Sense of Home

by
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Abstract

‘Home’ is one of those complex concepts signifying an excess of meaning. ‘Home’ does not just mean the physical aspects of a place. It is certainly more abstract. ‘Home’ usually implies the notion of ‘comfort’, which is constituted of multiple layers of meaning: intimacy, privacy, ease, convenience.

The thesis is an attempt to extend the meaning of ‘home’ into a primarily emotional sphere, which I would like to call a ‘sense of home’. We may live in different places throughout our lives, but not all of these places are called ‘home’. What is ‘home’? What brings the ‘sense of home’? The thesis focuses on the Vietnamese community in Canada as a case study. A ‘sense of home’ reveals a notion of identity and belonging, and it paves the way for further questions, especially how can a minority community express itself within a major culture? And how can a minor culture express itself culturally and architecturally? The thesis includes three parts. They are: *1. at home in the world*, *2. home and exile*, *3. the memory cookbook*.

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² Thank mom in Vietnamese.

³ Lovage is the powerful and aromatic herb, native to Romania.

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Introduction

‘Home’ is one of those complex concepts that signify a variety of meanings.

‘Home’ is nothing special, when you are at ‘home’. There are the times when you notice that something “looks” like ‘home’ or even “feels” like ‘home’. Other times, ‘home’ is defined only when you’re away from ‘home’. What is ‘home’? What brings the sense of home? These questions, put one way or another, will generally guide the following investigation into the notion of ‘home’.

We all have different reasons to talk about ‘home’. Perhaps, I should begin with my entanglement with ‘home,’ which dates back several years. Five years ago, I went to Paris to visit my cousin, whom I had only known about through my mother’s stories and family’s pictures. My cousin is the oldest son of my uncle, my mother’s half-brother, who left Vietnam for France in 1954, bringing his son with him. When I visited, my uncle had passed away and my cousin was a mechanical engineer for Peugeot. He and his wife also owned a restaurant in Paris. I imagine that I was the first person in our family to see him for many years.

When we met, we planned to go downtown for a little walk and have some food. We stopped in a restaurant that turned out to be Vietnamese, which I didn’t expect. My cousin ordered me some rice, chicken, vegetables and dipping sauce. I noticed that the soy-sauce with hot chili, which I found in the middle of Paris, was no longer popular in Vietnam. Despite this, the smell of the incense, the interior decoration and the Vietnamese language spoken by the owner and the waitress, created an unexpected feeling of familiarity in the middle of Paris.

We started a conversation about family members. My cousin proposed a schedule for my stay in Paris, including visiting some relatives and the Vietnamese market in 13th arrondissement. For the rest for the evening; I listened to my cousin's plan for a trip to go 'home,' to Vietnam in Paris.

At 2 a.m, we arrived at his apartment, a two bedroom flat located in a quiet suburb of Paris. His wife was not home yet. Every night, after completing all the work in the restaurant, she got home late. My cousin talked about getting around the city: "I don't drive anymore. I am still affected by the accident that happened several years ago. I let my son drive my car and bring his mom home every night" my cousin explained. "I've owned this place for several years. The apartment costs all of my savings. However, I am lucky, as the price of real estate has increased sharply. And I would like to leave this place for Hung," he continued. "By the way, I gave my son a Vietnamese name, Hung," he added. The apartment was not very large, but it was nicely decorated with colonial furniture. Beside a red leather sofa was a nice cupboard, containing family souvenirs. On the wall, there were some Vietnamese silk and embroidery paintings. I looked at the peaceful scenes of Vietnam, the faint gleam of the moonlight in the river, a water buffalo resting in the shade of a bamboo hedge, and I thought of 'home.'

I was very excited for my trip to 'discover' Europe, but I didn't know how to handle this feeling. I thought my cousin was too nostalgic, which appears to me as sad and confusing. My cousin went with my uncle to Laos at the age of ten. After spending several years in Laos for business, they left for France. My cousin actually didn't really settle down in Paris from the beginning. He went back to Laos for another three years,

and then moved permanently to Paris. He can speak French, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese. I was very impressed by his proficiency in Vietnamese.

At the time, I thought that if he wanted to go ‘home,’ he should have just gone ‘home.’ But if he didn’t consider Vietnam as his home country anymore, why didn’t he try to recreate here in France? In my mind, I criticized my cousin for not having a better attitude about France. I believed that his uncanny feeling for ‘home’ prevented him from leading a full life in Paris. Indeed, I wondered if people often romanticize their feeling of homesickness and their state of exile?

My trip to Paris ended without visiting the Vietnamese ‘district’, and without letting my cousin have another chance talking about his trip to go ‘home’. I was interested in Paris and having a French experience, whatever that is.

My memories and mixed feelings about that trip to Paris visit me frequently. Had I spent more time with my cousin on his trip to go ‘home’, would have I been as occupied with this concept as I am today? Perhaps, I still owe my cousin another visit, during which I will just simply sit down and listen to ideas about ‘home.’

It took me several years of being away from ‘home’ to realize that I greatly oversimplified the feeling of nostalgia that I associated with my cousin. Nostalgia is a state of being which may be confusing or even uncanny, but it is not necessarily sad.

Wikipedia defines home as:

A place where a person lives, spends much of her time, or feels generally comfortable. While a house (or other residential dwelling) is often referred to as a home, and is home to many people, the concept of ‘home’ is

broader than a physical dwelling. Home is often a place of refuge and safety, where worldly cares fade, with things and people you love becoming the focus. Home is central to one's life, primarily emotional, and partially physical.⁵

If the definition of home were confined to physical aspects of a place, this thesis would not be necessary. But the definition of home is certainly more abstract. Science has endeavored to capture a concrete definition of 'comfort,' and thermal comfort studies have provided us with precise definitions of comfort and discomfort zones. However, like the concept of home, 'comfort' means much more than its physical aspects, which can be measured. 'Comfort' incorporates multiple layers of meaning: intimacy, privacy, ease, convenience, and others that science has failed to acknowledge.

In general, the thesis is an attempt to extend the meaning of 'home' into a primarily emotional sphere, which I would like to call 'sense of home'. We may live in different places throughout our lives, but not all of these places are called 'home'. What is 'home'? What brings the 'sense of home'? Being trained as an architect, the notion of a 'sense of home' is attractive to me, as it suggests multiple possibilities for space, beyond the physical.

This thesis focuses on the Vietnamese community in Canada as a case study. A 'sense of home' reveals a notion of identity and belonging, and it paves the way for further questions, especially how can a minor community express itself within a major culture? And how can a minor culture express itself culturally and architecturally in certain built forms such as a community house?

⁵ "Home" *Wikipedia*, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home>>.

The thesis is composed of three parts. In part 1, *at home in the world*, I will look at how the concept of belonging has been changed by the process of globalization. The themes of ‘at home in the world’ are not new since they recall some of the central themes of postmodernism. However, I appreciate the way the globalization literature puts effort into analyzing the driving forces that have created massive changes in our contemporary world, especially at an institutional level, whereas postmodernism seems to avoid the reality of political economy and the circumstances of global power.

Part 2 is called *home and exile*; since ‘exile’ means to be away from one’s ‘home’, ‘exile’ and ‘home’ are indeed interconnected. One cannot be understood without the other, the notion of ‘exile’ will give shape to the notion of ‘home’. The notion of ‘exile’ will be explored in relation to the Vietnamese community in Canada. Who is included in the Vietnamese community? There are approximately 136,810 Vietnamese Canadians residing in Canada⁶, located in a few sites, mainly in Ottawa and Vancouver. My approach to the community is based on personal meetings, community events, and literature written in both English and Vietnamese. An important question arises at this point as to whether I am able to capture the whole of Vietnamese community in Canada with a few case studies? I think there are two answers. Firstly, the thesis itself is an attempt to redefine the notion of ‘community’, so it is almost unnecessary to consider a homogenous Vietnamese community. Secondly, if in *The Oxford Dictionary*, a community is defined as “a group of people of the same religion, race, occupation etc or

⁶ This figure comes from the Vietnamese Canadian Foundation web site at:

<<http://www.vietfederation.ca/>>

with the same interests,”⁷ then the term the ‘Vietnamese community’ is applicable, since the thesis looks at those of a distinctly Vietnamese origin.

Exile is an important concept throughout this thesis. Naficy notes that “thanks to the globalization of travel, media, and capital, exile appears to have become a postmodern condition” (Naficy 1999:4). Even if being ‘at home in the world’ is becoming a more common state, I find it necessary to ask how Vietnamese immigrant communities in Canada reflect this global phenomenon? It has been suggested that the Vietnamese community in Canada is an “unusual Vietnamese Diaspora,”⁸ The second part of the thesis attempts to address the historical roots of this “unusual Diaspora”. Part 3, called *the memory cookbook*, is an attempt to explore this concept in a new way, through memory and taste.

This thesis attempts to explore the notion of home, identity, space, architecture, cuisine, and the Vietnamese community. The intent is not to create a project or investigation devoted merely to one of the above subjects. The thesis is not a manifesto which attempts to define architecture. Instead it is about the intangible and its relationship to the material world. Such a relationship is consistent whether we are talking about designing a building or re-creating the taste of ‘home’ through smell and taste. The thesis itself, especially the *memory cookbook*, is my attempt to capture the corresponding intangible dimension, evoked by the materiality of the ordinary objects of everyday life. The study of the relationship between the tangible and the intangible is essential in imagining possible futures to the world in which we live.

⁷ Oxford Dictionary

⁸ See Jennings, 03/24/2004 Ottawa Citizen, and David 02/28/2003

‘Home’ is not a notion that merely exists by itself. ‘Home’ has always been associated with notions such as architecture, state and nation. Although an abstract concept, nations often interfere with the ‘sense of home’, and they are often powerful enough to make it possible or impossible to return ‘home’. Today, even when ‘home’ is far, halfway across the globe, memories about ‘home’ can always be refreshed because ‘home’ is there, just a twenty-hour flight away. Home is known to be there, but exists in a virtual but more powerful, imagined geography; thus ‘home’ seems simultaneously closer and further than it physically is, and memories about ‘home’ become more precious.

