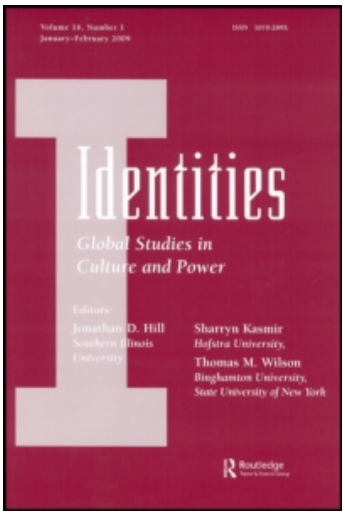

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THE ACCUMULATION OF NATIONAL BELONGING IN TRANSNATIONAL FIELDS: WAYS OF BEING AT HOME IN VIETNAM

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The notion of transnational citizenship emphasizes the mobility and flexibility of transmigrants with respect to the affective claims and disciplinary operations of the nation-state. Such representations tend to make redundant the analysis of the deep commitments of time, acculturation, and identification that have traditionally been considered the sine qua non *of national belonging. I shall aim to put these modalities of citizenship into a more dialectical relation by arguing that in order to reap the full benefits of their mobility, that is, to be able to secure the highest rates of conversion for their transnational cultural capital, transmigrants must legitimate their claims to national membership by accumulating* practical *national belonging. These issues will be explored through an ethnographic analysis of the strategies by which overseas Vietnamese attempt to assert and accumulate legitimacy as subjects of national belonging in Vietnam.*

Key Words*: transnational fields, national belonging, cultural capital conversion, transnational citizenship, overseas Vietnamese*

TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND NATIONAL BELONGING

One of the effects of the "transnational turn" has been to shift our attention away from the grand narratives of national belonging towards the processes by which globalization replaces deep attachment to the nation-state with a more flexible, mobile, and cynical relation. Although this has been a necessary and enabling theoretical step, it entails the risk of throwing the baby of national belonging out with the bathwater of "classical" national citizenship and identity in our conceptualization of transnational subjectivities. The transmigrant's mobility offers, no doubt, a freedom of sorts, but its liberatory potential has often been overstated. One is reminded of Bourdieu on the "California sports" (skiing, hang-gliding, windsurfing, etc.), which are attractive precisely because they offer a sense of "social weightlessness," "a sort of dream of social flying, a desperate effort to deny the gravity of the

social field" (1984: 220, 370). This seductive dream is, perhaps, best instantiated in the figure of Aihwa Ong's flexible citizen, who at first glance seems to have no need for social recognition as a member of the national community apart from the state's recognition of his or her "empty" legal status as a citizen. Yet as Ong herself acknowledges, a sort of transnational speed limit is imposed on the flexible citizen by the necessity of accumulating a degree of "deep" national belonging (e.g., penetrating elite local social circles), if only to facilitate further strategies of transnational accumulation (Ong 1999: 87–109).

I wish in this article to pursue the point that one cannot, in the end, exchange pure mobility for the weighty commitments of time, acculturation, and identification that the notion of national membership entails. Rather, in keeping with the increasingly accepted understanding that transnational and nation-state processes exist in a dialectical rather than mutually exclusive relation, I shall argue that national belonging, far from having been made obsolete by the emergence of transnational social fields, is in fact a key form of cultural capital operative in them. I will show how the accumulation of everyday national membership permits transmigrants to better reap the benefits of their mobility, enabling them to secure higher rates of conversion for their transnational cultural capital than those achieved when one simply "flies through."

The article will explore these issues through the ethnographic analysis of an instance of transnational citizenship to which they are particularly pertinent: the return of members of a refugee/exile community to a deterritorializing homeland. I shall speak of a range of overseas Vietnamese [*Viet Kieu*][1] returnees, but pay particular attention to 1.5 generation Viet Kieu professionals who have returned to work for transnational corporations in Vietnam. This group is particularly interesting because its members' Vietnameseness is constituted as a highly valuable form of symbolic capital in the corporate context. The efficacy of this capital lies in the fact that it is thought to allow Viet Kieu to act as cultural mediators between upper management and local staff. Yet in order to fulfill this intermediary role, and thus convert their cultural capital into power and mobility within the corporate structure, Viet Kieu professionals must find ways of presenting themselves to their subordinates as legitimately belonging to the Vietnamese nation.

METHODOLOGY

The material for this article comes from interviews with Vietnamese-Australian professionals in Sydney and interviews and participant observation with Australian, French, Japanese, and American Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese nationals who work with them in Ho Chi Minh City. "An," who takes the role of key informant in this article, was interviewed in Sydney some years after his experience working in Vietnam. He made a particularly good subject for a number of reasons, not least of which was the fact he had been in Ho Chi Minh City in the mid 1990s, a time in which investment was booming and the demand for Viet Kieu profes-

sionals was at its zenith. Interviewing him at a time and place distant from his Ho Chi Minh City experience had its advantages and its drawbacks. With the benefit of hindsight, he was able to conceptualize his time in Vietnam in a more reflexive and comprehensive way than subjects interviewed while in the thick of things, making sense out of the various phases he went through as he skipped between jobs and moved in different social circles. On the negative side, time and distance blur details and tend to produce idealized or simplified versions of the past, imbuing with meaning events which at the time did not present themselves as significant. Yet I would stress that subjects' desires to present themselves and their experiences in a certain light are themselves objects of ethnographic interest and interpretation, and I have accordingly treated the interview texts as personal narratives as much as factual accounts. An additional benefit of the Sydney interviews is that they give the ethnography a multisited dimension (Marcus 1995), permitting us insight into the actors' social grounds at both ends of the transnational field they traverse. We are able to see how experiences of social mobility and homeliness in Vietnam become especially pertinent in terms of the racial exclusion subjects experience in White host nations. Conversely, we observe that the experience of marginalization as a Viet Kieu in Vietnam can lead to the reaffirmation of hyphenated or diasporic identity.

Of course, the ethnographer has to not only pay attention to what subjects say, but also to be there to watch what they do. During the course of fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation, and as a postdoctoral researcher, I spent much time hanging around with Viet Kieu in Vietnam, observing and participating in their interactions with local Vietnamese in a number of different social and institutional settings: private homes, bars, restaurants, the street, government offices, and places of work. In addition, I got to know Vietnamese nationals who work and socialize with overseas Vietnamese, and have spoken to them at length in both the presence and absence of their Viet Kieu friends and colleagues about the pleasures and difficulties of their relationships.

