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Vietnamese Trajectories: Negotiating Refuge and Belonging Through Forced Migrations

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Abstract

Joining other ‘boat people’ following the end of the Vietnam or American War in 1975, Chinese Vietnamese refugees made up the majority of more than 200,000 Vietnamese nationals who landed in Hong Kong harbour over two decades from 1975 until 1996. Labelled ‘Chinese’ by the Vietnamese but considered ‘Vietnamese’ by Hong Kong Chinese authorities, many of these refugees were refused asylum in Hong Kong and were forced to migrate once again prior to the British handover of the Hong Kong colony to China in 1997. Between 1978 and 1996, over 40,000 Vietnamese were airlifted to the UK.

Introduction

Through experiences of two forced migrations, many Vietnamese find themselves challenging versions of self-identity. Focusing on the 1.5 generation, who were born in Vietnam but migrated with their parents at a young age to the UK via Hong Kong, this paper highlights serial migrants (Ossman, 2013) through their multiple forced journeys across the globe and into local and transnational identities. Insights gained from this project can inform current debates on forced migration in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. It must be noted that this paper is a first draft and will require further input and interaction as the research comes to a close in March 2017.

I begin this paper with an overview of scholarship on Vietnamese and Chinese background Vietnamese in Hong Kong and London. I then examine the notion of forced migration within the context of migration and refugee studies. In the next section, I trace the history of Vietnamese and Chinese background Vietnamese migration from Vietnam to Hong Kong and on to the United Kingdom and London, and finally, through an initial look at the research, I begin to examine ways that forced migration experiences have affected notions of self-identification, and what bearing the Chinese background Vietnamese experiences might have on current issues in forced migration.

Scholarship on Vietnamese in Hong Kong and London

The experience of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong has been examined by a number of scholars over the past thirty years (Bousquet, 1987; Chan and Loveridge, 1987; Davis, 1991; Hitchcox, 1993; Bun, 1995; Cunliffe, 1995; Settlage, 1997; Whitney, 1998; Towle, 2006; Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). The population of Vietnamese in London has also had some academic focus over a similar time period (Robinson, 1989; Robinson and Hale, 1989; Duke and Marshall, 1995; Baker and Eversley, 2000; Sims, 2007; James, 2011), including specialist studies related to business (Parravicini, 2004; Pham, 2004), mental health (Silverstone and Savage, 2010) and youth identity (Back, 1993). However, many of these academic studies assume a monolithic Vietnamese ethnic identity and with regard to Vietnamese in London, often miss many of the unique characteristics that have created deep social divisions within Vietnamese identity politics due to family and individual class, professional activity, education, as well as places and circumstances of origin in and departure from Vietnam. One of the key factors that seems to inform

Chinese background Vietnamese identity amongst 1.5 generation individuals in the London context is the experienced of forced migration.

Defining Forced Migration

Forced migration has been defined thus: “Forced migration [is] increasingly a result of ethnic conflict, inequitable access to natural resources, declining living conditions, and chronic and pervasive human rights abuses (Wood, 1994: 634). These reasons are typically the root causes of flight. However, they are not looked upon by authorities in receiving countries with equal weight. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees gave words to the dilemma facing both refugees and receiving nations as both parties sought solutions to lives determined by refugees to be impossible to live in the conditions at home. Seeking relief through migration is the result of multiple factors, but in the end the choice to leave home is made at the point at which life becomes untenable. UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ogata stated that:

“*Refugees* are forced to flee. *Immigrants* are supposed to have a degree of choice, but when their livelihood is so miserable, I don’t know what the level of choice is. It may be that they too should then be looked at as people forced to flee by poverty, but then it becomes very difficult. What kinds of freedom do you allow? What kinds of regulations do you put in place? (Wood, 1994: 607, emphasis mine). These questions are at the heart of policy decisions that have significant and life-changing effects on the lives of individual refugees.

