5. Cabramatta in the Multicultural (Trans)National Imaginary

In this chapter, I wish to further explore the problem of imagining the diaspora as a bounded national community in the context of its transnational connectedness with the homeland. I shall do this with reference to the processes by which “Vietnamised” urban spaces such as Little Saigon are able to be imagined as being delimited and, in some sense, “sovereign” diasporic territories. In the previous chapter, we saw how a diasporic national imaginary, when projected onto the urban space of Little Saigon, makes thinkable actions such as the destruction of SRV-produced CDs, or the acts of violence, symbolic and physical, perpetrated against Tran Van Truong. In each of these instances, the exile imaginary is realised in solidary political action which challenges the authority of the host nation, putting into question just who is responsible for “policing” the streets of Little Saigon, and who is the arbiter of which public expressions of identity are permitted there. In Chapter Four, the main “threat” to the integrity of diasporic space was perceived to be communist Vietnam. (The exile discourses we analysed, interestingly, did not recognise the threat posed by mainstream US consumer culture, blaming dwindling audiences for diasporic culture on the influx of cheap homeland products instead.) In that chapter, I deliberately bracketed the context of the host nation as a means of getting a clearer picture of the way in which diaspora and homeland mutually (de)constitute each other. In this chapter and the next, by contrast, we shall be concerned with the power of the national will of the host society to disrupt and interdict diasporic nationalist
imaginings, as well as remaining focused on the capacity of transnational flows and relationships to threaten the integrity of diasporic community space.

Differentiating “Ethnic” and Diasporic Subjects

In the light of transnational and diaspora theory, few would wish to assert that the state can absolutely determine and delimit the identity of diasporic subjects. By the same token, however, neither can diasporic identity processes be conceived as occurring outside the purview of state apparatuses. The borders of the host nation enable diasporic identifications - since to be diasporic one must be in another national space - even while the imperatives of the state challenge these identifications. Thus in addition to exploring how the diaspora-as-nation is imagined by its constituents, one must also be sensitive to the processes by which overseas Vietnamese are hailed as ethnic subjects within host nation-states. While I shall focus on Vietnamese Australians as an ethnic minority, I wish however to avoid demarcating ethnic subjectivity from or setting it up in opposition to diasporic subjectivity. We ought not to assume that the ethnic subject is automatically captured by the essentialist narratives of nation, while the diasporic subject is automatically liberated from them. The relationship between these two modalities of selfhood is best understood as being a dialectical rather than a binary one (Palumbo-Liu 1999: 344). Diasporism can function as critique of the nation-state, upsetting the minority/majority relationship between ethnic community and host nation (Clifford 1994: 302). It can also, however, be appropriated by the host nation for its own transnational projects, as when Asian Australians were re-imagined in the mid 1980s as instruments of globalisation in a discourse of “enmeshment” with the booming economies of East and
Southeast Asia. Official multiculturalist discourse has acted not only to place the Vietnamese in Australia as ethnic subjects within the nation, but also to produce them as docile transnational subjects, situated in a depoliticised, “productive” relation to Vietnam. For its part, Vietnamese diasporism has served as a critical resource for resisting the demands of assimilation and renegotiating the terms of incorporation into the host society, and also for maintaining heterodox identities (particularly those of refugee and exile) which refuse to be co-opted into the circuits of transnational capitalism. Below, we shall look at how the politics of ethnic/diasporic identity has been played out since the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Australia from the mid 1970s, with particular reference to the formation, representation and contestation of Vietnamised spaces within the Australian body politic.

Vietnamised Spaces in the Australian National Imaginary

The “Vietnamisation” of certain segments of Australian urban space has occasioned a trauma for the host society that is arguably unparalleled in the history of migration to Australia. Some twenty years after their advent, these spaces continue to haunt the national imaginary. They arguably remain the most “other” sites in the nation, places whose difference is typically represented as being either the most threatening or the most desirable outcome of multicultural policy. Why do Vietnamised spaces such as Cabramatta loom so large in the national imaginary? Why do they have the capacity to represent the best and worst of multiculturalism? These are the questions I will address in the first part of this chapter.
Before we begin, a brief note on the Australian political context is warranted. A change in Australia’s government from Labor to Liberal (Conservative) in the nineties saw a general shift to the right in Australian cultural politics. Prime Minister John Howard orchestrated a move away from the perceived cult of political correctness that had characterised the previous Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. This included a revision and re-evaluation of multicultural policy, including a tightening of immigration controls. While representations of Cabramatta have been affected by this shift, its status as the best-and-worst-place-in-the-nation has nevertheless remained constant throughout changes in government. Thus my analysis is not limited to a particular period or vintage of multicultural ideology.

The post-1975 Indochinese refugees were the first significant group of “Asian” migrants to arrive in Australia after the abolition of the White Australia policy and under the new policy of official multiculturalism. As a consequence, they were perceived to be the most different and putatively inassimilable migrants to land on Australia’s shores since the arrival of Chinese in the previous century. The landfall of about 2000 Indochinese refugees on Australia’s northern coast in the early eighties triggered historical fears of invasion by the “Asian hordes” to the north. This phobic narrative reflects Australia’s geographical insecurity as a White or European nation in “Asia”. At a deeper level, it arguably reveals Australia’s sense of the tenuousness of its status as a “Western” nation, given that its relation to European civilisation is historically the subaltern one of a colony to a metropole.

The historical myth of “Asian invasion” was also mobilised to articulate anxieties around the settlement of Vietnamese refugees in Australian cities. Arriving at a time
when the policy on dispersion of NESB entrants to Australia was as "tolerant" (or as will-less) as it had ever been, Vietnamese and other Indochinese arrivals were able to spatially consolidate their nascent communities in a way that some scholars describe as unprecedented in the history of postwar migration to Australia (Viviani 1996: 45).\textsuperscript{12} The so-called "Fairfield crisis" signalled the first wave of public hysteria about the concentration of Indochinese refugees in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA). Between 1976 and 1980, around 4 000 Indochinese refugees took up residence in Fairfield in Sydney's west. This number includes those initially settled in the East Hills, Westbridge and Cabramatta migrant hostels, as well as secondary "gravitation" settlers moving out of hostel accommodation elsewhere. By 1980 the Indochinese comprised 4\% of the population of Fairfield, an area in which 36\% of the population was at that stage overseas-born (26\% of whom were NESBs) (DIEA 1980: 4; cf also Viviani 1984, 1996, Burnley 1989). A quick scan of articles published in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} reveals a litany of stereotypes that are by now all too familiar, including claims that: the concentration of Indochinese is causing a potentially explosive racial situation; the long-term residents of Fairfield LGA resent the presence of refugees; they are endangering the "social peace" of Fairfield; they contribute to unemployment; they are inassimilable; they are getting preferential treatment; they are "swamping" Fairfield and threatening its identity; they are threatening Anglo-Australian culture; they won't learn English; they are not "real" refugees; they are predominantly young and single men, prone to drunkenness and violence; they are endangering the security of Cabramatta's streets; they are engaging

\textsuperscript{12} While others claim that Indochinese levels of residential concentration are "not much greater than those of East and Southern Europeans at similar stages in their migrations" (Viviani 1996: 45).
in political violence; they are unhygienic and have low living standards; they overcrowd accommodation; they are unskilled; and, finally, they are like the “Saigon cowboys” who preyed on US and Australian troops during the war (Molloy 1981, Molloy and Macey 1981).

