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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the presence and possibilities of political transnational activism stimulated by Vietnamese Americans in Orange County, California. Transnationalism is an increasingly dominant phenomenon that characterizes the way in which diaspora groups live their lives across borders. In fact, refugee diaspora, like the Vietnamese Americans, signify a unique dimension in the arena of transnational political practices, given their potential for raising awareness about their country's political struggles and affecting change.

The central argument of this dissertation is that a stable and significant transnational field of political action connecting Vietnamese Americans with their country of origin does exist. My research demonstrates that certain practices – protests, petitions and participation in internet forums – emerge as the most frequent forms of transnational political activity that Vietnamese Americans engage in. This dissertation adds insights to the transnationalism literature from the perspective of a vehemently anti-communist community that fled from political violence or the threat thereof – thus, all three forms of political action have a strong anti-communist agenda.

My dissertation speaks directly to the fact that the dynamics of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans are not uniform. Rather, demographic, contextual and socio-economic factors foster or hamper their political mobilization. From the logistic regression analyses, political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans is found to be significantly associated with age, gender, college degree, arrival in the U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income. Vietnamese Americans who are most likely to engage in protesting and sign petitions are older males who arrived in the U.S. during the early waves of refugee influx and are not very proficient in English. Unemployed Vietnamese Americans with lower incomes are also more likely to attend protests, while obtaining a college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam is associated with more frequent participation in internet forums related to homeland issues.

DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL TRANSNATIONALISM AMONG VIETNAMESE  
AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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B.A., University of Calcutta, 2002

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in *Social Science*.

Syracuse University

June 2013

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Transnationalism is an increasingly dominant phenomenon and characterizes the way in which ordinary individuals live their lives across borders. Immigrants and even forced migrants who move from one country to another rarely cut off all ties with those left behind. Today, attachments to the home country and the maintenance of multiple loyalties are considered a normal part of immigrant life and often complementary to assimilation in the host society.

All this has important implications for the field of refugee studies. The optic of transnationalism offers a fresh perspective on refugee studies (Nolin 2006, p.15). This is because the transnational character and practices of refugees have kindled a paradigm shift away from traditional notions of refugee assimilation and segmented assimilation (Cheran 2006, p.4). Refugees, as a class of “transmigrants” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995), now maintain transnational relations with their country of origin and in some cases, may even foster nationalist activities in their homeland. In fact, refugee diasporas<sup>1</sup> today signify a unique dimension in the arena of transnational practices, given their potential for raising awareness about their country’s political struggles and affecting change. As a class of migrants, refugee diaspora are seen as agents of change, who support and promote local development initiatives through hometown associations or as active political participants in the country of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003, p. 1214). As such, they warrant further consideration and examination.

Refugee transnationalism refers to the social, cultural, political and economic relations that refugees in the host country keep with their home states (Sherrell and Hyndman 2006, p. 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee diasporas can be generally defined as “those refugee communities living in or belonging to more than one national space” (Cheran 2006, p.4).

It differs markedly from that of other immigrant classes because of the involuntary nature of refugees leaving their home country and possible political violence experienced by them that shape their transnational relations. This dissertation focuses on one such group of political refugees, the Vietnamese-Americans. Most of them arrived during the three waves of refugee influx in the late 1970s and 1980s and settled down around Little Saigon in Orange County, California.

Over the last thirty five years, the complex and sometimes multiple identifications of the Vietnamese Americans have ranged from refugee to expatriate and now, to transnational. Despite more than two decades of limited communication and another decade of wary maintenance of ties between the Vietnamese American community and Vietnam, the former has managed to create vast networks and transnational connections (Valverde 2002). My research accordingly investigates the *presence and possibilities of political transnational activism stimulated by Vietnamese refugees in the United States*.

Research on transnational activism traditionally encompasses economic activities (such as sending remittances), political activities (such as voting in home country elections) and cultural activities (such as locally-nurtured musical talent being exported to the home country). Since the Vietnamese arrivals were political refugees, it is most interesting to explore their political ties with Vietnam. Moreover, on the political front, organized migrant groups are now increasingly embracing the role of promoting policy and regime change in their home territories.

Cohen (1996) describes the evolution of refugee diaspora relations vis-à-vis their homeland governments as moving from “victims to activists or even challengers”. For instance, in the likelihood of conflict in the home country, diaspora communities may raise money to support continuing warfare, promote public opinion and even substantially influence

international interventions in support of their cause. Beyond this, migrants (including refugees) have become important constituents and advocates for homeland governments. Numerous governments allow for dual citizenship or include members of its diaspora as official members of their political communities (Brinkerhoff 2009).

At the same time, an exiled diaspora community also has the ability to act as an additional watchdog on homeland governments. Given their potential access, through networks on the ground, to local information on policy implementation, regulatory enforcement and human rights abuses, diaspora organizations may be well placed to play a monitoring role in support of good governance (Brinkerhoff 2009). In extreme cases, a hostile diaspora community can sway public opinion against the ruling homeland government or even try to oust it from power.

Diasporas have influence disproportionate to their numbers owing to knowledge, skills, and financial capital acquired in the host society. Similarly, diaspora support to homeland political campaigns may disproportionately influence outcomes due to relative currency exchange rates (Brinkerhoff 2009). Moreover, diaspora communities' hybrid identities inform political considerations and action agendas vis-à-vis the homeland, whether they pertain to potential conflict with the homeland government or subgroups of its society, human rights, or partisan political schemes. In this way, the collective expression of diaspora hybrid identity occurs through transnational activities concerning homeland politics (Brinkerhoff 2009). Thus, migrant and refugee groups' transnational political influence and engagement has potential significance, as it raises political consciousness, shapes specific political agendas aimed at the homeland and provides forums for the enactment of these agendas in dispersed and heterogeneous communities.

Conventionally, transnational political participation is measured by electoral indicators. Transnational electoral participation includes membership in a political party in the country of origin, monetary contributions to these parties, and active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003). However, migrants and refugees also seek to be represented and participate in decision making through political means other than elections (Guarnizo et al. 2003). Hence, for the purposes of this dissertation, under the concept of transnational political participation, I include both electoral and non-electoral activities aimed at influencing conditions in the home country. Such transnational non-electoral political activities may involve sending political remittances<sup>2</sup> for civic projects in the community of origin, membership in charity organizations sponsoring projects in the hometown, participating in campaigns or petitions, and organizing in the host country around political/human rights issues concerning their home country.

Such an instance of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees as distinct from voluntary migrants or other refugee groups is worth investigating for a number of reasons. The specific circumstances surrounding refugee migration can affect the level and intensity of transnational political linkages; in the case of Vietnamese refugees, their experiences or fear of political persecution and the traumatic circumstances of their emigration have an effect on their transnational political activism. When they first arrived as destitute, uprooted refugees, the Vietnamese lay at the very end of the transnational class hierarchy. Despite these odds and the frigid state of the relationship between their host country and Vietnam for nearly two decades,

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<sup>2</sup> “Political remittances” here signifies money that is sent to a politically active local NGO or grass-roots organization in the home country as part of their fund-raising or contributions to a political party as opposed to economic remittances sent to family members or toward a business venture.

Vietnamese refugees have displayed considerable tenacity and agency in maintaining connections with their home country. However, Vietnamese Americans still consider themselves to be refugees-in-exile and identify with the coerced homelessness of a refugee status in spite of most of them having attained permanent residency or citizenship.

This leads us to another unique perspective offered in selecting Vietnamese refugees, namely anti-communism. The study of Vietnamese political transnationalism is in the context of a home country that is staunchly communist and transnational refugees who are extremely anti-communist and disapproving of the current regime in their home country. Second to a refugee identity, anti-communism is the next common denominator of unity and part of the rhetoric of Vietnamese-American cultural identity and transnational activism. Such political transnationalism in the context of a communist home state has been studied in the case of Cuban Americans (Diaz-Briquets and Perez-Lopez 1997, Grenier 2007); it will, therefore, be interesting to investigate the dynamics of transnational political activity in a similar context among Vietnamese Americans.

I investigate the possible determinants of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees by (1) conducting open-ended interviews (qualitative analysis) with a smaller group of refugees in order to establish the kinds of transnational political acts undertaken by Vietnamese Americans and (2) conducting a survey (quantitative analysis) among a larger group of refugees to gather information on possible determinants of political transnationalism. Thus, research on the Vietnamese refugees provides the necessary data and information to people who are responsible for making policy decisions dealing with Vietnam, and contributes to a more sensitive and accurate understanding of the heritage of an ethnic group which is becoming an integral part of the American society (Nguyen, M. H., 1984).

## **Statement of Purpose**

My research investigates the presence and possibilities of transnational political engagement aimed at Vietnam stimulated by resettled Vietnamese refugees in the United States. Transnational political activism is not solely indicative of specific home country contexts or political situation in the home country, but also of specific circumstances that influence individual refugee motivations/capabilities and structure their mobilization. To this end, I specifically aim to understand the demographic, contextual and resource-dependent factors that foster or hamper political mobilization of the Vietnamese refugees and subsequently shape the presence, type and intensity of transnational activist projects that are enacted.

This dissertation is part of the broader research about Vietnamese refugees in the United States - the 1975 evacuation and succeeding flows of refugees from Vietnam, the Vietnamese community in the United States, their resettlement process and eventual ties with their home country - known as Vietnamese American studies, a part of Asian American studies. Soon after their arrival in the United States, a growing body of research on the Vietnamese refugees emerged, covering a span of topics, including their experiences about the war and flight from Vietnam, their initial resettlement patterns, downward occupational mobility, subsequent educational and economic achievements, mental health, and the emergence of Vietnamese ethnic enclaves around the country, and so on.

However, the overwhelming majority of all these investigations of Vietnamese American experiences have been nation-bound. Thus, the Vietnamese Americans have usually been studied either as refugees with high rates of educational and economic mobility or as disenfranchised migrants with their youth joining gangs. What has been largely ignored is an analysis of the community in a transnational context; in other words, this scholarship largely leaves out the role

of Vietnamese Americans as an alternative group with potential for engaging in transnational action.

The one exception is Caroline Valverde's research on the making of transnational Vietnam through money and music. As she puts it, it no longer suffices to think of Vietnamese Americans as nation-bound refugees who left their home country to resettle permanently in and assimilate into the culture of their host country (Valverde 2002). This still, nevertheless, leaves a gap in the research on the political impact of Vietnamese Americans, whose transnational practices aim to change the policies of the ruling communist government, improve the human rights situation and engender democracy and community empowerment in Vietnam. Today, the Vietnamese population in America is one of the fastest growing segments of American population. Yet, little research has been conducted that demonstrates any pertinent factors that will assist in creating opportunities for transnational political activism.

My research seeks to fill this lacuna and contribute to the literature on Vietnamese American studies by investigating the presence of cross-national political ties among Vietnamese refugees as transnational actors rather than assimilated refugees with no transnational agency. This transnational paradigm offers me an arena in which to investigate the agency of those collectivities which are described as "unbound by national borders" (Goldring 2004). Investigating transnational interactions between Vietnam and the Vietnamese American community at the individual level of analysis, not only help to fundamentally challenge the ideas of the bounded nation-state, but also notions of an essentialist Vietnamese American culture. It is through such political means that the overseas Vietnamese community affirms its transnational status – this is the making of transnational Vietnam.



## **Argument of the thesis**

The central argument of this dissertation is that a stable and significant transnational field of political action connecting Vietnamese Americans with their country of origin does exist. My research demonstrates that certain practices – protests, petitions and participation in internet forums – emerge as the most frequent forms of transnational political activity that Vietnamese Americans engage in. In addition, certain demographic, contextual and resource-dependent factors help explain variations in the level of engagement in homeland politics. This section highlights my main findings and conclusions from both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this way, with a mixed-methods approach, this dissertation aims to bring to light the complex nature of Vietnamese Americans as emerging transnational subjects.

Findings from qualitative analysis of interview data collected in the pilot phase of my research indicate that unlike other immigrant groups, at the individual level of analysis, Vietnamese Americans do not engage in a broad array of direct transnational political activities, such as sending remittances to political organizations back home (Mexican immigrants) or direct participation in electoral politics in the home country (Dominican immigrants). Forming exile governments and attempting to overthrow the communist leaders in Vietnam has been a popular form of political transnationalism in the past, but it was at the organizational rather than individual level (example, Government of Free Vietnam). Moreover, such political practices have subsided since the decline of violent political acts (arson, assassinations) in the late 1980s. Rather, homeland politics among Vietnamese Americans is more indirect and limited in scope – the most popular forms of transnational political activity are participating in protests and demonstrations, followed by writing to government officials and signing petitions, and participation in internet forums.

Furthermore, this dissertation adds insights to the transnationalism literature from the perspective of a vehemently anti-communist community that fled from political violence or the threat thereof – thus, all three political acts mentioned above have strong anti-communist agendas. For instance, Vietnamese Americans hold demonstrations in large numbers to vehemently protest any display of communist symbols (such as the communist flag or Ho Chi Minh’s portrait) in Little Saigon, Orange County. Similarly, signed letters and petitions sent to local government representatives in California appeal against continuing arrests and human rights abuses in Vietnam, while bloggers and other participants in internet-based forums dealing with Vietnamese issues rampantly denounce the ruling communist government in Hanoi.

This study also speaks directly to the fact that the presence and dynamics of political transnationalism among all Vietnamese Americans is not uniform. Although there are common forces bearing on all members of the community, the particular circumstances of each individual also affect the extent and character of these activities. Findings from quantitative analysis of my survey data indicate that transnational political engagement among this group is significantly associated with age and differs by gender. Older Vietnamese Americans are more likely than younger ones to protest as well as sign petitions while men are more likely than women to engage in all three forms of transnational political activism. One significant finding of this study is that lack of a college degree – the independent variable for which there was overwhelming positive evidence in the theoretical literature – is not significantly associated with transnational political activism among Vietnamese Americans. In the case of participation in internet forums, what matters is place of college degree obtained - those who have earned a college degree in both Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to utilize this medium as a form of transnational political expression.

The evidence also suggests that it is not just the economically successful or more recently arrivals who are most prone to retaining ties with their home country politics. Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the U.S. in earlier waves and those who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to participate in protests and sign petitions than more recent arrivals and those who are proficient in English. Similarly, unemployed Vietnamese Americans and those with lower incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than Vietnamese Americans who are employed and those who have higher incomes. Thus, this dissertation also lays to rest any notion of Vietnamese Americans as solely nation-bound refugees without the resources, will or imagination to connect with those in Vietnam.

### **Organization of the study**

The above material has created a foundation for this study by defining pertinent aspects, such as a scope and significance, as well as discussing the argument of the thesis. Chapter Two examines the trajectory that has been followed in the literature on transnational studies so far and analyzes the major prevailing debates in the field. I develop the theoretical framework, drawing from the literature on transnationalism issues that directly relate to Vietnamese Americans as migrants and refugees, to political transnationalism and its determinants as claimed by the existing state of the art in transnationalism studies and on the basis of which I form my hypotheses for this study. In Chapter Three is a concise background regarding the flight of Vietnamese American refugees to the U.S. and a detailed description of the research design methods. My conceptualization of political transnationalism and possible explanatory factors of its variation among individual Vietnamese Americans are explained in the methods section. Sampling strategies and a description of the data collection procedures are all regarded in-depth as are methodological reasons for selecting variables such as age, gender, college degree, arrival

in U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income as they pertain to transnational political activism.

Chapter Four gives a brief history on Vietnamese refugees and their flight to the United States, along with highlighting germane aspects of their educational and socioeconomic progress as pertinent to transnational activism. In Chapter Five, I provide a detailed quantitative analysis of survey data collected and discuss the results and their significance. Chapter Six examines the different kinds of transnational political activities the Vietnamese Americans engage in, based on my interview data. This chapter also engages in an in-depth, qualitative discussion of the results from ordinal regression in the previous chapter as well as compares and contrasts my findings with expectations from the theoretical literature. Finally, in Chapter 7, I wrap up with appropriate summaries by looking at each question individually and conclude by examining the future of Vietnamese Americans political transnationalism.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

In this chapter, I provide a broad overview of the state of the art of the literature on migrant transnationalism and explore the ways in which refugee transnationalism is distinct enough to justify the investigation of transnational activism among Vietnamese refugees. I then go on to address the theoretical relevance of studying political transnationalism (as opposed to economic and socio-cultural forms of transnational activity) and expand on the ways in which transnational political activities affect outcomes abroad. Finally, I highlight those factors that are most frequently identified in the literature to explain variation in intensity of political transnationalism and that inform the hypotheses I test in this dissertation.

Transnational activities are those initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors like organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders that require coordination by members of civil society (Portes 2001). Many of these activities are informal, that is, they take place outside of state regulation and control since they are undertaken on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the state or other corporate bodies. Transnationalism as a process then consists of relations and interactions that lead to the emergence of relatively stable and durable transnational societal spaces (Pries 2007). According to their level of institutionalization, fixedness or strength, Pries (2007, p. 21) distinguishes three types of such societal spaces:

- At the micro-level, habitual and accountable patterns of action and behavior of individuals, households and their social networks in transnational everyday life – for example, Mexican immigrants in the U.S. making cash gifts to relatives in Mexico during annual homecoming trips;

- At the meso-level, transnational organizations as stable and dense loci of cooperation and interaction with rules of membership, given structures and processes, and stated goals and purposes – for example, non-profit organizations such as Greenpeace and Oxfam with decentralized resource structures and, at the same time, intense coordination patterns;
- At the macro-level, transnational institutions as complex frameworks of routines, rules and norms, which structure significant terrains of life – for example, border crossing migration systems or societal institutions such as governmental agencies that structure transnationality and citizenship.

In this dissertation, I focus on the micro-level transnational societal space and concern myself with patterns of actions and behavior of individual Vietnamese refugees living in the United States, who may or may not be members of transnational Vietnamese organizations.

The term ‘transnationalism’ has been used in the social sciences and cultural studies to signal an abatement of national boundaries and the development of ideas or political institutions that span national borders and include actors that are not states (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, p. 9). The term is especially relevant to migration studies; migration scholars locate transnational processes within the life experiences of individual migrants and families, constituting the ups and downs of daily activities, concerns, fears and achievements (Rouse 1992). Until recently, however, in the United States, several generations of researchers (see, for example, Handlin 1973, Glazer and Moynihan 1970) have viewed immigrants as persons who uproot themselves, leave behind broken homes, interrupting a familiar life and ceasing to belong. The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequence: the immigrants lived in crisis because they were uprooted.

Refugees take a special interest in this discourse: Gordonker (1987, p. 138) writes that the principle of third country resettlement formally implies abandoning any real hope of returning to the land of origin. It also implies the re-socialization of refugees into the political and social norms of the society (Strand and Jones 1985). What has been uniformly defined as unacceptable was a migration in which immigrants or refugees settled permanently in their new country while maintaining tie to countries they still saw as homelands (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). And yet this is an emerging pattern among migrant populations in the United States.

### ***Migrant Transnationalism***

This section introduces the concept of migrant transnationalism that emerged as a discipline of study in the early 1990s and then goes on to attend to two of the prevailing questions in the literature, namely (a) how do we define migrant transnationalism and decide which activities are encompassed by this concept in terms of intensity of institutionalization, degree of movement in the transnational field and involvement in transnational activities; and (b) is the phenomenon of migrant transnationalism novel enough or sufficiently distinct to justify a new area of investigation? Finally, I also address the question of how immigrant transnational practice is relevant in host society integration and significant in that it alters outcomes abroad.

Starting in the late 1980s, a handful of scholars of contemporary migration rejected the prevailing view of immigrants as uprooted persons and took note of the transnational networks of immigrants (Glick Schiller 1999a, Vertovec 2001). Calling attention to the fact that a significant proportion of the migrants who settle in and become well-incorporated into the United States still maintain home ties, they proposed transnational migration or transnationalism as a new paradigm for the study of migration across the borders of nation-states. This discovery of transnational

practices among immigrants by an enterprising group of anthropologists led by Nina Glick Schiller, Cristina Blanc-Szanton, and Linda Basch led to an enthusiastic flurry of activity seeking to document the most varied manifestations of this phenomenon. Transnationalism was defined by these authors as “*the process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders*” (Basch et al. 1994, p.6).<sup>3</sup>

Immigrant transnationalism began as a reactive phenomenon to the forces of globalization and nation-state building projects. It continues as an alternative adaptation process to assimilation. Nancy Foner (2005, p. 62-63) writes, “In a transnational perspective, the focus is on how contemporary migrants maintain familial, economic, cultural as well as political ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host society a single arena of social action”. In this respect, transnationalism is also about agency. While mainstream/domestic politics of minorities is generally a reaction of ethnic communities to the injustices they feel from the dominant culture, the transnational political paradigm is a broader concept for political empowerment (Valverde 1994). It allows for growth and participation in the host society at large and also enhances culture, individual identity and global participation. It encourages ethnic awareness, cultural preservation and community security which can best be attained through close relations with one’s ethnic community. By combining the local with the international, ethnic communities as well as individuals belonging to them can find self-empowerment while helping with the growth of the nation (Valverde 1994).

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<sup>3</sup> Portes (1997, p. 812) characterizes transnationalism as the formation of dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition.



Similarly, Vu Pham (2003) describes transnationalism as actions and experiences that occur when migrants politically, economically and socially link two or more nations. These ties need not always exist with multiple physical movements by these migrants across national boundaries, but can take place through actions such as political lobbying or economic remittances (Pham 2003). Immigrants and their home country counterparts organize transnational enterprises, mobilize for political action, and transform the character of local religious and cultural forms through their continuous back-and-forth exchanges.

During the 1990s, pioneer research on transnational migration and on transnationalism in general, especially when confronted with skeptical criticism, frequently concentrated its efforts on proving the mere existence of transnational phenomena (Pries 2007). Today, the expansion of immigrant populations in First World cities generate the basis for the future expansion of transnational activities; these initiatives are also fostered by the common situation encountered by Third World immigrants, namely as occupants of stigmatized low-paid occupations and subjects of widespread discrimination (Portes 2001). These difficult conditions offer a strong incentive for newcomers, especially the more educated and better connected, to mobilize their transnational networks in search of alternatives (See Guarnizo and Portes 2001; Levitt 2001). The number and scope of such activities has also continued to expand significantly because, unlike the grassroots activism, immigrant transnationalism is not driven by ideological reasons but by the very logic of global capitalism (Portes 2001).

Today, the main task is currently no longer to show that transnational social phenomena exist but, rather, as most authors in this research field agree, to demonstrate that the successful establishment of transnationalism as a valuable concept has led to new theoretical and empirical perspectives (See Portes et al. 1999; Levitt 2001; Vertovec 2003, 2004, Levitt and Jaworski

2007). A transnational approach accents the fact that immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one nation-state, thereby affecting the demographic and social composition of the nation-state. Aihwa Ong (1999) goes as far as to say that both migrants and governments have developed a flexible notion of citizenship. Similarly, Linda Bosniak (2006, p. 25) argues that even claims of “transnational citizenship” now seem more plausible since many scholars (Keck and Sikkink 1998) have described democratic practices engaged across national borders in the form of transnational social movements as citizenship. This requires recognition of citizenship practices in the domain of civil society that is not nationally bounded but takes transnational form. Hence, rather than viewing migrants as bereft of human agency, we ought to regard them, as Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 190) argues, as engaging in a “global production of locality”, in which transnational flows of people, goods, and knowledge become imaginative resources for creating communities and virtual neighborhoods.

Transnational studies have opened opportunities to understand “local realities in a global context” (Valverde 2002, p. 6). For instance, scholars on transnationalism have looked at global cities and their highly-skilled transnationals (Sassen 1991); the complexity of transnational citizenship and their multiple national affiliations (Laguerre 1998, 1999); transnational acts circumventing the nation-state (Smith 1994); and the power of information technology in creating transnational action (Castells 1996). Other influential studies have highlighted the important connections between minorities in the U.S. and other countries, such as the works on Mexican transmigrants with their transnational circuits (Rouse 1991); diasporic Chinese businessmen negotiating “flexible citizenships” (Ong 1993, 1999); and the transnational flows of capital, culture and peoples from Haiti, Grenada and the Philippines (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995).

*How do we define migrant transnationalism?*

Nancy Foner (2005, p. 63) writes, “Since the early 1990s, a virtual academic industry has developed on transnationalism, giving rise to debates on a variety of topics, including the very definition of the term itself. Some scholars prefer to speak of transnational practices or networks; others of transnational communities or villages; still others of transnational social spaces or social fields”. Again, some writers have described transnational entrepreneurs as an exceptional breed, whereas others would say that all immigrants participate in the transnational community.

Sometimes the terms *transnational* and *transnationalism* are used so vaguely and indistinctly that they are likely to become ‘catch-all and say nothing’ terms, as was the case with the globalization concept. In fact, according to Alejandro Portes (2001), the basis for such disagreements has to do less with the actual existence of the phenomenon than with methodological shortcomings that led to its overestimation in the early literature and the conceptual failure to distinguish between cross-border activities carried out by major institutions and ~~of~~ multinational activities conducted by private actors in civil society. Of course, one reason for the overextended claims of the earlier writings had to do with an understandable enthusiasm about the novelty of the phenomenon and, in particular, the ways in which it challenged models of immigrant assimilation (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999).

Strengthening the conceptual foundation for transnationalism then concerns the differentiation between transnational and other types of international relations. According to Pries (2007) in order to develop a specific and empirically useful approach on transnationalism, generally societal spaces are considered transnational only if “they differ from other types of international and multinational relations and conform to the following criteria: the distribution of resources, culture, interests and power is polycentric and not mono-centric”. In other words,

transnationalism need not privilege one nation as a center, since it challenges the concepts of “home” and “host” countries as statically defined notions (Pham 2003). This sets transnational societal spaces apart from, for instance, simple multinational societal spaces in which the distribution is polycentric but coordination is only weak, and from mono-centric societal spaces where coordination mechanisms could be strong but distribution is centre-periphery-like rather than homogeneous (Pries 2005). In this sense, the proposed concept of transnational societal space is narrower than the rather unspecific terms ‘transnational network’ or ‘transnational field’.

Using these defining criteria it is possible, Pries (2007) argues, to distinguish a transnational migration family from a simple emigration/immigration or return migration family. In the *immigration/emigration* case, the ongoing coordination mechanisms for resources (like sending remittances) for culture (such as making transnational phone calls once a week or sending letters), for interests (like going to school or having a stable working career) and for power relations (such as the competency to decide over who goes where and when), become more and more centered in the society of arrival while in the case of *return migrants* all these aspects are strongly centered and focused on the society of departure. In contrast, actual *transnational migration* and the corresponding transnational societal spaces span more or less homogeneously and without a clear center or point of reference between different locales, countries or regions (Pries 2007).

In response to the predicament of overextended use of the term, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999, p. 219) also offer guiding assumptions to fine-tuning the study of transnational activities:

- a) the process involves a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe (in this case, immigrants and their home country counterparts);

- b) the activities of interest are not fleeting or exceptional but possess certain stability and resilience over time;
- c) the content of these activities is not captured by some pre-existing concept.

This, however, still leaves us with a pretty broad interpretation of the concept of migrant transnationalism. In fact, Portes et al. (1999) recommend delimiting the concept of transnationalism to any occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation. They argue that within the definition of transnationalism, it is possible to accommodate a number of diverse activities, ranging from economic initiatives of transnational entrepreneurs who mobilize their contacts across borders in search of suppliers and markets to political activities of community leaders whose main goals are the achievement of political power in the sending or receiving countries and socio-cultural enterprises oriented towards the reinforcement of a national identity abroad or the collective enjoyment of cultural events and goods (Portes et al. 1999, pp. 219-221).

Itzigsohn, Cabal, Medina and Vasquez (1999) differentiate between narrow and broad transnational practices as two poles of a continuum defined by the degree of institutionalization, degree of movement within the transnational field, and degree of involvement in transnational activities.

“Transnationality in a ‘narrow’ sense refers to those people involved in economic, political, social, or cultural practices that involve a regular movement within the geographic transnational field, a high level of institutionalization, or constant personal involvement. Transnationality in a ‘broad’ sense refers to a series of material and symbolic practices in which people engage that involve only sporadic physical movement between the two countries, a low level of institutionalization, or just occasional personal involvement, but

nevertheless includes both countries as reference points” (Itzigsohn, Cabal, Medina and Vasquez 1999).

Pries (2007, pp. 3-4) opines that instead of ‘viewing transnational relations in any corner’, it is necessary to *define appropriate units of analysis for transnational societal phenomena*. The simplest transnational societal unit of analysis, according to him, could be a ‘transnational social relation’, like the communication and interchange between a migrant and his or her family abroad. The units of analysis in transnational studies are most frequently individuals, biographies, families, organizations, institutions and identities (Pries 2007). In my investigation of transnational political activities of Vietnamese refugees in America, the political interchanges between individual refugees and Vietnam would represent the individual unit of analysis – whatever the operationalization of the theoretical-analytical concept of political transnationalism (explained in greater in the Methodology chapter) looks like.

At the other end of the spectrum, some scholars propose substantially modifying the concept of migrant transnationalism, or even abandoning it altogether in favor of more limited concepts. For instance, Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004, 2008) argue that delimiting the concept of transnationalism, as Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) and Portes et al. (1999) have done, renders it so encompassing as to virtually erase the distinction between here and there. Because states seek to control movement – exit as well as entry – across territorial borders, to define transnationalism in terms of the “regular and sustained cross-border activities of individuals” is to ignore that this is a world divided by states, many of them expelling their undesirable residents or closing their doors to foreigners. They also claim that while scholars of immigrant transnationalism have veered so far toward celebrating transnationalism and depicting the phenomenon as subversive and transnationals as grassroots actors challenging the hegemony of states and global capitalism from below, this view is hardly evidenced by the past century’s record of producing refugees

without home *or* host, let alone persons without a state. They subsequently advocate adopting a much narrower definition of the term transnationalism as “the collision of the social organization of migration, and its state-spanning results, with reactive efforts by state and civil society actors to produce state-society alignment” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004, p. 1186; Waldinger 2008).

Similarly, Guarnizo (2003) claims that in order to temper often exaggerated conclusions from earlier studies that portrayed virtually every contemporary migrant as transnationally engaged, it became acceptable for transnational studies to investigate and analyze transnational migration focused only on a specific kind of action (e.g., political participation) or a single activity (e.g., participating in transnational civic organizations such as hometown associations). He then proposes abandoning it altogether in favor of a more limited concept, “transnational living” – defined as an evolving condition contingent on the relationship between migrants’ resources and socio-cultural positioning, as well as the historical contexts in the specific localities where they live (Guarnizo 2003, p. 670).

Clearly, not all immigrants are transmigrants. Relative to migration, transnational practices are still quite limited in absolute and relative numbers. It is, therefore, more useful to conceptualize transnationalism as *one* form of economic, political, and cultural activities that co-exists with other, more traditional forms, such as international and multinational activities. Although I accept some of the critiques leveled against the indiscriminate application of transnationalism, I do not believe that either the concept or the research field should be abandoned. On the contrary, I aim to further enrich its conceptualization by extending the refugee transnational into the realm of the political, an area of scholarship in which it has only recently begun to be applied. Following Pries (2007), I define the level of analysis of transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees at the individual level and following Itzigsohn et

al. (1999), I refer to their transnational political activities (protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums) in a broader sense of the term when considering degree of institutionalization and degree of involvement in transnational activities.

*Is migrant transnationalism a new phenomenon?*

Another prevailing debate in the transnationalism literature is: is transnationalism actually a new immigration experience or is it rather an extension of the manner in which migrants, as they settled in a new society, have always extended their social fields to include their home societies? In other words, is there anything new about these types of transnational relations that have existed for as long as nations, nation states and national societies have existed? Transnationalism has been described anywhere from novel and emergent to being as old as labor immigration itself (Portes et al 1999).

Scholars like Nancy Foner (2005, p. 63) argue that transnationalism is not a new phenomenon and that early claims of transnationalism's "newness" were exaggerated. In fact, shortly after the original pronouncements by Glick Schiller and her collaborators on the novelty and importance of transnationalism, critics rejected these claims by pointing to the presence of similar practices among immigrant groups in the past (Portes 2001). They pointed out that multiple historical instances of grassroots cross-border activities exist and have been extensively documented. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century Polish, Italian and Russian immigrants had also forged multi-stranded relations linking together their societies of origin and settlement by investing in land and businesses back home, crossing the Atlantic to visit families, and sponsoring political causes favoring independence or a change of regime (Foner 1997). On



the other side of the world, the overseas Chinese had been creating for decades complex trading communities spanning nations across the Pacific Rim (Portes 2001).

Similarly, Portes et al. (Haller and Guarnizo 2002) note the existence of precedents to contemporary transnationalism. They argue that transnationalism was alive and well a hundred years ago; what has changed is merely the nature of transnational connections due to advances in transportation and communication technologies. Rouse (1991, pp. 12-14) writes that with tight networks of continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information, past migrants have had little trouble participating in transnational migrant circuits. The point that there was really nothing new in the cross-border activities of contemporary immigrants implied that if these practices had always existed, then there was no novelty or justification for the introduction of a new term.

To say that transnationalism is not completely new or necessary as a term does not invalidate its importance as a conceptual framework. In fact, one of the benefits of transnational perspective is that it can shed fresh light on the past, just as it can bring new insights into the study of immigration in the present (Foner 2005). Until the concept of immigrant transnationalism was coined and refined, the common character and significance of disparate historical cross-border activities remained obscure. For instance, the parallels between Russian and Polish émigré political activism and the trading activities of the Chinese diaspora, for example, could not have been established because there was no theoretical idea that linked them and pointed to their similarities (Portes 2001, p. 184). In its absence, the respective events remained disparate and isolated from each other, as well as from present instances of immigrant transnationalism.

On the other hand, some transnationalism scholars argue that transnational migration differs significantly from previous migration experiences in terms of the sheer numbers of migrants' involvements in both the home and host societies. It is the scale and intensity of such relations that differentiates transnational activities from those of earlier migrants (Portes et al. 1999, Glick Schiller et al. 1995). Moreover, what distinguishes this immigrant experience from earlier remittances and home ties that immigrants have always maintained and makes it truly “transnational” is the emergence of a social process in which migrants *establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders* and make decisions, take actions and develop identities within these *social networks* that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Basch et al. 1994, p. 7). Hence, a new conceptualization, transnationalism, is needed in order to come to terms with the experience and consciousness of this new migrant population that maintains multiple relations – familial, social, economic, organizational, religious and political that span borders (Glick Schiller et al. 1995).

Moreover, the above-mentioned transnational social or societal spaces could also be conceptualized in a narrow sense. By this, they could be understood as nation states and national societies spanning interaction frameworks in the dimensions of (a) intensive and stable social practices, (b) systems of symbols, and (c) artifacts (Pries 2007, p. 5). According to Pries, used in this more specific sense of transnational spaces, these could be considered as a relatively novel topic recently discussed since the last quarter of the 20th century. The development of these transnational social spaces was pushed by innovative and cheap international communication technologies, such as the telephone, fax-machine, Internet and airplane transportation as a mass medium rather than an elite mobility system.

According to Glick Schiller et al. (1992, p. 8), an examination of the economic forces that structure the flows of international migration today and place the migrants' responses to these forces within the global capitalist context of differential power and inequality enable us to experience the differences between past and present migrants. The economic dislocations in both the Third World and in industrialized nations resulting from the growing internationalization of capital increased migration, and yet made it difficult for the migrants to construct some cultural, social or economic bases within their new settings. This vulnerability led migrants to construct a transnational existence by continuously translating the economic and social position gained in one political setting into political, social and economic capital in another (Glick Schiller et al. 1992).

Today's transmigrants are also different from those of the past as they are more likely to come from the peripheral world, be persons of color and include a large number of professionals (Rios 1992). Another distinctive feature is that they hold on to their native cultures and traditional networks in unprecedented ways. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two centers, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both (Portes 1997).

States, on their part, far from withering away in the epoch of transnationalism, are promoting the reproduction of transnational subjects by officially incorporating their "officials" residing abroad into their newly configured trans-territorial nation-state (Smith and Guarnizo 2004, p. 5). This political process has been termed by Basch et al. (1994, p. 19) as "deterritorialized" nation-state formation – a construct that defines state boundaries in socio-political rather than geographic terms.

In my opinion, transnationalism does mark a new type of migrant existence. While a high intensity of transnational exchanges, new modes of transacting, and a multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis are what constitute the true originality of the phenomenon, it cannot be denied that the occasional contacts, trips and activities across national borders that do not require a high level of institutionalization also contribute to strengthening the transnational field. The latter form of transnational activism can be said to represent transnationalism in a broader sense of the term and, therefore, is worth investigating.

*In what ways is migrant transnationalism relevant?*

Theoretically, the significance of studying immigrant transnationalism lies in the fact that it alters immigrants' process of integration to the host society. According to Portes (2001, p. 188) transnationalism may actually accompany and support successful integration into the host society by offering a viable alternative to bypass both labor market constraints and prejudice of the host society. The economic resources created by transnational enterprise can empower immigrants to resist exploitation in the labor market and propel themselves and their families into the native middle-class. The cultivation of strong networks with the country of origin and the implementation of economic and political initiatives based on these networks helps immigrants solidify their position in the receiving society and cope more effectively with its barriers. In fact, Landolt (2001) argues that transnationalism provides immigrant groups with an extra lift in terms of material and moral resources unavailable to those cut off from transnational activities. Moreover, to the extent that transnational activities support the successful economic and social

integration of immigrant families, they bear positively on second-generation youths (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Levitt and Jaworski 2007).

Another reason why the study of immigrant transnationalism is significant is its bearing on the development of sending countries, i.e. it plays an important role in altering outcomes abroad. Taking into account the aggregate volume of remittances sent by migrants, their investments in the home economy, and their political influence in terms of both contributions to parties and candidates in national elections and organized mobilizations abroad, governments of sending countries have moved in recent years to intensify their contacts with their respective diaspora and involve them in various forms in national life (Portes 2001). Dual citizenship and dual nationality laws for emigrants have been passed in many countries; expatriates have been granted rights to vote in national elections; and some governments have even explored ways to grant emigrant communities representation in the national legislatures (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). The visits by party officials and political dignitaries of Third World countries to their expatriate communities in the United States or Europe have become commonplace. Further, several Third World governments have established agencies and programs abroad targeting their emigrants and seeking to provide various services to them (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Landolt 2001; Smith 2000).

Thus, for sending country governments, their migrants have become increasingly important, not only as sources of remittances, investments, and political contributions but also as potential ambassadors or lobbyists in defence of national interests abroad (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt 2001). At the local level, the cumulative process of migration and the transnational activities of migrants can entirely transform the economic and political structure of towns and rural communities in sending countries as well as their culture. Given this impact of immigrant

transnationalism, let us now look into the special significance of studying transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans as an immigrant group.

### ***Refugee Transnationalism***

An important theoretical significance of studying transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans is that they arrived in the United States as refugees. By understanding the difference between immigrants and refugees, one can form a clearer picture of the way their “transnationalisms” are different (Alkire 2006). Unfortunately, little differentiation is given by researchers or the general public between an immigrant and refugee status in the developed world, making it even more challenging to appropriately understand either population. The following section contends with the question of why refugees are sufficiently distinct from immigrants to justify a separate area of transnational research and how their refugee status affects the transnational activism of refugees.

#### *In what ways are refugee transnationals different from immigrants?*

Immigrants are persons who come to a country to take up permanent residence. They are voluntary migrants who *choose* to make the move to another country, usually to join family members who already live in that country or to seek work and a better life for themselves and their families. On the other hand, numerous arguments have arisen concerning the meaning of the word refugee and the conferral of refugee status on an individual or a group of migrants. The definition used by the United Nations is a convenient starting point; a refugee is an individual who:

“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, memberships of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the

country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, in unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 1979).

This definition was applied, unquestioned, to the Vietnamese when they first began arriving in the United States. Generals, high and middle level military officers, government ministers, employees of the United States Information Agency, the CIA, American corporations and contractors and the American embassy – all these people feared for their lives as well as for their property and social positions. American embassy officials drew up lists of “high risk” individuals to be evacuated in case the government should fall (Kelly 1977). Moreover, the Vietnamese boat people left their homes not because they were Catholics, anti-Communists, associated with foreigners or upper class, but because the villages they lived in had become free-fire zones, battlefields and/or razed to the ground by rockets and mortars (Kelly 1977). They left home because they knew they would be killed or mutilated if they stayed there. Thus, most Vietnamese left out of fear, acting as refugees.