There is an argument that a longing for ‘home’ is not reserved merely for the ones who cannot return; instead, longing for ‘home’ is reserved for people who are ‘on the move.’ But, who is not ‘on the move’ in this global world? Who doesn’t have a ‘longing for home?’ If this is the case, then we should ask: how do we handle that longing for ‘home’, the anxiety of always being in exile, on the move? *The memory cookbook* is an attempt to handle and package this anxiety in order that it can be carried around easily, with comfort and even with a sense of inspiration.

1. at home in the world

We are born into relationships which are based in a particular place, and our narratives about these places constitute our identity. When we are asked about our identity, we usually start with our life-story, and we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-story. Our life stories are always based on our relation to place and time, and we often hear stories about the 'self' anchored in a concrete place, which we call 'home'. 'Home' is often associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and security among parents, brothers and sisters. Home is usually associated with a sense of belonging and gives people stability. But what make a place 'home'? Is it simply whenever your family is, where you have been brought up?

The concept of 'home' seems to be tied in important ways to the notion of identity – the story we tell of ourselves and also the story that others tell of us. When we say "make your self at home" we acknowledge that home is where we feel most comfortable, where we are comfortable, giving us a sense of who we are. In many ways, the notion of 'home' really suggests a notion of identity.

Our concept of identity seems to remain constant as we see ourselves reflected in a familiar place such as 'home'. However, 'home' also positions our identities in relation to others, especially in the postmodern era. As Shields notes, "Postmodern spatial differences, and why they matter, are approached via a meditation on our relation to Others, particularly to strangers and to foreigners who bring the far-off and exotic into the cozy, local world of our everyday lives" (Shields 1992:181). If Shields acknowledges the presence, and our relation to, "strangers," Sassen pushes the question even further by

expanding the definition of these strangers. “Strangers” are not only people who bring the exotic to the local world of your everyday lives but the increasing number of people whose life-stories are associated with the common feeling of alienation:

The modern world unleashes patterns of demography or migration that put people in situations where, in relation to themselves or to one another, they are no longer able to tell straight narratives of their “origins”. They become original without origins; their narratives become ungrounded, out of joint, constructed by superposition or juxtaposition rather than by development or progress; a “time” of socially ungrounded movement thus enters their being. (Sassen 1991:157)

The changes in Western social spatialisation over the last two decades have been acknowledged at various levels, from everyday life experiences and conceptions of the ‘self’ to perceptions of the world. This has had a strong impact on our notions of identity and ‘home’.

Sarup calls postmodernism as a “vast cultural transformation that has happened in western society” (Sarup 1996: 95). Modernity adopted perspectivism and relativism as an epistemology for revealing what it still took to be the true nature of a unified, though complex, underlying reality. Postmodernism took this further, denying the possibility of epistemological unity. Ephemerality, fragmentation and discontinuity are considered the key characteristics associated with postmodernism, while modernity is perceived as positivistic, technocratic and rationalistic. Modernity is associated with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of society, and the standardization of knowledge and production. Postmodernism, on the other hand, rejects totalizing

discourses, mega-narratives, large-scale theoretical interpretations and universal applications.

Moreover, the identity of the postmodern self does not have a center. Sarup characteristically describes such an identity as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash...[and] not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each observer in each period” (Sarup 1996: 94-104). Similarly, Lyotard describes the self, using electronic communication as a metaphor, as "nodal," consisting of a variety of points through which messages and experiences pass. The individual has become decentered, lacking any unified, core self, and exists only as the ever-changing sum of these messages. Postmodernism thus acknowledges that the self is not a unified whole. Identity is not a solid, identifiable thing; rather, the "self" is a mosaic of the different contexts, roles, and experiences the individual encounters.

Identity is also a function of contemporary, postmodern social and political formations. Modernity gave importance to the primal territorial framework of ethnic groups and nations and stressed biological and telluric characteristics associated with those origins, as if they were some how unaffected by historical vicissitudes or contemporary changes. Identity was considered to be equivalent to being part of a nation, a spatially delimited entity where everything shared by those who inhabited it – language, objects, customs – would clearly differentiate them from others. Modern identities were territorial and almost always monolingual. They were fixed by subordinating regions and ethnic groups to a more or less arbitrarily defined space, called a nation, which was opposed to other nations.

However many believe that the most radical redefinition of identity has resulted from globalization. In fact, globalization theory does provide some insight into the notion of belonging to our contemporary world through the exploration of the changes due to important economic changes, new technologies, and consumerism, to name a few trends.

There are various approaches to the phenomenon of 'globalization,' but there are two main approaches. On the subjective side, ones starts with the individual, and how her own decisions, media use, job situation, voting and consumption choices, in their turn, play a part in affecting the structures of globalization. The objective side looks at the forces of globalization themselves such as mass media corporations, global economic forces, institutions that structure politics and global marketing as forces that affect individual choices for different groups of people.

There are also more radical approaches that have been used to examine institutional changes and the changes in the division and modes of labour. In fact, much globalization theory is rooted in Marxism, which I'll briefly outline. According to Marx, the foundation of reality is "the existence of living human individuals" (Marx 1845: I.A). Humans began to distinguish themselves from animals because of their consciousness, religion, and especially, their capacity to produce their own means of subsistence. The mode of production is a defining form of activity for individuals. The productive forces, divisions of labour, and material conditions of existence are the key factors that form different nations and identities. The productive, material forces manifest themselves according to the division of labour. For Marxist theory, the division of labour provides the key insight into how society is structured in terms of gender, class and social and technical divisions.

In the contemporary economy, the divisions of labor and the modes of coordination between them operate in a much more sophisticated way. But Marxism provides a solid theoretical basis for looking at globaliztion. Engels, in *The Condition of Working Class in England*, provides a horrific description of how life was in England in the 19th century, when European capital started to exert its power. He assesses the influence of capital investment on the social and working conditions of life. Before the industrial revolution, which occurred in England in the 18th century, most of the population lived in small farms scattered throughout the country. A series of inventions, starting with the steam-engine and textile machinery, changed this. The Jenny, invented in 1764 by a weaver, James Hargreaves, made it more economical to produce in large urban factories.

Before the introduction of machinery, the spinning and weaving of raw materials was carried on in the workingman's home. Wife and daughter spun the yarn that the father wove or that they sold, if he did not work it up himself. These weaver families lived in the country in the neighborhood of the towns, leading righteous and peaceful lives. In that landscape of country life, 'home' obviously was the centre, around which lives were based.

These inventions transformed the manufacture of cotton in England and gave rise to a new mode of production, the factory system. Along with the new mode of production, there were dramatic changes in the structure of the society, as social relationships were increasingly defined by economic relations and tensions between the proletariat and the capitalists. Technologies produced new divisions of labour. A manufacturing establishment requires many workers employed together in a single

building, living near each other, and even forming their own village in the case of a good-sized factory. Immigrants from the countryside thus poured into large cities, which offered roads, railroads, canals and the essential infrastructure for industrial development, though the material living conditions were often abject.

If life in large English cities captured the full picture of the early stages of capitalism, Fordism, with its mass production, rapid assembly lines, specialized machinery and masses of disciplined workers, characterizes 'heavy capitalism'. As Bauman putted it, Fordism describes modern society in its 'heavy', 'bulky', 'rooted' and 'solid' phase. At that stage in their joint history, capital, management and labor were all, for better or worse, doomed to stay in each other's company for a long time to come – tied down by the combination of huge factory buildings, heavy machinery and massive labor forces.

The genius of Henry Ford was to discover ways of keeping the defenders of his industrial fortress inside the walls warding off defection and absenteeism:

Henry Ford decided one day to 'double' the wages of his workers. The (publicly) declared reason, the celebrated phrase 'I want my workers to be paid well enough to buy my cars' was, obviously, a jest. The workers' purchases formed a derisory fraction of his sales, but their wages made much greater part of his costs [...] The genuine reason to raise the wages was the formidable turnover of labor force with which Ford was confronted. He decided to give the workers a spectacular raise in order to fix them to the chain. (Cohen, as cited in Bauman 2000:58)

The invisible chain riveting the workers to their working places and arresting their mobility was, in Cohen's words, 'the heart of Fordism'. In its heavy stage, capital was as much as fixed to the ground as were the labourers it engaged. Lives and many other activities were centered around the production lines.

In recent years capitalism has been increasingly structured for short-term gain, and has been corrosive to both individual and social senses of purpose. Bauman expresses that liquidity is the metaphor which best characterizes the contemporary world:

Nowadays capital travels light – with cabin luggage only, which includes no more than a briefcase, a cellular telephone and a portable computer. It can stop over almost anywhere, and nowhere needs to stay longer than the satisfaction lasts. Labour, on the other hand, remains as immobilized as it was in the past – but the place which it once anticipated being fixed to once and for all has lost its past solidity; searching in vain for borders, anchors fall on friable sands. (Bauman 2000:58)

In a world which is unstable, everything is short-lived and nothing stands still. While human life expectancy continues to be extended, everything else seems to be short-lived, and anxiety among human beings rises as nothing stands still and people are constantly on alert. The person capable of the most liquidity, according to Bauman, will often come to power in a society. (Bauman 2000; Sennett 1998).

In the postmodern era, the nature of identity and employment has changed radically since the days of Ford. Even in menial jobs, personal self-image depends on an idea of progressive achievement, of continuous development through a "career". People now talk about

trying to “get a life.” Formerly people's lives were based on loyalties, attachments, and acquired skills and understandings that made them feel important to others. Now personal and family lives are increasingly marked by instability of income and location, the rupturing of attachments and learned work routines, the fragmentation of experience into dislocated episodes, the preoccupation with consumption, and the difficulty of understanding and coping with feelings of alienation. Employees no longer think in terms of loyalty or any long-term relationship with the organizations they work for. Cohen notes, for example, that someone “Who starts a career at Microsoft has no idea where it is going to end. Starting with Ford or Renault entailed, on the contrary, the near-certitude that the career would run its course in the same place” (Cohen, as cited in Bauman 2000:58).

Although, according to Bauman and Cohen, the movement of capital is invisible, it is obvious to see that agent of the new form of capitalism is the transnational corporation. Wallerstein argues that the logic of historical capitalism is necessarily global in reach. Indeed, the driving force of globalization is to be located in the logic of the capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein 1991; McGrew 1996).

