

Return Migration of Vietnamese Aucklanders



BA TRINH and her husband Ong Minh guided me through photo albums from their eight-week visit to Vietnam.¹ Their holiday pictures exemplified the activities of ex-patriate Vietnamese who have travelled back to the homeland: Ba Trinh's shots of family reunions, family dinners, family picnics, the urns of parents, old friends, familiar places, tourist attractions and shopping expeditions summarized a typical returnee's itinerary. Like most *Viet kieu* ('overseas Vietnamese') who left their homeland as adults, Ba Trinh and Ong Minh enjoyed their return visit. Ong Minh, a boat person who has lived in New Zealand since 1985, was particularly enthusiastic. Vietnam was home, that was where his family was, and eight weeks far too short a stay. But clearly there were definite tensions for returning *Viet kieu*. As we looked through the photos it was evident that New Zealand-Vietnamese like Ba Trinh and Ong Minh walked a fine line when they returned 'home'. There was a pressure to appear successful, but boastfulness was not appropriate; *Viet kieu* should be generous, but retain their modesty; shopping was a must, but be careful that shopkeepers do not know you are *Viet kieu* — they will hike up the price.

I gathered that the couple had developed their own *tao* of return migration. On the one hand this involved acts of considerable generosity to friends and family, among whom they distributed money and gifts, including more than 12 kilograms of New Zealand chocolate. Equally important was an unassuming manner. Leafing through the photo album Ba Trinh pointed out how she had deliberately dressed like a Vietnamese — and not a *Viet kieu*. She said that *Viet kieu* have a mixed reputation in Vietnam, and she did not wish to confirm or be subject to negative stereotypes.

Large numbers of New Zealand's adult *Viet kieu* have returned to Vietnam in the last decade. Their travels are possible because of a political turnabout by the Vietnamese State and its erstwhile citizens. Until 1986, refugees like Ong Minh had been barred from return. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) regarded boat people as traitors. Many refugees, in turn, were emphatic that they would not go 'home' until the communist regime was deposed. But in the late 1980s, as this ostensibly socialist nation's monetary policy swung to the right, official assessments of refugees softened. In a bid to attract overseas capital, the VCP's *Doi Moi* (literally 'renovation') reforms opened the way for the return migration of the former boat people.

In the dozen years since refugee homecomings became normal, a web of political, financial and emotional sensibilities has woven its way through return migration experiences. As Ba Trinh's comportment in Vietnam suggests, returning embroils *Viet kieu* and homelander in issues of belonging and difference. In fact, for most Vietnamese in New Zealand (and throughout the West), the tensions of belonging and difference were *the* hallmark of 'going home'. Throughout the 1990s, at the same time as the relationships between Vietnam and countries of

the West were becoming more cordial, return migration experiences confirmed how different *Viet kieu* had become from homelander.

The story of Ba Trinh and Ong Minh's return is the coda to a series of 31 interviews collected as part of an oral-history study of Vietnamese living in Auckland.² This sample was garnered from among 3462 Vietnamese living in New Zealand. Directly or indirectly, most of that population has some connection to the refugee flow precipitated by the reunification of Vietnam in April 1975. Between 1977 and 2000 more than 4000 Vietnamese refugees were accepted for resettlement in New Zealand on grounds of humanitarianism, perceived utility within the host economy and, especially in the early 1980s, pre-existent family links in New Zealand.³ Another 4000 gained residency under family reunification schemes, or through private sponsorship.⁴ Since their arrival in the late 1970s the majority of adult Vietnamese in New Zealand — as throughout the West — have worked in semi-skilled or unskilled positions.⁵ A large number resettled in Australia.

Using accounts of return journeys, this article investigates how *Viet kieu* have related to Vietnamese in Vietnam. It begins by describing some of the responses of *Viet kieu* to the opportunity to revisit 'home'. Evidently, the level of desire to return, the motivations for doing so, and the interactions with Vietnamese family and non-family in Vietnam have been fairly diverse. Yet within that diversity, certain patterns emerge. Returnees' experiences in Vietnam were strongly influenced by their degree of integration into the anglophone New Zealand mainstream culture, and by gender conditioning. Encounters with authorities, townspeople and family are used to explore how westernization and gender affected *Viet kieu*'s feelings of difference and belonging. The article concludes by examining how changes within Vietnam, and the opportunity to observe some of those changes, have shaped interviewees' anti-Hanoi politics and feelings about permanent return.

'Difference' had been a key element in the political representations of overseas Vietnamese since at least the fall of Saigon. In ex-patriate communities throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, refugee leaders argued that Vietnamese culture and family values were being destroyed by the imposition of the communists' 'foreign' social theory. Within such discourse, the West — so often the 'Other' of the Vietnamese imagination — paradoxically became a refuge in which traditional values could be kept alive. As one Australian-Vietnamese explained: 'The real Vietnam is here in freedom. It is our duty here in Australia to maintain the true Vietnam with its values intact.'⁶ If the 'real Vietnam' was present in the lives of overseas Vietnamese, then, for hard-liners at least, contact with the communist-run 'false' Vietnam was unnecessary and probably harmful. Communication between diaspora and nation was to be minimal until such time as the Hanoi government was removed. Many Vietnamese rated the chances of this as 'very small or non-existent'.⁷

Simultaneously, a sense of irreconcilable difference emerged between nationals and émigrés over how Westernized — how 'un-Vietnamese' — the generations brought up outside Vietnam were. This was true in both pro- and anti-Hanoi ex-patriate communities. Vietnamese youths' integration into Western culture led many adults to accept that, whether or not return to Vietnam became

possible, their children were destined to live in the West. As one French-Canadian study of the mid-1980s concluded, ‘the Quebec City Vietnamese consider their implantation in Canada more or less final. If they themselves often wish they could return to Vietnam some day, they do not generally believe that their children will be interested in doing so.’⁸

For its part, the Hanoi government also viewed refugee *Viet kieu* as a group that was very different from Vietnamese in Vietnam. The exiled South Vietnamese élite was correctly regarded as inimical to the state’s political agenda, while those from humbler backgrounds who had sought asylum in the West were considered traitors. Yet despite Hanoi’s antipathy to refugees, after 1975 the state came to rely on *Viet kieu* remittances as a means of increasing the national standard of living. To capitalize further on the wealth of the diaspora, in late 1986 the government cleared the way for former refugees to return to Vietnam for work or holidays, to take part in joint ventures with the state, and even to purchase land.⁹ These important developments were part of a broader project of political and economic liberalization known as *Doi Moi*.