Scholarship of refugees has traditionally focused overwhelmingly on the so-called practical issues of repatriation and integration, or on socio-psychological aspects of assimilation in host cultures and the transition of refugees to ‘ethnic minorities’ (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, pp. 92-107). At best, the refugee was grafted onto the social body of the host society (Shami 1996). Refugee communities were thus seen as divorced from any kind of transnational existence, unlike immigrant communities who began to be viewed as transnationals starting in the 1980s. The principal theoretical implication of studying refugee transnationalism is that it might be possible to conceive of refugee communities and transnational communities as co-existing on a single continuum and that, refugees can move along this continuum to transform into transnationals (Koser 2001).

Incorporating a transnational analysis recognizes that refugees are simultaneously connected to multiple nation-states; they retain and develop multiple relationships both within and between the sending and receiving countries (Al-Ali and Koser 2002, Sherrell and Hyndman 2006). Rigg (1971, pp. 474-481) states that political refugees often tend to be educated and from high socio-economic positions. This was true in the case of the first wave of Vietnamese refugees. Thus, a transnational lens would allow me to take into account the fact that Vietnamese refugees, as a class of transmigrants, also live their lives across national borders and respond to the demands and constraints of two or more states.

Unlike most immigrants, Vietnamese refugees entered the United States with few belongings and did not even have the long term goals of gaining citizenship and being able to fully access the mainstream American way of life, as immigrants typically do. The migration process for Vietnamese refugees began when they entered refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Guam, where they waited from months to years for a representative from a social service agency to announce an opening in the U.S. with an organization willing to sponsor them (Southeast Asian Archive 1999; SEARAC 2009). The refugees generally arrived in America with limited education, few language skills, no income and little exposure to Western culture. After arrival, they were totally dependent on their sponsors for food, clothing, money, housing and a job until such time as they could become self-sufficient (Desbarats 1986). Residential permanency and resettlement in America would come in the form of housing and employment, neither of which was readily available at the onset of their arrival. Such an instance of transnationalism among refugees as distinct from voluntary migrants is worth investigating since the specific circumstances surrounding refugee migration can affect the level and intensity of transnational linkages.



*How does refugee status affect transnational activities?*

It must be recognized that the agency and life choices of uprooted refugees thrown into transnational realities, often against their will, are quite differentially situated than those of (im)migrants when physical presence is impossible in the home country (Nolin 2002). The traditional definition of transnational migration assumes the freedom of choice in the migration decision (Peterson 1958, Strand and Jones 1985). Refugee migrants, however, relocate because of a threat of political persecution or conflict – this relocation is largely involuntary, often with little notice. “It is the reluctance to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive motivations to settle elsewhere, which characterizes all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrant” (Kunz 1973, p. 130).

Circumstances in the host country may also affect refugee transnational linkages. For instance, Salvadorans in the 1990s were granted temporary protective status (TPS) in the U.S., which carried no promises of asylum or temporary residence and restricted access to governmental support programs (Bailey et al. 2002, p. 127, 129). In their host country, majority of Salvadorans were not recognized as refugees, but were seen as illegal immigrants in search of work. Bailey et al. (2002) argue that such TPS-class persons are likely to have very different economic, social and political experiences than immigrants or even other refugees.

The transnational activities of refugees then encompass a host of motivations, influences, desires and imperatives quite distinct from voluntary migrants (Nolin 2002). This is because the transnational social fields that refugees forge and maintain are decidedly different from those of other migrants, who are socially and financially prepared to leave in the first place and who form transnational networks in a "quest for economic advancement and social recognition" (Portes 1997, p. 812). For instance, Catherine Nolin (2002, 2006) in her study on Guatemalan refugees

in southern Ontario, Canada, found that Canadian refugee narratives lack a distinct 'return ideology' found among migrants who travel with two- or three-year work plans, certain of their return and, therefore, are motivated to remit in order to guarantee family survival. In contrast, many Guatemalans who fled to Canada for survival reasons hold no illusions of return. She argues that unlike the lively transnationalism documented in an immigration context, refugee transnationalism (she studied traveling and sending money home) operates sporadically and poses greater challenges for maintaining significant connections. Varying legal status, the continuing instability, impunity and insecurity associated with living conditions in the home country, low income levels (in both countries) leading to the lack of communication, and physical distance between the two countries inhibiting regular travel, could all work to create transnational ruptures rather than transnational flows (Nolin 2002).

Forced migration is also distinct from voluntary migration in terms of the development of transnational relations. Al-Ali et al. (2001a) argue that the immediate concern of new refugee arrivals is to try to secure their positions in their new host countries. Few have the financial resources and social networks even to re-establish contacts with relatives and friends left behind, far less become involved in transnational activities. Sporadic remittances of money or gifts may represent the beginnings of transnational activities and relations for recent refugees who are struggling to establish themselves in the host society (Sherrell and Hyndman 2006). Over time, the very networks, patterns of connections and paths of travel shaped by earlier migrants can potentially be appropriated by refugees seeking links with their country of origin.

It could also be argued that forced migration sometimes leads to 'forced transnationalism'. For example, family responsibilities, social obligation and/or bureaucratic affairs, such as a property claim, might push refugees to a substantial involvement with their

home country even in the absence of any desire to return (Al-Ali et al. 2001b). Assisting families and friends financially or with goods, such as medicine and clothes, is also often perceived to be a responsibility, occasionally even a burden. Cindy Horst (2006) in her work amongst Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps of Kenya highlights the transnational connections in the refugees' lives when she describes how cultural-religious responsibility of Somali refugees in the U.S. to assist family members is central to the livelihoods of Somalis refugees in the first country of asylum, Kenya.

The physical violence (or threat thereof) and political persecution experienced by refugees in their home country prior to flight can also shape the trajectory of transnational activities undertaken by them. It is likely that refugees who were forced to flee from their homeland will be politicized to a greater degree and will want the international community to know of their plight, leading to a higher motivation for transnational activism. Thus, by incorporating experiences of political violence into the concept of immigrant transnationalism, a differentiated sense of refugee transnationalism emerges that is infused by the effects of political violence and forced displacement. Given the experiences or fear of political persecution by the Vietnamese refugees, it is imperative to keep in mind that the circumstances of their emigration may possibly have an effect on their transnational activism.

Refugee transnational processes seem to be accompanied by the re-inscription of lost identity on to the territory of the homeland (Gupta 1992). Though physical mobility may be more restricted in the refugee context (especially when the circumstances that led to their flight persist in the home country), imaginative, situated identity and social expression metaphorically work to suture the many fragments of identity and social relations in the process of reconstructing shattered lives and thus, challenge the centrality of mobility to notions of transnationalism (Nolin

2002). Thus, in contrast to immigrant transnationalism, refugee transnationalism incorporates a conceptual shift from a focus on “connections” to “ruptures and sutures” (Nolin 2002, p. 65) of identity and sense of belonging. This makes refugee transnationalism a particularly interesting and useful category of migrants to study. My focus, therefore, is on the possibilities offered by the transnational optic for studying the Vietnamese refugee diaspora in the United States.

As transnational actors, Vietnamese refugees have displayed considerable tenacity and agency in maintaining connections with their home country despite the odds. According to Valverde (2002), there exists a wide spectrum of transnational actors, with some having much greater economic and political power than others. At the very top of the transnational class hierarchy are elite transnationals – *global citizens*, who inhabit “global cities” (Sassen 1991) made up of highly skilled, wealthy professionals. For example, Aihwa Ong (1993, p. 770) describes the wealthy Chinese diasporas in California, who not only live in the most exclusive neighborhoods but also, by using shreds of Orientalism “convert political constraints in one field into economic opportunities in another, to turn displacement into advantageous positioning in a range of local contexts”.

Needless to say, Vietnamese Americans, when they arrived as refugees, lay at the other end of the transnational class hierarchy. Despite this, Vietnamese Americans have forged transnational connections in the areas of economics, culture and politics. Today, Vietnam heralds its overseas population as bridge builders and a great source of highly skilled professionals, calling upon them to contribute their knowledge to help rebuild Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnamese experience in the United States has been greatly affected by transnational linkages with Vietnam. This dissertation project is by no means an exhaustive account of refugee transnationalism.

Rather, my particular questions have led me to illuminate the material conditions characterizing Vietnamese Americans as refugees in their political trans-nationality.

### ***Political Transnationalism***

The following section introduces political transnationalism as one of the many forms of transnational activities undertaken by migrants, and defines what constitutes transnational political activities and articulates what their relevance in the home as well as host countries' politics is. Political transnationalism has very recently emerged as a growing dimension of transnational studies. Research in this field includes studies of migrant hometown associations (Caglar 2006, Bada 2003), comparative analyses of diaspora or homeland politics (Ostergaard-Nielson 2003, Itzigsohn 2000) and determinants of transnational political practices (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003). My research seeks to further develop this last field of political transnationalism – determinants of individual practices – in the context of Vietnamese refugees in the United States.

Political analysis in the field of transnational studies has been conducted, following Smith and Bakker (2008), at four levels of analysis: global civil society, transnational social movements, social networks and individual migrants. In discourses on global civil society, global-level institutional actors like governmental, international nongovernmental and supranational organizations – for example, regional political formations such as the European Union – seek to disseminate universal discourses involving issues of human rights, peace and international security. The second of these approaches focuses on the activities of transnational social movements, advocacy networks and coalitions – for instance, explorations on the social movement against the expansion of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and specifically, the

1999 Battle of Seattle protests. The global civil society as well as transnational social movement literatures tend to locate political agency at the level of supranational actors in a top-down approach, thereby downplaying or ignoring sub-national actors such as local grassroots forces in peripheral societies (Smith and Bakker 2008).

The third approach focuses on social networks developed by transnational migrants that have developed new conceptualizations of trans-local community development and the extraterritorial extension of political parties. Finally, and most germane to my research the fourth approach centers on the actual cross-border political practices of international migrants at the individual level of analysis. This literature examines the connections between migrant transnational politics in countries of origin and immigrant incorporation and ethnic politics in the country of settlement, drawing on quantitative survey methods in which the individual level of analysis and the factors influencing an individual migrant's propensity to engage in transnational political life are given precedence.

In this dissertation, I similarly emphasize the importance of highlighting transnational efforts of sub-national actors like individual migrants or refugee groups in a bottom-up approach; by profiling the case of homeland politics among Vietnamese refugees and their transnational political engagement, I seek to contribute to this particular literature on political transnationalism.

#### *What constitutes political transnationalism?*

The field of migrants' transnational practices encompasses a wide range of phenomena such as transnational election campaigns and cross-border voting, migrants' rallies against injustices in the country of origin or demonstrations to defend it, or engagement in hometown

association projects in the region of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). As opposed to immigrant politics which is undertaken to better migrants' situation in the host country, the political activities of migrants (and refugees) pertaining to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland constitute homeland politics and is the focus of my study of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees.

Following Itzigsohn et al. (1999), the distinction made between narrow and broad definitions of migrant transnationalism (described in the section on migrant transnationalism) can also be applied to political transnationalism. In terms of transnational political practices, then, "narrow" transnationalism refers to direct forms of cross-border participation in the country of origin by migrants and refugees (such as voting in elections and direct monetary support to political parties), while "broad" transnationalism refers to more indirect participation in meetings of political parties or protesting in the host country. In a similar vein, the concept of "core" transnationalism defines activities that are a regular, patterned and an integral part of an individual's life, while "expanded" transnationalism refers to more occasional practices (Guarnizo 2000).

I concur with scholars like Portes et al. (2002) and Itzigsohn et al. (1999) that usually, migrants engaged in narrow or core political transnationalism are few and far between compared to the wider, more sporadic engagements among those who stay in touch with and are occasionally mobilized by political events in the country of origin. This dimension constitutes a major part of the political activity of migrants and refugees, which means that actual mobility of the migrants involved is not a main parameter for the transnationality of the political practices (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). Therefore, in this dissertation, I operate with a rather broad definition of political transnational practices: indirect forms of transnational political participation by

Vietnamese refugees in the United States, such as protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums. In contrast to economic and social practices, regular cross-border contact, but not necessarily actual travel, is a constitutive part of such political transnational practices among Vietnamese refugees.

*In what ways is political transnationalism relevant?*

This section highlights the relevance of political transnationalism and the ways in which transnational political activities of migrants (and refugees) affect outcomes in their home country. Due to their attachments to the homeland and the ease of telecommunications, migrant diaspora are increasingly apt to insert themselves into political processes vis-à-vis the homeland. Cohen (1996) has described the evolution of diaspora relations vis-à-vis their homeland governments as moving from “victims to challengers”. For instance, in the likelihood of conflict in the home country, diaspora communities may raise money to support continuing warfare, promote public opinion and even substantially influence international interventions in support of their cause. Beyond this, migrants (including refugees) have become important constituents and advocates for homeland governments. Numerous governments allow for dual citizenship or include members of its diaspora as official members of their political communities (Brinkerhoff 2009).

At the same time, a refugee or exiled diaspora community, such as the Vietnamese community in the U.S., also has the ability to act as an additional watchdog on homeland governments. While direct transnational political activities might be focused on the home country (example, participating in electoral politics or supporting home-grown pro-democracy movements), more indirect transnational political activities focus on lobbying in the host country



(example, campaigning against human rights abuses in the home country). Given their potential access, through networks on the ground, to local information on policy implementation, regulatory enforcement and human rights abuses, diaspora may be well placed to play a monitoring role in support of good governance (Brinkerhoff 2009). In extreme cases, a hostile migrant (or refugee) community can sway public opinion against the ruling homeland government or even try to oust it from power.

Migrant diaspora have political influence disproportionate to their numbers owing to knowledge, skills, and financial capital acquired in the host society (Brinkerhoff 2009). Similarly, migrant support to homeland political campaigns may disproportionately influence outcomes due to relative currency exchange rates. Using their economic power to gain political foothold, migrants can, through direct political participation in their home country, constitute a positive force for the strengthening of the formal democratic rules of organizing political competition. For instance, Itzigsohn and Villacres (2008) claim that electoral and political participation of Dominican immigrants in the Dominican Republic and local involvement in development projects in El Salvador by Salvadoran immigrants have led to the emergence of participatory institutions, dynamism of local political competition and consolidation of democracy in these countries.

Besides consolidating the democratization process in the home country, migrant and refugee groups can also play an important role in promoting and reinforcing liberal values, and facilitating conflict resolution as they respond to political events in their country of origin. Brinkerhoff (2009), in her investigation of digital diasporas among immigrants and refugees from Afghanistan (Afghanistanonline), Somalia (Somalinet), Egypt (MyCopticChurch), Tibet (Tibetboard ) and Nepal (Thamel.com), explores the ways in which these cyber-grassroots

organizations not only support integration into the host society but also contribute to security and socio-economic development in the homelands.

Such transnational political activities provide migrants with opportunities to collectively express their hybrid identities (a sense of self that is neither wholly of the homeland nor exclusively reflective of the receiving country). Diaspora communities' hybrid identities in turn inform political considerations and action agendas vis-à-vis the homeland, whether they pertain to potential conflict with the homeland government or subgroups of its society, human rights, or partisan political schemes. In this way, the collective expression of diaspora hybrid identity occurs through transnational activities concerning homeland politics (Brinkerhoff 2009). From this perspective, political transnationalism is not only about a set of activities through which migrants become involved in the domestic politics of their home countries; it also shapes collective identities by creating overlapping memberships between territorially separated and independent polities (Baubock 2003). Thus, migrant and refugee groups' transnational political influence and engagement has potential significance, as it raises political consciousness, molds collective identities, shapes specific political agendas aimed at the homeland and provides forums for the enactment of these agendas in dispersed and heterogeneous communities. Given this impact of political transnationalism, let us now look into the factors discussed in the transnationalism literature that explain the level and intensity of transnational political linkages.

### ***Determinants of Political Transnationalism***

This section identifies some conditions that I see as emerging in the transnationalism literature as relevant to explaining variation in transnational political activities. In migrant studies, generally, a group of interrelating factors, including demographic factors, origin country

mobilization and receiving country institutions are understood to impact the identities and transnational practices of migrants (Basch et al 1994; Portes et al 1999; Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001; Guarnizo et al 2003). These factors condition the likelihood that migrants will have the motivation and capacity to engage in transnational activism.

Conventionally, transnational political participation is measured by electoral indicators. Transnational electoral participation includes membership in a political party in the country of origin, monetary contributions to these parties, and active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003). However, migrants and refugees also seek to be represented and participate in decision making through political means other than elections (Guarnizo et al. 2003). Hence, for the purposes of this dissertation, under the concept of transnational political participation, I include both electoral and non-electoral activities aimed at influencing conditions in the home country. Such transnational non-electoral political activities may involve sending political remittances<sup>4</sup> for civic projects in the community of origin, membership in charity organizations sponsoring projects in the hometown, participating in campaigns or petitions, and organizing in the host country around political/human rights issues concerning their home country.

Following Portes and Rumbaut (1996), Leal (2002) and Guarnizo et al. (2003), potential determinants of immigrant transnationalism can be drawn from theoretical literatures on: (a) classical theories of the role of individual demographic factors; (b) contemporary theories of immigrants' incorporation to host societies. To these, I add another set of determinants – that of the dependence of transnational political motivation and action on availability of resources.

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<sup>4</sup> “Political remittances” here signifies money that is sent to a politically active local NGO or grass-roots organization in the home country as part of their fund-raising or contributions to a political party as opposed to economic remittances sent to family members or toward a business venture.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

Age, gender and education, are the standard features that control for background factors.

**Age** - The factor of age has been used by many researchers (Strand and Jones 1985) with the intent of measuring resettlement issues in the refugees' new country. These studies claim that older immigrants and refugees find it harder to adjust to conditions in the country of settlement and integrate into its culture. This would suggest that older migrants are more likely to continue to maintain ties with the country of origin rather than severing all contact. It will, therefore, be interesting to see if this nostalgia for the homeland translates into motivation for transnational political action.

**Gender** – Literature on the relationship between gender and immigration tells us that males experience occupational downward mobility upon relocation and may tend to form, participate in and lead ethnic organizations whose interests and focus is on the country of origin in order to compensate for the loss of status in the host country (Guarnizo et al. 2003). Women's experience tends to go the opposite way, as many of them become paid workers for the first time in the United States; they are, therefore, more likely to shift their orientation towards the host state (Jones-Correa 1998). The hypothesis then is that as men, on average, tend to experience a loss in social status as opposed to women, they are more likely to engage in political transnationalism. Thus, social status operates through gender to explain variation in transnational activism.

**Education** – is the individual characteristic that has perhaps been used most often to explain variations in relative levels of political activity. In fact, the positive relationship between education and political participation is one of the most frequently identified in empirical political science (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, Guarnizo et al. 2003). Better engaged citizens are

more likely to be aware of and engaged by the political process, and they are more likely to become involved in various political activities (Tarrow 2005).

As educational levels increase, so do the skills and resources that support higher levels of political participation (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Viewed from a different vantage point, individual education provides the intellectual and cognitive skills that reduce the costs of participation, thereby shifting the incentives in favor of individual engagement. Well-educated citizens are more likely to possess a knowledge base that makes it easier to unravel the intricacies of the political process, and they are more likely to possess the cognitive skills that make it easier to absorb and process complex political information (Rosenberg 1988).

Highly educated individuals are also more likely to be surrounded by other highly educated individuals or belong to organizations whose members are more fully engaged by politics. In this way, conditions are enhanced for the production of social capital through shared patterns of interaction among people who are already likely to be politically well informed and expert at the individual level (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998). Therefore, we might say that education creates the human capital resources that lead to increased engagement within the political system.

The general importance of education for all migrants is pointed out by Portes and Rumbaut (1996, pp. 194-95): The process of 'learning the ropes' in the domains of language (learning English) and education is vital to attaining self-sufficiency. Only after migrants have established themselves in their new society do they start thinking about engaging in transnationalism.

For refugees, resettlement is greatly enhanced by the diversity of their pre-arrival environment. Their level of education, for instance, is one of the main factors affecting the

entrant's adaptation into American life. Refugees who have had the equivalent of an elementary education in either their home country or in refugee camps where their education continued will acculturate faster than those who have been denied such experiences (Strand and Jones 1985).

The Vietnamese refugee population is well-documented in education (See Portes and MacLeod 1996). Of the Indochinese refugees, the Vietnamese were originally considered to be the most highly educated, which most likely indicates that they were among the wealthiest in their homeland because of increased opportunities of living within the city as well as a heavier American influence for a longer period of time (Montero and Dieppa 1982).

Moreover, the level of education of Vietnamese refugees is a major factor in their adaptation to American life (Strand and Jones 1985). This is because levels of education vary depending on the time of their arrival, as earlier refugees tended to have more education than later arrivals. Existing literature states that the first-wave Vietnamese refugees arriving in 1975 were well-educated since they were among the elite – primarily students and professionals (U.S. government military, technical and managerial employees) (Kelly 1986). This is due, in part, to the geographic location as “the 1975 cohort was relatively well educated by any standard, and in South Vietnam they were, for the most part, among the educated elite” (Montero and Dieppa 1982, p. 74). However, over the years, the trend of high level education among Vietnamese refugees tapered off. This is because the second and third waves of refugees consisted mainly of family members of those who arrived in the first wave, fishermen and farmers who had few skills other than in slash-and-burn agriculture (Kelly 1986). It will, therefore, be interesting to explore whether variations in intensity of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees coincide with variations in their level of education.

### *Contexts of Incorporation*

Immigrant transnationalism is not only affected by demographic factors but also by their contexts of incorporation like length of settlement and English proficiency.

***Length of settlement*** – is especially important in determining maintenance of transnational relations and activities, with recent immigrant arrivals more likely to maintain ongoing relationships with the country of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003). The hypothesis then is that longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to progressive disengagement from home country loyalties and attachments. For example, much like assimilation theory, a lot of the existing literature on Latino transnational politics tends to assume that over time and across generations political transnationalism weakens as migrants and their descendants shift from a homeland-oriented politics to a receiving-society politics (Smith and Bakker 2008, p. 17). In fact, for some political scientists, transnational politics and Latinos organizing around local politics in the United States constitute alternate social universes (Jones-Correa 2005).

The competing argument is that the immediate concern of new immigrant arrivals is to try to secure their positions in their new host countries. Most lack the financial resources and social networks vital to transnational engagement, which are acquired over time (Al-Ali N, Nadjé, R. Black, and K. Koser 2001). The corollary hypothesis then is that longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to more frequent, organized forms of transnational activity. With two competing hypotheses vying to explain variation in political transnationalism, it will be interesting to see how length of settlement plays out in the case of Vietnamese refugees and which hypothesis holds true; in other words, whether integration and transnationalism are incompatible with each other or concurrent processes.

In the case of Vietnamese Americans, a majority of the refugees arrived in the U.S. during the first and second waves in the late 1970s and 1980s. Family members and relatives of those already in the U.S. as well as Amerasians continued arriving as immigrants into the mid-1990s as part of the family reunification and Amerasian programs. Therefore, what will also be interesting to explore is whether there is any significant variation in levels of political transnationalism between those who fled as political refugees or managed to cross over as boat people during the first two waves (1975-1985), and those political prisoners and Amerasians who subsequently arrived as immigrants between 1985 and 1995 and even post-1995. While the former group had to leave their homeland and belongings soon after the fall of Saigon and flee, in many cases, with only a few hours' notice, the latter experienced persecution at the hands of the communist authorities in Vietnam and have a stake in influencing homeland politics. Thus, while considering length of settlement in the U.S. as a potential factor, the wave/time of arrival of Vietnamese refugees will also have to be taken into account.

***English proficiency*** – The greater the socio-cultural differences between newcomers and the host society, the more difficult their process of incorporation. Proficiency in English becomes an important factor in influencing assimilation of immigrants. English proficiency is one of the most crucial factors in facilitating a refugee's socioeconomic success in the United States, as language communication skills have long been a dominant factor in successful assimilation. Language ability – the ability to read and write, as well as speak the language – is often the key that opens the doors to a better life in the refugee's new land of residence. English is required for the procurement of the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter as well as functioning within the general American culture. In general, we can expect to see higher levels of English proficiency leading to greater socio-economic success, and subsequently, more intense



participation in political transnationalism (as described below in the next section on resources). Socio-economic status, then, seems to operate through English proficiency in affecting transnational activism.

### *Availability of Resources*

Another explanation for the emergence of variation in transnationalism among immigrants is that they try to reconstitute linkages to the country of origin or relatives living in other countries, but are unable to do so because they do not have the time, resources or financial means to engage in transnational practices. In order to engage in transnational entrepreneurship, such as philanthropic acts like organizing a letter-writing campaign to protest against the human rights situation in Vietnam, immigrants need to have a stable employment status and have accumulated a certain amount of capital. From this point of view, then, those who engage in transnational practices are the most economically successful immigrants (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2005).

***Employment status*** and ***Income*** – Characteristically, an important part of a refugee's socioeconomic adjustment is obtained through the position held on the job. Once a refugee is able to secure steady, permanent employment, rising incomes and lifestyle changes follow. Employment status and income are also the most cited efforts of resettlement programs, as a refugee cannot be considered to be successfully resettled if he or she continues to receive social support (Strand and Jones 1985). The hypothesis then is that being employed and higher income levels lead to more intense political transnationalism.

In many cases of refugee influx where the arriving population is older as in the case of later waves of Vietnamese refugees, chronic unemployment and low income levels often

characterize these populations. In the case of Vietnamese refugees too, a variety of barriers exist for their employment opportunities status, including language difficulties, lack of skills, inadequate transportation, and a limited job market as well as more remote problems such as health, dress codes, religious convictions and childcare needs when they first arrived (Alkire 2006). In addition, two factors of repression are generally evident. The first is the lack of representation in the managerial, executive and administrative sectors even though the Vietnamese refugees tend to have higher levels of education than other Asian immigrants. The second is that of being the token, non-native employee, which inhibits the move to higher institutional positions (Alkire 2006). It will, therefore, be interesting to see how employment status and income correlate with level of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees.

The theoretical perspectives on migrant transnationalism underscored in this chapter inform my research in certain significant aspects. For instance, the literature indicates that relative to migration, transnational practices are still quite limited in absolute and relative numbers – clearly, then, not all immigrants are transmigrants. Nonetheless, a stable and significant transnational field of identity and action connecting migrants (and refugees) with their country of origin does exist. Hence, while acknowledging some of the legitimate critiques leveled against the indiscriminate application of transnationalism, I do not believe that either the concept or the research field should be abandoned. I argue instead that it is more useful to conceptualize transnationalism as *one* form of economic, political, and cultural activities that co-exists with other, more traditional forms, such as international and multinational activities. My focus, therefore, is on the possibilities offered by the transnational optic for studying the Vietnamese refugee diaspora in the United States.

Moreover, I believe that transnationalism does mark a new type of migrant existence. While a high intensity of transnational exchanges, new modes of transacting, and a multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis are what constitute the true originality of the phenomenon, it cannot be denied that the occasional contacts, trips and activities across national borders that do not require a high level of mobility or institutionalization also contribute to strengthening the transnational field. The latter form of transnational activism can be said to represent transnationalism in a broader sense of the term and, therefore, is worth investigating.

I aim to further enrich the conceptualization of and contribute to the literature on transnationalism by extending the refugee transnational into the realm of the political, an area of scholarship in which it has only recently begun to be applied. Such an instance of transnationalism among refugees as distinct from voluntary migrants is worth investigating since the specific circumstances surrounding refugee migration can affect the level and intensity of transnational linkages. Specifically in the case of Vietnamese refugees, while they arrived in the United States frightened and destitute at the very end of the transnational class hierarchy, they have displayed considerable tenacity and agency in maintaining connections with their home country despite the odds. As Vietnamese Americans continued to forge transnational links with Vietnam in the areas of economics, culture and politics, their refugee experience in the United States has in turn been greatly affected by their transnationalism.

While this dissertation project is by no means an exhaustive account of refugee transnationalism, my particular questions have led me to illuminate the material conditions characterizing Vietnamese Americans as refugees in their political trans-nationality. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define the level of analysis of transnationalism among Vietnamese

refugees at the individual level. I also operationalize transnational political activities (protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums) in a broader, indirect rather than narrow sense of the term when considering degree of institutionalization and level of involvement in transnational activities. In this manner, I emphasize the importance of highlighting transnational efforts of sub-national actors like individual migrants or refugee groups, as opposed to that of supranational actors in a top-down approach, and specifically aim to contribute to the particular literature on the actual cross-border political practices of international migrants (and refugees) at the individual level of analysis.

Finally, the literature review detailed in this chapter helps to articulate an important question: are there patterned differences among migrants (and refugees) in the incidence and forms adopted by the phenomenon of political transnationalism? Variation in intensity and frequency of transnational activism is linked to the great level of heterogeneity among refugees in terms of individual characteristics and contextual factors in the host state that distinguish Vietnamese refugees from one another. This dissertation seeks to determine the factors that shape the likelihoods and possibilities for the emergence of transnational political fields; in other words, explain the variation in level of political activism amongst Vietnamese Americans. To this end, the theoretical literature of determinants of political transnationalism offers possible explanations and helps to formulate several hypotheses: for instance, I hypothesize that older Vietnamese refugees are more likely to engage in political transnationalism than younger refugees. Similarly, women, highly educated refugees and those proficient in English are more likely to be transnationally active compared to men, those who are less educated and have poor English language skills, respectively. Finally, I hypothesize that employed Vietnamese refugees

with substantial incomes are more likely to maintain transnational political links than unemployed refugees with frugal incomes.

## Chapter 3

### Background and Methods

This chapter provides background on the group under research (including a demographic profile and look at how communism still politically affects this group), the research question, the sampling strategies of the intended research, and the research design, including a summary of the data collection methods and an overview of the survey instrument.

#### Background on Vietnamese Americans

##### *Basic Demographic Profile*

This research is situated in the Vietnamese community of Southern California. In Orange County, the cities of Garden Grove, Santa Ana, Anaheim and Westminster are recognized as the core of this ethnic community. The area is centrally anchored by the business and cultural district of Little Saigon in the city of Westminster, which has evolved to serve the needs of the Vietnamese. Located in the heart of Orange County, the enclave of Little Saigon has the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside Vietnam. Since 1980, their population has nearly quintupled (Rutledge 1992).

Before 1988, Vietnamese merchants and shoppers used many different names for the Bolsa area, such as *khu Bolsa* or *cho Bolsa* (Ha 2002). In the mainstream media, the use of the name “Little Saigon” became common as early as 1984 when the *Los Angeles Times* published an article entitled “Boom on Bolsa: Vietnamese Create Their Own Saigon”. However, it was four years later that a group of Vietnamese leaders would choose Little Saigon to be the area’s official name (Day and Holley 1984). As Dr. Co Pham, president of the Vietnamese Chamber of

Commerce in 1991 said in an interview, “We named the area Little Saigon because the Vietnamese who lost their nation, those overseas, always hope someday to return to Saigon. Therefore, we created the name Little Saigon so that we can remember a day when we can reconquer Saigon” (Pham 1991, p. 40).

Little Saigon is located in a business area of Orange County that is dominated by shopping centers, situated next to each other, all located around a few particular streets (namely, Bolsa Avenue, Westminster Avenue and McFadden Avenue). It is an area bustling with ethnic commerce and community activity. As early as the early 1990s, with over 1,000 Vietnamese businesses and over 40,000 Vietnamese, a symbiosis had been created (Rutledge 1992). The original hub is the Asian Garden Mall and the two-tiered shopping center directly across the street from the mall. With a large pedestrian cross-walk to link the two, any week day is sure to find the retail centers around bustling, and weekends are even busier. Freeway-close, and with easy access to local suburban neighborhoods, these are the heart of Little Saigon life.

Little Saigon is home to eight Vietnamese newspapers, including *Nguoi Viet* (Vietnamese People), founded in 1978, the largest Vietnamese newspaper in America (Freeman 1995, p. 12). Some newspapers are distributed free; their earnings coming from advertising. Santa Ana in Orange County houses Little Saigon T.V. and Little Saigon Radio, which reaches over 200,000 listeners. Vietnamese from towns all over southern California come to Little Saigon to shop or simply to stroll through ornate shopping malls and centers, where they find Vietnamese book and video stores, travel agencies that book flights to Vietnam, pharmacies that sell Chinese herbs and medicines, noodle shops and restaurants which specialize in Vietnamese regional dishes, night clubs and karaoke spots, grocery stores offering an array of Asian foods. They can also find an array of Vietnamese-owned services like the offices of physicians, dentists, tax accountants and

lawyers, medical clinics, auto repair shops, beauty schools, real estate and insurance offices as well as those of community service agencies and refugee rights advocacy groups.

Although they are barely emerging on the mainstream political arena, within every Vietnamese community are countless associations, organizations and clubs that have focused on homeland issues. Community politics is still controlled by the first generation, many of who were the military and political elites in Vietnam. For them, homeland politics is still of primary importance, and adopting fervent anti-Communist ideologies is mandatory (Võ 2003, p. xv).

### ***Why Communism Still Matters***

My study of Vietnamese political transnationalism is in the context of a home country that is staunchly communist and transnational refugees who are extremely anti-communist and disapproving of the current regime in their home country. Communism has undoubtedly achieved remarkable political success in Vietnam. Against Herculean odds, a communist cell of nine men had grown by December 1976 into a mass party of one and a half million and had come to power having defeated militarily two of the strongest powers in the world (Williams 1992, p. 19). Indeed, tragically for Vietnam, it was the very success of the communists as revolutionaries and fighters that proved to be one of the main reasons of Vietnam's failure to adjust to the more mundane tasks of national development after the end of the war in 1975.

In Vietnamese society, communism has had no other ideology to contend with. Non-communist parties faced an almost hopeless situation (Williams 1992, p. 19). The victory in 1975 was essentially a triumph of revolutionary organization and military strategy, rather than a spontaneous popular uprising. Not only was there little popular enthusiasm for the communist victory, but that victory itself had been achieved for the main part by regular units of the North



Vietnam Army (Williams 1992, p. 21). Very few of the leadership in Hanoi had recent experience of South Vietnam which had dramatically changed after a decade of strong American influence and had, in essence, become a service economy for the American war effort (Williams 1992, p. 21). The departure of the Americans and the removal of their substantial buying power created severe economic and psychological withdrawal problems for the urban economy and especially Saigon. It is, therefore, not difficult to see this in the origins of the “boat people” problem. The party leadership was well aware of all this and made every effort to consolidate military power. Re-education camps were set up for the internment of tens of thousands of soldiers and civil servants of the former South Vietnamese government and the last vestiges of autonomy in the South were quickly stripped away (Williams 1992, p. 22).

The history of the relationship between the United States and Vietnam is a long and complex one, centered primarily on that great political force called communism. The Vietnamese who came to America were fleeing communism and they, along with their descendants, today continue to be affected by it (Williams 1992, p. 22). More than thirty years after the fall of Saigon, large numbers of Vietnamese were still desirous of immigrating to the United States (Houle 2006). A steady stream of refugees has continued to apply for asylum for a variety of reasons. Families who were split apart during and after the war sent their loved ones to reunite with their stateside kin in hopes of a better life. Anti-Communist political prisoners continued to file appeals for safe passage (Houle 2006). In fact, since 1990, these former South Vietnamese civilian and military officials who had been imprisoned in reeducation camps and their families have constituted the largest category of Vietnamese refugees admitted to the United States.

The genealogy of Western, particularly U.S. human rights discourse is intimately tied to the discourse of anti-communism. With State Department preference granted to those individuals

fleeing “Communist-totalitarian” regimes, the political refugee – a special immigrant status was granted to Jews fleeing the Soviet Union, anti-Castro Cuban middle class professionals and members of the Hungarian 1957 uprising (Nguyen M. T. 2005, p. 301). Successive administrations categorized dissidents and arrivals from communist regimes as freedom fighters, while refugees from other countries were often denied asylum because they did not advance a U.S. anti-communist agenda. The continuing arrival of the Vietnamese refugees contributed to the continuing importance of home country politics – predominantly, anti-communism – in existing Vietnamese American diaspora<sup>5</sup> communities.

Of the political forces that have shaped Vietnamese Americans, none has been as virulent, omnipresent and empowering as anti-communism. In fact, anti-communism has dominated the politics of the community (Ha 2002, p. 35). Burning with grief over the loss of their country, many first-wave refugees believed that Communists would soon be overthrown and that they would return to Vietnam within a few months. As those months became years, and those years turned into decades, the pain of the initial loss decreased but did not disappear. To make matters worse, in the first few years following the mass exodus of the 1975 refugees, official regard by the Hanoi leadership for the refugee was one of vituperation and portrayal as the very dregs of society.

In the first post-Vietnam War years, the newly unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) said little officially about refugees, shunting off enquiries with the assertion that no problem existed (Pike 1999, p. 36). By 1979, however, that posture could no longer be sustained.

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<sup>5</sup> As an analytic category and a social imaginary, the concept of diaspora is understood as a spatially and temporally sprawling formation, the transnational condition of people dispersed from a homeland throughout the world and linked through diverse locations. (Nguyen, M. T. 2005) The recuperation of the nation or recovery of the homeland through the cultural and political productions of the diaspora means that national subjects are often formed in transnationality.

The official Hanoi position saw the Vietnamese refugee as one of two personality types: first was the credulous fool who was “tricked and seduced by the U.S. imperialists and Beijing reactionaries” (Pike 1999, p. 37). Second was the “social negative” of which there were two types: the worthless lay-about not willing to work for a living and the “social déclassé”, former middle class or upper class Vietnamese whose philosophic and political views were so contrary to the changed order that there simply was no room for them in the new society (Pike 1999, p. 37). The term employed for these two groups was “common criminal and incorrigible capitalist” (Pike 1999, p. 38). Both groups were seen as a threat to Vietnam’s security.

All this changed with the advent of the *doi moi* in 1986. Vietnam’s free market reforms gave Vietnamese Americans their first opportunity to reconnect with their home country. This began with short visits and the continued transfer of remittances to relatives. After the U.S. lifted its economic embargo in 1994, Vietnam launched its campaign to attract overseas Vietnamese tourists and investors (Valverde 2002, p. 8). Ever since, the Vietnamese Communist Party and State has affirmed that overseas Vietnamese are an inseparable part of the Vietnamese nation (Williams 1992). With increasing intensity and openness, Hanoi now encourages refugees to return home. This changing attitude of the Vietnamese government regarding their overseas population is most interesting: those who left after 1975 were once labeled *My Nguoy* (American puppets) and now are referred to by names like *Kieu Bao* (people coming from the same embryonic sack or womb) (Valverde 2002, p. 51). Thus, only in recent years have the communists, desperate for international economic assistance, loosened their control, but that’s too little, too late for most refugees (Moxley 2003).

In the meantime, the refugees have participated in the collective building of Little Saigons around the country, which came to represent safe haven and the symbolic resurrection of

their beloved country. Underlying the naming of Little Saigon was the assumption that everyone in the community was a Vietnamese-in-exile. More importantly, they were exiles because they feared, hated and had been persecuted by the Communists (Ha 2002, p. 35).

The use of the term “refugee” by Vietnamese Americans to describe themselves has been strategic and specific in its invocation of forced migration as alienation and loss. Within diaspora narratives, refugee-ness is more than a legal category. The Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States through widely differing historical circumstances, including the 1975 evacuation of many Saigon elites, the waves of boat people and through Orderly Departure Programs. Today, although Vietnamese refugees in the United States have for the most part attained permanent residency or citizenship, the cessation of legal refugee status does not preclude (even partial) identification with the coerced homelessness of a refugee imaginary (Nguyen, M. T. 2005, p. 20). Here refugee as an identity category is not just a legal category of migration; designating and regulating access to resources and rights of citizenship, but also signifies flexible and partial belonging to the nation-state (Nguyen, M. T. 2005, p. 21).

