwelmeier, "Spirits in the Marketplace", p. 138.

The woman owner of a nail salon in Dong Xuan Market in Berlin told us that in the 1989–1992 East German transition from a controlled economy, "gathering goods from one market and reselling them at another could make a lot of money" and the vendor could amass a small fortune. Vendors successful in street-based trade saved their money and used it to establish bigger and larger-scale businesses, such as factories, grocery stores, restaurants, or real estate in Vietnam. She compared their earning capacity at the time to "catching the gold showering down from the skies". She and her husband opened an "Asian" restaurant, labelled as Chinese and Thai, since Vietnamese food was not yet well known. Shortages of fresh vegetables, milk, and bread opened up opportunities for Vietnamese workers, who proved much more entrepreneurial than many European citizens of former socialist countries.

"Czech and Russian people didn't know how to make money, but for Vietnamese immigrants in Europe, it was common sense", a Vietnamese trader in Prague told us as we visited the wholesale Vietnamese market Sapa. "They had been taught that it was bad to sell things for a profit, to get them wholesale, and then sell them again at a markup in smaller shops. We knew about these things, since we had been sending western goods back to Vietnam for resale for many years." The scarcity of clothing, food, and household items that followed the collapse of the collective economy meant that the Vietnamese street markets and roadside shops filled an immediate need.

In the 1990s, resale and wholesale markets which became an important part of an underground economy focused on cigarettes, alcohol, and other semi-legal commodities.[15] While former workers successfully "reinvented" themselves as entrepreneurs, these markets were often seen as shady, dangerous places, where illicit drugs could circulate and crime was also high. Today, almost every Czech country town has a Vietnamese grocery market, and Vietnamese restaurants and take-away shops in German cities are increasingly upscale. Former smugglers and black marketeers have become the owners of legal businesses, although there remain stereotypes of Vietnamese as gangsters and drug dealers. In Prague, a Czech anthropologist told us that "it was the Vietnamese transnational traders who taught the Czech people how to be capitalists".

The revival of religious life in Little Hanois reflects the culture of workers from rural areas now settled in urban centres. Nostalgia for the traditional villages where workers grew up is displayed in the small Buddhist temple in Prague's Sapa market, with one altar deliberately styled like a traditional

15 More details are available in S. Broucek, *The Visible and Invisible Vietnamese in the Czech Republic*, Prague: Institute of Ethnology CAS, 2016.

bamboo house in the countryside. Evocations of the homeland (*quê hương*) are tied to performances of folk songs and traditional dances, rather than the more westernized love ballads so popular in Little Saigons. One popular bar where community meetings are held is called "the village headman's house". The village atmosphere is also associated with popular worship of Vietnamese Mother Goddesses. The uncertain world of petty commerce has an elective affinity (to adopt Weber's term) for people who worship the capricious pantheon of Đạo Mẫu spirits, who may bestow gifts of prosperity. It is not surprising that such practices have found a new home in the ethnic enclaves grouped around wholesale markets in cities like Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague.[16]

The worship of Mother Goddesses close to places of commerce is a pattern in northern Vietnam that moved into eastern Europe during the same decade (1995–2015) in which it enjoyed a resurgence in Hanoi.[17] During this time popular beliefs and rituals that once been attacked as wasteful and superstitious (and suppressed by government regulations) again became a conspicuous feature of contemporary city life. Markets and modernity are tied to the revival of the worship of nature-based spirits in Vietnamese communities in both Europe and Vietnam, due to the belief that "efficacious spirits" can reward their followers with success in attracting clients, building small businesses, and achieving prosperity and a harmonious family life.

A former refugee woman in Berlin described the rise of these ritual practices as showing a "fondness for magic" (*sùng bái ma thuật*), asserting that Marxist materialism manifests itself in religious practices such as praying to win the lottery, to be able to lure clients from rival vendors, and to become a more successful commercial entrepreneur. She contrasted them to the more contemplative practices of meditation, scripture study, and social work associated with Buddhist centres in Huế and Ho Chi Minh City. As an educated professional from southern Vietnam, she said: "I see religion as the centre of morality, the moral way of life, not a place where you seek material benefits or you become rich."

16 G. Hüwelmeier, "Bazaar Pagodas – Transnational Religion, Postsocialist Marketplaces and Vietnamese Migrant Women in Berlin", *Religion and Gender* 3 (2013) 1, pp. 75–88. See also G. Hüwelmeier, "Socialist Cosmopolitans in Postsocialist Europe: Transnational Ties among Vietnamese in the Cold War Period and Thereafter", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2017) 1, pp. 130–158.