In attempting to answer these questions, both Hong Kong and Britain played a major role in shaping the future of over 200,000 people. Millions more around the globe await similar decisions to those discussed here, often languishing for years in camps just

across borders, or in seacoast huts, or in urban detention centres. As the numbers of refugees increases so does the level of control and limitation. Wood argues that the distinctions made between the various causes of migration are an unnecessary part of attempts to find solutions. He points out:

“As a result of these overlapping causal factors and an international trend towards tighter immigration and asylum policies, many of those who have been forcibly uprooted, particularly those who remain within their country, are without adequate protection and assistance. [Wood] argues that legalistic distinctions between “economic migrants” and “political refugees” impedes multilateral efforts to prevent an increase in all types of forced migration. Such efforts must focus on underlying conditions that prompt political and socioeconomic instability” (Wood, 1994: 634).

This argument towards a focus on the originary causes of flight and the social phenomena associated with that flight stand on one side of the debate, while on the other is the power wielded by both states and theoreticians who focus on what to do with the refugees themselves and their plight, and more importantly what can be done to limit the numbers seeking flight. Chimni “contends that Refugee Studies, like Forced Migration Studies, has served the geopolitics of hegemonic states” (Chimni, 2009: 11). In other words, “the world of displacement has thus become a site of power to embed selective humanitarian practices that facilitate the exercise of hegemony” (Chimni, 2009: 24). While this debate around issues of power and the policies that work to maintain that power are a crucial component of the forced migration experience, the purpose of this paper is not to argue that point so much as to recognise it and describe it on the way to shedding light on its effects on the self-perception of individuals who have experienced it, both in the geopolitical West as well as the East, the North as well as the South. This paper is indeed a part of the Forced Migration Studies body of literature, and as such is

susceptible to Chimni's accusations. However, this work is an attempt to describe processes of migration, not to sit in judgement of them, but in order to examine their result in the everyday lives of Chinese background Vietnamese. I now turn to a description of Chinese background Vietnamese trajectories before moving to an engagement with notions of identity.

The Chinese Vietnamese Trajectory: An Historical Overview

The Hong Kong leg of this global movement of Vietnamese peoples involved over 200,000 Vietnamese and Chinese-background Vietnamese (Hong Kong Government, 1993; Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). These refugees traveled primarily from northern Vietnam to Hong Kong by boat, beginning in 1975 after the Fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam or American War, and ending in the year 1998 when the government of Hong Kong canceled the "Port of First Asylum" policy, thus ceasing to accept refugee asylum claims and repatriating to Vietnam those who arrived in Hong Kong after that date (Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). While some Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese refugees were taken to Britain in the years just after the Vietnam War, most arrived in Britain as the timeline toward the return of Hong Kong to the Chinese government loomed in 1997. The British and Hong Kong colonial governments sought solutions to the 'Vietnamese problem,' as the Chinese termed it so that by 1996, the Hong Kong head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stated that "twenty years after all this began, those remaining in the camps are not one of our concerns any longer" (Davis, 1991; Dizon,, 1996; Towle, 2006)

During the period, 1978 to 1998, some 40,000 of these boat persons were airlifted to the United Kingdom in several stages, where the majority eventually settled in London

(Sims, 2007; James, 2011). The increasingly tighter controls exhibited by Hong Kong authorities as the numbers of Vietnamese arrivals increased dramatically through the 1980s and into the 1990s illustrates the dilemma encountered by governments faced with refugee influxes. As Wood points out: “The dissonance between de facto subnational causes and proposed de jure national and international solutions demonstrates the international community’s dilemma over coping with the complexities of and the sharp increases in forced migration within and across international borders (Wood, 1994: 607). As can be seen in the Hong Kong model, there were multiple attempts made at an international solution that satisfied all parties, however, the complexities of the refugee situation were such that solutions also became complex and unwieldy, in some cases engendering backlashes from various sides at various times.