As a final note, the reader should keep in mind that while the ethnographic subjects are described as being engaged in the accumulation of various types of capital, so indeed is the ethnographer. His or her collection of ethnographic data is, among other things, an exercise in the accumulation of cultural capital that will be deployed in the academic field in order to enhance his or her reputation and advance his or her career (Bourdieu 1990b: 150–155). Like the Viet Kieu of which I speak, I have experienced my own struggle to assert membership and legitimacy in Vietnamese sociocultural worlds by striving for performative mastery of the Vietnamese language and other cultural and bodily codes. I have experienced incivility and exclusion, as well as the sometimes unwanted, sometimes seductive social power that Whiteness confers in Vietnam, and I have had to find personal and public strategies for dealing with these contradictory and sometimes distressing experiences.

CITIZENSHIP AS STATUS AND CITIZENSHIP AS PRACTICE

Transnational theory, alongside diaspora and multicultural theory, has been instrumental in taking us beyond an understanding of citizenship as conceived in the traditional categories of civil, political, and social rights and obligations asserted within the nation-state. The transnational subject actualizes his or her "citizenship" in a transborder social field that comprises "a combination of virtual and actual 'social spaces' or habitats that span and connect the social and political terrains of the [host nation] and those of the homeland" (Fouron 2000: 1). While virtually all theorists writing on transnational phenomena acknowledge that the nation-state continues to exercise significant powers of capture over transmigrants, virtually all consider transnational mobility to offer at least a limited means of escape from the reach of the repressive apparatuses of state and corporate power acting on subjects at national and supranational levels. The discovery of transnationality as a new and potentially transgressive form of citizenship necessarily takes the focus away from the identity-binds acting on traditional migrants (assimilation/cultural maintenance, accommodation/resistance, etc.). With this shift in perspective, we must take care not to lose sight of an equally important critique of citizenship that has come through feminist and postcolonial theory, according to which the concept of citizenship must be understood not (or not only) as a universal and empty juridical category, but as a social *performance* of national identity (e.g., Berlant 1991, 1997; Bhabha 1994; Joseph 1999). Among other things, these critiques suggest that the immigrant's achievement of legal citizenship does not immediately confer acceptance into the national community. He or she must, in addition, achieve mastery of the modes of gendered, cultural, linguistic, and bodily performance that underpin the principle of citizenship, despite its pretense to abstract universality.

One of the better attempts to theorize citizenship as a set of acquired cultural and class competences is that of Ghassan Hage (1998: 49–55), who approaches citizenship in the specific sense of the "right to membership of the nation-state." Hage makes an important distinction between "official" citizenship, which he argues signifies a *formal* recognition of one's national status by the state, and *practical* national belonging, which refers to one's everyday acceptance or non-acceptance as a subject of belonging by the dominant national community. (This latter mode of identity is roughly analogous to the notion of "cultural citizenship.") The idea of citizenship, Hage argues, is an inadequate way of conceptualizing national belonging because it does not give us any indication of the degree of acceptance which is granted to different classes of national subject by the dominant national community.[2] The concept of citizenship thus implies an either/or logic: one is either fully a citizen or fully not a citizen. Practical national belonging, by contrast, has a cumulative logic. "In the daily life of the nation," Hage argues, "there are nationals who, on the basis of their class or gender or ethnicity, for example, practically feel and are made to feel to be *more* or *less* nationals than others" (1998:

52). Although legal citizenship guarantees certain rights and privileges, it is in fact only a pass into the game of achieving an embodied and performed citizenship that is recognized as legitimate by the dominant national community. The two forms of citizenship are separable in principle, but it should be noted that the status of one's practical national belonging may in fact have consequences for one's official status, as when a member of a racial minority finds he or she is unable to actualize as many rights in the legal system as a member of the dominant racial community.

Note that I don't wish to advocate collapsing entirely the distinction between legal and performative citizenship. Such an approach might lead us to equate quite [illegible]gly Ong's privileged flexible citizens with marginal "grassroots transmigrants" [illegible]California's illegal workers and resident noncitizens (Smith 1994, Smith 2000). One would have to acknowledge that the latter groups' purely practical transnational citizenship is necessarily a precarious and disempowered one—indeed, not really a form of citizenship at all—no matter what one might think about the erosion of the authority of the nation-state by transnational social fields. Nevertheless, I would still argue for the importance of being able to conceptualize transnational citizenship in both its official and performative aspects, and in particular of understanding the various ways in which these interact to consolidate or undermine each other. The transnational citizen may not always need to perform citizenship in such a way that he or she accumulates practical national belonging, yet in certain circumstances, this performance may significantly enhance the profitability of his or her transnationality, whether those profits be material, social, personal, or psychological. The problem of the conversion of cultural capital accumulated in one field into another, which is perhaps the quintessential problem of the flexible citizen, is one such circumstance.

STATUS IN TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS

Cultural capital, for Bourdieu, describes such things as socially valued knowledges, tastes, dispositions, styles, and other acquired and inherited social and physical characteristics. These material and symbolic goods are constituted as having value within the limits of specific social fields that possess a market-like structure, such that individuals and groups compete within them to accumulate and deploy species of capital. A key property of cultural capital is its convertibility. Given certain preconditions, cultural capital may be convertible, for instance, into material capital, as when one knowledgeable about art manages to cash in on this knowledge by opening a commercial gallery; or into symbolic capital, the legitimated form of cultural capital, as when a high score in a secondary school exam confers entrance to an elite university (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1990a; Bourdieu 1990b). Bourdieu also speaks of differential rates of conversion of forms of capital, a point that can be illustrated by Persell and others' finding that young North American women receive less favorable rates of conversion of their economic, social, and cultural resources into educational gains than do young men—that is, they have to do and

be more than the men to gain entrance into the same elite colleges (Persell et al. 1992). When transmigrants move between national fields, they face precisely this same difficulty of interconversion. To take a somewhat crude economic example, Vietnamese investment law discriminates against non-Vietnamese nationals, meaning that Viet Kieu get less value for their investment dollar than do domestic investors. The overseas Vietnamese investor's nonnational status means, in effect, that his or her money is worth less than that of those investors who are deemed legitimate national subjects. This argument becomes significantly more sophisticated when one is also talking about the conversion of nonmaterial forms of capital.