On official diaspora holidays, like Vietnamese Armed Forces Day, and during commemorative events, double-sided paper flags of the United States and the former South Vietnamese republic as well as commemorative transnational-shirts reiterating refugee thanks and recreating national pride hang from steel poles and striped awnings in Little Saigon, California. Side by side, these fluttering banners proclaim the ostensible solidarity of Vietnamese-Americans, their dual loyalty to two countries, and their commitment to *chống Cộng* (anti-Communism) (Ha 2002). Similarly, the regular attendance and honoring of former South Vietnamese officers and the flags displayed at full mast at other Vietnamese community functions bespeak a nostalgic desire for an impenetrable space. Speaking to a local Los Angeles

paper, city council member Tony Lam reiterated, “Even though the international community no longer recognizes our country, in our hearts and minds, we recognize the flag” (Nguyen, M. T. 2005, p. 102). The national anthem, sung lustily not only at commemorative events but also on many public occasions, invokes not the existing Socialist Republic of Vietnam, but instead a besieged homeland imaginary.

Thus, refugee-ness, as the condition of becoming forcibly stateless and unmoored from native territory, is a definite political identification. Long after resettlement and naturalization, *refugee* persists as a salient form of Vietnamese subjectivity. Moreover, in a context in which claims to citizenship and national belonging are paramount, political visibility is a necessarily performative act. Through this constitutive role of representation in the social and cultural formation of refugee-ness, Vietnamese Americans come to live their identities as transnational subjects.

Second to a refugee identity, anti-communism is the next common denominator of unity and part of the rhetoric of Vietnamese-American cultural identity and political denunciations. It is a force that can be galvanized to create cohesion. An exilic narrative, privileging anti-communism as a unifying political signifier for the Vietnamese Americans, is sometimes called upon by diaspora writers and activists to represent a displaced collectivity (Nguyen M. T. 2005). Drawn together by their universal opposition to the Communists, for example, the Vietnamese-Americans in the first years of their naturalization voted, for the most part, as Republicans and contributed thousands of dollars to organizations planning for an “armed liberation” of Vietnam (Ha 2002, p. 35).

A large number of Vietnamese Americans continue to have a strong disdain for the current communist government in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese refugees left Vietnam for fear of

persecution under a communist regime. They blame the loss of their country to the communists in the North and communist sympathizers in the South (Valverde 1994, p. 105). This hatred often manifests itself in the form of dogmatic, anti-communist actions. A self-appointed exile government based in Little Saigon, California regularly issues official condemnations of the Vietnamese socialist state (Nguyen, M. T. 2005). Moreover, until recently, anything short of complete rejection of communism and leftist thought was intolerable in the Vietnamese American communities. Anyone who even appeared to be sympathetic to the current government of Vietnam was branded a traitor and a Communist. Business and cultural exchanges, including the export of goods and media, and the international travel of performers, artists and writers from Vietnam to the United States, have all been targets of such pressures (Nguyen, M. T. 2005).

When the United States opened diplomatic channels with Vietnam and planned to lift its twenty-year old trade embargo, the Vietnamese community was torn on the U.S. government's plans to normalize trade relations. As Ha (2002, p. 38) writes, "politically liberated individuals welcomed the development as an opportunity for economic growth, easier travel to Vietnam, facilitated communication with relatives, and perhaps increased political freedom for those in Vietnam through better access to education and material resources. Others, however, took a more hardline conservative stance, believing that Vietnamese-American visits to Vietnam could be used as propaganda by the Communists and could destroy their dream of returning to a free Vietnam." Moreover, those who opposed the normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam believed that the U.S. establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam fixed the mantle of legitimacy, an acceptance of Hanoi status quo (Pike 1999, p. 54). The U.S. embargo on Vietnam was something of a buffer between Hanoi and the refugees. When the embargo was dropped in February 1994, they claimed that, "We freedom fighters will now put on business suits and go to

Vietnam to make business deals, but our real goal will be to carry the message of freedom” (Pike 1999, p. 46).

At the same time, however, anti-communism has been a destructive force. Sometimes this dogmatism leads to violence and death; even without acts of violence, the community members are not completely free to express political dissent (Farragher 1990). In the 1980s, a vigilante group calling themselves the Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate the Communists and Restore the Nation (VOECRN) claimed responsibility for a string of arsonists and summary executions of purported Communist propagandists (Farragher 1990). Even though the wave of political violence eventually peaked in the late 1980s and then subsided, political protests emerged as a new form of political activity condemning Communism in the 1990s (Ha 2002). The most publicized occurrence was the protests held against Dr. Co Pham, president of the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce in Orange County, because he had hosted two ranking members of the Vietnamese Communist Party at his home, which was viewed as a traitorous fraternization with the enemy at worst (Christensen 1993). These incidents showed that voicing any kind of deviant opinion, or one vaguely critical of the émigré community, could be construed as pro-Communist. The compelling effect of the anti-communist political project thus operates consistently as accusation of those who have strayed from the ideal refugee figure produced by the memory of homeland and consorted with the socialist republic to disseminate communist propaganda (Nguyen, M. T. 2005).

Mimi Thi Nguyen (2005) writes about a commemorative event in Camp Pendleton, San Diego on June 24, 1995, “Operation Homecoming: A 20 Year Commemoration of the Vietnamese Refugee Camps” as a particular mode of public recovery and a strategic redemptive act. Along with the photographs of U.S. marines standing over huddled groups of refugees on the

decks of aircraft carriers, she finds a “black and white photograph of five or seven dead Vietnamese, fallen at angles on a palm-lined, cobbled street” (Nguyen, M. T. 2005, p. 85). A bulky, off-duty marine tell her the dead are Viet Cong. Nguyen interprets the commemorative event as producing “a model of the disciplined and thus grateful Vietnamese refugee figure distinguished from the ‘properly’ murdered Vietnamese by a political abstraction, the apparent specter of communism” (Nguyen, M. T. 2005). These performed affiliations between U.S. liberal ideology and Vietnamese refugees as potential model citizens have helped in the retention of an anti-communist South Vietnamese nationalism as a political identity.

According to Nguyen (2005), the commemorative production of the Vietnamese subject as still “refugee” is also strategic – the moral trajectory implied by refugee status and exile mandates a continued incorporation of loss and a particular political agenda by the subject. Following Donald Pease (1993)<sup>6</sup>, this agenda depends on a dual capacity: to identify dissension as a threat to South Vietnam and to characterize such dissension as the work of the communist other. The agenda can also take a violent turn as some men pursue coercive means to secure the nation – since 1981, there have been more than a dozen politically motivated book burnings, arsons, assaults and murders, targeting Vietnamese who support the socialist government, advocate diplomatic and economic relations, or simply reported on current social and political conditions without extreme bias. At the same time, a much darker logic of a politics of return has been actualized in the paramilitary organizing that some male South Vietnamese patriots have undertaken to recover homeland. For instance, former South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky once operated training sessions in U.S. national parks, asserting, “Give me the guns and

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<sup>6</sup> Pease (1993) argues that the cold war’s authority as a consensus formation depended on a dual capacity: to identify internal dissension as a threat to the national security and to re-characterize such dissension as the work of the national other.



we'll kick the communists out" (Nguyen, M. T. 2005, p. 105). The self-appointed Government of Free Vietnam, an exile organization headquartered in Southern California and presided over by a former civil engineer, claims to harbor secret bases along Vietnam's border with Cambodia and Laos where rebel fighters are training (Nguyen, M. T. 2005). Others, inspired by tales of dishonored fathers and abject nationalisms, have also taken guerilla measures to re-imagine active citizenship on the part of the nation-in-exile. On April 4, 1991, four armed Vietnamese youth entered a Good Guys electronic store in Sacramento, California and held 41 patrons hostage. In negotiations with the Sacramento County's Sheriff's Department, the young men demanded passage out of the country to Southeast Asia where they sought to defeat once and for all the communists who had stolen so much from their fathers (Smith and Tarallo 1995).

Five years after diplomatic ties between the United States and Vietnam were re-established, massive anti-communist demonstrations and political rallying took place over the course of two and a half months when store owner Truong Van Tran displayed a Socialist Republic of Vietnam's flag along with a portrait of Ho Chi Minh in his HiTek TV and Video store in Little Saigon, California. Anti-communist sentiment was so pervasive in Little Saigon that Truong Tran's actions actually served to galvanize the community and to create an unprecedented degree of unity. Not only were the protests attended and supported by Vietnamese from diverse social groupings, but one of the defining moments of the protests occurred when competing leaders of the Vietnamese community of Southern California shook hands (Ha 2002).

In an editorial published in the *Viet Economic Daily News (Việt Báo Kinh Tế)* on February 1, 1999, Khai Trần, a journalist articulated the deep and multi-faceted concerns of the Vietnamese Americans. Expressing the protestors' looming paranoia about another Communist takeover, he wrote, "We must remain law-abiding and calm because the Ha Noi regime is always

trying to infiltrate America, one way or another.... What if the Vietnamese government decided to buy several stores along Bolsa Avenue and hung red flags there?" (Trần 1999) Having lost the original Saigon, many Vietnamese feared that Communist Vietnam was monitoring them closely and would try to take over, or at least infiltrate their new Saigon (Ha 2002). Their fears were not completely unfounded. During the protests, the store owner Truong Tran received telephone calls from the Vietnamese Consulate in San Francisco offering him assistance (Ha 2002). The government of Vietnam was indeed paying attention to events in Little Saigon.

Former political prisoners especially oppose the Vietnamese Communist Party on grounds that it gives itself the right to leadership of the people without any justifications for which this Party could claim itself such rights. They claim that "to promote economic renovation in the direction of socialism, the Communist Party executes repressive measures to decimate the Vietnamese people's human and civil rights and repress peaceful evolution...In achieving this purpose, it exterminates any opposition that may be detrimental to its monopoly of power and leadership" (Nguyen, T. V. et al. 1995, p. 413). They report that the Vietnamese Communist Party has strengthened its political powers by restricting the basic rights of the human person and tightening religious freedom. Scores of Buddhist priests and believers, spiritual leaders of other religions, writers, artists and intellectuals voicing political viewpoints other than those of the Vietnamese Communist Party have been imprisoned or detained under house arrest for their religious practices and preaching (Nguyen, T. V. et al. 1995).

For the first decade after the refugees' arrival, the will to conform and to force others to conform to a political and ideological imperative of anti-communism generated a subterranean history of anti-communist Vietnamese death squads, paramilitary training for armed return to Vietnam, organized boycotts brought to bear upon both public and private transactions. As the

violation of civil and human rights of citizens has continued in Vietnam, even today, thirty-five years after the fall of Saigon, Little Saigon is a hotbed of activism, offering everything from backyard candlelight vigils to large-scale protests, from peaceful hunger strikes to violently anti-communist floats in the annual Têt parade. Representations of the suffering, pain and loss due to the Communist overthrow of Saigon are constantly reproduced through the media, successfully keeping a 35 year old experience fresh in the minds of the refugees (Hamatake 2006). Older refugees understandably have a difficult time forgetting the past, for they committed their younger years to fighting in the war; some spent the next phase of their life in prisons known as the “re-education camps”, only to be relocated to another country where they face social, economic and political displacement (Võ 2003). Their peers have moved on with their lives, their wives have become independent, their children disrespectful and U.S. society does not honor their sacrifices (Võ 2003). Therefore, the induced recollections of sorrow and loss still play an important role in the lives of older refugees; many of the first-generation refugees find a blurry of comfort-sadness in these reproductions of their homeland.

Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, the Communist rule has tried to convince international public opinion, notably the United States and the Vietnamese communities overseas of its “open door” and national reconciliation policies (Nguyen, T. V. et al. 1995). Their efforts, however, have come to no avail in the Vietnamese communities overseas. On the political front, anti-communist passion suggests that exilic political sentiments are still strong. This will persist as long as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam exists, but it will undoubtedly lose its historical fervor. Like other immigrant groups before them, the Vietnamese refugees retain feelings of loyalty to their country of birth, but realize that a gulf of thirty five years now separates them from Vietnam. The younger generation of Vietnamese-Americans sometimes perceives the

virulent anti-communism of the community as a divisive force with destructive potential. They view events like the HiTek protest as red-baiting (branding people as Communists) and intolerance towards nonconformists. They could perhaps be successful at channeling their community's anti-communist zeal towards the advocacy of humanitarian, political and economic progress for the people of Vietnam. It is the younger generation that will determine the future path of the Vietnamese American community.

A note on Viet Kieu – Viet Kieu translated means overseas Vietnamese or Vietnamese nationals living abroad. Even though this term has been adopted within media and academic circles and used openly in Vietnam, it is not wholly accepted by the overseas Vietnamese population. Some Vietnamese Americans disagree with its usage because it has political negative connotations (a term created by the communist government) and stereotypes (referring to the working class population of Orange County) as a word passed along by Hanoi to refer to its overseas population (Valverde 2002). It also implies that the overseas Vietnamese community is peripheral to Vietnam as a nation and no longer has a direct legitimate link or claims to Vietnam (Valverde 2002).

In an interview with Caroline Valverde, a member of an anti-communist group (name withheld) asserted, "Using the word *Viet Kieu* means you accept the Hanoi regime. We (Vietnamese overseas) are refugees even if you came over as an immigrant. If you refuse communist citizenship, you are not a *Viet Kieu*...I consider myself Vietnamese and do not accept the current regime" (Valverde 2002, p. 84). In this dissertation, I use the term Vietnamese American instead, except where the term Viet Kieu appears in a direct quotation/citation.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Question*

The primary objective of this research is to determine whether there are explanatory factors that facilitate transnationalism for Vietnamese refugees, and identify the most relevant ones. The overall hypothesis of this study is that there are variables that, when coupled, can be accurate predictors in determining the level of transnational activism undertaken by Vietnamese refugees living in California. These factors condition the likelihood that Vietnamese refugees will have the motivation and capacity to engage in transnational political activism. I focus on demographic, contextual and economic characteristics of Vietnamese Americans that may impact the possibilities of political transnationalism among this refugee population.

### *Research Design*

The research for this study was carried out in two stages. All respondents in Phase 1 of the research participated in interviews and those in Phase II completed a survey questionnaire. The data retrieved in this study was subject to mixed methodology analysis. Qualitative methodology was applied to the interview data collected during the first phase and the survey data collected in the second phase was addressed through quantitative methodology.

In Phase I, qualitative interviews were conducted among Vietnamese Americans of local standing in the community, who were able to give insight on the state of political transnationalism among this group of refugees and migrants. Participants in this phase responded to open-ended interviews with standardized questions. The purpose of the interviews was two-fold: first, to help determine which types of transnational political activity are most frequently undertaken by Vietnamese Americans. The second aim was to explore all relevant and

potentially significant explanatory variables that account for variation in the level of transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans.

Qualitative analysis that followed the completion of the interviews in the first phase informed and benefited the ensuing survey in my quantitative research (Phase II) in the following ways. In the first place, analysis of the interview records helped operationalize my dependent variable, political transnationalism. By identifying the types of transnational political activities (protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums) most frequently undertaken by Vietnamese Americans, I was able to create three dependent variables, *Protests*, *Petitions* and *Internet Forums*, and include appropriate questions in the survey to record their level of occurrence. Finally, the preceding interviews also helped me determine which independent variables to finally include in the survey to be recorded and utilized in the quantitative analysis. Ordinal regression analysis was then used to investigate the effect of explanatory demographic, incorporation and resource variables on the level of political transnationalism and to explain variation in transnational political activities among Vietnamese Americans.

### *Sampling strategy*

The sample used for this research was a convenience sampling consisting of both Vietnamese refugees who engage in political transnationalism and those who do not undertake transnational activities. One danger in the field of transnationalism is that empirical studies invariably sample on the dependent variables, focusing on those who take part in the activities of interest, to the exclusion of those who do not participate (Guarnizo et al. 2003, p. 1213). In my study, interview participants were drawn from among those Vietnamese refugees who do participate in transnational political activism since the purpose of the qualitative study was to

explore how to operationalize political transnationalism as a dependent variable and conceptualize what explanatory factors are found to be significant (by asking questions to determine how the explanatory factors stimulated / hindered their level of transnationalism). For the quantitative survey, however, I included respondents in my sample who do not engage in political transnationalism as well (by ensuring a random enough sample). Those who do participate in political transnationalism selected “Sometimes” or “Often” on the dependent variable questions in the survey, while those Vietnamese Americans who do not engage in transnational activities selected “Never” on the dependent variable questions in the survey.

Qualitative: For the interviews in Phase I of my research, I chose the respondents based on my knowledge of the community and by word of mouth. The interviews I conducted were with community leaders and prominent members who actively participated in political activities and had considerable influence in the Vietnamese community in Orange County. They included social service workers at mutual assistance associations (MAAs), educators, journalists and bloggers.

Quantitative: For the surveys in Phase II of my research, a variety of sampling strategies were considered in view of the criteria restrictions, such as transportation, availability of research sites and accessibility of the desired population. The primary obstacle in identifying the Orange County Vietnamese refugee population is the absence of a complete, reliable and current population list. Most community-based organizations operate independently of state-run institutions and consist primarily of job counseling, placement, housing, senior services and financial assistance programs for refugees and their families. Although current and past participation at the centers is generally thought to be quite high, the use of these files as a

population list would systematically under-sample refugees who do not use the services of the centers.

A Vietnamese community center (Little Saigon Economic, Cultural, & Social Service Center) in Little Saigon maintains active files on Vietnamese refugees, who are members and utilize the services of the center on a weekly/monthly basis for meetings or other personal business. Evidence within these files shows that this population is fairly well represented throughout the Orange County area. Therefore, the basic demographic profile of the Vietnamese refugee population at the center was assumed to reflect the profile of the general population of Vietnamese refugees in Orange County, California. Hence, I chose this center to carry out my surveys. In addition, weekly meetings held for Vietnamese community members at the Vietnamese Baptist church and American Vietnamese Fellowship provided the sample. The convenient sampling was obtained by asking Vietnamese Americans who were present at these locations on any given day to fill out the surveys. The process assumed that the Vietnamese refugees came to the community center and churches voluntarily, where they were randomly chosen to participate in the research.

#### *Description of Research Instrument Used*

Interacting with the Vietnamese refugee population through taped interview sessions was chosen in the qualitative study. To understand the true perceptions of the population being researched, especially since the population is foreign born, different techniques must be used. Qualitative research is ideally suited for this study as it provides a “systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context”. (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman 1993, p. 99)



I conducted 27 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Of these, 19 interviews were conducted face-to-face, 1 was conducted over the telephone and 7 interviews were conducted over a series of e-mails. The personal and phone interviews varied in length, ranging from half an hour to approximately 60 minutes and were usually set up by telephone or e-mail at a time and location convenient to the respondent. For face-to-face meetings, I met with the respondents in different locations – cafes, universities, churches, public gatherings and offices; most were audio-taped. Each session followed a schedule but flexible formatting was employed. The participants were told about the proposed research project and the consent form reviewed. The body of the interview then proceeded with open-ended questions that encouraged participants to talk freely about their own experiences as refugees and describe their transnational political links with Vietnam.

For those interviews conducted in person or over the phone, I read out the questions from the interview questionnaire and after giving the respondent adequate time to articulate his/her answer either asked additional follow-up questions or moved on to the next set of questions, upon gauging the willingness or reluctance of the participant in delving deeper into a particular topic. In keeping with IRB protocol, I only asked a question once and did not insist again when the respondent indicated that they were uncomfortable sharing a personal detail (like income) or answering a politically sensitive question (example, whether they attended the HiTek protest).

For the interviewees who preferred to have the interview conducted over e-mail, I sent them a copy of the interview questionnaire (attached at the end as Appendix A) over e-mail and they typed in answers below individual questions at their convenience. While this method of interview lacked the advantages of personal interaction, which afforded me the opportunity to read into respondents' silences or immediately ask follow-up questions not in the questionnaire,

it had the benefit of allowing participants to think over their response and not trying to fit in all questions within a certain time-frame. Moreover, most e-mail interview transcripts were finalized after considerable going back-and-forth to clarify points or, in some cases, ask additional questions. Again, following IRB protocol, respondents were only e-mailed the questionnaire once and not pestered with repeated requests for replies, unless I was specifically asked to send remainder e-mails.

The identities of the interviewees have been kept anonymous except in cases where they explicitly allowed me to use their real names. The formal, personal interviews were tape-recorded or typed into my laptop computer (in one case, the respondent refused to be audio-recorded). For the telephonic interviews, I usually took some notes by hand or mentally remembered the ideas of the conversation and wrote up my notes later that day. In the case of e-mail interviews, I received respondents' replies to specific items in the questionnaire by reply e-mails and was often encouraged to write back in order to clarify points or make sure we were on the same page.

It can be difficult to describe the sensitivity and volatility of the Vietnamese American community with regard to any transnational political connections with Vietnam. The Vietnamese government is highly suspicious of any political activities or conspiracies against the administration and this makes Vietnamese Americans reluctant to openly talk about any transnational political activities they might be conducting. Many Vietnamese Americans frequently go back to visit Vietnam and some even cherish dreams of returning to live there some day. As a result, they fear any word of their anti-communist activities in the United States reaching the ears of authorities in Hanoi.

Vietnamese Americans are also highly suspicious of their own people, fearing the presence of spies within their community. I believe my position as an outsider and my looking different allowed them to speak on matters they dare not talk about if I were seen as Vietnamese American, given the self- or externally imposed censorship on such matters. I attempted to empathize with the interviewees and offered a sympathetic ear for many to express their feelings, ideas or grievances. Lastly, as a woman researcher of Indian origin, I believe that I was considered as less of a political threat than if I were a middle-aged man of Vietnamese origin, who could easily be perceived as a communist sympathizer. Moreover, the presence of the staff at the churches and community center was beneficial in minimizing bias as a result of my position as a cultural outsider.

### *Operationalization of variables*

#### *Dependent variable: Political transnationalism*

The political activities that currently make up the repertoire of transnational political activities stimulated by Vietnamese refugees are the focus of my research. Horst (2006) reminds us that the political role of the refugee diaspora should not be underestimated – the financial weight of refugees in diaspora and their lobbying power largely accounts for their political importance in the home country, besides the fact that many of those in exile belong to the elite and thus historically have played a political role. Political transnationalism is a significant phenomenon to study to help us understand the ways in which the political activities of Vietnamese refugees in the host state are connected to the dynamics of domestic political change in Vietnam.

In the context of domestic political participation, Verba and Nie (1973, p. 2) employ the following definition: “Political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the action they take”. In this study, I apply such a conceptualization of domestic political participation in the transnational context.

Conventionally, transnational political participation is measured by electoral indicators. Transnational electoral participation includes membership in a political party in the country of origin, monetary contributions to these parties, and active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin. (Guarnizo et al. 2003) However, migrants and refugees also seek to be represented and participate in decision making through political means other than elections. (Guarnizo et al. 2003) Hence, for the purposes of this dissertation, under the concept of transnational political participation, I include non-electoral activities aimed at influencing conditions in the home country. Such transnational non-electoral political activities may involve sending political remittances<sup>7</sup> for civic projects in the community of origin, membership in charity organizations sponsoring projects in the hometown, participating in campaigns or petitions, and organizing in the host country around political/human rights issues concerning their home country.

Bearing this broad definition of political transnationalism, I included open-ended questions in the interview questionnaire to determine what kind of electoral or non-electoral transnational political practices are most popular among Vietnamese Americans. Following my archival research and qualitative analysis of the interview data in Phase I, I was able to narrow

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<sup>7</sup> “Political remittances” here signifies money that is sent to a politically active local NGO or grass-roots organization in the home country as part of their fund-raising or contributions to a political party as opposed to economic remittances sent to family members or toward a business venture.

down the range of cross-border political activities to the three most frequently engaged in activities among Vietnamese Americans – protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums. The following questions in the survey in Phase II then recorded political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans:

- “Do you take part in protests or demonstrations in Little Saigon?”,
- “Do you write to government officials or sign petitions in support of a Vietnamese person or issue?”, and
- “Do you participate in Internet discussion groups on issues important to Vietnam and Vietnamese people?”

The three dependent variables *Protests*, *Petitions* and *Internet Forums* are categorical variables, each measured as “Never”, “Sometimes” and “Often”.

### *Independent variables*

As detailed in my theory chapter, existing literature on empirical studies of transnational activities among diasporas informs my research and explains the reasons for choosing my variables in this study. The demographic characteristics regarded in this dissertation are age and gender of the refugee, level of education. These are the standard demographic variables that control for background factors. To these, I add a measure for whether the respondent has earned a college degree in Vietnam or in the United States or both. To these, I also include controls for incorporation variables: English proficiency and the length of time residing in the United States imply incorporation in the host country. Finally, employment status and income level of the respondents represent resource dependent variables that can potentially affect level of political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees.

The following questions in the survey recorded demographic, incorporation and resource dependent variables.

*Demographic variables:* Respondents were asked, “Which age group do you belong to?” to measure the independent variable *Age*, coded as 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64 and 65+ years. *Gender* was recorded and coded as Male=1, Female=2. *Education* was measured in the survey as high school or less, some college, college degree and graduate education/degree. Place of *college degree* received was considered separately – this was measured in the survey as No degree, Vietnam, U.S. and both.

*Incorporation variables:* Respondents were asked “In which time period did you arrive in the United States?” to measure the independent variable *Arrival in U.S.*, coded as pre-1975, 1975-84, 1985-95 and post-1995. To assess the language skills of the Vietnamese refugees, they were asked to rate their proficiency in English. *English proficiency* was measured on the Likert-scale as Poor, Fair, Good and Excellent.

*Resource variables:* The last two variables regarded in the questionnaire were employment status and income. These point to refugees’ and immigrants’ economic incorporation and imply their gradually acquiring control over increasingly more resources. Respondents’ *employment status* was measured as employed, temporarily unemployed and unemployed. Respondents’ *income* was measured as <\$25,000, \$25-40,000, \$40-60,000, \$60-75,000 and >\$75,000.

### *Missing values*

There were only two variables with one missing value each. The variable *Arrival in U.S.* had a missing value, which was assigned the modal value of 1985-95 and the variable *income* also had a missing value, which was assigned the modal value of <\$25,000. There were no

missing values in any of the dependent or other independent variables since this is a relatively small dataset.

### *Data analysis*

All interview data was read and analyzed after the qualitative phase, with special attention given to confirming possible explanatory factors to be included in the survey. In the quantitative analysis, the process of coding each question and the development of a classification system was established for the questionnaire. Answers obtained other than those specifically requested on the survey questionnaire were not incorporated into the research. However, for the qualitative portion, all demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors that were mentioned by respondents as important to their transnational activism were considered as such.

The survey data are categorical in nature; they are discrete in character from one category to another, it was assumed that there is no previous relationship between the categories. The descriptive statistics for all dependent as well as independent variables were analyzed and summarized with results presented in tables and charts. The correlation of political transnationalism (the three dependent variables) to each of the independent variables was then analyzed using ordinal regression analysis and presented in tabular form, e.g. how political transnationalism relates to level of education or how the absence of transnational activism relates to gender. This was followed by a detailed analysis of the results obtained from regression analysis.

### *Scope*

The range of the results for this study is relatively narrow, given the sample was drawn from a specific county in southern California rather than a statewide or nationwide level. Keeping this in mind, the following limitations were taken into account:

1. Only Vietnamese refugees living in the Orange County area are included in this study.

However, that does not mean that these findings are not applicable to other populations of Vietnamese refugees.

2. Only refugees from the community-based organizations and church meetings were used to gather survey data, thereby limiting this study to those refugees who came to these centers.

In the following chapter, I provide a historical context for my research and trace the journey of the Vietnamese refugees from the fall of Saigon to their settlement in Orange County in southern California. I also give a brief overview of the age, educational and employment profile of the Vietnamese as they arrived as refugees and also as they slowly adjusted to life in the U.S., making steady progress towards economic self-sufficiency and successfully integrating with the host society.



## Chapter 4

### **Flight into Exile: The Fall of Saigon and Refugee Displacement**

In this chapter, I start with a brief overview of the historical causes of the Vietnamese refugee exodus to the United States, followed by a detailed look into the three stages or waves of Vietnamese refugee arrivals in the U.S. Understanding the different circumstances of the three waves as well as subtle differences in the characteristics of the refugees in each wave can help us appreciate the demographic diversity of the population that immigrated and its possible impact on their transnational activism. This understanding is further aided in this chapter by outlining the educational and occupational profile of the Vietnamese refugees when they first arrived in the U.S. and then tracing their educational and economic progress as they settled all over the country and eventually relocated to California. Charting their economic and cultural adjustment over the decades gives us the perspective to then examine how the Vietnamese refugees used their economic success to mobilize their political passions and evolve from struggling refugees to active transnationals.

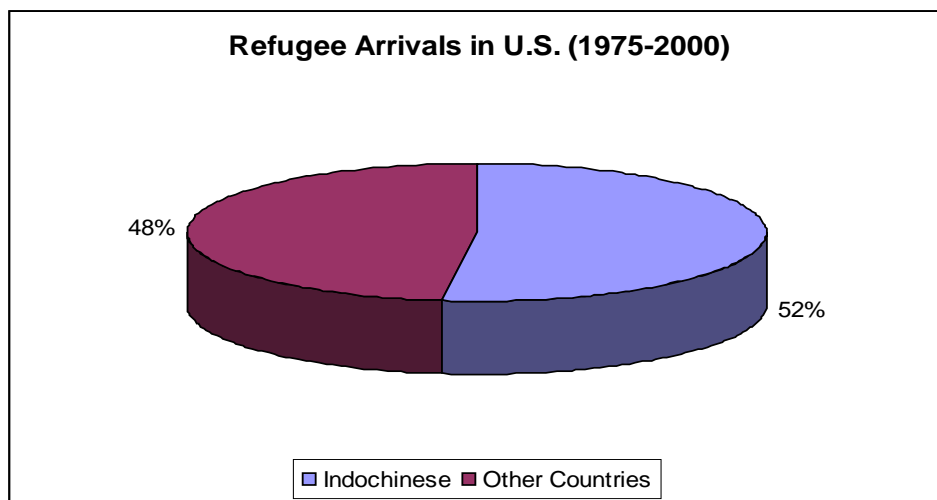
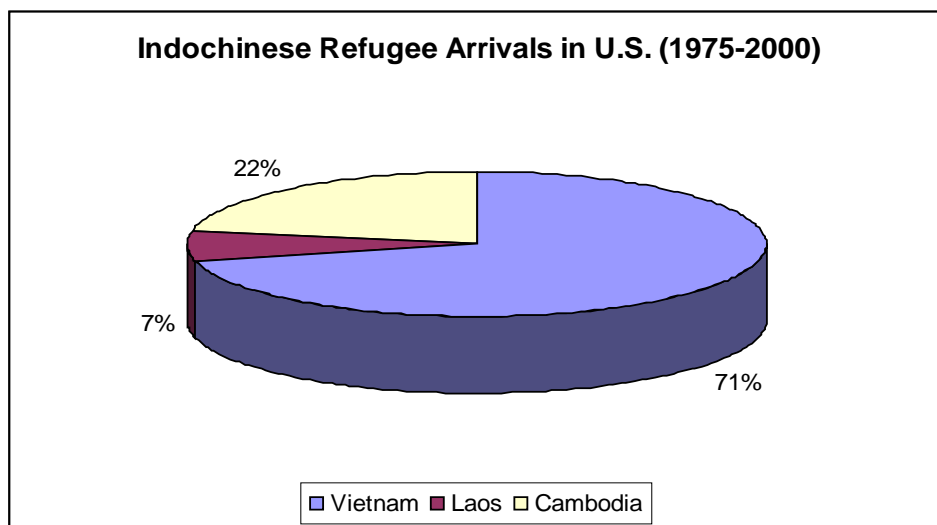
#### *Historical Context*

The Vietnamese exodus has its historical background as far back as Vietnam's first military conflict with France, which entered central Vietnam in 1858 with plans of colonizing the country. Vietnam remained under French occupation until 1945 when, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietminh, a coalition of Vietnamese nationalists created and dominated by the Vietnamese Communist Party, proclaimed independence and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was born (Nguyen, D. Q. 1994).

After unsuccessful attempts at negotiation between the French and the Vietminh, the first Indochina War broke out in 1946 and lasted for eight years (Jian 1993). At the Geneva Conference shortly thereafter, the French and the Vietminh signed an agreement that divided Vietnam in half (Jian 1993). Soon after, civil war erupted in the divided country in which the superpowers became increasingly involved. President Kennedy agreed to send military advisors to South Vietnam in 1965 followed by 549,000 troops over the next decade (Nguyen C. 1994, p. 3). As the war became extremely unpopular among the American public, in 1969, President Nixon began to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam. In the next few years, troop withdrawal was completed as the war became the solitary burden of the South. In April 1975, North Vietnamese troops pulled into Saigon and the Vietnam War officially ended with the fall of South Vietnam, opening the floodgates for the massive exodus of Vietnamese refugees to the United States.

#### *Vietnamese refugees – in numbers*

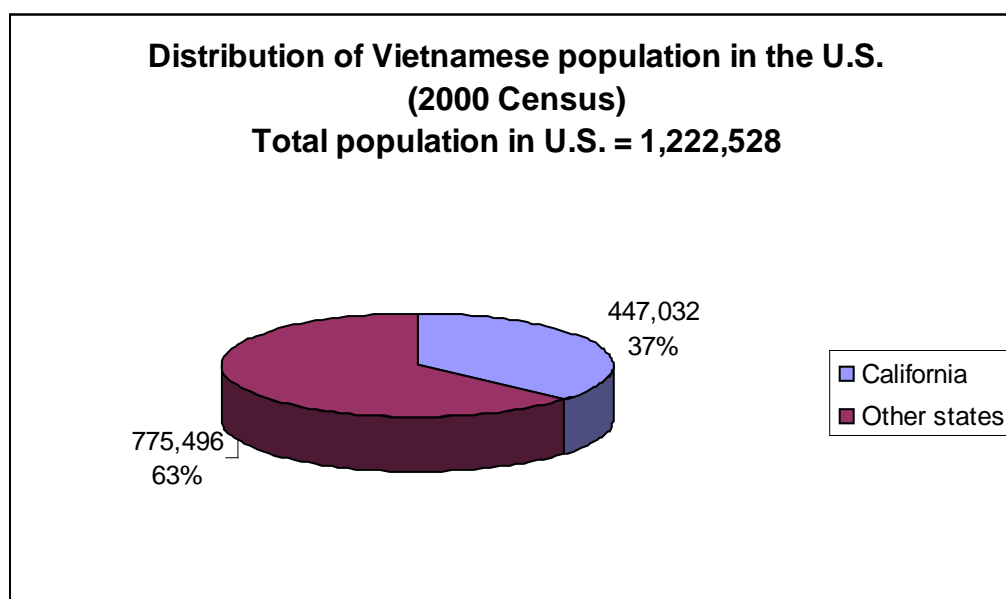
Indochinese refugees from the Southeast Asian countries of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam constitute the largest group of refugees ever to build new lives in the United States. Based on State Department figures for the period FY 1975 through FY 2000, about 52 percent of refugees arriving in the United States had fled from nations of Southeast Asia (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2007). Of these, the Vietnamese (71 percent) continue to be the majority refugee group (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2007). Figures 1 and 2 depict the number of Indochinese and Vietnamese refugees in the U.S., respectively.

**Figure 1.****Figure 2.**

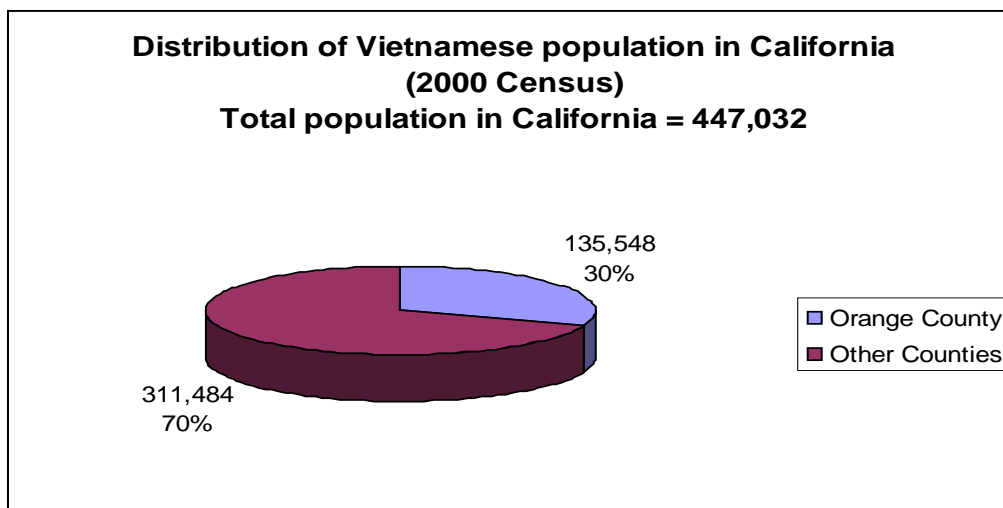
In total, since the fall of Saigon in 1975, approximately 995,000 Vietnamese refugees have immigrated to the U.S. (Nguyen, D. V. 2006, p. 123). They began to be resettled in the United States in 1975 and their numbers increased dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the influx of Vietnamese “boat people”, Amerasians and those arriving under the

Orderly Departure Program (ODP). The largest numbers of Vietnamese now live in Southern California, particularly in Orange County (SEARAC 2004). The U.S. Census Bureau in 2000 reported 1,222,528 Vietnamese living in the United States (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2000, p. 84). Of these 447,032 were in California with 135,548 in Orange County (1.3% of the state's population)<sup>8</sup>. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the distribution of the Vietnamese population in the U.S. and in California, respectively.

**Figure 3.**



<sup>8</sup> Estimates of the Vietnamese population in Orange County vary and are highly disputed by members of the community. For a brief overview of this dispute, see Eunice Cluck, "The Vietnamese Community in Orange County" (report prepared for United Way of Orange County, August 1994), Southeast Asian Archive, University of Irvine library, Irvine, California. The number used here, however comes from the 2000 Census Bureau (Profiles of the General Demographic Characteristics 2000: 2000 Census of Population and Housing, California, May 2001, U.S. Department of Commerce).

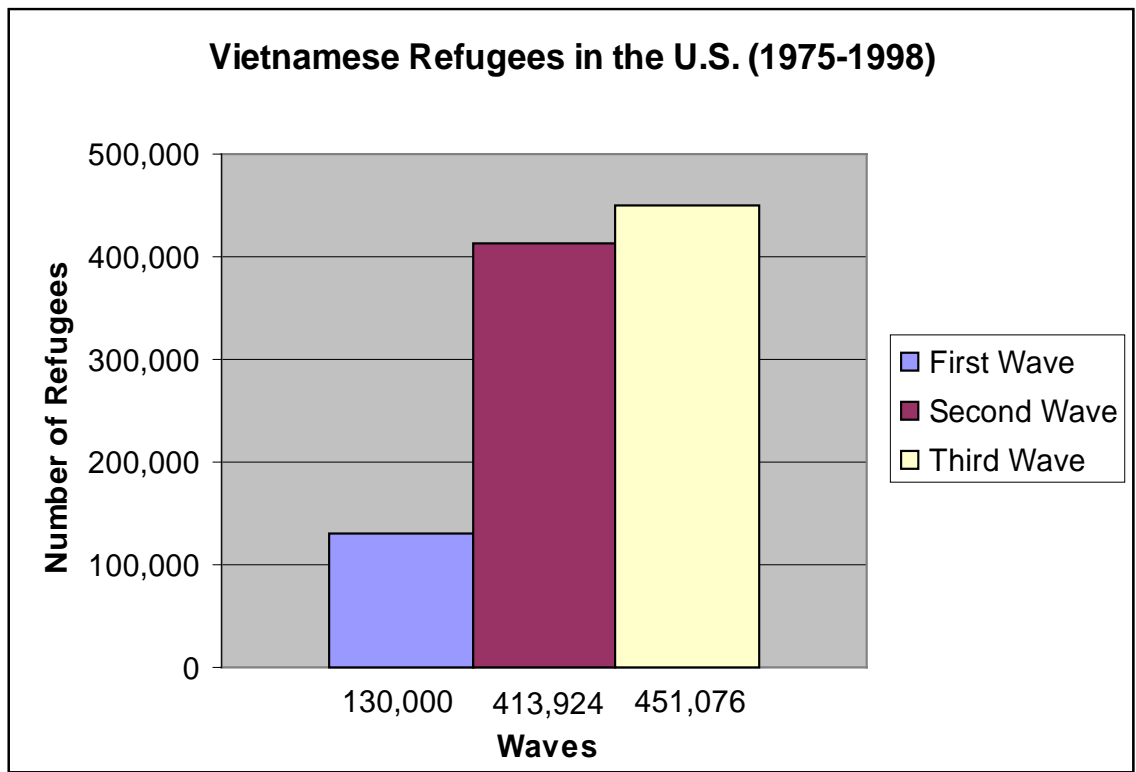
**Figure 4.**

Most Vietnamese refugees come from what was once the Republic of Vietnam, known as “South Vietnam”, which had its capital at Saigon. Their government, allied with the United States, collapsed under military pressure from communist North Vietnam in April of 1975. As Saigon fell to the communists, the Vietnamese arrived in the United States in three waves from 1975 to 1998. In the first wave (1975-77), 130,000 refugees were brought into the United States with the help of the U.S. government (Ha 2002, Zhou and Bankston III 2004). During the second wave (1978-88), 413,924 Vietnamese refugees arrived in the U.S., many of them by boat (Haines 1989, Ha 2002). Finally, in the third wave (1989-98), 451,076 Vietnamese refugees crossed over into the United States under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), Amerasian Program, Humanitarian Operation (HO), Public Interest Parole (PIP) and Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR) programs (Freeman 1995, Zhou and Bankston III 2004). Table 1 and Figure 5 below show the arrivals of Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. in the three waves.