With this interdependence between Hong Kong and China in mind, the settlement experience of Vietnamese and Chinese background Vietnamese boat migrants was a direct result of a series of actions and decisions made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a range of nations spanning the globe, including Vietnam, China, the Colony of Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, the United States, and several other countries of asylum such as France, Canada, West Germany (until unification) and Australia. Each of these nations, at different times and in various ways exercised control and authority over Chinese background Vietnamese. Each decision affected the trajectory of their mobilities. State authority and power played key roles with regard to the origins of the refugee experience, the slim possibility of remaining in Hong Kong, as well as the “moving on” of individuals and families from Hong Kong as the “port of first asylum” to other spaces. In the following sections I

outline the arrival and experiences of Chinese background Vietnamese into both Hong Kong and London.

First to Hong Kong

The human flight into Hong Kong was composed of two streams: The first included those who fled the Communist takeover of South Vietnam and originated primarily from southern and central Vietnam. The second stream was made up of Vietnamese, and particularly Chinese background Vietnamese who fled persecution of persons in Vietnam with ethnic and economic connections to China (Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). The initial group of boat migrants arrived in Hong Kong in May of 1975 following the surrender of Saigon, the capital of the Republic of [South] Vietnam, signaling the unification of Vietnam under Communist authority. In that year, just under four thousand people arrived by boat, having fled the Communist takeover and the ensuing reprisals against supporters of the South Vietnamese government and the United States as its ally (Hong Kong Government, 1993). By 1978, the “welcome” of refugees was formalized by the adoption of the “port of first asylum” policy, stating that the responsibility for processing refugees lies with the country in which the refugee first claims asylum (Hong Kong Government, 1993). By 1979, relations between Vietnam and China were deteriorating, due to Vietnam’s foreign policy toward the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea [Cambodia]. That year, Vietnam invaded that country and toppled the Pol Pot Kampuchean government. Vietnam orchestrated a new government, supportive of Vietnamese policies, but this move drew a sharp response from China including the invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979 that sparked the border wars of the next two years. During that time, there was a backlash against Chinese living in Vietnam that spilled over

to include not only recent migrants and guest workers from China, but also Vietnamese who had a Chinese background or “ethnicity.” In some cases, families persecuted for having Chinese links had been living in Vietnam for generations, intermarrying with Vietnamese such that practical connections to China no longer existed (Interview, Le, 2008). The difficulty for authorities in ‘ports of first asylum’ at this stage was that there began to be a mixing of Vietnamese who had little reason to claim asylum due to persecution, but who were seeking economic advantage due to the on-going economic difficulties in Vietnam (Chan, 2011). This development swelled the numbers of boat migrants considerably during the 1980s.

As a result of the significant rise in the population of refugees beginning in 1979, numbering 69,000 total Vietnamese in Hong Kong by that year, there began to be both a shift in public opinion as well as a government policy change (Davis, 1991; Cunliffe, 1995; Whitney, 1998; Towle, 2006; Chan, 2011, Hoang, 2016). While from 1975, refugee camps were open and refugees were allowed to travel freely and even find work in Hong Kong, by 1982, detention centers were established in which refugees were effectively incarcerated with no permission to work and no opportunity to leave the camps. This change represented a more conservative stance that saw the establishment of ‘closed’ detention centers in which boat migrants languished, in some cases, for years (Bousquet, 1987; Chan and Loveridge, 1987; Davis, 1991; Hitchcox, 1993; Bun, 1995; Cunliffe, 1995; Settlage, 1997; Whitney, 1998; Lindstrom, 2005; Towle, 2006; Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). In addition to the Hong Kong government’s response to the Chinese ultimatum to deal with the Vietnamese “problem,” (Davis, 1991: 13), the move to a more strict policy vis-à-vis the status and maintenance of Chinese background Vietnamese

came about as a reaction to both the increasing numbers of refugees arriving from Vietnam as well as the turn in Hong Kong public opinion as “refugee fatigue” began to grow (Hansen , 2011: 85).

