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Working Paper

The integration of Vietnamese refugees in London and the UK: Fragmentation, complexity, and "in/visibility"

WIDER Working Paper, No. 2018/2

Provided in Cooperation with:

United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

Suggested Citation: Barber, Tamsin (2018) : The integration of Vietnamese refugees in London and the UK: Fragmentation, complexity, and "in/visibility", WIDER Working Paper, No. 2018/2, ISBN 978-92-9256-444-5, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki,
<https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2018/444-5>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/190051>

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WIDER Working Paper 2018/2

The integration of Vietnamese refugees in London and the UK

Fragmentation, complexity, and 'in/visibility'

Tamsin Barber*

January 2018

Abstract: The Vietnamese refugee experience in the UK has been characteristically different from the broader international flows of Vietnamese ‘boat people’ to the West. With no pre-existing Vietnamese community in the UK, largely composed of the rural poor from northern Vietnam, this numerically small community has remained largely invisible in British society. London houses over half of the UK Vietnamese population and the London Vietnamese communities are notoriously heterogeneous, fragmented, and divided according to political ideology, refugee wave, social class, ethnicity, geographical location, and social origins. These factors have translated into differential access to/proximity to local ethnic and co-ethnic labour markets and services, opportunities for self-employment, ethnic and transnational networks, political representation, community organization, public service provision, and belonging. This article explores how these various layers have worked together to produce divergent outcomes for these population fragments across London. Attention is paid to variation across areas of higher population concentration in East London (Lewisham and Hackney) and the more dispersed North and West London populations. In addition to exploring socioeconomic features of integration, this article also reflects upon how the broader social status of Vietnamese refugees in British society has offered both opportunities and constraints for their success.

Keywords: first- and second-generation, intra-ethnic divisions, invisibility UK, Vietnamese communities in London

JEL classification: J15

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank Rachel Gisselquist and participants at the UNU-WIDER workshop on Forced Migration and Inequality for advice and comments on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks also to Hai Nguyen for her assistance with statistical data extraction. Any errors are the responsibility of the author.

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This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER initiative on ‘Forced Migration and Inequality: County- and City-level Factors that Influence Refugee Integration’, which is part of the UNU-WIDER project on ‘[The politics of group-based inequalities—measurement, implications, and possibilities for change](#)’, which is part of a larger research project on ‘[Disadvantaged groups and social mobility](#)’.

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Information and requests: publications@wider.unu.edu

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9256-444-5

Typescript prepared by Gary Smith.

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The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute or the United Nations University, nor the programme/project donors.

1 Introduction

The focus of this article is to understand the factors that have impacted upon the ongoing experience of the Vietnamese refugees and their children in the UK, both in terms of their distinctive forms of disadvantage, inequality, and exclusion, and the strategies and forms of advantage developed among this group in the UK, and London more specifically. It is argued that the different social backgrounds of the UK Vietnamese and their related emerging social networks that have been shaped by the context of reception have formed the key basis for their success and disadvantage in British society. These include: patterns of residential settlement, community formation, access to ethnic employment and to mainstream structures and organizations, forms of visibility, group-identity formation, and society participation. There are significant signs of intergenerational social mobility and socioeconomic success even though the community remains largely silent and invisible. In the following sections, I briefly outline the policy context for the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in Britain before turning to a review of baseline data on the position of the Vietnamese population in the UK and London. A methodological discussion provides the rationale for the focus on London and highlights some methodological issues and challenges pertaining to the availability of data on the community. The main analytical sections will demonstrate how differences and divisions within the Vietnamese population have largely served to perpetuate niche forms of advantage and disadvantage in London, while at the same time rendering the community largely voiceless and invisible today. Three areas of analysis will be explored: labour market experience and employment; community divisions and organizations; and social status in mainstream society.

In 1975, the fall of Saigon marked the end of the America–Vietnam War and led thousands of refugees from Vietnam to flee to countries all over the world. Initially, these were South Vietnamese refugees fleeing in small boats who were rescued by naval ships in the area; the majority of these refugees went to the USA, Canada, Australia, and France. This first exodus of refugees shaped the Western image of the ‘boat people’; and their plight captured the imaginations of the media and had a deep effect on the Western world (Dalglish 1989). However, the refugees arriving in Britain came from a different flow; the majority of these fled from the former North Vietnam and were largely ethnic Chinese fleeing the ethnic cleansing that took place after the Chinese invasion of North Vietnam in 1979. These refugees left in large boats and were hosted in ‘holding camps’ in Hong Kong and other countries in Southeast Asia before coming to the West. Their social composition and refugee experience was distinct from the majority of refugees arriving in other Western nations.

The ‘first wave’ of refugees were largely ethnic Vietnamese from South Vietnam, who faced persecution due to their involvement in the former capitalist regime. The majority of these refugees fled to countries with previous colonial links to Vietnam, including the USA and France. In the initial period following the events of 1975, the USA received 130,000 refugees and France, 9,500 refugees; the UK received only 32 refugees (Dalglish 1989). Very few went to Australia and Canada initially, although their intake increased rapidly soon after.¹ The UK received refugees in quotas from camps in Southeast Asia, and these tended to come from rural and poor areas of northern Vietnam (62 per cent) and were mainly ethnic Chinese (77 per cent) living in Vietnam who fled

¹ Australia initially accepted 539 Vietnamese refugees between 1975 and 1976, although the number rapidly increased to a peak of 12,915 in 1980 (Thomas 2005). In Canada, during the same period, 5,608 refugees were admitted, but between 1979 and 1981 a quota of 60,000 refugees was agreed; by 1985 there were 110,000 Vietnamese refugees in Canada (Besier 1999).

due to the ethnic harassment they suffered after the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (Duke and Marshall 1995).² This contrasted with those arriving in the USA (and Australia, initially), who came largely from South Vietnam and were well educated. This group was often evacuated as political dissidents of the communist state and tended to have strong political links with the US government. It has been noted that the USA and Australia were literally able to ‘hand-pick’ refugees from the professional classes of South Vietnam. This is believed to have contributed to the establishment of more prosperous communities—particularly in California and Sydney (Joly 1989; San Juan 2009). At the time Britain received its first refugees in 1975, the burgeoning Vietnamese refugee communities in the USA and France had already been formed; from the 1920s in France a settled Vietnamese community already existed due to French colonial links with Indochina (Bousquet 1991), and in 1965 in the USA due to US involvement in Vietnam. The lack of an existing Vietnamese community in Britain was an important factor affecting the integration of these refugees in Britain. Here, the Vietnamese became known unequivocally as ‘boat people’ and ‘victims’, a label that was deeply disempowering (Hale 1992; Refugee Action 2003). By contrast to other Vietnamese diaspora communities, the Vietnamese in Britain were not a strongly politicized community, nor did they mobilize around a shared anti-communist political consciousness due to their multifarious and unique reasons for leaving (economic drivers, poverty, and anti-Chinese hostility being key push factors). While the first-generation Australian Vietnamese refugees have been referred to as a key ‘foundational generation’ passing anti-communist ideologies down the generations (Baldassar et al. 2017; also see Valverde 2012 on the US Vietnamese), in the UK the first generation was more divided in its ideology, and so the generational transmission of ideology appears to be more blurred.

Two key host-country factors profoundly shaped the early settlement and future integration of the refugees in the UK. The first was their arrival during a period of economic recession and high unemployment during the 1970s; this had a number of implications for the financial assistance available for resettling refugees, as well as the conditions for integrating them into the UK labour market, which would be key to ensuring their future prospects for integration in the UK. The second was the UK government reception policies to deal with refugees—notably the 1979 dispersal policy that was intended to spread the burden of housing the refugees across the country and to enable better integration within British communities by avoiding ‘ghettoization’ (Robinson and Hale 1989). These factors, in addition to a lack of familiarity/colonial contact between the British and the Vietnamese (and the fact the UK was not the first country of choice for most of the refugees) led to a difficult readjustment period. Their reception and later integration into the UK was also strongly influenced by the multicultural model of Britain, which was based at the time upon the Commonwealth model privileging groups from the ex-colonies over newcomers (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Unlike in Canada, where Vietnamese refugees became beneficiaries of the ‘new state policy’ of multiculturalism that ensured the promotion of different cultures and languages as well as providing resources to enable the active participation of minority groups (Besier 1999), in Britain the ‘multicultural model’ was relatively laissez-faire and viewed more as part of the voluntary arm of the state. This entailed minimal state intervention, reducing government expenditure, and encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own welfare and destiny (see Robinson and Hale 1989). Factors from the side of the Vietnamese refugees included an incompatibility between their skills and those needed in the UK labour market, an interruption to education (as the majority arrived during their early twenties; Lam and Martin 1997), poor language skills and illiteracy, and the transition from their rural backgrounds in

² As relations deteriorated between Vietnam and China, this group found their position increasingly untenable and had restrictions placed upon their movement, their ownership of businesses, and their right to meet in public (Robinson and Hale 1989).

Vietnam to living in towns and cities in the UK. These things have had a relatively enduring impact upon the experience of Vietnamese in Britain up to the current day.

