Huyen Dam, John Eyles

Journeys to home and liminal spaces among former refugees: exploring identity and belonging among Vietnamese-Canadians

MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

Artykuły
Articles

PRZESTRZEŃ
Społeczna

Social
SPACE

Journeys to home and liminal spaces among former refugees: exploring identity and belonging among Vietnamese-Canadians

Huyen Dam*

School of Geography and Earth Sciences, McMaster University

General Science Building Room 206

McMaster University

1280 Main Street West

Hamilton (Ontario), Canada L8S 4K1

Email: huyen_dam@hotmail.com

John Eyles

School of Geography and Earth Sciences, McMaster University

General Science Building Room 206

McMaster University

1280 Main Street West

Hamilton (Ontario), Canada L8S 4K1

Email: eyles@mcmaster.ca

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Rites of passage are integral to the life course of human beings. They exist in societies as culturally appropriate means to help individuals transition into their new social role or status. The story and journey of the former Vietnamese refugees in Hamilton (Ontario), Canada is one that resonates with the literature on rites of passage. This process included an uprooting from home, which was followed by a crossing over into liminal space. After leaving Vietnam, these refugees were in limbo as a result of their circumstance. Rites of passage as a conceptual framework can help to explain the journey and settlement experience of these Vietnamese refugees. Their experience have shaped their understanding of home, identity and belonging as Vietnamese-Canadians. The following paper examines the Vietnamese refugees' stories and their reflection on settlement

and home, which suggest a process of continuous liminality that articulates the complexity of experience and sense making in the lives of migrants. In order to understand the sense of belonging of these former refugees, the authors examine their life, journey, and rites of passage from Vietnam to Canada.

Keywords: Vietnamese-Canadians, liminality, refugees, belonging, identity, place

1. Introduction: the Boat People in Canada

In this paper, the authors investigate the experience of a group of Vietnamese Boat People in Hamilton (Ontario). The purpose is to explore their incorporation into Canadian society as they seek their place in the world and understand their identity. Their experiences suggest a complex journey from flight to refugee camp, and to a new home, with identities from past places and cultural identities in tow. These journeys are explored in the context of flexible citizenship, incorporation and liminality. But first, the origins of the Boat People and their move to Canada will be discussed before addressing the theoretical lens.

The political and social situation in Vietnam during the 1970s led to multiple waves of refugees leaving the country in what was referred to as the Boat People Crisis (see Wood 1997; Beiser 1999). The first wave of refugees left Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in 1975. These were United States government assisted refugees who were elite members and supporters of the United States and South Vietnamese Government. The second wave of refugees was sparked by the political upheaval between Vietnam and China, which led to the country's expulsion of the ethnic Chinese in 1978 (Beiser 1999). Unlike the first wave, this cohort of refugees consisted of the expelled ethnic Chinese residents and Vietnamese people throughout the country, including those from the North, who felt they could no longer live in their country due to the political shift and turmoil (Beiser 1999). As a result, these refugees left the country on boats, and via land routes, to neighbouring countries. Other refugees who fell under the label of the Boat People included Laotian and Cambodian refugees. The respondents in our study are ethnic Vietnamese who left during the second wave on boats.

In 2001, there were approximately 150,000 Vietnamese people living in Canada (Statistics Canada 2001). The overall Vietnamese presence in Canada is a direct outcome of the Boat People Crisis. According to statistical data, 70% of Vietnamese-Canadians were born outside of Canada, and within in this group, 93% were born in Vietnam (Statistics Canada 2001). According to Statistics Canada (2001), 44% of ethnic Vietnamese immigrants arrived between 1981 and 1990, while another 31% came to Canada between 1991 and 2001. Vietnamese-Canadians make up one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada.

In some ways, Canada became a safe and welcoming place for the Vietnamese Boat People to migrate. According to Morton Beiser (1999), Canada had transformed from an overtly racist society to one that was pluralistic in 1972 with the adoption of an official policy of multiculturalism. Four years later, The Immigration Act of 1976 – the cornerstone of present day immigration policy – also broke new ground by laying out the fundamental principles, objectives, guidelines, and procedures of the Canadian immigration policy, which emphasized multiculturalism and diversity (Knowles 1997).

During the Boat People Crisis, the public's effort to raise awareness and funds immensely fostered the work of the non-profit sector. The exponential growth of the Vietnamese population during this time was driven by the increasing sponsorship rate from the private sector, the non-profit sector and the federal government (see Adelman 1982). Overall, the increasing rate of immigration in conjunction with effective polices transformed Canada's social and cultural landscape, and for the Boat People, these changes would make them the beneficiaries of shifting ideologies and policy as reflected in the statistical data below. The effective immigration policy is evident in the country's sponsorship between 1979 and 1980 when Canada admitted some 60,000 refugees (Knowles 1997). Although this was not the largest single refugee group to enter Canada since the Second World War, Canada had admitted the highest number of Boat People per capita than any other country during this time.

Hamilton was in fact a preferred locale for these refugees. Statistics published

by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)[1] show that the number of immigrants, who reported Hamilton as their destination when they landed in Canada, had increased by 1900 between the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s (CIC 2009a; CIC 2009b). During the height of the crisis, 1700 hundred government-sponsored refugees were destined for Hamilton, and 3000 entered through private sponsorship (CIC 2005a). As seen in Table 1, Vietnam was one of the ten source countries of landed immigrants in Hamilton from 1986 to 1995. With 1430 new incoming residents during those years, Hamilton was home to 4% of the total Vietnamese population for all of Canada.