Production, trade and finance are now increasingly organized on a transnational basis to reap maximum economic advantage in a highly competitive world. The world capitalist society is one in which the primary capitalist dynamic is located at the transnational as opposed to the national level, and in which the social relations of

production are no longer imprisoned within national territorial boundaries. Rorty discusses the legal implications of this trend:

The economic situation of the citizens of a nation state has passed beyond the control of the laws of the state... There is no way in which the laws of Brazil or the US can dictate that money earned in the country is invested in the country... We now have a global over-class which makes all the major economic decisions, and makes them in entire independence of the legislatures, and *a fortiori* of the will of the voters, of any given country... The absence of a global polity means that the super-rich can operate without any thought of any interests save their own (Rorty 1996:, as cited in Bauman 2003).

Nowadays the economy operates out of catallaxy, not out of economy. Economy refers to clusters of economic activities which are organized for a specific purpose and have a hierarchy of ends; knowledge of how to achieve these ends is shared, for example in households, firms and states. However, by contrast, a catallaxy has no unitary hierarchy of ends, but a mass of innumerable economies without a specific, common purpose. Denying any design and any forms of central control, catallaxy manifests itself as the “product of spontaneous growth” (Sayer 1995:71).

This redivision of labor has had a far reaching impact on economic and social outcomes all across the globe. The practices of our daily life, ranging from job opportunities to what TV channels to watch or to who to vote for, seem to be determined by these distant forces. Reading Bauman, Sayer, and other theorists of globalization, one

feels shocked to realize that how little control we have on what is going on in the world, and not merely in terms of the economy.

The concept of globalization, according to Scholte, has in many ways been reduced to internationalization, liberalization, universalization and westernization. These concepts, though do give some explanation for the phenomenon, do not capture the whole of globalization. Scholte defines globalization as “deterritorialization or as the growth of supraterritorial relations between people. Globalization refers to a far reaching change in the nature of social space” (Scholte 2000:85).

The documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*, by the Austrian director Hubert Sauper, paints a shocking picture of one aspect of globalization. The story is ostensibly about fish production, but it also makes one think about how the six billion of us on the earth relate to each other. The setting of the documentary is Lake Victoria, Tanzania, the world's biggest tropical lake, where Nile Perch (artificially introduced by man) have voraciously destroyed every other species of fish unfortunate enough to cross its path. These predatory fish have devastated the local economy and pushed the local population to starvation. The products from the lake, perch and white fillets, are exported to Europe and all over the world, and feed two million people every day. Local people who are lucky enough to have jobs fish on the lake and sell their catch. In Africa, however, no one can afford perch. As well, since fisheries have taken many Africans away from farming, there is a shortage of rice and other food staples. In one scene, some street children fight each other over a handful of rice.

Although the story about African villages around Lake Victoria is an extreme case, the global economy seems to have created different life stories for people in the

Northern and in the Southern hemisphere. However, whether you are working for Microsoft in North America or are a fisherman at Lake Victoria, both feel the effects of global capitalism. One will never know when that high tech job will be exported to China or India, and the other will never know when fish production will stop. One day, perch and white fillet produced artificially in another lake will be less expensive, just as labour costs for high tech job are much lower in China and India. People from the North may have to go to other cities, or even other countries, to search for new job opportunities, as will the Fishermen at Lake Victoria.

This story reminds me of the stories of farmers in the highland areas of Vietnam, where coffee plantation was famous and thrived for many years. In the last several years, however, the prices of coffee have experienced great fluctuations. Farmers, who have accumulated the skills and techniques required for growing coffee over generations, had no choice other than to give up their life and start something totally new. How long will these people stick with their next and career, or the one after that? How long they will be away from 'home'? No one can be assured of anything anymore, except the instability of the market.

Neal Ascherson notes the "The subjects of history, once the settled farmers and citizens, have now become the migrants, the refugees, the Gasterbeiter, the asylum seekers, the urban homeless" (Ascherson, cited in Parpastergiadis 2000:1). What has made these people become the subjects of history? Globalization and fragmentation have constructed the "ungrounded narratives" of their lives, the endless movement that governs their existence.

In many respects, globalization has ushered in the age of anxiety. The ones who are on the move don't know what lies ahead; the ones who stay physically put are also on the move by zapping between satellite television channels, flitting through the Web, traveling to distant 'lands.' Thus globalization not only has undeniable material effects in so far as it is possible to identify the flows of trade, capital and people across the globe, but it also refers to the "deterritorialization of culture"⁹ (Papastergiadis 2000:100).

The "deterritorialization of culture" in this context also refers to the flow of cultural change, and can take place in two different ways: through the movement of people and the circulation of symbols. Immigration and traveling are the primary means by which people circulate between cultures. However, in our contemporary world, the introduction of foreign symbols and different cultural practices is no longer dependent on the physical presence of strangers. New channels of communication have dissolved certain aspects of once-established borders, meaning that cultural displacement can occur without the movement of people. In a study of TV in Indonesia in 1970s, where one-quarter of programming was imported (mainly from the USA), it was found that television has been unable to operate completely free of Western influence. The point is that even if there were no programs from US or Western sources on even Indonesia TV, the culture-ideology of consumerism would still be framing the programming (Sklair, 2002). Besides TV, there are various transnational communities, based on religion, culture, lifestyle or ideology, that operate across the globe, largely thanks to the internet. Similarly, if virtual workspaces become more popular in the near future, they will seriously alter our conventional ways of inhabiting a place.

⁹ The concept of 'deterritorialization' was first used by Deleuze and Guattari to locate the moment of alienation in language.

The terrain created by television, telephone and telecommunications networks crisscrossing the globe has indeed produced in us a new kind of experience, the experience of telesthesia – perception at a distance. This is our “virtual geography,” the experience of which troubles and generally permeates our experience of the spaces we experience firsthand. This virtual geography is no less “real;” it is a different kind of perception, of things not bounded by rules of proximity, of “being there”.

“Being there” refers to the ways in which people now feel they belong to various communities despite the fact that they don’t share a common territory with all other members. Despite being spread across considerable distances, communities are redefined through exchanges across multiple borders, and this has challenged the classical ethnographic assumptions that cultures could be mapped into autonomous and bounded spaces. The authenticity of a cultural formation is no longer singularly linked to its physical proximity to a given cultural centre. As a result, national or even a regional cultures can no longer be conceived as reflecting a coherent and distinct identity. Papastergiadis continues:

The cultural dynamic of deterritorialization has decoupled previous links between space, stability and reproduction; it has situated the notion of community in multiple locations; it has split loyalties and fractured that secure understanding and knowledge within the family and social unit. This complex set of relationships has created more ambivalent images of homeland and put greater stress on the need for re-imagining the possibilities of belonging. (117)

Similarly, Trinh T Minh-Ha’s experiences confirm this sense of dislocation:

I travel from one culture to another—Senegalese, West African, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese—in making my films. This may fit well with today's transnational economy, in which the crossing of geophysical boundaries is of wide occurrence, whether by choice or by political circumstances. But for the notion of the transversal and the transcultural to take on a life in one's work, traveling would have to happen in one place, or inward. Home and abroad are not opposites when traveling is not set against dwelling and staying home. In a creative context, coming and going can happen in the same move and traveling is where I am. Where you are is where your identity is; that's your place and that's your home. (1991)

Should we give up the belief that individuals should always be rooted in a specific place, like home? Is the idea of home as the place one belongs to and longs for out of date? Why shouldn't we just be happy with the idea that we are free to go? As Rajchman notes, "We may thus experience ungroundedness no longer as existential anxiety and despair but as freedom and a lightness that finally allow us to move. For movement and indetermination belong together; neither can one be understood without the other" (Rajchman 1991:156).

2. home and exile

Being 'on the move' is now inevitable to both the elite traveling class and those who have been affected by the movement of capitalism, whose reach extends to even the most remote corners of the planet. Accordingly, being 'on the move' is not experienced in the same way for everyone. And, regardless of its universality, this phenomenon appears to have its own local peculiarities. The most common of meaning of 'on the move' means changing careers, traveling or moving houses. For some, 'on the move' is easy because it is often temporary and promises something new and exciting. For others, 'on the move' is difficult because it is not a matter of choice; in those contexts, 'on the move' means 'must leave' and sometimes, 'leaving for good.' Perhaps, the most appropriate way to understand the intricacies of 'on the move' is to approach the issue from an individual scale. Particularly, for this thesis, I should let the stories told by Vietnamese Canadians shape their own definition of the phenomenon.

The first wave of Vietnamese immigration to Canada dates back to the 1970s. In the early 1970s there were a few Vietnamese students who came to study in Canada thanks to the Columbus scholarship program. Immediately upon South Vietnam's surrender, Canada offered permanent resident status to the 4,000 Vietnamese already in the country if they did not want to return to Vietnam.

The second wave of immigration took place in years following the Vietnam war, after the collapse of the Saigon government in April 1975. Political refugees mostly created this second wave of immigration to Canada. They are famously known as "the boat people" because they often fled Vietnam in tiny, overcrowded boats. No one knows exactly how many people lost their lives in such risky and painful trips. The survivors sometimes languished for years in refugee camps. The luckier ones were taken in by countries like Canada.

According to Statistics Canada, the number of persons of Vietnamese ethnic origin residing in Canada was 94,250 in 1991 and 136,810 in 1996. Although not all the Vietnamese who immigrated to Canada experienced the same journey as the ones who fled Vietnam by boats, the history of Vietnamese immigration to Canada is more or less related to the wars that happened on Vietnamese soil in the 20th century.

Narrative 1: A.

A. came to Canada as one of the boat people in the early 1990s. He took the initiative in coming to talk to me when I was sitting in a Vietnamese restaurant in Vancouver. He told me that he wanted to talk with me because I had a voice from Hanoi. This is an interesting detail, as my voice sometimes causes me trouble. I will come back to this detail later.

A. fled Vietnam in 1984 from a port city in the North. He stayed five years in a refugee camp in the Philippines before he finally arrived in Canada. Life was very hard for him at the beginning as he didn't speak the language very well. After a while, he managed to work for a business owned by a Vietnamese man. He worked hard in order to make some money to support his family back home. But, he said, he doesn't have much to send them. He talked about his relationship: "Our marriage was ruined. My wife left with the kids as she didn't find me as the man she used to love anymore...I found it unexplainable. I prefer to think that she left because of the hardships accumulated over years...I don't have any complaint for the way things are at the moment. I work very hard throughout the week, and every Sunday afternoon, like today, I come here."