The opportunity to return to Vietnam challenged the prevailing public discourse of *Viet kieu* community representatives throughout the world. The overseas Vietnamese identity had long been portrayed as inseparable from political-refugee status. How could a real refugee return to Vietnam under the same government that had forced hundreds of thousands into exile? In 1987 for instance, a letter to the editor of a Vietnamese-language newspaper suggested returning compatriots had ‘betrayed our overseas community in its fight for a better treatment of our people at home and allowed the racists in Western countries to argue Vietnamese boatpeople [sic] are not political but economic refugees’.¹⁰

Such views, initially endorsed by overseas Vietnamese from refugee backgrounds, increasingly fell on deaf ears. By the mid-1990s, refugees were returning en masse to their homeland. In 1995, 40,000 returned from Australia alone, about one-fifth of the Australian-Vietnamese population. With numbers skyrocketing, anti-communist community representatives grudgingly abandoned the policy of no-return. Their political line had lost out to emotional and familial connections. While most refugees continued to oppose the Hanoi government, *Viet kieu* felt justified in returning because family networks took precedence over ethnic politics.¹¹ As Louis-Jacques Dorais has recently noted of the Vietnamese ‘diaspora’:

Rather than being understood as a nation in exile, the *Viet kieu* transnational community seems to consist of a cluster of networks of relatives and friends spread out over the world—including Vietnam—and maintaining more or less regular relations among themselves. In this sense, it is possible that for most Vietnamese, the only really meaningful form of human collectivity is one based primarily on kinship and the family. In such a context, the social organization and collective memory of the *Viet kieu* would be best expressed through shared cultural values stressing the primacy of the family, rather than being concerned with formal institutions and political discourses.¹²

My discussions with adult informants in Auckland about return trips confirmed the centrality of kin ties. However, with respect to links to the

homeland, Dorais' generalizations on the primacy of family need to be qualified. Vietnamese Aucklanders who had emigrated in their teens or earlier had a different relationship towards the extended family in Vietnam than their parents. This affected their motivations for visiting Vietnam. Interviewees' backgrounds in Vietnam also played a role in whether they wished to return or not: here there was some correlation between opposition to the Hanoi regime and gender.

It became clear in the course of interviews that males' antipathy to Hanoi could be significant enough to impose limits on their relationships with kin in Vietnam. Ong Quang, who had been imprisoned in a re-education camp for seven years, had not returned home, though his wife had. I believe that the thought of doing so was too disturbing.¹³ Other staunch anti-communists, all male, were saving return journeys for a time when human rights improved or the existing regime had collapsed.¹⁴

None of the women I encountered held this line.¹⁵ Middle-aged female interviewees, along with most middle-aged males, stressed that return trips were to see and help family living in Vietnam; these journeys were not a political statement of any sort. Ba Lan and Ba Nga returned in the 1990s to visit their elderly mothers.¹⁶ Ong Trung, in New Zealand since 1975, had visited Vietnam on three occasions for the same reason.¹⁷ Ba Trinh had returned to Vietnam in 1997 to see family and friends, and she was hoping to do so again, especially after her brother's recent death.¹⁸ Several other middle-aged women I spoke to informally had travelled to Vietnam to be with family after a parent had passed away.

Unlike their parents' generation, interviewees in their twenties who had grown up in New Zealand were not strongly orientated towards Vietnam-based kin. This reduced their motivation to return to Vietnam.¹⁹ Ong Viet, who arrived in New Zealand aged two, pondered: 'Would I think of going back? I don't have a big urge to, no. I'd like to see it, but I'd like to see other places before I see Vietnam.'²⁰ One interviewee in her late 20s said that her younger brothers felt nothing that would compel them to visit Vietnam: 'The older person, the more they been spent there, there's more feel like going home than I do, than the younger one. My brothers doesn't want to know about Vietnam . . . They don't know anyone, no one remember them. Why do they want to go back to a place that they don't want to know? You know they prefer to go to Bali, American, where is more [sic] exciting, *where they're more related to*.'²¹ Whereas adult Vietnamese usually had brothers, sisters or parents in Vietnam, younger interviewees often had all their close family in New Zealand and Australia:

Q: Do you often think about Vietnam [after six years] in New Zealand?

ONG CHIEN: Not really that much, since my family — all my family come in here I don't miss much, but I still miss a little bit.²²

For those who had grown up in the West with only their immediate family, the extended kin ties for which Vietnam is renowned hardly resonated:

Q: Did you feel like you were part of the family when you were there?

BA CHI: Oh no. No. No. It's like visiting your family — your relative. You don't feel

like a family, really You know you're related to them, you visiting them, they're welcoming you, but we don't feel like a family.

Q: But I heard that Vietnamese families are really close.

BA CHI: They are close in that sense, but I don't know. Maybe in a way that I'm brought up over here, so there's always a distance. The close bound family things like your mum and dad and like a small unit of family. Not so used to grandfather, grandmother, auntie, uncle and everything Not with my family. Some people here they are still — they are still like that.²³

According to Ba Huong, if Vietnamese raised in New Zealand wanted to return it was as tourists, not family: 'Older generation are more into maybe seeing family and um, yeah, mostly family and friends, whereas younger generation like to go over because they think it's a really cool place to be.' Ba Nhung, in the same interview, disagreed. She thought that, apart from those who attended a Vietnamese Buddhist temple regularly (those 'in touch' with their culture), young Vietnamese did not want to visit Vietnam. Language ability was a key variable: 'Because, sometimes they can't speak Vietnamese properly, and they just afraid to go back.'²⁴

Those intending to return have also wondered what treatment they could expect from the Vietnamese government. Especially in the early 1990s, anxiety towards government officials was common, and indeed predictable among people who had experienced state surveillance and often discrimination before their escape. Before Ba Lan, an interviewee, made her first return visit in 1990 she asked her New Zealand boss to be lenient to her if she did not make it back to her job on time: she worried that communist authorities might detain her. Her concern was not borne out, but she did find Vietnamese customs authorities particularly strict in dealing with *Viet kieu* like herself. While the ostensible reason for this stringency was that overseas Vietnamese posed a security risk, Ba Lan felt that there was a more cynical reason for official attention: 'They want the *money*. You know when [you] go to the airport before you get out you must go through security. They check for you the passport or something like that. If you give them the money, they [sic] easy for you. If you don't give the money, they ask something, deleting [?], then up [to] the high [authority], and they ask somebody like that. Making you long time then there in the airport.'²⁵ For returning *Viet kieu*, airport encounters were an opportunity to evaluate official conduct first hand; to judge the tenor of the *Viet kieu*-Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) rapport. Ba Lan's comments are typical of the interviewees in stressing the centrality of money in that relationship.