Table 1. Top ten countries of birth for immigrants in Hamilton, 1986 to 1995

Immigrated 1986-1995		
Country of origin	Number	Percentage distribution
1. Poland	4390	14
2. United Kingdom	2370	7
3. Philippines	1720	5
4. India	1650	5
5. Portugal	1610	5
6. Yugoslavia	1500	5
7. Viet Nam	1430	4
8. United States	970	3
9. Iraq	930	3
10. Croatia	910	3
Top ten countries	17480	54
All other countries	14960	46
Total	32440	100

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Facts and Figures, 2002 data set (CIC 2009a)

---

[1] Citizenship and Immigration Canada is the department of the Government of Canada that provides services relating to immigration and citizenship registration. In addition to this, they maintain ongoing research that supports the development of immigration programs, and they publish information on permanent and temporary residents.

Overall, Hamilton has a unique immigrant population in the sense that it has a greater proportion of refugees. As seen in Table 2, during the mid to late 1980s, one-third of Hamilton's incoming immigrants were from the refugee class.

Table 2. Recent immigrants by period of immigration and landing category in Hamilton, 1986-2000

Immigrant Class	1986-1990		1991-1995		1996-2000	
	Number	Percentage distribution	Number	Percentage distribution	Number	Percentage distribution
Family	5670	35	7980	45	4870	36
Economic immigrants	5450	34	6880	38	5920	44
Refugees	4750	30	2930	16	2570	19
Other immigrants	180	1	120	1	80	1
Total	16040	100	17910	100	13440	100

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Facts and Figures, 2002 data set (CIC 2009a)

Today, Hamilton continues to attract in excess of 3000 new immigrants per year, which places it among the top five immigrant centres in Canada. As a mid-size Canadian city, Hamilton's total population was 692911 in 2006, making it the ninth largest Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)[2] in Canada (Statistics Canada 2010). Hamilton continues to be a city where refugees relocate. In 2001, Hamilton received 1618 new refugees and 3052 refugee claimants were present on 1 December of that same year (see CIC 2009a; CIC 2009b). One-quarter of Hamilton's current population are immigrants, and within this group, approximately one-third of all foreign-born residents have entered Canada as a refugee. As a result, Hamilton is home to more refugees, proportionally, than any other city across Canada (CIC 2004; 2005b). Hamilton then is the Canadian locale in which identity is forged and where home is created as

---

[2] A Census Metropolitan Area is an area consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities situated around a major urban core. To become a Census Metropolitan Area, the urban core must have a population of at least 100,000 as of the last census. This definition is set by Statistics Canada.

life itself moves through its various courses for these refugees and perhaps other refugee groups as well.

Today, the acquisition of citizenship continues to be a significant step for newcomers. Granting citizenship to eligible applicants allows newcomers to acquire the full range of rights to newcomers while encouraging them to fulfil the responsibilities of being citizens of Canada (CIC 2011). As stated in the 2011 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, the acquisition of citizenship enables newcomers to 'secure a stronger sense of belonging to Canada and share a common bond as part of the Canadian family' (CIC 2011: 28). Many immigrants continue to opt for Canadian citizenship after migration. Overall, the rate at which immigrants become citizens of Canada is consistently high at 80% (CIC 2009a; CIC 2009b). Canada embraces the notion of multiculturalism and diversity that allow for flexible citizenship, although it is occasionally challenged, this means that permanent residents can maintain several identities, including that of their origins. For the Vietnamese group in Hamilton who came from Vietnam to Canada between 1986 to 1995, more than 90% had obtained Canadian citizenship by 2001 (CIC 2009a; CIC 2009b).

In fact, in a 2001 survey, 65% of Vietnamese-Canadians expressed having a strong sense of belonging to Canada according to the Vietnamese community profile of ethnic communities in Canada (Ministry of Industry 2007). Although this is a large percentage, this data must be treated with caution. The Vietnamese-Canadians' sense of belonging points to several critical elements. First, the journey and search for home perhaps has ended. It also suggests that despite the conflicting state of refugees as being placeless, their settlement in Canada through time perhaps has resolved a placeless and stateless status as reinforced by their citizenship. Also, perhaps the experience through time has enabled them to become familiar and comfortable, and to establish a home in Canada. This locale matters but so too does the Canadian approach to citizenship. In a recent study of Chinese-Canadians, Johanna Waters (2009) argues that transnational immigrants often demonstrate a high level of local civic involvement and a localised sense of identity in Canada, even when continuing to practise transnationalism on a daily basis. This certainly applies to Chi-

nese-Canadians but does it apply to the Vietnamese community, especially in Hamilton?

2. Theoretical framework: the use of liminality

Over 100 years ago, Arnold Van Gennep (2004: 2-3) introduced the idea of rites of passage to illustrate that '[t]he life of an individual in any society is a series of stages from one age to another and from one occupation to another…Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in…very existence...[L]ife comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings'. These stages are: separation, liminal period and reincorporation. These stages can be useful in understanding what happens when individuals and groups migrate and are inducted into a new way of living and then reincorporated with new status. This paper uses elements of this framework to explore the migrations of the Vietnamese Boat People from their origin through the refugee camps in Hong Kong, and to settlement in Canada.

But understanding of the migrant experience may be richer than that. Victor Turner (1995; 1970) later concentrated on the transitional or liminal phase. He argued that the liminal stage is structurally, if not physically, invisible. Liminality is, in fact, both the source and antithesis of structural assertions and 'a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner 1970: 97). A liminal state is ambiguous and for those not in it, it can potentially be dangerous. Liminal individuals have 'nothing to demarcate themselves structurally from their fellows' (Turner 1970: 98). The strength of Turner's view of liminality is its emphasis on ambiguity and possibility, a state from which individuals can develop new statuses and forge new identities. It focuses less on constraint and cultural imperatives.