I asked him about home: "Since you said life is not easy here, do you think you will go back to Vietnam one day? Where do you consider home?" A. replied: "Last year I went

to visit my parents for two months. Life over there has changed dramatically since I left, and I am different too. I guess I have changed, as it has been already more than 10 years that I have been living in Canada. I don't know where home is. I don't really think about it. I wish life had brought more joy. Maybe, after all, 'home' consists of those invaluable quiet moments. And you know what, joy turns out to be simple things, such as having this talk with you – you have a real voice from Hanoi”.

This was not the first time that I listened to such a story. A. had a hard and dramatic life. Being such a long way from 'home', even the most well-organized trips encounter unforeseeable challenges, especially a trip in which the departure for a new life requires taking a jump into a tiny boat heading across the Pacific ocean. After hearing these stories, I realized that making these type of decisions is a radical move.

With all the significant events in his life, which he needed several hours to tell me all about, I should have found it easy to write a story about people like A. and what they have experienced. Nevertheless, this intention has not been entirely fulfilled because there is a key challenge: how can a life story be written when common adjectives such as happy, sad, excited, satisfied, nostalgic do not seem applicable at all?

Narrative 2: B.

The Vietnamese community in Vancouver spreads over a large area and appears more visible than the community, for example, in Ottawa. Walking along the Kingsway for about 4 km, one can notice many Vietnamese restaurants, grocery stores, dentist offices, video rentals, money transfer services and immigration consultant offices. Many of them started in 1990s and aimed their services to the Vietnamese and other Asian

communities. Restaurants are mostly family based, and in that respect, are like the ones in Vietnam. The main difference here is that everything is bigger, from a bowl of soup to a cup of coffee.

Some Vietnamese Stores in Kingsway Vancouver

I was greeted warmly by B., the owner of an electrical shop in Vancouver. He turned out to be a key figure behind of many Vietnamese community's activities in Vancouver. When he found out about the purpose of my visit, he became excited. He was willing to offer help and answer any questions that I had. B. came to Canada from South Vietnam almost 20 years ago, and he appears to be a very dynamic businessman. Traveling back and forth between Vancouver and Asia, and always designing new business plans, he keeps his life busy. The large electrical shop seems to run efficiently with just the owner and one assistant, a man who has been with B. for many years, and who also works as an accountant. Besides famous brand names such as Sony, JVC and Panasonic, his store offers a variety of more inexpensive products made in China, ranging from mp3 players, digital cameras, to DVD players. "I studied the market and worked with many manufactures in China to order these products. The customers started to acknowledge the quality of them; they are amazed at the performance of such

inexpensive electrical devices made in Asia,” he said while taking me for a tour throughout the store. When I asked him about home, he gave a thoughtful response:

I definitely think of Canada as home. My children are happy here; they will enjoy an excellent education and speak perfect English without any accent, but I also find it important to look for one's roots. I have been working closely with other Asian communities such as the Korean and Chinese communities. They all experience inner conflict but they know how to unite themselves to create a united group, which will directly and indirectly create favorable conditions for doing business. When we are a minor group, the relationship of individuals to the whole community is very important.

He then continued, “I am lobbying to create a Vietnamese street, with unique characteristics, expressed in sign-boards in the front of each shop and street lights. I don't know if we should build a gate like the one in Chinatown, or a community centre, but anyway, we should really think of doing something to make the area truly Vietnamese.” Personally, I don't find it absolutely necessary for the Vietnamese “to become a united community,” as B wishes. However I was interested in the idea about “a unique Vietnamese street.” When I asked him what the street would like if it were uniquely Vietnamese, B said; “I can show you several Vietnamese restaurants in downtown Vancouver which have a beautiful design. The whole restaurant is decorated with handicrafts from Vietnam, and they attract large numbers of customers.” Then he added, “at the moment, I am working on a project to establish an organization to promote and

support young Vietnamese businessmen in the Vancouver region. Last week, we worked on the logo for the organization, and I proposed one with three bamboo shoots,” B said.

The image of “three bamboo shoots” has a historical connotation. Bamboo is a very important plant in Vietnam. Bamboo hedges surrounding villages create wonderful shade for children playing and adults resting during hot days. Anyone who has ever rested under the shade of a bamboo hedge will not easily to forget the sound of the wind blowing through the leaves. Bamboo is a favorite construction material thanks to its flexible and resistant character. During the wars, bamboo’s strength and resilience was considered the symbol of Vietnamese endurance and sacrifice. I prefer to think the image of “three bamboo shots” as a symbol for dynamic flexibility. I wished him well with his project.

The owner of a medicine store on a corner in Vancouver’s Chinatown showed me on a map the location of a pagoda and said it was rather famous, as it was “built” to resemble the ones at home. This phrase, ‘built to resemble the ones at home’ was appealing to me. Many complain about Vancouver for its ‘placelessness.’ I would agree that Vancouver is a de-centralized city. It is time consuming to travel from one place to another, and the Vietnamese community is scattered across a large area, so locating a community house which can be convenient for all is definitely a challenging job.

From a distance, the “Chan Quang pagoda” looks like a big residential building. I was greeted by an old lady, who takes care of the place. After showing me both floors, she let me wander on my own. The first floor is compact, and serves as a large meeting hall with nicely decorated tables and chairs. The second floor is reserved merely for

praying. In Vietnam, people go to pagodas on the first and the middle day of each month according to the lunar calendar, but most of the activities are usually scheduled for the weekends in Canada.

Building a pagoda in Canada is a big job. There are many factors to be considered, such as looking for a proper location that is approved by the city. As well, several issues must be addressed, such as how religious activities can be organized without disturbing the neighborhood, especially when the residents in the neighborhood may not share the same religion; adequate parking spaces for cars; fire alarms, etc. Since heavy smoke can easily trigger fire alarms, most of those pagodas in North America use a non-traditional form of incense that doesn't generate smoke when burnt.

While pagodas and temples in Vietnam are not designed to appear more significant than vegetation and water bodies surrounding them, Vietnamese pagodas in Canada are built to appear much more compact and enclosed, such as the Tu An Pagoda in Ottawa. Short summers and long, severe winters makes semi-open spaces for outdoor activities less appropriate than in Vietnam.

The lady at the Chan Quang Pagoda was very proud to show me the interior; the wooden handicraft products; tables, chairs, statues, mosaics. "Like many other pagodas built in Canada, the greatest effort has been put in getting gilded and bronze Buddha sculptures, incense burners, incense holders and flowers vases from home," she said. Looking at the golden reflections of the mosaics on the walls, I came to understand why the pagoda was believed to be "built to resemble the ones at home".

Pagodas and temples are community centers in Vietnam. Each village builds its own temple and pagoda, which are often masterpieces. The old profession of creating

handicrafts has a long history in Vietnam, and this is reflected in these traditional structures. Talented artists and constructors are honoured to be assigned the greatest job in their lives: to build their own village temple and pagoda. The process of building such structures involves many stages. Feng Shui principles are used to look for a proper location and to plan the layout, which includes the arrangement of the buildings, bodies of water, gardens and yards. Buildings usually face a water pond and a large yard, where most activities take place. As well, the preparation and treatment of lumber and bamboo is a time-consuming process which can take years. Lumber and bamboo is usually immersed in the water or the mud of a pond for one or two years to prevent damage from insects and rot. The treatment of the construction materials is crucial in order to guarantee a long life span for the buildings, since a good part of the buildings are directly exposed to the outdoor environment, characterized by high heat and humidity. Buildings such as temples and pagodas are sometimes semi open spaces, constructed out of a roof, columns and almost no surrounding walls. Architecturally, the roof is basically supported by a frame formed by a system of columns; the frame itself is composed of many trusses. A truss forms a plane that is perpendicular to the length of the building and determines the depth of the building and the incline of the roof.

Most people associate their memories of villages with the moments of touching the lumber columns of those temples. The treatment brings them to the stage when exposure to the sun, heat and humidity make them even more resistant and solid without being shrunk, cracked and curved. Entering the main temples, one has to walk through a tiled front yard. The tiles absorb heat, and can burn one's feet, while the lumber columns sustain an extremely cool surface, which calms one down. These temples often last for

several hundred years. Time is important when thinking about these buildings; it passes through human lives, but it is compressed in the lumber columns, which records one's departures and returns.

1

2

3

*1. Interior of a temple in Vietnam
2 & 3. Interior of Chan Quang Pagoda, Vancouver, Canada*

Architectural components – columns, beams, trusses – are partially decorated by carpenters and artists before they are assembled and erected to create the frame and then the whole structure. Although interior design and furnishing is the final stage, it by no means is less complicated or important. Gilded and bronzed Buddha sculptures are usually prepared and ordered at the time when the buildings are started, since not every village has craftsmen who specialize in sculpture. The wood used for sculptures generally comes from the jack fruit tree, and is sculpted, polished and covered with pieces of gold leaf just a few microns thick. Before the gold leaf is applied, the wood is covered with a very fine plaster mixture diluted in soft water and a red or yellow clay found suspended in the water of certain rivers. This mixture is called the "plate;" the gold leaf sticks to it without glue and is put into place using a special bristle brush. Compared to the long lifespan of the temple, the gilded wood sculptures last even longer. Buddha sculptures in

Vietnamese pagodas tend to be based on a human scale. They don't appear to overshadow human beings with tremendous size or frightening character. Tenderness and flexibility are among the qualities imbedded in Buddhism, which appreciates a sense of harmony and minimalism. This has thus translated into Vietnamese life, and its architecture accordingly.

If there is any thing which suggests the manifestation of the sacred in these temples, then it must come from the fragrance of *Tram*¹⁰ blended with *Hue* flowers. *Tram* is the resinous wood that comes from the *Do Bau* tree. In Vietnam, *Do Bau* trees are usually found in hilly regions with high humidity and high precipitation. They can grow up to thirty to forty meters high and sixty centimeters in diameter, and bear sweetly-scented, snow-white flowers. *Do Bau* trees frequently become infected with a fungus or mold. In response to this infiltration over a period of years, the trees defend themselves by producing a form of resin, which acts as a bandage to cover the wounds. That is how the precious and aromatic resin is formed. Not all *Do Bau* trees will produce such a precious resin. The most precious resin, named *Tram Ky*, is produced by trees infected by the fungus for ten to twenty years. *Tram Ky* is often used in medicine, and is a very popular ingredient in the Vietnamese incense used in pagodas, temples and homes.