**Table 1.**

<b>Vietnamese Refugees in the U.S. (1975-1998)</b>				
Years	1975-77	1978-88	1989-98	1975-98
First Wave	130,000			
Second Wave		413,924		
Third Wave			451,076	
Total				995,000

**Figure 5.**



### *Three Waves of Refugees*

*In what ways were the refugees in the 3 waves distinct?*

On April 30, 1975, the day Saigon fell, and in its immediate aftermath, thousands of Vietnamese fled with American soldiers and government employees. While some ten to fifteen thousand managed to escape in the ten days before the collapse of South Vietnam, another eighty-six thousand Vietnamese and Americans were brought out in the last few days of April; most of them air-evacuated (Freeman 1995). In the chaos of the last days of April, 1975, helicopters were used in the rescue of about 3,000 (Maclear 1981, p. 346). In those days and in the days following the fall of Saigon, another forty to sixty thousand Vietnamese made their way in small boats to the American Seventh Fleet or to Vietnamese navy ships in the South China Sea (Freeman 1995).

These individuals constituted the “first wave” refugees, individuals who were relatively well-prepared to live in the United States. This wave consisted of Vietnamese who spoke English well, were relatively well educated, had skills presumed marketable in the American economy and were, for the most part, urbanized and westernized (Kelly 1977). Many had been high-ranking officials of the South Vietnamese government, military leaders, provincial and district chiefs, and mayors. Others were persons who had worked closely with the United States as translators, intelligence experts and propagandists or were employed by American corporations in Vietnam.

On the other hand, the second and third wave refugees were persons who had little power in Vietnam and were not associated with the American government or with private agencies. Among the refugees were not only former enlisted rank and file members of the South Vietnamese army and navy, but also lower level Vietnamese government officials, frightened

fishermen and farmers, teachers and petty traders. They were not necessarily urban, had few skills that were usable in the United States, spoke little or no English, and were totally unacquainted with life outside their parishes or villages in Vietnam.

Moreover, the experience of those who came to America since 1989 i.e., third wave refugees, was not at all like that of the first wave refugees or the boat people of previous years. First wave refugees arrived at a time when the American and world economic situation was better and public sympathy for the refugees was widespread, especially following horrific media images of the toll the Vietnam War had taken on innocent civilians there. As a result, the refugee programs included three years of financial assistance, English instruction and job training (Freeman 1995). The later arrivals had different experiences and also found a different America. Those arriving in the third wave, especially, had already endured years of abuse and hardship in post-war Vietnam. Some were former reeducation camp prisoners who suffered years of starvation and mistreatment. Others spent years in New Economic Zones in Vietnam doing hard physical labor. In America, their skills rarely prepared them for work. Refugee assistance, English training and job training programs had been drastically cut. The newly arrived Vietnamese also faced rising anti-immigrant sentiment (Freeman 1995).

The reasons for these differences in the profiles of refugees in the three waves as well as the discrepancy in the welcome extended to them can be explained by taking a closer look at the circumstances surrounding the three waves of refugees and factors accounting for the prolonged flow of refugees from Vietnam for so many years even after the war ended, as described below.

### *First wave*



The rapid military collapse of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975 surprised the American government, who began a belated emergency lift to evacuate American citizens; mainly military and diplomatic personnel and their dependents, along with some at-risk Vietnamese: members of the South Vietnamese army and government, and those who had worked for the Americans. The rapid disintegration of the Vietnamese army; the panic that seized the population of South Vietnam, many of whom were already refugees either from North Vietnam or from the war; and American hesitancy in planning and executing the evacuation of Vietnamese civilians all affected the question of who would come to the U.S.

At the time of the fall of Saigon, there were a modest number of ex-military and government officials, students and professionals, Vietnamese who had worked for the U.S. during the war and their families who were part of an American-sponsored evacuation (Kelly 1986). As mentioned before, many had been high-ranking officials of the South Vietnamese government and military leaders. Others were persons who had worked closely with the United States in Vietnam as secretaries, chauffeurs, translators, intelligence experts, or propagandists. Some were employed by American corporations like Chase Manhattan Bank and TWA; still others were married to Americans or related to persons married to Americans (Kelly 1977). The bulk of these refugees fled due to widespread fears that any association with the collapsing Saigon regime or with the American effort in southern Vietnam held the risk of subsequent discrimination or punishment (Osborne 1980).

Prior to the fall of Saigon in 1975, only a small number of Vietnamese had immigrated to the United States. Unlike the other Asian groups already in America, the 1975 wave of Vietnamese refugees did not choose to come here (Nguyen C. 1994). In fact, they had no decision to make, for they were driven out by the powerful events surrounding them. The city

shuddered under relentless missile bombardments; homes and buildings were burning everywhere. At the street level, panic gripped the people. “On those last days of April,” remembered a refugee, “there was a lot of gunfire and bombing around the capital. People were running on chaotic streets. We got scared...” (Takaki 2006). The refugees had no time to prepare psychologically for the departure; more than half of the refugees later said they were given less than ten hours (Nguyen C. 1994).

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975 marked the end of the virtually constant state of war that began with the partitioning of Vietnam in 1954. The first wave of postwar escapees also included large numbers of the 1954 North-to-South Vietnam refugees (Knudsen 1995). Of these refugees, the majority fled fearing experiences of political and/or religious persecution under the new regime. In addition, they were now gripped by the fear of being accused of having been members or employees of the previous regime (Knudsen 1995).

Certainty about the new regime’s antagonistic attitude toward the family constituted one major reason for the flight from Vietnam. The war had already divided families, leaving family members as opponents in battles defined by international politics (Knudsen 1995). The refugees saw their children transformed by the school system and youth brigades, the latter being viewed as police forces, whose aim was to report the thoughts and actions of parents, neighbors and strangers (Knudsen 1995). In this environment of political oppression and vigilance, many chose to flee.

In all, during the first wave, some 130,000 Vietnamese refugees fled to the United States between 1975 and 1977 after the Communists took over Saigon and renamed it as Ho Chi Minh City (Haines 1989, p. 3; Nguyen C. 1994, p. 3). By 1977, all 130,000 refugees who had fled Vietnam were allowed to settle in the United States on parole status granted by the U.S.

government (Zhou and Bankston III 2004, p. 11). As mentioned earlier, those in this initial wave of refugees were mostly member of the elite and the middle class who either had access to the evacuation arranged by the American military or could afford their own means of flight. At the same time, many Vietnamese who could not leave for the United States, afraid of Communist brutality, escaped to other countries by land and sea – around 60,000 refugees were held in refugee camps in Hong Kong or Thailand (Kelly 1977, p. 36).

### *Second wave*

The second wave of refugees took place from 1978 to 1988; with a total of 413,924 Vietnamese refugees entering the United States (Haines 1989, p. 3; Ha 2002, p. 4). These refugees were quick to join those in the first wave fearing persecution under the new regime. The new regime not only wished to get rid of political opponents but also to purge the private economy, since these two were considered to be the main obstacles to the socialist transformation of society. In the past 400 years, sizeable Chinese communities had developed in Vietnam. The Chinese played an important role in urban business, controlling markets such as rice and pepper (Freeman 1995). As conditions in the southern portion of the newly reunified Vietnam (former South Vietnam) worsened in the late 1970s, there was a drive by the new government to rid the country of its Chinese merchant class by confiscating their wealth (Kelly 1977).

Heavy taxes had already been imposed on the peasants, who were also ordered to deliver most of their surplus harvest to the state for a fixed price (Knudsen 1995). The government established New Economic Zones (NEZ) to increase agricultural production. Another objective

in establishing the NEZ was that the areas constituted an important link in the government's attempt to control the uncertain situation in the former South Vietnam.

On May 16, 1975, the Communist government in Vietnam ordered all former high-ranking government officials to register for re-education (Nguyen D.V. 2006, p. 105). An estimated 400,000 former South Vietnamese civilians and military officers were sent from Saigon to settle in these areas from 1975 to 1976 (Knudsen 1995, p. 15). Among the internees of the NEZ and the "reeducation" camps were many who had supported the fight against the previous regime in the South. The government also confiscated properties of rich businessmen and middle-class citizens and then forced millions of people to move to the new economic zones around the country (Ha 2002). The authorities promised a short internment during which the "volunteers" would go through a program of reeducation and self-criticism. In reality, for more than ten years, thousands remained imprisoned and humiliated (Amnesty International 1987). The camps were heavy workplaces in isolated jungles where the people suffered great hardship and starvation. The NEZs were poorly organized, with hardly any food supplies and no plans for the production of goods. People were abandoned, isolated and starved to death.

While the heads of household were jailed and suffered in reeducation camps, their family members, estimated at one million women and children, without the main breadwinners and no resources to maintain themselves, fell into miserable situations in substandard living conditions (Ha 2002). As a result, along with thousands of former South Vietnamese government officials who had escaped being sent to reeducation camps as well as frightened Vietnamese farmers and fishermen, the families of those in reeducation camps sought to perilously escape from the country on boats which were not suitable for ocean voyage. Between May 1975 and July 31, 1979 alone, 292,315 Vietnamese successfully escaped by boat (Freeman 1995, p. 32). In 1976,

the number of escapees was 5,247 while in 1977, 15,690 people escaped; in 1978 and 1979, the numbers skyrocketed to 85,213 and 185,826 respectively (Freeman 1995, p. 32).

At this time, thousands of Vietnamese, who refused to cooperate with the Communist government, interacted with the Sino-Vietnamese merchant class to seek asylum by boat (Nguyen D.V. 2006). Thus, between 1978 and 1980, the majority of the tens of thousands of boat people leaving Vietnam were ethnic Chinese, victims of anti-Chinese sentiment fueled by a border clash with China in 1979 (Whitmore 1985, pp. 59-76). The refugees brought with them reports of how their wealth had been confiscated by authorities before they were allowed to leave (Freeman 1995). As the impact of gradual social transformations were felt, including the persecution of individuals and suppression of freedoms, more fled.

Only about 60 percent of these “boat people” survived and reached refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Hong Kong (Ha 2002, p. 4; Nguyen D.V. 2006, p. 106). As for the rest, pirates robbed them, killed men, raped women and young girls, and kidnapped and sold girls as prostitutes to other countries. Still others fled overland from Vietnam through Cambodia, hoping to reach Thailand; on the way they were hunted by bandits, Khmer Rouge soldiers and Vietnamese troops (Freeman 1995). Moreover, as hundreds of thousands of refugees fled Vietnam, neighboring countries in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong found themselves unable or unwilling to absorb the stream of refugees that threatened to overwhelm them. In a number of well-publicized cases, Vietnamese refugee boats attempting to land in Thailand and Malaysia were towed back out to sea (Freeman 1995). During this time, the U.S. government admitted approximately 400,000 Vietnamese refugees who had fled on boats and successfully reached refugee camps in neighboring countries (Office of Refugee

Resettlement 1998; Haines 1989, p. 3). Of these, over 200,000 were ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam (Freeman 1995, p. 32).

For a lot of these refugees, their defining experience is often said to be their traumatic escape by boat. The voyages of the Vietnamese boat people fleeing from persecution were as remarkable as they were often tragic. Thousands of people failed in their attempts to escape, missing rendezvous, being cheated by people who claimed to be organizing escapes, and being caught by security forces while trying to flee Vietnam. Since, according to Vietnamese law, leaving the country without permission was a crime, those who were caught were placed in jail, women and children in one room, the men in another (Freeman 1995). Despite failures, refugees made repeated attempts to escape. If, finally, they succeeded in eluding the shore guards and coastal patrols, they still faced the dangerous storms and swirling tides of the South China Sea. Their journey, often in small, un-seaworthy vessels, lasted from a couple of days to weeks, and the distances they traveled ranged from a few hundred to five thousand miles. The survivors weathered fierce storms, attacks by Vietnamese patrols out at sea; they suffered from hunger, thirst and dehydration (Freeman 1995). Beyond that, the waters around Thailand and Malaysia were infested with pirates who often worked in teams of boats to rape, pillage and murder their hapless victims (Freeman 1995).

### *Third wave*

Reports about piracy and drowning of the “boat people” created growing concern in the late 1970s, and the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was able to negotiate an agreement under which the government of Vietnam would allow “orderly departure” for some of its citizens (Kelly 1986, Nguyen D. V. 2006). In May, 1979, as a tentative

solution to worldwide attention attracted by the boat people, the UNHCR established the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) (United States Catholic Conference 1984). It initiated the third wave of Vietnamese arrivals but slowed down the boat people exodus. The ODP allowed those interviewed and approved for resettlement in America by U.S officials in Vietnam to leave by plane with their Vietnamese passports.<sup>9</sup>

Under the ODP, Vietnamese could enter the United States if they had close relatives who had resettled and were living in the United States who applied to bring them over: spouses, sons, daughters, parents, grandparents and unmarried grandchildren. The family reunification program thereby reunited Vietnamese family members who had been living in the United States and in Vietnam. Others who qualified were those who had been employed by Americans or American companies in Vietnam, or officials, soldiers, and their close relatives who had been associated with the United States (Freeman 1995).

However, excluded from the ODP until 1984 were those Vietnamese prisoners who were sent to re-education camps, where they were detained for many years under harsh and inhumane conditions. Concerned about former comrades-in-arms and colleagues, the U.S. government pleaded for their release and asked permission for them to emigrate. In 1984, the U.S. and Vietnam agreed to allow 10,000 former political prisoners to emigrate overseas to join family members in America (Freeman 1995, p. 36). Finally, the U.S. Department of State pledged to secure the release and resettlement of the remaining 85,000 reeducation camp prisoners who, after 1975, had been incarcerated for at least three and, in some cases, more than fifteen years. In 1988, the U.S. State Department reached an agreement with the Vietnamese government that

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<sup>9</sup> During this time, the Refugee Act of 1980 became the most comprehensive piece of refugee legislation in U.S. history as it provided for an annual number of admissions for refugees, which was designated independent of the number of immigrants admitted.

would allow them to leave through the ODP (SEARAC 2004; Nguyen D. V. 2006). The Humanitarian Operation (HO) program, a subprogram of the ODP, brought in these former South Vietnam military and civil employees; most of them had been brought to America by 1995 (Freeman 1995). Once freed, the former political prisoners also chose to join the close to one million refugees who had been forced into exile. The Public Interest Parole (PIP) also brought in those Vietnamese who had cooperated with America during the Vietnam War (United States Catholic Conference 1984).

The Amerasian program admitted children in Vietnam who were born to Vietnamese women and fathered by Americans during the war years (Kelly 1986, Ha 2002). Since the end of the war, many Americans had become concerned about the plight of these so-called Amerasians. Because these children were of mixed blood, the Vietnamese government regarded them as the dust of life, homeless children (Willis 2000). Under pressure from Vietnam veterans, the U.S. agreed to accept Amerasians as refugees. In December 1987, the U.S. Congress passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act, under which some 100,000 Amerasians and their immediate families were allowed to immigrate to the United States through 1994 as refugees but with full citizenship rights and obligations (Nguyen, D. V. 2006, p. 116). The HO, PIP and Amerasian programs formally ended in September 2000. Lastly, the Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR) program allowed Vietnamese who voluntarily returned to Vietnam from refugee camps in Southeast Asia to enter the United States (Ha 2002). By the mid-1990s, over 200,000 Vietnamese had been admitted to the United States under the Orderly Departure Program and by 1996, the number had grown to over 450,000 refugees (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1998; Zhou and Bankston III 2004).



*Reasons for the prolonged refugee crisis*

Several factors account for the lengthy flow of refugees from Vietnam for so many years even after the war ended: first, political repression continued to make life difficult for those individuals who were detained at or released from reeducation camps as well as or their family members (Zhou and Bankston III 2004). Second, economic hardships, exacerbated by natural disasters and poor harvests in the years following the war, created a widespread sense of hopelessness. Third, incessant warfare with neighboring countries further drained Vietnam's resources for capital investment and development (Zhou and Bankston III 2004). These severely adversarial conditions triggered the second and third exodus of Vietnamese boat people in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Vietnamese came to the United States motivated by events that occurred in Vietnam. When they left their country, most believed their departure was temporary lasting only until the new government fell; they were not consciously choosing to become part of another society or culture (Kelly 1977). As the Vietnamese entered American refugee camps, both in Guam and on the U.S. mainland, it became apparent to them that they had left Vietnam for good and that their future lives would be shaped by American society. In refugee holding centers, the Vietnamese began to adjust to this perspective; they moved into a world that was run by Americans and in which their options were molded by what Americans expected of them and arranged for them (Kelly 1977).

Initially, the refugees who came to the United States arrived at four U.S. military bases in California, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and Florida (Nguyen D.V. 2006, p. 104). Several national voluntary agencies, under the contract of the Department of State, settled the new arrivals in communities throughout the country and arranged sponsorships for the refugees. These

sponsorships involved the provision of housing and initial support from interested Americans. Gradually, most of these refugees resettled themselves in California, particularly in Los Angeles and Orange County, because of the familiar climate and support from the large Vietnamese community.

The Vietnamese refugee exodus initially began in the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in a frenzy of evacuations of not only those Vietnamese considered closest to the American government's military and offices and therefore, at greatest risk of persecution by the communist government, but also those considered as the most likely candidates to adjust to life in America. As socio-economic conditions deteriorated in Vietnam and political persecution resulted in tens of thousands of former South Vietnamese being sent to "reeducation camps", this triggered an exodus of the "boat people" and prolonged the refugee crisis. Growing concerns about piracy and the drowning of those attempting to escape by boat as well as reports coming out of Vietnam regarding the plight of Amerasians led the U.S. to establish the Orderly Departure and Amerasian Programs and the arrival of the third wave of refugees. The Vietnamese continued to arrive in the United States even after 1998 through family reunification programs and sponsorships by relatives already in the U.S. – these latter arrivals are considered immigrants, not refugees. We can now turn to a brief demographic and educational profiling of the Vietnamese refugees.

### ***Profile of arriving Vietnamese refugees***

The refugees who arrived in the first wave of the exodus were extensively profiled as they arrived in the United States, both by government agencies providing aid and by scholars for

academic purposes. To give a brief profile of Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States in the first wave, they tended to be young, part of a family group and Catholic. 45.9 percent of all refugees were under the age of 18, and, therefore, likely to be dependents of a family while another 35.6 percent were between ages 18 and 34, roughly the ages of military service (Kelly 1977, p. 41). Many more men than women left Vietnam and the predominance of men was strongest in the age group affected by military service (Kelly 1977). According to the 1980 Census, the ratio of men to women was 108.8 and 64.8% of male Vietnamese refugees participated in the labor force compared to 47.9% of females (US Department of Commerce 1984, pp. 1-6).

In terms of education, the Vietnamese in the first wave were relatively well educated when they arrived, even by American standards. Vietnamese heads of households looked not too terribly different educationally from American heads of households. According to Kelly (1977, pp. 47-48), over 27.4 percent of all heads of households (or 19.5 percent of all refugees over age eighteen) had some university education or more while another 47.8 percent of heads of households (or 37.9 percent of refugees over eighteen) had some secondary education. Only 18 percent of heads of households (or refugees over age eighteen) had less than secondary schooling (Kelly 1977, p. 48). In fact, many younger Vietnamese had been students at the time they came to the U.S. Their educational levels indicate that they tended to be urban and from relatively well-to-do families.

The fact that many of the refugees in the first wave were from the South Vietnamese elite is apparent not only in the educational backgrounds of immigrants, it is also clear in their occupational skills as translated into U.S. Department of Labor job skill categories. 31 percent of refugee heads of household had professional, technical or managerial skills, followed by

transportation and miscellany into which 17 percent of refugees fell, while 12 percent fell in to the category of clerical and sales skills (Kelly 1977, pp. 50-52).

However, many first wave refugees, despite their educational levels, spoke little English. While they awaited sponsorship in refugee camps in California, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and Florida into which they were placed, the refugees did attend English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and receive introductions to American culture. However, by December 1975, the camps were closed and refugee families had been released to their American sponsors (Ryan 1987). As a consequence, a year after the Vietnamese arrived, 27 percent of all heads of households and 65 percent of all refugees still spoke no English at all (Kelly 1977, p. 56).

As a result of their low proficiency in English, the Vietnamese refugees underwent considerable class and occupational change in moving from Vietnam to the United States, despite their education. For the most part, when employed, the Vietnamese could only find jobs at the lowest end of the American occupational spectrum. The work they found was often temporary and tended to offer little or no possibility for advancement. Many Vietnamese worked for less than \$2.39 per hour, the U.S. minimum wage as of 1976 (Kelly 1977, p. 175). Thus, Vietnam's former managerial and technical elite, while perhaps better acquainted with American lifestyles than rural or lower class Vietnamese, lost power, prestige and income in getting displaced from Saigon to the United States.

In contrast to the first wave refugees, the second and third wave refugees were persons who had little power in Vietnam and were not associated with the American government or with private agencies. Among the "boat people" were former enlisted rank and file members of the South Vietnamese army and navy, fishermen, farmers, teachers and petty traders along with the impoverished families of those imprisoned in the reeducation camps in Vietnam. The third wave

mainly consisted of former political prisoners of the communist government in Vietnam, those Vietnamese who had fled to refugee camps in neighboring Southeast Asian countries but had been forced to return to Vietnam due to poor conditions and Amerasians, who were considered the very dregs of Vietnamese society. These refugees were not necessarily urban, had few skills that were usable in the United States, spoke little or no English, and were totally unacquainted with life outside their parishes or villages in Vietnam (Ha 2002).

The majority of the refugees in the second and third waves hailed from Vietnam's rural, lower classes and had little or no education in Vietnam. Refugees in these waves also had next to no English language skills upon arrival, irrespective of their educational or employment background. Moreover, the first wave refugees had access to at least a few months' worth of ESL training and introduction to American culture at the refugee camps they were held in before being released to their sponsor families. By contrast, the "boat people", former political prisoners and Amerasians in the second and third waves were introduced directly into mainstream American society and, for the most part, had to fend for themselves.

However, by drawing out experience from friends in the first wave – who had received a higher education in Vietnam and then, in some cases, additional education in the United States – second wave refugees acquired stable jobs and eventually secured high salaries. Some refugees in the second wave even held their first job long enough to go to school and get an education in the United States; others participated in professional graduate training (Ha 2002). Many refugees in the third wave, however, did not have enough time to enroll in education in the United States because they only had eight months of public assistance and had to rely mostly on their previous education in Vietnam to find a job. As a consequence, the majority of refugees in the third wave

ended up working in low-skilled jobs in textile factories, beauty shops, restaurants owned by Vietnamese in Vietnamese communities, or became self-employed (Ha 2002).

*Initial challenges faced by Vietnamese refugees*

The Vietnamese refugees from all three waves had to constantly adjust to the challenges of American life and the stress they imposed. The fact that the Vietnamese arrived in the United States as refugees meant that they came under the guidance of the U.S. government or voluntary resettlement agencies (VOLAGs). Resettlement in the United States initially involved such conditions, in which Americans set the range of possibilities within which the Vietnamese could act. They struggled with identity crises, mental and emotional problems and family dysfunction. Many were separated from their families or left without any extended families. The stability of the typical Vietnamese family was eroded as they were influenced by the values and norms of Western society (Tran, T V. 1987).

The cultural clash between the dominant American culture and Vietnamese culture presented many adjustment problems to the Vietnamese family because the change came abruptly. For adult Vietnamese, husband and wife roles were often reversed and problems related to employment and language problems continued to plague them; similarly, children were often 'parentified' and assumed roles and duties that belonged to their parents and becoming the family negotiators because of their fluency in the English language (Graham 1998).

One way to cushion the impact of a new community is for refugees, like many immigrant groups, to become part of an ethnic enclave. Stein (1979) suggests that one reason some early Vietnamese refugees had a difficult time was because of the lack of an established ethnic community to lend support. Resettlement was first arranged in different states so that most

Vietnamese began their life in America isolated from one another (Kelly 1977). As a result, all Vietnamese coming out of Vietnam or refugee camps to be resettled faced the loss of any Vietnamese society. Gradually, the Vietnamese began regrouping within the United States as part of the reunification programs of extended families, forming enclaves in several locales and thereby making ineffective the earlier government plan to scatter the Vietnamese refugees throughout the country.

Not only did the Vietnamese move closer together, reversing the American-sponsored diaspora, they also began organizing themselves into a community. Some of the movement of Vietnamese into communities was also part of a conscious effort of the former South Vietnamese leadership to reassert itself in the context of an American-Vietnamese community. In those early years, some of the organizations were purely social, providing places for Vietnamese to meet together; others confined their activities to job placement; and still others emphasized bicultural programs such as English language tutoring of school aged children and Vietnamese cultural events (Kelly 1977).

Over the course of more than a decade of adjustment, Vietnamese refugees started making progress in integrating into American society. With the aid of public assistance, they had time to go to school, study English, participate in vocational training and attend a community college or university. From the skills learned at these schools, they obtained employment. Earned income helped Vietnamese refugees get off public assistance and become economically self-sufficient and socially adapted.

*Assistance offered to Vietnamese refugees*

Most Vietnamese who entered the United States from 1975 on were classified upon arrival as refugees and received public assistance (Ha 2002). In fact, up to 1983, Vietnamese refugees in California were assisted by federal and state programs, directed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the federal and state levels (Tran, L K. 1986, p. 53). Since 1984, the Targeted Assistance Program (TAP) was started and continued through 1988. The goals of the TAP program were threefold:

1. To increase the self-sufficiency of refugees through the reduction of welfare dependency,
2. To build mutual assistance capacity among refugees towards the goal of refugee self-sufficiency,
3. To increase private/business sector commitment to aid in the reduction of welfare dependency.

In addition, a business technical assistance program was started by the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. The primary objective of the program was to assist and train those refugees desiring to improve their businesses and/or to start a business by providing the resources, technical assistance and access to capital sources and conducting training programs on the different aspects of doing business (Tran, L K. 1986). The Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce received funds from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Office of Refugee resettlement in Washington D.C, enabling it to organize seminars and business sessions every month, which were attended by Vietnamese businessmen to gain further business knowledge (Tran, L K. 1991).

After the completion of the programs, they wrote business plans with which the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce assisted them in getting a loan from the Small Business Administration Office or from banks. After one or two years, they became successful business owners and returned to the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce as trainers in the seminars and



also received further assistance to expand their businesses (Tran 1991). The concrete benefit to the community was that jobs were created for the many Vietnamese refugees who had just arrived in the United States and who had not yet received any special training to work in an American company. In this manner, with special policies, the government allowed these refugees to receive public assistance but encouraged them to adapt to the new society, search for employment or get involved in vocational training.

### *Economic progress of Vietnamese refugees*

The Vietnamese refugees made great efforts to learn skills and gain employment in the United States and quickly made steady progress towards English-language acquisition (Dunning 1979). To give an example, among 1981 (second wave) arrivals, only 18.8% of Vietnamese-Americans were employed, whereas among the 1975 arrivals who had been in the U.S. for 7 years by then, the percent employed climbed to 64.2% (Ryan 1987, p. 118). With monthly income as indicators of economic adjustment, the mean family income of second-wave Vietnamese refugees in 1978 was \$755; by 1981 this increased to \$1,220 a month (Ha 2002, p. 137).

Similarly, over time there was a marked general improvement in the English-speaking ability of the Vietnamese refugees, from 9.2% among 1981 arrivals to 76% among 1975 arrivals (Ryan 1987, p. 121). Among 1981 arrivals, only 2.9% of Vietnamese refugees owned homes whereas this number rose to 65.4% among 1975 arrivals (Ryan 1987, p. 131). Finally, as time spent in the U.S. increased, a sharp drop occurred in the percentage of adult Vietnamese refugees receiving Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) from 81.9% among 1981 arrivals to 13.9% among 1975 arrivals (Ryan 1987, p. 134).

Their progress continued well into the third decade of their resettlement in the U.S. Census data shows that between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of Vietnamese who did not speak English very well had decreased from 42% to 34% (Zhou and Bankston III 2004, p. 15). The proportion of college graduates among adults aged 25 and over was 17%, up from 13%; while the poverty rate stood at 24%, down from 35% (Zhou and Bankston III 2004, p. 15). Meanwhile, the Vietnamese also preserved their own culture and established their own communities. In building their communities, like Little Saigon in California, the Vietnamese created many kinds of jobs for themselves, raised their economic status by earning income and produced an appearance of prosperity in the United States.

Thus, Vietnamese refugees quickly entered the U.S. labor market, and their employment rate steadily improved with the length of their resettlement. According to Ryan (1987), overall, time spent in the U.S. was the greatest single factor in accounting for economic adjustment of the Vietnamese refugees; the longer the refugees had been in the U.S., the greater were the chances for successful adjustment. The ability to speak English, a higher education from their country of origin, as well as such factors like age and gender, have also shown to have had a significant influence upon Vietnamese refugees' success within the U.S. labor market (Graham 1998).

It should also be acknowledged that certain cultural values such as hard work ethics and family cohesion have facilitated the economic and educational success of Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. Kibria (1994) notes that the economic stability of the Vietnamese refugee households was shaped by an ideological sense of family collectivism that encourages the "sharing of individual social and economic resources within the household". In this way, the Vietnamese refugees gradually became self-sufficient, then progressed to higher economic adjustment, and adapted well to the new society.

*Diversity of Occupations among Vietnamese refugees*

Vietnamese Americans started working in all branches of economic activities to attain economic self-sufficiency. They worked in factories, in professional and nonprofessional agencies, in trade companies, in local and central government and in the military, providing services in both the private and public sectors. Overall, the occupation of the employed refugees reflected a high number of Vietnamese in skilled labor using technical skills and manual dexterity. In Orange County, for example, 5 percent of the refugees worked in electronics (Ha 2002, p. 136).

A majority of Vietnamese refugees with a strong motivation to rebuild their careers became entrepreneurs. In a survey conducted among Indochinese entrepreneurs, 39% had completed high school, 49% had college degree, 7% had a graduate degree and only 5% had no formal schooling (Tran 1986, pp. 84-85). The study found that entrepreneurial initiative came from people who were educated, but not at high level; who were seeking from business not only money, but also freedom and achievement which would earn them a high status in American society and who were willing to move from one occupation to another (Tran 1986).

After more than thirty years in America, the Vietnamese today hold a wide variety of occupations based on their education, length of time and location in the United States. In many communities, the Vietnamese are in relatively low level and low paying blue collar occupations, such as waiters, cashiers, cooks, fishers and textile sewing machine operators (Zhou and Bankston 1994, p. 830). At the same time, they have established Chambers of Commerce and many professional associations, such as the Association of Vietnamese Press and Media in the U.S., the Vietnamese Employee Association of Los Angeles and the National Institute of Administration Alumni Association (Ha 2002). In addition, becoming U.S. citizens, the

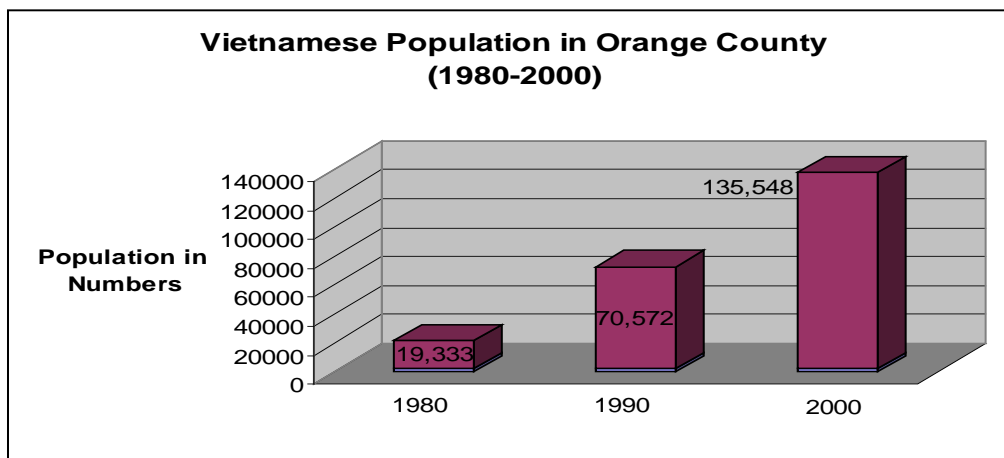
Vietnamese established the Vietnamese-American Voters Association to engage in local and federal political processes. Some Vietnamese were elected to city councils and nominated for congressional elections while many hold high positions in the private sector, in United States government agencies, in NASA and even in the White House (Ha 2002).

### ***Vietnamese Refugees in California***

Most of the Vietnamese were initially resettled in or gravitated towards California; this concentration in California was a result of several factors. Before details of American government policy towards refugees from Vietnam were worked out, the Vietnamese refugees, both adults and orphaned children, were often flown to Travis Air Force base in California and released directly into American society (Manney 2006). The second factor contributing to heavy resettlement in California was the presence of Camp Pendleton, the first and largest of the holding centers to open on the U.S. mainland. Camp Pendleton, staffed by a host of volunteers, was the point of entry for the Vietnamese in California and it was soon inundated by American news media and curious private citizens. Many United States military veterans lived in Orange County, and some sponsored refugee families of South Vietnamese soldiers beside whom they had fought (Dewilde 1996). Also, Orange County, a bastion of political conservatism, was the first to initially welcome the South Vietnamese as refugees from communism (Weiss 1994). Along with these socio-political ties, in the mid-1970s the county's work force lacked a large ethnic minority population to perform any menial tasks the economy required (Dewilde 1996). Thus, many refugees in the first wave were able to take those jobs and gain entry into the local economy.

The third factor that led to a Vietnamese concentration in California was Vietnamese preference. By the time the first boat people arrived in the United States, the first wave refugees had begun clustering, forming small enclaves through secondary migration after their initial government-orchestrated dispersal (Weiss 1994). Many of the latter refugees who arrived subsequent to the first wave also exhibited the same secondary migration pattern of gravitation from dispersed locations to form enclaves or clusters in order to live near other members of the same ethnic group. The reasons for their moving included family reunification and better job opportunities, real or perceived. The climate seemed hospitable and since large numbers of Vietnamese had already settled there from the early influx into the country, many Vietnamese anticipated less isolation there than in Nebraska or Wisconsin (Dewilde 1996, Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce 1991). Thus, strong cultural bonds, weather similar to tropical Vietnam and former network ties attracted more Vietnamese to concentrate in California.

Orange County, California absorbed a tremendous number of Vietnamese refugees, who in turn have greatly influenced the county's cultural landscape and impacted its government services. As early as the 1980 Census, Orange County had 19,333 Vietnamese and nearly half of the Vietnamese refugee population of Orange County lived in the area which came to be known as Little Saigon (Weiss 1994, p. 5; U.S. Census Bureau 1980). By 1990, it was estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau that approximately 70,572 Vietnamese resided in the county (Dewilde 1996, p. 3; U.S. Census Bureau 1990). According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, the number of Vietnamese living in Orange County had risen to 135,548 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Ha 2002). Figure 6 below illustrates this meteoric rise in the Vietnamese population residing in Orange County over the past three decades.

**Figure 6.**

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, first and second wave Vietnamese refugees found employment in California's growing defense industries in jobs such as electronic assembly (Weiss 1994, p. 32). Their sons and daughters were able to take advantage of the state's inexpensive higher educational system, training for professional careers while adult Vietnamese were able to adapt gradually to their new country's language, customs and job market (Dewilde 1996).

Orange County in the early 1980s had a thriving and diversified economy with more than 1.3 million workers employed in industries ranging from high technology electronics to construction, agriculture, retail and financial service industries (Tran, L K. 1986, p. 35). Because of the county's strong economic growth, the employment outlook for Vietnamese refugees was extremely good. Third wave refugees and those Vietnamese immigrants sponsored by their relatives, entering the United States since 1990s, further contributed to the growth and the county continued to grow in population and commerce in to the 1990s. Gradually, the number of Vietnamese businesses, including stores, offices and restaurants, in Orange County grew to over 2,000 (Dewilde 1996, p. 12).

Sociologist Steven Gold suggests that the development of an enclave such as Little Saigon fulfills important needs for some Vietnamese people. Little Saigon began to attract Vietnamese refugees as the place where job opportunities were created and where aid was offered in the resettlement of Vietnamese newcomers. Businesses in Little Saigon were often started by people who spoke little English and maintained little contact with American society, and in some cases wanted to keep it that way. They preferred to limit their contacts with an unfamiliar culture, to provide employment for relatives and provide a positive setting for their families to develop in the United States, and finally, to enjoy the relationships that come from living and working within the refugee community and immersing themselves in Vietnamese culture (Gold 1992). In Little Saigon, they could speak the Vietnamese language, retain old customs, and interact with people with whom they share common values and feel at ease.

### ***Conclusion***

The Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States in the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in three waves covering the following time periods. In the first wave (1975-77), the exodus began in a frenzy of evacuations of those Vietnamese associated with the American government and, therefore, at greatest risk of persecution by the communist government. During the second wave (1978-88), the “boat people” comprised of Vietnamese escaping deteriorating socio-economic conditions and political persecution in Vietnam as well as families of those imprisoned in reeducation camps. The third wave (1989-98) witnessed the prolongation of the refugee crisis as the U.S. established the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) along with its subprograms and the Amerasian program following continued attempts by the Vietnamese to immigrate to America.

Over the decade from 1975, when people had left out of fear, the refugee movement had transformed itself into an expression of far broader socioeconomic grievances and desires. In the early days after the fall of Saigon, there was a frenzy to escape Vietnam as many former South Vietnamese military leaders and those associated with the American government feared for their lives as the communists took control of their country. However, by the 1980s, boarding a boat was no longer a response to specific fears: for many, it constituted an act of resistance to the communist government, and a radical rejection of the difficulties the government expected people to endure for a cause in which they no longer believed (Hardy 2003). Thus, the Vietnamese refugees were already highly politicized when they came to the United States.

Over the years, the Vietnamese refugees have not simply adjusted to America, but rather have made it their home. From 1975 to 2000, the Vietnamese mobilized their education and job skills received in Vietnam as well as in the United States and utilized their cultural values and experiences to win against all odds, survive and live in happiness. During their first decade in the United States, the top priority of the Vietnamese was simply to survive and recover from the refugee experience. In the second decade, another phase of adjustment began; expansion from mere survival to economic strength and self-sufficiency. In the third decade, the Vietnamese developed new and distinctive ways of retaining or reconfiguring values and traditions in American social settings and strengthening their ties with Vietnam as their relatives continue to arrive from Vietnam and resettle in America, not as refugees but as immigrants.

Vietnamese culture demonstrates the endurance of the Vietnamese on both sides of the Vietnam War. Since April 1975 to date, over thirty years, the Vietnamese who live outside their country have continued to fight in many ways to preserve the Vietnamese culture against the domination of Marxist values while at the same time pursuing their new Western values of



freedom and democracy. Right from the early days of their settlement, along with surviving and recovering from the refugee experience, the refugees expressed vocal opposition to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which they blamed for the refugee crisis and their plight.

The level of forces in fighting for freedom and democracy has been high over time. For example, the Vietnamese refugees have spent a lot of time and energy to keep the flag of the Free Vietnam before 1975 waving everywhere, especially at official ceremonies that the Vietnamese refugees participate in, such as the annual International Culture Day organized at the United Nation's office in New York (Los Angeles Thoi Luan 2001). They have also successfully prevented Vietnamese Communists from waving their flag in Vietnamese communities. Finally, they have organized many political organizations, even a Government of Free Vietnam, to promote freedom and democracy in Vietnam.