17 K. Endres, *Performing the Devine: Mediums, Markets and Modernity in Urban Vietnam*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2011; T.H. Nguyen, *The Religion of Four Palaces: Mediumship and Therapy in Viet Culture*, Hanoi: The Gioi Publishing House, 2016; P.Q. Phuong, *Hero and Deity: Tran Hung Dao and the Resurgence of Popular Religion in Vietnam*, Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2009.

She described many practices at the temples in eastern Berlin as "silly superstitions" (*ngu ngốc mê tín dị đoan*), which she condemned from the perspective of elite forms of religious practice like those of Zen Buddhism, Catholicism, and Caodaism. Her use of categories like "superstition" and "erroneous folk beliefs" echoes a modernist criticism of folk religion which has been a significant part of debates in Vietnam for over a century.

Some of the workers who travelled to Germany in the 1980s were from southern Vietnam, not just the north – but since their migration took place after Vietnam had been united, they are generally part of communities that are coded as "Little Hanois", and they join associations that proudly fly the Hanoi flag (*cờ đỏ*) rather than the refugee associations which fly the yellow flag of Saigon. A woman from Da Nang whom we interviewed in Berlin described how her team was housed in Dresden and assigned work in a textile factory. When the factory was closed in late 1989, she stayed on with her husband and young son, but they were obliged to sell things in the streets to stay alive. She told us that at that time her co-workers heard that capitalism was a system characterized by "the jobless and the homeless". They were afraid of the impending transformations and returned to Vietnam. She herself, however, had had experience in small-scale trading and sewing before the fall of the Berlin wall and so decided to stay:

> At that time no one knew what the rules were. We sold whatever people would buy, and didn't know how to get the right paperwork or pay taxes. [. . .] Later, when we knew that tax collectors were going around, we gradually started to become part of the legal trading system. When we knew what the rules were, we followed them, since we did not deliberately break the laws. In the old days of the subsidy economies [the 1980s], we knew nothing. At the end we gradually became more stable, paid taxes, did the paperwork, and someone advised us how to do it. Before we were all groping around and trying to survive with whatever we had.[18]

The Living Conditions of Refugees in Germany and France

It was a very different story for refugees. While contract workers had to scramble around to figure out how to support themselves after 1989, refugees were provided with resettlement help from the government in all of their new homes. As soon as they arrived, refugees in West Germany were assigned to a sponsoring family, who would help them to integrate into the local setting;

18 Fieldnotes, May 2018.

some of these relationships lasted for the rest of their lives. Schoolchildren received tutoring to catch up with their classmates, and older adults could qualify to go to the Goethe Institute to study for certification in order to attend university.[19] But refugees were spread out across West Germany, so they never formed a concentrated ethnic community. Since many struggle to raise their children to speak and read Vietnamese, the Buddhist temples founded by refugees offer language and culture classes along with religious instruction.

In Germany and France, as in the United States, the first refugees were dispersed across many geographic areas, often sponsored by Christian churches, with the expectation that this would help them to integrate into mainstream society. After a few years, many refugees decided to move closer to other family members, often choosing to settle in the emerging ethnic enclaves known as the Little Saigons.[20] In France, the largest number of refugees settled in the Paris area, and for some time the large public housing units known as "Les Olympiades" sheltered many new arrivals. For that reason, the thirteenth *arrondissement* came to be seen as the "quartier asiatique", and it still has many Chinese and Vietnamese-owned restaurants and grocery stores. A neighbourhood association of "former residents of Indochina" organizes Lunar New Year festivities, but the Vietnamese population itself is – as in West Berlin – highly dispersed throughout the city.

Contract workers, on the other hand, were housed together in complexes near their factories in East Berlin, and later deliberately chose to settle in areas where other Vietnamese were concentrated. What Zhou and Bankston have called "ethnic social capital" was clearly a part of their survival strategies, but the very fact that they appeared to be part of closed communities increased social stigmatization of the Vietnamese in eastern Berlin (and in eastern Europe more generally) as gangsters and criminals.[21] There is also evidence that they were discriminated against in housing and employment after 1990.[22] Vietnamese

19 Bosch and Su, "Invisible, Successful and Divided", p. 3.

20 See J.A. Hoskins, "Caodai Exile and Redemption: A New Vietnamese Religion's Struggle for identity", in: P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (ed.), *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006, pp. 191–210; see also T.H. Nguyen, "Integration, Changes Tradition and Cultural Identities of the Vietnamese Diasporic Community: The Case Study at Silicon Valley, California", *Tạp chí Văn hóa học* [Journal of Cultural Studies] 5 (2015), pp. 15–32.

21 M. Zhou and C.L. Bankston, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States*, New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1998.

22 Bosch and Su, "Invisible, Successful and Divided", p. 5; F. Hillman, "Riders on the Storm: Vietnamese in Germany's Two Migration Systems", in: E. Spaan, F. Hillmann, and T. Naerssen (eds.), *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and Processes of Immigrant Labour Market Insertion in Europe*, London/New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 80–100.