2 Early experiences of reception, dispersal, and resettlement

Responding to UNHCR appeals for countries to accept quotas of refugees for resettlement, the UK accepted around 15,000 refugees (1,500, 1,400, and then 10,000 in 1979, and a further 2,000 in 1989). Alongside family reunion and the Orderly Departure Programme (ODP), this totalled about 24,000 refugees by the early 1990s (Refugee Council 1991). These Vietnamese refugees constituted a ‘special group’ in the eyes of UK policy makers because by comparison with other refugees, they were accepted for asylum before arriving in this country and many came as part of a quota programme specifically designed for them by the international community (Duke and Marshall 1995). Quota refugees were provided with systematic arrangements for reception, while non-quota refugees were left in the care of local authorities. However, the Vietnamese refugees arrived in Britain in three main waves. The first wave (1975–82) saw the arrival of the bulk of refugees—those from the South and then increasingly ethnic Chinese from the North. The second wave (1983–88) represented a steady trickle of a few hundred Vietnamese who arrived every year as boat rescue and family reunion cases, or as part of the ODP (Duke and Marshall 1995). There was no systematic reception arrangement for the refugees during this second wave, which was partly due to the existence of newly established refugee families (from North Vietnam) with whom they could stay or who could help them (Joly 1989; Robinson and Hale 1989). The third wave (1989 onwards) saw a steadier stream of arrivals supplemented by the ‘2,000 quota’, a special programme of 2,000 admissions. These came mainly via camps in Hong Kong and included some admissions on ‘self-sufficiency’ and humanitarian grounds (Hitchcox 1988). The bulk of them, up to the end of 1992, were family reunion cases joining relatives already settled in Britain (Duke and Marshall 1995). Although the majority of the Vietnamese were ‘programme’ or ‘quota’ refugees, meaning that their immigration status had been granted overseas, and after arrival in the UK they were assisted through a resettlement programme comprising housing and social welfare support (IPPR 2007), in practice the delivery of the programme was not as coherent as planned. According to Robinson and Hale (1989), refugees were housed in reception camps for a maximum of three months; after that, services and support were delegated to local charities and voluntary groups. As already alluded to, the initial experiences of the refugees were structured largely according to the context of their arrival in the late 1970s at a time of high unemployment and shifts in public policy. While the first wave of arrivals (1975–82) was initially housed in reception centres funded by the government and run by voluntary agencies (British Council for Aid for Refugees, Save the Children Fund, and the Ockenden Venture), after the bulk of the quota of 10,000 had arrived these reception centres were phased out. This decision meant the majority of refugees—those from the two later waves—were unsupported. This had an important impact as these refugees came from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds and were more likely to have spent periods of time in refugee holding camps in Hong Kong, which had damaging psychological and health effects (Hitchcox 1988).³ The combination of these factors had a detrimental effect on how well this group was able to adjust to their new lives in Britain (Refugee Action 2003).

Refugees arriving under these later waves were also encouraged to stay with relatives living in the UK, rather than moving through the reception centres. However, as they were expected to make their own arrangements, this often meant they missed out on key services and opportunities to

³ These camps were introduced in 1982 as a policy of ‘humane deterrence’ to discourage other Vietnamese from going to Hong Kong (Hitchcox 1988).

adapt to British society (Refugee Action 2003; Robinson and Hale 1989). Retrospective research found that reception centres offered certain advantages in relation to later resettlement, including: language courses, medical help, opportunities to learn about life in the UK, advice about practicalities of life in the UK, arrangement of subsequent accommodation, enrolment of children in local schools, and childcare (Duke and Marshall 1995; Lam and Martin 1997; Robinson 1992). As a consequence, a large majority of the Vietnamese refugees who were already the most disadvantaged became further disadvantaged through this change in policy.

The geographical dispersal of the refugees under the 1979 dispersal policy played an important role in their reception experience (Robinson 1985). The broader policy aimed at integrating refugees into society by giving them access to mainstream welfare programmes, and regular employment and housing was believed to be the key. The dispersal policy sought to avoid a concentration of Vietnamese communities by restricting household clusters to between four and ten households (Joly 1989). However, the wisdom of the policy was widely challenged by refugee experts, who thought the decision would further fragment an already unsettled people (similar debates also took place in the USA over whether the 'scatter' policy was introduced for the purposes of enabling greater assimilation or for avoiding 'ghettoization' (Rumbaut 1995)). Concerns were raised about the likelihood of cultural isolation and the feasibility of delivering tailored support services and resources within the context of an already strained public service sector. This was especially pertinent given the absence of an established Vietnamese community in Britain from which support could be garnered. The refugees were dispersed widely across rural areas of Britain; as many of the Vietnamese refugees were themselves from rural towns and villages in Vietnam, there was an assumption that they would adapt more easily to a rural context in the UK. However, as these areas were harder hit by the UK recession, this meant finding employment (and thus integration) even more difficult for the refugees (Lam and Martin 1997). As the Vietnamese refugees were so sparsely dispersed (with fewer than 300 refugees in the most densely populated areas of London), providing specialized and tailored services was rendered virtually impossible (Dalglish 1989).

The refugees were generally poorly prepared for life in the UK for a number of reasons, including: lack of transferable skills; low levels of education; limited prior contact with Western civilization; the UK not being their chosen destination; the absence of an established Vietnamese community to support new arrivals; recession and high unemployment on arrival; and significant divisions within the refugee population according to religion, language, and geographical origin (Dalglish 1989). By contrast, in the USA Vietnamese refugees have been found to benefit from the newly reformed Vietnamese communities' networks and resources (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

As a result of the problems discussed above, the dispersal policy was abandoned in 1984, when an overwhelming rate of secondary migration of Vietnamese from isolated locations in Britain to major cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds marked the failure of the policy (Robinson 1985). The Vietnamese regrouped in larger cities, particularly London, where they were eventually able to form small communities and develop interpersonal networks that enabled them to improve their practical, cultural, and social wellbeing (Bell and Clinton 1993; Robinson and Hale 1989; Tomlins et al. 2002). However, a negative outcome of this re-concentration has been that the Vietnamese became increasingly concentrated in poor urban areas where housing was more easily available and affordable (Tomlins et al. 2002). In summary, the 'dispersal' of the Vietnamese refugees led to high levels of isolation, which prompted a secondary migration of the refugees into more concentrated urban pockets in an attempt to improve their situation by drawing upon co-ethnic resources and relationships. However, at the same time many of the issues facing the Vietnamese have not been dispelled.

3 The Vietnamese community in Britain today

Studies conducted 30 years after the arrival of the Vietnamese refugees in Britain have enabled a rudimentary outline of the geographic, demographic, and labour market experiences of the contemporary Vietnamese population. However, significant limitations in the availability of data prevents a full and clear picture of the position of the Vietnamese population in the UK today. Firstly, at an official level there is no 'Vietnamese' category for the purposes of ethnic monitoring in the UK. At best, statistics are collected by country of birth, so while some data pertaining to the first generation are available, data on the UK-born population tend to be incomplete or estimates. In other cases, the Vietnamese are included under the broader 'Chinese Other' or 'Southeast Asia' categories as the numbers for the Vietnamese remain too small to be disaggregated. In the Census, a slightly more complete count of numbers is provided under the option for Vietnamese to 'write in' their ethnicity under the 'Other, please specify' category. Data exist for the Vietnam-born population in some aspects of the Labour Force Survey and the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Notwithstanding these problems, the following statistics and estimates enable some insight into the current community profile.

The Vietnamese population was counted at 60,635 in England and Wales in the last Census, in 2011 (ONS 2011). Although these statistics are based on 'write-ins' (those who wrote their ethnicity as Vietnamese under the 'Other ethnic' category) and are therefore an imprecise count, they do confirm previous estimates from community leaders who placed the population at 55,000–65,000 in Britain (IOM 2006). More recent estimates provided by the UK Vietnamese website VietHome place the community at around 90,000. While current ethnic monitoring procedures preclude counting the exact number of those of Vietnamese origin born in the UK, community organizations have placed estimates of the British-born Vietnamese population at 22,000 in 2005 (IOM 2006). Commonly quoted estimates place Vietnamese international students at around 5,000, but HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency) counted overseas Vietnamese students at 3,995 in 2016 (HESA 2016).⁴ Community estimates placed undocumented migrants at 20,000 (IOM 2006; Sims 2007). The Vietnamese population is thus a numerically small population in the UK and represents roughly 0.1 per cent of the overall UK population of 65,648,100 (ONS 2017). The UK's larger minorities such as Asians (Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani) represented 8 per cent, and Black/African/Caribbean 3 per cent of the overall population at the last Census (ONS 2011).

In terms of geographical location, in line with trends in secondary migration (those relocating to urban conurbations after their initial dispersal), data indicate that the community has continued to re-concentrate in well-defined urban hubs. Data from the 2011 Census show that of the 29,459 people born in Vietnam living in England and Wales, over half (15,337) are living in London. Next come Birmingham (1,479), Manchester (865), Nottingham (405), Leeds (374), Northampton (322), Cambridge (259), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (245), Bristol (220), and Leicester (202) (ONS 2011). While these numbers only reflect UK residents born in Vietnam, an educated guess would be double the amount to take into account the second-generation Vietnamese who are now British citizens and increase the figure by a further one-third to take into account the number of undocumented Vietnamese presently in the UK. Within London, the most current statistics and estimates show that over one-third of the population live in the boroughs of Lewisham, Southwark, and Hackney (IOM 2006; Sims 2007). In terms of the total number of Vietnamese in London (including those born in the UK and undocumented migrants), community sources in

⁴This might be due to HESA counting students by the country of application (rather than birth), and it is known that Vietnamese students may be applying from a third country.

2006 estimated a figure of 35,000–55,000 in London (Sims 2007). Given the difficulties in accessing reliable sources and the impossibility of counting the number of undocumented migrants, a more accurate estimate is difficult to establish. The IOM (2006) provides a breakdown of the estimated populations in those London boroughs where significant numbers of Vietnamese are known to live. They estimate numbers of 3,000–5,500 in the boroughs of Hackney, Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, Lambeth, and Tower Hamlets (in descending order of density). These boroughs span areas of East and Southeast London, which are popular settlement areas for new migrants (Eade 1997).