The hard line public opposition to Vietnam continues among refugees, although privately, a growing number of Vietnamese in America are sending money to relatives in Vietnam, visiting Vietnam, and doing business in the land of their birth. From their earned income, the Vietnamese send back money, about 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of total remittances to Vietnam (US\$6.8 billion in 2007), to help their relatives in Vietnam, who under the Communist regime, are unemployed and hungry (Tran 2008). Despite this, an overwhelming majority of Vietnamese living in the United States still consider themselves to be refugees and have strong emotional ties with Vietnam (South Vietnam, as they knew it); they still think of themselves as Vietnamese rather than Vietnamese Americans.

The Vietnamese refugees were already highly politicized when they came to the United States. Over the years, their political fervor and anti-communism has persisted and found expression in the ethnic enclaves they have built all around the country, notable in Little Saigon.

Hence, the Vietnamese refugees in California constitute a compelling case-study for examining what kinds of political ties they maintain with Vietnam. With this in mind, we can now turn to look at transnational political activities among Vietnamese refugees and examine the determinants of such political transnationalism in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5

### **Determinants of Political Transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans – A Quantitative Analysis**

#### *Introduction*

The Vietnamese American community appears to be invested not only in U.S. – domestic but also homeland politics. My interviews with members of the Vietnamese American community in Orange County, California during the course of my archival and qualitative research brought three main forms of transnational political activities to the forefront: protests and demonstrations, signed petitions and written letters to government officials, and participation in internet forums<sup>10</sup>. In this chapter, I investigate the determinants of political transnationalism – in other words, the possible factors that explain the odds of participation in these three activities by Vietnamese Americans.

Treating immigrants from the same country or even a certain group of migrants as homogenous does not lead to an accurate explanation of the specific individual factors relating to home country and resettlement contexts that foster or hamper transnational practices that are enacted. Variation in intensity and frequency of transnational activism is linked to the great level of heterogeneity among immigrants (Al-Ali 2002). Likelihoods and possibilities for the emergence of transnational political activities among Vietnamese Americans, such as protesting, signing petitions and participating in internet forums, are thus shaped by factors which distinguish immigrants from one another. Such factors include individual (demographic) characteristics, incorporation in host society and resources available. Based on hypotheses in the

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<sup>10</sup> These three forms of transnational political activity among Vietnamese Americans are discussed in greater detail in the next (qualitative) chapter.

theoretical literature as well as my own interview data, age, gender, education, place of college degree, arrival in the U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income are the most relevant factors in explaining odds of engaging in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans.

In the following sections, I explain my quantitative methodology; give a brief overview of the data and then go on to conduct quantitative analyses on the survey data collected in Phase II of my research, examining the effect of the above demographic, incorporation and resource dependent explanatory variables on political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. The results show that gender is significantly associated with all three forms of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans - men are more likely than women to engage in transnational political activities. Age and English proficiency are significantly associated with both protesting and petitioning, while arrival in the U.S., employment status and income help in explaining the odds of protesting among Vietnamese Americans. College degree, one of the variables for which overwhelming evidence existed in the theoretical literature, is significantly associated only with participation in internet forums.

Thus, Vietnamese Americans who are most likely to engage in protesting and sign petitions and letters to government officials dealing with Vietnamese issues are older males who are not very proficient in English. Unemployed Vietnamese Americans with lower incomes and those who arrived in the U.S. during the early waves of refugee influx are also more likely to attend protests, while obtaining a college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam is associated with more frequent participation in internet forums related to homeland issues.

## **Data and Methods**

The purpose of this study is to identify variables that, when coupled, can be accurate predictors in determining the level of transnational activism undertaken by Vietnamese refugees living in California. These characteristics condition the likelihood that Vietnamese refugees will have the motivation and capacity to engage in transnational political activism.

*Research Design* – A pilot study, which consisted of qualitative interviews, among the Vietnamese American population in Orange County, helped me to identify the types of transnational political activities – protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums – most frequently undertaken by Vietnamese Americans. I was, thus, able to operationalize my dependent variable – political transnationalism – by creating three variables, *Protests*, *Petitions* and *Internet Forums*. A survey questionnaire was then developed to record the frequency of all three types of political transnational activities as well as obtain information pertaining to the specific independent variables as they may impact these activities. These factors were ascertained from the existing literature on transnationalism as well as my own qualitative findings. The dependent variables recorded were protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and letters to government officials, and participating in internet forums. The independent variables recorded were age, gender, education, place of college degree earned, arrival in U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income.

The data for this analysis is drawn from my own research situated among the Vietnamese American community in Orange County, California. In Orange County, the cities of Garden Grove, Santa Ana, Anaheim and Westminster are recognized as the core of this ethnic community. The area is centrally anchored by the business and cultural district of Little Saigon in the city of Westminster, which has evolved to serve the needs of the Vietnamese. Located in

the heart of Orange County, the enclave of Little Saigon has the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside Vietnam.

*Sampling Strategy* - The sample used for this research was a random convenience sampling consisting of both Vietnamese refugees who engage in political transnationalism and those who do not undertake transnational activities. One danger in the field of transnationalism is that empirical studies invariably sample on the dependent variables, focusing on those who take part in the activities of interest, to the exclusion of those who do not participate (Guarnizo et al. 2003, p. 1213). Hence, I included respondents in my sample who do not engage in political transnationalism as well (by ensuring a random enough sample).

A Vietnamese community center (providing economic, legal and cultural services) in Little Saigon maintains active files on Vietnamese refugees, who are members and utilize the services of the center on a weekly/monthly basis for meetings or other personal business. Since evidence within these files showed that this population is fairly well represented throughout the Orange County area, I assumed them to reflect the profile of the general population of Vietnamese refugees in Orange County, California and hence, chose this center to carry out my surveys. In addition, weekly meetings held for Vietnamese community members at two churches in Westminster (a Baptist church and a Fellowship church) provided the sample.

The convenient sampling was obtained by asking Vietnamese Americans who were present at these locations on any given day to fill out the surveys. The process assumed that the Vietnamese refugees came to the community center and churches voluntarily, where they were randomly chosen to participate in the research. A total of 140 surveys were collected among Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants. Out of these, 3 respondents indicated that they

were born in the U.S.; thus, the survey forms that they filled out were not taken into account. In this analysis, I have included the survey response from 137 Vietnamese-born respondents who currently reside in the United States. Ordinal regression analysis was used to determine which demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors affect political transnationalism.

### *Dependent variables*

The following questions in the survey recorded political transnationalism among Vietnamese refugees and immigrants:

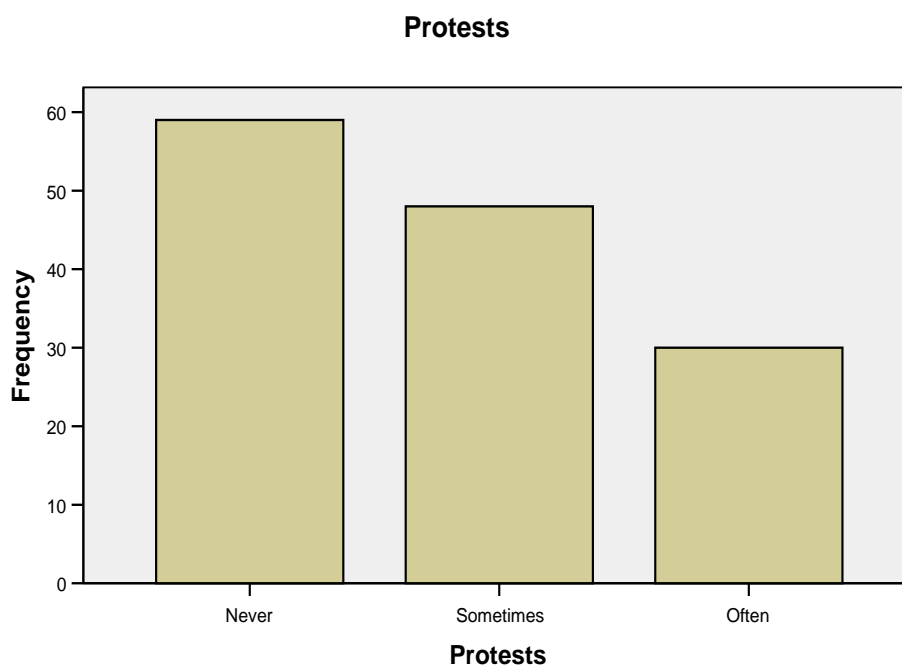
- “Do you take part in protests or demonstrations in Little Saigon?”,
- “Do you write to government officials or sign petitions in support of a Vietnamese person or issue?”, and
- “Do you participate in Internet discussion groups on issues important to Vietnam and Vietnamese people?”

The first dependent variable *Protests* is a categorical variable measured as “Never”, “Sometimes” and “Often”. As Table 2 below shows, 43.1% of the respondents never participate in protests or demonstrations, whereas 35% and 21.9% of the respondents engage in such activities sometimes and often, respectively. The modal category of the variable is Never, while the standard deviation in 0.781.

**Table 2. Protests**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	59	43.1	43.1	43.1
	Sometimes	48	35.0	35.0	78.1
	Often	30	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 7: Protests** below shows a frequency distribution of the categories of the variable *Protests*.



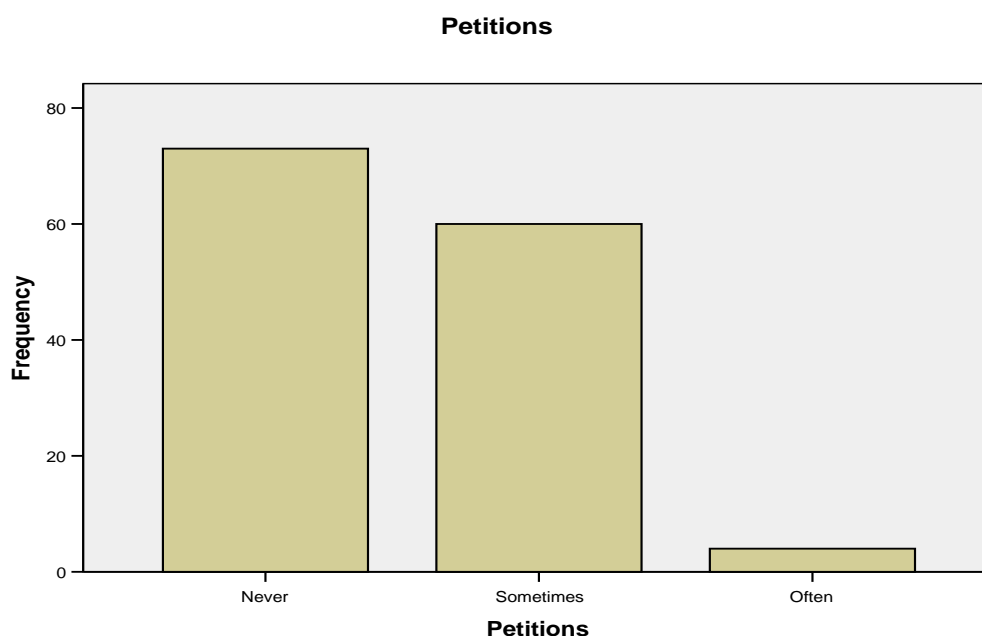
The second dependent variable *Petitions* is also a categorical variable measured as “Never”, “Sometimes” and “Often”. As Table 3 below shows, 53.3% of the respondents never write to government officials or sign petitions, whereas 43.8% and 2.9% of the respondents engage in such activities sometimes and often, respectively. The modal category of the variable is Never, while the standard deviation is 0.557.

**Table 3. Petitions**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	73	53.3	53.3	53.3
	Sometimes	60	43.8	43.8	97.1
	Often	4	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	



**Figure 8: Petitions** below shows a frequency distribution of the categories of the variable *Petitions*.

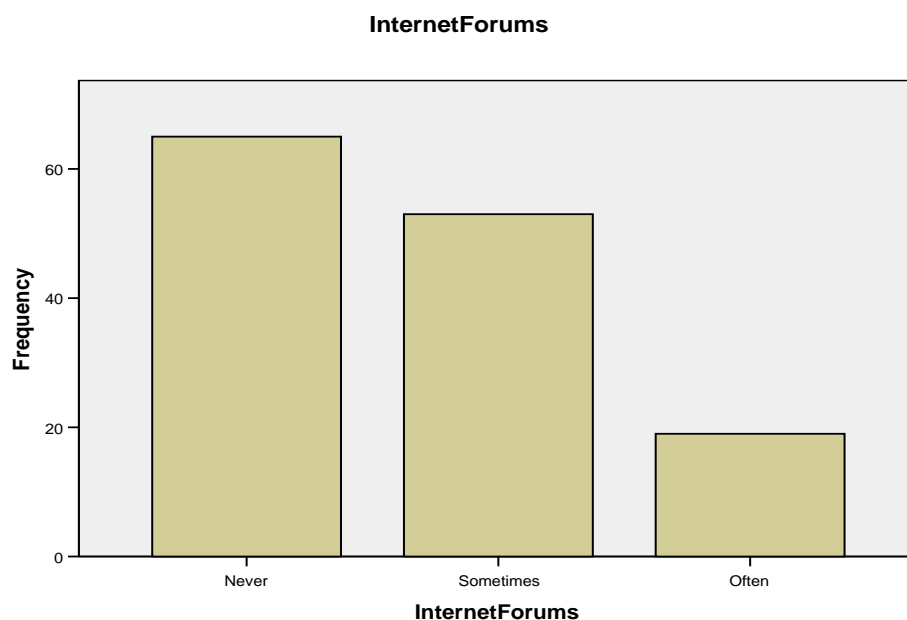


The final dependent variable *Internet Forums* is also a categorical variable measured as “Never”, “Sometimes” and “Often”. As Table 4 below shows, 47.4% of the respondents never participate in internet forums dealing with Vietnam and Vietnamese issues, whereas 38.7% and 13.9% of the respondents engage in such activities sometimes and often, respectively. The modal category of the variable is Never, while the standard deviation is 0.71.

**Table 4. Internet Forums**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	65	47.4	47.4	47.4
	Sometimes	53	38.7	38.7	86.1
	Often	19	13.9	13.9	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 9: Internet Forums** below shows a frequency distribution of the categories of the variable *Internet Forums*.



On the whole, we see that most Vietnamese Americans participating in the survey reported never engaging in all three forms of transnational political activities, followed by sometimes participating in them. It is interesting to note that roughly the same percentage – 35% (protests), 43% (petitions), and 38% (participation in internet forums) – of respondents reported that they “sometimes” participated in all three forms of transnational political activities. While 22% and 14% of respondents reported “often” participating in protests and internet forums respectively, only 3% of respondents sign petitions often. This suggests that perhaps organizing petitions to collect signatures is not as common a political activity in the Vietnamese American community as protesting or participating in internet forums. I will be discussing the nature and frequency of each form of activity in more detail in my qualitative chapter. Thus, members of the community do not have the occasion to engage in this form of transnational political activity often, but certainly participate in it sometimes (43%) when an opportunity to do so presents itself.

*Independent variables***Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables**

Variable	Percent	Mean	Mode
<i>Demographic</i>			
<b>Age</b>		3.07	35-49
18-24	5.1		
25-34	17.5		
35-49	49.6		
50-64	21.2		
65+	6.6		
<b>Sex</b>		0.42	Male
Male	58.4		
Female	41.6		
<b>Education</b>		2.93	College Degree
HS or less	7.3		
Some college	18.2		
College degree	48.9		
Grad degree	25.5		
<b>Place of College degree</b>		1.92	U.S.
U.S.	46.7		
Vietnam	23.4		
Both U.S. and Vietnam	21.2		
No degree	8.8		
<i>Contextual/ Incorporation</i>			
<b>Arrival in U.S.</b>			1985-95
Pre-1975	0		
1975-1984	35.0		
1985-1995	43.8		
Post-1995	21.2		
<b>English Proficiency</b>		2.81	Good
Poor	2.2		
Fair	30.7		
Good	51.1		
Excellent	16.1		
<i>Economic/ Resource dependent</i>			
<b>Employment Status</b>		1.5	Employed
Employed	68.6		
Temporarily Unemployed	13.1		
Unemployed	18.2		

<b>Income</b>		2.77	< \$25,000
<25,000	26.3		
25-40,000	21.2		
40-60,000	18.2		
60-75,000	18.2		
>75,000	16.1		

The following questions in the survey recorded demographic, incorporation and resource dependent variables.

*Demographic variables:* Respondents were asked, “Which age group do you belong to?” to measure the independent variable *Age*, coded as 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64 and 65+ years. A majority (48.2%) of respondents who participated in the survey belonged to the age group 35-49 years. The next highest age category was 50-64 years (22.6%), followed by those who were 25-34 years (17.5%). 6.6% of the respondents were 65+ in age, while 5.1% belonged to the age group 18-24 years. *Gender* was measured as Male=1, Female=2. 58.4% of the respondents were male while 41.6% were female.

*Education* was measured in the survey as high school or less, some college, college degree and graduate education/degree. Looking at the level of education among those who participated in the survey, the majority of respondents (48.9%) held a college degree, followed by the category graduate school/degree (25.5%). 18.2% of respondents had some college experience, while 7.3% of respondents belonged to the category high school or less. Place of *college degree* received was considered separately – this was measured in the survey as No degree, Vietnam, U.S. and both. The majority (46.7%) of those who participated in the survey obtained their college degree in the U.S., followed by those participants (23.4%) who had earned

it in Vietnam. 21.2% of respondents had a college degree from both the U.S. and Vietnam, while 8.8% of respondents had no college degree/experience.

For ease of interpretation of regression results, I combined the two variables *Education* and *Place of college degree* into a single measure to create a new variable *College Degree*. This variable consists of the following categories: college degree or more in Vietnam (includes those who reported their education level as college degree or graduate education/degree and their place of degree received as Vietnam), college degree or more in the U.S. (includes those who reported their education level as college degree or graduate education/degree and their place of degree received as U.S.), college degree or more in both countries (includes those who reported their education level as college degree or graduate education/degree and their place of degree received as both U.S. and Vietnam) and no college degree (includes those who reported their education level as H.S. or less, or some college). For place of college degree, the survey instrument asked respondents, "If you have a college degree, where did you get it?". Hence, survey participants who had an education level of H.S. or less and some college did not respond to this question. For those participants with some graduate education/degree, their place of college degree pertains to their college (bachelors) degree and not any subsequent graduate education they may have obtained.

*Incorporation variables:* Respondents were asked "In which time period did you arrive in the United States?" to measure the independent variable *Arrival in U.S.*, coded as pre-1975, 1975-84, 1985-95 and post-1995. Most respondents (43.8%) had arrived in the U.S. between 1985 and 1995, followed by 35% of respondents who arrived between 1975 and 1985. Only 21.2% of those who participated in the survey arrived post-1995, while there were no respondents who had arrived in the U.S. before 1975. To assess the language skills of the Vietnamese refugees, they

were asked to rate their proficiency in English. *English proficiency* was measured on the Likert-scale as Poor, Fair, Good and Excellent. A majority (51.1%) of those who participated in the survey reported a Good level of English proficiency, followed by 30.7% who rated their English proficiency as Fair. 16.1% of respondents reported an Excellent level of English proficiency, while 2.2% of respondents fell in the category of Poor.

*Resource variables:* The last two variables regarded in the questionnaire were employment status and income. These point to refugees' and immigrants' economic incorporation and imply their gradually acquiring control over increasingly more resources. Respondents' *employment status* was measured as employed, temporarily unemployed and unemployed. A majority of those who participated in the survey (68.6%) were employed, 18.2% were unemployed and 13.1% were temporarily unemployed. Respondents' *income* was measured as <\$25,000, \$25-40,000, \$40-60,000, \$60-75,000 and >\$75,000. A majority of those who participated in the survey (26.3%) reported that their yearly income was less than \$25,000, followed by 21.2% who reported an annual income of \$25-40,000. The percentage of respondents who belong to both categories \$40-60,000 and \$60-75,000 is 18.2%, while only 16.1% of respondents reported an annual income of more than \$75,000.

There were only two variables with one missing value each. The variable *Arrival in U.S.* had a missing value, which was assigned the modal value of 1985-95 and the variable *income* also had a missing value, which was assigned the modal value of <\$25,000. There were no missing values in any of the dependent or other independent variables since this is a relatively small dataset. Table 5 above shows the descriptive statistics - percentages, modes and means of all the independent variables.

### ***Ordinal Logistic Regression***

I conducted the categorical data analysis in three stages, estimating models for participating in protests and demonstrations, signing letters and petitions, and participating in internet forums as measures of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Logistic regression can be used to predict a categorical dependent variable on the basis of continuous and/or categorical independents and to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent; to rank the relative importance of independent variables; and to assess interaction effects. The impact of predictor variables is usually explained in terms of odds ratios. Logistic regression applies maximum likelihood estimation after transforming the dependent into a logit variable (the natural log of the odds of the dependent variable occurring or not). In this way, logistic regression estimates the odds of engaging in political transnationalism.

It is interesting to note here that my dependent variables are ordinal, i.e. the values can be ranked but the real distance between categories is unknown. If the scale of outcome categories (e.g., never, sometimes, often) is arbitrarily collapsed into a binary measure (e.g., no, yes) to conduct logistic regression analysis, important information may be lost in the resulting binary model. (Chen and Hughes 2004) Similarly, using linear regression method to analyze an ordinal outcome may produce incorrect estimation and interpretation based on the violation of model assumptions of normality and constant variance. (Chen and Hughes 2004) Therefore, in order to study the effects of the explanatory variables on all levels of the ordered categorical outcome, as in this case, the ordinal regression method is a superior tool to obtain the valid research results.

Ordinal regression is an extension of the binary logit model to ordinal categorical data. The ordinal logistic model for a single independent variable is

$$\ln(\theta_j) = \alpha_j - \beta X$$

where  $j$  goes from 1 to the number of categories minus 1 ( $j$  being the number of categories of the ordered dependent variable). There is a minus sign before the coefficients for the predictor variables instead of the customary plus sign so that larger coefficients indicate an association with larger scores. (Norusis 2010, p. 71)

The ordinal regression model is called the cumulative logit model because the model is built based on the cumulative response probabilities  $P_j(X)$  of being in category  $j$  or lower given the known explanatory variable. The ordinal regression model with the logit link is also known as the proportional odds model. (Chen and Hughes 2004)

The PC-based version 19.0 of SPSS was used to perform the ordinal regression analysis. The primary focus of this chapter is the formulation of the ordinal regression model and the interpretation of study results. The political transnationalism survey questionnaire was analyzed by the ordinal regression method to achieve the following objectives: (a) identify the significant explanatory variables, i.e. demographic, incorporation and resource dependent factors; (b) to estimate constants and regression coefficients; and (c) to describe the direction and strength of the relationship between the explanatory and dependent variables based on the sign (+ and -) and magnitude of the regression coefficients.

In the ordinal regression model, the estimates labeled *Threshold* are the  $\alpha_j$ 's, the intercept equivalent terms. (Norusis 2010, p. 73) The estimates labeled *Location* are the coefficients for the predictor variables. (Norusis 2010, p. 73) A positive regression coefficient indicates that there is a positive relationship between the explanatory variable and the ordinal outcome and vice versa. The magnitude (odds or  $e^b$ ) of the coefficient of a specific explanatory variable indicates that a one unit change in that explanatory variable changes the odds of the event



occurrence (in this case, protesting, petitioning or participating in internet forums) by a factor of  $e^b$ , holding all other significant explanatory variables as constant.

## Results and Interpretation

### *Protests*

Table 6 below presents the logits from the ordinal regression analysis in which the dependent variable is participation in protests/demonstrations. The threshold estimates represent the response variable *protests*. In Model 1, for example,  $Protests = 1$ , i.e. respondents who had a value of  $-0.88$  or less, is the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never protest from those who sometimes and often protest, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero. The threshold value for  $Protests=1$  is significant ( $p < .05$ ), which means that when values of explanatory variables are evaluated at zero, those who never petition are significantly different from those who petition sometimes and often. Similarly,  $Protests = 2$ , i.e., respondents who had a value of  $1.29$  or greater, is the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never and sometimes protest from those who do it often, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero. Respondents who had a value between  $-0.88$  and  $1.29$  on the latent variable would be classified as those who protest sometimes. We can similarly interpret the threshold estimates for all the other models.

Model 1 presents the baseline model which only includes the demographic variables. The  $-2 \log$  likelihood (106.11) of this model provides model fit information – since it is significant ( $p < .001$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis that all of the regression coefficients in the model are equal to zero and have no effect. In other words, including the explanatory variables improves upon a model with only an intercept to predict the categorical outcome variable *protests*.

**Table 6. Logit Coefficients from the Regression of Participating in Protests on Selected Independent Variables**

Characteristic	Demographic (Model 1)	Incorporation (Model 2)	Resources (Model 3)	Full model (Model 4)
<i>Threshold</i>				
Protests=1	-.88* (.29)	1.63** (.63)	.28 (.66)	.25 (1.82)
Protests=2	1.29 (.12)	3.57*** (.69)	1.69* (.69)	2.95 (1.83)
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>				
<i>Age<sup>1</sup></i>				
18-24	-3.26* (1.32)	—	—	-5.04** (1.93)
25-34	-2.56*** (.86)	—	—	-2.26* (1.2)
35-49	-1.55* (.72)	—	—	-1.89 (1.05)
50-64	-1.01 (.77)	—	—	-1.18 (1)
<i>Sex<sup>2</sup></i>				
Female	-1.13** (.39)	—	—	-1.53** (.48)
<i>College Degree<sup>3</sup></i>				
College degree or more in Vietnam	.89 (.59)	—	—	1.34 (.71)
College degree or more in U.S.	-.15 (.48)	—	—	.02 (.68)
College degree or more in Both	.13 (.56)	—	—	.84 (.72)
<i>Incorporation Variables</i>				
<i>Arrival in U.S.<sup>4</sup></i>				
1975-84	—	1.37** (.51)	—	.43 (.71)
1985-95	—	.87 (.52)	—	.45 (.65)
<i>English proficiency<sup>5</sup></i>				
Poor	—	3.32** (1.27)	—	5.25** (1.68)
Fair	—	1.45** (.56)	—	.77 (.87)
Good	—	.52 (.51)	—	-.79 (.73)
<i>Resource Variables</i>				
<i>Employment Status<sup>6</sup></i>				
Employed	—	—	-.63** (.52)	-.19** (.78)
Temp. Unemployed	—	—	1.07 (.61)	2.47 (.86)
<i>Income<sup>7</sup></i>				
<\$25,000	—	—	-1.05 (.66)	-1.37 (.96)
\$25-40,000	—	—	.75 (.57)	.24 (.83)
\$40-60,000	—	—	.71 (.58)	1.51* (.76)
\$60-75,000	—	—	.19 (.57)	.66 (.71)
-2 log likelihood	106.11***	57.65**	71.78**	175.9***

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; N=137.

\*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001 (one-tailed tests)

<sup>1</sup> The reference age group is 65+.

<sup>2</sup> The reference group is males.

<sup>3</sup> The reference group is those with No College Degree.

<sup>4</sup> The reference group is those who arrived Post-1995.

<sup>5</sup> The reference group is those whose English proficiency is Excellent.

<sup>6</sup> The reference group is those who are Unemployed.

<sup>7</sup> The reference group is those whose income is > \$75,000.

The effect of age on the ordered log-odds of protesting is statistically significant in this model. The reference category is the age group 65+. The coefficient for age group 18-24 is -3.26 which is significant ( $p < .05$ ). We can say that, controlling for other significant demographic variables, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of protesting of Vietnamese Americans who are 18-24 years old decreases by 96.2% ( $\exp^{-3.26}$ ). The coefficient for age group 25-34 is -2.56 which is significant ( $p < .01$ ). We can say that, controlling for other significant demographic variables, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of protesting of Vietnamese Americans who are 25-34 years old decreases by 92.3% ( $\exp^{-2.56}$ ). Similarly, the coefficient for age group 35-49 is -1.55 which is significant ( $p < .01$ ). We can say that, controlling for other significant demographic variables, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of protesting of Vietnamese Americans who are 35-49 years old decreases by 78.8% ( $\exp^{-1.55}$ ). Older Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants are thus more likely to participate in protests than younger ones.

The effect of gender on the ordered log-odds of protesting is also statistically significant; in this case, the coefficient for women (-1.13) is negatively significant ( $p < .01$ ), which means that compared to men, female Vietnamese Americans are less likely to participate in protests. We can say that, controlling for the other significant demographic factors, i.e. age, being female results in a 67.7% ( $\exp^{-1.13}$ ) decrease in the odds of protesting compared to men. The variable college degree is not significantly associated with protesting among Vietnamese Americans.

In Model 2, I test for incorporation variables. The -2 log likelihood (57.65) for this model is also significant ( $p < .01$ ), so we can reject the null hypothesis that the model without explanatory variables is as good as the model with explanatory variables. In this model, the effect of both arrival in U.S. and English proficiency on the ordered log-odds of protesting is significant. The reference category for arrival in U.S. is those who arrived post-1995. The

coefficient for the period 1975-84 is positively significant at 1.37 ( $p < .01$ ), which means that, controlling for proficiency in English, those who arrived in the U.S. between 1975 and 1984 are 2.94 ( $\exp^{1.37}$ ) times more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations compared to those who arrived post-1995.

In the case of English proficiency, the reference category is Excellent. The coefficient for the category Poor is 3.32 ( $p < .01$ ) which means that, controlling for arrival in the U.S., those with poor English language skills are 26.66 ( $\exp^{3.32}$ ) times more likely to protest than those with excellent English proficiency. Similarly, the coefficient for the category Fair is 1.45 ( $p < .01$ ) which means that, controlling for arrival in the U.S., the odds of protesting of those with fair English language skills is 3.26 ( $\exp^{1.45}$ ) times greater than that for those with excellent English proficiency.

In Model 3, I test for resource dependent variables. The -2 log likelihood (71.78) for this model is also significant ( $p < .01$ ), which means that at least one of the regression coefficients in the model is not equal to zero. In this model, the effect of employment status on the ordered log-odds of protesting is positively significant. The reference category is those who are unemployed. The coefficient for the category Employed is -.63 ( $p < .01$ ), which means that compared to unemployed Vietnamese Americans, those who are employed are less likely to participate in protests and demonstrations by 47% ( $\exp^{-.63}$ ). Income of Vietnamese Americans does not appear to have any significant effect on the ordered log-odds of protesting.

Finally, in the full model (Model 4), the -2 log likelihood (175.9) for this model is also significant ( $p < .001$ ), which means that at least one of the regression coefficients in the model is not equal to zero. We see that in the case of demographic, incorporation and resource variables, age, gender, English proficiency and employment status – the same explanatory variables as in

the nested models – continue to be significantly associated with protesting. However, arrival in the U.S., which was significant in the nested model, ceases to be significant in the full model. This suggests that when demographic and resource variables are added to the model, the effect of arrival in the U.S. on the log-odds of protesting is actually explained by the other significant variables.

College degree of Vietnamese Americans did not appear to have a significant effect on the ordered log-odds of protesting in the nested models and this is also the case in the final model. However, income - which was not significant in the nested model - becomes significant in the final model. The reference category is those whose income is  $> \$75,000$ . The coefficient for the category  $\$40-60,000$  is significant ( $p < .05$ ), which means that, controlling for the other significant variables in the model, Vietnamese Americans whose annual income falls in the category  $\$40-60,000$  are 3.53 times ( $\exp^{1.51}$ ) more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations, compared to those whose annual income is  $> \$75,000$ .

In supplemental analyses, I also tested the significance of a variable interacting two of the significant variables, age and sex. Since there are no females who are 65+ in the dataset, I collapsed the age categories of 50-64 and 65+ to create the category 50+. I then used this new variable measuring age to create the interaction term age\*sex. The interaction coefficients represent the combined categories of the variable sex and the new recoded variable age. The interaction is not significant, which means that the effect of age on the odds of protesting is not different for men and women. Since the interaction of age and sex did not turn out to be significant, the interaction term was not included in the final model.

### *Petitions*

Next, I conducted ordinal regression analysis for the effect of explanatory variables on signing letters and petitions to government officials. Table 7 below presents the logits from the ordinal regression analysis in which the dependent variable is petitions. The threshold estimates represent the response variable *petitions*. In Model 1, for example,  $\text{Petitions} = 1$ , i.e., respondents who had a value of -1.45 or less, represents the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never petition from those who sometimes and often petition, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero. Similarly,  $\text{Petitions} = 2$ , i.e., respondents who had a value of 2.17 or greater, is the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never and sometimes petition from those who do it often, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero. The threshold value for  $\text{Petitions}=2$  is significant ( $p < .05$ ), which means that when values of explanatory variables are evaluated at zero, those who petition often are significantly different from those who never and sometimes petition. Respondents who had a value between -1.45 and 2.17 on the latent variable would be classified as those who petition sometimes. We can similarly interpret the threshold estimates for all the other models.

Model 1 presents the baseline model which only includes the demographic variables. The -2 log likelihood (93.75) of this model provides model fit information – since it is significant ( $p < .01$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis that all of the regression coefficients in the model are equal to zero and have no effect. In other words, including the explanatory variables improves upon a model with only an intercept to predict the categorical outcome variable *petitions*.

**Table 7. Logit Coefficients from the Regression of Participating in Petitions on Selected Independent Variables**

Characteristic	Demographic (Model 1)	Incorporation (Model 2)	Resources (Model 3)	Full model (Model 4)
<i>Threshold</i>				
Petitions=1	-1.45 (.95)	2.79*** (.77)	.09 (.68)	2.72 (1.93)
Petitions=2	2.17* (.91)	6.16*** (.92)	3.32*** (.79)	6.61** (1.95)
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>				
<i>Age</i> <sup>1</sup>				
18-24	-3.65** (1.37)	—	—	-1.97 (1.69)
25-34	-2.59** (.95)	—	—	-1.88 (1.2)
35-49	-2.03* (.84)	—	—	-2.36* (1.06)
50-64	-1.63 (.89)	—	—	-2.14* (1.01)
<i>Sex</i> <sup>2</sup>				
Female	-.8* (.39)	—	—	-1.53** (.49)
<i>College Degree</i> <sup>3</sup>				
College degree or more in Vietnam	-.36 (.62)	—	—	-.53 (.69)
College degree or more in U.S.	-.01 (.48)	—	—	.33 (.63)
College degree or more in Both	.03 (.57)	—	—	-.28 (.69)
<i>Incorporation Variables</i>				
<i>Arrival in U.S.</i> <sup>4</sup>				
1975-84	—	1.19* (.52)	—	1.07 (.71)
1985-95	—	.93 (.52)	—	1.11 (.64)
<i>English proficiency</i> <sup>5</sup>				
Poor/Fair	—	2.4** (.71)	—	3.51** (1.02)
Good	—	1.98** (.67)	—	2.68** (.86)
<i>Resource Variables</i>				
<i>Employment Status</i> <sup>6</sup>				
Employed	—	—	-.36 (.52)	.95 (.69)
Temporarily Unemployed	—	—	-.76 (.62)	.01 (.78)
<i>Income</i> <sup>7</sup>				
<\$25,000	—	—	-.28 (.64)	-.45 (.88)
\$25-40,000	—	—	.65 (.59)	-.36 (.83)
\$40-60,000	—	—	.28 (.6)	-.67 (.76)
\$60-75,000	—	—	.66 (.59)	-.19 (.72)
-2 log likelihood	93.75**	38.72***	51.14	159.19***

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; N=137.

\*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001 (one-tailed tests)

<sup>1</sup> The reference age group is 65+.

<sup>2</sup> The reference group is those who are male.

<sup>3</sup> The reference group is those with No College Degree.

<sup>4</sup> The reference group is those who arrived Post-1995.

<sup>5</sup> The reference group is those whose English proficiency is Excellent.

<sup>6</sup> The reference group is those who are Unemployed.

<sup>7</sup> The reference group is those whose income is > \$75,000.

The effect of age and sex on the ordered log-odds of petitioning are statistically significant in this model. The reference category for age is 65+. The coefficient for the age group 18-24 is -3.65 which is significant ( $p < .01$ ). We can say that, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of petitioning of Vietnamese Americans who are 18-24 years old decreases by 97.4% ( $\exp^{-3.65}$ ). The coefficient for the age group 25-34 is -2.59 which is significant ( $p < .01$ ). We can say that, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of petitioning of Vietnamese Americans who are 25-34 years old decreases by 92.5% ( $\exp^{-2.59}$ ). Similarly, the coefficient for the age group 35-49 is -2.03 which is significant ( $p < .05$ ). We can say that, compared to those who are 65+, the odds of petitioning of Vietnamese Americans who are 35-49 years old decreases by 86.9% ( $\exp^{-2.03}$ ). Older Vietnamese Americans are thus more likely to sign petitions and letters to government officials than younger ones.

The effect of gender on the ordered log-odds of petitioning is also statistically significant; in this case, the coefficient for women (-.8) is negatively significant ( $p < .05$ ), which means that compared to men, female Vietnamese Americans are less likely to participate in protests. We can say that, controlling for the other significant demographic factors, i.e. age, being female results in a 55.1% ( $\exp^{-.8}$ ) decrease in the odds of petitioning compared to men. The variable college degree is not significantly associated with petitioning among Vietnamese Americans.

In Model 2, I test for incorporation variables. The -2 log likelihood (38.72) for this model is also significant ( $p < .001$ ), so we can reject the null hypothesis that the model without explanatory variables is as good as the model with explanatory variables. In this model, time of arrival in the U.S. is significantly associated with petitioning among Vietnamese Americans. The reference category for time of arrival is those who arrived post-1995. The coefficient for the category 1975-84 is 1.19 ( $p < .05$ ) which means that Vietnamese Americans who arrived



between 1975 and 1984 are 2.29 ( $\exp^{1.19}$ ) times more likely to sign petitions than those who arrived in the U.S. post-1995. The effect of English proficiency on the ordered log-odds of petitioning is also significant. For ease of interpretation of the variable English Proficiency and to ensure consistency with the coding of my interaction variable (specified below), I collapsed the categories of Poor and Fair to create the category Poor/Fair. The reference category is Excellent. The coefficient for the category Poor/Fair is 2.4 ( $p < .01$ ) which means that, compared to those with excellent English proficiency, those with poor or fair English language skills are 10.02 ( $\exp^{2.4}$ ) times more likely to sign petitions. Similarly, the coefficient for the category Good is 1.98 ( $p < .01$ ) which means that the odds of petitioning of those with good English language skills is 6.24 ( $\exp^{1.98}$ ) times greater than that for those with excellent English proficiency.

In Model 3, I test for resource dependent variables. In this model, neither of the explanatory variables, employment status and income, has a significant effect on the ordered log-odds of petitioning. As expected, the -2 log likelihood (51.14) for this model is not significant ( $p > .05$ ), which means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the model without explanatory variables is as good as the model with explanatory variables.

Finally, in the full model (Model 4), the -2 log likelihood (156.65) for this model is significant ( $p < .001$ ), which means that at least one of the regression coefficients in the model is not equal to zero. We see that age, gender and English proficiency which were the significant explanatory variables in the nested models continue to be significantly associated with petitioning in the full model, while arrival in U.S. ceases to be significant. This suggests that older Vietnamese Americans are more likely to petition than younger ones, men are more likely to petition than women and those who are not very proficient in English are more likely to petition than those with excellent English skills.

In my supplemental analyses, I also tested the significance of a variable interacting two of the significant variables, gender and English proficiency. Since there are no males whose English proficiency is Poor in the dataset, I collapsed the English proficiency categories of Poor and Fair to create the category Poor/Fair. I then used this new variable measuring English proficiency to create the interaction term sex\*English proficiency. The reference category is Female\*Excellent. The interaction is not significant, which means that the effect of English proficiency on the log-odds of petitioning is not different for men and women. Since the interaction term did not turn out to be significant, it was not included in the final model.

### ***Internet Forums***

Finally, I conducted ordinal regression analysis for the effect of explanatory variables on participating in internet forums. Table 8 below presents the logits from the ordinal regression analysis in which the dependent variable is participating in online forums dealing with Vietnamese American issues. The threshold estimates represent the response variable *internet forums*. In Model 1, for example, Internet Forums = 1, i.e., respondents who had a value of 1.01 or less, represents the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never participate in internet forums from those who do so sometimes and often, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero.