Interviewees also emphasized the state's unwieldy, paranoid and authoritarian dimensions. Ba Huong visited as a teenager in 1993 and was not impressed by what she saw: 'I got a bad image when I first got into the airport, because there was this European lady that was there, um, she brought a camera and they kind of — like she was taking photos through the airport, but they were really restrictive and they took it off her, and it was just — I thought it was really rude how they handled it, 'cause, yeah. I think they're so hush-hush about everything. They think everybody's a spy or something.'²⁶

However, interviewees who have returned more recently tended to find the situation improved. When Ba Lan made her second return visit in 1998 she felt that, notwithstanding the occasional small bribe, the country was 'very open.... Easy to come, easy to go.'²⁷ The sense of positive progress was confirmed by Ba Ha. She and her husband returned to Vietnam in 2000, shortly after a smuggling and corruption scandal that had ended in several executions and the temporary replacement of customs officers by police. The stand-ins, Ba Ha told me, had very little job knowledge, but neither did they require the usual bribes: 'No questions, no problems, smiling and oh so happy!'²⁸ These changes, within a nation rife with corruption, indicate something of the importance of *Viet kieu* visitors. Ong Son, who was planning his first visit to Vietnam at the time of our interview, believed that Vietnamese officials would not risk the diplomatic effects of treating *Viet kieu* badly (having a New Zealand passport was important in this respect), not to mention the loss of revenue that could be incurred through bad press. News of any abuses would travel quickly throughout the Vietnamese transnational community, discouraging would-be returnees and jeopardizing a major source of income for the state. Buoyed by his own argument, and despite a possible criminal record as an SRV prison escapee, Ong Son appeared unconcerned at the prospect of re-encountering Vietnamese authorities. 'They need us. They need us. The fact that at the beginning, a lot of corruption at the airport. At the moment I heard that they improve a lot.'²⁹

Despite improvements, one interviewee still took serious offence at her treatment by customs officers. In 1999 Ba Chi returned to Vietnam seeking a home she had lost at age 12. Instead, she found that authorities were treating her as an outsider. At the airport, 'They ask me why I am here, what the reason you been here, like, you are Vietnamese and you're going back to the country is not good enough excuse So they ask me, with an arrogant face. If I don't say the right thing they could put me in jail or something like that.'³⁰ Behind the unfriendly treatment, Ba Chi perceived what has been called the 'lingering prejudice' against *Viet kieu*.³¹ The basis of this, she said, was jealousy. 'They look at me as an envy and hatress [sic] They treat me like I'm the one who left the country, escape the country and now [I am] much higher position so they hate me for that. I'm a wealthier — I'm more wealthier. I'm wealthier. So they don't like that.' She felt that her reception at customs was so inhospitable not in spite of her Vietnamese origins, but because of them: 'They treat [me] like a foreigners [sic]. Badder, worse than a foreigner. I think they will treat you better than they treat me And yet I'm a Vietnamese. So there's a hatred and there's something against it. With you, you're so different they can't really have that sort of hatred. You know what I mean?'³²

The inhospitable treatment Ba Chi encountered has some provocation. The conspicuous wealth of *Viet kieu* has antagonized many homeland Vietnamese. Returning *Viet kieu* have annoyed locals with their complaints about cramped living conditions, poor hygiene and unsatisfactory living arrangements. I was told of one *Viet kieu* woman who offended her hosts in Vietnam by refusing to use their flush toilet. Instead she made recourse, when necessary, to the facilities provided by her hotel.³³



Figure 1: Informal dining. A meal prepared for returning *Viet kieu* was eaten on the floor because the dinner table was too small. Ho Chi Minh City, 2002. Private collection.



Figure 2: Meat For Sale. Street vending of this sort is often remarked upon by returning *Viet kieu*, who consider it unhygienic and unsavoury. Hanoi, 2001. Author's collection.

Disapproval of *Viet kieu* has been strongest among those sympathetic to the Hanoi government. For them, being *Viet kieu* carries connotations of treachery, reactionary politics and Westernization.³⁴ One pro-Hanoi international student from northern Vietnam explained to me how *Viet kieu* 'don't want to be recognized as Vietnamese . . . That's very, very bad.' She dismissed the myth of the great fortunes of *Viet kieu*: only poorly educated and untravelled Vietnamese thought that *Viet kieu* were wealthy. In reality, she said, they worked in restaurants, butcheries or 'something like that', and were not 'like top-class people' at all.³⁵

Even among recent Vietnamese migrants opposed to the government, the political discourse of refugee *Viet kieu* has not always been well received:

When [Vietnamese] people here [in New Zealand] they object to the government, they are anti-communist. And I myself have the right to say those words [i.e. complain about the communist government], not them. You know why? Because revolution, a lot of them refugees ran out before the war, or the days of the war, or just some months after the war. So they lost their properties. But they still have a little bit of money with them to escape by buying the seat on the boat. But my family, completely broke, had nothing . . . We had to suffer, starving. And with the refugees here they escape before the starving time. In New Zealand they have plenty of food . . . You know the difference?³⁶

Despite indications of mixed feelings towards overseas Vietnamese, almost all refugee interviewees felt that, outside of government, the reputation of *Viet kieu* in Vietnam was good. While it was not a term that adults in New Zealand used to describe themselves, they were not particularly averse to it. When I mentioned it they generally laughed. But, behind that laughter, the stereotype of what *Viet kieu* are, what they should be capable of, and what they will bring back to friends and families, has sometimes made returning bitter-sweet. In New Zealand, as throughout the West, most refugees and migrants took on work for which they had no previous experience. The majority of those who had been employed in white-collar positions in Vietnam had to accept unskilled or manual work.³⁷ This, or the alternative of being unemployed, caused a loss of face. However, because refugees and migrants settled in some of the richest countries in the world, family members in the homeland were not necessarily informed of the dive in job status. Any money sent back to Vietnam went a long way, and this made it possible to sustain the fallacy that life in the West was well-to-do. When it came time to return to Vietnam, the tensions between the realities and fictions of life overseas were brought to a head:

When you go there everyone think you are like all rich. Everyone think that you are big man, you know, and very rich. So expect you to pay something, to give them something. And it's embarrassing if you don't give them anything. It's embarrassing . . . Some people they are very poor here, like they live on benefit, but when they go back there they make up, exaggerate it, that they've been the big boss there [*laughs*]. They've been — 'Oh, and overseas has been wonderful, you know? Got a high salary and all sorts of things.' Pretending, but, later on, the Vietnamese over in my country they can tell that [*sic*] who is lying, because, you know, the people they got a full-time job they can't go there for months for holiday, only a few weeks. But the people on benefit they go there for months. But still they have to pay something, give them something, the gift.³⁸

The comic image of the boastful relative who is finally caught out mingles with what might, in many cases, constitute either a personal tragedy or a massive relief: on the grounds that, for all concerned, the expectation of great wealth can finally be laid to rest. For Vietnamese in Vietnam, that stereotype is undergoing an attack at the hands of those who are unable or unwilling to maintain the pretence of extravagance. Still, Vietnamese in New Zealand feel obliged to pander to the expectations of what it means to be *Viet kieu*. Ba Nga, who has never had long-term employment in New Zealand, returned to Vietnam with

the aid of money from an American-based nephew. When in turn she passed on some of that cash to family in Vietnam she did not reveal its origins: ‘Thay (translating for Ba Nga), said ‘She doesn’t said about nephew money, because her nephew give her, for her, only for her. Yeah, and she want to give anyone, up to her.’³⁹ Thay, in conversation, told me that it is usual for Vietnamese families in Auckland to take back \$10,000 for their families in Vietnam. This is sometimes accomplished by selling major items like cars and televisions. For others, the sum required constitutes an insurmountable obstacle. I asked Ba Duyen whether her family had considered visiting Vietnam:

Yes, but we can’t afford it. Because like when you go back it’s not just going back. You have to meet your relative[s], and you have to give them money as well, so it’s very heavy. It’s not like a normal holiday. You need a lot of cash before you can go back.