The IOM (2006) report from which these estimates are derived based these figures largely upon one community activist whom they judged as ‘well informed’. The report authors also note that community sources were preferable to more official sources as they had access to ‘more reliable information’ on the number of families living in certain parts of the country. Given the current Census data indicating that the Vietnamese population doubled between 2001 and 2011, it could be projected that these estimates made in 2006 are likely to have doubled, and even trebled if we take into account numbers of undocumented migrants in the last decade. As will be discussed later in the article, this could be partly due to the recent success of Vietnamese businesses (restaurants and nail salons, in addition to shadow-economy industries such as cannabis farming, which has been a big draw for Vietnamese migrants since the early 2000s).

The labour market and socioeconomic position of the Vietnamese in Britain is difficult to assess in its entirety due to lack of available statistics on the Vietnamese and the difficulty in finding disaggregated statistics. Nevertheless, the available data suggest a mixed picture. According to the Labour Force Survey data in the first quarter of 2016, among the Vietnam-born residents (31,567) 42.5 per cent were employed, 7.4 per cent unemployed, and 39.8 per cent inactive (ONS 2017). This compares to the 2011 UK national average employment rate of 70.4 per cent, unemployment rate of 8.1 per cent, and an inactivity rate of 23.3 per cent (ONS 2011). The low levels of employment and high levels of inactivity can be explained by the fact that the Vietnam-born population includes the first generation of refugees who were not employed in previous estimates who have now reached retirement age. Unemployment rates have historically been high and in the London borough of Lewisham (the most concentrated Vietnamese area) their unemployment rate had been estimated to be as high as 60 per cent (Tu 2000). This trend for the Vietnamese appears to have remained relatively stagnant, reflecting a similar rate in 2001 of 40 per cent (ONS 2001). Evidence also shows that high unemployment rates have been persistent; for example, Spence’s (2005) interrogation of the Labour Force Survey showed that 23.5 per cent of Vietnamese migrants between the ages of 16 and 64 years were unemployed. This trend is seen as a hangover from high levels of unemployment on entry to the UK, and lack of relevant educational qualifications, lack of English-language skills, and those needed in the labour market (Lam and Martin 1997). Another explanation is that this is an outcome of the dispersal policy through which many refugees were sent to rural areas in the UK that experienced higher than average levels of unemployment (Robinson and Hale 1989). There has also been evidence of considerable labour market segregation. A greater proportion of persons born in Vietnam (27.5 per cent) were employed in the hotel and catering industry, representing a greater proportion than any other national group (Spence 2005). This statistic also falls in line with more recent data on the broader sector average for Southeast Asians, who tend to be overrepresented in hotel and catering industries (31.9 per cent) compared to the national average (18.5 per cent) (SOPEMI 2012: 64). Vuong (2006) has argued that as a consequence of experiencing high unemployment levels, the Vietnamese tended to enter the UK service sectors, where they are most likely to succeed in ensuring a secure living.

In terms of education, among the first generation there appears to be a shift. In the early 1990s estimates placed 76 per cent of the population as holding an educational level below secondary school level (Hale 1992: 279); in the early 2000s only 18.7 per cent of the Vietnam-born population

in London possessed higher-level qualifications (which was 15 per cent below the London average) (Spence 2005). In the period January–March 2017 the Labour Force Survey reported 22 per cent as being in higher education, 12.7 per cent GCE A-level or equivalent, 13.8 per cent Other qualification, and 51.4 per cent no education among the Vietnam-born population (including newer arrivals) (ONS 2017). While national-level data on education levels of the second- and third-generation Vietnamese born in Britain are unavailable, local-level educational indicators show high levels of educational attainment. Data from two London local authorities, Lambeth and Southwark, at the heart of the Vietnamese community in the UK indicate that Vietnamese and Chinese children consistently outperform all other ethnic groups (London Borough of Lambeth and London Borough of Southwark, in Rutter 2006). Around 47 per cent of Vietnamese pupils in Southwark gained five Grade A*–C grades at GCSE in 2001,⁵ compared with 34 per cent of white pupils (Rutter 2006: 68). This may be understood as a great success, given the low levels of education and lack of relevant educational qualifications and lack of English-language skills of their parents. Lam and Martin (1997) have argued that the strong cultural values of prioritizing education may have had a large impact upon attitudes to their education. With these factors in mind, after briefly discussing the methodology, the remainder of this article will analyse qualitative data on the experiences of the first- and second-generation Vietnamese in London.

4 Methodology

While data and research on the Vietnamese population in Britain remains very sparse, research on the Vietnamese outside of London remains virtually non-existent and nearly all the available research data and literature focus upon the London population. Due to this, this article uses the London-based population as the focus of the case study. As data on the Vietnamese disaggregated at the sub-London level are also not available (for example, the study is reliant upon estimates of the numbers of Vietnamese residents in various London boroughs), this article will instead attempt to give a picture of comparative sub-groups by drawing upon insights from the qualitative data which help to demarcate neighbourhood configurations and differences, networks and affiliations according to social backgrounds and ties. This report will focus upon two populations within London to explore how these various layers have worked together to produce divergent outcomes. First, the more highly concentrated Vietnamese area in East London (Lewisham and Hackney) will form the first local-level unit of analysis; and, second, the more dispersed pockets of Vietnamese refugees across North and West London will form the second unit of analysis. These two groups have been chosen for a few reasons. First, due to the over-representation of Vietnamese communities in the city of London. Second, London is the most established community and there are very few available data and literature about Vietnamese communities in other major cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, or Leeds. Third, London provides a useful microcosm of the different groups of Vietnamese and their business endeavours and community group organizations.

The material used in this article is largely drawn from primary research data. Specifically, these are qualitative in-depth interviews collected with first- and second-generation Vietnamese in London during the period 2005–09 in addition to ongoing research insights and involvement since then (see Barber 2015a). This relates to in-depth biographical interviews with 30 second-generation

⁵ However, London local authority data showed significant differences between girls' and boys' achievement at 14 and 16 years, with Vietnamese and Chinese girls securing far better test and examination results (an average gap of 23 per cent) (see Rutter 2006). It is argued that this gender gap may be caused by the 'laddish' behaviour of adolescent Vietnamese and Chinese boys and their unwillingness to be identified as 'boffins' (Archer and Francis 2007).

Vietnamese and semi-structured interviews with six community leaders and workers, as well as participant observation, informal conversations, and attendance at a range of community events based around East and Southeast London. This research focuses more strongly on the experience of the second generation; primary data on the first-generation is supplemented with secondary data where appropriate and relevant. It should be re-emphasized that even within London, gaining a holistic understanding of the Vietnamese community is not possible due to gaps in the data; this study goes some way to establishing their experiences more fully.

5 Labour market experience

In this section, I analyse the differing experiences of the Vietnamese communities in the UK labour market. I explore the different experiences of the northern and southern Vietnamese in the labour market, showing how those from northern Vietnamese backgrounds (the majority) have tended to be located in small businesses in ethnic niche economies such as the nail industry, while those from southern Vietnamese backgrounds where the educational backgrounds have traditionally been stronger have tended to occupy higher labour market positions. The main ethnic niche industry is the ‘Vietnamese nail salon’, which has been heralded as evidence of a distinct business advantage among the northern Vietnamese, but it has also presented a dominant negative public image drawing unwanted attention to claims of human trafficking, money laundering, and illegal migration. I will also explore how the second generation have seen higher levels of educational success and labour market integration; however, the social class differences of their parents have a visible effect upon their labour market outcomes and opportunities. Other labour market experiences involving the negotiation of parental versus societal expectations have involved deeper questions of ethnic identity negotiation.

5.1 London Vietnamese refugee labour market insertion

As a consequence of the high unemployment rate and incompatibility between the work skills and experience and those required for the British employment market, the Vietnamese refugees entered into sectors where they were most likely to succeed in making a secure living—predominantly in the service sector through catering and the clothing industry (Vuong 2006); as Wilkins (2016) has shown, these were also closely linked to the availability of housing in London. According to Vuong (2006),⁶ a Vietnamese community business-link coordinator, in the early 1980s the majority of Vietnamese women entered into home-based garment-making, which was poorly paid but convenient, enabling women to combine their work with household responsibilities (care of elderly or young family members), while men were involved in distribution of garments. In the late 1980s, catering in Chinese restaurants (evidence of the relationship between the Vietnamese and Chinese in Britain) was the main employment and men in particular gained new skills and became chefs and dim sum chefs in Chinese restaurants.⁷ The money earned in the clothing industry was invested into new businesses, such as takeaways and home-made products tailored to the needs of the community. In the 1980s, as unemployment remained high, Vietnamese women developed new skills in garment-making, and new businesses including private

⁶ This information comes from conference proceedings of the conference ‘25 years of Vietnamese in the UK’, held at London Metropolitan University, July 2006. The author has been the key Vietnamese business-link coordinator for many years and has extensive knowledge and contacts among the Vietnamese community.