Such discourses have in the past been used to legitimate the use of governmental power to disperse concentrations of Vietnamese in Australia. In response to the Fairfield “crisis”, the Cabramatta and East Hills Migrant Centres were closed in 1982, and new arrivals were directed to the Endeavour centre in Coogee. Attempts were also made to disperse Indochinese among states and to rural areas (Burnley 1989: 140, Viviani 1996: 40). These efforts were, however, by and large unsuccessful. Since the eighties there has been some outmigration with social mobility from areas of residential concentration to outlying middle class areas, but there has also a consolidation and expansion of Vietnamese Australian residential centres, particularly Cabramatta and Bankstown, in Sydney’s Outer Southwest (Healy 1997: 62). Excluding the majority population of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic Australians, the Vietnam-born have the highest levels of residential concentration of any ethnic group in Australia. They comprise 13.6% of the population of the Fairfield LGA (in which Cabramatta is located), and from 9.6-13.7% in Melbourne’s western suburbs. They are followed (needless to say far less controversially) by the British-born at 9-10.8% in areas on Sydney’s middle class North Shore. The Vietnam-born currently comprise 1.7% of the Australian population, numbering 150 839, with a second generation of about 40 000 Australia born children (Viviani 1997: 54-6). Vietnamese Australians are a highly urbanised population, with 97% living in State or Territory capitals (BIPR 1994: 2).
The Polarised Structure of Representations of Vietnamese Australians

Analyses of mainstream media representations of Vietnamese Australians have typically read them as simply and purely having fulfilled the function of the “national otherness” which the nation-state requires in order to constitute itself as proper and whole (see Jakubowicz 1994, Loo 1994, McKay 1993, Quek 1997). As I have argued elsewhere, these analyses are limited in that they cannot account for the many positive figurations of Vietnamese Australians in the mainstream media (Carruthers 1997). Vietnamese Australian community centres, the most important being Cabramatta in Sydney’s Outer Southwest, are in fact conceived in the national imaginary in a highly polarised way. We discover both positive and negative essentialisation in the dominant metaphors for Cabramatta, which is typically represented either as a ghetto or an exotic site for culinary and cultural tourism. In each permutation, sites identified with Vietnamese residential concentration figure as being in some sense un-Australian: the first in that social practices perceived to be alien to Australia such as overcrowding and “Asian” forms of criminal organisation are imagined to go on there; the second in that these are exotic, foreign spaces such as one might encounter overseas. The ghettoised Cabramatta might best be seen as a subnation, a site in which extranational forces (often amorphously conceived) are perceived to hold sway and threaten the will of the host nation. The touristic Cabramatta, conversely, may be seen as a translocality, a multicultural frontier in which authentic cultural identities, practices and products are available to the gaze and agency of the cosmo-multicultural consumer (Hage 1997).
The Capture of Cabramatta by Judgmental Multiculturalist Discourse

Cabramatta was once famed as Australia’s multicultural triumph ... Now, though, the town is famous for just two things: the murder of New South Wales MP John Newman, and heroin (Four Corners, “Cabramatta”, 1997).

[Indochinese refugees] formed the first and most difficult test case of the outcomes of the abolition of the [White Australia] policy (Viviani 1996: 1).

Representations of Cabramatta circulating in the Australian public sphere are, almost universally, radically reductive. Whether they are positive (Cabramatta as “heaven on a chopstick”) (Knox 1996) or negative (as “Australia’s heroin capital”), they give us equally little sense of the suburb in its everydayness, complexity and heterogeneity. Let’s reflect for a moment on the quotation above, taken from the ABC’s Four Corners program. Initially, Cabramatta appears here (in the past tense) not simply as a triumph, but as a multicultural triumph, i.e. a triumph of the state-sponsored policy of multiculturalism. This good Cabramatta, however, is superseded in the diegesis of the report by the bad Cabramatta of the spectacularly blatant street deal, and the unsolved murder of state MP John Newman, for which rival politician Ngo Canh Phuong is currently on trial. What is common to each of these representations is that Cabramatta appears in them as a sign of the success or failure of Australian multiculturalism. This figuration of Cabramatta is metonymic in that the state of the suburb is made to stand in for the state of the multicultural nation as a whole.
Of course, there is a specific historical sense in which certain aspects of Cabramatta can be said to be the products of multicultural and immigration policy. The suburb’s “high” rates of Indochinese residential concentration, for example, can be traced back to the fact that the majority of Indochinese refugees arriving in Australia between 1976 and 1982 were initially settled by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in three migrant hostels in the Fairfield LGA. In a certain mode of inquiry, then, it is appropriate and necessary for us to read Cabramatta in terms of these narratives of nation-building. The process I am attempting to identify here, however, is a far more generalised “capture” of the local and specific, to the extent that events in Cabramatta can’t simply be talked about “in themselves”. Indeed, the very utterance of the word Cabramatta brings all sorts of connotations along with it: Asian immigration, unemployment, ethnic conflict, Asian crime and so on. Such is this overdetermination that one is no sooner talking about Cabramatta than one is discussing the “multicultural question” itself.

It is thus that even so putatively socially responsible a TV show as Four Corners, a current affairs program made by the public broadcaster the ABC, is unable to conceive of the phenomenon of heroin dealing in Cabramatta as something engaged in by individuals with unique social histories. Rather, the Indochinese dealers’ criminality is explained in terms of their being the subjects of “a fragmented culture with fractured values” (Four Corners, “Cabramatta”). Note that this is not merely a restating of the crude cultural difference = crime equation. Rather, Four Corners has pretensions to a sociological understanding of Indochinese criminals, constructing them as the damaged subjects of a culture that couldn’t take the strain of the experiences of displacement and
resettlement in a land in which it is “so alien”. The program doesn’t suggest anything so essentialist as that the drug dealers are criminal because they are Indochinese. Rather, it suggests that they are criminal because they are Indochinese in the wrong time and place - the victims of a humane but ultimately misguided immigration policy. Thus “immigration” comes to explain, if indirectly, why Indochinese get involved in heroin dealing, and the possibility of a specific and local approach to the issue is lost. The specificities of heroin in Cabramatta are recouped instead into an interpretation that yields meaning for the multicultural debate.

