Exile and Return: Deterritorialising National Imaginaries in Vietnam and the Diaspora

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Synopsis

This work draws on the insights of an anthropology of transnationalism to explore an emergent field of translocal connections, practices and identifications between reformed Vietnam and the post-1975 Vietnamese diaspora in the West. In the post Cold War period, it is argued, we have witnessed a collapse of the geopolitics of exile that once divided diaspora and homeland. In this context, it is not appropriate for Vietnamese migration studies to speak of “two” discrete national and diasporic Vietnamese communities. Rather, the discipline is required to come to terms (theoretically and empirically) with a complex and contradictory field of transnational social relationships through which diaspora and homeland are co-constituted. The thesis charts this field via the study of phenomena such as: the explosion of mobility between Vietnam and diaspora; the emergence of a transnational Vietnamese language commercial music culture; the constitution of translocal Vietnamese urban spaces in the host nations; the enabling of symbolic and market citizenship in a Vietnamese “transnation”; and the flow of overseas Vietnamese “grey” and “green” matter (cultural and material capital) back into Vietnam. *Exile and Return* shows how the state in Vietnam, and elites in the diaspora, have responded to the advent of transnational flows between homeland and diasporic sites by authoring both traditional, border-enforcing and novel, border-expanding strategies of imagining and governing the “national” community. It argues that overseas Vietnamese have made sense of their own transits to and engagements with Vietnam through a logic of “transnational exilic space” that variously resists and accommodates the claims of capital, the state and diasporic belonging.
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this possible.
Note on Referencing

Vietnamese names fit with difficulty into Western conventions of referencing. When referencing Vietnamese authors, I have cited their entire names, in the order surname, middle name(s), given name. Where the owners of these names have anglicised them (usually by omitting middle names and reversing the order of surname and given name), I have referenced them in the standard way. Interview subjects who are not public personae have been given pseudonyms.

Newspaper articles and those published or reproduced on the Internet which do not have by-lines have been referenced by full or abbreviated versions of their titles in the original language (e.g. “Dam sau lung nguoi ty nan”, “Over 400 Overseas Vietnamese...”). Translations of the Vietnamese titles have been provided in the references section. Where such articles do have by-lines, I have referenced the name of the author and year of publication.

All translations from the Vietnamese are mine.