Q: So, it’s a pretty big deal going back?

BA DUYEN: Yes.

Q: What do they think about going back?

BA DUYEN: They like it. But everyone complains about the money. Because we had a lot of relatives or acquaintances in Vietnam. And it’s just expected that when you come back you have to give them money.

Q: Like, every single relative?

BA DUYEN: Not every single relative, but just the important people to you. It’s just an unspoken thing.⁴⁰

So, returning to Vietnam has become a performance of the status which *Viet kieu* aspire to, and which homeland Vietnamese may have already come to expect of their overseas relatives. While the case of Ba Duyen was a little special — her older siblings had high-status jobs in the health sector — it typifies agendas of responsibility and representation. Such agendas are not satisfied by achievement in the West; rather, as Ba Duyen’s comments show, achievement augments the sense of what is owed to those back in Vietnam.

Gender conventions may have added to the stress of return. Interviewees explained to me how men took responsibility for presenting gifts. ‘Ba Thanh said, ‘They expect a man to give it [*laughs*] . . . If I’m a man and I have a girlfriend here, and . . . I go back there they all then don’t expect things from the girl, but from the man.’⁴¹ For Ba Chi, receivers acknowledged men as the gift-givers, but it was largely a matter of convention: ‘If I’m visiting my side of family, they don’t know my husband, isn’t it? So they think the gift is from me, but then they will say, politely saying, “Oh, it’s from [Ba Chi’s] husband.”’⁴² The basis of this practice lies in the expectation that men are the chief breadwinners and household heads. However, in many Vietnamese families in the West this has ceased to be the case. As Nazli Kibria has described in the United States, many Vietnamese men have been unable ‘to fulfil adequately, as they had in pre-1975 Vietnam, the role of the primary economic provider for their families’.⁴³ These men may have felt an acute sense of their limitations when returning to a country in which the breadwinner culture has remained sacrosanct.

Even among *Viet kieu* who are not financially well-equipped, their return supports the impression of the general bounty of overseas life. For Vietnamese in New Zealand, any friend’s trip back is an opportunity to send goods and

monies to relatives. The individual undertaking the journey becomes an envoy for the gifts of his or her New Zealand-based friends and family: ‘I think, like, next week, my sister going back to Vietnam for holiday, and everybody, you know, come and see her and say, “Oh, can you give her this gift, send to their family, their friends” Many people come, give you 200 dollars. “Please, give my mum 200 dollars” And some people give my sister skin care and things like that. And you go there, and have to ring all them up, and they come and collect it, you know. And then from Vietnam to here, from there they will send something back to New Zealand.’⁴⁴ Vietnamese from an Otahuhu Buddhist temple would often entrust small items to fellow devotees who were making a return visit.⁴⁵ I imagine that those ‘homeland’ Vietnamese who come to pick up gifts from travellers with whom they have no direct relationship might be struck by this network of Vietnamese — far removed from Vietnam, unregulated by Vietnam. In reconfirming the relationship to the family with gifts, the *Viet kieu* reveal the existence, importance and effectiveness of the connections among overseas Vietnamese.

So far the discussion has dealt with *Viet kieu* identity in the context of the homeland. Central themes have been familial responsibility, tensions of reputation and an uncertainty about a status that was both Vietnamese and Western. It is clear that enthusiasm for return has been far from universal; willingness to make the journey ‘home’ was conditional on an informant’s background in Vietnam, the age at which they escaped or emigrated, and their level of material success in New Zealand. Gender and generation proved significant variables, too. Each of these factors also proved significant in shaping returnees’ encounters with family and community. Interviewees’ accounts draw attention to moments of belonging, but most emphasize returnees’ liminality, and the capacity of ‘homeland Vietnamese’ to withhold insider status.

For adult migrants or refugees, many of whom have poor English language skills, the return to Vietnam meant being reacquainted with the culture with which they were most conversant. Ba Ly described the positive feelings which returnees fluent in Vietnamese have had: ‘Vietnam has always been loud, and noisy, and all that, and in New Zealand it’s quiet. When people went back to Vietnam they’re like, “Oh my God! It’s so fun! It’s so fun! All this noise! All these places!”’ And all these tropical fruits that they’ve been deprived of for the past few years. All these Vietnamese languages, all these people talking language that you can understand. “Oh my goodness, I can actually understand these people!”⁴⁶ For adults there was a wonderful satisfaction from fitting in linguistically. There was also the matter of learning about one’s own difference. Partly this meant being treated as a very special guest: ‘Thay (translating for Ba Nga): She says when she came back [to] Vietnam and her sister and her nephew take her — took her to a supermarket to buy some food, and came back home and they cook, they cook for [her], and they have lunch and dinner together. She didn’t do anything. Sit down. Cook and do something for her. *Because she’s Viet kieu* And after that she went to another house to see her relation.’⁴⁷



Figure 3: Street Life. Especially during Tet (Lunar New Year) Vietnam's cities have an extraordinary vibrancy. Hanoi, 2001. Author's collection.

For younger people, especially unmarried women with parents in Vietnam, re-entry into the family could also mean a temporary loss of independence:

BA THANH: I have to ask my parents' permission to go out with friends Sometimes she [Mum] doesn't allow me to go out and things like that [In New Zealand] I'm free, I can go any time I want, and nobody ask me anything. So when I go back there and she does like that the way she didn't want me to see my friends, my best friends. [Inaudible] Not good

Q: Did you feel that the power relationship between you and your parents had changed because you were living in a rich country?

BA THANH: No, not really. Not really. The power? No. Not with my mum. She always has power [laughs].⁴⁸

Social relations within the wider community reinforced feelings that young people were not their own agents: 'The idea that something might be "none of your business" didn't apply in Vietnamese society. People were very judgmental, always noticing one another's behaviour. The effect of this was that people made decisions with a view to the community's feelings. [Ba Van] did not have the same sense living in New Zealand. On the one hand this could make life lonely, on the other it conferred a kind of freedom which she missed when she returned to Vietnam.'⁴⁹

Returnees were objects of particularly intense scrutiny. Ba Chi told me that she had to spend a night at the homes of each of her uncles and aunts. Her hosts were very particular about this. Declining a relative's hospitality might be interpreted as a sign of *Viet kieu* fastidiousness:

You got to be really careful what you say, because they say, 'Oh, my house is too poor for you, is it? That's why you don't want to stay' You know, you've got to visit

here, visit there, visit that, and giving money, all that sort of thing. And you know it's not a fun thing ...