This ‘closed camp’ policy, implemented for the purpose of deterrence, was meant to cause potential refugees to re-think their desire to flee to Hong Kong (Davis, 1991; Cunliffe, 1995; Whitney, 1998; Towle, 2006; Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). Deterrence continued through the next fifteen years, which included another large influx of refugees in 1988, while in 1989, 34,000 arrivals were recorded (Hong Kong Government, 1993). In response to the large number of arrivals, the colonial government put in place a “screening policy” in 1988 which reviewed each case with the possibility of repatriation should a refugee be found as entering for economic rather than “fear of persecution” reasons (Cunliffe, 1995; Whitney, 1998; Towle, 2006; Chan, 2011). By the end of 1989, the first repatriations took place (Whitney, 1998; Towle, 2006; Hoang, 2016). Roughly ten years later, in 1998, the policy of the “port of first asylum” was abolished. All subsequent arrivals were deemed illegal immigrants and were subject to repatriation to their country of origin. By the year 2000, all centers were closed. In the final tally, between 1975 and 2000, 213,000 Vietnamese arrived in Hong Kong, 143,000 received settlement opportunities in other countries, 67,000 refugees were repatriated, and 1,400 were allowed to remain in Hong Kong on a permanent basis, mostly due to marriage to Hong Kong Chinese (Chan, 2011; Hoang, 2016). At this point, the international and British public outcry against the possible repatriation of genuine refugees who had reason to fear persecution increased. Public opinion as well as international pressure from both governments as well as non-government organisations had a significant effect on policy.

On to the United Kingdom and London

One result of this public outcry in addition to other factors, such as international pressure for Britain to take more refugees, was that a series of three British government programs were initiated in which an eventual 40,000 Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese were airlifted from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom from 1975 to 1992 (James, 2011). By comparison, 143,000 people were settled in other countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia (Hoang, 2016). Entry of Vietnamese from Hong Kong refugee camps into the United Kingdom took place through three significant programs under the Margaret Thatcher regime, and historically represented one of the first major non-British Commonwealth migrations into Britain since the 1940 acceptance of 300,000 Polish military exiles (Robinson, 2003).

The three post-Vietnam War migration trajectories of Vietnamese from Hong Kong to the UK include an initial era of migration during which the vast majority of Vietnamese arrived in the United Kingdom as so-called ‘boat people’ primarily from 1979 to 1982. The second migration, involving significantly fewer migrants carried on from 1983 until 1988. From 1989 to 1992, as pressure mounted to clear the Hong Kong refugee camps the ‘2000 Programme’ was enacted in which roughly 2000 refugees were admitted into the country directly from Hong Kong (Ibid.). These three periods of migration from Hong Kong established the Vietnamese as a significant group of communities in the United Kingdom.

The official number of 40,000 arrivals accounts for those Vietnamese and Chinese background Vietnamese who entered the United Kingdom through official channels. Others arrived in the UK from Vietnam through non-programmed, but legal family

reunion visas, by-passing Hong Kong through the Vietnam-British government negotiated “Orderly Departure Programme.” This initiative was instituted in order to “reduce [Vietnamese] departure by boat” as another attempt by authorities at deterrence (Duke and Marshall, 1995). In addition, and over the course of the following 30 years, Vietnamese have continued to enter the United Kingdom as international students, diplomats, guest workers and non-legal immigrants so that estimated totals of Vietnamese in Britain are in the range of between 50,000 to 100,000 (James, 2011).