Buddhist associations in former socialist countries came to be formed in the early 1990s, in part to provide social services for workers who did not have access to medical care, food, shelter, or funeral services.

Two Versions of Buddhism and Two Rival Sanghas

While Buddhism has long been described as Vietnam's largest religion, somewhat different forms of Buddhism have developed in the northern and southern parts of the country, and since 1954 these have been identified with different organizations.

Popular Buddhism all over the country has been primarily devotional, associated with the Pure Land (Amidist or Tịnh Độ) sect, but the Buddhist reform movement in the 1920s brought new prominence to Zen (Thiền), especially in Saigon and the old imperial capital of Huế. The emphasis on meditation of the Trúc Lâm school of Zen is found in the influential writings of Thích Nhất Hạnh (b. 1926), who is without doubt the most widely read Vietnamese Buddhist figure in the west. He helped found the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất or UBCV) in Saigon in 1964, and came to be known as a prominent peace activist. Exiled since 1966 for proposing a reconciliation that pleased neither the Saigon nor the Hanoi government, he came to live in rural France and run meditation workshops from Plum Village (Làng Mai), attracting a large international following.

After the communist victory in 1975, the Hanoi government dissolved all existing Buddhist organizations and formed a single, state-sanctioned group called the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (Phật Giáo Việt Nam or PGVN) in 1981. All other Buddhist organizations, including the UBCV, were not allowed to operate publicly. As Chapman notes: "There now exist two Buddhist representative bodies in Vietnam: one authorized, sponsored and controlled by the government, and representing Buddhism in its official assemblies, and the other, the UBCV, more difficult to define since it no longer has an official base and its leaders are no longer recognized by the authorities as legitimate".[23] A 2004 Ordinance on Religious Belief and religious Organizations affirms each citizen's right to religious belief, but also says any "abuse" of religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence and unity" is illegal.[24]

23 J. Chapman, "The 2005 Pilgrimage and Return to Vietnam of Exiled Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh", in: P. Taylor (ed.), *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007, pp. 297–340, at 309.
24 Ibid., p. 312.

Most former Vietnamese refugees in Europe are associated with the UBCV (although many are also Catholic or secular), while most former migrants and contract workers are associated with the PGVN. Thích Nhất Hạnh was historically associated with the UBCV, but he is now independent of it and has been able to visit Vietnam several times since 2005, and his once banned books are now widely available for purchase. The resurgence of interest in Buddhism in twenty-first century Vietnam is evident in both northern and southern regions, but still takes somewhat different forms.[25] Buddhism in Hanoi today is a tradition that is deeply infused with worldly religious practices of "conspicuous devotion" which include making offerings (*cúng thường xuyên*), chanting, and praying for greater material prosperity.[26] As Soucy notes:

> Vietnamese religion, as a general characteristic, embraces the mundane, revels in money and business, and affirms an essential goodness of material wealth and success, as well as valuing longevity, health and happy families with many descendants [. . .] The most dominant theme in explanations of the purpose of Buddhist practice was that of bringing good luck and wealth to the practitioners and to their families.[27]

He notes the contrast with doctrinal Buddhism, which preaches that everything in the world is unsubstantial, and the cause of suffering is an excessive attachment to these worldly things. Pure Land practice, marked by the wearing of dark brown robes for devotional Buddhists, predominates in northern Vietnam, and it is contrasted with the Zen tradition which is more common in southern Vietnam, and marked by the wearing of grey robes.[28] Followers of the Zen tradition, taught in famous pagodas in the central city and former imperial capital of Huế, see this as a "higher practice" than the popular devotionalism of the north. These regional differences in Buddhist practice are also echoed in oppositions between former southern refugees and former northern contract workers.

A Buddhist monk at Khuông Việt temple in the Parisian suburb of Orsay explained the situation in these terms:

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25 Philip Taylor notes that it is misleading to argue that the outlawing of the southern-based United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất) in today's Vietnam has prevented the powerful resurgence of Buddhism in public life. "Buddhism in Vietnam is blossoming in a sea of transnational flows, re-emerging from obscurity like a resplendent lotus" (Taylor, *Modernity and Re-Enchantment*, p. 28). Communist party leaders have taken on elements of Buddhist reform movements (attacking superstition and developing a coherent national tradition) in the hopes of forging an enlightened society with a strong ethical orientation.

26 A. Soucy, *The Buddha Side: Gender, Power and Buddhist Practice in Vietnam*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012.