Q: So did you feel that there was a lot of obligation?

BA CHI: Oh yes! I do feel a *lot* of pressure for the first time.⁵⁰

Thus, while interviewees sometimes became part of the households to which they returned, it was not on regular terms. By linking up with the family it became clear where and how one did not connect. 'Coming home' could in fact mean coming to terms with foreignness in the place that was meant to be theirs.

Failure to fit in physically and mentally could renew an appreciation of conditions back in Auckland: '[I] talked to Mr [—], the middle-aged regular attendee. He had returned to Vietnam in 1993, and again in August 2001. I asked him what it was like going back and he said that he felt uncomfortable in the heat, and that for two or three weeks he had food poisoning. He wanted to get back to New Zealand, with its milder climate and safer food. He has brothers and sisters in Vietnam, but he feels quite different from them.'⁵¹ Upon her return in 1989, Ba Hong, who had lived in New Zealand for more than 20 years, was very curious about whether or not she would fit in. She found that she was different: 'When [she] returned she watched her own behaviour, conscious of standing out because of her years in the West. Despite wearing Vietnamese clothes (what she called "servants" clothes) Vietnamese knew straight away that she was a *Viet kieu*. She thinks they guessed because of the way she was looking around at everything.'⁵²

Moving through town there were other visible signs of a returnee's exotic upbringing, as Ba Chi explained: 'I look, you know, more fleshy . . . I walked faster, I looked fairer. My — even the way I walk, my gesture, or my attitude, it's not the same as Vietnamese from Vietnam . . . We look more freedom of movement [sic] . . . very confident.'⁵³ In fact, passers-by sometimes mistook Ba Chi's origins:

When I walk on the street people think I'm Japanese or something, because I walk very fast . . . There, people are so relaxed, they just walk slowly. So we stand out. So — different. And they don't think I'm Vietnamese 'cause I don't look Vietnamese . . . And so they think that — '*Konnichiwa, konnichiwa!*' [laughs] '*Genki des ka?*' And then I just keep quiet. They think that I'm Japanese. And they talk behind me in Vietnamese. 'Oh, you know, that girl, she looks so fast, she walks so fast, and she —' They think I don't — they think I can't hear them, understand them, so they keep — give me all sort of compliments. Even compliments or they criticize as well. I can hear both.⁵⁴

Young people in particular found that their behaviour was sometimes unacceptable in unexpected ways. Ba Huong, who returned at age 14, learned by trial and error that window shopping was not good form. When she moved from vendor to vendor without buying anything, 'the shop person would just openly snicker or talk badly about you, even though you can hear them'.⁵⁵ Gender-specific criticisms were also given vent by local Vietnamese:

BA HUONG: A lot of things like we think are accepted here, aren't accepted over there. Like, when I went back . . . I usually wear shorts, because you know we always wear

shorts, especially because it's really hot over there, but then — like, people — people, like, talk, and say, 'Aw, you know, that's so inappropriate.' And, like, I'm just going shopping in shorts, you know . . .

Q: What did they think of you wearing shorts?

BA HUONG: [laughs] No, they just think you're a bit slutty. Yeah.⁵⁶

According to several informants the same standards would not be applied to *Viet kieu* teenage boys.⁵⁷



Figure 4: The *Viet-kieu* look. The two young people (right) are *Viet kieu* from the United States. Their mannerisms and style of dress make them conspicuous in Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City, 2002. Private collection.

Returning women also faced judgements based on constructions of proper femininity. Ba Chi, having spent almost two-thirds of her life in Australia, had taken on values which endorsed a career path and individuality. 'To me, I have the rights of doing this and that . . . I don't have to have kids if I don't want to.' Then, returning to Vietnam, she encountered another set of standards. 'In Vietnam if I'm an Asian, as a girl, I would just — growing up, get married, have some education if you can, and have kids. That's what life is for a female.'⁵⁸ The gender expectations of Vietnamese in Vietnam fazed and alienated Ba Chi.

To me, I'm me. I'm 29. They say, 'Oops, she not married. She going to be a spinster. She not getting married. There must be something wrong with her.' You know? That sort of perception in a person. And to me, 'Oh, yeah, go on. It's no big deal.' Their perception is very different. It's the expectation as well.

Q: Did that shock you when you went back?

BA CHI: Oh, yeah. I feel very sad. I feel sad that I don't belong anywhere. As I said, I feel like a lost soul, in a way.⁵⁹

Vietnamese 'womanhood' has traditionally been conferred by marriage. According to women's rights advocate Tran Thi Que, 'a [Vietnamese] woman who is still unmarried by the age of 30 typically feels deeply unhappy and a failure, whatever her work and her socio-economic situation'.⁶⁰ This is in keeping

with what Ba Chi found when she visited Vietnam. However, I encountered no evidence to suggest that older Auckland Vietnamese hold substantially different views.⁶¹ In that case, it may be that Ba Chi took to heart the judgements of those in Vietnam not because they were unprecedented but because they confirmed the values she had struggled against in Vietnamese communities in Auckland. Pinning these views on the distant homeland may have been a way of trying to isolate their influence. As well, by relegating them to the scrap-heap of a ‘backward’ third-world country (and there are, for Ba Chi, no exceptions to the narrow vision of women in Vietnam) she could make a separation between traditional values and modernity in which she ‘justifiably’ occupied the latter position.

As Ba Chi’s comments show, strategies of self-representation have made use of the concept of modernity. This term and its antithesis may also be invoked as shorthand for the distinction between the overseas-Vietnamese ideals of government and perceived practices of the SRV. Where the SRV is thought corrupt, authoritarian and impoverished, the West is ‘Free’, its officials largely honest and its standards of living good.⁶² The articulation of these ‘modern’ qualities by overseas Vietnamese had a strong precedent in colonial and Republic of Vietnam-era propaganda, and a longer history under the ideology which Edward Said famously describes as ‘orientalism’.⁶³

How has *Doi Moi* and the return of *Viet kieu* led to re-evaluations of that divide — between the prosperous, modern, democratic West, and a poor, backward, authoritarian, homeland? My interviews showed that, politically, the émigrés’ familiar tropes continue to have currency 16 years after *Doi Moi*’s official inauguration. The opinions of interviewees who had returned and those who had not tended towards pessimistic agreement. There was a general acceptance that change had occurred through the 1980s and 1990s, but that actual improvements were realized only slowly.⁶⁴ Several informants spoke of strong rural-urban differences. Ong Quang (who had not returned) believed that conditions were better for some living in cities, but life remained very difficult in the countryside: ‘The poor is still poor.’⁶⁵ Those who had made the return journey confirmed this assessment. During her 1996 visit Ba Nga found the ‘system’ had changed a lot, that high rise buildings had sprung up in Ho Chi Minh City, but that her own town remained largely as it had been when she last saw it in 1989.⁶⁶ It was the same for Ba Huong’s family:

Q: Did your parents think that things had changed a lot [by 1993]?