As well, the *Hue* flower is commonly used in temples and pagodas in Vietnam. These flowers usually grow in rich soil, with plenty of water and an abundance of sun. The trees grow in elongated spikes that produce clusters of aromatic white flowers. The *Hue* flower is believed to bring serenity to the mind and heart, which is why they are commonly used in temples, pagodas and altars in homes. Although *Hue* flowers bloom in

¹⁰ 'Tram' is Aloeswood in English; 'Do Bau' is *Aquilaria* tree. 'Do Bau' tree is an evergreen tree native to northern India, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

sunlit places, they do not lose their scent when picked. On the contrary, the *Hue* has a heady floral scent that continues to produce itself, which seems to be activated by the heat produced by burning as incense. This reason is why the *Hue* has become a favorite flower to be used as an offering. The blend of burning *Tram* incense mixed with *Hue* floral scent creates an extremely aromatic sweet fragrance. The *Hue* flower originates in the tropics, and is not common in Canada. However, in Vietnamese pagodas in Canada, one can still detect the smell of *Tram* incense, whose sweet fragrance brings many Vietnamese Canadians a special feeling. In the guest book of many pagodas in Canada, one frequently finds such notes as, “When inside Vietnamese pagodas in Canada, the smell of incenses coming from the altar, (or nave) brings the sense of familiarity, the sense of home”.

Vietnamese community events in Ottawa are usually concentrated around several occasions, such as the lunar New Year, the full moon festival, *Vu Lan*¹¹, etc. For many people, community events are a chance to express political opinions, commemorate the Saigon government, show their disapproval to the Hanoi government, etc. Attending such events, one may think that the Vietnam war was not over yet. I speak Vietnamese with a Hanoi accent, which is a real disadvantage whenever I show up in such a crowd because for some people I sound like a communist.

The Vietnamese exile communities are rather well-known for their political involvement. Hundreds of thousands of people gather for demonstrations against anything ‘related’ to communism, ranging from a visit by a communist leader, to singers, and artists who are classified by them as communists coming from Vietnam...

¹¹ *Vu Lan* in Buddhism is a day to celebrate Mothers.

When being asked to describe the Vietnamese communities in North America, Hoang Thi Bac¹² references a monologue from Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

The essence of being Czech vanished into thin air. [...] The only thing they were all able to understand was the flames, the glory of the flames when he was burnt at the stake, the glory of the ashes, so for them the essence of being Czech came down to ashes and nothing more. The only things that held them together were their defeats and reproaches they addressed to one another. (Kundera 1984:97)

In reality, there are people who left Vietnam because of their economic situations, and many refuse to be classified as either communists or anti-communists. Thus, not all Vietnamese Canadians find it necessary to show up at political demonstrations and protest against the Hanoi government. For the rest, community events simply are great opportunities for everybody to have good time together, speaking the language, reading poems, singing and enjoying the food.

Last year, the *Vu Lan* was organized in a meeting hall on a Saturday afternoon on St. Stephens street in Ottawa. Many families of two or even three generations came to attend the events. *Vu Lan* is similar to Mother's Day in Canada, and most women dressed in traditional costume. The event is dedicated to mothers and parents in general. People who attend the ceremony are invited to get a rose for themselves: if your mother is still alive, a red rose is reserved for you; if your mother has passed away, you will then

¹² Hoang Thi Bac, a writer, replies in an interview with Tran Van Thuy. The interview is published in *If one travels the whole ocean*, by Tran Van Thuy, Thoi Van, California (2004: 79-93). In the interview Hoang says that what has been described by Milan Kundera for Czechs is absolutely applicable to Vietnamese exiles.

pick up a white rose. Each makes a contribution to the ceremony by preparing a poem, a song or an essay written about their own mothers in English and Vietnamese. Some talk about memories associated with their mothers, some sing songs, and others read poems about the *Que me*, or motherland.

In Vietnam, many of the public meetings dedicated to ‘mothers’ are used to praise the Vietnamese mothers’ great sacrifices. This is not so difficult to understand in a country in which four million people died during the war. The women who are praised in such meetings are the ones whose lives have experienced the most extreme human loss and pain. What can one say to the woman who has lost eight children and a husband? Their sufferings cannot be comforted by words. Can praising such a sacrifice do any thing more than make us insensitive towards loss and pain? In Vietnam there is a famous poem, learned by heart by many generations, which says “one has only one native land, like one has only one mother” (*Do Trung Quan*). If ‘native land’ appears an abstract notion, which may not have enough power to elicit the courage for young people to throw themselves into the battle field, ‘mother land’ appears to be a much more convincing notion. When ‘native land’ means both ‘mother’ and ‘mother land’, it encourages much more emotional and personal attachment.

The ceremony that I attended in Ottawa was not hero-worship. It was far different from what one may experience when attending such a ceremony on the other side of the globe. The attendees talked about the similarities between *Vu Lan* and Mother’s Day in general. Some wondered why the Vietnamese in general do not say “I love you, mom” as many Canadians do? Nevertheless, many agree that besides the things that we can do to make our mothers happy, it is also important to let them know that we love them by

speaking out such a words. Sometimes, such simple words can bring great happiness to mothers.

Different from the mournful atmosphere of public ceremonies held in Vietnam, the *Vu Lan* ceremony in Ottawa is still enjoyable. It tries to suggest that happiness lies in the experience of everyday life. After the meeting, I set up an appointment with D, who volunteers as one of the event organizers.

Narrative 3: D.

D. is a Vietnamese Canadian who came to Canada in 1970. Although he has lived in Canada for thirty five years, he seems to retain close ties with his cultural roots. He coordinates with some nuns from a small pagoda in Ottawa to organize numerous activities for the Vietnamese community in Ottawa. I asked him about his Canadian and Vietnamese identities: "I always think of myself as a Vietnamese. I remember after my first six months in Canada, I managed to cook a pot of rice in my room. That was perhaps the most memorable meal which I have ever had in my life; I ate plain rice with fish sauce. You see, in addition to the fact that I speak Vietnamese language, I eat rice and fish sauce, we have an altar in our house to worship ancestors [...] I believe this is what characterizes the Vietnamese culture, its mercifulness, the greatest philosophy of Buddhism" D. said.

D. is one of the few Vietnamese Canadians who talk openly about community with a critical attitude. According to him, the Vietnamese community in Canada is sophisticated and somehow unusual. D. said, "Anyone claims they have a noble cause to fight to create war, to make so many lives become torn apart. The war was over thirty

years ago, but so many people still suffer from its consequences. I just think how the Vietnamese, especially the young generations will be happier, and how I can help more people.” What D. said seems to give me the answer for the question that I wanted to ask him earlier about why he thought mercifulness was a unique characteristic of Vietnamese culture. I have also met some other people who seem to think the same way. Many people spend time doing charity work in response to their cultural situation: collecting money to help victims who have suffered from natural disasters, teaching the Vietnamese language to children and helping other Vietnamese political refugees settle in when they first come to Canada. “Let’s put it this way,” D. said, “How much have we suffered from the war, compared to the many other Vietnamese people who lost their lives either in the battlefields or in the ocean during their escape from Vietnam? We are the survivors, the lucky ones. The ones who are alive have to find the way to handle the past and to move forward. Things can be changed. There are more things that need to be done rather than argue about who is right and wrong [...] I think of Vietnam with peaceful memories, the aroma of sticky rice wrapped in a lotus leaf...”

D. perhaps, appears to be a very reasonable thinker among the Vietnamese exiles I have met in Canada. D. conveys a positive message through what he has done. The only thing which bothers me is attending the public events organized by him and his group which seem to suggest that mercifulness and Buddhism are the only possible choice to help the Vietnamese exiles, in particular and the Vietnamese nation in general, to find the tranquility in their minds in order to handle the past, and move forward.

Narrative 4: C.

C. may be my 'closest' Vietnamese friend that I have 'met' in Canada. I happened to run into her web site while surfing about a year ago. Since then I have visited the web site frequently in order to read her journal, entitled *From Saigon to Montreal via Paris*. As the title suggests, it is the diary of her life journey. I find her writings compelling and truly interesting. C. usually writes about her obsessions, and what has been stored in her memory. Sometimes, she wonders why little and insignificant things stay lodged in the memory, like the saying "Memory is a child walking along a seashore. You never can tell what small pebble it will pick up and store away among its treasured things." Writing, for C., is simply a release. And although she doesn't always directly speak of 'home,' she nevertheless is one of the Vietnamese Canadians who has inspired me to implement this thesis.

C. is among the Vietnamese exiles who will never return 'home'. For them, going back to Vietnam means surrender and betrayal to their political and ideological belief¹³. C. expresses this attitude towards the ones who return to Vietnam often in her diary. For people like C. 'home' absolutely should be Canada, but that seems not really true. C's entanglement with 'home', expressed in these following two notes, once again confirms that 'home' is one of those complex concepts that signifies a variety of meanings.

¹³ Nguyen Duc Bat Bat-Ngan, a Vietnamese Canadian poet, who lives in Winnipeg, shares the same thinking with C. in his poem *White Bone*:

...
Now I am in exile, Mother
And then my white bones will be left in a strange place
Send my words to Father, please Mother
That hard as it is, I still hold a smile
 ...

White Bones by Nguyen Duc Bat-Ngan, translated by Andy Kale. Original title: *Xuong Trang*, From: "*Binh Minh Cam*" (*Shrouded Dawn*). A collection of poetry written in 1975 published in 1985.