27 Ibid., pp. 89–90.

28 Ibid., p. 134.

> When Vietnamese people came here and built these temples, the temple's religious orientation depended on the builders. Vietnamese Buddhism in the central region, stretching from Quang Tri to Ca Mau, is more refined because it has been through many reforms and changes, and has eliminated superstitious local practices from its core worship. Up North, wartime lasted such a long time. The government created many new regulations on religions, so after many years, Buddhism was pushed back to the state it was in many years before. Since 1975, those things have eaten so deep at the blood and hearts of the people there, so to fix that problem is very difficult. In Buddhism you can only give advice [. . .]. The first generation might be very stubborn, the second generation will be a little less, and the third generation will be even less.[29]

The importance of religious gatherings was initially much less for Vietnamese contract workers in officially secular socialist states. Since workers were generally young and their parents were still alive, few even had ancestral altars in their dormitories, although almost all of them came from homes where offerings were regularly made at family altars.[30] Since 1990, Vietnam has experienced a resurgence in popular religious activity, as have the host countries in the post-socialist world and this has influenced overseas Vietnamese communities. The first religious gathering points were small altars which appeared in the 1990s at the wholesale markets or bazaars where many Vietnamese worked as vendors.[31] Most of the Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas and Mother Goddess temples in Germany and the Czech Republic opened in the twenty-first century, but there were small pagodas near Paris and Moscow already in the 1990s.

It is not unusual in the "Little Hanois" to see prominent merchants seek out the advice of a spirit medium, fortune teller or psychic when they want to make an important business decision. There are also a number of temples (in Erfurt [Germany], Moscow, and Warsaw) built for the spirit possession practice of *lên đồng*, which honours Mother Goddesses (Đạo Mâu) who are believed to be able to bestow gifts of health, prosperity, and success in both business and love.[32]

One Buddhist temple stands as a significant exception to the rule that congregations are highly polarized politically – the Linh Thứu Buddhist temple in

29 Fieldnotes, Paris, June 2018.

30 Hüwelmeier, "Bazaar Pagodas", pp. 75–88.

31 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

32 H.T. Nguyen, *The Religion of Four Palaces*; H.T. Nguyen and K. Fjelstad, *Spirits Without Borders: Vietnamese Spirit Mediums in a Transnational Age*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; H.T. Nguyen and K. Fjelstad (eds.), *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities*, Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2007. For Mother Goddess worship among Vietnamese Americans, see J.A. Hoskins, "The Spirits You See in the Mirror: Spirit Possession in the Vietnamese American Diaspora", in: J. Lee (ed.), *The Southeast Asian Diaspora in the United States*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014, pp. 73–100.

Spandau, just west of Berlin. In this temple administered by nuns, the religious leadership has tried to reconcile the differences between refugees and migrants. While Linh Thứu was initially founded by refugee groups, after the fall of the Berlin Wall the Vietnamese population of migrants from the former East Germany (the "red flags") came to be larger than the population of former refugees in West Germany (the "yellow flags"). The nuns have insisted that no national flags should be brought to the grounds of the pagoda. A small shrine commemorates the sufferings of those who came by boat, and a much larger replica of the eleventh-century "One Pillar Pagoda" of Hanoi now stands in front of the main temple entrance. The children of former refugees and those of migrants now sit together in classes about Vietnamese culture, language, and religion, and their families come to celebrate together large-scale festivals like Vesak, celebration of Buddha's birth (Figure 10.3). The nuns have been successful mainly because they have chosen not to take sides in these political divisions.

Figure 10.3: Celebration of Vesak, the Buddha's Birthday, at the Linh Thứu Buddhist temple in Spandau, just west of Berlin in May 2018 (Photograph by Janet Hoskins).

As the capital cities of two countries with large divided populations, Berlin and Paris are mirror images of each other. German statistics indicate that roughly two-thirds of Vietnamese people in Germany are former migrants or contract workers, while roughly one third came as refugees,[33] while informal assessments about the French community (where the census does not count race or ethnicity) are more or less the reverse: Former refugees and students from the former South Vietnam form the majority, with those affiliated with the "Red Flag" a significant minority. Since it was Hồ Chí Minh himself who founded the first overseas Vietnamese organization (the Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France) in Europe in 1919 they are, however, a historically significant minority with a long history of militant protests against the American war in Vietnam, and next year they are preparing to celebrate a century of revolutionary activism.