BA HUONG: Um, not really. No. Everything was quite similar. But then it was because it was in the village, and usually that doesn’t change too much. In the city it’s quite — like — McDonalds popping up and KFCs and stuff like that. They never had that sort of stuff when [we left in 1985].⁶⁷

Where change had occurred it was sometimes for the worse, interviewees told me. Ba Ha described negative developments in Ho Chi Minh City between her departure for New Zealand in 1997 and a return trip in 2000. Rural poverty (which she explained as an effect of natural disasters) had led to rapid urbanization, which in turn depressed wage rates and employment conditions.⁶⁸

She said the Asian economic crisis had seen widespread investment pull-outs, while the US-led market slump following ‘September 11’ had affected export flow. Under these conditions lottery-ticketing, pickpocketing, begging and prostitution burgeoned — yet while the majority experienced hard times, communist cadres had not suffered. Wealth, Ba Ha noted, was still in Vietnam, but its spread was uneven and its manifestations not necessarily for the good. She complained that rice fields and historic buildings were being cleared to make way for offices, apartments and hotels. Corruption was endemic.⁶⁹



Figure 5: Poverty in Vietnam. Shacks bordering a stagnant waterway a few minutes drive from the centre of the city. Hai Phong, 2001. Author’s collection.

Returnees were also critical of human rights abuses. Ong Trung felt that the treatment of dissidents had gradually improved, but that the situation was still unsatisfactory.⁷⁰ Ong Liem wished to return to Vietnam to preach the gospel and contribute to the Christian revival currently underway, but freedom of expression had not advanced to the point where this was possible (preaching by foreigners and *Viet kieu* remains illegal).⁷¹ Buddhists and Christians described government control of religious appointments, continuing infiltration of spies into religious organizations and arrests of religious leaders who had been too candid in their public assessments of Hanoi’s rhetoric of freedom.⁷²

Likewise, former re-education camp detainee Ong Quang did not believe that the human rights situation had improved. In his experience the government orchestrated scenes for overseas observers in order to convince them of state benevolence: the final goal was to secure foreign aid and trade deals.⁷³ The idea was also raised that economic reforms were inaugurated for the sake of the ruling elite alone. Ba Ha put forward a case that I heard quite often: ‘*Doi Moi* [is] mostly for the communist people . . . When the business, like, for example, Australian businessman, when he go and he invest some work in Vietnam, he have to set up a director. Must be a Vietnamese. Must be a communist. He [the foreigner] can’t be a boss himself. And who benefits from that? Mostly communists. I’m sorry to say that, but it’s the truth.’⁷⁴

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the opening of links between Western countries

and the SRV, the coming of the so-called free market, and the easing of oppressive state control, had the potential to rob zealous anti-communist *Viet kieu* of much of their agenda-in-exile. However, changes in Vietnam have not silenced these critics: the current situation is one of ‘authoritarian capitalism’, and émigré lobby groups continue to protest abuses of human rights. For Auckland’s refugees, whose political feelings have been grounded on the welfare of their families, and who, out of Vietnam, were never very active opponents of the regime, *Doi Moi* reforms have not altered much the sense they have of their role as Vietnamese overseas. Few will return permanently to Vietnam because few would feel more comfortable there than they do in Auckland.

Yet with this in mind, for the first time the homeland has become an attractive financial prospect for some Auckland-based Vietnamese. Ong Chien immigrated to New Zealand enthusiastically in 1995 because he believed that ‘a foreign country will be better than Vietnam’, in terms of standards of living and employment opportunities. However, more recently he had received reports from his sister, who returned to Vietnam in 2001, that the pendulum had swung:

The thing has changed. Totally different.

Q: The city?

ONG CHIEN: Yeah. They build more hotel. In the modern day, most like — ah — foreign people or Australia, have come to Vietnam and they build hotels and stuff, just for business . . . Yes, lots of changes. It’s more even beautiful place than before. Because, like, foreign people coming through, and business have invested some money to build hostel and stuff like that . . . She [his sister] say, ‘that is more even better than New Zealand’, if you have money . . . The night club, the stuff there, it’s more like luxury than in here.⁷⁵

The positive impression of present-day Vietnam, which Ong Chien’s sister presented may reflect the destinations she visited — including the family’s hometown of Nha Trang, now a major beach resort. The endorsement may also be indicative of a certain family history. (Ong Chien’s parents were non-aligned during the war, and their children had not inherited an anti-communist ‘grudge’.)⁷⁶ Moreover, his sister’s assessment may itself reflect the tastes of young people.



Figure 6: Urban Development in Vietnam. Hai Phong, 2001. Author’s collec-

Though coming from a very different background than Ong Chien, Ong Duong (62) shared an enthusiasm for Vietnam's economic development. A firm opponent of the current government, Ong Duong is now close to retirement. His appraisal of the Vietnamese and New Zealand economies had led him to question whether Auckland was the place for him after all.⁷⁷ Typical of older Vietnamese, he invoked the family as the deciding factor in where he chose to live:

If I want to make good money I stay at home. I can make good money because I have a small group of my friends, I'm the leader of the group, and we make some extra money by design[ing], or maybe some small installation, and also the maintenance of the air-conditioning and the refrigeration. I make quite a good money, but I decide to try to leave Vietnam. My friend, he stay back, and now he's ten times more wealthier than I am. He's a millionaire now, yeah. Yes. If I stay behind I might be better off than I came here. But you never know, you know. You never know When I first arrive here I very disappointed because I couldn't find a job properly, it make me thinking to go back to Vietnam, but I say, 'No, I can't.' When you make a decision, and for the benefit of my children, I better stay.⁷⁸

While Ong Duong stressed on several occasions that it was now possible to make 'good money' in Vietnam, he believed that political freedom remained elusive. He said he would return once the regime had collapsed — which he expected would take another 10 years: 'But it may be too late. By that time I might die already. [Both laugh] I might die already! . . . I still want to go back, but not under present situation where people have no freedom.'⁷⁹

The desire for eventual return on these terms was shared by several interviewees in their sixties, and by Ong Hung, in his late 30s. These were adults, mostly men, who had had their job or status ambitions thwarted in New Zealand, either because of their age or lack of English language skills.⁸⁰ Ong Chinh, who had been a well-placed local official under the Saigon government, said that for him and his friends life was 'cold' and 'sad' in New Zealand. He planned to return to Vietnam permanently once the communist government collapsed.⁸¹ Some, like Ong Viet's mother, had intentions to buy back family land that had been confiscated at the time of their escape.⁸² Ong Chien said that older Vietnamese had a strong urge to return to Vietnam to be buried alongside their ancestors.⁸³ However, several younger interviewees doubted that plans for permanent return would be realized. 'Ong Viet: [My mother] intimated that she'd like to go back and retire there, later on. But, I mean, you don't know. She's got family here, she's got grandkids.'⁸⁴

Adult Vietnamese who have found their niche in New Zealand showed, by contrast, little or no desire to live permanently in Vietnam. Ong Son explained to me how he had 'got over' the homeland: 'You don't sort of sit and think Vietnam. Lot of thing here to do. Work every day, and you have family to look after. I don't have time to sit and think back about Vietnam.'⁸⁵ Young people who had spent their teens in New Zealand or Australia also had no plans to make Vietnam their home again:

Q: You'd never live in Vietnam?