⁷ While there is no systematic evidence of the role of ethnicity here (i.e. whether the ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were more able to secure this work due to cultural similarities or linguistic competences), a study in Canada found that this was an important factor in Vietnamese employment in Chinese restaurants in the early years (Johnson 1988).

factories and distribution sub-networks developed. The Vietnamese remained in similar areas of employment during the 1990s, although the trend in self-employment increased, spanning garment manufacture, catering, grocery stores, and the development of travel agencies based on the ethnic community's needs. The late 1990s saw employment in nail bars—emerging from hair salons (and developed through family links in the USA, from where products and techniques are imported)—off licences, home-delivery catering, pubs, and snooker clubs. More new businesses developed in the early 2000s, including consultancy services (mortgage, insurance, business consultancy, business transfer, legal, translation, childminding, housekeeping), brokers and agents, e-commerce, business networks, hotels, and export (heavy plant and equipment to Vietnam) and import (seafood, furniture, and handicrafts from Vietnam) (Vuong 2006). A mapping study conducted by Bagwell et al. (2003) identified 284 Vietnamese businesses in Greater London, although those operating in the informal economy were believed to account for a further 300–400 businesses (Bagwell et al. 2003).

Between 2000 and 2005 the nail industry became the fastest-growing UK Vietnamese business sector, accounting for over half of all Vietnamese businesses in London (Bagwell 2006). There are no official figures available on the size and nature of the nail industry, but in 2017 HABIA counted 1,512 nail bars/technicians (HABIA 2017) and in 2016 the professional nail industry was estimated as being worth £153 million by Kantar (Douglas 2016). The nail and catering industries are estimated to be the largest employment sectors of Vietnamese workers, who have been able to corner the market in low-price products (Bagwell 2006; Vuong 2006). Unlike the previous Vietnamese sectors discussed above, which catered largely to the Vietnamese local ethnic labour market niche, Vietnamese nail salons cater mainly to mainstream society, and this suggests an improvement on the previous generations of Vietnamese businesses that generally served only the Vietnamese ethnic community. Inspiration for the boom in the British nail industry is understood as emerging from the Vietnamese communities in the USA, where the industry was already well established (Eckstein and Nguyen 2011). Bagwell (2008) argues that ‘the willingness of the Vietnamese to work long hours for low wages and the use of a faster, more automated process enabled them to provide the service more quickly and cheaply than traditional beauty parlours—making it affordable to a larger customer base’ (Bagwell 2008; 385; also see Eckstein and Nguyen 2011). The low entry costs of the nail sector are also seen as an enabling factor for the Vietnamese (Bagwell 2008). Vietnamese nail shops have been considered attractive business propositions, and the sector has also attracted new undocumented migrants who, according to Bagwell (2008: 385), ‘have been able to operate on an informal basis from tables in hairdressing salons’. A study by the Runnymede Trust (Sims 2007) estimated there were as many as 20,000 undocumented migrants living in the UK, although more recent estimates put the number much higher at 71,000 undocumented Vietnamese manicurists (Arbuthnott 2013), and many are believed to work in nail bars. Overwhelming anecdotal evidence has confirmed that often nail salons and Vietnamese restaurants are ‘waiting posts’ for migrants entering cannabis farming work. In recent years, there has been something of a media ‘moral panic’ about illegal Vietnamese migrants to the UK, with frequent news headlines linking illegal migration with nail salons and cannabis farming; another more recent concern has been human trafficking and nail shops acting as a front for this. In particular, there is a concern around ‘trafficked children’. In many media discussions there has been a conflation between human trafficking and illegal migration, and generally the issue has been at the forefront of the public image of the Vietnamese in the UK.

From the perspective of the broader community, the association between the Vietnamese and the nail industry has brought both advantages and disadvantages in terms of their image and position in British society. First, in terms of employment and business success this is now the main industry associated with the Vietnamese and they have achieved a market monopoly (Bagwell 2006). Second, it has become the focus of negative attention from the police and the British press.

It has been argued that the labour market trajectories of the Vietnamese in London are closely tied to traditional gender roles and aspirations for family employment (Bagwell 2008; Hitchcock and Wesner 2009),⁸ and self-employment has played a central role in creating employment for all family members in addition to making use of children's labour and their language skills. This trend is common among migrant groups more generally (Ram et al. 2008), particularly in relation to UK Chinese family businesses (Song 1999). While in the USA nail shops tended to be run by Vietnamese from the more business-oriented South, in the UK nail shop ownership has a different profile, with many of the older nail shop owners being the less-educated refugees from the 1980s from rural areas of North Vietnam who had few other skills or qualifications relevant to the UK job market and previously worked in the UK textile or catering industries (Bagwell 2008). In relation to the northern Vietnamese in the UK, Hitchcock and Wesner (2009) identified distinctive 'trusted networks' which they argue are based on 'the extended family and friends, and loyalty to one's home region', which give them a competitive advantage in business. According to these scholars, it is these networks that have enabled their success in key areas of self-employment. This explanation, however, overlooks important structural disadvantages that the Vietnamese have faced in the mainstream labour market. An alternative reading of this situation might be that these networks have developed out of necessity (a lack of alternative sources of employment) and an avoidance of racism, leading to the Vietnamese (like other ethnic groups) entering into self-employment and become over-concentrated in a few key sectors of the economy. Breaking out into mainstream markets and moving into higher value-added markets has generally been hindered by the difficulties many ethnic minority businesses face in accessing sufficient capital and suitable premises (Ram et al. 2008). Evidence for this latter argument can be found in the sections below, which illustrate experiences of structural barriers in labour market mobility and community access to mainstream services and support. I suggest that it is a combination of these factors that best explains the labour market integration of the Vietnamese in London.

5.2 Labour market experiences among the second generation

Given the context above for the first generation, general understandings of the trend for employment among the second generation is that they are largely doing better than their parents. In discussion with community informants, a shared consensus was that while the younger generation are seen to be doing well, their confidence is undermined by a lack of awareness of their culture and country, which is perpetuated by lack of awareness in British society, meaning they are not as 'vocal' as other minorities. This was evidenced by the fact that many second-generation Vietnamese are entering more conventional occupations such as business, accountancy, and information technology. There is a desire among community leaders for the younger generation to expand into other sectors and to take up more political and artistic professions. Differences within the Vietnamese population relating to cultural, linguistic, and sometimes political differences also appear to lead to important socioeconomic outcomes for their children. For example, differences in attitudes, occupations, and aspirations are believed to be prevalent between children of southern and northern Vietnamese refugees, with the southern Vietnamese culturally having a strong tradition of education means their children tend to become professionals (doctors/accountants/lawyers). The northern Vietnamese, coming generally from a less-educated background, are more likely to go straight to work rather than into higher education, and therefore more of them can be seen in businesses such as restaurants and manual work. Ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese were traditionally strong entrepreneurs in Vietnam and have tended to succeed by running small businesses in London (a similar trend was found in Canada; see Johnson 1988).

⁸ However, this is something that Hitchcock and Wesner (2009) identified as potentially undermining the future of their business success as women and the second generation are likely to aspire to other employment arrangements.

However, Chinese-Vietnamese children are known to be the largest in number to attend Saturday language schools due to a stronger tradition of education among Chinese-Vietnamese families. Discussions with community informants also indicate that although there are considerable generational differences, Vietnamese children tend to feel a great sense of loyalty to their family and a great sense of indebtedness towards their parents, which manifests itself in the need to achieve in terms of their occupation as something that would not only elevate their own position but also that of their parents. Parents, in turn, are viewed as having traditional expectations of what their children should do, which is based on respected professions in Vietnam: medicine, law, accountancy, and business (the latter for girls in particular). However, it is felt that the younger generation predominantly go into jobs that are valued in British society rather than those preferred by their parents, as will be explored below.

During in-depth interviews with 30 young second-generation Vietnamese Londoners, my research found only three participants who worked full-time in Vietnamese businesses. Two females in their twenties worked in nail salons and one younger male worked in his parents' supermarket. Other participants often worked part-time in the family business, commonly in their parents' restaurant, but these participants were also studying for undergraduate or postgraduate degrees and intended to pursue distinctive careers. Other participants were employed in the following sectors: finance and banking (3), publishing (2), the music industry (1), estate agency (1), IT and design (2), local government (1), sales (1), and self-employed (2). University students (6) studied the following subjects: law, anthropology, business, computer science, biology, and medicine. Although this is not a representative sample, sampling of this study included an attempt to include participants from northern and southern Vietnamese backgrounds, ethnic Chinese and ethnic Vietnamese, and those from different parts of London. Nearly all of the second-generation participants had gone into 'mainstream' traditional occupations and only a minority continued in the family business; of the latter, there was a reluctance to remain in these businesses due to the associated connotations and the perceived lack of occupational mobility. In the accounts of these nail workers, a distinctive theme was their heightened awareness of the power dynamics at play both within the community and in relation to mainstream society:

I am a nail technician as most Vietnamese are [laughs]. I fall under that bracket you know, 'the job for the Vietnamese' sort of thing but I want to get out of that. I am not proud of it, and I think if you want to ask a lot of Chinese people who are in Chinese takeaways you know they probably won't be proud of it either. It is just like the majority of what you find is that the workers in nail bars are like new immigrants ... so I am not particularly proud of myself falling into this bracket because I actually feel like I could do more.

(Kim Ly, 25, northern Vietnamese, nail worker, Southeast London)

London is quite rough and there is lots and lots of competition from other salons, there is a lot of violence and abusive behaviour, I'm not up to that. So I like to work outside of London, you know where there is no competition and you ... respect your ... there is no abusive behaviour. You are paid to work, you are not paid to listen to abuse.