Note 1: “since the winter is long and severe in Canada, houses are well insulated to keep the heat, regardless of how much it snows, there will never be any smell, any sound coming from outside. That is what is missing [...] Sometimes, I miss desperately a shout by children from the street, the scent of dry sun, the scent of precious breeze in hot summer days, the smell of fire rice coming from the kitchen of the house next door [...] The smell traveled along with my childhood and haunts me still. That sounds so simple but impossible to find in here”¹⁴

Note 2: “I remembered it was 1976, sitting on the shore in the middle of the night, waiting for the boat to come, my aunt kept quiet whenever I asked her where we are going. Who wanted to let a child know that we were going to flee Vietnam by boat during an ‘illegal’ trip. Everyone was quiet; everything was covered by a deep, dark blue sky. I don’t remember how long I was asleep. When I woke up, the sky had turned to violet with little reflection of the earliest sun rose far in the horizon. Looking around, I noticed a small thatch house not far from the place where we hid. I couldn’t see clearly the thatch house, but I could see the shadow of woman going back and forth while holding an oil lamp. About half an hour later, I saw some strands of smoke coming out from the thatch roof. The sky was still dark; but the strands of smoke stood out in the background of dark sky [...] The boat didn’t come that time. Two months later, we left Vietnam. That was the day end of the year, the day since then I have never come back [...] What puzzles me is why such a fragile image of the strands of smoke coming out from the thatch house, haunts me still for the whole life. Perhaps, that image was stored in the memory to

¹⁴ C. Diary notes, *The smell of fire rice from the house next door*, January 13, 2001

present the image of my country, or that is the image, which the Vietnamese, who lives in exile will never, never be able to find...¹⁵

Reading such a diary, one may agree that childhood memories are stubborn. However, childhood memories may have their own justification. *The smell of fire rice from the house next door* and *The strands of smoke at dawn* sound modest but they suggest a thick interpretation of what they present. The first fragment suggests the culture in hot and humid climates, where open and semi-open spaces are of great for natural ventilation. By sharing a communal inner court yard, one can really have a sense of what is going on outside from the scents and sounds. This olfactory memory also suggests a time in the past, when life was more secure and centered around small communities, and in which between houses there seemed to be no fences, no locks or even no doors. Maybe, however, this is nostalgia for a pre-industrialized society, which is impossible to reconstruct.

The strands of smoke coming out from the thatched roof is a typical image of Vietnamese rural areas. Perhaps, in all cultures, the scene of “smoke coming out from the chimney” suggests the beauty of daily life and the comfort of the fire in a home. Perhaps for C., and many other Vietnamese Canadians, this image implies a particular meaning in a particular context, which has been stored in their memories forever. Compared to what is ‘out there’ – the dark, bottomless sea with the unpredictable dangers of typhoons, piracy and death – the scene of strands of smoke coming out from the thatched roof brings a cozy and secure feeling to mind. From the shore, looking toward the ocean, one sees nothing but darkness; looking toward the land, regardless of the dark blue sky, the

¹⁵ C. Diary notes, *The strands of smoke at dawn*, March, 11th, 1999

thatched house with some strands of smoke coming out from the roof is always visible.

Contrary to the abstract darkness of the bottomless ocean, the thatched house was a real object, which was seen, described and even smelled, yet was not a 'possible' choice. The house was there, but it was out of reach.

There are so many reasons why it impossible to go 'home' for many Vietnamese Canadians. For G., Vietnam is forever a lost homeland; the memories of Vietnam have been imprinted with his experiences in re-education camp. Similarly, Vietnam is the name which recalls so many grieving memories for E¹⁶. E. witnessed his wife and sisters being raped and killed by pirates. He was one among three 'lucky' men, who survived in the group of more than thirty people. The three men managed to handle the boat, which was devastated by the pirates and landed in Malaysia after a month of drifting on the ocean without almost no food or water. For people like G. and E., the concept of 'home' is overshadowed by the notion of state and its political regime. The notion of 'home' is

16

...
but there is such a disastrous and miserable cry
the escaping night running into darkness
the sea is coldly silent and you are hungered
unsteady
fearful
gloomy
a group of beasts with human faces maliciously surrounding
pirating, raping, devastatingly, eagerly
pirating, raping, insanely, savagely
 ...
deep in your broken heart, you know the sweet years are dead
since our lives
the smiles have
withered
since the day of departure, our house ruined
our country lost
since life with no truth left

...
 -Quoted from the poem *The Sea Diary*, written in 1979, in a refugee camp in Indonesia, by Nguyen Duc BatNgan, a Vietnamese Canadian poet, who lives in Winnipeg, translated by Thanh Quang
 "Nguyen Duc BatNgan" <<http://www.saigonline.com/ndbn/>>

overlaid with many layers of political and ideological conflict. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the project 4000, which was held recently in Ottawa, the Vietnamese political refugees express “After 25 years many Vietnamese-Canadians settled here, they still yearn to return to their home land if it were ruled by a democratic government.”¹⁷

Leaving for good refers to the condition of exile. Exile has a long tradition as a form of punishment. It was known in Ancient Rome, where the Roman Senate had the power to exile individuals, entire families or countries (which amounted to a declaration of war). Exile means to be away from one's home (i.e. city, state or country) while either being explicitly refused permission to return and/or being threatened by prison or death upon return.¹⁸

When large groups, or occasionally a whole people or nation, are exiled, it can be said that this nation is in exile, or Diaspora. Nations that have been in exile for substantial periods include the Jews, who were deported by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon in 597

¹⁷ See Jennings, 03/24/2004 Ottawa Citizen, and David 02/28/2003

...
*Mother, I have only tears left
 To share with people throughout the war.
 Nights dash by and days are squeezed short
 In my heart, as I long for home.*

*Mother, are you still sitting by the kitchen fire?
 As the smoky fumes cover the hair flowing down
 your back,
 A crowd of children, but not one is left,
 How could you have happy tears, Mother?*

-Quoted from the poem *In Exile* by Nguyen Duc BatNgan, a Vietnamese Canadian poet, who lives in Winnipeg. Translated by Sinh Vinh. From: "*Binh Minh Cam*" (*Shrouded Dawn*). A collection of poetry written in 1975 published in 1985.

¹⁸ "Exile" *Wikipedia*. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exile>>

BCE and again in the years following the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in the year CE 70.

Exile has been softened, to some extent, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as exiles have been welcomed in other countries and have either created new communities within those countries or, less frequently, returned to their homelands following the demise of the regime that exiled them. Today, it is possible to be exiled in place, that is, to be at home and long for other places and other times so vividly portrayed in the media. It is possible to be in internal exile and yet to be home. It is also possible to be forced into external exile and be unable to, or wish not to, return home.

The Vietnamese community in Canada appears as the “refugees, who lost their homeland, the *que huong* that is always carried in their heart, the beloved that has gone forever” (Jennings, 2004). Although it is clearly understood that the Vietnamese exile directly resulted from war, I don’t intend to contribute more to the profile of the Vietnam war either by deepening the topic of war, or joining any discussion or debate about the war. The stories, told by the Vietnamese Canadians, used in this thesis may give some insights for what has been described as “unusual Vietnamese Diaspora”. However, in order to understand the sensitivity of that “unusual Diaspora”, I find it necessary to look at the root of the issue.

Narrative 5: Exile in the home country

I was born and grew up in the old quarter of Hanoi, and I did not have any connection to the rural areas. I often heard adults saying *Ve Que*. *Que* is the short form of the saying *Que huong*, which means the place where one was born, ‘native village’,

‘native land’ or ‘native country’ depending on the context. When people in the city say *Ve Que*, they mean ‘returning to their native village or native home town.’ My grandmother’s native village had all of the typical things from the stories; the paddy field, the old gate, the thick bamboo hedge surrounding the village like a protective wall, a temple with a front yard, which was near a lotus pond. According to my grandmother this front yard was the favorite place for children to play in, and was scented with the smell of lotus flowers in July, and the smell of straw at the harvest times in May and November. When I was a young girl, my grandmother’s stories appeared abstract to me, and I did not understand why the native village was so important for so many adults. Since I wanted concrete answers, she agreed to offer me a clearer definition. One’s native village is a place where one was born and a place where one can long for. According to that logic, my native village no doubt was the city of Hanoi. However, I liked the stories of my grandmother’s native village. Playing in the yard, saturated with the scent of lotus flowers and straw must have been wonderful. I also liked other stories about native lands which I found in my school books, especially when they are about the peaceful images of villages:

*The new moon stretches in the sky;
A field stirs in afternoon shadows.
The warm grasses muffle the frogs’ sharp cries;
Paddies sway as softly as strands of silk.*

*That spring. I remember that spring.
We chased birds, romped through grassy fields;
We watched the buffaloes pass the gate,
Their horns the shape of the crescent moon.*¹⁹

¹⁹ Poem *The Country* by Nguyen Khoa Diem

My family used to live in *Hang Dao*, which means the silk street, specializing in silk products. *Hang* means merchandise and *Dao* refers to a deep pink color, the color of peach flowers. When I was born, the profession of dying and selling silk products was no longer popular. However, the shop houses, once specializing in silk products, were still there.

In Vietnam, as well as many other Asian countries, a shop house is the most typical form of residence. As the name it suggests, it was meant for living and working in the same place. The houses usually have two floors, the first floor for business and the second floor for living. Shop houses, especially ones in the old quarter of Hanoi, are long and narrow. Since the houses are long and surrounded by other buildings, inner courtyards were used to bring light and wind into the houses. In Vietnam's hot and humid climate, these courtyards not only help to stimulate natural ventilation, but are also the preferred places for various daily activities.

Our living room opened onto a small inner court yard, which had intense sun in the morning and some shade until late afternoon. In the summer, it rained a lot. Tropical rains were heavy and came without warning. Raindrops landing in the ceramic tiles in the court yards created sonorous echoes, especially at night. In the corner of the courtyard, my grandmother grew some herbs and some dry lotus flowers. That was the place in the house that reminded her of the scenes of her native village, she usually said.

The country sounds in the poems I learned at school and my grandmother stories brought me to another world. The warm grasses muffling "the frogs' sharp cries", the whistle-kite playing "music with the wind" and the perfumed lotus aroma in my

grandmother's childhood playing yard created a peaceful and poetic image of a "native land". Like many other Vietnamese children of my generations, who were born and grew up in cities, the "native land" that appeared in our school books was the world of beauty and peace. Like the descriptions in the following poem, *Native Village*, our concept of "native land" as an idyllic and peaceful alternative to the city:

*As a boy I went to school twice a day.
From the pages of my school book
I learned to love my native village:
"Who says tending the water buffalo is a hard life?"
I listened to bird song from the trees as if in a dream.*

*Some days I played truant from school,
Catching butterflies by the pond
Until my mother caught me,
Although she didn't use the whip, I cried,
The little girl next door
Looked at me and laughed and I was ashamed.²⁰*

The impressive images of "native lands" as wonderful places filled with "birds and butterflies" certainly constructed a fantastic image in our minds. Other times, the poems we learned coupled the native village with scenes of war. For example,

*Then the revolution,
The long war started
And my native village was filled
With the shadows of the enemy.
Leaving my mother, I went away.
Who could believe the girl next door
Also joined the guerrillas?²¹*

The fairy tale images of birds and butterflies alternated with images like "the shadows of the enemy" and were repeated in our "Resistance Literature" lessons. At school, the area of 'resistance literature' was studied in chronological order. There were so many assignments in which students were supposed to make comparisons between 'the love

²⁰ Poem *Native Village* by Giang Nam

²¹ Poem *Native Village* by Giang Nam

towards the nation' expressed in literature written in different historical periods. The word Vietnam is composed of two words: "Viet" referring to the name of the indigenous ethnic group, 'Bach Viet,' and 'Nam' referring to 'South'. The name Vietnam thus refers to a country, belonging to the Viet people, located in the South of China. We learned early the declaration of independence of Viet Nam:

*The Southern Emperor rules the Southern land.
Our destiny is writ in Heaven's Book.
How dare ye bandits trespass on our soil?
Ye shall meet your undoing at our hands!* ²²

The lesson that Vietnam was a small nation that had to fight against exterior invasion to maintain its independence is one of the most important lessons for Vietnamese children.