Four Corners tells us absolutely nothing about why a particular number of Australians who happen to be of Indochinese origin might engage in various forms of criminal activity. As in classical Orientalist discourse, we discover less about the putative object of knowledge than we do about “our” world (Said 1978: 12). In this case what is highlighted is the polysemic nature of Cabramatta as it is figured in the discursive struggle over the interpretation and evaluation of “the multicultural”. It seems that Cabramatta can be made to yield virtually any meaning in the service of the various positions and interests in this struggle. The example I gave above is a negative one, perhaps familiar from the critical discourse on racism and the media. But I could well have chosen a positive or celebratory one. Newspaper articles of the “Heaven on a Chopstick” variety, for example, perform precisely the same hollowing out and fixing of “Cabramatta” as a sign of state of the multicultural nation - only in this instance a sign of the pleasures rather than the risks of diversity. On the release of research based on the 1996 census statistics showing that Vietnamese residential concentration in the Fairfield LGA is no longer increasing and may even be on the decline, the Sydney Morning
Herald’s Greg Sheridan told us to “Relax Australia, you’re a better country than you think and you’re working better than you realise ... We should be proud of what an effective and inclusive society we are” (Sheridan 1997). The “breaking up” of Vietnamese Australian residential concentration in Fairfield here signifies the success of multicultural policy.

While it would be nice to think that this fallacy is unique to media discourse on Cabramatta, it is in fact shared by much scholarly work on the suburb. Debates amongst sociologists, social geographers and demographers have centred on the theme of whether or not Cabramatta is a “ghetto”, i.e. whether or not Australia’s multicultural and immigration policies are creating ghettos. A disproportionate number of studies have in consequence been devoted to the residential concentration of Indochinese Australians. Scholarship on Vietnamese residential concentration has incorporated and reproduced assumptions about “clinging together” as a block to assimilation, as well as its perceived threat to the national will by creating “un-Australian” spaces which signify the foreign, the Third World, the Asian. Nancy Viviani, perhaps the most influential student of Indochinese immigrants in Australia, seems to have been concerned above all with the question of whether or not the Indochinese have been “good for Australia” (see for instance Birrell 1993, Dunn 1993, Jupp 1993, Viviani, Coughlan and Rowland 1993). As with media “exposés” of Cabramatta, the sociological and demographic questions that are typically asked about the suburb are designed to produce knowledge about the things that the dominant find troubling about the dominated.

This “expert” mode of discursively producing Cabramatta as a measure of the health of multiculturalism demands also to be mastered by anyone aspiring to be a
“community leader”. It is indispensable when applying for government grants, attempting to create a good impression with the media, or indeed addressing a Vietnamese Australian community meeting, a context in which it is necessary to legitimate one’s position by claiming knowledge of the modes of community self-representation that will be well received by the host-society’s institutions. On one occasion I heard a leader exhorting community members to participate in Clean Up Australia Day as a (reflexive) strategy of “getting Australians to like us”. On another, a very senior Vietnamese community leader who has had a long association with Cabramatta assured me that heroin dealing in the suburb is indeed an ethnic conspiracy. It is controlled not by the Vietnamese, he claimed, but by the ethnic Chinese Vietnamese, since they can speak Cantonese (and thus can communicate with and gain the trust of counterparts in Hong Kong), and they run small businesses (convenient locations from which to organise local distribution). These Chinese Vietnamese, he claimed, prey on naive young ethnic Vietnamese to do the far more visible work of dealing at the street level (Interview, 1997). The logic of the community leader’s passing the buck of guilt for criminal activity in Cabramatta onto “another other” is precisely the same as that by which Anglo-Australians blame the ills of the nation - in this case its heroin problem - on their ethnic others. What is notable is that despite his sophisticated practical knowledge of Cabramatta, the community leader still seeks to make a purely culturalist interpretation of Cabramatta crime - only in this version it isn’t Vietnamese culture, but Chinese culture that is “making” people behave criminally. I would argue that it is a function of the capture of Cabramatta by an evaluative multiculturalist discourse that such cultural instrumentalist interpretations are the only ones available, since the only way we can
seem to get Cabramatta to show itself to us is in terms of concepts such as ethnic conflict/ethnic harmony. Again, this applies to pro- as well as anti-multiculturalist positions. Pro-multiculturalists who deny that ethnicity has anything whatsoever to do with crime then happily go on to make cultural instrumentalist explanations of something like the educational successes of Vietnamese Australian students (i.e. that it is an essential and timeless Confucian reverence for education that is making Vietnamese do well at school). Such arguments connect up fairly readily to more general debates about the “cultural mix”, which offer culturalist interpretations of the social reality of the entire nation - and in the process, perform a total denial of the social world and a mystification of the class relations submerged beneath sets of relations that manifest themselves as purely intercommunal and intercultural.

**Cabramatta as the Little Piece of the Real**

The radical simplification of a complex social phenomenon such as criminal activity in Cabramatta is a function, I would suggest, of the way in which empirical events in the suburb are positioned and fixed by large-scale symbolic formations. The Lacanian notion of the articulation of the symbolic to the real is a useful analytical tool in helping us to understand this process. For Lacan the symbolic can never exhaustively “capture” the real, reducing it to meaning. It is thus that the real returns to haunt and disrupt the symbolic but also, paradoxically, serves as that which gives it its support. “For things to have meaning, this meaning must be confirmed by some contingent piece of the real that can be read as a ‘sign’” (Zizek 1991: 32). These “little pieces of the real” give consistency to a given formation by filling in the gaps and absences endemic to the
symbolic field. Without some form of “encouragement” from the real, a given symbolic formation becomes unviable. Consider, to take a crude example, the paranoid symbolic formation: ethnic difference = violence.\(^{13}\) This is certainly a flimsy formulation in itself, but it manages nevertheless to remain viable (at least for some) by incorporating events such as the murder of politician John Newman into itself as signs from the real, thus giving itself consistency and convincingness. “See, we were right. They do not stop short of assassinating politicians. This is what comes of letting Asians into the country”. It is remarkable just what lean pickings from the real such formations can survive on. As “the most different place in the nation”, I think that Cabramatta can be read as in some sense being the little piece of the real that fills in the void at the centre of the multicultural symbolic. This would seem to explain why, on the one hand, it seems to be impossible to represent with any complexity or specificity and, on the other, why events there have taken on such inordinate significance in the multicultural debate. Here we might read the media’s insistent and repetitive imaging of the train line to Cabramatta in terms of its being (mistaken for) some sort of symbolic conduit along which signs from the real flow, but which, a little like the river in *Heart of Darkness*, leads to somewhere totally unrepresentable. For Zizek, the type of overinterpretive projection of meaning onto the real that we see here is to be regarded as a failure. What we must strive for, he suggests, is not to incorporate the real into our symbolics by obsessively seeking messages in it, but to come to terms with it “in its senseless actuality” (Zizek 1991: 35). I’m not going to suggest anything so unsemiotic as that it might be possible to grasp the brute reality of