The forging of new identities is never simple. As Renato Rosaldo (1993) remarks, there is struggle over who or what has narrative power in liminal states. Some groups may not challenge the power of assimilation and indeed may well use dimensions of the pre-liminal stage (see Hoey 2005 on the role of the existing moral

landscape) or specific phenomena during liminality (see Allan 2007 on how the liminal state of infertility may be overcome) to forge identities. These past and contemporary strategies and institutions may help define the self as non-transitional and not dangerous. Yet as Dhanashree Thorat (2010) argues, migrants must negotiate their identities in an ambivalent cultural space (the destination society). Cultural boundaries are always in a state of flux. This flux – the in-between spaces (see Bhabha 2004) – leads to the constant creation and re-creation of cultural meaning, potentially made more intense by relocation through migration.

Is liminality – the in-between space – still a useful idea, especially to examine those individuals and groups who find themselves betwixt and between? John Clayton (2009) argues that liminal spaces help understand national belonging and community cohesion among young people of different ethnic backgrounds in Leicester. Furthermore, Danielle Wozniak (2009) argues that healing does involve equilibrium or maintenance, noting the importance of trajectory between victim of abuse and survivor of violence in a study of physically abused women in the United States. Liminality can provide possibilities of change but also threaten established social relations as when western women tour rural Costa Rica (see Freidus, Romero-Daza, 2009). Taken-for-grantedness is threatened and biography is disrupted. But betwixt and between has to be reconciled so individuals can classify themselves in socially accepted, –valued and –worthful ways.

Liminality is, therefore, a complex and nuanced force for individuals. The experience of transition is of central relevance for groups such as the Vietnamese Boat People, i.e. those involved in transnational movement. Hamid Naficy (2003) sees a close association between transnationalism and liminality. Wanning Sun (2002) has pointed to the importance of transnational spaces in shaping Chinese identity and sense of belonging. Furthermore, many Asian families are seen as being in transition. Yet liminality may be overcome in part by simultaneity, which sees the geographies of transnational families incorporating activities, routines, and institutions in many different places potentially on an everyday basis (see Levitt, Glick-Schiller, 2004). This may require group-specific rights and the recognition of the importance

of past cultures and their identities (see Kymlicka 1995). Louise Waite and Joanne Cook (2011) note in the context of the United Kingdom, communities and citizenship demands that members of diasporic communities often have complex relationships to their host societies, and their feelings of belonging may be stretched and simultaneously be 'here and there'. They argue that emotional attachments to place(s) of first and second generation Zimbabwean, Somali, Sudanese, and Kenyan migrants may be understood as belonging through ideas of pluri-local homes and simultaneity of attachments to different places.

Attachment suggests belonging which is related to citizenship and identity, and rooted in place (see Mee, Wright, 2009). Migrants are a revealing group in which to examine belonging with their status being tied to borders, to leaving and arriving, and to different places (see Trudeau 2006). S. Muller et al. (2009) see belonging, and therefore identity, in a state of flux, or perhaps liminal space? Who belongs depends not only on the individual but on structural forces. Migrants then can remain 'migrants' in their new locale if structural forces, such as restrictive legislation and anti-immigrant discourse, act against integration despite the supportive role of transnational families (see Sargent's 2006 study of Malians in Paris). Yet for other groups, political and economic conditions along with familial support may ensure settlement and a feeling of being at home (see Huang et al. 2008).

The transnationality may, however, fracture as well as sustain families and commitment to family and cultural values and practices (see Yeoh 2005; Le Espiritu 2003). For some individuals, this may result in some of these places being regarded as mythic time-space, so that returning home, to the old country, may be an important desire, which may aid settlement and assimilation or help construct an uncertainty about identity, another liminal state or in-between space. Individuals may, of course, move between these places for identity and belonging themselves. These themes will be explored among a sample of Vietnamese Boat People in a Canadian city in which to anticipate the cultural importance of family within a particular ethnicity is key. And to understand the process of journeying and its possible implications for citizenship and belonging for these former refugees, the respondents' lived

experience will be examined starting with their accounts of life in and journey from Vietnam, to their lives in the refugee camp, and finally, to their journeys to and lives in Canada. To anticipate, the authors suggest that in-between spaces and liminality do not disappear, but rather like the refugees in this, people move continuously through experiences, always redefining themselves and their places.

3. Methodology: sample and design

The authors employed a case study approach to investigate the journey and lived-experience of the Vietnamese refugees in Hamilton. As noted by Robert Stake (1995), case studies explore issue(s) within the bounded system that identifies both the setting and object of study. For this study, the setting was restricted by a geographical boundary that limited participation to individuals who resided in the city of Hamilton. The study was also bounded by time, narrowing the selected sample to only those who left during the second wave from Vietnam on boats in the 1980s during the height of the Boat People Crisis. The purpose of this bounded system was to investigate the nature of belonging and identity in place through time for individuals who have lived in Hamilton for at least 15 years.

Recruitment began in August 2008 and ended in December 2008. The lead investigator on the project, who came to Canada as a Vietnamese refugee herself, is also a member of this community. She contacted different Vietnamese organisations in Hamilton such as Vietnamese churches and other formal groups. The purpose of this was to connect with gatekeepers and gain formal access to the Vietnamese community in the city. Letters of information outlining the purpose and details of the study were distributed at these locations.

Twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the approval of the McMaster Research Ethics Board prior to data collection. The conversations narrated the respondents' lives in Vietnam, their temporary home in the refugee camp, and their current home in Canada. The interviews were conducted in English and Vietnamese, audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and mostly took place in the homes of the respondents.

A total of six male and six female respondents were interviewed. At the time of the interview, the respondents' age ranged from 22 to 56 years of age. For the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms were given to each respondent at the onset of the study. Table 3 summarizes some additional information about the respondents (i.e. year, and age, of arrival in Canada) to provide context for the research findings.