Religions and Flags in Little Hanois and Little Saigons

In the "Little Saigons" of the United States, Canada, and Australia, Buddhist pagodas and Catholic Churches were important centres in helping to resettle refugees, offer English classes to older adults and Vietnamese classes to their children, and serving as gathering places for the community. The US is also a country where religion is often fused with ethnicity: Barack Obama observed that Sunday morning is the most segregated moment in American public life, a time when people who may otherwise mix at work, in schools and even in neighbourhoods gather with others of similar ancestry to worship the sanctification of their heritage. Churches had sponsored many of the first generation of Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s, often providing a year of free rent, bundles of hand-me-down clothes, and sometimes also expectations that the families would respond with the gesture of converting to Christianity (often just before they left to move to another community where it would be possible to once again follow their own religious traditions).[34]

The veneration of the former Saigon government has become part of familial worship at ancestral altars in the homes of former refugees in the US, Canada, and Australia: A small yellow striped Saigon flag (*cờ vàng*) is very often placed just beside the images of Buddha, the Virgin Mary, or the Caodai

33 Bosch and Su, "Invisible, Successful and Divided", pp. 1–22.
34 Hoskins, "Caodai Exile and Redemption", p. 200.

left eye of God. This flag symbolically represents the vanished regime as a sort of ancestor: an important part of family history, and a now deceased, but still influential and possibly benevolent spiritual authority. People that I interviewed about this custom described it as "showing respect" or "keeping alive the memory of their homeland", but of course it does so with an explicitly political interpretation.[35] The red Hanoi flag, in contrast, is never placed on ancestral altars (even by those very loyal to the regime) precisely because its government is still very much alive.

An early refugee community in San Jose represented its ties to ancestors by building a temple to the legendary Hung Kings (founders of the imperial dynasty), where ceremonies are held to celebrate the first Vietnamese state over three thousand years ago.[36] This historical festival is also celebrated in the Sapa market in Prague, and by several Vietnamese communities in both eastern and western Germany. The ritual commemoration of the Hung Kings was a national holiday under both the Hanoi and Saigon regimes and could be a meeting ground for formerly opposed communities.[37]

In both Germany and France, some Buddhist temples are associated with the "Red Flag" (and formally linked to the government sanctioned Vietnam Buddhist Sangha or PGVN), while others are associated with the "Yellow Flag" (and affiliated with the United Buddhist Church of Vietnamese in Europe, UBCVE). The flying of the Red Flag was most clearly marked at Buddhist temples in Prague and Moscow – two places where there were very few former refugees. While the red flag itself is not flown at two temples in the Paris suburbs that are affiliated with the Hanoi-approved Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, there is a history of politically charged conflicts among the followers of these temples. One man who serves as a mediator between the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in Hanoi and the temple followers in Paris said he is in an extremely difficult position, since members of one of the temples even tried to change their affiliation about a decade ago. While he knows many former refugees and works with them on the temple governance committee, he nevertheless asserted that there

35 Hoskins, "Introduction: Globalizing Vietnamese Religions", pp, 1–19; Hoskins, "Sacralizing the Diaspora", pp. 108–140.

36 K. Fjelstad and N.T. Liem, "Bảo tồn di sản, giáo dục con cháu: Thờ cúng Hùng Vương ở Thung lũng Silicon, California, Mỹ" [Safeguarding Heritage, Education Children], in: Conference Proceedings, *Tín ngưỡng thờ cúng tổ tiên trong xã hội đương đại: Trường hợp tín ngưỡng thờ cúng Hùng Vương ở Việt Nam* [The Worship of Ancestors in Contemporary Society: The Case Study of Hùng Kings in Viet Nam], Hanoi: Văn hóa Thông tin, 2011.

37 O. Dror, "Foundational Myths in the Republic of Vietnam (1955–1975): 'Harnessing' the Hùng Kings against Ngô Đình Diệm Communists, Cowboys, and Hippies for Unity, Peace, and Vietnameseness", *Journal of Social History* 51 (2017) 1, pp. 124–159, at 124–125.

"could never be a reconciliation" or even any formal cooperation between the two opposed strands of Buddhism.[38]

In 2008, members of the anti-communist student group AEGVP (Association Générale des Etudiants Vietnamiens de Paris or Tổng Hội Sinh Viên Việt Nam tại Paris) decided to quite consciously reinvent a tradition by sanctifying the Saigon flag. The association was founded in 1964 at the Hiền Lương restaurant on the rue de Broca in Paris's fifth arrondissement (Latin Quarter) to support the Saigon government. Several hundred of its members returned to Vietnam in 1972–1973 to work to help the current regime, even though their French nationality protected them from the draft. Its former President in 1972, Trần Văn Bá, returned to Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and was executed for plotting against the government.[39]

The yellow striped flag was created by the emperor Thành Thái in 1890, at the same time that he encouraged celebrations of the Huong Vuong dynasty. It was adopted by former emperor Bao Dai in 1948 for a supposedly "sovereign" Vietnamese state within a proposed French Union, and it is this date which is commemorated in the ceremonies held in 2008 and 2018 to celebrate a Vietnam which would be "free, democratic, and sovereign".