(Mary, 27, northern Vietnamese, nail worker, East London)

Attributing nail salon work as a devalued sector for the second generation, as 'job(s) for new immigrants', both Mary and Kim Ly also indicate elsewhere in their accounts the role of hierarchy and patriarchy in the industry and the need to navigate this by having to accept first-generation male authority and cut-throat competition in the industry, which sometimes leads to 'abusive

behaviour'. This confirms existing research that has found that second-generation business owners⁹ have more individualistic values and struggle to work with older first-generation family members due to the obligation to treat them with greater respect (Bagwell 2006). However, as second-generation workers with privileged access to mainstream society and English-language skills, they perceived their position to be preferable to that of new migrant workers. The concerns indicated by these participants about working in the nail salons also have some broader foundation, as argued by Bagwell (2006): while second-generation Vietnamese have access to a wider range of networks than the first generation or new arrivals, a sense of obligation towards the family, often coupled with the need for family support with the business, mean the second-generation are still strongly embedded in family and community networks. Other research has also noted the long hours worked (10–12 hours a day, seven days per week), leaving little time to develop other contacts outside the existing family and social networks (Bagwell 2006: 65; Wilkins 2016).

Among second-generation participants, it was notable that those coming from southern Vietnamese families have an increased active engagement with international Vietnamese networks, which bring a greater knowledge of the diaspora and tend to build stronger diasporic networks with pre-existing communities in the USA, Canada, and France. By contrast, northern Vietnamese networks tend to be more locally based in London and revolve around businesses and work relations. However, there is evidence that northern Vietnamese business networks are also forging transnational networks. For example, Mary (northern Vietnamese) found the role of the transatlantic Vietnamese nail industry to be central during her own professional development, visiting her cousins who work in the nail industry in the Vietnamese communities in New Orleans.

5.3 Professional experience among second-generation southern Vietnamese

Among children of the southern Vietnamese, a different set of concerns were presented that related to issues of cultural identity, where a perceived 'erosion' of cultural identities made them feel caught in a bind between, on the one hand, a lack of a sense of belonging to a Vietnamese community and, on the other hand, a lack of openness in mainstream institutions to expression of ethnic difference. Southern Vietnamese participants frequently referred to how the 'trusted networks' among the northern Vietnamese played out in their sense of exclusion from a range of social networks in the community, which they felt were dominated by northern Vietnamese. This is illustrated by Hoa, a Vietnamese community organization worker:

They [North Vietnamese] have friends, relatives, it is their business they have a lot of friends, relatives and umm a lot of friends helping around. But in the South, hardly any... They [North Vietnamese] know people through people and 'cos like they have a lot of relatives here, a lot of cousins and the cousin knows friends of friends, of friends and more friends so ... they are very good in communication. Yes, very good! That is why they will have a good network! You know you are helping around each other, and they will stand up for each other ... yeah! But we [southerners] don't have that.

(Hoa, 25, southern Vietnamese, community worker, Southeast London)

Hoa notes the importance of extended family and other non-kin networks for mutual support in both business/employment and in social/emotional matters. She feels at a disadvantage because she has very few extended family members in the UK and struggles to develop close friendships with other Vietnamese. A further aspect of the social divisions is also experienced by Hoa as a

⁹ And new migrants.

barrier to her local Vietnamese community. Hoa describes feeling not able to belong fully to ‘the community’ because of the combination of her Chinese and southern Vietnamese origins. Being Chinese-Vietnamese and from southern Vietnam is experienced as affecting her inclusion among particular community networks and her sense of belonging, which has implications for her business connections, as she explains:

because I wasn’t born in Vietnam but because my great grandparents are Chinese, they are Chinese so they [Vietnamese] took me as Chinese-Vietnamese so you know ‘okay so you are different’ so there is no long relationship or communication there ... you just have that natural instinct, you just have this view and you can sense it. There is a barrier between me and them.

(Hoa, 25, southern Vietnamese, community worker, Southeast London)

In other employment sectors, a ‘whitening’ processes was experienced among the second-generation southern Vietnamese which related to class and ethnic processes. For example, one participant, Duc, who works as a City banker explains the process by which he had to adopt the norms and values of ‘corporate England’ and marginalize his Vietnamese background in order to succeed:

I guess I have already conformed at a young age, umm, you know, when I had set my sights on working in that kind of environment that I had already conformed to that, so, you know, it wasn’t a case of ‘I had to readjust myself’. So by then I’d already sort of had the same sort of thoughts and feelings, the same kind of ambition, the same kind of ideals, ideology as the people, you know, who were recruiting. So it wasn’t so much for me ... you know? I’d already conformed. Yeah?

(Duc, male, southern Vietnamese, 30, banking executive, North London)

Having already conformed to the ‘white’ world of banking, Duc is nevertheless critical of what he sees as a kind of ethnic tokenism operating in the industry whereby white middle-class values are dominant and expected to be held by everyone, even if you look different and represent ‘diversity’:

I felt sorry for people who didn’t, you know, ‘fit their mould’, you know, working now for the last few years I find that the whole ethnic diversity, ethnic sort of quotas which, you know, every institution in the financial ... you know, ‘oh yes we are ethnically this...’ it seems like ‘yes you are but as long as the people fit your mould’, so you are not likely to go and hire someone who, you know, went to a less prestigious institution and someone with very poor GCSE or A level grades, umm. You will hire an ethnic person if they went to a British institution, if they had good grades, they had the same sort of thoughts and feelings etc. It is just you are looking for someone who are like yourselves, but are not white—that is your ethnic quota!

(Duc)

Duc’s criticism of the practices within the industry is revealing of his own position within it, as while he was able to pass as middle-class and was seen as fitting in, he also notes how he did not have the option to express his cultural background more openly. In this case, Duc’s narrative might be understood as a negotiation of the ‘split identity’ position noted by Sims (2007) as ‘yellow on

the outside and white on the inside', as he only partially belongs through the virtue of being easily culturally assimilable.

There has been some evidence that the Vietnamese migrants have experienced a generational change with regard to their core values, which may have influenced the labour market trajectories of the second generation. Hitchcock and Wesner (2009) found the younger generation to be more individualistic, less collectivistic, and less committed to their traditional Vietnamese values than earlier generations. One suggestion could be that this has enabled them to more easily move away from the family business and enter into mainstream occupations. Although the younger generation of Vietnamese may have adopted selected values of the majority society, notably a move away from the family as the primary economic unit, this does not necessarily mean they have abandoned their Vietnamese cultural heritage. Hitchcock and Wesner (2009) make the point that the second generation 'prefers to adapt quickly', and quote one of their interviewees as saying: 'What I wanted most as [a] child was to be like the others, to speak like them, to dress the same and to make friends. Only later in life I realised that my Vietnamese background gave me a kind of special touch, something individual' (second-generation businessman, quoted in Hitchcock and Wesner 2009).

In summary, in the area of employment and the labour market there has been a mixed picture according to the northern and southern Vietnamese, social class origins, and by industry. Self-employment has been seen to be dominated more by the northern Vietnamese, who have cornered the market in the niche economy of the nail business which has been occupied largely by the first generation and new migrants, and to a more limited extent by the second generation. It has been argued that the Vietnamese have experienced limited support and service provision by enterprise-support services (Bagwell 2006), and that the success of the nail salons and their family business model has prevented them from taking risks to expand outside the sector. In order to improve social inclusion and prevent further entrenchment into Vietnamese-dominated sectors and a levelling off of these businesses, services are needed to help encourage 'break out' and diversification to avoid ethnic concentration of businesses to facilitate the start-up and development of a more diverse range of successful businesses in inner-city areas.

While the nail and restaurant sectors have offered important contributions to the economic life and positive visibility of the community in London, this has also represented somewhat of a 'mixed blessing' through the accompanied media attention regarding claims of links to human trafficking, money laundering, and illegal immigrants. In the area of the mainstream labour market, while the second generation of all backgrounds are largely branching out into a range of occupations, those at the top of the occupational ladder have tended to come from southern Vietnamese backgrounds, where the importance placed on education is historically greater, and the families come from professional classes and do not necessarily have the experience of opening businesses nor the local networks through which to sustain them. Those from southern Vietnamese families often feel even more disconnected from the community through not being part of these networks. In summary, this section has shown that a combination of labour market successes and limitations contribute to the position of the Vietnamese in London.

6 Community divisions and organization in London

The contemporary configuration of the Vietnamese communities in London are understood both officially and unofficially as being divided into four main social groups that correspond roughly to initial arrival characteristics; refugees from the former South Vietnam, refugees from the former North Vietnam, new undocumented economic migrants from northern and central Vietnam, and

international students (see IOM 2006). The northern Vietnamese have tended to have more contact with Vietnam in recent years due to their less politicized positioning in relation to the Vietnamese government (as economic refugees and fleeing ethnic persecution for the ethnic Chinese, rather than straightforwardly political refugees), while the southern Vietnamese tended to have more contacts in the international diaspora, including a range of transnational organizations and networks due to their more critical stance towards the Vietnamese government, as also found elsewhere in the diaspora (Lieu 2011; Viviani 1996). These subdivisions have had continued relevance among the first generation (James 2011) as well as the second generation (Barber 2015a). This has had implications for those born in Britain; notably, the children of northern Vietnamese parents who have had more contact with the London community have often recounted a more acute sense of exclusion and lack of belonging among the London Vietnamese communities due to their limited connection to and knowledge of Vietnam, including limited access to the cultural heritage and language. Meanwhile, those from southern Vietnamese families tended to have a more politicized identity and looked to international (anti-communist) diaspora organizations in the USA, Australia, and France (Barber 2015a). These issues of internal divisions and fragmentation, have shaped possibilities for the development of community solidarity, infrastructure to enable engagement with public and mainstream organizations to secure resources and support, as well as the related impact upon public visibility and group-identity formation. As is argued below, these factors have contributed to ongoing inequalities experienced by the Vietnamese in Britain in relation to full social and political participation.