Table 3. Study respondents

Pseudonym	Place of birth	Year departed from Vietnam	Time spent in refugee camp	Location of refugee camp	Year arrived in Canada	Age of arrival in Canada
Anh	South Vietnam	1981	6 months	Kalong Island	1982	13
Ngoc	North Vietnam	1982	6 months	Hong Kong	1986	22
Hoan	South Vietnam	1981	18 months	Indonesia	1983	25
Hung	North Vietnam	1983	2 years	Hong Kong	1985	32
Minh	North Vietnam	1982	3 years	Hong Kong	1985	21
Tung	North Vietnam	1982	5 years	Hong Kong	1987	9
Nam	North Vietnam	1986	5 years	Hong Kong	1991	32
Vinh	North Vietnam	1982	7 years	Hong Kong	1989	25
Trang	Hong Kong	N/A	2 years	Hong Kong	1990	2
Von	Hong Kong	N/A	4 years	Hong Kong	1989	4
Lien	Hong Kong	N/A	5 years	Hong Kong	1989	5
Hanh	Hong Kong	N/A	5 years	Hong Kong	1989	5

The interviews aimed to obtain, as accurately as possible, the fullest, most complete description of the case by using life history and narratives as the means of collecting data. Although the study was originally designed to conduct 40 interviews with Vietnamese refugees in Hamilton, this was not achieved due to difficulties encountered during recruitment. Recruitment strategies and attempts (i.e. initial contact and follow-ups) were unsuccessful. This relatively small sample means that this study can only be exploratory and its conclusions suggestive. With that said, types of migration, timing of journey, age and gender were captured in the sample and these narratives speak to the experience of the Vietnamese Boat People. For example, the sample included respondents from various birth places within Vietnam in addition

to those who were born in the refugee camps. The sample also speak to the experience of those at various depature point and time from Vietnam to reflect the ongoing crisis and attempts made by the refugees to seek asylum after the war. The duration of time under liminality experienced in the refugee camps is also reflected in the length of time spent in detainment while waiting for sponsorship and arrival to Canada. Finally, the respondent's age at the time of arrival to Canada, which ranged from 2 to 32, also support the notion that barriers and challenges encountered during the settlement experience is influenced by age.

All interviews were translated and transcribed by the first author. The interview questions explored the respondents' migration experience on the boat, their journey to the refugee camps, and their desires for a safe haven. The first author had a strong personal lens to examine the responses, and coded the transcripts, to derive themes. The second author also read the interviews and codes were compared and agreed themes emerged. The second author questioned the first about her stance given her positionality as a boat person and research instrument. Once themes emerged, the authors discussed how to best present this complex, nuanced set of stories, deciding on the journey as the dominant theme.

Although the study was conceptualised as a case study from the beginning, the focus of exploring the lives of individuals and retelling of stories reflect aspects of the narrative approach within qualitative research. As noted by John Creswell (2007), the narrative approach enables the researchers to let the voice of the respondent speak and carry the story through dialogue. During analysis, codes that were related to the story, such as chronology and the plot, are incorporated into the findings in addition to the themes that emerged from their experience. In doing so, chronology and plot provides a thick description and analysis of the case, which can then be used to embed themes within the life history of the respondents. As a result, the analysis was twofold. First, the respondents' journey from Vietnam to the refugee camp, and then Canada, was examined. The latter examined their ideas about home and identity through time and place.

4. Discussion: journeys to home

The following section examines the migration journey of Vietnamese refugees from Vietnam to Canada. Their stories highlight the rite of passage from locale of duress to multi-local transitional belonging.

4.1. Duress in transition – leaving Vietnam and life in the refugee camp

Leaving Vietnam was a difficult and necessary process, potentially colouring the refugees' views of origins and from where their cultural identity in part flows. Problems encountered on the waters such as sickness, disputes, hunger, thirst, stormy conditions, and damaged vessels reinforced this. The chance of not making it to their country of asylum had settled in with the prospect of dying at sea. The respondents' reflection on their journey and places of anxiety suggest a struggle to find a home. Vinh reflects on a particular memory and recalls the sense of fear she experienced:

It was sad when we got to the middle of the sea. With the waves smashing against the sides of the boat, and with the likelihood of drowning, I was sad and scared.

(Vinh)

Anh remembers the harsh conditions on the boat:

...on the fourth day we hit the sea storm and the waves were as big as the building… Everybody just throw up all over the place...and we just sit in the bottom of the boat and the water came in…vomit and pee all over and you just have to hold your ground.

(Anh)

Ngoc reflects on the child-like naivety about the danger that she was about to encounter:

We just think that when we go out to the sea, there will be a ship to pick us up…and there's nothing. Just water and sky. We see nobody. There wasn't even light. Darkness and water and that's it. And I even see the people die on the sea... A lot of people thought we were going to die… A lot of people say, 'if we are going to die then let's die on the sea' cause they

don't want to die back in Vietnam. So we kept on going.

(Ngoc)

For some of the respondents, the crossing to the first country of asylum was relatively short, lasting only ten days, while for others, the passage took as long as two months. For those who journeyed from Vietnam, the refugee camp was a temporary home along their migration trajectory. For the children of refugees who were born in their parents' first country of asylum, life in the refugee camp was home, and in most cases, the respondents stated that the camp was a safe place. Home was therefore created in what is known as transitory circumstances, although the length of time spent there was often unknown.

The age of the respondents influenced their experiences in the refugee camps. The children and youth conveyed a carefree attitude:

It was great… For me as a child growing up there, I found that it was a lot of fun with all the kids… you didn't have to worry about food cause they always provide you with food and there was always a place to stay.