Existing studies of status in transnational social fields address this issue to some extent by demonstrating how the homeland provides transmigrants with a context for legitimating status claims. According to Goldring, transnational social spaces constitute "zones of sociocultural intelligibility" in which social trajectories that are invisible or devalued in the host nation can be recognized (Goldring 1999: 169). She shows how a life of scrimping and saving in the U.S. becomes worth it because one can return to Mexico and enjoy instant social mobility. In this account, the conversion of economic and cultural capital acquired in the U.S. into symbolic and social capital (communal acceptance and prestige) at "home" in Mexico is more or less automatic:

> Individuals and families can improve their houses, wear U.S. clothing styles, drive imported vehicles, buy rounds of drinks, travel to Mexico to get married, return for the patron saint's day, or engage in other practices and know that these claims to mobility, some of which are also claims to community membership, will be properly interpreted. (Goldring 1999:181)

For our purposes, this approach underplays the difficulties of interconversion between fields. The historical and ideological disjunctures between overseas and domestic Vietnamese populations are such that any "transnational sociocultural intelligibility" that exists between home and diaspora is a fractured one at best. Certainly, returning overseas Vietnamese can effectively create social envy by displaying their wealth. However, the conversion of their success in America, France, or Australia into durable status within local Vietnamese social hierarchies is far more difficult to achieve. The typical Viet Kieu experience in Vietnam is one that includes incivility, exclusion, extortion, and refusal of social honor.[3] Thus, any study of the conversion of capital between Vietnam and the diaspora has to take account of the blockage caused by this popular refusal of national membership. Admittedly, this issue is far more fraught with difficulties for returning overseas Vietnamese than for Mexican transmigrants in the U.S., since the disjunctures between overseas and domestic populations are far more significant. Nevertheless, even in Mexican-American transnational social fields one would expect there to be at least some hiccoughs in the process of conversion: for instance, manifestations of resentment and subtle modes of exclusion of the returnees.

WHITENESS AND THE ACCUMULATION OF NATIONAL CULTURAL CAPITAL

Given the limited applicability of the literature on status in transnational fields, I have looked instead to anthropological work on multiculturalism and the social exclusion of "Third World-Looking People" [TWLP] in White nations. This work may not at first seem relevant to the case of returning overseas Vietnamese professionals. For one thing, they are not racially different from the dominant national community. For another, they typically possess significantly more economic capital than their domestic counterparts. They also embody types of cultural capital extremely difficult for Vietnamese nationals to accumulate (foreign university degrees, bilingualism, cosmopolitanism, etc.). Nevertheless, as I shall argue below, overseas Vietnamese experience in Vietnam a refusal of recognition as legitimate national subjects comparable to that experienced by TWLPs in White nations, with the difference that the local Vietnamese challenge to the authenticity of Viet Kieu identity is not imposed by a socially and economically dominant national community (as in the migrant experience), but is exerted instead from below by a national community that retains a monopoly over the right to define who or what is authentically Vietnamese. Thus just as the legitimacy of their claims to Americanness or Australianness may be questioned in their host lands, Viet Kieu, who are widely perceived in Vietnam to have "lost [their] roots" [*mat goc*], frequently have the authenticity of their Vietnameseness questioned in their "home" land. Indeed, differences between domestic and overseas Vietnamese are often considered to be not only culturally irreconcilable, but may even be biologized, as in a postwar discourse in which south Vietnamese were considered to have been physically transformed and corrupted by the "neocolonial poison" that constituted national culture under the U.S.-sponsored regime (Carruthers 2000a; Taylor 2001: 23–55). A more contemporary version of this metaphor is found in local perceptions about overseas Vietnamese corporeality, in which the idea that Viet Kieu are fatter than domestic Vietnamese is deployed "as a physical sign of moral decay, of an assimilation to Western physiques and lifestyles" (Thomas 1999a: 31).

In a chapter of *Flexible Citizenship* entitled "*Fengshui* and the Limits to Cultural Accumulation," Aihwa Ong explores the difficulties that Hong Kong professionals who have migrated to the United States experience in attempting to convert their economic and cultural capital into the social and symbolic capital necessary to gain acceptance into White high society (Ong 1999). These well-heeled migrants find that they are judged by the White elites whom they aspire to join as lacking mastery of the requisite class cultural forms—or, more invidiously, their achieved mastery of these forms (a Harvard MBA, an inconspicuously expensive suit, or a killer volley) is not recognized. This misrecognition occurs because of "a perceived mismatch between the distinction of their symbolic capital and their racial identity, which may be associated with low social value in the host group" (91). In other words, their middle class cultural capital, incorporated in Asian bod-

ies that signify as "low class," is interpreted as cultural incompetence. This devaluation creates phenomena like already-polished young Hong Kong Chinese women going to finishing classes in the U.S. to learn how to deport themselves more like White, middle class American women. We might say that these migrants have met a sort of transnational speed limit, and must slow down in order to accumulate more embodied Americanness.

Hage (1998) offers an analysis of the social exclusion TWLPs experience in White host nations which is more nuanced than Ong's in its development of the idea of a national social field in which Whiteness is accumulated. As we saw above, Hage conceives practical national belonging as a form of symbolic capital that can be accumulated within the social field constituted by the nation. It comprises "the sum of accumulated nationally sanctioned and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions … looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour" (1998: 53). The aim of accumulating national capital is to transform it into national belonging, the form of symbolic capital specific to the national field, and recognized as legitimate by the dominant national grouping. Indeed, Whiteness itself can be understood, not as a biological essence, but as an agglomeration of nationally valued physical and cultural styles. By accumulating Whiteness, that is, by assimilating, non-White subjects can legitimate their claims to national membership. But of course there is a difference between those who accumulate various national capitals to try and be like White Australians and those who naturally appear to be White Australians, the most legitimate national subjects. What Bourdieu calls the logic of the aristocracy of the field means that inherited cultural capital will always be more valuable than acquired capital (Hage 1998: 61).

THE BODILY POLITICS OF "PASSING"

Lauren Berlant (1991) argues that the bodies of those who exemplify the ideal of the White, male national subject—in Hage's terms, those who have accumulated enough national cultural capital to appear "naturally" to be the most legitimate national subjects—become, in a sense, invisible. This is to say that their embodiment signifies as normal and unmarked, in opposition to the abnormal or excessive embodiment that is imposed on nonnormative subjects of the nation (women, racial and sexual others, etc.). Since marked bodies can only mime the legitimate relationship to the nation, the subject who attempts to pass for White creates a juridically fraudulent body that is always susceptible to rematerialization (Berlant 1991).

In socialist Vietnam, this national corporeal politics is of course radically differently structured. For one thing, the people or masses are envisaged as the legitimate (collective) subject of the nation rather than the person or the citizen. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is still possible for us to apply the distinction between abstract and material national bodies to the category of *market* citizenship in Viet-

nam. As part of its endeavor to capture diasporic wealth for a deterritorialized nation-building project, the Vietnamese state offers Viet Kieu who want to retain their foreign passports a symbolic citizenship in a Vietnamese transnation, and partial citizenship in the Vietnamese market (Carruthers 2001b). Under certain conditions they pay less than non-Vietnamese foreigners for rent, visas, tax, and transport, and enjoy privileged conditions for investment and the purchase of land-use rights. However, they enjoy fewer property and investment rights and less privileged access to goods and services than do Vietnamese nationals.