6.1 Fragmentation and ‘community cohesion’

In addition to the social differences within the Vietnamese population in London outlined above, the communities have also geographically scattered across London boroughs, forming seven distinct community ‘hubs’ in Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich, Hammersmith, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Peckham. Community leaders in these areas have described these sub-communities as relatively self-contained; one informant noted that members were ‘unlikely to network across other hubs to attend events or use services provided by others unless it is for a specific occasion such as Mid-Autumn Festival or lunar New Year’ (community youth arts worker, Lewisham). The development of these separate hubs is thought to have endured as a legacy of council housing provision by particular boroughs during the 1980s (Robinson 1992; Tomlins et al. 2002). It has been suggested by community leaders that the availability of housing and personal economic constraints are still the main determinant of housing patterns rather than being based on kin ties or solidarity. Over the years since ‘secondary migration’ (Robinson and Hale 1989), family members and those coming from the same villages in Vietnam are known to have applied to live near each other to form very small clusters of two or three households, but the majority of the Vietnamese population in London live among a range of other Vietnamese, forming networks with those from a similar background in Vietnam (community leaders 1, 2, and 3). A study by Tomlins et al. (2002) that explored the housing issues of the Vietnamese population in their area of greatest concentration—the areas of East and Southeast London (Lambeth, Greenwich, Tower Hamlets, and Newham)—found the main reasons given by the Vietnamese-born participants for moving were proximity to friends, relatives, and other Vietnamese who shared common customs, thoughts, and lifestyles, as well as to share in facilities. Rather than these choices being made out of a sense of identity or kinship, the authors found these choices were made because they offered a sense of ‘belonging’ and provided a more definable social role for the refugees. Haswell (1999) also showed Vietnamese have attempted to avoid high levels of racial harassment by seeking protection in more ethnically concentrated areas. These experiences have been central to the way in which the community has been restructured.

Combined with the geographically fragmented nature of the community, sociopolitical difference and divisions characterize the London Vietnamese population. This was understood largely in

terms of those from northern and southern Vietnam, but also between ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese (and new migrants and international students, to be discussed in later sections). However, rather than being divided geographically across the neighbourhood hubs, these groups live among one another but tend to use separate networks and different services (also see Tomlins et al. 2002). This ‘separateness’ of social networks is explained by one community worker:

When I first came [in the early 1980s] it was quite divided between North and the South, and Chinese and Vietnamese, and now it is less than before, but still like the Chinese are setting up their own groups and the Vietnamese the same ... and sometimes you know they don't like dealing with the South [Vietnamese], you know they see the South [Vietnamese] more dominating, because they are more educated when they come in here. The majority of the South [Vietnamese] will be more educated than the North [Vietnamese], so sometimes I feel quite confused really, for me, my work, because myself I very much identify myself and my identity as combined—Chinese and Vietnamese.’

(Female, mid-forties, community arts youth worker, Chinese-Vietnamese,
Lewisham, 2007)

While it was generally acknowledged that it is important for these sub-groups to have groups and services tailored towards their particular and specific backgrounds, there were also concerns over missing out on overall opportunities across the community to share advice and facilities ranging from cultural events, wisdom, and support in applying for government funding and fundraising for particular community causes. As another community worker explains in relation to the elderly population users of the community centre where he works, as well as the youth groups he has been involved in:

There is a funny feeling between the old generation. It just so happened that the young, the South people tend to stick together with the South and the North tend to stick together with the North, there has never been an agenda of separating the two or rejecting the other, it just so happens to be that way because, maybe our parents were that way.

(Male, 34, community worker, southern Vietnamese)

This sort of sentiment can be problematic for cross-community building and for accessing and sharing funding and developing a ‘cohesive community’ (also see James 2011). These differences have presented a challenge for community workers attempting to find ways to improve the situation of the first generation, especially as the Vietnamese are no longer a priority for government funding—meaning that services have to cater for all. Community leaders also spoke about having to deploy a ‘high level of sensitivity’ in order to try to bring these different elements together. While many of the views of the first-generation community leaders tended to be in consensus with one another, it was also possible to see differences in attitudes according to their own ethnic and social backgrounds. The ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese were perceived by ethnic Vietnamese informants as different, and as differentiating themselves from other Vietnamese and often preferring more Chinese-oriented events or Chinese-Vietnamese-specific events in particular. One Chinese-Vietnamese informant, however, expressed this in a more complex way, suggesting that these differences are too often over-emphasized by the ethnic Vietnamese. She explained that she feels she is often unfairly criticized for being ‘too Chinese’ in the activities she arranges for the community when in fact due to the scarcity of Vietnamese products in the UK she is often forced to use Chinese resources such as artists, music, and other materials. She refers

to the synthetic nature of constructing Vietnamese culture according to what is available. She was less clear about the differences between ethnic Chinese compared to ethnic Vietnamese, but spoke about the increasing mixture of the two. For her, while ethnic Chinese may sometimes attend Hong Kong Chinese events held in their area, they do not feel they belong, and in reality there are more differences than similarities. From a practical perspective, this community worker commented that it was ‘very difficult to please everyone in the Vietnamese community, and cater for all the differences’. It is based upon these formations that I have noted the need to use the term ‘Vietnamese community’ critically to acknowledge the problem of referring to any notion of a cohesive community (Barber 2015a); likewise, James (2011) has used the term ‘Vietnamese communities’ to acknowledge the plurality of community groups among the London Vietnamese.

A range of issues were raised by community leaders, who explain how these groups have remained rather solidified through a range of official and cultural processes. This solidification of subgroups is likely to lead to a range of different access to resources and outcomes and has a range of impacts upon the socioeconomic chances and opportunities of the Vietnamese populations. The issues of community organizations, funding, and developing a ‘cohesive community’ were understood according to the relationship between the different subgroups and were expressed in different ways by the informants according to their own backgrounds. One recognized varying degrees of ‘hostility’ between groups, but pointed out that among the first generation of refugees there were still some very radically minded members who held extreme anti-communist sentiments—especially those from southern Vietnam. Among Vietnamese from northern Vietnam, a strong ‘the enemy’ sentiment is observed to still exist and is believed to be held by some of the less educated. However, many of the community leaders tend to be of southern Vietnamese origins, which is maybe in keeping with the initial position that the southern Vietnamese were generally better educated and more politically engaged. James (2011) has noted that those who are involved in local communities in leadership structures, planning groups, the implementation of policy, and in provision of services are also involved in transnational activities through networks across the wider Viet Kieu population. These filtered down into the views and experiences of the second generation. However, among the second generation, these were based more on a form of endogamy (rather than hostility) in which there were simply different social networks within which they tended to remain:

I just don’t feel associated to it [Vietnamese community] that much. I wouldn’t mind being part of it more and having a role in it, but then you do feel a lot of the time that it is not close knit enough or like people don’t like they disregard somethings you do like if you do something for the Vietnamese community, a lot of people though ‘oh it is just a scam’ or something like that. Or it is just umm people trying to make money sort of thing. So I haven’t really associated myself with it that much.

(Rachel, 24, MSc student, northern Vietnamese, East London)

... one issue I slightly had with some North Vietnamese people ... they didn’t sort of treat me at all as being Vietnamese they just treated me as being just British and just there [coming from Britain] so ... and it was not as if there was anything really rude in the way that they were doing it, but I was slightly annoyed about the way they were doing it. The guys from North Vietnam they didn’t have any understanding about how the South Vietnamese people came here ... like they had to leave Vietnam ... for me to get this level of education we had to move and so therefore I’d lost touch with my Vietnamese culture, South Vietnamese people tend to be much more sympathetic about that, whereas the North Vietnamese they have access to like ... they have money they have I guess power as well to be able

to send their kids to other countries ... it is nothing explicit it is more like saying 'oh you're British' and sort of comments like that and 'oh you are not Vietnamese at all'.

(Binh, female, 19, medical student, southern Vietnamese, South London)

I find people from the North ... in London ... not everyone but generally I think it is a different taste, different habits, different mentality and they are not as nice to people that I found in Orange County [in America]. Most of them from the North were influenced by the government more, and this is what my dad as well believes, that the government has in a way brainwashed people and affected their mentality. So it is just like China it has created a certain type of people that has learnt to be protective, that has learnt to be a bit distrustful, you know?

(Hai, male, 28, law student, southern Vietnamese, Hackney)

In terms of overcoming differences between the northern and southern Vietnamese, informants often referred to a 'crossing of social boundaries' to explain the nature of social mixing. One-to-one interactions formed the basis of these rather than group-level interactions and among the subsequent generations. Forming friendships, visiting the other's houses and attending events organized by another group was seen as much easier for the young than the older generation as they were in general less aware of the more nuanced differences between groups. In this respect, the young were perceived as a key group to bring about change in the community, in terms of communication and solidarity even though, as discussed, the second generation were also distinctly aware of these differences and sometimes felt them keenly. While broader community social networks have been arguably limited in the Vietnamese communities, it has been observed that social and cultural community networks more often than not take place through and within Vietnamese businesses rather than existing independently of them (Tieu 2017). This may lend further evidence for why these forms of group endogamy exist.