\(^{13}\) Although crude, it has currency: the homepage of the anti-immigration party One Nation includes a link to the full text of the parliamentary discussion paper on Asian organised crime in Australia
Cabramatta in a way unmediated by the symbolic. However, I would argue that an important step towards deepening and diversifying representations of the suburb is the recognition that Cabramatta, with all its pleasures and problems, is the reality of Australian society, and not some sort of social laboratory for the testing of multicultural policy.

Consuming Cabramatta

Hage (1997) points out that a sense of risk and danger is part of the “cosmo-multicultural” experience of eating in Cabramatta. He shows how accomplished consumers actually enjoy the experience of being unwelcome in a Vietnamese restaurant without English menus, taking this as a sign of the authenticity of the cuisine. Such consumers are disdainful of the “domesticated” ethnic subject who has compromised the authenticity of its culinary practice to attempt to attract Western customers. What they desire to consume is that which is produced when the ethnic subject is free from having to assimilate in any way. However, the desire for this freedom is predicated on its availability for consumption. Cosmo-multicultural subjects typically misrecognise the relations of power which make this “culture in the wild” available to them. For Hage, the “cosmo-multiculturalist capacity for ‘daring’ and ‘appreciation’” is underpinned by a sense of safety, by the assurance that the “natives can’t spear you” (Hage 1997: 141). Those who go to Cabramatta to experience the edgy quality of this multicultural frontier are “like visitors to a zoo who like to think they are on a wild tour of an African jungle” (ibid: 142). In culinary or consumer multiculturalism, which Hage argues is the dominant modality of Australian multiculturalism, the Cabramatta natives’ freedom from the
pressures of assimilation is not for themselves, for their own enjoyment, but for that of cosmopolitan consumers.

In discourses about crime and drugs in Cabramatta, we witness however the resurfacing of an anxiety that the natives might spear you - perhaps with an HIV-infected syringe. The flipside of the image of Cabramatta as multicultural translocality is that of Cabramatta as a “nation within the nation” which cannot be contained within the multicultural order, and thus threatens to disrupt national unity. This “bad” Cabramatta is typically represented as being controlled by dark, external forces - transnational drug syndicates or evil, manipulative community leaders, for example. Such discourses perceive in Cabramatta, Hage argues, the operation of a (sub)national will which poses a threat or challenge to the national will of the host society (Hage 1998: 112). We might add that Cabramatta’s transnational links also make it a symbolically “leaky” site through which national otherness - in the form of drugs, illegal immigrants, disease and so on - are perceived to be able to enter the nation with greater ease than elsewhere.

In the first mode of representation, the national will manifested in Cabramatta can be recouped for “safe” consumption. The exotic Cabramatta has edge, yet is ultimately subsumed into the multicultural national order. At other moments, however, Cabramatta is deemed unsafe, and therefore unconsumable. It is imagined to enjoy its difference “for itself” rather than making this difference available to non-Vietnamese consumers. For Zizek, what disturbs us most about the other is “the peculiar way he organises his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the ‘excess’ that pertains to this way: the smell of ‘their’ food, ‘their’ noisy songs and dances, ‘their’ strange manners, ‘their’ attitude to work etc” (Zizek 1993: 203). In short, the other is imagined to have access to a perverse mode of
national enjoyment to which “we” do not. Thus criminal cultures are often represented as being part of a perverse Vietnamese mode of enjoyment of Cabramatta, as when a magistrate referred to the use of knives in fighting as being “part of Vietnamese culture” (Interview, 1997). The perceived dangerousness of Cabramatta is imagined not to deter “Vietnamese” from enjoying the suburb, but to prevent “Australians” from going there to consume. Thus an Anglo-Australian chef from the North Shore who used to go to Cabramatta to eat pho in “the old [pre-heroin] days” reported that he had stopped going there because a policemen friend had told him “Don’t go there, mate” (Interview, 1997).

**Appropriating Vietnamese Diasporism**

Cabramatta, located in Sydney’s Outer Southwest, needs to be contextualised in terms of a history of metropolitan discourses on the “Westie” as a subject of lack, and as the other which bulwarks the subjectivity of the city’s cosmopolitan centre. Western Sydney has historically been represented in the Australian media as a site where the constitution of modern subjectivity is not possible (Symonds 1997), and even as a kind of Third World space in relation to the rest of Sydney. Media audiences are positioned as distanced observers of this “foreign”, disconnected space (Diane Powell in Grace et al. 1997: 2). One consequence of this disconnectedness is that we, as subjects of the city centre, can be constructed as tourists, especially culinary tourists, when we go to Cabramatta.

A pamphlet entitled “Cabramatta, Sydney’s Day Trip to Asia” invites us to come to the suburb to “Eat ... take your palate on a cook’s tour of Asia”, “Shop ... enter an exotic new world of pastes and purees”, “See ... elderly women in their traditional black
pyjama outfits”, “Sit ... and become part of the Asian sitting society”, and so on (Tourism New South Wales 2000). As readers of this document we are constructed as tourists who, in going to Sydney’s “Little Saigon”, will cross the line dividing First and Third Worlds as we travel from (white) Australia to Asia. We are also addressed as denizens of the metropolitan centre, who will have to make a “day trip” (rather than a short visit) out of our journey to Cabramatta, located as it is in the socially and geographically peripheral zone of Outer Southwest Sydney. While it is less convincing in its promise of cultural authenticity than the Lonely Planet guide to Vietnam, the “Cabramatta” pamphlet nevertheless partakes of a discourse of cultural tourism with which readers of the Lonely Planet would not be unfamiliar. Potential visitors are invited not only to consume in Cabramatta, but also to have a “deep” intercultural experience as they sit and communicate with the locals they encounter there, becoming themselves part of the exotic spectacle. No doubt veterans of the backpacker trail who have experienced the “real” Vietnam first hand are among the chief targets of this marketing exercise. For them, visiting Cabramatta will be a nostalgic experience, but also an opportunity to exercise the cultural knowledges they picked up in Vietnam - to practice the few words of Vietnamese they learnt, to eat the pho they had in Ho Chi Minh City and so on.