Domestic Vietnamese have an extremely finely honed capacity to spot a nonnational, who is identifiable by the tiniest departure from locally constituted codes of dress, deportment, speech, and so on. A Vietnamese Australian reports the experience of being singled out: "I traveled in a local bus all the way back from the country to the city … and when I got off all the cyclo guys yelled "Oh that guy, that Hong Kong guy is mine!" (Interview with author). This interviewee put down his visibility to the fact that he wore fashionable small, round glasses and had closely cropped hair. Another subject, a Vietnamese-Japanese man, claimed that it was not his way of dressing or grooming that sometimes gave him away, but the fact that, having lived in Japan for so long, he had become "too polite," and thus stood out from the aggressive locals! In these cases, what confounds the capacity to make the body abstract is not racial difference (as in the multicultural scenario), but the Viet Kieu's nonlocal body hexis and foreign technologies of the body.

The consequences of being hailed as a nonnational subject are typically more than just symbolic, since Viet Kieu, like foreigners, are routinely double or triple charged in street transactions. In Vietnam, when you check into a hotel, rent a house, or buy a domestic air ticket, you have to show your identity card or passport. This supervisory mechanism works to identify Viet Kieu, making it difficult to counterfeit national status in such transactions. It is only in street transactions in the unregulated sector (such as hiring a cyclo) that the possibility of passing for local comes into being. In this context, Vietnamese nationals apply invidious visual and bodily classifications to Viet Kieu, identifying them as national others and excluding them from the privileged access to the market, and thus to the nation. The street traders' overcharging gains a certain support and legitimacy from a state policy that works to systematically deny equity to overseas Vietnamese. Only the Viet Kieu who has expertly (re)assimilated a local bodily hexis is able to evade this surveillance by miming or performing a "legitimate" national body, and thus gaining fraudulent entitlement to full market citizenship.

Of course, the benefits of passing are strictly contextual, and one does not "go native" all the time. Under other conditions, greater social profits can be obtained by foregrounding one's Viet Kieu identity. Indeed, the highest gains come from being able to play the space in-between, and those who play the game of passing truly well are able to modulate their performances of Vietnameseness to suit the occasion. Thus one interviewee asserted to me that he was able to appear equally at home eating in a fancy restaurant as he was eating on the street with cyclo

drivers and students. Another subject, "An" (a Vietnamese Australian working for a company that distributed pharmaceuticals and other products in Vietnam), described how he slipped in and out of Viet Kieu embodiment in various situations when doing market research. Once when visiting a local company, he had a chauffeur drive him in a car, and represented himself to the boss as a Viet Kieu who wanted to open a supermarket in Vietnam. The boss, smelling money, discoursed on his company's complex distribution network for two hours, and An was able to go back to his office and write up a report straight away. Conversely, when An needed to do research at a Ho Chi Minh City produce market, he went on a bicycle, and tried to establish solidarity with the market people, who would no doubt have given a Viet Kieu a hard time.

Another version of this ruse is what is known as "contraband" investment [*dau tu "chui"*], whereby a Viet Kieu investor uses a relative or friend who has Vietnamese citizenship as a front for his or her investment. In this instance, the Viet Kieu borrows the prophylactic national body of the relative as an illegal means of achieving incorporeality. It would be difficult to think of a better example than this subterfuge with which to illustrate the imbrication of the performative and juridical aspects of market citizenship in Vietnam. One might say that those who pass have effectively deassimilated (or, perhaps more accurately, dissimulated) the negatively valued Western modes of embodiment that are typically arrogated to Viet Kieu. By dint of their own performances of locally valued social and physical styles—or by the performances of their proxies—they accumulate national cultural capital. The reward for these performances is being misrecognized as a legitimate national subject, and thus being able to convert one's material capital at the same privileged rates as locals.

The phenomenon of passing cannot be adequately described as being either fully rational or fully intuitive. In Bourdieu's terms, we may speak of a pre-conscious and embodied "feel for the game" of passing (Bourdieu 1990a). Yet we may also speak of a sense in which one makes a more or less conscious and rational choice as to how to present one's social being in Vietnam. Returned Viet Kieu are perhaps comparable to those "invisible ethnics" in White nations (Mullings 1979) who have a limited scope within which to make voluntary ethnonational identifications (unlike those non-White ethnics subject to repressive social exclusion on the basis of visible racial difference). Of course, when found out, Viet Kieu also may be subject to such exclusion, as we have seen. Nevertheless, provided one possesses the requisite bodily cultural capital, the possibilities of passing for local, or alternatively of flaunting one's diasporic or hyphenated identity, are there to be taken up or not, and may present themselves consciously or not.

THE USES OF SOCIAL DISTANCE

We may contrast the Mexican transmigrants analyzed by Goldring, who return in order to build status in their homelands, with returnees who go back in a more

antagonistic way. A dramatic instance of this is the return of Cuban exiles in the late 1970s, an occasion many used to make a conspicuous display of the wealth they had found in America (in many cases on credit). This incident led to a bout of leave-the-country fever that eventuated in the Mariel boat lift of 125,000 Cubans to the U.S. (de la Campa 1994: 307). Similarly, the influx of foreign consumer goods, media, tourists, and overseas Vietnamese in the mid to late 1980s led, among other factors, to a mini peak in emigration from Vietnam in 1989, including a resurgence in illegal emigration (Hitchcox 1994; Thayer 1989). Thomas (1999b) has analyzed the way Overseas Vietnamese assert their superiority over their domestic relatives by sending gifts that emphasize their own wealth and privileged access to the fruits of Western modernity (e.g., sending a refrigerator to relatives in a village without electricity so they would realize how backward their living conditions were). This sense of social competition is vividly captured by Vietnamese-American writer Andrew X. Pham in a passage from his novel *Catfish and Mandala.*

> Many Vietnamese Americans "have been back". For some of us, by returning as tourists we prove to ourselves that we are no longer Vietnamese but Vietnamese Americans. We return, with our hearts in our throats, to taunt the Communist regime, to show through our material success that we, the once pitiful exiles, are now the victors. No longer the poverty-stricken refugees clinging to fishing boats, spilling out of cargo planes onto American soil, a mess of open-mouthed terror, wide-eyed awe, hungry and howling for salvation. Time has veiled the days when America fished us out of the ocean like drowning cockroaches and fed us and clothed us—we, the onus of their tragedy. We return and, in our personal silence, we gloat at our conquerors, who now seem like obnoxious monkeys cheating over baubles, our baggage, which mean little to us. (Pham 2000: 7–8)

These "potlatch" returns would appear to be somewhat crude uses of the social distance that separates Vietnamese migrants from nonmigrants. The returnees burn their bridges behind them, as it were, through displays that are calculated to create envy, awe, and resentment, thus radically devaluing locally acquired cultural capital. Although these displays undoubtedly produce a certain effect, it is clearly not one likely to lead to the accumulation of durable forms of social and symbolic capital (networks and prestige). Indeed, this is not the intention of the potlatch returnee, who is typically firmly anchored in the U.S. and comes to Vietnam infrequently and for short periods only. (It is this figure of the "Viet Kieu tourist," wealthy but without cultural attainment, perhaps having been a peasant migrant, who drops in briefly and makes a splash, that stands in the popular Vietnamese imagination for overseas Vietnamese.) Rather, the aim of potlatch return is to display in its most instant and visible form the social mobility the returnees have achieved through migration, and at the same time perform a critique of communism for failing to deliver decent standards of living to the people (see Carruthers 2001b). Significantly, the claims made by Viet Kieu displays of wealth are not claims to membership of the Vietnamese national community, but rather, conspicuous statements of

membership of the U.S. and other Western national communities.