Similarly, Petitions = 2, i.e., respondents who had a value of 3.49 or greater, is the estimated cutoff value on the latent variable used to differentiate those who never and sometimes participate in internet forums from those who do it often, when values of the explanatory variables are evaluated at zero. The estimate value 3.49 is significant ( $p < .001$ ), which means

**Table 8. Logit Coefficients from the Regression of Participating in Internet Forums on Selected Independent Variables**

Characteristic	Demographic (Model 1)	Incorporation (Model 2)	Resources (Model 3)	Full model (Model 4)	Interaction Model (Model 5)
<i>Threshold</i>					
Internet Forums=1	1.01 (.82)	.89 (.6)	.32 (.65)	3.01 (1.74)	3.1 (1.87)
Internet Forums=2	3.49*** (.88)	3.02*** (.65)	2.46*** (.69)	5.73** (1.82)	5.91** (1.94)
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>					
<i>Age</i> <sup>1</sup>					
18-24	.33 (1.03)	—	—	.45 (1.35)	.17 (1.39)
25-34	.08 (.81)	—	—	-.21 (1.07)	-.21 (1.09)
35-49	.77 (.71)	—	—	.32 (.92)	.4 (.95)
50-64	-.001 (.78)	—	—	-.49 (.9)	-.63 (.92)
<i>Sex</i> <sup>2</sup>					
Female	-1.22** (.38)	—	—	-1.79*** (.48)	-1.97* (.94)
<i>College Degree</i> <sup>3</sup>					
College degree or more in Vietnam	.37 (.58)	—	—	.39 (.64)	1.27 (.82)
College degree or more in U.S.	.36 (.46)	—	—	.28 (.61)	.28 (.71)
College degree or more in Both	1.38* (.55)	—	—	1.09* (.66)	.69 (.75)
<i>Incorporation Variables</i>					
<i>Arrival in U.S.</i> <sup>4</sup>					
1975-84	—	-.24 (.48)	—	-.26 (.65)	-.3 (.68)
1985-95	—	.12 (.47)	—	-.04 (.56)	-.15 (.6)
<i>English proficiency</i> <sup>5</sup>					
Poor	—	1.19 (1.25)	—	1.93 (1.56)	2.05 (1.7)
Fair	—	.93 (.57)	—	1.25 (.82)	1.25 (.83)
Good	—	1.56** (.53)	—	1.2 (.69)	1.34 (.72)
<i>Resource Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i> <sup>6</sup>					
Employed	—	—	.14 (.49)	.59 (.65)	.41 (.69)
Temporarily Unemployed	—	—	-.01 (.59)	-.19 (.7)	-.46 (.74)
<i>Income</i> <sup>7</sup>					
<\$25,000	—	—	.29 (.6)	.97 (.81)	1.14 (.83)
\$25-40,000	—	—	-.02 (.57)	.14 (.77)	.09 (.78)
\$40-60,000	—	—	.61 (.58)	.97 (.72)	.84 (.73)
\$60-75,000	—	—	1.36 (.57)	1.47 (.69)	1.3 (.7)
<i>Sex*CollegeDegree</i> <sup>8</sup>					
Female*Vietnam	—	—	—	—	-2.43 (1.61)
Female*U.S.	—	—	—	—	.13 (1.09)
Female*Both	—	—	—	—	1.75* (1.37)
-2 log likelihood	95.18***	57.36*	78.69	198.27***	191.24***

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; N=137.

\*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001 (one-tailed tests)

<sup>1</sup> The reference age group is 65+.

<sup>2</sup> The reference group is males.

<sup>3</sup> The reference group is those with No College Degree.

<sup>4</sup> The reference group is those who arrived Post-1995.

<sup>5</sup> The reference group is those whose English proficiency is Excellent.

<sup>6</sup> The reference group is those who are Unemployed.

<sup>7</sup> The reference group is those whose income is > \$75,000.

<sup>8</sup> The reference group is Females\*NoCollegeDegree.

that when values of explanatory variables are evaluated at zero; those who participate in internet forums often are significantly different from those who never and sometimes do so. Respondents who had a value between 1.01 and 3.49 on the latent variable would be classified as those who participate in internet forums sometimes. We can similarly interpret the threshold estimates for all the other models.

Model 1 presents the baseline model which only includes the demographic variables. The -2 log likelihood (95.18) of this model provides model fit information – since it is highly significant ( $p < .001$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis that all of the regression coefficients in the model are equal to zero and have no effect. In other words, including the explanatory variables improves upon a model with only an intercept to predict the categorical outcome variable *internet forums*.

Age appears to have no significant effect on the ordered log-odds of participating in internet forums in this nested model. The effect of gender on participation in internet forums is statistically significant in this model. The coefficient for gender is -1.22, which is negatively significant ( $p < .01$ ), which means that compared to men, female Vietnamese Americans are less likely to participate in internet forums. We can say that being female results in an 70.5% ( $\exp^{-1.22}$ ) decrease in the odds of participating in internet forums.

College degree is the other significant variable in this model. The reference category for college degree is those with no college degree. The coefficient for the category College Degree or more in both countries is significantly associated with participation in internet forums ( $p < .05$ ). This means that, controlling for gender, Vietnamese Americans who have a college degree or more and who obtained their college degree in both countries are 2.97 times ( $\exp^{1.38}$ ) more likely to participate in internet forums than those with no college degree. Thus, those with a

college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam are more likely to participate in internet forums than those Vietnamese Americans without a college degree.

In Model 2, I test for incorporation variables. In this model, English proficiency has a significant effect on the ordered log-odds of participating in internet forums. The coefficient for the category Good is significantly associated with participation in internet forums ( $p < .01$ ). This means that Vietnamese Americans whose proficiency in English is good are 3.76 times ( $\exp^{1.56}$ ) more likely to participate in internet forums than those with excellent English proficiency. Arrival in U.S. does not have a significant effect on the ordered log-odds of participating in internet forums in this nested model.

In Model 3, I test for resource dependent variables. In this model, neither of the explanatory variables - employment status and income, has a significant effect on the ordered log-odds of participating in internet forums. As expected, the -2 log likelihood (78.69) for this model is not significant ( $p > .05$ ), which means that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the model without explanatory variables is as good as the model with explanatory variables, employment status and income.

In the full model (Model 4), the -2 log likelihood (198.27) for this model is significant ( $p < .001$ ), which means that at least one of the regression coefficients in the model is not equal to zero. In this model, gender and college degree continue to be significantly associated with participating in internet forums, while English proficiency ceases to be significant. This suggests that when demographic variables are added to the model, the effect of English proficiency on the log-odds of participation in internet forums is actually explained by the other significant variables, gender and college degree.

In the final model (Model 5), I also tested the significance of a variable interacting two of the significant variables in Model 4 - sex and college degree. The interaction coefficients represent the combined categories of the variables sex and college degree. The reference category is Female\*No College degree. The interaction term turns out to be significantly associated with my dependent variable. The coefficient for the category Female\*College degree in both countries is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). This means that, compared to females who do not have a college degree, the log-odds of participating in internet forums among females with a college degree in both countries increases by 4.75 times ( $\exp^{1.75}$ ). Thus, the effect of gender on the ordered log-odds of participating in internet forums is significantly different for Vietnamese Americans who do not have a college degree and those who obtained their college degree in both Vietnam and the United States.

### *Overlaps across all three activities*

Another interesting aspect of the analysis would be to look at how groups overlap across the three forms of political transnationalism. For instance, are there respondents who report “never” or “sometimes” engaging in all three activities? If so, how do the demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors under consideration distribute among those “never” or “sometimes” engage in political transnationalism? To investigate this angle, I created a new variable Never that consists of only those cases where the respondents reported never participating in protests, petitions and internet forums – this variable contains 23 cases. I similarly created another variable “Sometimes”, containing 14 cases.<sup>11</sup> I then conducted additional bivariate analysis for those respondents who reported participating “Never” and

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<sup>11</sup> Since those who reported “Often” engaging in all three activities were only 3 respondents – a number too small for any form of statistical inference – they were left out of the analysis.

“Sometimes” on all three forms of political transnationalism, and explored whether the explanatory factors that were significant in my ordinal regression analysis hold true for this smaller, extracted dataset as well. The following are the results from my analysis:

### *Age*

Figure 10

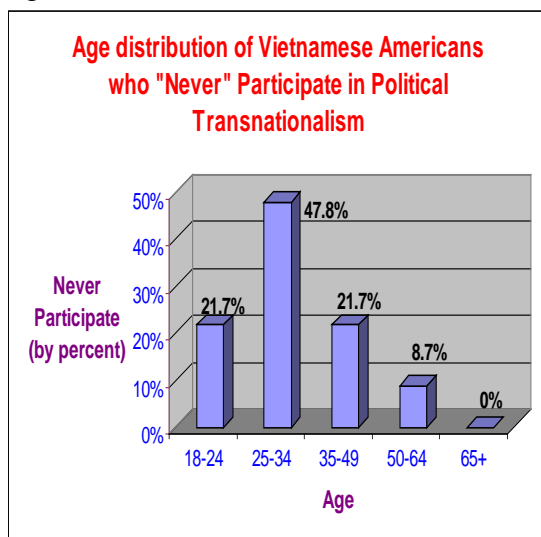
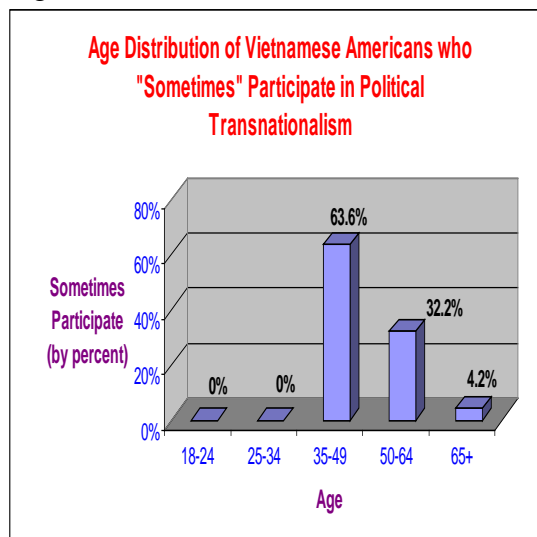


Figure 11



As we see above in Figure 10, the highest percentage of Vietnamese Americans who never participate in political transnationalism belong to the age group 25-34 while no respondents who report never participating in all three activities are over 65 years of age. On the other hand, in Figure 11, 63.6% of those who sometimes participate in political transnationalism belong to the age group 35-49 while no Vietnamese Americans who report sometimes participating in all three activities belong to the 18-24 or 25-34 year old age category. Thus, my finding that older Vietnamese Americans are more likely to engage in transnational political activities holds true even in groups overlapping all three activities.

## ***Gender***

As we see below in Figures 12 and 13, the majority (69.6%) of Vietnamese Americans who reported never participating in all three forms of transnational political activity are female, while 90.9% of respondents who reported sometimes participating in political transnationalism are male. Thus, this confirms my finding that among Vietnamese Americans men are more likely than women to participate in political transnationalism.

Figure 12

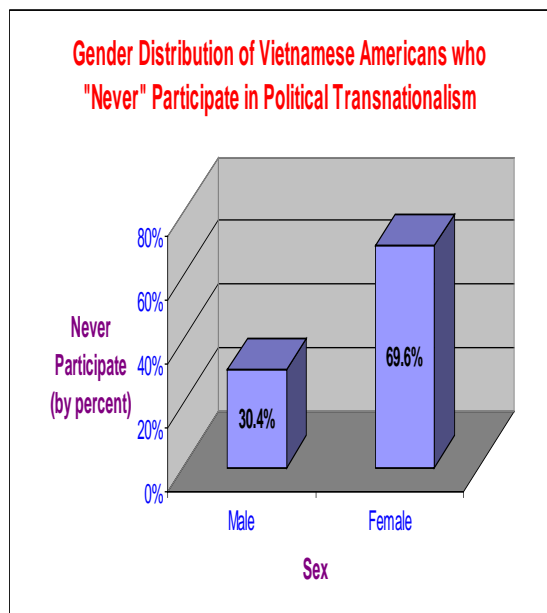
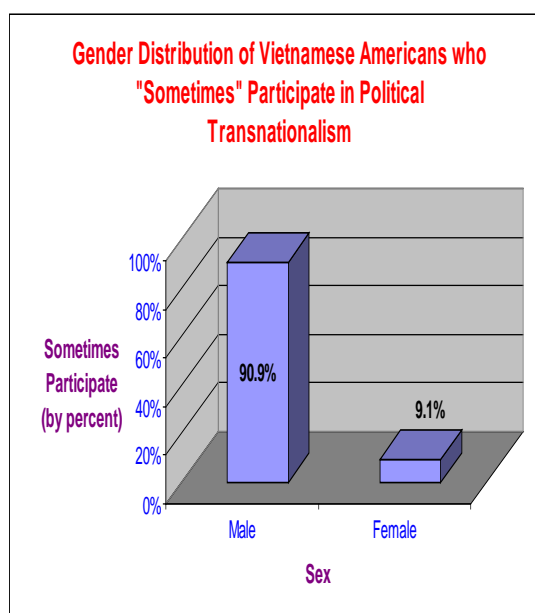


Figure 13



## ***Education***

As we see below in Figure 14, as Vietnamese Americans' level of education rises, the percentage of respondents who reported never participating in political transnationalism also increases. In fact, the majority (39.1%) of those who report never engaging in all three activities are respondents with a graduate degree or some graduate experience. This confirms my finding that, contrary to the theoretical literature higher levels of education do not correspond to greater



likelihood of participating in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. In Figure 15, the majority (54.5%) of respondents who reported sometimes engaging in all three activities are those Vietnamese Americans with a college degree, but this relationship is not statistically significant as shown in the ordinal regression analysis earlier in the chapter.

Figure 14

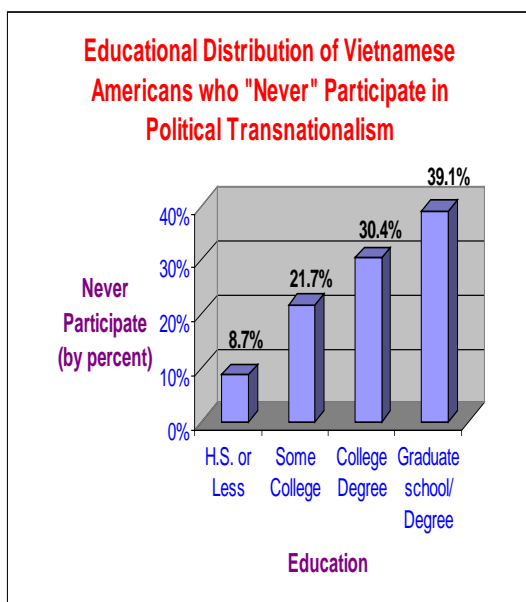
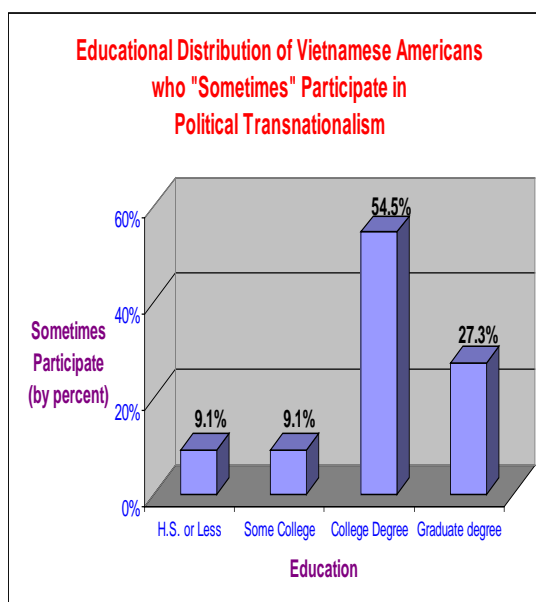


Figure 15



### *Arrival in U.S.*

As we see below in Figures 16 and 17, most respondents (45.1%) who report never participating in political transnationalism arrived in the later waves, especially post-1995. On the other hand, most Vietnamese Americans (91%) who reported sometimes participating in all three activities arrived in the first two waves (1975-85 and 1985-95). Among Vietnamese Americans who reported sometimes engaging in all three activities, none arrived before 1975 and only 9% came to the U.S. post-1995. This confirms my finding that refugees in the earlier waves (post-

1975 evacuees, boat people and former political prisoners) are more likely to engage in political transnationalism than those who arrived later through family reunification programs.

Figure 16

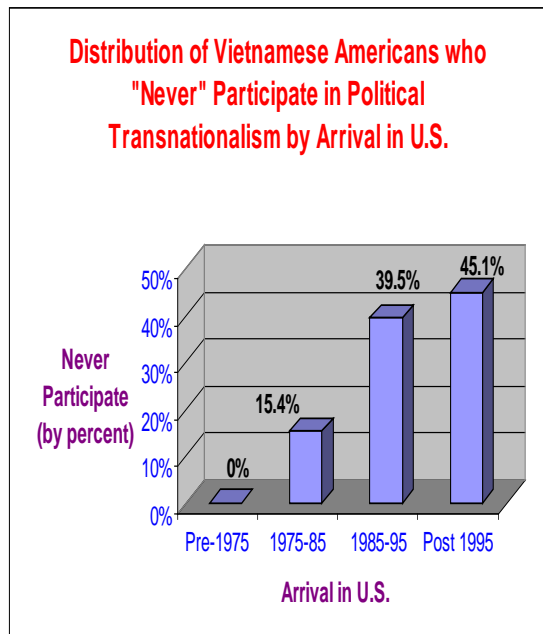
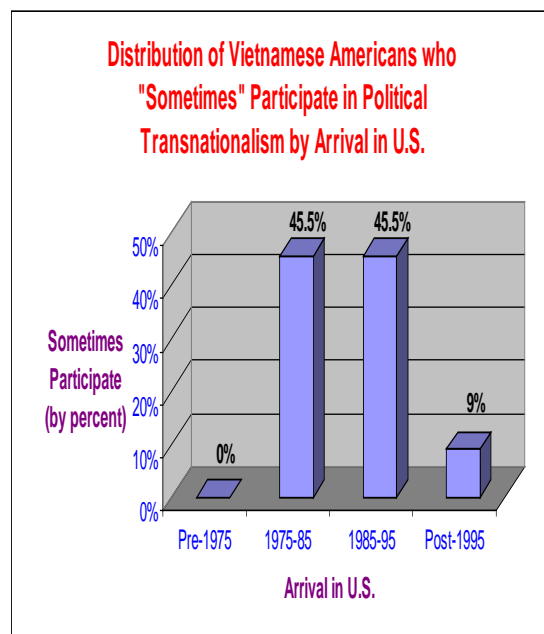


Figure 17



**English Proficiency**

Figure 18

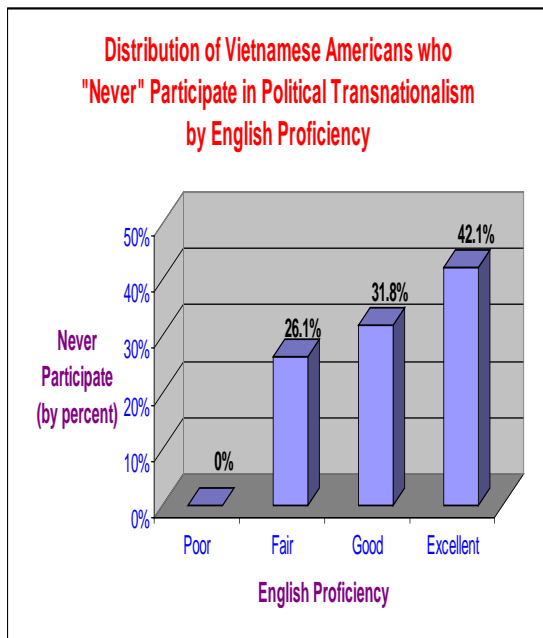
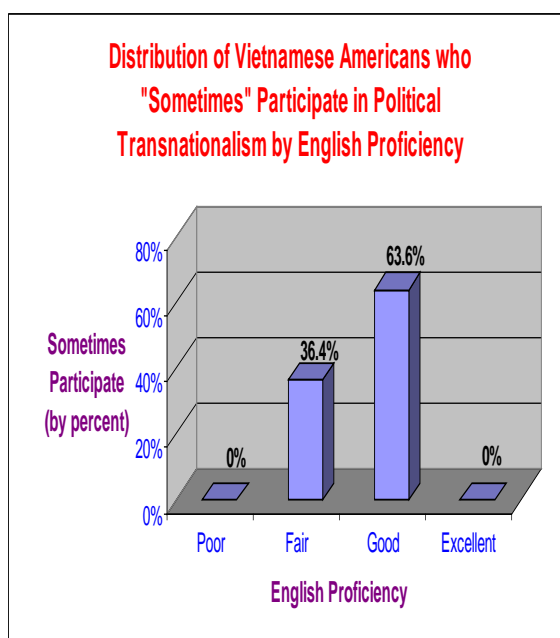


Figure 19



As we see above in Figure 18, the majority of Vietnamese Americans who reported never participating in all three forms of transnational political activities (42.1%) also had an excellent level of English proficiency. In Figure 19, the majority (63.6%) of those who reported sometimes participating in political transnationalism selected a good level of English proficiency – nearly double of those (31.8%) who reported never participating in political transnationalism and also had a good level of English proficiency. It is also interesting to note that no Vietnamese Americans with an excellent level of English proficiency reported sometimes participating in all three activities – thus, contrary to the theoretical literature, those with higher levels of English language skills are less likely to be politically active. This finding is consistent with the results of the ordinal regression analysis that respondents who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and petition.

### ***Employment Status***

Figure 20

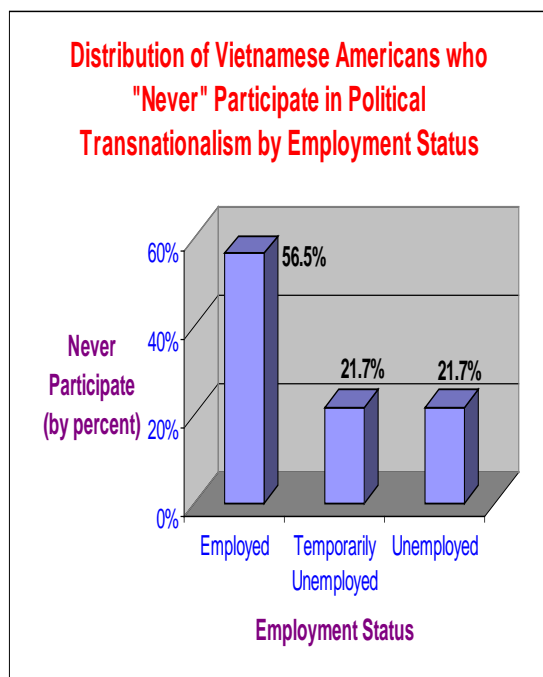
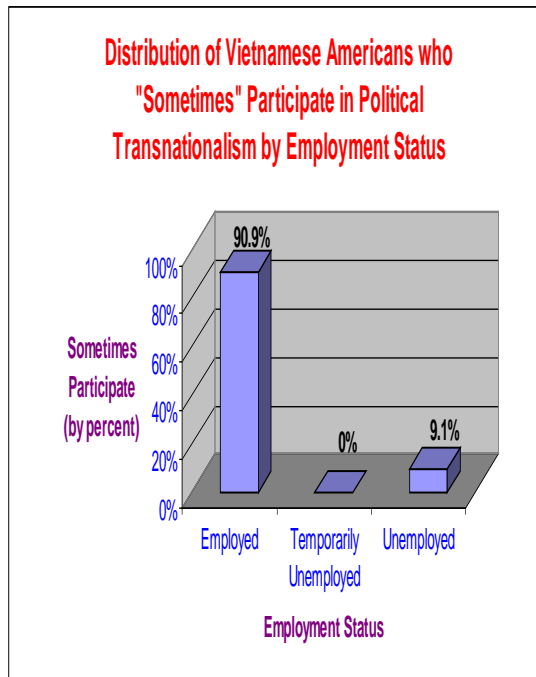


Figure 21



As we see above in Figures 20 and 21, the majority of Vietnamese Americans who report both never as well as sometimes participating in all three activities are employed. 56.5% of those who never engage in political transnationalism are employed, while 91% of those who sometimes do so are employed. The ordinal regression analysis had shown that unemployed Vietnamese Americans are more likely than those employed to participate in protests and demonstrations. However, no clear effect of employment status on political transnationalism seems to be visible from the descriptive statistics.

### ***Income***

Figure 22

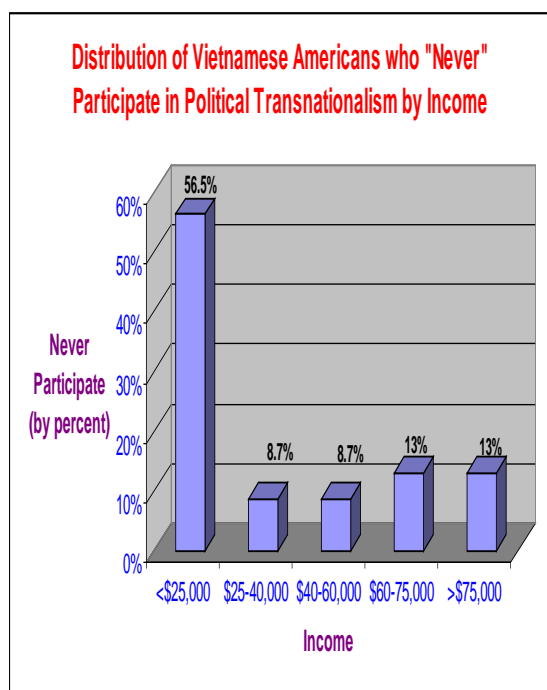
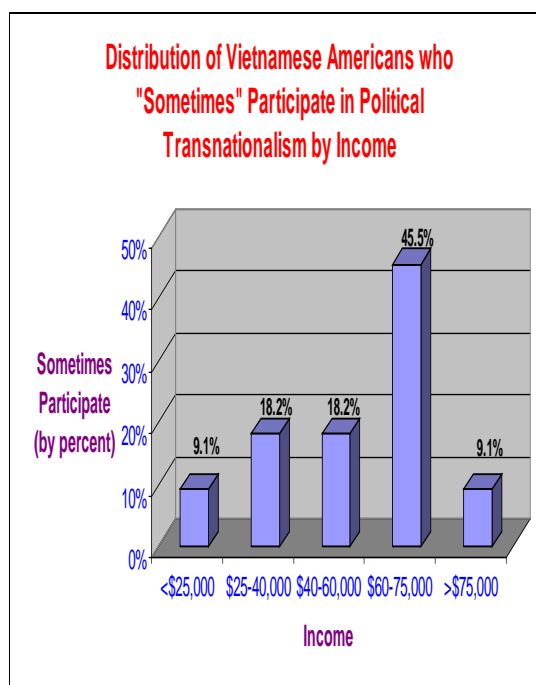


Figure 23



As we can see above in Figure 22, the majority (56.5%) of those Vietnamese Americans who reported never participating in political transnationalism reported an income of < \$25,000. On the other hand, the majority (56.5%) of those respondents who reported sometimes engaging

in all three activities reported an income of \$60 – 75,000. This finding is consistent with the theoretical literature that as socio-economic status, of which income is a primary indicator, raises so does the likelihood of participation in transnational activities. However, this positive relationship between income and political transnationalism was not found to be statistically significant in the ordinal regression analysis.

This section examined how groups overlap across the three forms of transnational political activities. The purpose was to investigate how the demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors under consideration distribute among those who “never” or “sometimes” engage in political transnationalism. The results showed that in the case of age, sex, arrival in U.S. and English proficiency, the effect of these factors on political transnationalism is consistent with those found in the regression analysis. Even though, employed Vietnamese Americans were found to be less likely to engage in transnational political activities in the ordinal regression analysis, no clear effect of employment status on political transnationalism seems to be visible from the bivariate analysis. Contrary to the theoretical literature, lack of a college degree did not correspond to lower likelihood of participating in political transnationalism. The effect of income did seem to be consistent with the theoretical literature but the factor was not found to be statistically significant.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the ordinal logistic analyses conducted confirm some hypotheses of the theoretical literature, but not others. Among demographic variables, age and sex are the two most significant factors. As hypothesized in the theoretical literature, age is positively associated with

political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans – older Vietnamese Americans are more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations as well as sign petitions than younger respondents (as I discuss in further detail in my qualitative chapter). Similarly, the evidence for gender as a significant factor confirms the hypothesis in the transnationalism literature that male immigrants are more likely to engage in transnationalism than women. Among Vietnamese Americans, men are more likely than women to protest, sign petitions as well as participate in internet forums as types of political transnationalism.

It is interesting to note that the explanatory variable for which there was overwhelming evidence in the transnationalism literature – college degree – turned out to not be a significant factor in predicting protesting and petitioning among Vietnamese Americans. In other words, lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with a lower likelihood of protesting and signing petitions. In the case of participating in internet forums, having a college degree is significant. The regression analyses suggest that what also matters is where the college degree was earned. Compared to Vietnamese Americans who do not have a college degree, those who obtained a college degree in both Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to participate in internet forums as a form of expression of political transnationalism.

Regarding incorporation variables, the time-period of arrival in the U.S. is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning in the nested models, but ceases to be significant in the full models. Proficiency in English is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning but not with participating in internet forums in the final model. As for arrival in the U.S., Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the earlier refugee wave of 1975-84 are more likely to participate in protests and sign petitions than those who arrived post-1995. However, while English proficiency is a significant factor in explaining political transnationalism, contrary to the

hypothesis in the theoretical literature, Vietnamese Americans with poor English proficiency are more likely to protest and petition than those with excellent English language skills.

Finally, resource dependent variables were hypothesized to be an important variable in determining the transnational political activities investigated in my research. Employment status and income turn out to be significantly associated only with protesting. However, contrary to the theoretical literature, unemployed Vietnamese Americans and those who have lower annual incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than those who are employed and earn > \$75,000 annually. Employment status and income of Vietnamese Americans are not significantly associated with petitioning or participation in internet forums.

Thus, Vietnamese Americans who are most likely to engage in protesting and sign petitions and letters to government officials dealing with Vietnamese issues are older males who arrived in the U.S. during the early waves of refugee influx and are not very proficient in English. Unemployed Vietnamese Americans who have lower incomes are also more likely to attend protests, while being female and obtaining a college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam is associated with more frequent participation in internet forums related to homeland issues.

To sum up, in this chapter, I have conducted quantitative analysis to determine whether the demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors identified in the theoretical literature and confirmed in my interviews are found to be statistically significant and to what extent they are able to explain differences in the frequency of transnational political activities among Vietnamese Americans. With the help of the logit link to build the ordinal regression models, political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans was found to be significantly associated with age, gender, college degree, arrival in U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income.

Overall, the ordinal logistic analyses provide strong evidence that demographic variables are more useful than incorporation and resource dependent variables in predicting the likelihood of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. A more detailed analysis of the results as well as possible rationalizations for outcomes relating to explanatory factors for political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans will be discussed in the qualitative analysis section in my next chapter.



## Chapter 6

### Political Transnationalism among Vietnamese Refugees – A Qualitative Analysis

#### Introduction

In looking at Asian-American diaspora, the content of their politics has emphasized transnational policy-making rather than domestic politics (Nakanishi 2003). The Vietnamese American community similarly appears to be invested not only in U.S. – domestic but also in homeland politics. In this chapter, I briefly outline the history of political activism in the Vietnamese American community in the early period of their resettlement in California. This is followed by an in-depth investigation of the transnational political activities currently undertaken by Vietnamese Americans in Orange County, California. This phase of the research was carried out by analyzing the interview data obtained in Phase I of my research and expanding on the information available by reading scholarly, newspaper and online accounts of various political events. Finally, I conduct a detailed qualitative analysis of the results obtained from ordinal regression (in Chapter 5) based on the survey data collected in Phase II of my research.

The main findings of this chapter are briefly highlighted here. An important finding from the initial years of political transnationalism is that the early period of transnational activism among Vietnamese Americans was fraught with violence, sometimes fatal. This wave of political violence peaked in the late 1980s, following which there was a gradual movement away from violence towards other non-violent forms of political activity and expression of disapproval of communists, especially protests, beginning in the 1990s.

Second, present-day transnationalism engaged in by Vietnamese Americans takes the form of indirect, non-electoral political activities. In other words, they do not appear to be direct, electoral transnational political acts such as voting in home country elections or active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin. Rather, the kinds of transnational

political acts that Vietnamese Americans engage in are more of an indirect nature, such as participating in protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and letters to government officials as part of political campaigns as well as participating in various internet forums on homeland issues.

Finally, discussion of the ordinal regression results in the last section of this chapter indicates that political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans was found to be significantly associated with age, gender, college degree, arrival in the U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income. One noteworthy finding is that the lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with lower likelihood of protesting and petitioning in the case of Vietnamese Americans. In the case of participation in internet forums, those with a college degree obtained in both the U.S. and Vietnam were found to be more likely to participate in internet forums as a form of expression of political transnationalism. A third remarkable finding in my research is that in the case of three of the significant independent variables – age, gender and arrival in the U.S. – the direction of the association with political transnationalism is consistent with expectations in the theoretical literature. However, in the case of two other explanatory factors – English proficiency, employment status and income – the opposite is true. In other words, contrary to the theoretical literature, Vietnamese Americans with poor English skills and those who are unemployed and have lower incomes are more likely to engage in political transnationalism.

### **Transnational political activism in the early period of resettlement**

This section provides a brief overview of the history of political activism in the Vietnamese American community in the early period of their resettlement. The Vietnamese

Americans, as political refugees from the war, have always had ambivalent attitudes towards their homeland. The Vietnam War was a shattering experience that disrupted families and traditions. For those who remained for a while under Communist rule, the reforms of the new regime were equally, if not more, disruptive. At the same time, some Vietnamese refugees have mixed reactions about living in the United States, a country which abandoned them at war's end, but then took them in as refugees, giving them political freedom and economic opportunities. While grateful to America, older Vietnamese fear that living in America leads to the loss and abandonment of their traditions and their remembered life in their ancestral lands (Freeman 1995). Till date, the Vietnamese refugees retain a strong sentimental attachment to their homeland, customs and traditions, and to the many relatives they left behind in Vietnam and continue to maintain regular contacts with their homeland (Lien 2001).

During the early years of refugee settlement in the United States, Vietnamese Americans worked to establish themselves. There was little time or resources to organize politically until they gained economic stability in the 1980s and 1990s. Due to the growth of sizeable urban refugee communities in Orange County, the development of refugee businesses and self-help groups grew. These groups, known as Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA), assisted refugees in securing employment, provided teachers for English and societal skills and encouraged the preservation of Vietnamese culture (Valverde 1994). As the MAAs became more established, they also became more politically powerful. They lobbied their congressional representatives concerning refugee issues and matters germane to Vietnam (Valverde 1994). They also formed some potentially powerful political action and advocacy groups, and raised money to support selected political action like pressuring Congress not to lift the economic embargo on Vietnam

(Rutledge 1992). The MAAs thus served as a medium for early political mobilization and activity for Vietnamese Americans.

Vietnamese American transnational political activism in the early years proved violent and deadly. On July 21, 1981 in San Francisco, Duong Trong Lam, an anti-war activist, was the first Vietnamese assassination victim (Coburn 1983). A group calling themselves the Anti-Communist Viets Organization (ACVO) took responsibility for the killing, claiming that Lam was assassinated because he was a communist agent who edited the *Cai Dinh Lang* newspaper to “bolster the image of the hated Vietnamese communist regime” (Coburn 1983). In another case, Doan Van Toai, head of the political group called Institute for Democracy in Vietnam, was shot and wounded near his home in 1989 (San Jose Mercury News 1989). Sources in the Vietnamese American community claimed he met with Hanoi officials and advocated U.S.-Vietnam dialogue and hence, wanted him dead (Valverde 1994, p. 105).

The most publicized occurrence was the death of the journalist Tap Van Pham who was killed when arsonists set fire to his newspaper office located in Little Saigon on August 9, 1987 for running advertisements for a company that specialized in money transfers to Vietnam and that was strongly suspected of having ties with the communist government of Vietnam (Kiger 1987). As listed in the *Orange County Register*, assassinations also included the 1986 shooting of Van Khan Tran outside a Westminster shopping center for speaking in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with Vietnam (Brody 1987b) and the 1994 slaying of Nguyen Van Luy, honorary president of a pro-Hanoi group in San Francisco (Ha 2002). These incidents showed that voicing any kind of deviant opinion, or one vaguely critical of the refugee community, could be construed as pro-Communist.

There have also been varied forms of expressions of anti-communist sentiments. In the 1980s, a vigilante group calling themselves the Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate the Communists and Restore the Nation (VOECRN) claimed responsibility for a string of arson attacks and summary executions of purported Communist propagandists (Ha 2002). On April 30, 1980, the National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (NUFRONLIV) was formed by Hoang Co Minh and Pham Van Lieu and has gained worldwide support among the Vietnamese. According to its Directorate, the Vietnamese Resistance, led by NUFRLONLIV, aims to overthrow the totalitarian Vietcong regime and to return peace, freedom and democracy to the Vietnamese people (NUFRONLIV 1986).

The task of the Vietnamese Freedom Fighters was aimed not only at overthrowing a brutal regime but also at reconstructing a free, democratic and progressive society based on justice, freedom and humanity and rebuilding an economy of free enterprise (NUFRONLIV 1986, pp. 44-45). From overseas, Vietnamese refugees have made many efforts to support the struggle for liberation of their homeland. This group supposedly trained fighters on the border of Thailand with the intention of taking back Vietnam by force (Valverde 1994). In 1987, a group of 200 fighters from NUFRLONLIV attempted to enter Vietnam but failed; 104 of the invaders were killed, another 65 were captured (Grossman 1988, p. 6).

Eventually, the wave of political violence peaked in the late 1980s and then subsided as organizations like VOECRN and NUFRLONLIV disappeared and showed no further signs of activity. The next instance of political activity occurred in the 1990s when protests against suspected communist sympathizers continued even though the violence disappeared. For example, at the end of 1994, Thanh Lan, a famous Vietnamese singer, was scheduled to sing in the United States. However, her concert was picketed by Vietnamese Americans accusing her of

being an agent of Communist Vietnam (Jung 1994). Since then, Vietnamese political participation has run the gamut from conventional to unconventional activities, ranging from boycotts and demonstrations to dramatic protest events.

### **Transnational Political Activism Today**

This section begins with a few general observations on homeland sentiments prevailing in the community based on my interviews and then goes on to describe in detail the transnational political activities currently undertaken by Vietnamese Americans, based on my interviews and supported with additional information from scholarly, newspaper and online accounts of political events in Orange County, California. The Vietnamese American community appears to be invested not only in U.S. – domestic but also homeland politics. Despite the fact that all the leaders in Orange County are naturalized U.S. citizens (their nationality is technically American), half of them describe their nationality as “Vietnamese” or “Vietnamese American” (Nguyen, M. H. 1984, p. 209). This reflects a lingering attachment to national identity that is both possible and advantageous in the context of political organizing in the Vietnamese American community (Valverde 1994). For instance, the community often expresses strong anti-Communist sentiments – in a poll conducted for the *Orange County Register* in 2000, an overwhelming majority of 600 Vietnamese Americans surveyed in Orange County ranked fighting communism as “very important” (Collet 2000). Thus, because they are a fairly mobilized refugee group and because homeland concerns are particularly salient, much of their political energy is devoted to issues dealing with their homeland, Vietnam.

In order to investigate the kind of transnational political activism undertaken by Vietnamese Americans in the present day, I conducted a thorough qualitative review and analysis

of the 27 interview transcripts. A copy of the interview questionnaire is presented in Appendix A. This section describes the most popular forms of transnational political activism undertaken by Vietnamese Americans, as expressed to me during the course of the interviews and supplemented with newspaper and online accounts of these activities. I begin with a few general observations based on the interviews and then move on to describe specific transnational activities.