On 9 June 2018, they celebrated the seventieth anniversary of this "sanctification" of the flag by parading a giant yellow striped flag through the thirteenth arrondissement, Paris's "Asian quarter", starting at a popular Vietnamese market (Tang Frères) and proceeding to a rally to protest the communist government's abuse of human rights. Two weeks later, Buddhist monks in the now outlawed Unified Buddhist Church led a large demonstration at the Human Rights Square in front of the Eiffel Tower, waving the Buddhist flag, the French flag, and dozens of yellow flags to challenge the legitimacy of the present Vietnamese government and protest new laws on Internet censorship and leasing new economic zones to China.

Political partisanship is particularly marked in the Paris area because the monks who lead the largest Buddhist temple in Europe – Khanh Anh, in the Paris suburb of Evry (affiliated with the UBCV in Europe) – are also actively organizing demonstrations against the policies of the current Vietnamese government. For this reason, a diplomat in Paris told us that government cadres should never not go to the temples of the "Yellow Flags".

38 Fieldwork, June 2018.

39 See N.C. Nguyen, *Le Temps des ancêtres: Une famille vietnamienne dans sa traversée du XXe siècle*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018.

The flags even appear in a somewhat disguised fashion in Vietnamese restaurants in Berlin and Paris. In 2005, a newly opened restaurant in Prenzlauer Berg, the tourist zone of East Berlin, raised the Hanoi flag in front of its entrance and took the name "Onkel Ho".[40] Across town, the refugee-established restaurant called "Monsieur Vuong" installed a red and yellow striped awning over their entrance. And another refugee affiliated restaurant called "District Một" (after the fashionable central area of Saigon) set up yellow striped outdoor café tables to signal its regional and political loyalties (Figure 10.4).

Figure 10.4: The refugee affiliated restaurant called "District Một" (after the fashionable central area of Saigon, now Hồ Chí Minh City) set up yellow striped outdoor café tables reminiscent of the Saigon flag (now outlawed in Vietnam) to signal its regional and political loyalties.

40 Hüwelmeier, "Bazaar Pagodas", p. 139.

Community and Spirituality in the "Little Hanois": Markets, Citizenship, and Symbols of Unity

The Dong Xuan Market in the former East Berlin has emerged as a cultural centre for former workers and recent migrants, where celebrations were held for Hồ Chí Minh's birthday, Vietnam's national day, and other "patriotic" occasions. While some younger members of refugee families said that they enjoyed eating at restaurants there or getting services like haircuts and manicures, most of the older generation chose not to visit. They have separate cultural associations to gather for the Lunar New Year, the Mid-Autumn Festival and other Vietnamese holidays. Unlike groups in Paris or the "Little Saigons" of the US, Canada, and Australia, refugee groups in Berlin do not explicitly commemorate the fall of Saigon as "Black April", but they do observe separate community rituals.

A number of the migrants who now live in Germany, Poland, Russia, and the Czech Republic are undocumented, but most have a renewable short-term visa, which allows them to be "guest workers". Every few years they have to renew their visa or return to Vietnam. Some of them broke the law and stayed over to work illegally for a number of reasons: Some were afraid that if they returned to Vietnam, they would lose their chance to get a visa due to their illegal status. Others simply needed to save enough money to cover the renewal fee, or may have failed to pass the citizenship exams in Germany or in the Czech Republic (which require mastery of the language of the host land). Many others are in a sort of limbo, with a legal status as guest workers but no clear path to permanent residency. They remain Vietnamese citizens, and some of them may plan to return to Vietnam when they retire, but they do not have the status of citizens in Europe – which virtually all of the former refugees now have.

As one Vietnamese intellectual who has spent more than 30 years in Russia and now has both a Russian and Vietnamese passport explained:

> Most Vietnamese people immigrated to Europe with a plan to stay there for only a limited time. They came to try to earn as much money as possible and save it for their return to Vietnam. But as the years passed, and they stayed on longer in Europe, their children were not fluent in Vietnamese, and so they hesitated to return because they had formed another life there. They had settled into a different lifestyle and they could see that the situation in Vietnam was unstable. Only after about a decade did many of them decide to stay in Europe for the rest of their lives. This is when a number of them started to invest long term in opening new businesses, usually in retail, new technologies, pharmacies, and transnational currency trading.[41]

41 Fieldnotes, Moscow, June 2018.

Most Vietnamese who have come to Europe in the last decade are young people. They are similar to undocumented workers in the US or elsewhere in Europe who have described their status as one of homelessness, an unsettled and unmoored state in which they are forced to lie to get by. As journalist Jose Antonio Vargas noted in his memoir *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen,* the lives of undocumented workers have to be about "constantly hiding from the government and, in the process, hiding from [them]selves." While living illegally in a country that does not consider them as its own, they make a temporary home in an ethnic enclave, but can not be sure that they will be able to stay there either.