There exists of course a multitude of styles of diasporic return. Pham, author of the passage cited above, went back to Vietnam as a penniless backpacker, who in his cycling odyssey along Highway One was often thrown upon the mercy of local villagers. Although it remains the case that one can still run into any number of Viet Kieu tourists conspicuously consuming Vietnam, the intensely competitive scenario sketched by Thomas and Pham was truer of the early 1990s than it is of today. The improved material conditions that market reforms have brought to some in Vietnam, and the accumulated experience domestic Vietnamese now have with visiting Viet Kieu, have diminished the effect of displays of wealth and the trappings of a hyphenated identity. For their part, Viet Kieu are becoming less interested in anticommunist politics and the sumptuary destruction of wealth in Vietnam and more interested in investing in real estate and small business. In this shifting context, the experience of 1.5 generation Viet Kieu temporary labor migrants is perhaps becoming more paradigmatic. This is a cohort whose members have typically experienced significant acculturation in western host nations, but also retained the capacity to perform competently in a Vietnamese sociocultural universe. This bicultural competence, in addition to their achieved social mobility, makes them more secure in their hyphenated identities than those in their parents' generation, who as a rule experienced downward social mobility, deskilling, racial exclusion, and material deprivation in the diasporic host countries (Haines 1989; Rutledge 1992; Viviani 1996). Most significantly, their embodied cultural capital makes members of this group capable of, and inclines them towards, subtler negotiations of the social distance that separates them from locals, and strategies of return that are oriented to reaping longer-term social profits than those sought by the potlatch returnees (by building social networks, accruing favors and so on). In what follows, I want to examine the ways members of this group accumulate national cultural capital in the specific sense of (re-)assimilating locally intelligible and valued ways of manipulating social distance in order to deal with the contradictions of status difference between themselves and locals, thus facilitating the conversion of their cultural capital as mediators.

CASE STUDIES: AN AND THANH

An migrated from Ho Chi Minh City to Sydney in 1989, at the age of 24, under the family reunion category. His cosmopolitanization began in Vietnam, where his gay sexuality, his interest in the arts and foreign languages, and his work as a tour guide threw him into contact with a sophisticated multiracial milieu. His English is fluent although quite heavily accented, and his Vietnamese is not distinguishable from that spoken by locals. Although his relatives left Vietnam as refugees, and he does to an extent identify with an anticommunist refugee identity, An's main motivation for leaving Vietnam was to be able to further his education. On coming to Australia this dream was realized when he successfully completed a BA

in Tourism Management, then later a Master of Commerce and Marketing. An worked for a time in the hospitality industry in Australia, but found it "too subservient." On completing his master's, he was again disappointed:

> "I got into the field and it's so competitive with the Australian born.… How could you know like a NESB just speaking English with the accent how could you get it? And they're so competitive. I never see any hope at all." (Interview with author)

He was forced to take low status jobs in telephone marketing. Then, at a graduate recruitment session, he was interviewed by the Asia Pacific Chairman of a multinational market research company:

> "And he liked me so much. He said 'Oh, you're the best. I would like you to go to Vietnam.' Oh just say I put all of my heart; I thought oh my god that's a good thing to be sent back to Vietnam. . . . Like with [company name] it's so professional. . . . It's just fun for me when you couldn't find a good job in Australia and when you went back to Vietnam jobs so abundant. You could think I'd apply for this job, and I got an interview, I refused. I got accepted by all of them, seven. I refused. I don't like it. I say sorry, not enough money, I want more. At that time you know just in Vietnam you know everyone want more money. You can see money … floating around. It's fascinating.…"(Interview with author)

Going to Vietnam proved a highly viable means of exit for An from the hierarchical racial order of multicultural Australia. After his experience of exclusion and frustrated social mobility, he vividly conveys the excitement he felt as a Viet Kieu in Saigon in the mid nineties. In a city awash with transnational venture capital, An found his bicultural abilities were in high demand. He eventually took a number of positions in Ho Chi Minh City, the most high-powered being a managerial position in projects and marketing with a Vietnamese-Australian importer and distributor. This entrepreneur, connected by family to elite local political circles and to Hong Kong and Malaysian capital, had set up a Vietnamese franchise of a large multinational company. Working for this man, An suddenly found himself with responsibilities he had never dreamed of. He and his other young Viet Kieu colleagues did such things as organizing publicity events for former Vietnamese prime ministers and other luminaries at Ho Chi Minh City's Independence Palace, and presenting marketing proposals to such eminences as the chairman of Minolta in Japan.

In this firm, An worked alongside a number of young Vietnamese Americans with MBAs from universities such as Berkeley and Harvard. He was answerable to the company director (who was in turn answerable to Hong Kong), had two local Vietnamese staff beneath him, and regularly liased with local partners and authorities in the firm's interest. Working as marketing manager at this early stage of his career in Vietnam, An describes himself as having been "too vocal," "confident," and "arrogant" in his relations with his local staff and counterparts. He

differentiates himself from the young Americans he worked with, however, who he says were even more alienated from the locals than he. Not having been primarily socialized in Vietnam, these young graduates were not fluent in Vietnamese, and behaved "Like typical Americans. Arrogant, boastful, unreasoning, demanding." At first, An had been impressed with the confidence and pushiness of these young graduates, yet later came to feel that, despite their prestigious degrees, his own knowledge was equal to theirs because of his greater understanding of the local people. He claims to have been looked to in the company as a middleman between the locals and the young Vietnamese Americans, who were "always asking for [his] help." At least one of these graduates was dismissed while An was working at this company for the reason he simply could not do his job because of these difficulties of translation. An eventually left this company because, after a highly successful year with them, he could not secure a raise in salary. He complained to me that while the salaries he was paid in the various positions he took in Vietnam were "ten times higher" than those paid to locals, he was typically offered less than non-Vietnamese expats. He was particularly annoyed at the "supremacy" of the French director of a big multinational who offered him a wage lower than offered to expats when his credentials were the same and his real abilities so much greater given his understanding of the local scene.