A common thread running through all the interviews was that of pride in Vietnamese culture and nostalgia for “the old days” before the fall of Saigon. Many of the interviewees told me that although they were now living in the United States and some had never even returned to visit Vietnam, their hearts still lay with their homeland. Their attitude towards the motherland (by which they invariably mean South Vietnam) is one of cultural pride and strong attachment. One respondent brought with him to the interview the South Vietnamese “heritage flag” to show me after I had asked him about the protests over display of the communist flag in our previous e-mail correspondence. Other interviewees were similarly eager to share tid-bits about their traditions, asked me if I had sampled Vietnamese phó and invited me to attend the annual Tet parade in his neighborhood.

As to the matter of impetus for their involvement in transnational politics, the motivation of many Vietnamese Americans to remain politically active despite their busy lives seems to be the fact that “most Vietnamese abroad do not consider themselves as belonging to a Vietnam that is unified under communism”. One respondent, for instance, declared that the years of separation from his family (brother and sister) that he had to endure did not let him forget his anger and motivated him to attend anti-communist protests whenever he could.

With regard to the question of why anti-communist sentiment is still so strong among the Vietnamese American community in Little Saigon, after the interviews I was compelled to once again revisit the early instances of violent political expressions of hatred towards communists, which included several actual and attempted assassinations (as described in the previous section) that rocked the community. Compared to those times, when there was a constant fear and suspicion of the presence of communist spies amongst themselves, red-baiting is nowhere nearly as common now. Thus, there has been a definite shift in Vietnamese political transnationalism from its earliest, violent form to present-day, non-violent activities.

Based on my archival research and interviews, most transnational political activity by the Vietnamese Americans is confined to Little Saigon, the ethnic enclave where they have coalesced through secondary migration within the U.S. In fact, as Brody (1987a) has written, Little Saigon, named for the former capital of South Vietnam, is considered “the capital of the Vietnamese in exile”. Finally, transnational political participation is generally measured by electoral indicators, for example membership in a political party or active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin. However, migrants and refugees also seek to be represented and participate in decision making through political means other than elections (Guarnizo et al. 2003). The Vietnamese Americans in Orange County present one such case where the political transnationalism pursued is of a non-electoral, indirect nature. In other words, as to specific transnational political activities undertaken by Vietnamese Americans, they do not appear to be directly transnational political acts such as voting in home country elections or sending political remittances to community-based political organizations in their hometown. Rather, the kinds of transnational political acts that Vietnamese Americans engage in are more of an indirect nature, such as protests, and petitions. In almost all the interviews, participants



vividly remembered the HiTek protest of 1999 (described in detail below) and several described the politically charged atmosphere they experienced at the incident. While several respondents recalled lending their signatures at a Vietnamese Buddhist temple to a letter-writing campaign to free imprisoned Vietnamese dissidents, others mentioned their pride in seeing the “heritage” flag of South Vietnam being displayed at official functions (at a high school graduation one respondent attended) after flag resolutions were adopted by several Orange County cities following petitions for the same.

An analysis of the interviews also led me to discover another indirect, yet novel form of transnational political activism, one that I had not thought of before embarking on my research. A majority of the respondents claimed to use the Internet frequently, while several professed to visiting websites related to their homeland, Vietnam. They enthusiastically mentioned “going on the internet” to keep themselves updated of news from “home” and some expressed surprise that I was not aware of the popular blogging site, The Bolsavik. One particular interviewee (name withheld) proudly showed me his remarks in the comments section of a Vietnamese language blog that he visited frequently. Thus, blogging and expressing dissent on English as well as Vietnamese language internet forums turned out to be an unexpected form of indirect transnational political activism among Vietnamese Americans. The following sections describe in details the three transnational political activities among Vietnamese Americans – protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums.

### ***Protests***

Participating in protests and demonstrations is by far the most popular mode of political participation, as depicted in my interview data; it is quite conspicuous that protest plays a central role in many of the Vietnamese American political demands and expressions of grievances in the

1980s and well into the 1990s. This trend was also reflected in a 2000 Orange County Register poll (Collet 2000). According to one interviewee, Mr. Do<sup>12</sup>, participating in demonstrations does not require a higher degree of civic skills, and it is an easier task to accomplish because participants only have to decide to get themselves to the event and follow instructions on how to participate.

For a refugee group like the Vietnamese, who come from a repressive polity, the relative tolerance offered to protestors by authorities in the United States was inviting. The interviews portray that for Vietnamese Americans protesting and the very fact of being able to do so demonstrates not only the openness of American politics, but also, by contrast, the repressive nature of the regime they have fled. The following section gives an account of the more high profile protests that took place in recent years in and around Little Saigon.

#### *Recent Protests*

The majority of Vietnamese protests in Orange County take place in Westminster or Garden Grove, an area which coincides with the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon and where large numbers of Vietnamese Americans have settled. The concentration of protests here is supported by the notion that increased political mobilization comes from the establishment of an ethnic community that can support such political activism (Ong and Meyer 2004).

As the cycle of political violence waned in the mid-1990s, Vietnamese Americans took to protesting, especially around 1994 when they demonstrated frequently to show their disapproval of normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam and lifting of the 20 year embargo on the communist government of Vietnam. Angry Vietnamese refugees gathered to protest the lack of democracy and human rights abuse record of the Vietnamese government. Supporters of the

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<sup>12</sup> Not respondent's real name. Personal interview conducted February 11, 2009.

embargo argued that normal trade relations between the two countries could be used as propaganda by the Communists and could destroy their dream of returning to a free Vietnam (Ha 2002).

Even today, in an ethnic enclave like Orange County, the lion's share of Vietnamese Americans protests are homeward-looking that deal with a world thousands of miles away and tend to overshadow the relatively fewer protests dealing with immigrant issues in the U.S. In June, 2007, Vietnamese-American protesters demonstrated outside Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet's hotel in Dana Point, California, during his visit to the U.S. (Johnson 2007). His trip sparked protests in Little Saigon and across the country, given what many Vietnamese Americans described as the regime's poor human rights record and recent crackdown on pro-democracy groups and activists in Vietnam.

Other high profile protests which stemmed from conflicts in the Vietnamese American community have been similarly rooted in differences over Vietnam-related issues. For instance, Truong Van Tran became infamous for inciting the largest anti-communist demonstrations in Little Saigon's history when he displayed a Socialist Republic of Vietnam's flag along with a portrait of Ho Chi Minh in his HiTek TV and Video store. Over the course of two and a half months of political rallying, tens of thousands of Vietnamese protestors flooded the retail plaza in front of his business to denounce both Truong Tran and the communist government of Vietnam (Jolly 1999). In protest of his display, they claimed it as an affront to their refugee experiences and to American ideals of freedom and democracy (Nguyen, M T. 2005).

A cross-section of the Vietnamese community attended the protests: men and women of all ages from different social classes and regions of Vietnam were represented. Although peaceful, the emotional charge behind the protests was very real (Ha 2002). Almost all

Vietnamese Americans I interviewed brought up the HiTek incident and described the charged atmosphere of the protest. Mr. Nguyen<sup>13</sup> recalled scenes where people were “denouncing the Communist government of Vietnam on megaphones, burning macabre effigies of Ho Chi Minh and waving along with their children South Vietnam’s yellow flag with the three red stripes”. Soon, the protest expanded to a demonstration and became a movement. T. Diem<sup>14</sup>, the owner of a mom and pop store only a couple of blocks away from the scene of the protests, recalled how almost overnight, protestors plastered the store and surrounding strip mall with thousands of South Vietnamese flags. American and South Vietnamese flags also appeared on the rooftops of every shopping center in Little Saigon. Tony Lam, then Westminster councilman, also endured a one-month long protest outside of his family’s restaurant for not publicly opposing the Vietnamese flag display at the HiTek video store (Ong and Meyer 2004). Thus, even when activists picked more proximate targets, the latter were virtually always used as a proxy for the communist government of Vietnam.

While the protests were going on, Daniel C. Tsang, in an article published in the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote that “newer generations of Little Saigon seem less and less interested in the old politics of division and the history that sustains it. Increasingly, these Vietnamese-Americans are U.S.-born” (Tsang 1999). In response to Tsang’s article, in a show of unity, more than 25 Vietnamese youth (student and religious) groups organized the largest rally at the HiTek store (Ha 2002). The mobilization of youth came after Tsang’s claim that ardent anti-communist feelings were retained only by the older generation of Vietnamese-Americans. In an impressive display of solidarity with their elders, Vietnamese-American youth claimed both membership and leadership in their community. Inspired by Vietnamese language radio and mainstream

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<sup>13</sup> Not respondent’s real name. Personal interview conducted on March 2, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Not respondent’s real name. Personal interview conducted on March 4, 2009.

national television coverage of the HiTek incident, sympathetic protests were organized by Vietnamese-American communities in San Jose, California (Houle 2006). Although separated by thousands of miles, these Vietnamese American demonstrators were united by their grief, hate, passion, and idealism.

During the protests, people told and retold horrific tales of the violence, abuse and loss they endured at the hands of the Communists. As one protestor, Dung Huynh narrated, “I saw my friends killed by the Communists. Every time I see the flag, I get so mad. I still see it; I still hear the gunshots. I cannot forget” (Warren and Tran 1999). This story and others like it provided the emotional fuel that kept the demonstrators coming back. For the protestors, the important thing was that the community had appeared united, had used a collective voice in giving utterance to the assumption that theirs was a community founded by political exiles who had all suffered under and hate the Communists. Not only were the protests attended and supported by Vietnamese from diverse social groupings, but one of the defining moments of the protests occurred when competing leaders of the Vietnamese community of Southern California shook hands (Ha 2002). Thus, in the short term, the controversy served to unite disparate interests and to move the community towards a greater sense of political empowerment.

In November 2007, the controversy over the HiTek protest surfaced again when VAX, short for *Vietnamese American eXposure*, (an English-language TV show broadcast on Saigon TV) aired clips from this event in a half hour show. In a hip MTV-documentary style program that featured diverse aspects of the Vietnamese community in southern California, VAX ran a retro look at the protest and, as part of the program, showed CNN footage of the protest which includes 5 seconds of the close up of Truong Tran’s altar — i.e. the offending Ho Chi Minh portrait in the HiTek incident. Half a dozen angry protestors showed up at Saigon TV and

accused VAX of being communist sympathizers and received support from right-wing radio hosts such as Viet Dzong, regarded as the voice of protests big and small (Bolsavik 2009). As a result, Saigon TV canceled the remainder of VAX's 12-week contract.

Protests on the same theme still occur whenever there are visits from Vietnamese officials, formation of sister-city ties with Vietnam, local art exhibitions or performances by Vietnamese artists and similar events. One such protest was in January 2009, when dozens of members of the local Vietnamese American community gathered at Cypress College to protest what they said was the college's display of "communist propaganda". The Vietnamese Arts & Letters Association (VAALA) opened a group exhibition, "Fresh off the Boat II: Art Speaks" at the Orange County college and the protestors' ire was stoked by one image in particular (Chang 2009a). Brian Doan's photograph, "Thu Duc, Viet Nam", contained imagery depicting a Vietnamese young woman wearing a shirt similar to the communist Vietnamese flag, posing next to a bust of Ho Chi Minh, which some viewers thought was pro-communist (Chang 2009b).

The protesters, mainly older Vietnamese residents of Orange County and Southern California, chanted slogans and denounced the curators and organizers of the exhibit. Several dozen protesters waved U.S. and Vietnamese flags and chanted "Down with Communists!" and "Shame on you, Brian Doan!" – a shot at the photographer who took the photo (Mello 2009). Visitors urged the curators of the exhibit to take it down, while some reportedly scratched at the photo's glass surface and spit on the image. The Union of Vietnamese Student Associations of Southern California released a statement urging Doan and Cypress College to "be sensitive to the feelings of thousands of Vietnamese Americans" and "consider removing the display in order to have a discussion with members of the community" (Chang 2009b). Ultimately, the Vietnamese

artists' group VAALA closed down the controversial exhibit prematurely after the Little Saigon community activists threatened to launch a large-scale protest (Bharath 2009).

It's fascinating that one photo can still evoke so much emotion. In the summer of 2007, a small group of anti-communist protesters began to make life a living hell for the publishers of a Little Saigon newspaper, *Nguoi Viet Daily News*, a media outlet accused of being an agent of Hanoi. *Nguoi Viet Daily News* made the costly mistake of publishing an image of a foot spa (foot-bathing bin) painted in the colors of the South Vietnamese flag (also known as the heritage flag) in a special edition of the newspaper (Chang 2009a). The photograph was actually a tribute to the artist's immigrant mother-in-law, who put her kids through college thanks to her nail salon business. However, the publication sparked angry protests; a handful of protesters led by Ngo Ky, former South Vietnamese military official Trung Doan, spent months picketing *Nguoi Viet Daily News* (Schou 2009). Ultimately, their protests led to the dismissal of the two top editors of that newspaper who approved the supposedly offensive photograph (Chang 2009a; Schou 2009).

Annual political events are also occasions for making anti-communist denunciations, notably the anniversary of the Army of Republic of South Vietnam on June 19<sup>th</sup> and the commemoration of the fall of Saigon on April 30<sup>th</sup>, also known as the Black April ceremony. Traditionally, Southern California Vietnamese American community groups led by the Vietnamese American Community of Southern California – a conglomeration of groups that includes students, seniors and veterans – have organized Black April commemoration events at the Sid Goldstein Freedom Park in Orange County every year. Typically, the event includes speeches by veterans and community members and a solemn ceremony (Bharath 2010). 2010 marked the 35th anniversary of the refugees' arrival to the United States, particularly to California, after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

Protests and demonstrations that give vent to the political agenda of the Vietnamese American community also extend to the socio-cultural realm. Even the musical taste of Vietnamese Americans reflects their political ideology – their music evokes nostalgic sentiments and is often accompanied by lyrics that have themes of a lost nation, patriotism and the refugee experience (Valverde 2003). Given that the single ideology of anti-communism has been central to every facet of Vietnamese American life, including community institutions, political organizations and cultural production, there are still many in the Vietnamese American community who will never accept music or art produced under the communist Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Some staunchly anti-communist refugees take the extreme line of boycotting anything related to Vietnam; even cultural productions are seen as propaganda tools of the socialist government. As such, Vietnamese Americans boycott music from Vietnam, ostracize Vietnamese-American singers who work in Vietnam and protest Vietnamese artists when they perform in the United States. Thus, by imposing severe social sanctions on all Vietnamese cultural productions, Vietnamese Americans use social and cultural settings to achieve a greater sense of political empowerment.

#### *Political Significance of Protests*

Scholars see social movements in general, and protests in particular, as an extension of more conventional politics, that is, an additional means for any constituency to make political claims (Tilly 1984). According to Meyer and Tarrow (1998), in general, people who protest are likely to engage in conventional political activity on the same issues, including writing letters to elected officials, contributing money and time to campaigns, voting and running for office. Protests can offer clear benefits as part of a larger political strategy. At once, colorful protests are more attractive to mass media than less dramatic political action, allowing a relatively small



group of people to project their concerns to a larger audience (Gitlin 1980). For a relatively small ethnic community, protesting represents a strategy that demonstrates political concerns and commitment, and offers the promise of keeping the issue alive while waiting for better political opportunities (Ong and Meyer 2004). Beyond that, staging a protest event is one way to build an organization and feelings of political efficacy among participants.

Protesting, the most accessible form of political participation to the Vietnamese refugees in the early days of their resettlement as well as today, has eventually served as an initial platform for opening other forms of participation in the earlier part of this decade, such as writing letters to elected officials or more recently, blogging and participating in online political forums.

In conclusion, from the pattern and content of protests, we can see that the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon, Orange County is home to most of the protests, and the most frequent target of protests is the government of Vietnam. Sometimes, proxies for that government, for example, advocates of normalizing relations, are targets, but Vietnam always looms large on the horizon. Identified protest leaders have mostly been passionate and committed individuals, rather than established organizations. To many Vietnamese-Americans, protests came to represent the potential power they wielded as a political unit. Indeed, the HiTek incident has, especially, been successful in fostering a spirit of cohesion and political activism.

### ***Petitions and letters to government***

Political contributions to awareness campaigns about the human rights situation in Vietnam (in the form of signing petitions and letters to local Congressional representatives), and petitioning to local legislatures on issues pertaining to Vietnamese are yet another form of

political expression by Vietnamese Americans. The tactics employed by Vietnamese Americans remarkably closely follow the same patterns as those of transnational advocacy networks, albeit on a much smaller scale. Although less in numbers than protestors, several interviewees reported signing petitions and letters, particularly the 2009 petition to free Father Ly. This section describes the most recent, high profile campaigns and petitions undertaken by Vietnamese Americans and their political significance.

### *Recent Petitions / Campaigns*

***Heritage flag*** – One of the most popular and cherished causes taken up by Vietnamese Americans is the recognition of the South Vietnamese flag in America. According to one interviewee Mr. Diem<sup>15</sup>, “overseas Vietnamese exiles consider the red-bar-on-golden flag (the heritage flag) is much more symbolic of the nation of Vietnam than the Communist yellow star” and believe that “the heritage flag will be restored whenever the communist regime ends in Vietnam”. Another interviewee, Mr. Huynh<sup>16</sup>, when asked about the heritage flag said that “most Vietnamese anti-Communist patriots hope that their flag of liberty and democracy will be honored everywhere in the land of freedom, America”. Most anti-communist Vietnamese reject the yellow star flag that was originally the flag of the Vietnam Communist Party since the 1940s.

In early 2003, the Virginia state legislators introduced and approved legislation that would require the display of the former South Vietnamese flag instead of the current government’s flag at official state-sponsored functions in deference to the refugees from that country who sacrificed and resisted communist aggression (Lewis 2003). The bill was sponsored in the U.S. Senate by Virginia Robert Hull, but ultimately, the measure did not come to a vote and was killed (Legislative Information System 2003). Inspired by this legislation, several

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<sup>15</sup> Not respondent’s real name. Personal interview conducted on April 13, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Not respondent’s real name. E-mail interview conducted in March 2009.

members of the Vietnamese community in Little Saigon petitioned their local city councils, calling the current Vietnamese flag an inauthentic “blood flag”, a communist rather than a national banner, and comparing it to the Nazi swastika (Nguyen, M. T. 2005). Letters submitted to city and state legislators arguing for recognition of the defunct South Vietnamese national flag described the current socialist republic as a “reign of terror” and thereby sought to invalidate its territorial claim to nationality.

Soon afterward, in February 2003, Westminster and Garden Grove City Councils in California, taking a cue from their counterparts in Virginia, both proposed and passed resolutions authorizing the use of the South Vietnam flag at all of their official functions and also banning any use of the communist flag (Ferry 2004). The same year, the Vietnamese American Public Affairs Committee, a political advocacy group based in California, launched a national campaign mobilizing Vietnamese American activists all over southern California to petition local government bodies (legislatures and municipalities) to recognize the pre-1975 South Vietnamese national flag as the “official” flag of the Vietnamese American community, to be flown on city property and at city-sponsored events when the occasion called for representation (Nguyen, M. T. 2005). As the campaign gathered momentum, flag resolutions in various forms were passed in over twenty cities, including Westminster and Garden Grove in Orange County; along with Milpitas, San Jose and San Francisco in northern California (Tran 2003; Nguyen, M. T. 2005). The flag resolutions contained strong language condemning the government of Vietnam for human rights violations of religious freedoms.

College Vietnamese Student Associations in California also requested that administrators sanction the use of the former South Vietnamese national flag at graduation ceremonies

(Nguyen, M. T. 2005). Two of the respondents I interviewed, Thanh and Wendy<sup>17</sup>, were members of the Vietnamese American Association at a prominent university in Orange County who responded to my e-mail enquiries and, in course of their interviews, expressed their reasons for supporting the South Vietnamese flag, “The Vietnamese refugees living in the United States came here seeking freedom from the communists. They violated our human rights, they oppressed us. So when we see the communist flag, we naturally get upset” while Wendy said, “The communist flag is immoral...No, the communist government does not represent us”.

*Amerasian Paternity Recognition Act* - Another prominent campaign in the Vietnamese American political radar has been the Amerasian Paternity Recognition Act (H.R. 4007). The majority of Vietnamese Amerasians that made it to the United States were not U.S. Citizens. Citizenship classes have not been productive since the majority of Vietnamese Amerasians were illiterate when they arrived. As a result, they were unable to take the US citizenship examination. This cause was taken up by Vietnamese Americans in California and elsewhere in the country; as a result of their lobbying efforts, Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren sponsored a bill in Congress in October 2007 which, if passed, would allow some Vietnam-era Amerasians to obtain automatic U.S. citizenship. H.R. 4007 (Library of Congress 2007) would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide automatic citizenship for certain children of United States servicemen born overseas during the Vietnam and Korean Wars (Washington Watch 2006-2010). Unfortunately, this bill, which was proposed in a past session of Congress, has never become law. Congressional sessions usually last for two years and at the end of each session, those

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<sup>17</sup> Not respondents' real names. Personal interview conducted on October 28, 2008. This interview was part of the initial pilot study I conducted when I was still establishing my contacts in the Vietnamese community. The interview was not taken into account during qualitative analysis since both respondents are 2nd generation Vietnamese Americans. (I have limited my sample to 1<sup>st</sup> generation Vietnamese Americans who arrived as refugees and immigrants in this study.)

proposed bills and resolutions that have not been passed are cleared from the agenda (GovTrack 2007-2008). Nevertheless, the bill garnered a lot of attention among the Vietnamese American community.

*Human Rights Campaigns* - More recent campaigns by Vietnamese Americans have tended to focus on appeals for democracy and improved human rights in Vietnam through peaceful means. One such informal campaign took place when leaflets were distributed at the annual Tet Festival 2010 held in Little Saigon appealing all intellectuals, students, workers and farmers, in Vietnam and abroad, to wage a non-violent struggle for democracy. Other more formal, organized campaigns include the petition launched by Amnesty International USA and supported by Vietnamese in Orange County for the release of dissident Vietnamese poet Nguyen Chi Thien, who was imprisoned at the notorious BaSao prison in Hanoi. He was adopted as a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International and throughout the late 1980s, Vietnamese Americans in California organized events to bring to light Thien's plight, who was serving twenty-seven years in Communist prison, eight of them in solitary darkness. Thanks to their efforts, Thien, by then famous as the "prison poet", was released in November 1991 after twenty-seven total years in prison (Thien 2008).

Poet Thien now, in turn, leads the Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) petition campaign among Vietnamese people in Orange County and in San Jose, asking for the release of all political prisoners in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, specifically, the Reverend Nguyen Van Ly, who has been in solitary confinement for two years since his public trial on March 30, 2007 (VietAm Review 2007). The petition also names Thich Quang Do, who has been in detention at the Thanh Thien Vien Pagoda in Saigon for over twenty-five years. The campaign collected over 150 signatures at the Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam pagoda in Orange

County on April 19, 2009 inspiring similar petitions in northern California (VietAm Review 2009). The bilingual petition campaign was sent to the Vietnamese government on May 2, 2009 and requested that Father Ly and other political prisoners be released in recognition of the United Nations Human Rights Council periodic review of Vietnam that took place in Geneva on May 8, 2009 (VietAm Review 2009). Copies of the petition letter (Appendix 1) were also sent to the U.S. State Department as well as the American Embassy in Vietnam. In March 2010, Radio Free Asia announced that “Father Ly, Individual at Risk prisoner adopted by Amnesty International USA Groups 19 and 67, was temporarily released from prison on March 15, 2010 due to ill health” (Hieu 2010).

Another campaign currently underway is Free Thuy – Nhan – Nghien organized by the Vietnam Reform Party (Viet Tan). Working with other pro-democracy groups inside Vietnam and among the diaspora, the organization aims to mobilize the power of the people to overcome dictatorship, achieve a sustainable democratic transition for Vietnam and demand human rights for the Vietnamese (Viet Tan 2010a). In June 2007, Diem Do, then chairman of the Viet Tan, joined members of the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans in a meeting with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi before she met with Vietnam’s visiting President. Their aim, as Diem Do put it was to “to impress upon the Vietnamese president that he must respect human rights, particularly freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and association, and must release the peaceful dissidents” (Orange County Register 2007).

Viet Tan’s Free Thuy – Nhan – Nghien campaign is part of its movement for Freedom for Prisoners of Conscience, which actively challenges the arbitrary detention of Vietnam’s greatest intellects and independent voices, and lobbies for international pressure on the regime to release all prisoners of conscience. The campaign lobbies for the release of novelist Tran Khai Thanh

Thuy (3.5 years imprisonment), human rights lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan (3 years imprisonment) and democracy activist Pham Thanh Nghien (4 years imprisonment followed by house arrest) (Diem 2010). All three were active bloggers and cyber activists who have peacefully campaigned for human rights and social justice, and against corruption in Vietnam. They were arrested for disseminating propaganda and petitioning to hold a peaceful demonstration (Diem 2010).

*Internet Freedom Campaigns* - Viet Tan's other campaign, the Internet Freedom Campaign, challenges legal statutes restricting freedom of expression in Vietnam, and supports citizen journalists and imprisoned prominent journalists and cyber activists in the country. The campaign declared that "Blogging Is Not a Crime" on its page *Internet Freedom* and reported that the Committee to Protect Journalists calls Vietnam one of the "10 worst countries to be a blogger" while Reporters Without Borders lists the Vietnamese government as an "enemy of the internet" (Viet Tan 2010c). The campaign also drafted a letter (Appendix 2) to be used as a template, urging members of the Vietnamese American community to write to their Congressional Representatives to co-sponsor the Vietnam internet freedom resolution (Viet Tan 2010c).

#### *Political Significance of Petitions / Campaigns*

Vietnamese American campaigns to legislate government recognition of a defunct national flag, release imprisoned democracy activists and protest restrictions on internet in Vietnam compel us to acknowledge that the transnational activism undertaken by Vietnamese Americans expresses their disapprobation and rejection of the communist government of Vietnam to this day. In a sense, these proposals and resolutions hope to mandate state identification of the Vietnamese in America as a "displaced or usurped nation" (Nguyen, M. T.

2005). Through these political and ideological practices, the national fortune of ‘Vietnamese America’ is construed as oppositional to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Due to their large numbers in most political constituents of Orange County, Vietnamese Americans use their votes as lever to gain recognition on their efforts on homeland issues. The community is not afraid of getting their voice heard in Washington D.C. by lobbying their local representatives with the promise of votes in forthcoming local elections. Their lobbying efforts have won them official support from their local representatives on several homeland issues, including the release of detained prisoners and their campaign on internet freedom in Vietnam. The advantage in U.S. – domestic politics that translates into political significance in the arena of transnational homeland activism of Vietnamese Americans is highlighted in the following paragraphs.

In January 2009, representatives of the Vietnamese American community expressed solidarity with their constituencies by writing to an organization that displayed the communist flag in an art exhibit and asked them to immediately remove the offensive materials. The document was signed by Van Tran, representative of the 68th district (cities with large Vietnamese population - Westminster, Garden Grove and Fountain Valley); Margie Rice, mayor of Westminster; Tri Ta, mayor pro tem of Westminster, several city council members, and Andrew Nguyen, a school district trustee at Westminster (Mello 2010). The Free Thuy – Nhan – Nghien campaign was supported by Senator Barbara Boxer and two members of Congress, Loretta Sanchez and Zoe Lofgren, who wrote to the President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to convey their concern regarding the detentions (Library of Congress 2009). As a result of the efforts of the Internet Freedom Campaign, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez



introduced House Resolution 672 on July 23, 2009 calling on the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to release imprisoned bloggers and respect Internet freedom (Hoang 2009).

As recently as April 2010, Senator Lou Correa (D-Santa Ana), whose district includes Orange County's Little Saigon, refused to be on the State Senate Floor for the introduction of a visiting delegation from the communist government of Vietnam and staged a walkout protest in support of the local Vietnamese American community. He said, "I proudly represent central Orange County and Little Saigon, the home of the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside of the country of Vietnam" (Joseph 2010). Correa walked off of the Senate Floor just moments before the State Senate formally welcomed the Judiciary Committee of the National Assembly for Vietnam. Correa also filed a written protest with Senate Leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) stating that, "There are numerous published reports that describe continuing human rights abuses of Vietnamese citizens by the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" (Joseph 2010).

In conclusion, from the pattern and content of the petitions, we see that Vietnamese American campaigns reflect the most compelling homeland issues of the time that serve as a mobilizing factor among the population. For instance, while images of the former South Vietnamese flag conjure a shared historical past, the flag resolutions also sought to usurp the place of the current and official Vietnamese national flag in public ceremonies and institutions – this was also reflected in the interviews. In this way, their flag was claimed as a natural and national heritage against the possible unity of the socialist state as an entity and thus, established their position as a formidable transnational diaspora. Similarly, my interviews showed that campaigns to release imprisoned activists and bloggers and demand greater internet freedom in

Vietnam arouse feelings of political efficacy among those who sign petitions and letters to local government officials.

### ***Internet Forums***

We have already seen in the previous section how Vietnamese Americans enthusiastically launch campaigns and lobby their local representatives for support as an expression of their political will. Blogging about latest developments in the human rights situation in Vietnam and expressing strong anti-communist sentiments on online forums are yet another form of political expression by Vietnamese Americans. The following section examines the political significance of online forums and traces some of the most popular blogs / Vietnamese websites that are sites for transnational political expression.

#### ***Popular online forums***

While organized protests was the most common way of expressing their denunciation of the communist government in the 1990s, today such dissent is most prolific on internet forums such as blogs. There are several blogging sites, both in Vietnamese and English that are authored by Vietnamese Americans living in Orange County and are active forums for discussing homeland politics. In this section, I highlight three of the most prolific and well-visited English-language blogs that came up repeatedly during the course of the interviews.

***EthnoBlog*** - Vietnam-born American writer Andrew Lam in his blog, called EthnoBlog, draws attention to the climate of increasingly harsh political repression in Vietnam. In his January 2010 blog post, he feared that in the lead-up to a key Vietnamese Communist Party congress in 2011, the Vietnamese government would intensify its campaign to silence government critics and curb social unrest in an effort to quell any potential challenges to its one-

party rule. He drew attention to the Human Rights Watch World Report 2010, titled *Vietnam: Repression Intensifies Prior to Party Congress* (Human Rights Watch 2010) at the release of which Asia Director, Brad Adams said, “With its treatment of peaceful critics, the Vietnamese government seems determined to stand out as one of the most repressive countries in Asia” (Lam 2010). In this way, Lam’s EthnoBlog serves as an intermediary means via which visitors of the blog, Vietnamese American and otherwise, are regularly informed of Human Rights Watch’s interest in their homeland.

*Vietnam Human Rights Journal* - Stephen Denney is another blogger who highlights homeland issues in his blog, Vietnam Human Rights Journal. In his posts, he brings to light the current human rights situation in Vietnam. For example, in his July 15, 2009 post titled *Truong Quoc Huy petition circulated*, he informs his diaspora readers about Reporters without Borders circulating a petition for Truong Quoc Huy, a cyber-dissident imprisoned since August 18, 2006. Huy had been accused of using the internet to try to “overthrow the government”; his activities that led to his arrest included participating in a pro-democracy chat forum (Denney 2009a). Denney also keeps his readers updated about other organizations that join Vietnamese Americans in denouncing the Vietnamese government. For instance, in his March 10, 2009 post, he reported that Reporters without Borders had named Vietnam Communist Party Secretary General Nong Duc Manh a “predator of press freedom” – a category the organization reserves for political leaders who suppress freedom of the press in a harsh or systematic manner. (Denney 2009b)

*Bolsavik* – This is perhaps the most popular and widely known blog currently active among Vietnamese Americans in Orange County. The author, Hao-Nhien Vu, writes about political protests and marches in other parts of the country to keep the Vietnamese community in southern California informed. For example, in his blog post *Demonstrations Against Vietnam’s*

*General Consulate*, Vu, who himself has become well-known in the Little Saigon Vietnamese American community as Mr. Bolsavik himself, informs his readers about hundreds of Vietnamese coming out to protest the inauguration of Vietnam's general consulate by Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in Houston. He wrote, "An official presence of the representatives of the communist government in the heart of the third-largest Vietnamese enclave obviously was not appreciated by the community of refugees who had risked life and limb fleeing communism" (Vu 2008).

The Bolsavik is a blog with many avid followers who also make use of the comments section for heated discussions on homeland politics. For instance, regarding the F.O.B. II incident mentioned in the previous sections, Jung Kim, a regular visitor of the online forum, wrote, "The motivation of this art exhibit propaganda only helped revisit the past pain suffered by our Viet community members", and in another comment, "We have general agreement that this exhibition was an aggression [sic.] against our anti communist community" (User comment 2009a). Another visitor, who calls himself XYZ, wrote, "A bust of former communist leader Ho Chi Minh is tantamount to a slap in the face... Everyone who were victims of communist brutality, suffered injuries to their human core at certain degree. Even to this day, there are many people still grapple with a mixture of fear, sadness, anger, incomprehension, and loss. And not everyone would insist on going to have an open dialogue, not everyone would think that such a dialogue will secure liberty and democracy for the less fortunate Vietnamese at homeland" (User comment 2009b).

Other blog visitors employ the comments section to express their own political views, even if they are not always related to the topic of the posts. For instance, one user Tim666, in the comments section of the Bolsavik, wrote his own post titled *Pro-Communist Senator "Hanoi"*

*John Kerry: Stop Supporting Oppressive Communist Vietnam By Putting On Hold In The Senate The 2009 Vietnam Human Rights Act (H.R. 1969)*. He wrote, “Senator “Hanoi” John Kerry, now is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is always known as a good, loyal friend of communist Vietnam, not only for his important role in Vietnam war’s antiwar movement, but also for his great efforts to put Vietnam Human Rights Acts on hold twice in the Senate in 2001 and 2003 after they were passed by a large margin in the House of Representatives” (User comment 2010).

As with all online forums, there exist in the Vietnamese blogosphere voices of dissent. Some bloggers write about homeland politics but also criticize the anti-Communist protestors for red-baiting. For example, with reference to the Nguoi Viet Daily News protests, Nick Schou in his blog Little Saigon Follies writes that the photograph of a foot-bathing bin painted in the colors of the South Vietnamese flag, whose publication in Nguoi Viet Daily News triggered off the protests that culminated in the dismissal of the editor was actually a tribute to the artist's immigrant mother-in-law, who put her kids through college thanks to her nail salon business, and was in no way remotely connected to communist propaganda. Schou wonders “what kind of punishment will bother a group of folks who don't mind sitting on the same street-corner in a little-traveled cul-de-sac for months on end, waving placards at the few passing motorists who've long forgotten what their beef is” (Schou 2009). Of course, user comments on other blogs reflect opposing opinions. A visitor to The Bolsavik, who calls herself Trina, writes, “There are ways to stimulate dialog about Viet identity and politics without bludgeoning people with communist images... There is something wrong when Vietnamese Americans protest hateful/ harmful/ disrespectful expressions and they are (wrongly) accused of being censors of free speech” (User comment 2009c).

Some online sites also carry links to campaigns, such as the active community on Facebook called “Release Nguyen Tien Trung – say 1000s and 1000's of Vietnamese on FB”. The online group states its aim as the release of the pro-democracy blogger and creator of the Association of Young Vietnamese for Democracy, Nguyen Tien Trung (Release Nguyen Tien Trung Facebook Group). Trung, an active member of the Vietnam Democratic Party, was arrested on 7 July, 2009, just a few hours after being discharged from the army for refusing to take an oath (Reporter Without Borders 2009).

**Political commentary** – Other than blogs, pro-democracy movements such as the Vietnam Reform Party (Viet Tan, 2010b) also publish political commentary on their websites. In a press release titled *Freedom of Speech Outlawed in Vietnam*, Viet Tan claims that contrary to its denials, the Hanoi regime does in fact hold political prisoners. In an open letter to all Vietnamese abroad posted on its website titled *Open Letter for Liberty, Democracy and Territorial Integrity*, Viet Tan’s Chairman Duy Hoang calls on all Vietnamese to continue rising up, using all forms of non-violent action against the Hanoi dictatorship and promises to continue mobilizing its members in Vietnam and abroad (Hoang 2010).

Viet Tan’s website also contains links to external articles on its page on Internet Freedom: Digital Activism: A Tool for Change in Vietnam (4/03/2010), Vietnam Internet Users Fear Facebook Blackout (11/17/2009) and Vietnam’s Restrictions Threaten Progress (3/12/2009) and United States House Demands Vietnam Free Bloggers (10/21/2009). Moreover, in response to reports of Vietnam’s government blocking access to several sites, Viet Tan recently posted links on “How to Access Facebook in Vietnam” for internet users in Vietnam as well as members of the Vietnamese American community who are traveling to their homeland (Viet Tan

2010d). Viet Tan provides a list of methods to not only access Facebook but also other fire-walled websites in Vietnam.

### *Significance of internet forums*

According to Bos and Nell (2006), transnationalism and new media need not broaden or dissolve geographical identity or connectivity, but may reinforce it. The online lives of diaspora groups often reveal extensions of their offline activities; their Internet usage indicates the extent to which territoriality channels these groups' online practices. This is certainly true in the case of Vietnamese American blogs and other internet forums.

The internet provides an easily accessible platform to those politically active Vietnamese who are not able to afford the time and resources to devote to attending a protest march or participating in a letter-writing campaign. Expressing their anti-communist sentiments or engaging in heated political debates on blogging sites gives them a sense of political empowerment. In this way, homeland-oriented politics helps maintain the Vietnamese ethnic identity by reproducing wartime memories and by reviving their history as a refugee community. Transnational surfing of Vietnamese Americans not only provides the basis of ethnic identification but also allows for expression of opinions and dissemination of information regarding homeland issues.

In conclusion, blogs about homeland politics are not just a means for their authors to post their opinions or inform readers about diaspora events occurring elsewhere; rather, visitors to these blog sites also utilize their comments sections to voice their own views. Moreover, while some online sites carry links to campaigns, others publish political commentary on their websites. Thus, we see that bloggers, visitors to blogs and other online forums and diaspora organization websites all utilize the World Wide Web to express political opinions and inform

others in the Vietnamese American community about protests and demonstrations they can attend as well as about latest developments in the human rights situation in the country.

### **Discussion of the Regression Analysis Results**

In the following section I discuss in detail the regression results obtained in Chapter 5. I first reiterate which of the demographic, contextual and resource variables turn out to be significant, and then offer possible rationalizations for outcomes relating to explanatory factors for political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. In addition to the significance of the association, I also discuss its direction – in other words, the sign of the regression coefficients. This tells us whether the effect of the significant demographic, contextual and resource-dependent explanatory factors increase or decrease the likelihood of participating in political transnationalism. For instance, do the odds of engaging in transnational political activities increase or decrease among older Vietnamese Americans? Next, I discuss how the explanatory factors are distributed in relation to groups of respondents who overlap across all three activities (as analyzed in Chapter 5) and whether these results confirm my findings from the regression analysis. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on whether my findings are in conformity with or contrary to the hypotheses put forth in the theoretical literature of transnationalism.

#### *Significance and Direction of Independent Variables*

The regression results in the previous chapter provided evidence that demographic variables are more useful than incorporation and resource dependent variables in predicting the odds of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Among demographic variables,



age and gender are the two most significant factors. Age is positively associated with and is a significant factor in explaining variance in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Older respondents are more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations as well as sign petitions than younger respondents. This is probably explained by the fact that older Vietnamese Americans were young adults rather than babies when they fled Vietnam after the fall of Saigon and hence, still find it difficult to forget the trauma of flight and hardships of the early years as uprooted, struggling refugees.

Moreover, the older Vietnamese American age group includes those who were held by the communist regime as political prisoners for many years under extremely harsh conditions and still bear the emotional scars from their incarceration in re-education camps – these older refugees and immigrants are more likely to attend a protest rally against communism in Little Saigon or sign a petition to free pro-democracy activists still imprisoned in Hanoi. It is possible, then, that in the case of Vietnamese Americans traumatic experiences while fleeing from Vietnam and as political prisoners appear to operate through age. However, operationalizing appropriate variables that measure the level of psychological trauma or negative experiences among Vietnamese Americans is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, conceptualizing and investigating such factors for significance certainly presents opportunities for further study in the field of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Moreover, another plausible explanation for why age is a significant factor is that older people find it harder to adjust to their surroundings in a new country and forget their past. As hypothesized in the theoretical literature, older Vietnamese Americans are more likely to continue to maintain ties with their country of origin rather than severing all contact, as they feel nostalgic towards their homeland. Hence, these older refugees and immigrants are more likely to attend a protest rally

against communism in Little Saigon or sign a petition to free pro-democracy activists still imprisoned in Hanoi.