The focus in this paper is on one segment of a population of Vietnamese that is divided into multiple communities, many based on family and place origins, such as Hanoi or Haiphong. In London, according to initial research, 85% of the Vietnamese are originally from the north, and about 85% of those from the north are actually Chinese-background Vietnamese (Interview, Le, 2008). This gathering of United Kingdom-based Chinese background Vietnamese is unique amongst the Vietnamese diaspora for whom scholarship has often ignored or erased this Chinese origin. “The Vietnamese diaspora” has often been gathered into a single monolithic ethnic identity, historically based on the larger, more visible and accessible Vietnamese American communities, and in more recent scholarship, Eastern European Vietnamese communities. The exception to this statement is Yuk Wah Chan’s seminal edited volume titled *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the Boat People*, in which Chan argues that it is important to revisit the Vietnamese refugee experience in order to address the “Asian part” that is, those who remained in Asia (Chan, 2011: 4). Chan explains that “by investigating the Vietnamese diaspora in Asia, with a particular focus on Hong Kong, we aim to explain some of the confusion remaining about Vietnamese refugees, and shed new light on refugee

settlement and different patterns of host-guest interactions that will have implications for refugee studies elsewhere” (Ibid.). For the purposes of this paper, I seek to lift out Chan’s particular focus on the Chinese background Vietnamese who made up seventy percent of the 200,000 refugees who entered Hong Kong (Chan, 2011: 3) in order to highlight a particular segment of the population of migrants from Vietnam who travelled through Hong Kong to the United Kingdom.

With Chan’s excellent study as a base, I hope to expand Vietnamese studies scholarship to elucidate a more nuanced and diverse view of the Vietnamese global diaspora that moves beyond an ethnic focus to the further exploration of possibilities of spatial and socio-economic alternative identities, thus illuminating the multiple ways that Vietnamese gather and create communities. In the case of Chinese background Vietnamese Londoners, I examine the realities and affects of two expulsions and subsequent multiple mobilities as they relate not only to the end of the Vietnam War, but also the ethnic upheaval resulting from the intra-Socialist, Sino-Vietnamese border wars of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the conclusion of the imperial, Victorian-era Hong Kong lease agreement between Britain and China in 1997 (Whitney, 1998).

On arrival in the United Kingdom from Hong Kong, Vietnamese asylum seekers were housed in a wide variety of locales across the country due to the policy of “dispersal” (Price, 2006; James, 2011). Intended to facilitate integration into British society by not “overloading” particular areas of the country with asylum seekers, it was clear by 1993 that the policy had failed and that Vietnamese were on the move again, this time in intra-migration mobilities, moving into major cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester, where Vietnamese community centers and support structures were being

established (Interview, J. Shieh, 2016). One result of this internal migration has been the growth of five primary areas of Vietnamese permanent settlement in London. These include the London Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey, Lewisham, Southwark and Greenwich (Baker and Eversely 2000). These Boroughs have long been sites of immigrant arrival such that at the current time, there are up to 150 first languages spoken in local schools (Baker and Eversley, 2000; James, 2011). It is within this multi-lingual and multi-ethnic milieu that 1.5 generation Chinese background young people intermingled and settled.

Chinese Background Vietnamese Identities

I begin this section with an examination of the notion of 1.5 identities. Paul Ryer, taking his cue from the originator of the 1.5 generation designation (Rumbaut, 1991) and also from the Cuban American Scholar, Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1994), offers a social definition of the 1.5 generation that is useful in the context of this paper. He asserts that the 1.5 generation includes “those whose lives, languages, experiences, and fundamental sense of identity are inexorably split, bifurcated, or hyphenated due to long-term dislocation during adolescence.... Identity, in other words, as a process of lived social relations as much as of an accident of birth or geography” (Ryer, 2010: 75). This idea of identity that is based on ‘lived social relations’ is one that resonates with the experiences of the young people involved in this project. The nuance that remains unique to this group of Chinese background Vietnamese is that there have been multiple settlements that have forced them to adapt to several social settings and multiple types of relations. The experience of forced migration multiplied several times, has in some ways induced

an ambivalence toward an identity with an ethnicity or nation. These are the preliminary findings of this research.