(Tung)

As a young adult, Minh also expressed a similar sense of adventure; a feeling that may not have been shared by others in the same situation:

It was an adventure for me, yeah, an adventure for me because I was young. It's like I wasn't afraid of anything. Everything is new and everything is something new you want to learn about… so it was different for me. But for the older people, and for the women, maybe it was difficult for them? But for me I think, 'I like it'.

(Minh)

For some of the older respondents, the camps brought safety but with confinement. Some of the respondents found fencing and constraint within the camp difficult to adjust to. This shaped ideas of belonging. According to some of the refugees who spent years living under these circumstances, confinement impacted their mental health and shaped their identity as placeless people without a home:

Living in the camp is no different than living in a jail. All day you're just wandering around within the fence. You're not allowed to go outside. There's nothing to do and the days just go on like that... You were depressed if you thought about your future, because living in the camp, you didn't know when the day would come when you'd get to leave and be free.

(Nam)

The feeling of imprisonment was especially disheartening for the refugees since much of their future remained unknown, shaping a view of the world that was limited. While the search for freedom was hindered by the delay in sponsorship, the stress and uncertainty about ever leaving left the refugees longing for permanent settlement so that release would not only heighten their sense of worth, but also that of their being (their identity):

Respondent: *I lived in camp-prison…Clearly the refugee camp was a prison camp… You worry about the day you're alive for… Who knows when you can permanently settle.*

Researcher: *So you didn't know how long you were staying there.*

Respondent: *I didn't know.*

Researcher: *So how long did you live in the refugee camp?*

Respondent: *Seven years.*

While living in the refugee camp, none of the respondents could have anticipated a new life in Canada, nor did they prefer one there. It was very much a second choice and one with some apprehension about the conditions for belonging. For many respondents, the decision to sign up for an interview with the Canadian immigration officer was determined by the inability to go to other choice countries, which included the United States and Australia. Most people were initially not enthusiastic about living in Canada:

Most people wanted to go the U.S. or Australia and that's it. Canada? They wouldn't have it. Is it going to be a good country to go to? They always think it's cold. We all think, 'Oh man, why come to this freezing country'... people would say, 'Canada is a freezing coun-

try! Igloo country!'

(Anh)

Without knowing what awaited them on the other side of the world, some of the refugees had misconceptions about what would happen after they left the camp. They wondered what they might become and how their identities might change. As they had imagined, their new life would be very different from their current situation and from their life in Vietnam. Resettlement and integration in Canada meant full incorporation of lifestyle and culture, and perhaps, not expressing some aspect of being Vietnamese:

When we were there [in the refugee camp] we always think that when we come to Canada, probably some white family will take us in at the adoption [agency], you know, to adopt the whole family. We dreamed of having our own room. Our own bedroom with a nice single bed and eat potatoes with the white people.

(Anh)

4.2. Settlement – the Hamilton experience

After arriving in Canada, the refugees found that living and adapting to a new place and culture was both challenging and difficult. One of the first challenges was finding a place to live. Anh and his family had to live for a month in a hotel downtown – a temporary dwelling place organised by the government for new refugees. Anh recalls the isolation he and his family experienced initially after coming to Hamilton:

… they would give us a room… and then they would serve us breakfast, lunch, dinner… and after that, we went back to your rooms again… The first few weeks we were scared… we didn't go out[side] at all. And then by the third week, my uncle said, 'We gotta get out. This is kind of like a jail'.

(Anh)

Despite the shift from living in a refugee camp to settlement in Canada, the early phase of precarious housing after resettlement brought back a sense of imprisonment

and uncertainty not dissimilar to that experienced in the camp. Feelings of isolation and sadness were influenced by the lack of familiarity with the environment in addition to the inability to navigate their new surroundings:

When we first came, we didn't know English, we didn't know where to go, or how to drive a car, and that's why we were sad.

(Vinh)

Receiving help and assistance from others was critical for the resettlement of the refugees. In particular, guidance from people of their own community helped the newcomers adjust to unfamiliar environments and socio-cultural norms. Knowledge and practice of Canadian customs helped the refugees to overcome their sense of their in-betweenness and not belonging:

We lived in an apartment on our own. We had people, like Vietnamese people from the group who came and teach us. They showed us where to shop for food and clothes, and what to do with the soap and things like that.

(Hoan)

Access to food was a critical issue for the Vietnamese refugees in Hamilton; where to buy food, adjusting to the different type of food, living without certain food sources, and substituting for the lack of food. Past cultural elements present a context for incorporation into a new place and society. A huge challenge for the refugees in Hamilton was the awareness of culturally acceptable food customs:

We go to Canadian grocery store. We buy some funny things. People even buy dog food and cat food and eat them too. They didn't know. They think everything is edible... because people saw the picture on the outside and so they think, 'it's dog meat'. And they didn't know that people didn't eat dogs here.

(Minh)

Food, like language, illustrates the confrontation and challenge of cultures and practices when people and/or groups are incorporated into new environments. At

the same time, food was critical for the maintenance of a Vietnamese identity and culture after separation. Because there were no Asian grocery stores in the city at that time, some people resorted to the purchasing and killing of their own livestock in order to obtain familiar food sources; a practice the refugees thought their neighbours would not understand:

We don't like the meat that they sell here because it's too soft. So we went to the farm and bought our own livestock [and butchered them] in our basements [laughs]. Those type of things I think we should hide from the Caucasian because they don't understand. [They say], 'why do you people have to do that… why don't you just buy it?' But the whole reason is because it's cheaper to do it [yourself] and another thing is, we don't like that soft chicken, now we are used to it but before I didn't like to eat it. We don't like to eat the frozen foods. We like to eat fresh things.

(Minh)

Language was also a major challenge to the settlement and integration process for all of the Vietnamese refugees. While the older refugees were required to take English language courses at the community centre, the children of refugees had to learn English amongst their peers in public school:

Everyone around me were like mainly Caucasian and it was hard cause you don't know where to fit in and you don't understand the language yet and because I was born in the refugee camp, the only language I knew was Chinese. So when they're speaking to me and I speak to them in Chinese, I [became] a social outcast.