The evidence for gender as a significant factor confirms the hypothesis in the transnationalism literature that male immigrants are more likely to engage in transnationalism than women. Among Vietnamese Americans, the ordinal logistic analyses suggest that men are more likely than women to engage in all three forms of political transnationalism - protests, signing petitions as well as participation in internet forums. One possible explanation in the literature is that since men experience occupational downward mobility upon relocation, they tend to mobilize around activities that focus on the country of origin in order to compensate for the loss of economic status in the host country. Women's experience tends to go the opposite way, as many of them become paid workers for the first time in the United States. They are, therefore, more likely to shift their orientation towards the host state and less likely to become involved in transnational activities.

This then suggests that socioeconomic status is actually the significant factor here and appears to be playing out through gender. This study has appropriate variables for measuring socio-economic status among Vietnamese Americans, namely employment status and income. Hence, if it were the case that socioeconomic status was actually playing out through gender, then the coefficient for gender would cease to be significant as soon as measures for socioeconomic status – employment status and income – were added to the model. However, we see that in the case of all three transnational activities, gender remains highly significant in the final model even after the variables employment status and income have been added to the regression equation, while employment status (except in protests) and income remain

insignificant in determining the odds of engaging in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans.

Hence, the difference in participation between men and women is actually a function of gender and not any underlying socioeconomic causes. This can be explained by the fact that while women are more likely to engage in cultural transnationalism by adhering to the traditions of their homeland culture or enrolling their children in training programs for their native language, male immigrants express their transnational identities by engaging in political activities. Among Vietnamese Americans, the ordinal logistic analyses suggest that men are more likely than women to protest, sign petitions as well as participate in internet forums.

It is interesting to note that the one explanatory variable for which there was overwhelming evidence in the transnationalism literature as well as in my qualitative research interviews was college degree. One Vietnamese American I interviewed, Mr. Huynh<sup>18</sup>, commented that, “I think it will be very interesting to see the role that education plays out, especially in keeping informed of the human rights situation in Vietnam. If I were you, I would have more than one category for education: college education in Vietnam, college education in the U.S. and maybe a third category for both”. Surprisingly, however, the lack of a college degree did not turn out to be significantly associated with lower likelihood of protesting and signing petitions among Vietnamese Americans. One possible explanation for this is that anti-communist sentiments are so strong in Little Saigon that when political fervor reaches a feverish pitch, as in the case of the HiTek incident, Vietnamese Americans gather in large numbers to protest or rally in support of imprisoned pro-democracy activists irrespective of their college educational qualifications. Also, the protests and petitions are generally organized at a grassroots

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<sup>18</sup> Not respondent's real name. E-mail interview conducted in March 2009.

level in the malls and churches of Little Saigon and, therefore, do not require a superior degree of political sophistication necessitating a college degree. Thus, while having a college degree was found to be significant in predicting U.S. – domestic political participation and transnationalism in the theoretical literature, among Vietnamese Americans it was not a significant factor due to the nature of the types of transnational political activities under consideration in this study.

In the case of participating in internet forums, the regression analyses suggest that what matters is where the college degree was earned. Compared to Vietnamese Americans who do not have a college degree, those who obtained a college degree in both Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to participate in internet forums as a form of expression of political transnationalism. Vietnamese Americans who obtained a college degree in both countries are more likely to be familiar with the internet, as well as aware of and exposed to online political forums as avenues of political expression. They are, therefore, more likely to participate in online forums dealing with homeland issues than those who received their college degree only in Vietnam. Thus, once again, given the nature of the transnational political activity under consideration, i.e. participation in internet forums, it is not level of education per se, but the place where the college degree was obtained that is significant in predicting political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans.

Regarding incorporation variables, the time-period of arrival in the U.S. is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning. Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the earlier refugee waves are more likely to protest and petition than those who arrived in the later waves. This can probably be explained by the fact that those who arrived in the early waves either escaped the communist regime in the early days after the fall of Saigon, often with only a few

hours' notice, or crossed over as boat people – both groups fled not due to economic reasons but because of a genuine fear of persecution at the hands of the communist authorities. In contrast to these refugees, those who arrived later came as immigrants, often as part of family re-unification programs and did not experience the same persecution and hardships that the earlier refugees had to face. As a result, those arriving at a later time-period might not be as emotionally invested in homeland politics as those who arrived earlier as refugees. It is interesting to note that while time-period of arrival in the U.S. is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning in the nested models, it ceases to be significant in the full models. This suggests that the effect of time of arrival in the U.S. is actually explained by other significant variables in the full model, i.e. age, gender, English proficiency and employment status.

Level of English proficiency is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning but not with participation in internet forums. Respondents who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and petition. This suggests that those who are highly proficient in English are either younger Vietnamese Americans who learnt the language in school or are assimilated in the host country to such an extent that they now distance themselves from homeland politics. It is interesting to note that English proficiency is not a significant explanatory factor in accounting for variance in participation in internet forums among Vietnamese Americans. This is probably due to the fact that while gaining college education in the U.S. exposes Vietnamese Americans to different websites and online forums (such as blogs) as an avenue of political expression, once they become aware of these various mediums, a high level of proficiency in English is not a pre-requisite for participation. A large number and wide variety of Vietnamese language blogs, websites and internet forums abound that offer opportunities for even Vietnamese Americans with poor English language skills to post their

political opinions and calls for action as guest blogs or user comments. This explains why English proficiency does not have a significant effect on participation in internet forums, while place of college degree earned does.

Finally, regarding resource dependent variables, employment status is significantly associated with protesting; unemployed Vietnamese Americans are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than those who are employed. This is comprehensible since protests which are long-drawn, such as the HiTek protest or the 2007 picketing of Nguoi Viet Daily News (discussed above), often stretch out into the work week. This makes it easier for unemployed Vietnamese Americans to attend these protests; if the protests continue into the weekend, they are then joined by those who are otherwise employed during the rest of the week. The employment status of Vietnamese Americans is not significantly related to petitioning or internet forums, suggesting that both activities are carried out by employed and unemployed Vietnamese Americans alike.

Similarly, income of Vietnamese Americans is significantly associated only with protesting; Vietnamese Americans with lower incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than those whose income is higher. This is perhaps best explained by the fact that the types of transnational political activities I focused on do not necessitate the expenditure of a lot of financial resources. Vietnamese Americans who engage in protests, sign petitions or participate in internet forums are not required to invest in a lot of resources other than their time. Income would probably have been a more significant explanatory variable if the kind of political transnationalism under study was making monetary donations to the pro-democracy movement in Vietnam or organizing widespread campaigns to spread awareness about the human rights

situation in Vietnam – in other words, if the scope of my study had been organizational rather than at the individual level.

*Overlaps across all three activities*

Next, I analyzed how the explanatory factors discussed in the previous section are distributed in relation to groups of respondents who overlap across all three forms of transnational political activities (as analyzed in Chapter 5) and whether these results confirm my findings from the regression analysis. The purpose was to investigate how the demographic, incorporation and resource-dependent factors under consideration distribute among those “never” or “sometimes” engage in political transnationalism. The results showed that in the case of age, gender, arrival in U.S. and English proficiency, the effect of these factors on political transnationalism is consistent with those found in the regression analysis. In the case of age, my finding that older Vietnamese Americans are more likely to engage in transnational political activities holds true even in groups overlapping all three activities. Similarly, the bivariate analysis confirms my finding that among Vietnamese Americans men are more likely than women to participate in political transnationalism. In the case of arrival in U.S., my finding that refugees in the earlier waves (post-1975 evacuees, boat people and former political prisoners) are more likely to engage in political transnationalism than those who arrived later through family reunification programs holds true even in groups overlapping all three activities. Similarly, the results of the bivariate analysis (although contrary to the theoretical literature) are consistent with the results of the ordinal regression analysis that respondents who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and petition.

Education, the one variable for which overwhelming evidence existed in studies on U.S. – domestic politics did not turn out to be statistically significant in predicting protesting and

petitioning. Contrary to expectations from the theoretical literature, lack of a college degree did not correspond to decreased likelihood of participating in political transnationalism. As we saw in the bivariate analysis, as Vietnamese Americans' level of education rises, the percentage of respondents who reported never participating in political transnationalism also increases. In fact, the majority of those who report never engaging in all three activities are respondents with a graduate degree or some graduate education.

In the case of employment status, even though employed Vietnamese Americans were found to be less likely to engage in transnational political activities in the ordinal regression analysis, no clear effect of employment status on political transnationalism seems to be visible from the bivariate analysis. As we saw in Chapter 5, the majority of Vietnamese Americans who report both never as well as sometimes participating in all three activities are employed. The effect of income in the bivariate analysis did seem to be consistent with the theoretical literature that as socio-economic status, of which income is a primary indicator, raises so does the likelihood of participation in transnational activities. However, it is important to reiterate that this positive relationship between income and political transnationalism was not found to be statistically significant in the ordinal regression analysis, except in the case of protesting.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, both the qualitative as well as quantitative parts of my study have yielded some important conclusions. In this section, I briefly summarize the major findings from each phase of the research.

### *Qualitative conclusions*



An important finding from the qualitative analysis is that the early period of transnational political activism among Vietnamese Americans was fraught with violence, sometimes fatal. This wave of political violence peaked in the late 1980s, following which there was a gradual movement away from violence towards other non-violent forms of political activity and expression of disapproval of communists, especially protests, beginning in the 1990s.

Second, present-day transnationalism engaged in by Vietnamese Americans takes the form of indirect, non-electoral political activities. In other words, they do not appear to be direct, electoral transnational political acts such as voting in home country elections or active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin. Rather, the kinds of transnational political acts that Vietnamese Americans engage in are more of an indirect nature, such as participating in protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and letters to government officials as part of human rights campaigns as well as participating in various internet forums on homeland issues.

From the pattern and content of protests, we can see that the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon, Orange County is home to most of the protests, and the most frequent target of protests is the government of Vietnam. Identified protest leaders have mostly been passionate and committed individuals, rather than established organizations. As for petitions, Vietnamese American flag resolutions and campaigns to release imprisoned activists and bloggers and demand greater internet freedom in Vietnam reflect the most compelling homeland issues of the time that serve as a mobilizing factor among the population. Similarly, bloggers, visitors to blogs and other online forums and diaspora organization websites all utilize the World Wide Web to express political opinions and inform others in the Vietnamese American community about protests and demonstrations they can attend as well as about latest developments in the human

rights situation in the country. In this way, to many Vietnamese-Americans, protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums have come to represent the potential power they wield as a political unit.

### *Quantitative conclusions*

As for the quantitative part of my results, the majority of findings from my ordinal regression analysis (in Chapter 5) as well as the bivariate analysis above are consistent with expectations from the theoretical literature. Previous studies have suggested that older migrants are more likely to continue to maintain ties with the country of origin rather than severing all contact. In the case of Vietnamese Americans, nostalgia for the homeland does translate into motivation for transnational political action. Thus, older Vietnamese Americans are more likely than younger ones to protest as well as sign petitions. Similarly, the hypothesis that male migrants are more likely than female migrants to engage in political transnationalism holds true for all three types of transnational political activities under consideration in the case of Vietnamese Americans as well.

A significant discovery of my research that is contrary to the theoretical literature is that college degree is not significantly related to protesting and signing petitions. The positive relationship between higher education and political participation is one of the most frequently identified in the theoretical literature – however, this association does not hold true in case of the Vietnamese Americans. In other words, lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with decreased likelihood of protesting and petitioning. For those Vietnamese Americans who have a college degree, place of college degree obtained is significant in the case of internet forums – those who have earned a college degree in both Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to utilize this medium as a form of transnational political expression.

There were two competing hypotheses in the case of arrival in the U.S. – while one argued that longer periods of U.S. residence lead to progressive disengagement from home country loyalties and hence, less likelihood of political transnationalism, the other claimed that longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to more frequent, organized forms of transnational activity. In the case of Vietnamese Americans, the latter hypothesis holds true – those refugees arriving in the U.S. in the earlier waves are more likely to participate in protests and sign petitions.

In the case of English proficiency, employment status and income, the results from the ordinal regression analysis are contrary to the theoretical literature. As per the literature, I expected to see higher levels of English proficiency leading to subsequently more intense participation in political transnationalism – however, in the case of Vietnamese Americans those who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and sign petitions. Similarly, according to the theoretical literature, those who engage in transnational practices are likely to be the most economically successful immigrants. However, the opposite is true in the case of Vietnamese Americans - unemployed Vietnamese Americans and those with lower incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than those who are employed and whose income is high. Employment status and income are not significantly associated with petitioning or participation in internet forums.

In closing, with the help of the logit link to build the ordinal regression models, political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans was found to be significantly associated with age, gender, place of college degree, arrival in U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income. From the ordinal regression analysis results, it can be supposed that Vietnamese Americans who are most likely to engage in protesting and sign petitions and letters to

government officials dealing with Vietnamese issues are older males who arrived in the U.S. during the early waves of refugee influx and are not very proficient in English. Unemployed Vietnamese Americans who have lower incomes are also more likely to attend protests, while obtaining a college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam is associated with more frequent participation in internet forums related to homeland issues.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

A transnational perspective has brought new vistas on international migration and political participation. It has questioned conventional analyses that focus exclusively on assimilation in the host society, neglecting migrants' ties and ongoing relations with their countries of origin. Dearth of knowledge about the scope, and determinants of such practices has been a consistent weakness in studies of political transnationalism (Guarnizo et al. 2003). This study, in providing clear operational definitions as well as empirical evidence of the scope and determinants of political transnational activism among Vietnamese Americans, has sought to address these shortcomings.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the presence and nature of political transnationalism among the Vietnamese American community in Orange County, California as well as determine the demographic, contextual and resource-dependent factors that explain differences in the frequency of participation in transnational political activities among individual Vietnamese Americans. The research for this study was carried out in two phases. In phase I – the qualitative phase – I conducted archival research and in-depth, open ended interviews with members of the Vietnamese American community in order to explore the most common types of transnational political activities. In phase II – the quantitative phase – I carried out a survey among randomly selected Vietnamese Americans, designed to collect information on potential explanatory factors.

### **Conclusions based on qualitative analysis**

My first major conclusion based on the qualitative research is that the scope of political transnationalism among individual Vietnamese Americans is not as widespread as originally thought when I had first started the project. In other words, individual Vietnamese Americans in Orange County do not engage in a broad array of transnational political activities, such as sending remittances to political organizations back home like Mexican immigrants (Xochitl 2003, Smith and Bakker 2008) or participating in electoral politics in the home country like Dominican immigrants (Itzigsohn et al. 1999, Itzigsohn 2000). Forming exile governments and attempting to overthrow the communist leaders in Vietnam has been a popular form of political transnationalism in the past, but it was at the organizational (for example, Government of Free Vietnam) rather than individual level.

Secondly, an important conclusion from the initial years of political transnationalism is that the early period of transnational activism among Vietnamese Americans was fraught with violence, sometimes fatal. This period was fraught with attempted and actual assassinations and acts of arson against anyone that was suspected of having ties with the communist government of Vietnam. Several organizations (National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam) and vigilante groups (Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate the Communists and Restore the Nation) gained worldwide support among the Vietnamese. This wave of political violence peaked in the late 1980s, following which there was a decline in violent political acts and a gradual movement away from violence towards other non-violent forms of political activity and expression of disapproval of communists, especially protests, beginning in the 1990s.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews leads to the conclusion that among Vietnamese Americans, nostalgia for the old days before the fall of Saigon runs deep. Their attitude towards

the motherland (by which is invariably meant South Vietnam) is one of cultural pride and strong attachment. The motivation of many Vietnamese Americans to remain politically active despite their busy lives seems to be the fact that most Vietnamese abroad do not consider themselves as belonging to a Vietnam that is unified under communism. Vietnamese Americans do not believe the nature of the relationship between the communist state of Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora to be the same as that which exists between two governments or two sovereign nations as is the case of the two Koreas, or between mainland China and Taiwan.

Based on my archival research and the interviews, most present-day transnational political activity by the Vietnamese Americans is confined to Little Saigon, the ethnic enclave where they have coalesced through secondary migration within the U.S. This leads me to my next major conclusion that present-day transnationalism engaged in by Vietnamese Americans takes the form of indirect, non-electoral political activities. In other words, they do not appear to be direct, electoral transnational political acts such as voting in home country elections or active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin. Rather, the kinds of transnational political acts that Vietnamese Americans engage in are more of an indirect nature, such as participating in protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and letters to government officials as part of political campaigns.

An analysis of the interviews also led me to discover another indirect, yet novel form of transnational political activism, one that I had not thought of before embarking on my research. A majority of the respondents claimed to use the Internet frequently, while several professed to visiting websites related to their homeland, Vietnam. They enthusiastically mentioned “going on the internet” to keep themselves updated of news from “home”. Thus, blogging and expressing

dissent on English as well as Vietnamese language internet forums turned out to be an unexpected form of indirect transnational political activism among Vietnamese Americans.

*Protests* – From the pattern and content of protests, the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon, Orange County seems to be home to most of the protests, and the most frequent target of protests appears to be the government of Vietnam. Sometimes, proxies for that government, for example, advocates of normalizing relations, are targets, but Vietnam always looms large on the horizon. Identified protest leaders have mostly been passionate and committed individuals, rather than established organizations. To many Vietnamese-Americans, protests came to represent the potential power they wielded as a political unit. Indeed, the HiTek incident has, especially, been successful in fostering a spirit of cohesion and political activism.

*Petitions* – From the pattern and content of the petitions, we see that Vietnamese American campaigns reflect the most compelling homeland issues of the time that serve as a mobilizing factor among the population. For instance, while images of the former South Vietnamese flag conjure a shared historical past, the flag resolutions also sought to usurp the place of the current and official Vietnamese national flag in public ceremonies and institutions – this was also reflected in the interviews. In this way, their flag was claimed as a natural and national heritage against the possible unity of the socialist state as an entity and thus, established their position as a formidable transnational diaspora. Similarly, my interviews showed that campaigns to release imprisoned activists and bloggers and demand greater internet freedom in Vietnam arouse feelings of political efficacy among those who sign petitions and letters to local government officials.

*Internet forums* – As for participating in internet forums, blogs about homeland politics are not just a means for their authors to post their opinions or inform readers about diaspora



events occurring elsewhere; rather, visitors to these blog sites also utilize their comments sections to voice their own views. Moreover, while some online sites carry links to campaigns, others publish political commentary on their websites. Thus, we see that bloggers, visitors to blogs and other online forums and diaspora organization websites all utilize the World Wide Web to express political opinions and inform others in the Vietnamese American community about protests and demonstrations they can attend as well as about latest developments in the human rights situation in the country.

### **Conclusions based on quantitative analysis**

In keeping with the above findings as well as existing literature, my primary focus in the quantitative analyses has been on the determinants of transnational political activities in which respondents were involved, namely, protests, petitions and participation in internet forums. Questionnaire items measuring involvement in each of these three types of political activities provided three response categories: “never”, “sometimes” and “often”. While such an operationalization identifies those Vietnamese Americans who are most committed to transnational political action, at the same time, the transnational field is also nurtured by the more occasional activities of other Vietnamese Americans, and I also pay attention to them.

My first set of findings is related to determinants of these practices in relation to predictions stemming from different theoretical schools and my own qualitative research. Ordinal regression results led me to conclude that political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans was found to be significantly associated with age, gender, place of college degree, arrival in U.S., English proficiency, employment status and income. One noteworthy finding is that having a college degree, a factor for which there was overwhelming evidence in the

literature on domestic political participation in the U.S., is not significantly associated with protesting and petitioning in the case of Vietnamese Americans. In other words, lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with decreased likelihood of protesting and signing petitions. For those Vietnamese Americans who have a college degree, place of college degree obtained is significant in the case of internet forums – those who have earned a college degree in both Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to utilize this medium as a form of transnational political expression.

A second remarkable finding in my research is that in the case of three of the significant independent variables – age, gender and arrival in U.S. – the direction of the association with political transnationalism is consistent with expectations in the theoretical literature. However, in the case of three other explanatory factors – English proficiency, employment status and income – the opposite is true. In other words, contrary to the theoretical literature, Vietnamese Americans with poor English skills, those who are unemployed and have lower income levels are more likely to engage in political transnationalism. I discuss my findings in relation to expectations from the theoretical literature in further detail below.

### *Significance and Direction of Explanatory Factors*

My quantitative analyses provide strong evidence that demographic variables are more useful than contextual and resource dependent variables in predicting the odds of political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Among demographic variables, age and gender are the two most significant factors. Age is positively associated with and is a significant factor in explaining variance in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans. Older respondents are more likely to participate in protests and demonstrations as well as sign petitions than younger respondents. Among Vietnamese Americans, the ordinal logistic analyses suggest

that men are more likely than women to protest, sign petitions as well as participate in internet forums as forms of political transnationalism.

It is interesting to note that the one explanatory variable for which there was overwhelming evidence in the transnationalism literature as well as in my qualitative interviews was education. The positive relationship between higher education and political participation is one of the most frequently identified in domestic politics in the U.S. – however, this association does not hold true in case of the Vietnamese Americans. In other words, lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with decreased likelihood of protesting and petitioning. In the case of participating in internet forums, while lack of a college degree continues to be insignificant, the regression analyses suggest that for those respondents with a college degree, what matters is where the college degree was earned. Vietnamese Americans who obtained their college degree both in Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to participate in online forums dealing with homeland issues.

Regarding incorporation variables, the time-period of arrival in the U.S. is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning. Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the earlier refugee waves are more likely to protest and petition than those who arrived in the later waves. Similarly, level of English proficiency is significantly associated with protesting and petitioning but not with participating in internet forums. Respondents who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and petition.

Finally, regarding resource dependent variables, employment status and income are significantly associated with protesting; unemployed Vietnamese Americans and those with lower incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than those who are employed and whose income is higher. The employment status and income of Vietnamese

Americans is not significantly related to signing petitions or participating in internet forums, the other transnational political activities investigated in my research.

Bivariate analyses were additionally carried out to examine how groups overlap across the three forms of transnational political activities. The results showed that in the case of age, sex, arrival in U.S. and English proficiency, the effect of these factors on political transnationalism is consistent with those found in the ordinal regression analysis. Contrary to expectations from the theoretical literature, lack of a college degree did not correspond to decreased likelihood of participating in political transnationalism. As we saw in the bivariate analysis, as Vietnamese Americans' level of education rises, the percentage of respondents who reported never participating in political transnationalism also increases. As for employment status, even though employed Vietnamese Americans were found to be less likely to engage in transnational political activities in the ordinal regression analysis, no clear effect of employment status on political transnationalism seems to be visible from the bivariate analysis. The effect of income in the bivariate analysis did seem to be consistent with the theoretical literature but the factor was not found to be statistically significant, except in the case of protesting.

### ***Expectations from theoretical literature***

While the majority of findings from my ordinal regression analysis results are consistent with expectations from the theoretical literature, in the case of three of my independent variables, the findings diverge from the literature.

*Age:* The transnationalism literature suggests that older immigrants and refugees find it harder to adjust to conditions in the country of settlement and integrate into its culture. Thus, older migrants are more likely to continue to maintain ties with the country of origin rather than severing all contact. In the case of Vietnamese Americans, nostalgia for the homeland does

translate into motivation for transnational political action. Older Vietnamese Americans are more likely than younger ones to protest as well as sign petitions.

*Gender:* Literature on the relationship between gender and immigration tells us that males experience occupational downward mobility upon relocation while women's experience tends to go the opposite way, as many of them become paid workers for the first time in the United States (Jones-Correa 1998, Guarnizo et al. 2003). The hypothesis then is that as men, on average, tend to experience a loss in social status as opposed to women, they are more likely to engage in political transnationalism. The hypothesis holds true for all three types of transnational political activities under consideration - protests, petitions and participation in internet forums - in the case of Vietnamese Americans.

*Education:* The positive relationship between education and political participation is one of the most frequently identified in the theoretical literature (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995, La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998, Guarnizo et al. 2003, Tarrow 2005). The hypothesis then is that higher levels of education create the human capital resources that lead to increased engagement in political transnationalism. However, this association does not hold true in case of the Vietnamese Americans. Lack of a college degree is not significantly associated with decreased likelihood of protesting and petitioning. For those Vietnamese Americans who have a college degree, place of college degree obtained is significant in the case of internet forums – those who have earned a college degree in the U.S. or both in Vietnam and the U.S. are more likely to utilize this medium as a form of transnational political expression, compared to those who have obtained their college degree in Vietnam only.

*Arrival in U.S.:* There were two competing hypotheses in the case of arrival in the U.S. The first one argues that recent immigrant arrivals are more likely to maintain ongoing relationships with

the country of origin; over time political transnationalism weakens as migrants shift from a homeland-oriented politics to a receiving-society politics (Smith and Bakker 2008, Guarnizo et al. 2003). The hypothesis then is that longer periods of U.S. residence lead to progressive disengagement from home country loyalties and hence, less likelihood of political transnationalism. The competing argument is that new immigrant arrivals lack the financial resources and social networks vital to transnational engagement, which are acquired over time (Al-Ali N, Nadjie, R. Black, and K. Koser 2001). The corollary hypothesis then is that longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to more frequent, organized forms of transnational activity. In the case of Vietnamese Americans, the latter hypothesis holds true – those refugees arriving in the U.S. in the earlier waves are more likely to participate in protests or demonstrations and sign petitions or letters to government officials.

*English proficiency:* English proficiency is one of the most crucial factors in facilitating a refugee's assimilation and socioeconomic success in the United States. The hypothesis then is that we can expect to see higher levels of English proficiency leading to greater socio-economic success, and subsequently, more intense participation in political transnationalism. However, in the case of Vietnamese Americans those who rated their level of English proficiency as poor are more likely to protest and petition.

*Employment status and Income:* Employment status and income are the most cited efforts of resettlement programs, as a refugee cannot be considered to be successfully resettled if he or she continues to receive social support (Strand and Jones 1985, Alkire 2006). According to the theoretical literature, those who engage in transnational practices are likely to be the most economically successful immigrants. The hypothesis then is that being employed and higher income levels lead to more intense political transnationalism. However, the opposite is true in the

case of Vietnamese Americans - unemployed Vietnamese Americans and those with lower incomes are more likely to attend protests and demonstrations than Vietnamese Americans who are employed and those who have higher incomes. Thus, in the case of employment status and income too, the results from the ordinal regression analysis are contrary to the theoretical literature.

To sum up, from the ordinal regression analysis results, it can be supposed that Vietnamese Americans who are most likely to engage in protesting and sign petitions and letters to government officials dealing with Vietnamese issues are older males who arrived in the U.S. during the early waves of refugee influx and are not very proficient in English. Unemployed Vietnamese Americans who have lower incomes are also more likely to attend protests, while obtaining a college degree in both the U.S. and Vietnam is associated with more frequent participation in internet forums related to homeland issues.

My final conclusion is that the presence and dynamics of political transnationalism among all Vietnamese Americans is not uniform. Although there are common forces bearing on all members of the community, the particular circumstances of each individual also affect the extent and character of these activities. For some refugees, transnational politics is a means to maintain an active presence in homeland politics; for others, it is a practice to be avoided in order to leave a violent and unsettling past behind.

Thus, contrary to classical views of immigrant assimilation, my results indicate that transnational political activities are not the refuge of economically marginalized, downtrodden, poorly educated immigrants or recent arrivals. While the determinants of this phenomenon of political transnationalism contradict a normative view of the assimilation process that places a premium on the rapid shedding of old loyalties and identities, this does not however mean that

acculturation to the host society is not occurring or that transnational activism necessarily precludes successful integration. Thus, my research demonstrates that *a stable and significant transnational field of political action connecting Vietnamese Americans with their country of origin does exist.*

### **Limitations**

Of course, no analysis of the ordinal regression model can be complete without mentioning the potential limitations of the study. The drawbacks of my model are obviously connected with the limitations of working with data collected in a limited time frame (2009-10). Although the survey data have been gathered in Little Saigon over the period of several months, the sample size was still too small to yield the high power of the statistical test given that many explanatory variables entered the equation for analysis. My study was also limited to three types of transnational political activities at the individual level – protesting, petitioning and participating in internet forums. There are several other kinds of transnational activities, especially at the organizational level of analysis, for example, organizing human rights campaigns in the U.S. and worldwide, sending remittances to and active involvement in pro-democracy groups in Vietnam that are undertaken by some Vietnamese Americans organizations and even individuals not included in my study.

Finally, the selection of explanatory variables in the final model depended upon my qualitative research interviews based on existing literature, intuition and a trial and error approach. Other potential factors that could influence political transnationalism and explain some of the variance are – respondents' level of political activism in the home country Vietnam that would make them predisposed towards homeland politics, respondents' activism in host state



politics, respondents' networks at present and at the time of arrival in the U.S., whether respondents identify themselves as an ethnic minority and so on. These would be interesting explanatory variables to consider if one is to conduct further research in this area.

Overall, this study is an important first step in exploring the relationship between political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans and multiple explanatory variables concerning demographic, incorporation and resource dependent factors. The knowledge gained from this study would be beneficial to Vietnamese Americans themselves as well as scholars studying this particular population. The goal was to obtain information from respondents to establish benchmarks that could be helpful to scholars of transnationalism researching other populations. For example, scholars studying other refugee groups that have fled political persecution could compare the two populations to examine whether significant factors in political transnationalism among Vietnamese Americans, such as age, gender, time period of arrival in the U.S. and English proficiency (in the case of non-English speaking populations) hold true across refugee populations. Alternately, scholars conducting their research among the Vietnamese American population say, five or ten years down the line could do a time series analysis and observe whether the significant explanatory variables in political transnationalism among this group remain constant over time.

### **Changing nature of Vietnamese political transnationalism**

In the first decade following the mass exodus of the 1975 refugees, official regard by the Vietnamese government for the Vietnamese American refugees was one of vituperation and portrayal as the very dregs of society. In fact, both groups expressed extreme hatred and distrust of one another. This hatred manifested itself in the form of dogmatic, anti-communist actions by the Vietnamese refugees. Burning with grief over the loss of their country, many first-wave

refugees believed that Communists would soon be overthrown and that they would return to Vietnam within a few months. From overseas, Vietnamese refugees made many efforts to support the overthrow of the communist regime and liberate their homeland. Within the Vietnamese American community in Orange County, expressions of anti-communist sentiments and political activism in the early years often proved violent and deadly. Vigilante groups like VOECRN and NUFRONLIV claimed responsibility for a string of arson attacks and summary executions of purported Communist propagandists or those suspected of having ties with the communist government of Vietnam. In those early years, voicing any kind of deviant opinion, or one vaguely critical of the refugee community, could be construed as pro-Communist. Thus, for the first decade after the refugees' arrival, the will to conform and to force others to conform to a political and ideological imperative of anti-communism generated a subterranean history of anti-communist Vietnamese death squads, paramilitary training for armed return to Vietnam, and organized boycotts brought to bear upon both public and private transactions.

All this changed with the advent of the *doi moi* and Vietnam's free market reforms in 1986. After the U.S. lifted its economic embargo, Vietnam launched its campaign to attract overseas Vietnamese tourists and investors. The Vietnamese Communist Party and State has since affirmed that overseas Vietnamese are an inseparable part of the Vietnamese nation. This changing attitude of the Vietnamese government regarding the refugees was accompanied by the wave of political violence peaking in the late 1980s and then subsiding as vigilante organizations showed no further signs of activity. The next instance of political activity occurred when protests against suspected communist sympathizers continued even though the violence disappeared. Political protests emerged as a new form of political activity condemning Communism in the 1990s. For instance, in 1999, five years after diplomatic ties between the United States and

Vietnam were re-established, massive anti-communist demonstrations and political rallying took place over the course of two and a half months over the display of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's flag of Ho Chi Minh's portrait in a store in Little Saigon, California.

On the political front, anti-communist passion suggests that exilic political sentiments are still strong. This will persist as long as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam exists, but has undoubtedly lost its historical fervor. Like other immigrant groups before them, the Vietnamese refugees retain feelings of loyalty to their country of birth, but realize that a gulf of more than thirty five years now separates them from Vietnam. The younger generation of Vietnamese-Americans sometimes perceives the virulent anti-communism of the community as a divisive force with destructive potential. They view events like the HiTek protest as red-baiting (branding people as Communists) and intolerance towards nonconformists. Compared to the mid-1980s, when there was a constant fear and suspicion of the presence of communist spies amongst themselves, red-baiting in the Vietnamese American community in Orange County is nowhere nearly as common now.

Nevertheless, the community often expresses strong anti-Communist sentiments and a large number of Vietnamese Americans continue to have a strong disdain for the current government in Vietnam. Because they are a fairly mobilized refugee group and because homeland concerns are particularly salient, much of their political energy is devoted to issues dealing with Vietnam. Present-day transnationalism engaged in by Vietnamese Americans takes the form of indirect, non-electoral political activities such as participating in protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and letters to government officials as part of human rights campaigns as well as participating in various internet forums on homeland issues. Thus, there has

been a definite shift in Vietnamese activism from its earliest, violent form to present-day, non-violent transnational political activities.

### **Future of Vietnamese political transnationalism**

Since the mid-1980s, with the advent of *doi moi* (renovation policy), the Vietnamese government has realized the great potential of overseas Vietnamese in bringing about a bright future for the country. Despite their having a different political viewpoint, the communist leaders affirm their appreciation for the capital and intellectual capacity of overseas Vietnamese. In fact, overseas Vietnamese have already made important contributions to the economy of Vietnam – in 2001, remittances by nearly three million overseas Vietnamese, through both official and unofficial channels, were estimated at US\$3 billion, almost one-eighth of Vietnam's GDP (Khoa 2002).

Today, the Vietnamese Communist Party and State affirm that overseas Vietnamese are an inseparable part of the Vietnamese nation. Once considered traitors (*Viet-Gian*) and labeled *My Nguy* (American puppets) by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, those who left Vietnam have today been elevated to the status of *Viet Kieu* (overseas Vietnamese) and are now referred to by names like *Kieu Bao* (people coming from the same embryonic sack or womb). Indicative of how semantics can reflect politics, this change in vocabulary signified the government's more open attitude towards Vietnamese Americans that directly coincided with Vietnam's need for economic investment and its desire to join the global market. Thus, official regard by the Hanoi leadership for the overseas Vietnamese has undergone a complete circle over the last thirty five years from vituperation as the very dregs of society to solicitation as potential saviors of the current political system.

While many Vietnamese Americans have now come to believe that participation in the renovation process, not confrontation or violence is the best way to bring freedom and democracy to Vietnam, they cannot ignore the continuing human rights abuses going on in the country. To this end, transnational political acts like protests, petitions and participation in internet forums seek to involve overseas Vietnamese in the struggle for human rights and transform it into a cause. At the same time, there still exist many staunchly anti-communist Vietnamese Americans, who have never trusted the good will or sincerity of the communist party leaders. One Vietnamese American I interviewed, Mr. Ha<sup>19</sup>, emphasized that Vietnamese communist leaders must at least accept political opposition and initiate a dialogue with other political leaders from inside and outside the country. In view of their bitter experiences with the communists, the term “national reconciliation” is, therefore, still taboo to many Vietnamese Americans.

What this means is that even today Little Saigon is a hotbed of political activism, offering everything from backyard candlelight vigils to large-scale protests, from peaceful hunger strikes to violently anti-communist floats in the annual Têt parade. Representations of the suffering, pain and loss due to the Communist overthrow of Saigon are constantly reproduced through the media, successfully keeping a 35-year old experience fresh in the minds of the refugees. Pop culture recreates war scenes through music and images. These induced recollections of sorrow and loss still play an important role in the lives of older first-generation refugees; they find a blurry of comfort-sadness in these reproductions of their homeland.

At the same time, as Vietnamese Americans are showing even higher levels of socioeconomic progress, Vietnam directly appeals to this community for their capital and

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<sup>19</sup> Not respondent's real name. Personal interview conducted on April 20, 2009.

technical skills. As a result, Vietnamese Americans are now in a unique position of being able to support Vietnam economically while contesting it politically. This only goes to show the strategic role that homeland politics has played in the incorporation of a refugee group that arrived thirty-five years ago at the bottom of America's socioeconomic ladder and now boasts of numerous successful businessmen and publicly elected officials. Today, political transnational engagement, combined with the new economic and domestic political opportunities enjoyed by Vietnamese Americans in the U.S. democratic system, is redefining the new nation of Little Saigon.

**Appendix A. Interview Questionnaire****Determinants of Political Transnationalism among Vietnamese-Americans**

*Q1: Could you specifically describe any political activities you have recently engaged in, which were related to your country of origin, Vietnam?*

Answer:

*Q2: Have you recently made any payments/donations to any pro-democracy movement or local community organization aimed at bringing about change in Vietnam?*

Answer:

*Q3: Could you describe any grassroots Vietnamese-American political organizations/voluntary associations in the U.S. that you have recently led or been an active member of?*

Answer:

*Q4: Have you recently attended any protests or demonstrations (eg. HiTek protest) in Little Saigon aimed against the Vietnamese government?*

Answer:

*Q5: Have you recently carried out any political activities, such as voting or campaigning, directly in Vietnam?*

Answer:

*Q6a: In what ways has your education played a role in stimulating political activism across borders?*

Answer:

*Next Page*

*Q6b: Would you say your education level is high school or less, college education or graduate degree or higher?*

Answer:

*Q6c: Have you received any formal education (other than English language classes) or undergone any vocational training in the United States?*

Answer:

*Q7: Which of the following factors have affected the level and frequency of your political activism aimed at influencing politics in Vietnam?(Age, gender, employment status, income, length of stay in the U.S., English proficiency, satisfaction with life in the U.S.)*

Answer:

*Q8: Please add any further observations about your cross-border political activism. Are there any factors (other than the ones I mentioned) that influence it significantly?*

Answer:





**Appendix C. Petition**

His Excellency Nguyen Minh Triet  
President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
c/o Ambassador Nguyen Tam Chien  
Embassy of Vietnam  
1233 20<sup>th</sup> Street N.W. Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 200369

May 2, 2009

Your Excellency,

I have the honor and the duty to send you 780 signatures on petitions calling on you to honor your international human rights obligations by releasing all prisoners of conscience, including the Reverend Nguyen Van Ly, who has already spent around 17 years in prison for peacefully criticizing government policies on religions and advocating for greater respect for human rights since the late 1970s. Amnesty International names him as an Individual at Risk.

We have gathered these signatures on petitions in hope that you will release the prisoners of conscience in recognition of the United Nations Human Rights Council Review scheduled for May 8, 2009 in Geneva.

Amnesty International states for the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review that Article 69 of the 1992 Constitution of Viet Nam affirms the right to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, but only 'in accordance with the provisions of the law.' These laws, often enacted after 1992, are explicitly in breach of international human rights treaties that Viet Nam has ratified.

Our volunteers' experience is a humbling one because of the outpouring of support for the release of prisoners of conscience in Viet Nam by our Vietnamese friends, neighbors, co-workers and fellow citizens. We have translated the petition into Vietnamese with their appreciation and support. Please notice that a large majority of the signatures are Vietnamese.

At the head of the list, a political prisoner for twenty-seven years in Viet Nam between 1961 and 1991, dissident poet Nguyen Chi Thien, has personally gathered hundreds of the names. He was rescued from imprisonment when he was near death from deliberate starvation in 1991.

With sincere thanks for your attention,

Amnesty International Group 19  
California

**Appendix D. Letter Writing Campaign****Ask your Member of Congress to support the Vietnam internet freedom resolution**

*(To find the contact information for your Congressional Representative,*

*visit <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/>*

*or <http://capwiz.com/democracymforvietnam/dbq/officials/>)*

July 23, 2009

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to ask you to co-sponsor H. Res. 672 calling on the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to release imprisoned bloggers and respect Internet freedom.

The Government of Vietnam is taking a step backward by imposing restrictions on the internet and imprisoning bloggers and cyber activists who peacefully express their views.

The Committee to Protect Journalists calls Vietnam one of the “10 worst countries to be a blogger.”

Reporters Without Borders lists the Vietnamese government as an “enemy of the internet.”

Internet censorship is not only a violation of freedom of expression—a basic human right—but also a serious impediment for Vietnam’s economic development and integration into the world community.

Please support H.Res 672 to send a strong message that the US Congress supports the right of Vietnamese citizens to share and publish information over the internet.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

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### PUBLICATIONS

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