For instance, in a preliminary interview, a young, 1.5 generation Chinese background Vietnamese, made the following observation: "The Vietnamese didn't want us [because we're Chinese]; the Chinese [Hong Kong] didn't want us [because we're Vietnamese], and now [with Brexit], some of the English don't want us. So who are we - Vietnamese, Chinese, English, British...?" (Interview, Chan, September 2016). This statement illustrates the difficulties associated with multiple forced migrations. In the case of Chan, his family left northern Vietnam at the start of the Sino-Vietnamese border war, and crossed into China where they were put to work on a farm. After several years impoverished in this setting, the family decided to travel by boat to Hong Kong for a better life, arriving at the height of the influx. Having relatives abroad allowed the family to leave Hong Kong for London after some period of time in a refugee camp.

The question "Who are we?" raises the Foucauldian question of "Who has the power to decide?" (Foucault, 1980). Who has the power to decide membership in a diaspora- 'Am I Vietnamese, Chinese, British?' Participants are both products of and participants in the process of diaspora-making. How does this play out vis a vis forced migrations? As mentioned earlier, it seems that there is an ambivalence toward belonging to either a diaspora, a host nation, or a people that is expressed by many subjects in this research project. The early conclusions of this research on double forced migrations and displacements indicates that 1.5 generation Chinese background Vietnamese may call into question essential and binary notions of nationality, belonging, and identity. To get at this embryonic hypothesis, it is important to examine the ethnographic stories of migrants

in the unbounded "diaspora" (Brubaker, 2005), in comparison to other Vietnamese mobilities (Malkki, 1992; Siu, 2004, 2007; Ossman, 2013; Schwenkel, 2014; Szymańska-Matusiewicz, 2015; Grubbauer, 2012; Alamgir, 2014) as described above. It is also crucial to explore places occupied by Chinese background Vietnamese, particularly Hong Kong and London as "frames" of "everyday life" (de Certeau, 1988; Appadurai, 1996; Goffman, 1997; Agamben, 1998; Franklin, 2004; Tsang, 2004; Van Hear, 2006; Owens, 2009) in order to understand the trajectories of their lives and what power structures affected and continue to affect them in their everyday existence.

Illustrative of the importance of these elements, is the experience of Huong, whose family migrated by boat early in the 1980s. Huong describes her experience as a young girl travelling by boat with 101 other migrants. After many days on board together, those in the boat decided to emigrate to the West all together, and when Huong's family were offered separate accommodation outside the camp, they refused, choosing instead to remain with the members of the boat. Eventually, the bulk of those in the boat found themselves all together in the UK. As Huong describes it, "I don't think my parents ever set foot in a Vietnamese community centre. They rely on others from our boat. They are like our family now" (Interview, Huong, August 2016). When describing her own sense of identity and belonging, Huong sits back and thinks for a moment... "You know, I only have one Vietnamese friend. I really don't spend time with other Vietnamese. I have friends from lots of different cultures. I haven't really thought about it very much, but it's true" (Ibid.).

Another interviewee stated that he grew up in multi-cultural South London, and he never really knew that differences in ethnicity were important. "I grew up in a highly

multi-cultural neighbourhood. I had friends who were from so many places and cultures, but I never really thought about difference. When asked where he felt most comfortable, he stated, “I was in Cambridge on a course one time and I experienced racism for the first time. It wasn’t bad but I realised that I am most comfortable in London” (Interview, Chan, September 2016). Huong also mentioned that she was most at home in London (Interview, Huong, August 2016). The notion of London as a place and space of safety is one that must be explored further.

Vélez and Bello speak to this point stating that “in the city, many abandon their responsibilities, opting instead for a form of independence that denies kinship bonds and family authority in favour of relationships within their peer group” (Vélez and Bello, 2010: 70). What does this look like in the London context for Chinese background Vietnamese? The nuclear family remains intact, however, the breakdown occurs within the extended family and Vietnamese communities as new loyalties are formed with other Londoners and with other non-related Vietnamese, some of whom share the experience of multiple forced migrations and varied settlement.