(Lien)

Refugees children played a critical role in bridging their elders to the norms of Canadian culture and customs. They were critical links to the process of beginning to belong (i.e. to reduce or redefine liminality). Not only does language enable newcomers to overcome various barriers (i.e. socio-economic, health, and cultural), the refugees' ability to communicate with members of the host society secured a stronger sense of belonging in Canada overall. With time, the ability to speak English fluently

for the Vietnamese refugees was an indication of integration into Canadian culture. Instead of being an outsider, language and communication solidifies a dimension of incorporation and identity:

I think when you start speaking English fluently, that feeling goes away cause you know that you have adapted to this country. But when you are still struggling to learn the language – that is when you feel like you are an outcast – you are an outsider... I think [it took] around three years. The first year was okay and then the second year I felt more confident, and by the third year, that feeling, it just go away because you have friends you can speak English. You can learn more things and you adapt to the culture.

(Anh)

4.3. Settling into place

Most respondents indicated that Canada has now become their home as they have acquired citizenship for permanent settlement. The respondents expressed the role of family, familiarity, culture, and community as reinforcing a sense of belonging:

I just can't imagine living anywhere else cause I've been here all of my life and my actual home; like my house, is here. My family is here and it's not strange to me. If I were to go to another city, who would I know there? What do I know there, places I know? But here it's like, I kind of know the city inside out and I know where things are, I know where my friends are, I know where my family is and you don't feel alone.

(Trang)

Some respondents were less certain about retaining fixed residency in Canada. For example, one respondent was certain that he would return to Vietnam in his old age to become reincorporated into Vietnamese society:

I'm always dreaming that one day when I retire that I go back to my homeland where my aunts and uncles and my relatives, who lives in Vietnam, and I live there… I hope that I will go back to my country and retire because it's my hometown; it's my homeland.

(Tung)

Anh also shares the same nostalgia for homeland and thinks about the possi-

ble reincorporation while also remaining in part Canadian. The feeling of belonging to and longing to return to Vietnam, along with the sense of belonging in Canada suggests that some respondents hold a pluri-local transnational perspective:

*Generally I have that feeling that I was born there. Yeah I was born there and when you come back you think, 'I belong here'... I would like to live in Vietnam but sometimes [I think], 'No, Canada is better'... It's just that when you go there and you speak your own language, you feel more belonging. You **belong** there.... Sometime you're just thinking, 'maybe it's a path you walk through'. Here, I don't know, I have a different feeling. I think I belong in Canada but not as much as where you are born, where you originate from... Here, you feel you have freedom, you have opportunity to grow and stuff, but it's just sometimes, you feel like home.*

(Anh)

Overall, these respondents expressed that their desire for homeland is influenced by an awareness of their Vietnamese identity:

We are Vietnamese. Whenever we go, whenever we live, we still think about our own country, right? My generation is different than your generation. You were born here, right, and you're used to the life here. Although I'm living here, in reality, I am always conscience that I'm a Vietnamese person.

(Nam)

Does home mean being settled? The meaning of home is influenced by various elements of the Vietnamese refugee experience. For these refugees, Vietnamese heritage is negotiated by a Western outlook; home is where you put down roots. The rite of passage to becoming Vietnamese-Canadians, which included a separation from homeland – a liminal journey through past and present home, and the acquisition of belonging through time – reflects a pluri-local understanding of home and identity so that several places provide belonging and a sense of identity without the loss of other ties.

4.4. The meaning of being Vietnamese-Canadian

So does settlement mean becoming Canadian? The meaning of being

a Vietnamese-Canadian according to the respondents illustrates themes of dual identities, roots, embeddedness, in-betweenness, and pluri-locality. Overall, the definition of a Vietnamese-Canadian meaning alludes to complexity of experience instead of the simplification of meanings. It invokes a flexible citizenship. The following excerpts reiterate these elements, which are important to the understanding their story, journey, and whole being:

…I came [when I was] 25 years old. The thing is I'm already divided. I'm a Vietnamese.

(Hoan)

Because we're Vietnamese our root is in Vietnam but we live in Canada.

(Vinh)

…I feel like everyone is my family so I don't distinguish myself from everyone else. And as an individual, I don't feel isolated. I don't feel different because of my skin colour or because of my ethnic background. I just feel like I'm both. Because if I'm just Vietnamese, then I differentiate myself from you…If I'm just a Vietnamese person living in Canada, it basically means that I don't belong here; I don't belong in this country, I'm just living here, right? And if I'm [just] Canadian, then basically I'm not Vietnamese. So when [I say] I'm a Vietnamese-Canadian, it means that I don't feel any difference, I can be Vietnamese or Canadian and it still would not make a difference. I just feel like I know that I'm someone and I belong here in Canada.

(Von)

Because I adapted to this environment, the society here, but I still keep my old tradition in Vietnam and I try to keep it as much as possible to balance both things out. I don't want to lose everything from my country where, one day, I know I will go back. And if I don't know anything then it will be a problem for me.

(Tung)

The notion of rite of passage, and this sometimes difficult pluri-local identity, resonates particularly with those who journeyed from Vietnam to Canada, in com-

parison to of those born in the camps. Individuals undergoing the ceremonial rites of passage are ultimately re-incorporated or integrated again into society in the last phase, the formal oath of Canadian citizenship. And only after such a passage will they exercise all the rights and privileges of their new social status or position. The respondents who were born in Vietnam often highlighted the citizenship as symbolic of this rite of passage and, at least in part, the disappearance of the liminal period. The meaning being Canadian for these refugees was centered on the meaning of citizenship:

I know that I'm a Canadian citizen and that the law will protect me. I left the country [when I was] pretty old already; 18 years old. I know my identity already. I know that I am Vietnamese. But I don't have a Vietnamese citizenship, I have a Canadian citizenship, and that is why I say that I'm a Vietnamese-Canadian; a Vietnamese person living in Canada that has a Canadian citizenship.