After his first tumultuous year in Vietnam, in which he played employers off against each other in order to get pay raises, and lived something of a high-powered lifestyle, An says he eventually "opted out" of this rat-race by taking a job with a local advertising firm and settling into a much more modest and "local" existence. Indeed, he represents himself as having gone somewhat more native than the natives. He surprised his friends by letting a local journalist acquaintance stay in his house for some months when he needed accommodation. He also made it a policy to "buy Vietnamese" at a time when locals made it a policy to buy anything but. Friends would be intrigued on coming to his house to find he had made a decoration out of two baskets and a carrying pole used by peasants to bring their wares to market, or that he had hung traditional lacquer paintings on the walls.

Ong distinguishes globalization, in the sense of narrow corporate strategies, from transnationality, "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism" (Ong 1999: 4). As a social scientist, she says, she is interested in the economic rationality that produces transnational movements of people and capital. As an anthropologist, however, she is interested in the cultural logics, themselves embedded in the processes of capital accumulation, which make such movements "thinkable, practicable, and desirable" (1999: 5). While Viet Kieu professionals in Vietnam can and do typically articulate the economic rationality behind their decisions to return to work in Vietnam, this is always supplemented and ultimately exceeded in their accounts of their movements by other logics. Thus if An's statements show that the movement of transnational capital into Vietnam creates a "pull" factor for Over-

seas Vietnamese professionals, they also demonstrate that the experience of marginalization in a largely White middle class professional milieu in Australia acts as a "push" factor. This was very much the case for another interview subject, "Thanh," the Vietnamese-Australian director of a branch of a multinational software corporation in Ho Chi Minh City. Although Thanh achieved more social mobility in Australia than An, he nevertheless did not feel "at home" in a workplace in which his largely White middle class colleagues were connected by social networks and a shared class culture (after work his Anglo-Australian colleagues would "go to the pub and talk about football," a practice in which Thanh did not feel at all comfortable). He also worked in Silicon Valley for a time but experienced a similar sense of alienation there, and when the chance of a job in Vietnam came up, he jumped at it. On leaving Ho Chi Minh City for Australia, Thanh had promised his friends that he would be back in 10 years. In the end, he more than made good on his word by returning in only seven. Thanh speaks most often of his apparently permanent move back to Vietnam in terms of his desire to find a place for himself where he is not negatively racially marked; his own nation, as it were. He says he feels "at home" in Vietnam, and has, in fact, bought several properties in Ho Chi Minh City. Although he is conscious of the exclusions to which he is subject in Vietnam as a Viet Kieu, he projects these onto the communist state and not onto "the people," from whom he says he does not feel any sense of alienation. Indeed, he says, they are the real reason why he is here. Similarly for An, who after two years left the high-powered world of Ho Chi Minh City for a less pressured job as an arts development officer with a Vietnamese community organization back in Sydney, the real value of his experience was in the rediscovery of the worth and beauty of Vietnam's culture and people. After having shunned the Vietnamese community in his first years in Australia, he now lives and works in the thick of it, and has become an important community representative and organizer.

Certainly, An and Thanh differ in that the former's experience in Vietnam confirmed him in a diasporic or hyphenated identity that he had previously tried to resist, whereas the latter seems to have drifted away from diasporic selfhood, and towards a reconstructed, reasserted homeland identity. Nevertheless, I would like to stress the fact that both subjects emphasize the value of the proximity to domestic Vietnamese they have enjoyed in Vietnam, and both deplore the behavior of Viet Kieu who go there with the intention of nakedly profiting from the distinction their wealth and honorary Whiteness give them. By way of illustrating this, Thanh tells me a story about a Viet Kieu professional he met who was drinking at a bar and speaking Vietnamese with his friends. When the waitress came around, this man would revert to speaking English in an effort to impress her!

It will be noted that while the logics of mobility An and Thanh express can by no means be reduced to the rationality of material capital accumulation, their shared disposition to refuse or minimize the distinction between themselves and domestic Vietnamese happens to be very much attuned to the demands of the corporate social fields in which they and others like them operate. To act successfully as

cultural intermediaries in these hierarchical corporate structures, Viet Kieu like them must be able to achieve social proximity to local staff, while at the same time negotiating the social distance that continues nevertheless to separate them from locals (their higher salaries, educational qualifications, etc.) in order to be able to manage and translate them for the upper management. We shall get a more concrete sense of this dynamic in what follows.

STRATEGIES OF CONDESCENSION

"Truc" is a Saigonese university graduate in her mid twenties who works as a sales rep for a foreign company employing several Viet Kieu. She complained to me over a bowl of *pho* about her boss, a Vietnamese Frenchman who "talks down" to the company's local employees. According to Truc, the boss performs his job badly because he is completely out of touch with the needs and desires of the people who constitute the local market for the company's product. As a counterpoint to her boss, Truc spoke of the few "nice" Viet Kieu who worked in her company. They, unlike the others, did not try to talk down to local Vietnamese, but rather spoke to them as equals. Neither did their manners, speech, dress, eating habits—in short, their habitus—single them out over-conspicuously from the locals. Indeed, Truc admitted to having something of a "crush" on a young Vietnamese Frenchman who worked for her company, with whom she was good friends. "He looks distinguished [*dang hoang*], but to look at him you wouldn't know he was a Viet Kieu," she assured me. There is no doubt an element of the Manichean in Truc's account of the two types of Viet Kieu. Yet the simplex distinction she makes, I would argue, rests on a deeper and more complex classificatory structure—that by which national belonging is judged and quantified. The arrogant Viet Kieu, according to Truc, is less of a national subject ("less Vietnamese") than the one who goes native. This is a judgment which she, as a member of the dominant national community, and coming from a family with a revolutionary history, feels empowered to make.

For Bourdieu, a strategy of condescension is when one occupying a higher position in the social space denies or negates the social distance that separates him or her from those occupying lower positions. Paradoxically, the symbolic negation of distance implies at the same time a recognition of that distance ("He's not arrogant . . . for a professor"), thus allowing one to enjoy both the advantages of proximity that the negation of the distance brings, and also the advantages of an objective social distance that continues to exist despite its symbolic negation (Bourdieu 1990b: 127–128). Such strategies, I would suggest, are an important means by which overseas Vietnamese negotiate the refusal of their entry into local social worlds in Vietnam. In Truc's case, we discover admiration for those Viet Kieu who negate the inequity between themselves and the locals, but nevertheless also find desire for the distinction that this disavowed yet still existing social distance gives them. Truc's friends joke that she would never date a mere local Vietnamese; and indeed, her circle of friends and suitors does contain a high proportion of overseas

Vietnamese and foreigners.