This pamphlet performs two moves, which I want to argue are intimately connected. The first is to “reconnect” Cabramatta to Vietnam, thus representing it as a transnational space continuous with the homeland. The second move is to make this transnational space symbolically available to consumption. The mainstream Australian media are in the habit of representing the Vietnamese community in Australia using the flag of the SRV rather than the three-striped flag [co ba soc] of the RVN, oblivious to the
existence of a critical homeland politics that makes this almost universally distasteful to those thus represented. In much the same way, the translocal Cabramatta of the pamphlet erases the difference of local diasporic identity by reconnecting this community space to Vietnam in a way that suggests there is no disjuncture between the sites. In this touristic space, we find no hint of an exile politics, or of a refractory “national will” which potentially challenges the will of the host nation. Constructing Cabramatta as a continuation of Vietnam in western Sydney also has the effect of disarticulating it from the discourses of crime, drugs and ghettoisation through which it is usually symbolically produced. Instead of being a dangerous urban space it becomes an Indochinese market town in which skill at bartering is more appropriate than skill at avoiding stepping on discarded syringes. In speaking about perceptions of ethnic others in American cities versus touristic perceptions of these others in their “proper” places, Edward Bruner has suggested that “The Other in our geography is a sight of disgust; the Other in their geography is a source of pleasure ... There is a racialisation at home and a primitivisation over there, in exotica” (Bruner 1996: 160). Innovatively reworking this distinction, the pamphlet resituates the Vietnamese Australian Other in a transnational space in which it can be re-racialised and re-primitivised, so that on going to Cabramatta we encounter exotic natives in “their” national space rather than unwanted ethnic subjects in “our” national space.

Metaphorically removing Cabramatta from the national territory in this way is, however, a risky manoeuvre. What if the denizens of this subnational space were to manifest a national will of their own? The discourse of multicultural consumption we encounter in the pamphlet forestalls the fear that Anglo-Australians’ enjoyment of
Cabramatta will be “blocked” by a national counter-will by performing a double
disembedding. Vietnamese Australians are removed from Australian social space, thus
bracketing historical tensions around their settlement and integration; and they are also
disembedded from a local diasporic identity based on exile consciousness, thus erasing
the memory of the war which led to their displacement (and Australia’s complicity in
creating the Indochinese refugee “problem”). A narrative of the troubled assimilation of
ethnic subjects is thus superseded by one of incorporation into a space of transnational
consumption, or rather the consumption of exotic transnational identities, spaces and
cultural products.

Cabramatta may even be seen as furthering the Australian national project of
globalisation, which has focused since the mid eighties on integration into East and
Southeast Asian economies. This “Asian Turn” was motivated by the perceived necessity
of Australia’s integrating itself with these booming economies, which by the 1980s had
well and truly become a part of and force in globalisation. As a result of this project of
“enmeshment” with Asia, Ang and Stratton (1995) argue, Australia (officially) no longer
sees itself as an outpost of white settler culture in a civilisationally alien geography. The
Australian subject no longer relates to East and Southeast Asia as the Far East, but rather
as the Near North (see also Frost 1994). The phallic imagery of the “push into Asia”
suggests a concatenation of desires around the discursive formations of Confucian
Capitalism and “alternative” East Asian modernities, and the discourse of enmeshment
envisages a role for local Asian communities in realising Australia’s union with these
formations. This was made manifest in an early 1990s policy of “productive diversity”,
which linked success in international trade with an ethnically diverse population. This
alternative multicultural cum transnational imaginary constructed migrant populations as links to Asian economies, and their bi-cultural capacities, once seen as problematic excess, now became resources for globalisation. In this context, Cabramatta as translocality is captured to the “national interest” to the extent that it operates as something of a training ground for (Anglo) Australian tourists, schooling them in or allowing them to maintain the skills they will need to consume “Asia”. This project of cultural globalisation is of course connected to that of economic globalisation, an endeavour that requires us to become “Asia literate”. Cabramatta is thus transformed from being a dangerous subnational territory that is “selfishly” (and perversely) enjoyed by the Vietnamese alone into a productive translocality, which can be enjoyed by “all” Australians. It has gotten with the (national) project.

Exile as a Resistant Homeland Politics

The prospect of Vietnamese refugees being resettled in Australia was originally accompanied by the fear that

like the Croatian migrants before them, the Vietnamese in Australia would seek to “liberate their homeland”, thus causing problems of legal control, diplomatic headaches with the new government in Vietnam, and a backlash among Australians. This was the origin of the pungent epithet for Vietnamese, Yellow Croats (Viviani 1984: 56).
Indeed, overseas Vietnamese homeland politics were to push the fairly rigid limits of political agency which minority communities have been permitted under Australian multiculturalism.\textsuperscript{14} As Australia made steps towards normalisation with Vietnam in the 1980s, anticommunists refused to be co-opted as a national minority into the host nation’s foreign policy. This desire to pursue an independent foreign policy towards Vietnam resulted in a small number of violent clashes. In 1984, large crowds protested the visit of Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach. One protester, with the stated intention of showing what the communists were doing to his country, attempted to throw himself underneath the minister’s car - an extraordinary metaphorical equation of the body of the exile with the homeland (Interview with Nguyen Vi Tuy, 1997). In 1985 there was a violent confrontation between anticommunist protesters and a meeting of former Vietnam War moratorium marchers, attended by the Vietnamese ambassador to Australia, Hoang Bao Son. A crowd of 300 protesters surrounded the club and pelted it with stones, rotten eggs, tomatoes and rotten fish sauce. In reaction to this and other acts of violence, the SRV made threats to end the Orderly Departure Program, and there were calls for the continuation of Vietnamese immigration to Australia be contingent on an end to the violence. Claims were also made that the Vietnamese language media incited the violence by placing the Vietnamese political struggle above Australian law (White 1985, 1985a).

The projection of a transnational imaginary of enmeshment onto Vietnamese Australians in the 1990s called for a significant rewriting of these narratives, whereby diasporic Vietnamese would aid rather than hinder the host nation in its Vietnam policy.