(Minh)

Vietnamese-Canadian. Born in Vietnam and Canada gives me an opportunity to become a citizen.

(Anh)

For those who were born in the refugee camp and spent most of their lives in Canada, and who have never lived in Vietnam, more emphasis is placed on what it means to be Vietnamese. Their embeddedness in Canadian culture and custom is explicit, and thus, the critical reflection on identity is focused on the more elusive Vietnamese culture and tradition:

It means I'm not just Vietnamese because I feel that if you're just a Vietnamese [person], you live in Vietnam only. But then I just don't feel like I'm a 'Vietnamese person living in Canada' because I belong to this country. I am a citizen of this country and I've grown up here. I'm accustomed to all of the Canadian customs and I keep my own Vietnamese customs as well. So I'm not just a Vietnamese person living in the country. And I'm not a pure Canadian so I consider myself a Vietnamese-Canadian where I kind of embrace both cultures in my life.

(Trang)

For me it's like I wish I was Vietnamese but I don't want to be Canadian. I kind of wish I could blend in a little bit better with Vietnamese people. You know, I wish I could go back to Vietnam and feel comfortable there. But I'm not. But then again, I don't really want to associate myself with like the melting pot because I may think in English and speak in English but I would prefer the way things use to be, like with [Vietnamese] values, like with order, with respect.

(Hanh)

I find that the more I live here the more I try to tap into my roots. Like my cousin, she's the same age as I am, the more she lives here the more she calls herself a 'Westernized Vietnamese'. She's like a pure Canadian. She feels actually ashamed of her roots…she and I just don't [share the same attitude or perspective] because I've become more traditional. I love the Vietnamese opera [laughs]. This is probably the most annoying and embarrassing aspect of Viet culture to the younger generation. I don't know why. You know, I love speaking Viet and I'm trying to tap into my roots more.

(Lien)

5. Conclusion

In sum, most of the refugees interviewed recognised themselves as fully incorporated and integrated member of the national community. They are rooted in Canada's flexible citizenship and feel they have retained roots and maintained connections to Vietnam, including those who were not born there. They have taken up many new cultural values and behaviours and live with both traditional and new cultures, developing a bi-ethnic or a multi-ethnic identity (see also Michiyo 2011 for a similar case study of the Vietnamese refugees experience in Australia and Japan). In the same manner, pluri-local homes and attachments to past homes are influenced by the refugee experience and the past in general, in terms of cultural ties, finding a refuge and safety. Citizenship, familiarity, family, and language acquisition also fostered a greater sense of belonging for the refugees to Canada.

Now with a distinct separation from home and homeland, and their physical and symbolic entrance into the unknown, the Vietnamese refugees reached a point of no return. The crossing and period of uncertainty transitioned the refugees into a marginal state of non-status and unanchored identity (see Salamone 2004; Teather 1999). While living in the refugee camps, they lived as liminal outsiders (Turner 1974) waiting in a betwixt and in-between state of liminal suspension before coming to Canada. Lucy Williams (2006) suggests that while refugees wait in the camps to be re-incorporated into society, or into a new nation state, they wait in limbo with little control and live in an underworld between past and [the imagined] future life. Arnold Van Gennep's stages of rites of passage and Victor Turner's view of liminality are useful in understanding their experience, highlighting a state of ambiguity within a transitional period prior to their resettlement.

But regardless of the desire to belong and to be socially accepted, liminal suspension may continue and individuals and groups may continue to live in a state of betwixt and in-between, possessing identities in pluri-local settings (see Waite, Cook, 2011). Some groups, such as the Malian immigrants in France, live in a state of existential limbo, moving between legal and undocumented immigrant status and refusing French 'nationality' (Sargent 2006). But most of the Vietnamese-Canadians in our study do not. They see themselves as citizens with important Vietnamese spaces.

Citizenship represents a successful transition and an end of a journey. Leo Chavez (1992) suggests that in most rites of passage, the individual successfully completes the proper rituals and is incorporated after he or she acquires the appropriate knowledge, experiences, and behaviours. For this group of Boat People, citizenship means successful passage, new status, and a new forged national identity with a sense of belonging in Canada. They seemed to have developed a place and a sense of home that permits a successful presence in Canada's multicultural society. And as Will Kymlicka (2010) notes, these strategies must be recognised and respected. Yet the Vietnamese refugees do not seem to shift back and forth to an immigrant/refugee status but retain their liminality, 'shadowed lives' – potentially a continuous liminality? The Vietnamese refugees are not likely to negotiate

a refugee status because they no longer identify themselves as homeless beings living in a state of insecurity or unresolved certainty. As noted by Howard Adelman (1982), in English the word refugee suggests the situation into which the individual arrives, whether it is a safe haven or not. In the Vietnamese context, the term suggests someone in transition, from what was previously safe towards something unknown, and the reference is to the perilous situation from which the person has fled (Adelman 1982). Someone who has found a refuge is, by definition, is no longer a refugee. Yet the nature of this transition is determined by the refugees themselves.

These former refugees carry with them experiences from past places and cultural identities in tow, while they seemingly manage other aspects of in-betweenness. Perhaps this is because their identity has to have been shaped and constructed, partially, in the discourse of movement - a journey from, and a journey to, home. The objective of arriving and settlement in Canada is not assimilation but rather a cycle of transition. And even with induction into a new way of living with the stripping of a former refugee characteristic, the new status does not equate to the removal of other aspects of who they are.