In a conversation with Hai over dinner in Hong Kong, this point was made clear: “The only thing I knew growing up was East London...actually my little neighbourhood in East London. But then I started dating a girl from Hong Kong who lived in America. It was like all of a sudden I saw that there’s a big world out there. When we broke up, I decided then and there that I wanted to see the world, so after university I applied for jobs all over the place, Singapore, Tokyo, New York, Hong Kong.... And then I got an interview and I told them I wanted to take the job in Hong Kong. I do miss my family, but I know this is right for me” (Interview, Hai, February 2017). Hai mentioned that he

doesn't really hang out exclusively with other Vietnamese in Hong Kong. He stated that he doesn't know very many Vietnamese, particularly of his own age in the city.

From another Chinese background subject, interviewed in Hong Kong, came a different perspective. When asked if she considered herself Vietnamese or Chinese, she stated emphatically in English, "I'm Hong Kong." I asked her to clarify and she simply stated again, "I'm Hong Kong, not Vietnamese or Chinese" (Interview, Lily, February 2017). As I tried to engage with Lily in Vietnamese, she also stated that she understands some Vietnamese but was not encouraged to speak the language as her parents wanted to settle in Hong Kong and "leave Vietnam behind" (Ibid.).

Maintaining a Vietnamese cultural identity is not easy according to many Chinese background Vietnamese due to pressures of work and busyness, lack of opportunities for both formal and informal (familial, neighbourhood) cultural learning, and simply lack of interest. From a spiritual standpoint, few 1.5 generation Chinese background Vietnamese subjects report that they maintain an altar for ancestor veneration. They are content to visit their parents on key holidays and memorial days, and they do participate with their parents, but do not keep up with a regular practice in their own homes. This break with the ancestors and with the wider Vietnamese diasporic community is a key aspect in 1.5 generation every day life. By living outside of the norms, values and behaviours of the Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese communities, Vietnamese culture is not passed down easily to the next generation, and new values, new norms and behaviours are picked up from those who are not Vietnamese or Chinese around them.

As I consider Huong's perspective mentioned earlier, I can describe this work as an attempt to examine the inter-twining relationships between the refugee, her fellow

refugees from diverse backgrounds and ideologies, the institutions that exacted power over her subjectivity, and finally the places through which she passed and people amongst whom she now lives. Patricia Owens, in a literary conversation with Agamben and Arendt, asserted that refugees are a clue to "a new political model of international relations" (2009). I hope that this project will shed further light as Anthropologists grapple with blurring boundaries, increasingly complex human institutions, greater linkages through globalization, while at the same time the closing of borders and isolationism of some nations, regions and communities. With regard to the 1.5 generation, early indications are that there is a sense of identity and safety that comes from belonging to the city, to a place inhabited by people of multiple backgrounds. This place is less about belonging through legalities, although all of my interlocutors have British passports, and more about belonging through relationships across ethnic boundaries and other divides. It's about being a 'Londoner,' which is a designation that must be further explored.

In light of these comments, that there is a sense of self, identity, place, safety and belonging as 'Londoners' that is unique in the experience of the subjects of this project, I offer three concluding thoughts in an attempt to get at the questions of this research which are 'Who am I in relation to those around me? And to whom do I belong? With the current emphasis on "sanctuary cities" and the place of undocumented "non-citizens" who nevertheless participate in the city as citizens, I think of Monica Varsanyi's postulation related to undocumented migrants in which she asserts that,

I...entertain a normative vision of urban citizenship in which a person would become a "citizen" not by explicit consent of fellow citizens, but merely by presence and residence in a place. While the immediate

possibilities for such an unbounded, “grounded” citizenship are slim, I take lessons from this model and discuss a fourth approach to cities and citizenship which explores contemporary “local citizenship” policy formation for undocumented migrants” (Varsanyi, 2006: 231).