BA DUYEN: My thinking is different, and I grew up here, so my home's here. I'm

more comfortable here than in Vietnam, and I'm more comfortable with Kiwi people than Vietnamese people as well. Because Vietnamese people expect differently, and it's scary.⁸⁶

The younger people I spoke to had positive memories of Vietnam but it was not a place in which they wished to live permanently.⁸⁷ This age group's decision to remain in the West will probably determine their parents' place of residence.

In conclusion, we can see that returnees were caught between conflicting desires to help kin and fulfil the role of wealthy *Viet kieu*, to have their 'Vietnameseness' recognized, and to defend their 'Western' beliefs and behaviour. There are certain ironies here. In looking to connect with their ethnic heritage, *Viet kieu* were branded as un-Vietnamese at 'home'; they sometimes used their wealth to buy acceptance within the community, but in doing so they exacerbated their outsider status; the family whom they were 'closest to' in Vietnam were those most able to confer or reject their 'Vietnameseness'. What was particularly significant in the attempt to belong was that, while returning was an *assertion* of identity, young people seemed to be passive agents within Vietnam. Their inclusion within communities was something over which they had little or no power: belonging was conferred or withheld by Vietnam-based families and communities. In response, informants shifted the 'boundaries of difference', identifying with Western values as a way of claiming an alternate insider status.⁸⁸

The connections between individuals in Vietnam and New Zealand are sustained as much by difference as by a sense of being the same (usually in terms of kinship). Unequal resources and relationships compel contact: the *Viet kieu* are attracted to homeland culture and motivated to return by filial obligations, while homelanders stand to gain from the wealth of their overseas family. In the brief history of Vietnamese refugee return migration, these unequal bonds have ensured that links with the homeland are mutually beneficial. Bonds are not adhered to universally, however, and in returning difference often translates to feeling like an outsider. One group in particular, *Viet kieu* born or raised in the West, do not feel strongly connected to homeland kin or culture. Lacking personal contacts and an insider status means that this generation's commitment to return migration is absent, weak, or, for the time being, dormant.

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NOTES

- 1 The names of interview subjects have been altered to ensure confidentiality. 'Ong' designates a male subject, 'Ba' a female.
- 2 Ong Minh and Ba Hang, fieldnotes, Mangere, 22 May 2003. Geoffrey Moore, "'Strangers to the Country": An Oral History of Vietnamese Identity in Auckland', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 2002. The interviews were conducted in English, or in Vietnamese with the aid of an interpreter.
- 3 'Refugee Quota – applicants approved', Department of Immigration, available on-line at: http://www.immigration.govt.nz/research_and_information/statistics/RQ1.xls (March 2003).
- 4 'Approved for Residence by Region 1982–1998', Department of Immigration, available on-line at: http://www.gate.whs.school.nz:8080/Intranet/Depts/SocialSci/Geography/Form_7/resources/approved_resid_region.html+%2219+286+157%22&hl=en&ie=UTF-8 (August 2003).
- 5 Trung Tran, 'Deconstructing the 'asian' Other: A Case Study of the Vietnamese Community in Auckland', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1997, pp.117–21.
- 6 Mandy Thomas, *Dreams in the Shadows: Vietnamese-Australian Lives in Transition*, Sydney, 1999, p.179.
- 7 Nancy Viviani, *The Long Journey: Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, Melbourne, 1984, p.179; cf. Louis-Jacques Dorais, Lise Pilon-Le and Nguyen Huy, *Exile in a Cold Land: A Vietnamese Community in Canada*, New Haven, 1987, pp.178–9.
- 8 Dorais et al., p.181.
- 9 See Lewis M. Stern, 'The Return of the Prodigal Sons: The Party and the *Viet kieu*', *Indochina Report*, 13 (1992), pp.9–17.
- 10 Damien McCoy, 'From Hostel to Home: Immigration, Resettlement and Community — the Ethnic-Vietnamese in Australia, 1975–1995', PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1996, pp.186–7.
- 11 McCoy, pp.189, 190, 193.
- 12 Louis-Jacques Dorais, 'Defining the Overseas Vietnamese', *Diaspora*, 10, 1 (2001), p.21
- 13 Ong Quang, interview, 13 January 2002.
- 14 Ong Liem, interview, 1 February 2002; Ong Hung, interview, 17 June 2001; Ong Duong, interview, 7 December 2001. See Robert Templer, *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam*, London, 1998, p.310.
- 15 Viviani notes 'many Vietnamese men seem preoccupied with the past or politics in Vietnam whereas these women are concentrating on what is before them now'. Nancy Viviani, *The Indochinese in Australia 1975–1995: From Burnt Boats to Barbecues*, Melbourne, 1996, p.113.
- 16 Ba Lan, interviews, 26 May 2001 and 10 March 2002; Ba Nga, interview, 17 March 2002.
- 17 Ong Trung, interview, 9 May 2001.
- 18 Ba Hanh, interview, 5 May 2001. A potential issue for returnees is the eldest male's responsibility for family land and men's role in leading ancestor veneration. Ba Ha explained that in her family, to spread the costs of time and money involved in ritual observances, the eldest male's traditional responsibility to honour the ancestors had been divided up among relatives, Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002.
- 19 See Dorais, p.21; James Freeman, *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese American Lives*, Stanford, 1989, p.392; Templer, p.317; Thomas, p.186.
- 20 Ong Viet, interview, 12 October 2001.
- 21 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001. Emphasis added.
- 22 Ong Chien, interview, 15 July 2001.
- 23 Ba Chi, interview, 3 February 2002.
- 24 Ba Huong and Ba Nhung, interviews, 10 March 2002.
- 25 Ba Lan, interview, 10 March 2002.
- 26 Ba Huong, interview, 10 March 2002.
- 27 Ba Lan, interview, 10 March 2002.
- 28 Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002.
- 29 Ong Son, interview, 27 July 2001.
- 30 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001.
- 31 Stern, p.16.
- 32 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001.
- 33 Ba Trinh, fieldnotes, 22 May 2003.