The head nun at a Buddhist temple in Moscow shared a sad story about a funeral where she was invited to perform the Buddhist death rituals in Russia. A number of young illegal vendors in Moscow steal away, living temporarily in very small and shabby apartments with hopes of saving money to pay the debt they borrowed for the trip. They try to get several year work-permits and visas. Many of them have no money for medical care, and can end up isolated in hospitals with no relatives or close friends when they die. The Buddhist congregation in Moscow has to take responsibility to give these indigent workers a proper funeral. We also attended another funeral sponsored by a Buddhist temple, this time in Berlin, when a worker suddenly died and no one had the information to contact his family back in Vietnam. While he was described as a loner with few close friends, many members of the work team that had migrated with him to Berlin attended the funeral and prayed for him to show their solidarity after his death.

The newly popular cult of Hồ Chí Minh as a figure of healing and spiritual power appears in the "Little Hanois" as the invisible power behind certain recent developments. When we visited a Buddhist temple in Brandenburg headed by a dynamic young monk who had been quite successful in raising funds to build a large new temple, we were told by one follower "We are very grateful to Hồ Chí Minh for sending us this new monk" – although since Hồ Chí Minh died in 1969 and the monk was not even born until 1973, that was not a historical possibility. A spirit medium in a small village near Prague proudly showed us a withered old apple where she "saw the face of Hồ Chí Minh", and interpreted this as a blessing for her home temple to the Mother Goddesses. Another spirit medium in Paris told us of "channelling" Hồ Chí Minh's spirit when he sat contemplating his bust in the Vietnamese cultural centre, or the offices of the Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France where Hồ Chí Minh's portrait was burned in 1985.

From the perspective of one monk in the UBCV, Hồ Chí Minh's spirit itself is not at rest because his remains have not been treated as they should have been. Although he had published a will requesting that he be cremated and his

ashes scattered over the whole country, he was instead mummified in the Soviet tradition, and his body continues to be displayed at the Hồ Chí Minh mausoleum. The discomfort with this rather "un-Buddhist" treatment of his remains signals the ways in which this "patron saint of the revolution" may also be used to express more recent understandings of spiritual power.

Debts to the Homeland and Debts to the Hostland

Both former refugees and former contract workers stress their shared experiences of trauma, displacement, and precarity. And both commemorate these experiences at ceremonial occasions and send remittances to family members which are perceived as ways of "re-paying their debts". Refugee organizations like "Thank You Germany"[42] in Berlin re-enact the idea of the "debt of freedom" while the livelier folk performances of the homeland associations (*hội đồng hương*) made up of former workers show the idea of a "debt to the homeland", also always present in religious charities and social services directed to send assistance back to their region of origin.

Many former refugees see their trauma as moral experience, which shows the sacrifices that they made for "freedom", and the character-building project of achieving educational and professional success in a new country. People in the "Little Saigons" of the United States, Canada, and Australia are now well established and have achieved relatively high levels of education and professional employment. But since they initially came as refugees, they still see themselves as a "stateless diaspora", in the sense articulated by Gabriel Sheffer that they are "dispersed segments of nations that have been unable to establish their own independent state".[43] While many of them now visit Vietnam, they

42 This refugee association, called *Danke Deutschland* (after a famous song) in German or *Cám ơn nước Đức* in Vietnamese, sponsors cultural gatherings with food, dances, and entertainment in places like Spandau (Berlin). It is an interesting question why West German refugees have expressed the "thank you for rescuing us" argument most strongly. Former refugees in France, while often proud of their associations with elite French schools and universities, almost all also profess to despise the oppressions of French colonialism. And for Vietnamese Americans, the US is both the rescuer and the betrayer – betrayer because of the perception that the US could have won a military victory, but chose not to, and rescuer because there was a willingness to receive refugees in the 1980s and former prisoners in Vietnamese re-education camps and their families in the 1990s.

43 G. Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 73.

are reluctant to identify with the current government, while still strongly asserting their loyalty to Vietnamese culture and tradition. While younger Vietnamese-Americans have now to some extent turned against this, arguing that they were the pawns in an American propaganda effort to show how "we-win-even-when-we lose",[44] former refugees in Germany remain deeply grateful for the assistance they received, and feel a debt to reciprocate.

For former contract workers, the debt is felt instead to their homeland. While their own hardships have been intense, they acknowledge that many of them are now wealthier in the west than they would be in their home country, so they also suffer from a sense of debt and obligation to their homeland, and the relatives they left behind. Thus, they feel they need to repay this debt through remittances and performances of patriotism in both religious and secular contexts. In Germany, the Czech Republic, and Russia, many Vietnamese workers occupy lower rungs of the social ladder and are not citizens of the host nation. But they send a significant portion of their earnings back to Vietnam – most of them simply as gifts to family members, but for the wealthier ones also as investments. They should be classified as a "state-linked diaspora", intimately "connected to states of their own ethnic origin".[45] The most successful of them have established transnational trading enterprises which require them to visit Vietnam at least annually, and some send their children back to live with relatives in Vietnam so that their language skills will remain at the native speaker level. The links to the Vietnamese state are expressed not only through economic activity but also in affiliations with "patriotic" religious groups, cultural events, and even Facebook pages.