\textsuperscript{14} See Perera and Pugliese (1995) on the limits to multicultural representation.
Not surprisingly, this policy initially met with little success. In May of 1993, Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet visited Australia. This was an occurrence reflecting the escalating commercial and “cultural” involvement of Australia in the Asia-Pacific region. Vo Van Kiet’s trip was largely an attempt by Australia to cement relations with Hanoi before the lifting of the U.S. trade embargo. (In 1993 Australia was ranked as the seventh largest foreign investor in Vietnam.) Protesters responded to the visit by building a mock re-education camp outside Parliament House as a representation of post-1975 Vietnam.

“Australian officials have acknowledged that security for the visit will be ‘extremely tight’”, it was reported, “and that the hard core of the protesters are considered ‘very volatile.’” That section of the Vietnamese community which saw the visit of Vo Van Kiet as a “sell-out of Australian personal and political ideals for short-term business advantages” were subjected not only to the strong implication that they were being “un-Australian” (by acting contrary to the interests of the “wider community”), but to seeing themselves characterised as a volatile threat to the eminent body of one of Australia’s major prospective Southeast Asian trading partners (“Viet PM’s visit sits delicately…”).

The proper way for the Vietnamese to behave was suggested by then Prime Minister Paul Keating when he said that their role was to help to advance Australia’s trade prospects in Vietnam by re-establishing links with their former homeland (“Ire at Vietnam PM’s visit”).

These protests mark a refusal, at least at the level of official community representation, to give up a historically defining relation of exile to Vietnam. They are a defence of a local diasporic identity in the face of the host nation’s attempts to redefine this in the idiom of transnational capitalism. Below, I wish to look more specifically at
how this struggle has been fought out over the identity and integrity of Vietnamese Australian community spaces. We shall look at an instance in which Vietnamese community organisations and media were able to successfully exert political pressure at the level of local government to prevent a shift in the “national” signification of a community centre in Melbourne, asserting its history as a space of exile in the face of attempts to reconstruct it as a “normative” translocality. Then we shall go on to a consideration of the translocal nature of Little Saigon as revealed through the Tran Van Truong protests.

The Maribyrnong-Ho Chi Minh City District 1 Sister City Project

In July 1998, a Vietnamese Australian local politician, who supported government policy on the role of Vietnamese Australians in facilitating trade and investment in Vietnam, initiated a sister city project that would link the city of Maribyrnong\textsuperscript{15} with District 1 of Ho Chi Minh city. This alliance would entail, as reported in SRV newspaper \textit{Tuoi Tre}, a yearly exchange of information on investment opportunities, as well as cooperation in the areas of the economy, culture, education, training, sport and medicine (\textit{Tuoi Tre} 19.3.1998 cited in “Hoi dong thanh pho Maribyrnong...”). When news of the project reached the Vietnamese Australian community, it unleashed a furore. The Victorian and federal chapters of the Vietnamese Community in Australia were quick to proclaim that Ho Mai had acted without their knowledge and certainly without their

\textsuperscript{15} Maribyrnong is part of suburban Melbourne in which around 12 000 of some 40 000 Vietnamese in Victoria live. It includes the suburbs of Footscray, Sunshine and Keilor.
approval. Other bodies, such as the Vietnamese Professionals Society, Women's Association and ex-servicemen's associations, as well as the entirety of the Vietnamese language media (including SBS Vietnamese radio), joined in a concerted effort to have the project stopped. Ho Mai's non-Vietnamese fellow councillors, under political pressure from their Vietnamese constituents, quickly withdrew their support, and the project was dropped.

As was the case with Fairfield Councillor Ngo Canh Phuong, currently in remand awaiting trial for the murder of MP John Newman, community associations and media were quick to point out that Ho Mai is not in fact a Vietnamese community leader. Rather, both have been represented as career politicians holding the interests of Australia (or their own interests) above those of their communities, but cynically using their ethnicity to win Vietnamese votes. The Ho Mai incident was described in one newspaper article as the "most blatant betrayal" in the history of Vietnamese refugees in Australia ("Cong Dong Nguoi Viet Nam Tu Do... "). Elsewhere she was accused of having forgotten her own refugee status ("Tri nho ty nan"); of having betrayed her fellow refugees (Le Thanh Luan 1998); and of having betrayed her voters, who are assumed to have voted for her on a "refugee" platform ("Ba Ho Mai - Mot Nu..."). Further, she was accused of having "betrayed the sacred and legitimate feelings of Vietnamese refugees towards their homeland" ("Chu tich cong dong..."), as well as having undermined the efforts of diasporic political organisations to exert international pressure on Vietnam on issues such as human rights, freedom of speech, religious freedom and so on (Le Thanh Luan 1998). Sentiments were perhaps best summed up in a cartoon in TiVi Tuan San,
which had Ho Mai saying “I’m a Vietnamese refugee, but I only know the Australian flag” (“Can ngo”, TiVi Tuan San, 24.9.1998, p.68).

Indeed, Ho Mai’s loyalty to the three-striped flag of the RVN was repeatedly brought into question. Commentators raised the spectre of the communist flag flying over council chambers in Maribyrnong and forced lowering of the RVN flag. This symbolism was made all the more unbearable by dint of the fact that the City of Maribyrnong is the site of the headquarters of the Victorian branch of the Vietnamese Community in Australia, as well as the equivalent of the RSL and Vietnamese Professionals Society. Ho Mai, it seems, was well aware of the provocative nature of her action, and went ahead unilaterally because she was well able to anticipate the reaction she would receive. Thus she in effect staged a challenge to the power of the “anti-return” bloc. She gave the statistic that in 1997, 40 000 Vietnamese Australians returned home, saying “I don’t understand how those who call to oppose the project dare to say that they represent all of these tourists and migrants” (“Nguyen Van Ban...”).