34 Ong Son, interview, 27 July 2001.

35 Ba Hau, interview, 13 August 2001. For Ba Hau, *Viet kieu* were specifically those who had left Vietnam as refugees and were living in the West. In her opinion, Vietnamese who migrated under Hanoi auspices to Warsaw Pact countries were not *Viet kieu*. See Andrew Hardy, 'From a Floating World: Emigration to Europe from Post-war Vietnam', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 11, 4 (2002) p.476.

36 Ba Ha, interview, 18 May 2001. Cf. Templer, p.323; Stern, p.16.

37 See Dorais et al., pp.122–3; Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans: Patterns of Resettlement and Socioeconomic Adaptation in the United States*, Boulder, Colorado, 1979, pp.33–55; Paul Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1992, pp.77–83; Templer, p.312; Tran My-Van and Robert Holton, 'Sadness is Losing our Country, Happiness is Knowing Peace: Vietnamese Social Mobility in Australia, 1975–1990', Working Papers on Multiculturalism no.12, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, 1991, p.60; Van Luu, 'The Hardships of Escape for Vietnamese Women', in Diane Yen-Mei Wong, ed., *Making Waves: an Anthology of Writings by and about Asian-American Women*, Boston, 1989, p.68.

38 Ba Thanh, interview, 14 November 2001.

39 Ba Nga, interview, 17 March 2002.

40 Ba Duyen, interview, 23 August 2001.

41 Ba Thanh, interview, 14 November 2001.

42 Ba Chi, interview, 3 February 2002.

43 Nazli Kibria, *Family Tightrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*, Princeton, 1993, pp.109, 108–43; Rutledge, p.84.

44 Ba Thanh, interview, 14 November 2001.

45 Ba Huong, interview, 10 March 2002.

46 Ba Ly, interview, 23 August 2001.

47 Ba Nga, interview, 17 March 2002. Emphasis added.

48 Ba Thanh, interview, 14 November 2001. Kibria writes how for one family she studied, 'migration had fundamentally transformed their experience of family life by removing them from the immediate influence of familial authority', pp.159–60.

49 Ba Van, fieldnotes, Auckland, 12 September 2002.

50 Ba Chi, interview, 3 February 2002. Emphasis in original.

51 Fieldnotes, Giac Nhien temple, Otahuhu, 24 March 2002.

52 Fieldnotes, Trung Tam Viet Nam, Otahuhu, 17 January 2002. One of Freeman's informants had the same experience: Freeman, p.122.

53 Ba Chi, interview, 3 February 2002.

54 Ba Chi, interview, 3 February 2002.

55 Compare the case of Brazilian-raised ethnic Japanese who, upon returning to Japan, were abused for not acting sufficiently Japanese. Like *Viet kieu*, the Brazilian-raised *Nikkeijin* are outsiders; but *Nikkeijin* are also an underclass in Japan, whereas *Viet kieu* are wealthy by comparison to most Vietnamese. Keiko Yamanaka, 'Return Migration of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan: The Nikkeijin as Ethnic Minority and Political Construct', *Diaspora*, 5, 1 (1996), pp.84–85.

56 Ba Huong, interview, 10 March 2002.

57 Ba Huong and Ba Nhung, interviews, 10 March 2002.

58 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001.

59 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001.

60 Tran Thi Que, 'Gender Issues in Vietnam's Development', in Irene Norlund, Carolyn L. Gates and Vu Cao Dam, eds, *Vietnam in a Changing World*, Richmond, Surrey, 1995, p.193. For a discussion of deteriorating conditions for women see Murray Hiebert, *Chasing the Tigers: A Portrait of the New Vietnam*, New York, 1996, pp.165–9.

61 Cf. Thomas, pp.168–9; Gisele L. Bousquet, *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Politics in a Parisian Vietnamese Community*, Ann Arbor, 1991, p.97.

62 See Thomas, p.192.

63 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1978. For aspects of the cultural history of 'modernity' in Vietnam, see Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, Berkeley, 1993; also David Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism: 1885–1925*, Berkeley, 1971, and David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1925*, Berkeley, 1981.

64 Ong Trung, interview, 9 May 2001; Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002; Ba Hong, interview, 17 January 2002.

- 65 Ong Quang, interview, 13 January 2002. On economic conditions in the Vietnamese countryside, see Hiebert, pp.86–110.
- 66 Ba Nga, interview, 17 March 2002.
- 67 Ba Huong, interview, 10 March 2002.
- 68 What Le Hong Ha euphemistically calls ‘under-employment’ — in other words poverty — is an especially pressing issue because of Vietnam’s high rate of population growth (2.3% in the mid-1990s) and the large number of people entering the work force each year, estimated at one million. See Le Hong Ha, ‘Labour and Employment in Transition to a Market Economy in the 1990s’, in Norlund et al., p.181.
- 69 Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002. For discussion of worsening corruption under *Doi Moi*, see Hiebert, pp.135–6, 200–1.
- 70 Ong Trung, interview, 9 May 2001.
- 71 Ong Liem, interview, 1 February 2002; Fieldnotes from an interview with a New Zealand Catholic nun, Ho Chi Minh City, 23 February 2002.
- 72 Fieldnotes, Giac Nhien temple, Otahuhu, 24 March 2002; Ong Duong, interview, 7 December 2001; Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002.
- 73 Ong Quang, interviews, 13 January 2002 and 24 March 2002.
- 74 Ba Ha, interview, 10 January 2002. See Taylor, p.157.
- 75 Ong Chien, interview, 15 July 2001.
- 76 Ong Chien said that no one in his immediate family had fought. His father was a fisherman. They were ‘just like normal people, didn’t involve in that kind of thing’. Ong Chien, interview, 15 July 2001.
- 77 Cf. Thomas, p.190; McCoy, p.192.
- 78 Ong Duong, interview, 7 December 2001.
- 79 *ibid.*
- 80 Barry N. Stein, ‘Occupational Adjustment of Refugees: the Vietnamese in the United States’, *International Migration Review*, 13, 1 (1979), pp.27–28, writes that ‘for refugees the dynamic element needed to attract them to the new culture and bring them satisfaction with their life is their present economic and social rewards compared to those in their homeland. Successful occupational and economic adjustment promotes a willingness to assimilate and increases the refugee’s capacity to overcome obstacles to social adjustment.’ This is exactly in accord with my findings.
- 81 Ong Chinh, interview, 30 June 2001. See Freeman, p.392.
- 82 Ong Viet, interview, 12 October 2001.
- 83 Ong Chien, interview, 15 July 2001. See Hiebert, p.91; Thomas, pp.184–5.
- 84 Ong Viet, interview, 12 October 2001.
- 85 Ong Son, interview, 27 July 2001.
- 86 Ba Duyen, interview, 23 August 2001.
- 87 Ba Chi, interview, 24 June 2001; Ong Chien, interview, 15 July 2001; Ba Duyen, interview, 23 August 2001; Ba Huong, interview, 10 March 2002; Ong Viet, interview, 12 October 2001.
- 88 Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community Culture Difference*, London, 1990, p.227.