One "native" interpretation suggests the social judgment of Viet Kieu behavior is carried out according to the expectations summed up in the saying, "To return to one's village dressed in brocade [fine clothes]" [*Ao gam ve lang*]. In the feudal social context of this saying, it is expected that one should return home from the wide world with the trappings of success. However, this legitimate display must be tempered with the quality of "knowing moderation" [*biet dieu*]. One is expected to behave with extra sensitivity, in order not to cause resentment at one's newly acquired status. Even the contemporary returned scholar is still open to the charge that "You have studied, but you are stupid" [*May co hoc, ma may ngu*]—that is, stupid in matters of social etiquette.[4] Thus the returnee's new status may be recognized and legitimated, but only if he or she does not stand on this social distance. An awareness of the pressure that can be exerted from below against the arrogant assumption that social distance can be immediately converted into power in Vietnamese social relations is neatly summed up in the phrase, "Respect those above, spoil those below" [*Kinh tren, duoi nhuong*].

We can observe this manipulation of social distance in a more microscopic way in the following ethnographic vignette. "Brenda" is the Vietnamese-American manager of a restaurant in Saigon. When interviewing "Phuong" (one of my local informants) for the job of buyer, Brenda refers to herself with the first person pronoun "younger sister" [*em*], and to Phuong with the second person pronoun "older sister" [*chi*]. Phuong is in fact a little younger than Brenda, and she is somewhat embarrassed by Brenda's use of this diminutive self reference. She actually becomes physically agitated, shifting in her seat at the false promotion she has been given. It would have been unmarked or natural for Brenda, the elder and the prospective employer, to have referred to herself as an equal/superior "I" [*toi*] or "elder sister" [*chi*]. Conscious of not appearing the haughty Viet Kieu, however, Brenda symbolically places Phuong above her. Ultimately, though, the social distance that separates the two is not negated. Phuong loses this contest of politeness because she is unable to "politely" refuse the elevated status that Brenda has chosen to confer on her.

Strategies of condescension are perhaps only truly effective when one has the capacity to reassert the authority of social distance. Brenda, it seems, was in many contexts unable to do this. Her "damaged" status as a Viet Kieu, a woman and a *métisse* [*lai*] meant that her position was able to be subverted from below. Indeed, the difficulties Brenda experienced with her staff, suppliers, and local authorities led her father-in-law to recall her from Saigon after only a few weeks. When I told An this story, and asked him how a boss should act towards his Vietnamese staff, he asserted the need to "be sensitive" but ultimately to maintain aloofness. "Vietnam is a hierarchical society," he said. "A boss has to act like a boss." This formulation beautifully expresses the movement back and forth between proximity and distance, communitas and hierarchy, the molecular and the molar, which is familiar and intelligible to actors in the context of contemporary Vietnamese social

institutions (Carruthers 1998). An went on to say that, when working in midmanagement in an overseas Vietnamese-owned firm, he consciously kept his distance from the local staff. He contrasts his own behavior with that of a Vietnamese-American friend, who didn't object to being "used" for free drinks.

> AC: He pays for everyone?
> An: Yeah because he's got his own agenda. Because he can use them later. . . . And at the end, you know … they like me, I'm fun to be with but I'm a little bit distant. But another guy, you know, my god. He, I think he used them, but they like it because they can use him. You know, just a kind of interdependence. Because he can take care of them some time, you know, it's a different thing. And later he can call them up and say "Look, I need a bike now." And some guy will just say "OK, here's a bike," and drive for the whole day whenever you like. And me, I never get anyone to give me motorbike like that. Maybe that's a lesson I learned from Vietnam, you know. Just give when you can give, and later you can ask.
> AC: Was this guy getting respect?
> An: Of course. To get respect. They'll say "Hmm you're a rich man." Because in Vietnam always think the wealth, people listen to the wealthy people. The society still revolves around material things. (Interview with author)

Although An represents the Vietnamese American as in a sense buying the loyalty of the locals, one might make the significant point that the possibility of turning drinks bought into favors is not a mechanical system, but is dependent on an achieved intimacy and reassimilation to the local social institution of "relations" [*quan he*]. Yet anyone naively assuming that *quan he* is nothing but the buying and selling of favors would be sure to be bested in this delicate social negotiation. The conversion of economic into social capital is enabled only when one has achieved a certain proximity (allowing onself to be used), and then successfully reasserted the social distance that makes one a boss and a rich man ("Look, I need a bike now!"). If one is not to risk wasting one's drink money, hoping for favors that will never be returned, one must have achieved mastery over a local feel for manipulating the social space, and acceptance of one's claim to participate as an authentic subject in a Vietnamese social universe. One must have accumulated practical national belonging.

DIASPORIC VIETNAMESENESS IN THE GLOBAL RACIAL ORDER

It is important to recognize that the Viet Kieu negotiation of national belonging and corporate power does not go on solely between overseas and local Vietnamese. To properly understand it, one is required to contextualize this relationship in a global political economy of race, "an international hierarchy in which wealth, power, and advanced development are associated largely with whiteness or 'hon-

orary whiteness'" (Harrison 1995: 50). As An and Thanh found, transnational corporate power has the capacity to challenge the sets of racial hierarchies embedded in the host nation by constituting a certain "vintage" of diasporic Vietnameseness as symbolic capital. Rather than seeking to accumulate Whiteness to counter social and economic exclusion in the host nation (which at its limit manifests as a craze for cosmetic surgery that allows one to pass as "not too Vietnamese" (Gilman 1999: 55–56)), An, Thanh, and others like them are put into a situation in which the accumulation of Vietnameseness becomes desirable. Paradoxically, it becomes a way of accumulating more Whiteness, in the sense that a successful reassimilation to Vietnam may advance their corporate careers. Nevertheless, one would be naïve to assume that Viet Kieu professionals working in Vietnam are exempted from the classificatory force of the global racial order. As we saw in the case of An, who was offered pay packets lower than those offered to non-Vietnamese expats, Viet Kieu are also subject to racial othering by transnational corporate power. White managers in Vietnam are, my research showed, frequently informed by stereotypes of Vietnamese communities in their own nations as criminal and low class, and also by the abject status that is conferred on Viet Kieu by local Vietnamese. As a senior executive from a transnational banking corporation said of working with a Vietnamese-American superior, "His English is not natural, nor his Vietnamese. He is culturally neither American nor Vietnamese. He is neither expat nor local staff. I have found it an uncomfortable combination to deal with." Just as there are Whites who are "truly and only white," and White ethnics who are "white and also something more—or is it something less" (Frankenberg in Harrison 1995: 64), so are Viet Kieu able to be constituted by the logic of being at once something more (an excessive self realized in metaphors such as greater-than-local wealth, body size, sexual appetite, etc.), and something less (an incomplete, hyphenated self that is too American to be Vietnamese and too Vietnamese to be American).