My grandmother spent her youth under the colonial French occupation, and was evacuated from her native village. I often wondered why the Vietnamese who experienced such circumstances during wars had such a vibrant attachment to 'home'. In reality, my grandmother's peaceful childhood lasted only for several years after which she was evacuated to several places.

I remember the school assignments in which students were supposed to analyze the "love toward the nation" in different historic periods. The tradition of resistance against foreign aggression was among the things students were to absorb from these kinds of school lessons, and they instilled strong sentiments toward the nation.

Strong patriotism appeared as tradition in these exercises. The Vietnamese can be absolutely proud of their patriotism; how to use that patriotism appears to be the question

²² Ly Thuong Kiet, Translated by Huynh Sanh Thong

Marshal Ly Thuong Kiet read this poem to his troops in 1076, exhorting them to resist aggressors from China.

that needs most to be asked. The last war, which happened between 1955 and 1975, still excites so much controversial debate. The government in the North called it ‘the war against American invasion’, the South called it ‘the anti-communist war’ and some people just called it a war of ideological conflict. Patriotism was the driving force that caused so many Vietnamese young people going to war. Why so much bloodshed? Why were so many schools, hospitals, residential buildings destroyed while everyone who participated in the war claimed they had the ‘noble cause’ to fight?

The reason that I decided to use poems as quotations for the thesis is I have read so many diaries written in verse by soldiers. There are diaries that have been drifting for years and returned to the soldiers’ families by American war veterans. Reading those diaries, one is shocked to see how so many Vietnamese left their ‘home’ in order to:

*“join the Western Advance this spring
Set their mind toward Sam Nua, far from home”*

and to see...

*“Graves sprinkled along the border lie in silence;
We throw ourselves into battles with no regrets.”*²³

Did they identify themselves as a ‘communist’ or a ‘capitalist’ or did they just hope to bring peace to their mother land? Is it right that the fever of patriotism results in bloody massacres and mass destruction, which go beyond any human comprehension?

Unavoidably the question arises: what kind of history suppresses the historical in favor of the mythical? What kind of history resurrects mythicized figures and mythicized events in order to narrate contemporary events? Pelley provides this wise summary:

²³ Poem *Western Advance* by Quang Dung (1948)

“Eliade has suggested that in heroic literature suffering can be normalized; only transcendent explanations of historical contingencies can justify it and make it bearable. Without recourse to archetypes, he maintained, the terror of history would be intolerable; historicism simply says: it happened that way. By sublimating history and appealing to transcendent ideals such as the ‘tradition of resistance to foreign aggression,’ official historians provided what George Mosses has described as an ‘ideology for confronting mass death and destruction’ (Pelley 2002:146).

In Vietnamese literature, there is a large amount of work that addresses the longing for, and memories of, home. Those peaceful moments of ‘home’ are invaluable. They made it possible for the Vietnamese to struggle through the painful and grieving time of war. In reality, the peaceful, imagined moments of returning ‘home’ had never happened, at least for the four million Vietnamese who died during the war, and for several other millions, who now live in exile across the globe. But those memories and images of places as peaceful and tranquil have been carried on in their minds, through various forms of literature, songs and oral history.

3 PLACES is a music program inspired by Charles Ives’ iconoclastic masterpiece, *Three Places in New England*. The ‘places’ of Ives’ composition were not just physical locations, but places of the imagination rooted in specific traditions and memories. *An Afternoon on the Perfume River*, by Paul Chihara, is one of the three compositions featured in *3 PLACES*, and the music was inspired by a poem by Nguyen Khoa Diem. In an interview, Chihara said that the poem created a special passion in him, for it was written in the context of a devastating war, but there was no hint of death, anger or

bitterness. On the contrary, the poem depicts a wonderfully peaceful moment by the Huong River, seemingly holding the war at bay.

*After this time, there may be others,
The clouds as high, the sun as warm.
Then too the winds may blow away those afternoons to come,
But this day all the world dances on images of windswept hair.*

*This afternoon a cow grazes by the river,
Unaware the afternoon is dying.
The cow and I, a pair of old friends,
Look gently out over the Perfume River.*

*A peaceful afternoon, peaceful afternoons on a river bank,
Things I have lived and I have not lived.
An afternoon in whose fading light
I see through the waters clearly for the first time.*²⁴

Another person who is engaging with history and memory through art is Tran Anh Hung, the exiled Vietnamese film director who has made a series of nostalgic movies such as *The Scent of Green Papaya* and *The Vertical Ray of the Sun*. He once said that he feels deeply connected to Vietnamese culture even though he left Vietnam at an early age. Many people believe that Tran's movies are deeply eastern, and some say that Tran's languorous version of Vietnam resembles a haiku. Indeed, one can pause the film at any moment and create a rapturous portrait. A clean, Eastern sense of beauty saturates every scene with rich details expressing harmony with nature: the sound of trickling, stone garden fountains, the resonating dings of wind chimes designed to produce calmness. One commentator wrote that "The Eastern eye delights in symmetry, intuitive placement, subtle shades and combinations of colors, a proclivity toward balance, rational sequence, and separation of colors. The Eastern design penetrates into all levels, from ceramics,

²⁴ Poem, *An afternoon on the perfume River*, by Nguyen Khoa Diem (1968)

textiles, the tea ceremony, gardens and flower arrangement” (Chappell 2001). Tran’s movies vaguely remind the viewer of a distant land, where the sense of harmony and quietness seems to be absolute, even in the scenes of present daily life activities in the crowded city. He once said, in an interview,

I wanted my film to feel like a caress. It had to have a gentle smile floating through it, a sort of floating feeling...My thoughts turned back to my childhood in Da Nang, remembering the time when I’d be waiting to fall asleep at night, my mind racing from one thing to another, nothing precise. The smell of fruit coming in through the window, a woman’s voice singing on the radio. Everything was so vague. It was like a feeling of suspension. If I’ve ever experienced harmony in my life it was then. It was just a matter of translating that rhythm and that musicality into the new film. (Tran 2000)

The feeling of suspension, occurring at moments of absolute quietness and harmony, hints at a nostalgia for a time that may never have existed. This “floating feeling” finds a unique expression in his movies; however, it appears that Tran is not alone in capturing such a feeling.²⁵

²⁵ In the process of studying hundreds of writings about ‘home’ by the Vietnamese, I have found numerous writings about the “peacefulness of a village scene”. The inner courtyard in a modern house (2) is described by the owner as trying “to capture a bit of the quietness that recalls the peacefulness of village scene”. The interior design of a Vietnamese restaurant in Ottawa (3) is decorated with bamboo. However, no single real image of that village scene with bamboo has been found among the images. The closest one that I have found is the painting (1) “Bamboo at my native village”. The painting is the attempt to capture the imagined peaceful moment of a village scene by an artist.

Pelley has put much effort into challenging the ‘accuracy’ of the images of villages and the “Vietnamese sentiments towards their native villages” in her book, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*. According to her, in order to strengthen the belief of Vietnam as united nation, which has a long history of fighting against its invaders, it appeared as the necessary task for politicians to reinforce the belief these sentiments. That task was performed successfully by the government in the North of Vietnam.

The discussion about “the Vietnamese sentiments towards their native land” raised by Pelley recalls me of school lessons on the “native land,” which I mentioned earlier. In this thesis, I don’t place much importance in verifying the accuracy of what appears in the discussion as “the Vietnamese sentiments towards their native land”. My argument rests on two reasons. First, a large number of the Vietnamese population was born and grew up in rural areas, and it is reasonable to say that the Vietnamese have some emotional connection with their native villages. Second, and more importantly, even when these sentiments are nothing more than myths, who is to say that myths are less powerful?

1,

2,

3,

1. Painting, “Bamboo at my native village”
2. Inner courtyard of a modern house in Hanoi
3. Interior design of a Vietnamese restaurant in Ottawa

These sentiments that were used by politicians as an effective political instrument, driving so many lives into wars, appear relevant to the discussion of nations as “imagined communities”. In his piece, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson defines the concept of nation as following:

Nation is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion. It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm [...] Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (Anderson 1986: 7)

What makes these objects of the imagination generate such colossal sacrifices?

According to Anderson, the beginnings of an answer lay in the cultural roots of nationalism. The nation emerged as the strongest imagined sense of timelessness, disinterestedness, and naturalness. Anderson defines nationalism as a construction created in imagination by print media. Looking at the early communities, which were mostly constructed around religious ideologies and were linked by the publication of books on those religious concepts. These original "communities" did not necessarily

confine themselves to a given geo-political unit. However, newspapers made it possible for people in a geographically vast region to discuss the same topic. This process had a powerful impact on the creation of an imagined community, called a nation. He claimed that it was print capitalism which allowed for the development of these new national cultures and the creation of imagined communities. As we witness the changes of technology evolving over time, it will become impossible to talk about the circulation of the concept of nation without addressing mass media, different kinds of educational institutions such as museums, associations and churches as the main cultural forces. Similarly, Scruton argues that the most important social forces are “language, religion, custom, associations and traditions of political order – in short, all those forces that generate nations” (Scruton 1982:14).

Modern societies are often referred to as “secular societies,” meaning that religious and other absolute moral values no longer play a central role as cultural bonds operating as a kind of cultural “cement” to varying degrees in modern society. Despite the assumption of secular theories stemming from the Enlightenment that religion would steadily decline in significance, it continues to play a prominent role in the different ideological constructions of national communities. Religious discourse was one of the key sites where there was a struggle to produce the required ideological effect of cementing national unity and rooting out any divisive tendencies.