This incident is an eloquent demonstration of the executive power of the keepers of the return taboo, and their ability to retain hegemony over the definition of the Vietnamese community as a “refugee” one. They, it seems, were able to convert the shared understanding that the establishment of formal transnational links between Maribyrnong and Ho Chi Minh City constituted an unthinkable breach of exile into political action even more effectively than the Little Saigon protesters. Contradictorily, however, the exile imaginary is revealed in this incident as both transgressive and intimidatory. It functions as a source of resistance to the host nation’s attempts to erase the history of diasporic subjects, transforming them through the discourses of
enmeshment and productive diversity. At the same time, however, it excludes from the diasporic public sphere the voice of a figure who is herself marginal. Ho Mai’s biography is very different to that of those holding positions of authority and influence in Vietnamese Australian community associations. Unlike these elites, Ho Mai held no position of distinction in the Republic of Vietnam. She is of another generation to this group, having been only 15 years old at the close of the war. She was married at this age to a pharmacist 18 years her senior, and had two children between the ages of 15 and 19 before separating from her husband. She came to Australia as a young single mother, and for many years was obliged to pose as the aunt rather than the mother of her two daughters. In Australia, she worked not as a professional but in various jobs ranging from a fruit picker to a beauty therapist. These lowly social origins mean that she has been marginalised within the traditional structures of community politics. A senior community leader told me dismissively that in the old society, “She was nothing!” He described her as an uneducated girl who knew nothing about sex and who carried the additional stigma of having been abandoned by her husband. Ho Mai had in the past complained to this leader that Vietnamese community hierarchy “didn’t appreciate her talent”. She had also complained to the Anglophone press that single mothers were looked down upon in the Vietnamese community (Interview with community leader, 1998). Thus, we may also read Ho Mai’s position as a class and feminist critique of a patriarchal homeland politics. She is perhaps comparable to Le Ly Hayslip, author of When Heaven and Earth Changed Places, the novel that was the basis for the Oliver Stone film Heaven and Earth. Hayslip, herself of peasant origin, has preached a message of reconciliation and forgiveness, much appreciated in Vietnam but meeting a great deal of resistance in the diaspora (e.g. “Le Ly
Hayslip lai that bai...”). Finally, while she is supportive of the Australian government’s agenda of Vietnamese Australians taking a role in building links with Vietnam, Ho Mai also retains a critical distance on Australia. Indeed, she has used her transnational “citizenship” to voice a critique of racism in Australia in the SRV media.

Reterritorialising: “Little Saigons” in the Diasporic Imaginary

Many of us still remember vividly the touching moments of the ceremony [in 1988] at the Asian Garden Mall where a freeway sign of Little Saigon was unveiled. Some ... could not hide their tears. For them being thousands of miles away from their homeland, they could still associate their beloved City of Saigon with Little Saigon. Ever since Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City, we all felt that we had lost the old name for good and that we needed to revive the name in one form or another. That is the reason why the Vietnamese community had chosen to rename the so-called “Capital of the Vietnamese Refugees in America” Little Saigon ... Only by adhering to our tradition will we [be] able to retake our beloved city and rename it Saigon (in Reyes 1999: 102).

In the desire to reterritorialise the old Saigon on American soil, we discover the operation of a national will that stakes a claim to a specific piece of US territory. Such a move necessarily brings this will into potential conflict with the national will of the host society, a potentiality that was realised in the “battle of the flags” around the Tran Truong protests. The combatants were, on the one hand, a diasporic nationalism and a hyphenated communal identity fostered and supported under multicultural policy,
perceiving Truong’s actions as a threat to its sense of distinction from the homeland and within the host nation; and on the other, a host nation legal-rational discourse of individual freedoms (enshrined in the First Amendment), and a liberal ideology setting limits to communal rights. We might read this as a critical encounter between an alternate public sphere, asserting its right to maintain a communal identity with nationalist and political dimensions (especially within the public space of Little Saigon); and a host nation-state, acting to contain and reincorporate the refractory national will of an ethnic minority community. Such battles of national will are characteristic of relations between diasporas and host nation-states, and indeed are a defining feature of diasporas.

The above conflict arises precisely because the community leaders who organised the protests, and the protesters themselves, aspire to what Hage (1998: 48-77) calls “governmental belonging” to the subnational territory of Little Saigon. This is an empowered form of national belonging characterised by the sense that one can legitimately take up a governmental relation towards the national space and its denizens. It is only from a position of governmental belonging, Hage argues, that one can articulate statements such as that there are “too many” migrants in one’s country, an utterance which claims a privileged relation between one’s own racial group and the national space. In the Ho Mai and Tran Van Truong incidents, exile elites claim this privileged relation to the reterritorialised “national space” of their respective Little Saigons. While they do not protest the fact of the flying of the SRV flag over the Vietnamese embassies in Washington or Canberra, its display in public in Little Saigon is perceived by anticommunist elites to fall within their jurisdiction. An act performed in a mall in downtown Westminster thus takes on the complexion of one performed within diasporic
territory. The protests may be read in this sense as an attempt to perform a state-like function, i.e. excluding a perceived national other from within the boundaries of the national territory. In the event, this fantasy of statehood was disrupted by the US courts, which found in favour of Truong’s First Amendment right to hang the flag. Nevertheless, the protests proved just how powerful the diasporic vision of the reterritorialisation of Saigon on US soil is. Significantly, Truong was not permitted within this space to take on the persona of an independent and “free” US citizen exercising his right to his own political beliefs (one which he sought to establish for himself). Instead, an ethical responsibility to a communal identity was by and large forced upon him as he was quite literally hailed and disciplined as a wayward constituent of the diaspora-as-nation.

The Porosity of Reterritorialised Space

Few in the diaspora would, it seems, be willing to take up the SRV’s offer of belonging to a “loyal” transnation - at least not publicly. Perhaps with the exception of recent migrants, the overwhelming majority of overseas Vietnamese in the West see themselves as diasporic subjects or exiles whose presence in diaspora constitutes an imaginary or cultural nation which is distinct from that instantiated in the contemporary homeland. This dynamic is well demonstrated in the totalising narratives of diasporic identity that were articulated by anticommunists around the Truong protests - narratives that tend to evoke a Cold War geopolitics, thus giving us the impression of two discrete “nations” in struggle.

As one Vietnamese American commentator observed of the Truong protests, however, there existed a glaring contradiction between the rhetoric around the protests
and the consumer practices being played out on the very streets along which the anticommmunist protesters marched: the shops lining these streets were full of goods imported from Vietnam (Reed 1999). Going further, we can assume with a fair degree of certainty that a substantial number of the people who formed the crowds which gathered in Little Saigon will have been home to communist Vietnam (probably a number of times, like Truong himself), sent remittances, done business, invested, found spouses, and activated in a multitude of other ways links with their or their parents’ country of birth. Thus, the “exile” crowd gathered before Tran Van Truong’s shop, united under the symbol of the co ba soc or three red stripes against a yellow field of the defunct RVN, is in fact permeated with transnational identities and practices. Likewise, the space of Little Saigon is itself a translocality or transnational space, its character defined by its connectedness to the homeland. These links are particularly dense around Ho Chi Minh City, and they are made immediately visible on the streets in the presence of things such as homeland food products, commercial music culture and the urban styles brought by sojourners and returnees.

We must of course distinguish between Truong’s and the protesters’ transnationalisms. Taking up the possibilities opened up by reform in Vietnam - communication, tourism, investment, language education, consumption and so on - does not necessarily mean that one identifies with the contemporary regime. Indeed, one may continue to vehemently oppose it while going back and forth. The point I wish to make, however, is that while the anticommmunist protesters and Truong differ in their political orientations towards the SRV, they nevertheless occupy together a space of identity.