The lack of a unitary community was a strongly emerging theme in all interviews. While any claim to a 'cohesive' or unitary community should always be challenged due to the inherent heterogeneity of any group of people, in terms of the Vietnamese community in London references to this seemed inherently recurrent. Many of the northern Vietnamese tended to have stronger connections to the homeland than to the overseas Vietnamese or Viet Kieu population (Barber 2017). However, the lack of a singular central body representing the Vietnamese was felt to be an important cause and perpetuation of the fragmentation and this was raised by both members of the first and second generation. Without a central body, the community is unable to have official voice and potential to develop a shared sense of cultural heritage. This was seen as a central concern for the young, who are trying to explore their cultural background and understand their history (something they are often lacking due to reluctance of parents to share their experience). For example, many of my second-generation participants spoke about a 'lack' of community both in terms of community organizations to organize events, Vietnamese events, as well as Vietnamese role models. This led to a sense of a 'lack of identity' as a Vietnamese in Britain or as a Vietnamese 'you don't have an identity' or 'there is no identity for us'. This translated into a sense of being unable to claim belonging in Britain, as explained by Luke:

I mean quite a lot of people say this to me, that being from a different place even though you were born and bred, brought up in the UK, you don't have no identity, you know they won't call you 'you are British' they won't call you 'you're from here' even though you are from here, even all the things that you might know about or whatever there is no identity for us.

(Luke, second-generation southern Vietnamese, 24, financial industry, East London)

Luke draws upon the fact that being born and brought up in the UK, with all the knowledge of and familiarity with British culture that this entails, acts as no guarantee or entitlement to stake a claim in Britishness. This was developed particularly in relation to the notion of recognition and the lack of cultural recognition which was deemed crucial for inclusion in Britain. This chimes with Phillips' (1995) notion of the 'politics of representation' which she argues have overtaken the 'politics of ideas'; accordingly we now place a greater sense of trust in those sharing our experience to represent us more closely. However, Phillips argues that the role of political representation also extends beyond the realm of formal politics to refer more broadly to 'positions of influence in society' (Phillips 1995: 54) as being one of the many important avenues for challenging existing hierarchies of power. 'Positions of influence' can shape how young people feel represented in society, particularly, as noted by Taylor (1992), as they are more actively engaged in less formal spheres of influence such as the media, culture, sport, and fashion. A sense of oppression was commonly experienced through their lack of representation in the cultural sphere, particularly through areas of media and popular culture (a trend that has also been observed in relation to the Chinese in Britain; Parker and Song 2006). Taylor (in Phillips 1995) notes how in the modern age, as identity is more problematic, a sense of recognition becomes more central to people's sense of wellbeing. Participants commonly drew upon comparisons with communities abroad and in the UK that were felt to have a stronger presence:

I think the Vietnamese community is not so well known over here as opposed to ... say in America. I would say it is a lot more successful in America ... I think over here, I think the Vietnamese community ... unless you are studying it or you work for the government or you have some kind of interest it would be classed together with the Chinese community I think. So we don't have a separate identity, not as far as I know anyway.

(Hanh, female, 34, financial sector worker, southern Vietnamese)

I don't think I have seen one Vietnamese celebrity! I mean there is no one here who has been on the news or anything like that. I mean, yeah, apart from the reason that they have been growing weed and stuff, I mean that is the only popularity that Vietnamese people get these days! And that is quite a bad opinion to be honest with you ... instead of leaving a good mark we are already branded as weed growers! I mean they even make some songs about this you know, about the Vietnamese over here. It is quite shocking!

(Kim Ly)

Everybody knows about African and Indian culture like the festivals, Caribbean carnivals and like the Hindu festivals, everyone knows about that, but no one knows about what is Buddhism or like the Mid-Autumn Festival. So it is like we are not part of it—we are just left alone to do our own thing.

(Thi, male, 25, designer, Chinese-Vietnamese, southern Vietnamese)

Participants' desire for more cultural events to foster better understanding of the Vietnamese in Britain refers also to a desire for a basic recognition in mainstream society of important cultural festivals—here the Vietnamese 'Mid-Autumn (Moon) festival'—shifting responsibility in Thi's

case away from the ethnic community towards more sensitive inclusion on the part of wider society. Other participants placed responsibility upon the Vietnamese community:

The Vietnamese community in the UK, I don't think it is really as tight as other communities.... I think there should be more pride and Vietnamese people just need to develop.... Because some people just don't understand how and where our culture and background is from.... We need more people to speak out.

(Khanh, male, 17, trainee estate agent, Southeast London)

The lack of a political presence was seen as contributing to a marginal social position in the UK and was frequently raised in the narratives of second-generation participants who often contrasted their experience to that of the more vocal Black and African Caribbean groups in Britain. For example, one participant (Mark) noted the Vietnamese community needed a 'Martin Luther King figure' to help galvanize a politicized Vietnamese identity. Here the depoliticization of the first generation due to their initial economic refugee status might partly explain its translation to the second generation, who without a form of homeland politics have yet to develop a UK-based politics.

Past attempts to organize events for the entire community have shown the necessity to demonstrate to each part of the community that they have been sufficiently represented and have an equal stake. While it was suggested by the first-generation participants that past attempts to organize events to bring the second generation together were thought to have always failed because while the young may enjoy the events there is no further basis to hold the second-generation together. 'Rather, they return to their separate areas and get on with their own lives with their own group of friends. None of them seem to want to get involved or take responsibility for organizing future events' (community informant 2). The second generation explained a sense of frustration that any attempt to organize something was often met with suspicion by other segments of the community. For example, Rachel, a 24-year-old northern Vietnamese from Hackney, explains how she has tried to be involved in organizing events in the community before, but people in the Vietnamese community 'don't like or disregard some things you do', assuming 'it is just a scam' or 'it is just people trying to make money'. This sort of reception discourages future participation by many members of the community. Instead, the participants who did organize community activities tended to hold smaller-scale events inviting a distinct set of people from their own social background and neighbourhood (in these cases, southern Vietnamese). Allegations of internal corruption within the community also turned (especially northern Vietnamese) young people away from involvement in community organizations (community informant 4; participants Rachel, Matthew, Luke, and Hanh). Other reasons stated were that young people felt they have no connections to community organizations and that these are for the older generation with whom there is often a conflict of ideas and views. Many second-generation Vietnamese also feel that they don't have enough knowledge about their culture, language, and traditions, and felt they were not seen as authentic enough to be accepted by the rest of the community (Barber 2015a, 2017). In addition, it is thought that they avoid community centres and organizations and related activities because this reminds them of all the problems facing the older generation, such as poverty and isolation, aspects they are trying to forget. Activities focus mainly on the elderly and there are no activities/facilities for teenagers or young adults, it was also acknowledged that the young don't need the communities, and are more likely to go to mainstream organizations. All the community informants expressed a concern over the current crisis within the community regarding a lack of younger-generation interest in the community to replace current workers who are reaching retirement age. The young were also believed to not get involved with the community as a form of employment because it does not offer any attraction in terms of the level of pay or career structure.

Thirty-five years after the arrival of the first refugees, the first official Vietnamese community public event took place. It had been more than five years at the planning stage, and ten years ago when I spoke to the community leader of An Viet foundation the idea was being developed. In September 2015, the very first Vietnamese festival in London was organized by the Vietnam Embassy and showcased Vietnamese culture, music, art, food, etc. It was estimated that 25,000 visitors attended the event, including Londoners, international tourists, and Vietnamese people living in the UK. In July 2017 the community observed the first second-generation-led event for the community. A photographic exhibition called ‘Vietnamese Londoners’ was launched at the Oxford Gallery in London by Julia Thanh (26 years old, university administrator) which documented the experiences of a range of Vietnamese living in London. The launch event was well-attended and was supported by local British-born artists (poets, actor, rapper). In her opening address to launch the exhibition, the curator explained that motivation for the project was to create a basis upon which other second-generation Vietnamese could come together and develop a network—all too often, she said, there are no role models for the young Vietnamese in Britain and she frequently asks the question ‘where are the other young Vietnamese like me?’, confirming the sentiment shared among other second-generation Vietnamese (Barber 2015a). October 2017 also featured one of the first second-generation music events, ‘Vietnam Now’, which will showcase local DJs, musicians, and film-makers. By contrast, any previous community events of note have generally tended to be organized by international student societies at major universities, including New Year celebrations (Imperial College London) and Vietnamese food festivals (University College London).

6.2 Political engagement and recognition

In comparison to the Vietnamese communities in the USA, the UK Vietnamese are perceived as having a ‘weak’ level of political engagement, particularly in relation to ‘homeland’ politics. For example, there have tended to be very few protests outside the embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and the UK Vietnamese population is believed to contain only a small minority of anti-communist supporters. One community leader (community informant 1) attributed this to the ‘low educational profile’ and ‘rural backgrounds’ of most of the initial refugees who essentially fled for economic rather than political reasons. While in the initial years of the refugee community there was some political engagement, ‘nowadays there is no political motivation or activism, there are no protest marches, and a lack of political solidarity around current affairs in Vietnam contributes to weakened community ties’ (community informant 1). Many in the community were felt to be politically unaware, especially the young. It was also felt that this political inactivity plays an important part in the position of the Vietnamese in the UK, explaining the communities’ more marginalized position in socially deprived areas compared to other ethnic groups, who have been more able to voice their concerns and gain recognition from local authorities. Mobilization along the lines of cultural expression was seen as an important part of political recognition and vice versa.