Varsanyi is getting at the notion of citizenship from a social and participatory angle rather than on a legal or policy basis. Along these same lines, Purcell brings out a similar concept around the “urban politics of the inhabitant” (Purcell, 2002: 106). Purcell goes on to say at length:

But it is precisely the analytical and political power of the idea of inhabitance that it opens up the definition of the political subject to include a range of different identities and political interests. One’s class and race and gender and sexuality are all fundamental to inhabiting the city. The struggles of inhabitants against marginalization are struggles against an array of social and spatial structures of which capitalism is only one. The concept of inhabitant is not limited to a single social category – it can incorporate these diverse identities and interests because it is defined by everyday experience in lived space (Ibid.).

‘Everyday experience in lived space’ brings about a comfort level and a sense that one belongs simply because one is participating on a regular basis with those in the same space. In the instance of forced migrations, these opportunities to engage over time with those in one’s space are interrupted, and in many cases, those with whom one is living are so traumatised as to make normal interactions difficult. Forced migrations for the 1.5 generation arrest the originary culture in it’s infancy so that new cultural norms are laid over the top of the old in such a way that often there are competing norms and values that must be constantly negotiated. As another informant said about how she describes herself to others, “Identity depends on the situation. When I first came to England, I told everyone I was Chinese. I hated the Vietnamese for what they had done and the persecution I and my family experienced. But then, after five years, I now tell most

people that I'm Vietnamese. I'm more comfortable with it now" (Interview, Trang January, 2017). Time spent in a place often makes the difference. Engin Isen describes citizenship as a 'social process' of engaging with 'rights:'

Rather than merely focusing on citizenship as legal rights, there is now agreement that citizenship must also be defined as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights. Being politically engaged means practising substantive citizenship, which in turn implies that members of a polity always struggle to shape its fate. This can be considered as the sociological definition of citizenship in that the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities (Isin, 2000: 5).

Isin's point is in keeping with the other scholars quoted here who focus on an engaged, social and participatory notion of citizenship and belonging.

Conclusion

Given the realities associated with forced migration and the sometimes long and torturous journeys through which refugees travel, tremendous losses occur, not least of which is the loss of an ordinary sense of 'home.' As resettlement becomes, not a resettlement into a new 'home,' but a temporary resettlement with an uncertain future, according to the subjects in this research, there is a loss of a sense of grounding in place, leading to an 'untethering' from the nation.

Through multiple forced migrations, it seems that for many 1.5 generation Chinese background Vietnamese there is a sense of having been stripped of something important, that sense of belonging to one place and one people to the exclusion of all others. With that exclusivity stripped away, there can be an openness to the influence of other cultures, other norms and values that then shape the individual into a 'citizen' of the city in which she lives. Regardless of the cultural identities of others in the city, she

belongs, as do they, all of them in a swirling mix of individuals interacting and living out everyday life in the same space, grappling with issues, negotiating difference, all the while potentially changing with each new interaction with others.

Bringing the results of this project into a wider context of global refugee experience, an initial assessment demands that national and transnational authorities act far more quickly and efficiently in adjudicating refugee status, thus limiting the traumatising affects of long-term camp life and uncertainty. The experience of Chinese background Vietnamese is a clear indication that there are no positive outcomes to long-term incarceration.

A second point to be made is against the policy of ‘dispersal’ in which small groups of refugees are settled in outlying areas in order not to ‘swamp’ local communities with large influxes of outsiders. This policy has not been effective as refugees eventually migrate once again to key ‘hubs’ where they experience less isolation and ‘difference’ and find the support and encouragement of other members of their own communities, including access to culturally appropriate food, language and media, as well as to opportunities for cultural gatherings such as festivals, celebrations and the like.

Finally, a third point is the reality that for many in the 1.5 generation, there may never be a loyalty to any particular nation, but there will be a commitment to the city and peoples with which they interact on a daily basis. This new kind of ‘citizenship’ will continue to be a growing reality as the numbers of global refugees increases exponentially due to climate change, environmental disasters, poverty, war, cycles of violence, shifting employment opportunities, and persecution due to authoritarian

regimes. Expectations of these new kinds of citizens must necessarily be re-negotiated as they move across the landscape.

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