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16 As for Cabramatta, Sydney (see Thomas 1997: 161).
formation that is “open” to Vietnam. While the identities of the combatants may retain some sense of continuity with those forged in the war, these protests do not constitute a simple struggle between two monolithic blocs, an “exile” diaspora and an enemy regime. Played out on the streets and airwaves\textsuperscript{17} of Little Saigon, in the domestic Vietnamese press, in the US public sphere and on the Internet, this contemporary contestation of diasporic identity is not simply an international but a transnational one.\textsuperscript{18} Despite the stated object of the protests, communism in Vietnam, what the protesters are resisting is not so much a disagreeable ideology in a distant land as the here and now prospect of the transformation of the exile and anticommunist nature of diasporic identity. This transformation will be effected, anticommunists fear, by the irruption of heterodox transnational identities and circuits (such as the air route travelled repeatedly by Truong between Little Saigon and Ho Chi Minh City) into the heart of the diasporic “capital”.

The Tran Truong protests are thus a response to a perceived subversion of diasporic communities \textit{from within}, brought about not by warlike means but, paradoxically, by the very openness of Vietnam in the Doi Moi era. Truong is not a communist infiltrator, soldier or spy, but rather a refugee cum transmigrant who credits the legitimacy of the Hanoi authorities over that of diasporic community elites as spiritual guides to a happy state of nationalist being. We discover here an anxiety about the “end of diaspora” and

\textsuperscript{17} The protesters were mobilised and the protests co-ordinate with the aid of the Californian Vietnamese media (radio stations in particular), which were uniformly opposed to Truong’s actions (Tini Tran 1999).

\textsuperscript{18} The distinction between international and transnational is that the former suggests relations between discrete nation-states while the latter suggests connections between locales which undermine the capacity of the nation-state to delimit a proper national space.
loss of a distinct, oppositional diasporic identity which the possibility of easy return to Vietnam poses.

The perceived loss of consensus around the nature of the diaspora’s relationship to the homeland since the advent of Doi Moi has been accompanied by a discourse of anxiety about the decline of anticommunist nationalism as a unifying force in communal politics. Hence the apparent delight with which elites watched the resurgence of anticommunist affect around the Truong protests. A number of Vietnamese American commentators even went so far as to thank Tran Van Truong for his action, one saying that he had “delivered a dose of tonic for the struggle of the Vietnamese refugees which for so long has been weakened by factionalism within the community” (“Cac cuoc bieu tinh...”, see also Jolly and Tran 1999). But if the contestatory formations of refugee identity and exile culture can be said to be undergoing an intensification, at least as affective symbols, this is no longer a strictly “local” matter.

It has often been observed that globalisation tends to create a heightened sense of the particularity of local identities precisely because it acts to deterritorialise the local, upsetting the possibility of imagining the bounded spaces that these identities inhabit. We might understand the resurgence of anticommunist identity in the diaspora as the result of this familiar “globalisation effect”, which operates something like a feedback loop. The Truong protests illustrate, on the one hand, the persistence and even intensification of Cold War national imaginaries that articulate two distinct possibilities for Vietnamese identity, one situated in a revolutionary legacy and hegemony and the other in an anticommunist nationalism. On the other, they demonstrate the way in which flows between Vietnam and the diaspora have reduced the ability of either side to “insulate”
itself from the other, thus threatening the integrity of these contestatory national identities. In the diasporic context, the protests illustrate the way in which the end of the geopolitical certainties of the Cold War has caused the notion of exile to be de- and re-territorialised, displaced and reinvented, such that the “anticommunist” identity of the protesters as a collectivity demands to be read as an instance of what Stuart Hall calls that more “tricky” version of the local, which operates within and has been thoroughly reshaped by the logic of the global (Hall 1993: 354).

**Conclusion: Doubly Marginalised?**

Reyes, after Eastmond, suggests that Vietnamese exiles may be seen as the victims of a “double marginalisation” (Eastmond in Reyes 1999: 172-3). This is because they are resistant both to the contemporary regime in the homeland, as well as to the pressures and opportunities of integration and assimilation in the nations where they have settled. If the glorious vision of the restoration of the lost nation is to be maintained, Reyes argues, the exiles “cannot allow themselves to fully belong” to the host society (ibid: 173). Thus, they are marginalised in a society into which they will not permit themselves to integrate, and if they do go “home”, are marginalised there by their own anti-regime identifications. We see this dynamic operate in the sidelined of the exiles by the confluence of interests between an Australia seeking to establish global links in East and Southeast Asia and a Vietnam looking for aid, FDI and foreign export markets. This relationship acts to validate a depoliticised, dehistoricised transnational Vietnameseness which makes exile identity at best irrelevant and at worst “counter-productive”, a self-
interested ethnicity perversely enjoying its difference for itself instead of putting it at the service of the multicultural nation.

In criticism, I would stress that national belonging is not simply a matter of self-will, as Reyes appears to suggest. There have been significant structural obstacles to the possibility of Vietnamese in the US and Australia achieving acceptance and accumulating national belonging, particularly around the right to spatially consolidate their communities. Ironically, an exile consciousness has supported Vietnamese Australians and Americans in their struggles to belong to their respective host nations with a difference. The imaginary of a reterritorialised Little Saigon, as I have shown above, supports attempts to “make space” for a Vietnamese exile identity in the face of normalising pressures, thus pushing at the limits of the multicultural nation-state. The “exile public sphere” has served as a means of projecting alternative self-representations of Vietnamese Australian communities, sometimes producing successful political action, as in the case of the Maribyrnong - Ho Chi Minh City sister city issue. However, we must also be aware of the fact that this dominant communal identity itself has the power to marginalise heterodox voices such as that of Ho Mai.

While the spatial imaginary of a “reterritorialised Saigon” would appear at first glance to be an absolutist one, we have seen how it is in a sense always already deterritorialised. If overseas Vietnamese have been successful in resisting the imposition of SRV and host nation transnational imaginaries onto community spaces, the mobilisations of nationalist affect which have facilitated this resistance are themselves produced by the existence of cross-border practices and links. Exile, anticommmunist and refugee identities react against these connections and are reinvented through them. Thus
the “anticommunism” which was sparked by Truong was more intense and more popular than that which manifested during the Cold War. However, it was also more complex and less “local” than Cold War anticommunism. We might read it as a means of making sense of, and attempting to reassert control over, a multitude of exchanges with and links to the homeland that elude the fantasy of diasporic “state” power, and which give Little Saigon its translocal texture.