A lack of recognition of the Vietnamese population by local authorities has been experienced as a problem for some of the poorer Vietnamese areas, and as responsible for preventing social mobility due to the impact of lack of community cohesion and representation more generally in broader society on the community. Authorities and mainstream youth services providers were perceived by Vietnamese community leaders and their constituents as only responding to the needs of the community when there was a ‘special issue to tackle’, such as gangs and delinquency. An observation made by community leaders was that the Department for Education saw the second-generation Vietnamese as doing ‘reasonably well’ and so no extra help or funding was given for youth provision for this group. For example, in Deptford, Lewisham, the most populous area for young Vietnamese, no youth group existed for the young Vietnamese at the time of this research (2006–09). Instead, the majority of Vietnamese community organizations tended to cater to the

elderly and serve the community in terms of housing. The issue of ‘trust’ was also identified as an issue hampering communities’ access to support. Community leaders explained the lack of trust often held by members of the community towards local and central government; one example was the suspicion and lack of trust still held towards Save the Children, a charity that had been working with them for 20 years. Among the older generation, a lack of knowledge about how to engage with authorities and power was also seen to be a barrier. Added to this, the difficulty encouraging members of the Vietnamese communities to take on leadership roles (including first- and second-generation Vietnamese), was identified by all community leaders, and especially those refugees coming from a rural background as they did not have the same educational background or political aspiration to be councillor or sit on committees. The second generation have felt generally disconnected from the wider Vietnamese community (particularly the northern communities) and so are less inclined to provide leadership or promote the community in various ways. These aspects, it can be suggested, have prevented the community from pursuing important channels to gain recognition and resources.

6.3 Social status and visibility in British society

Levels of engagement and participation in mainstream society are generally seen as a key indicator of a group’s inclusion in society, and there has been very little research conducted on these more culturally oriented aspects of the Vietnamese communities in London. Indicators of the social status of the Vietnamese communities relate not only to their labour market position but also to their social participation and visibility in urbanized, multicultural, or ‘superdiverse’ areas of London. However, by comparison to other groups, the Vietnamese communities have been better known for their entrepreneurial rather than cultural presence in public life. One source has been quoted as saying: ‘Black people have the Hackney Empire and do a lot of party organising. Vietnamese families concentrate more on the work side of things than they do on activities’ (in Benedictus 2005), and this seems to encapsulate the experience of the Vietnamese community today. Early research on the first-generation Vietnamese by community organizations and other small-scale studies in the early 1990s characterized them as largely absent from the public sphere (Lam and Martin 1996; Tayao 1986, and recent research suggests this holds true of the majority of first-generation Vietnamese in London (James 2011; Wilkins 2016). Barriers to engagement in mainstream society and the public sphere have been identified largely as being due to lack of language skills, confidence, and cultural visibility. Kar (1993) and Tayao (1986 identified fear and shyness as a problem among their study participants for developing language skills, and in some cases lack of language skills was found to be a target for racist abuse. Other studies found language barriers and lack of confidence linked to their refugee status translated into a reluctance to approach mainstream institutions (Bell and Clinton 1993; Free et al. 1999). This, combined with the lack of a strong community identity, has hindered engagement with the Vietnamese, as a group, in the public sphere, contributing to their exclusion from ‘ordinary British consciousness’ and society (Arowobusoye 2004; Sims 2007). Consequences of this language barrier are that people have lacked information about available services and lack the confidence to ask for help, which has been found to severely limit their access to public services and their capacity to participate in wider society (Sims 2007). This finding is important as it suggests that the first generation were often deprived of access to public services, and thus also supports the tendency outlined in the sections above to rely upon informal familial and community networks for help and advice rather than mainstream service provision. Many Vietnamese have reported feeling helpless in their inability to communicate effectively with these services (Free et al. 1999). Lack of confidence in navigating mainstream services has placed more demand for services on Vietnamese organizations (Sims 2007), although these organizations often have difficulty providing them due to underfunding. This lack of confidence has also been reflected in the lack of awareness among funding bodies of the needs of the Vietnamese community, particularly in relation to translation

and advice services (Free et al. 1999). These aspects of discrimination, alongside lack of language skills and confidence, appear central for understanding the barriers to integration into mainstream society for the group.

These issues have a different relevance for the second-generation Vietnamese, for whom a lack of a strong or unified community in the UK has impacted upon their sense of self and their integration into British society (Barber 2015a). These have related to a sense of ‘not helping each other out’ enough within the community, which has hampered the development of a ‘positive self-esteem’, and in mainstream society a reduced a sense of recognition, political representation, and visibility. These, in turn, have ramifications at the individual level relating to their ability to protect themselves from various forms of racism, stereotyping, and discrimination. A lack of belonging in the London Vietnamese communities has been found to inhibit ethnic identity formation. For example, the second-generation Vietnamese have expressed concerns over the perceptions about their ethnic ‘authenticity’ and legitimacy to participate in the community (Barber 2015a, 2017). However, combined with this, in mainstream society, the Vietnamese, like other East and Southeast Asians (including the more established British Chinese population) have tended to remain invisible and ‘silent’ minorities who rarely feature in debates on British multiculturalism (Parker 1995; Song 2003). This invisibility has often protected them from the ‘worst kinds of racism’ (see Archer and Francis 2007). One of the distinctive experiences of the second-generation Vietnamese has been the consequences of ‘positive racism’. A common experience described by my participants was that the racism they experienced was ‘not as bad’ as that experienced by other groups, especially Black Britons (Barber 2015a), who are often the target of more ‘direct’ and ‘colour’-based racisms. This has led to a sense that they ‘can’t really complain’, and instead try to use it as an advantage and play up to positive images, or strategically use it as a way to get ahead (in job applications and interviews) (Barber 2015a). While more established diaspora groups (those with former colonial links to the UK) might be more visible in the discourses of a nation, it has been argued that newcomer groups (like the Vietnamese) may occupy ‘uncharted positions’ within society due to their non-colonial experience, meaning that they are often subject to a ‘poverty of categorisations’ (Ang-Lygate 1997) that affects their recognizability in everyday encounters in society and in public discourse. This often leaves individuals to experience a sense of ‘unlocation’ and thus non-belonging.

7 Conclusion

The migration history, settlement experience, and social characteristics of the first Vietnamese refugees in Britain have been crucial in shaping the experiences of Vietnamese communities in London today. The reception policies and subsequent geographical dispersal further exacerbated the already precarious situation of Vietnamese refugees, rendering them deskilled and isolated in the new society. This legacy has continued into the present day for the first generation, who still endure some of the highest unemployment rates among minority ethnic groups. The secondary migration and re-concentration of Vietnamese families in urbanized centres had two effects: first, to locate them within largely impoverished areas and in overpopulated living conditions; and second, to give them access to important support structures and services previously denied under the dispersal policy. While these factors are suggestive of significantly disadvantaging this population, a number of recent developments have shown how the Vietnamese in London have resourcefully found ways to navigate and move beyond these restrictions.

This report has shown how the integration of the Vietnamese diaspora in the UK, and London in particular, can be understood by three different spheres of experience: the labour market; community structure; and organization and social status in UK society. Overall these have shown

a complex and varied experience at the sub-community level according to generational, northern/southern, and Chinese/Vietnamese networks and differences. A combination of the effect of the initial government reception policies, the distinctive social backgrounds of the refugees alongside the relationship of the refugees to Britain, in addition to the race-relations landscape, has led to the group's invisibility in British public life. Fragmentation of the community internally has weakened its bargaining position as a minority group and hampered the development of structures to enable a common mobilization around shared common ground of experience or identity. However, areas of success in the community (particularly among the first generation) have been their ability to develop a niche market out of relatively little investment and capital. While this has acted to offer employment to this otherwise underemployed population, it has also been seen as stymieing their economic participation in other mainstream sectors. At the level of societal recognition, the Vietnamese nail industry has provided the community with a distinctive and visible presence in London; however, news stories of new Vietnamese migration into the nail and other sectors have tarnished the Vietnamese community's image in London and the effects of this can be seen in the identity constructions of the young second-generation Vietnamese (Barber 2015a).

Notwithstanding the problem of gaining full and complete data on the educational and employment profile of the community, the apparent educational success of the younger generation and their employment in professional mainstream sectors (and burgeoning presence in a wide range of fields) suggests that the second generation has become significantly upwardly mobile by comparison to their parents. Although there is some evidence that they are branching out into less traditional and more creative areas (such as journalism, the arts, and performance arts), a combination of first-generation expectations (and those of their parents), societal stereotypes, and lack of leadership/role models in the community have meant that they still remain largely in traditional sectors and perceive social barriers in entering new areas of employment and in aspiring to reaching higher leadership roles.

Another key feature of the Vietnamese community in Britain has been the internally divided or at least fragmented nature of the community. There is evidence that key cultural, social, ideological, and regional differences still pattern their social networks and have an impact upon their relative forms of advantage and disadvantage in UK society. However, the generational differences have been apparent in the experience of the second generation, particularly in relation to their upward educational and social mobility by comparison to the first generation. However, concerns around cultural identity and visibility confront the second generation in relation to both the Vietnamese community and within mainstream society. These appear to emerge out of the experience and foundations laid down by the first generation and the complex nature of intergenerational relations, which have related to parental expectations and language barriers. As part of this experience of community fragmentation and of being a numerically small and new minority in the ethnic landscape of Britain, the social status of the Vietnamese has remained largely 'invisible' in the cultural and political spheres.

Overall, due to the paucity of data on this community it has been difficult to draw together the threads of the experience of different sub-community groups to provide a clear picture of the main host of societal factors shaping the integration of this group beyond the factors internal to the community (discussed above), and experiences of racism/invisibility in mainstream society. However, given the diverse nature of the neighbourhoods occupied by the Vietnamese communities and recent evidence of diversification of identifications of the younger generations (Barber 2015a, 2015b), there are opportunities to recast the restrictive social images of previous decades and also increase the opportunities and possibility for greater pan-ethnic engagement and solidarity. Also, it is perhaps due in part to the high concentration of the Vietnamese communities in areas of East and Southeast London, which are, and have always been, diverse areas of high

immigrant populations. This familiarity with ethnic difference (of a wide range) and the associated dynamic business environment has perhaps enabled Vietnamese businesses to flourish.

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