For this group, liminality is present, emerging from their talk of home. Home is variable, and while it is searched for, redefined, and negotiated, it is located in many places and so the heart also remains in many places. They belong but remain in-between. In some ways, the identity of this group is in association to homes, the plural bases of identity and belonging. As they move continuously through experiences, they redefine themselves, and their place, and maintain liminality in spite of their citizenship and stable settlement, which challenge and resist the notion of fastened anchors and fixed boundaries of identity. In other words, they seem always to be becoming. And one might ask: is such a status common among migrant groups? Or is it the specific conditions – individual, group or structural – that shape belonging, identity and home in very different ways? It would appear so, but that requires further investigation.

6. References

Adelman H., 1982: *Canada and the Indochinese refugees*. Regina: L. A. Weigel Educational Associates.

Allan H., 2007: *Experiences of infertility*. "Nursing Inquiry" 14, 132-9.

Beiser M., 1999: *Strangers at the gate: the 'boat people's' first ten years in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bhabha H., 2004: *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.

Chavez L.R., 1992: *Shadowed lives: undocumented immigrants in American society*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004: *Immigration overview*. The Monitor Spring. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005a: *Recent immigrants in metropolitan areas: Hamilton – a comparative profile based on the 2001 census,* Research Reports. Research and Statistic. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english//pdf/research-stats/2001-hamilton.pdf

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005b: *The Canadian refugee system*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009a: *Canada – refugee claimants present on December 1st by province or territory and urban area. Facts and figures 2008 – immigration overview: permanent and temporary residents*, Research and Statistics. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2008/temporary/24.asp

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009b: *Canada – total entries of refugee claimants by province or territory and urban area. Facts and figures 2008*, Research and Statistics. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2008/temporary/23.asp

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011: *Annual report to parliament on immigration*. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/annual-report2011.pdf

Creswell J. W., 2007: *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Clayton J., 2009: *Thinking spatially: towards an everyday understanding of inter-ethnic relations*. "Social & Cultural Geography", 10, 481-98.

Freidus A., Romero-Daza N., 2009: *The space between*. "Gender, Place and Culture", 16, 683-92.

Hoey B., 2005: *From pi to pie*. "Journal of Contemporary Ethnography", 34, 586-624.

Huang S., Yeoh B., Lam T., 2008 : *Asian transnational families in transition*. "International Migration", 46, 3-13.

Knowles V., 1997: *Strangers at our gates: Canadian immigration and immigration policy, 1540-1997*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

Kymlicka W., 1995: *Multicultural citizenship.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Kymlicka W., 2010: *The rise and fall of multiculturalism*. "International Social Science Journal", 61, 87-112.

Levitt P., Glick–Schiller N., 2004: *Conceptualizing simultaneity*. "International Migration Review", 38, 1002-39.

Espiritu le L., 2003: *Home bound: Filipino American lives across cultures, communities, and countries*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mee K., Wright, S., 2009: *Geographies of belonging*. "Environment and Planning A", 41, 772-9.

Michiyo Y., 2011: *Women, citizenship and migration: the resettlement experience of Vietnamese refugees in Australia and Japan*. Kyoto, Japan: Nakanishiya Shuppan.

Minister of Industry, 2007: *The Vietnamese community in Canada. Profile of ethnic communities in Canada.* Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division. Statistics Canada. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2006002-eng.htm

Muller S., Power E., Suchet-Pearson S., Wright S., Lloyd K., 2009: *"Quarantine matters!": quotidian relationships around quarantine in Australia's northern borderland.* "Environment and Planning A", 41, 780-95.

Naficy H., 2003: *Phobic spaces and liminal panics*; in: E. Shohat, R. Stam (eds.): *Multiculturalism, postcoloniality and transnational media.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP; 203-26.

Rosaldo R., 1993: *Culture and truth: the remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon.

Salamone F.A., 2004: *Encyclopedia of religious rites, rituals, and festivals*. New York: Routledge.

Sargent C., 2006: *Liminal lives*. "American Behavioral Scientist", 50, 9-26.

Stake R., 1995: *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Sun W., 2002: *Leaving China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Teather E. K., 1999: *Embodied geographies: spaces, bodies and rites of passage*. New York: Routledge.

Thorat D., 2010: The great immigration experiment: an exploration of cultural hybridity in white teeth; in: *Exploring Critical Issues Conference Papers*. 3rd Global Conference. http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/thoratpaper.pdf

Trudeau D., 2006: *Politics of belonging in the construction of landscapes*. "Cultural Geographies", 13, 421-33.

Turner V., 1970: *The forest of symbols*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Turner V., 1974: *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Turner V., 1995: *The ritual process*. New York: Aldine.

Dik van Y., 2005: *Hyphened-living*. MA thesis. Auckland University of Technology.

Gennep van A., 2004: *Rites of passage*. London: Routledge.

Waite L., Cook J., 2011: *Belonging among diasporic African communities in the UK*. "Emotion, Space and Society", 4, 238-48.

Waters J., 2009: *Immigration, transnationalism and 'flexible citizenship' in Canada: an examination of the Ong's thesis ten years on*. "Tijdschift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie", 100, 635-45.

Weber D., 1996: *From limen to border*. "American Quarterly", 47, 5225-36.

Williams L., 2006: *Social networks of refugees in the United Kingdom: tradition, tactics and new community spaces*. "Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies", 32, 865-79.

Wood J., 1997: *Vietnamese American place making in Northern Virginia*. "The Geographical Review", 87, 58-72.

Wozniak D., 2009: *Rites of passage and healing efficacy: an ethnographic study of an intimate partner violence intervention*. "Global Public Health", 4, 453-63.

Yeoh B., 2005: *Observations on transnational migration*. "Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies", 31, 409-13.