A final twist to these politics is added by the fact that domestic Vietnamese, who are typically paid one-tenth what a Viet Kieu earns, often seek to contest the lowly value accorded to their labor by challenging the honorary Whiteness conferred on Viet Kieu. One finds in Vietnam resentment among local staff directed at overpaid White managers also, but with nothing like the vehemence reserved for Viet Kieu, who are perhaps perceived to replace or disbar local Vietnamese from access to corporate power. The domestic contestation of the value accorded Viet Kieu by transnational capital may, in addition, be read as a local challenge to the power of this capital to destabilize local hierarchies of Vietnameseness, which valorize homeland identity over the abject diasporic identity of the anticommunist refugees. Finally, local resentment targeted at Viet Kieu might be understood as a misrecognition of, or misguided resistance to, the interpellation of domestic Vietnamese as Third World citizens in a radically uneven and unjust global economic and racial order.

CONCLUSION

The fact that mobile overseas Vietnamese are not racially different from the dominant national community in Vietnam does not ensure their acceptance as subjects of belonging. Often to their surprise, they find themselves in the position of having to accumulate other forms of national cultural capital, two key types of which I have identified as that conferred by the mastery of locally intelligible and valued bodily and performative styles ("passing"), and that conferred by (re)assimilating locally intelligible and valued ways of manipulating social distance in order to deal with the contradictions of status difference between themselves and locals. In the case of professional overseas Vietnamese labor transmigrants, the necessity of acquiring practical national belonging constitutes something of a limit to transnational mobility and flexibility, since the processes of reassimilating local styles and negotiating entry into local social worlds is a time-consuming one for which there are no shortcuts. I would argue that the diverse writings on transnational citizenship have yet to come to grips with how such cumulative, performative, and embodied aspects of citizenship can be reconciled with its flexible aspects.

Although I have suggested that the accumulation of national belonging can, under certain conditions, help transmigrants to secure higher rates of conversion for their various forms of capital, I do not wish to put forward a simple scenario in which going native is a key to successful transnational accumulation. As we have seen, the profits that can be accrued by presenting as a native are strictly contextual. In other conditions, one obtains greater social profits by foregrounding one's Viet Kieu identity. Indeed, the highest gains come from being able to play the space in-between. National cultural capital, I would stress, is not necessarily valuable on its own. Indeed, it is those who have failed to achieve success in other social fields who typically invest the most in their national belonging. Cosmopolitans have other social resources, whereas marginalized groups like racist "White trash" have only their Whiteness with which to claim social distinction. Nevertheless, as I have argued, the accumulation of national belonging may assist in the conversion of other forms of capital. Thus, in the context of the transnational corporation, one may convert one's cultural capital (educational qualifications, professional expertise, linguistic and cultural competences, etc.) at higher rates if one has managed to establish a claim to membership of the local workplace milieu. If, on the other hand, one can't find a modus vivendi with local staff, one's value as a cultural intermediary may well be sabotaged.

If transmigrants, as they move between national fields, are on the one hand able to exploit the disciplinary effects of localizing regimes of truth and power on nonmobile subjects (Nonini and Ong 1997: 24), on the other, they are faced with the difficulty of presenting themselves as legitimate national subjects. What I have tried to do in this article is come to an understanding of a particular instance of transnational social practice in which mobility is not seen primarily as an escape from the demands of national belonging. Rather, to invert things somewhat, this is

a case in which national belonging has to be accumulated in order to actualize the always only contingent benefits of mobility.

NOTES

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1. Viet Kieu means "Vietnamese from afar." In the past, this term carried pejorative connotations, but by now it has become relatively neutral. It sounds somewhat informal relative to the terms *nguoi Viet Nam o hai ngoai* [overseas Vietnamese] or *nguoi Viet Nam o nuoc ngoai* [lit., Vietnamese in foreign countries]. Overseas Vietnamese in overseas contexts tend not to refer to themselves as Viet Kieu but as "Vietnamese refugees" [*nguoi Viet ty nan*] or "overseas Vietnamese" [*nguoi Viet o hai ngoai*]. In Vietnam, however, they do use the term self-descriptively. The Committee on Overseas Vietnamese used to be called the *Ban Viet Kieu*, but has changed its name to the more formal and respectful *Ban Nguoi Viet Nam o Nuoc Ngoai*.
2. Bauböck agrees here that "Analyses of migration and migrants' insertion into a polity . . . often adopt a purely formal definition of membership—citizenship then becomes equivalent with the legal definitions of 'nationality'" (Bauböck 1994: viii).
3. Anyone who doubts this should read Andrew X. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala* (2000).
4. Many thanks to Dr. Pham Van Bich for these observations.

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The accumulation of national belonging in transnational fields: Ways of being at home in Vietnam

Carruthers, Ashley

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aihwa ong's "FLEXIBLE CITIZENSHIP"

Aihwa Ong’s flexible citizen, who at first glance seems to have no need for social recognition as a member of the national community apart from the state’s recognition of his or her “empty” legal status as a citizen. Yet as Ong herself acknowledges, a sort of transnational speed limit is imposed on the flexible citizen by the necessity of accumulating a degree of “deep” national belonging (e.g., pen- etrating elite local social circles), if only to facilitate further strategies of transnational accumulation (Ong 1999: 87–109). I

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03 d l Page 3

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rationale of 1.5 generation return migration.

members’ Vietnameseness is constituted as a highly valuable form of symbolic capital in the corporate context.

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VK as cultural mediators betwen management and locals

Viet Kieu to act as cultural mediators between upper management and local staff. Yet

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white host nations

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marginalization of VK in VN can reaffirm hyphenated or diasporic identities

Conversely, we observe that the experience of marginalization as a Viet Kieu in Vietnam can lead to the reaffirmation of hyphen- ated or diasporic identity.
Of

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cathurrers also researched locals

In addition, I got to know Vietnamese nationals who work and socialize with over- seas Vietnamese, and have spoken to them at length in both the presence and ab- sence of their Viet Kieu friends and colleagues about the pleasures and difficulties of their relationships

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feminist and postcolonial theory that states that citizenship should also be understood as the performance of citizenship/national identity.

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simply obtaining citizenship does not confer you access to the national community, you must also "achieve master of modes of gendered, cultural, linguistic, bodily performance that underpin the principle of citizenship"

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distinction between FORMAL recognition and PRACTICAL national belonging of citizenship.

Ghassan Hage (1998: 49–55), who approaches citizenship in the specific sense of the “right to membership of the nation-state.” Hage makes an important distinction between “official” citizenship, which he ar- gues signifies a formal recognition of one’s national status by the state, and prac- tical national belonging, which refers to one’s everyday acceptance or non-accep- tance as a subject of belonging by the dominant national community. (This

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Hage argues, “there are nationals who, on the basis of their class or gender or ethnicity, for example, practically feel and are made to feel to be more or less nationals than others” (1998:

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Note that I don’t wish to advocate collapsing entirely the distinction between
legal and performative citizenship. Such an approach might lead us to equate quite wrongly Ong’s privileged flexible citizens with marginal “grassroots transmigrants” like California’s illegal workers and resident noncitizens (Smith 1994, Smith 2000).

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