44 Y.L. Espiritu, *Body Counts*: *The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014; Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*.

45 Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, p. 73. Grazya Symanska-Matusiewicz writing about the Vietnamese community in Poland, describes them as a "state-bound" or "state-linked" diaspora which is deeply affected by religious trends in the homeland. Looking at various organizations with a gendered analysis, she argues that institutions and movements either opposing the Vietnamese state or maintaining their independence from its official structures are the most likely to provide women with the opportunity to play a leadership role. In this respect, religious institutions seem not to differ from other associations. She says that groups which work closely with the Vietnamese government are male dominated, while those that are more distant from it or oppose it have more women leaders. See G. Symanska-Matusiewicz, "Political Power, Religion and Gender: The Case of the Vietnamese in Poland", *Central and Eastern Migration Review* 7 (2018) 2, pp. 153–164, at 160.

Conclusions: Are the Sufferings of Refugees and Migrants Really so Different?

Several recent critics have argued that the distinction between "migrant" and "refugee" is a false one,[46] since asylum has traditionally been granted to people fleeing countries that have a bad relationship with the host country (for the US, this used to be people "fleeing communism"), while others, perhaps equally desperate and fleeing both violence and extreme poverty, are classed as "migrants". Shifting geopolitical alliances seem to have greater weight than any direct assessment of danger, persecution, or suffering. It is also increasingly difficult to separate economic hardship from political disenfranchisement and political persecution. Today's migrants are often fleeing gang violence, corrupt governments, and economies impacted by climate change, so their lives are as endangered as the lives of people more conventionally described as refugees.

We argue that we need a dynamic and relational concept of religious innovation in the face of precarity, which can be applied to both refugees and contract workers. Precarity helps us to understand how refugee trauma is in many ways similar to the trauma and dislocations of factory workers suddenly unemployed and told to return to their homeland. While contract workers in Eastern Europe did not "lose their country", they did lose their livelihood and were cast aside during a period of transition that they turned into an opportunity to develop new ways of seeking a living – even if these new ways included smuggling, operating black markets in the chilly streets of border towns, and finding ways to get "new papers" to cover up a criminal record.

Vietnamese American writers, including our colleague and occasional collaborator Viet Thanh Nguyen, as well as historian Phuong Tran Nguyen and cultural critic Mimi Thi Nguyen depict their refugee status as their defining feature of their overseas community.[47] But many diasporic Vietnamese were never refugees, yet

46 M. Gessen, "Trump's Asylum Proclamation and the False Distinction Between 'Migrant and Refugee'", *The New Yorker*, 12 November 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/trumps-asylum-proclamation-and-the-false-distinction-between-migrant-and-refugee; C. Kulkathas, "Are Refugees Special?", in: S. Fine and L. Ypi (eds.), *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 249–268.

47 P.T. Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon*, Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017; V.T. Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016; V.T. Nguyen, *The Refugees*, New York: Grove Press, 2017; V.T. Nguyen (ed.), *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2018; M.T. Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*.

they define their experiences as travelling overseas in order to send material support back to their homeland, and note the considerable amount of trauma, suffering, and bare bones precarity that they have had to endure in order to do so. We see a great many communalities in these experiences, whatever flag was flown to dignify these sacrifices.

Early scholars of Vietnamese religion such as Paul Mus described its essence as "cadastral",[48] a spiritual practice that marked the boundaries of community and ordered political authority in space. For displaced Vietnamese, creating new forms of community overseas has become linked to setting up new altars to both sacred and secular figures, with Hồ Chí Minh placed in the same spaces at the goddess of mercy Quan Âm. In Vietnam, the veneration of goddesses provided a lens through which rural-urban migrants and traders made sense of the new market economy.[49] This practice was carried to eastern Europe in the twenty-first century, where former factor workers turned small businessmen have prayed to the same spirits to help them succeed on new terrain. We argue that the centrality of the refugee experience and a sanctified yellow flag in "Little Saigons" is paralleled in "Little Hanois" by the traumas of the migrant worker experience and the fusing of the red flag with a spiritualized image of Hồ Chí Minh.

Overseas Vietnamese identity is not quintessentially that of the refugee, but is today a more complex mixture of former refugees, workers, students, and more recent immigrants. Despite the tenaciousness of these polarities, they seem doomed to eventually disappear into a more cosmopolitan identity for these people who share so much more than just a language.

48 P. Mus, "Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 33 (1933), pp. 367–410, p. 370.

49 Taylor, *Modernity and Re-Enchantment*, p. 8.