It is not difficult to understand why periods of social tension or crisis should give rise to more pronounced efforts to articulate a dominant discourse defining the sacred character of the imagined community by contrasting it with an alien opponent. Older symbols and values, such as those deriving from religious sources do not necessarily

disappear from modern society as the inevitable result of secularization. There are strong traces of them in various layers of culture and they are capable of being adapted, or articulated with non-religious elements in new combinations (Thompson 1996).

The consolidation of the ideas and narratives of the nation and nationhood has been linked to many factors, including the attempt by ruling elites and governments to create new identities that would legitimize the enhancement of state power and the coordination of policy (Breuilly 1992); the creation, via mass education systems, of a common framework of understanding – ideas, meanings, practices – to enhance the process of state-coordinated modernization (Gellner 1983); the emergence of new communication systems – particularly new media (such as printing and telegraph), independent publishers and a free market for printed material – which facilitates interclass communication and the diffusion of national histories, myths and rituals (Anderson 1983); and building of an historic sense of homeland and deeply rooted memories, the consolidation of ethnic communities via common public culture, shared legal rights and duties, and an economy creating mobility for its members within a bounded territory.

Ideology persuades people to see their society as a particular kind of unitary entity in which they themselves have a certain identity.²⁶ There may not be a single dominant

²⁶ Initially, I put some effort in studying and understanding the term ideology because I find the concept relevant to the Vietnamese context. My research responded to Fukuyama's essay, "The end of history?" in which he states that Liberalism was "the end of history as such; that is, the end point of mankind's ideological revolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1989: 3). I think the idea of the end of ideology, as raised by Fukuyama, is misleading. The belief that no other form of ideology can surpass liberalism is not very far from imperialism. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis.

By including the quotations below, I want to open out my discussion about ideology and the Vietnam war. I would like to invite the readers to review different perspectives raised by the people, who participated in the Vietnam war;

ideology based on shared values in a modern society, but there are many cultural processes that reproduce social integration. For example, there is a certain degree of cultural integration to the extent that people are won over by the symbolic appeal of a combination of discourses, as in the appeal of the “imagined community” of the nation.

For a large number of the Vietnamese, war was seen as inhumanity and fatality. They got their definition of the war through what they experienced. American bombs destroyed villages, cities, and civilian people. For them, the Vietnam War got its noble cause as the war against America.

For others, especially the Vietnamese refugees who fled Vietnam after the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975, the Vietnam war got its noble cause as the war against communism. David Ta notes “*After 25 years many Vietnamese-Canadians settled here, they still yearn to return to their home land if it were ruled by a democratic government.*”(David Ta, Ottawa)

Oliver Stone, American film director, who made *Platoon*, the well known movie about the Vietnam war, once noted: “*We came to Vietnam to participate in the war. We fought with people, who didn’t understand the reason why we should be there? They didn’t understand us, and we didn’t understand them either... I participated in that war to make my father satisfy and I wanted to serve for the Nation. You will not believe that, until I came back to New York, I started to realize the true intention of such a war and the true intention of politicians. I decided to enroll in the film school and then I made Salvador. I wanted to say that the dirty war on behalf of democracy, which America propagated, was the war, carried for many other purposes in which, democracy was aimed at the bottom line*”. (Stone; online)

Keith W. Taylor, a veteran of the Vietnam War notes “*...It became very clear to me that I am not among the self-loathing Americans who notice people in other countries looking to us for leadership and see nothing but neocolonialism and imperialism; I accept the premise that the United States has a legitimate, even inescapable, role to play in the world today ...In my opinion, the tragedy of Vietnam is not that the United States intervened when it should not have, but rather that the intervention was bungled so badly and that the Vietnamese who believed in us were ultimately betrayed...*”,

Keith W. Taylor is professor at Cornell University. Summary notes from the writing “How I Began to Teach about the Vietnam War”, (Fall 2004 Michigan Quarterly Review. Ann Arbor).

Nguyen Ba Chung, a writer, poet and translator notes “*For a Vietnamese to write about the Vietnam war is to write about one's self-definition: the war touched every aspect of one's reality -- personal, communal, philosophical, political, religious, and cultural. The problem with this self-definition is that it isn't so much self-definition as picking a position that's already defined -- left, right, middle, pro, con, or indifferent. There is no position on the war that hasn't been already discussed, analyzed, praised, or condemned. Yet neither is there a position that takes into account all aspects of Vietnam's two thousand year history of hard-fought existence. And that, I believe, is the essence of the Vietnam tragedy*” (Nguyen Ba Chung; online) (Nguyen Ba Chung is a writer, poet and translator. Nguyen has taught at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and been an associate at the William Joiner Center For The Study of War and Social Consequences)

Regardless of how ‘noble’ those political opinions are, nevertheless, the Vietnamese experienced one of the most inhumane wars of the 20th century.

The term ideology was first employed during the French Revolution by Destutt Tracy. Tracy defined ideology as a new 'science of ideas'. Currently, the term ideology is used to indicate the frameworks of thought which are used in society to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world. According to Hall, "Nowadays, ideology includes the whole range of concepts, ideas and images which provide the frameworks of interpretation and meaning for social and political thought in society, whether they exist at the high, systematic, philosophical level or at the level of casual, everyday, contradiction, common-sense explanation" (Hall 1986: 36). Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism for example are the political ideologies, which have tended to dominate and organize many societies over many years.

The very legitimacy of the state's claim to exercise power over individuals rests on its success in convincing people that it acts in their interests. In circumstances of international economic competition, periodic crises and the decline of the role of the national economy, the state depends on its success in harnessing the feelings of solidarity with the national community in support of its power. It is in such circumstances that we are likely to witness the sorts of upsurges of nationalist symbolism, usually involving royalty and civil rituals.

Contemporary social life is associated with the modern state, specifying the proper form of nearly all types of human activity. The state appears to be omnipresent, regulating the conditions of life from birth registration to death certification. From the policing of everyday activities to the provision of education and the promotion of health care, the steady expansion of state power appears beyond question. Quantitatively, the

growth of the state, from the size of its budget to the scope of its jurisdiction, is one of the few uncontested facts of the twenty century (Held and McGrew: 2003).

Yet, however limited the actual control most states possess over their territories, they generally fiercely protect their sovereignty, their entitlement to rule, their autonomy and their capacity to choose appropriate forms of political, economic and social development. The distinctive 'bargains' governments create with their citizens remain fundamental to their legitimacy. The choices, benefits and welfare policies of states vary dramatically according to their history and context, but, in the age of nation-states, the independence bestowed by sovereignty, in principle, still matters greatly to all states. Modern nation-states are political communities which create the conditions for establishing national communities; and few seem willing to give this up. Although national political choices are constrained, they still count and remain the focus of public deliberation and debate. According to the skeptics, national political traditions are still vibrant, distinctive political bargains can still be struck between governments and electorates, and states will continue, given the political will, to rule. The business of national politics is as important as, if not more important than, it was during the period in which modern states were first formed.

The sense of being part of a unitary entity such as national community may well be rooted in real elements of shared characteristics and common history, but these are frequently matters of dispute and contestation, linked to different interests and power struggles. Territory, language, religion, race, etc. produce a sense of belonging to a national community. There is nothing mechanical or inevitably determined in the

working of such ideologies. Whether culture has particular ideological effects depends on processes of social construction, the transmission of meanings and their perception.

Before continuing the next part, I would like to emphasize the fact that the imagined communities of nations are the sites of ideological contestation and power struggles, as evidenced in the resurgence of ethnic-religious nationalism throughout the world. This forces us to think about the concept of belonging, the way people perceive our sense of themselves as individuals with an identity derived from membership of some larger community or grouping. In the case of Vietnam, the Vietnamese have paid an extravagant price for the so-called 'noble' wars.

The "unusual Vietnamese Diaspora" exists according to the imagined moment of coming 'home', which has been carried by Vietnamese exiles across the globe. These people are exiles in their home country, separated from their native land by the ideological images of a 'home' that does not exist. To decode the "unusual Vietnamese Diaspora" is an attempt to capture that obsession of 'home'. Since I would like to capture the subtlety of that obsession, I have tried not to describe it as an emotional feeling, which would easily fall into the well-defined channels of either fondness or hatred. This feeling is also far different from either the feeling of exultation experienced by those who claim themselves the winners, or the feeling of loss experienced by the haunted ones, who think they are the losers of history.

Let's look at this another way: if I had to find some alternative way to describe this obsession of 'home', could I not use the sense of taste? Is this obsession with 'home' salty, sour, sweet or even bittersweet?

3. Project: memory cookbook

Home²⁷

Home by Richard Wilson

Home²⁸

Idea of 'home' suggested by Germane Koh

Richard Wilson's memory of home is perhaps close to what Engels portrays of life in England before the industrial revolution in his piece *The Condition of Working Class in England*. 'Home' in the painting of Richard Wilson includes the farm house, trees, and river. The landscape of the golden sunset in the late afternoon seems to capture the full range of emotion of the artist towards his 'home'.

When asked, whether we are entering an era in which we can really manage to disregard the concept of home as a source of stability and be happy with the state of being free to go," Germane Koh, a Malaysian Canadian artist replied: "speaking for myself, I maintain relationships with people across the country and the globe, so in some sense my email address is the closest thing I have to a permanent home."²⁹

²⁷ Richard Wilson, [Welsh Romantic Painter, ca.1713-1782]

²⁸ Idea of Home, suggested by Germane Koh, in an interview done by the author.

²⁹ Germane Koh, in an interview done by the author.

If home in Richard Wilson's painting is deeply connected with its natural landscape - trees, river, and the sky - in a specific moment of an afternoon, home as suggested by Germane Koh doesn't show any hint of the place. I can enter my 'home' (with a splendid address: senseofhome@hotmail.com) anywhere on the planet and no one will have any clue from where such a nostalgic person comes from. In other words, there are so many things happening in this global world, which ask us to re-define the concept of 'home'.

*The Universal Picture 3*³⁰ is the title of an art installation by Ron Terada, a Canadian artist who lives and works in Vancouver. In the piece, Terada presents photographic images of signs welcoming people to Vancouver. The photo on the front page of the poster is sign that reads *Entering the City of Vancouver*, backed with a blue sky and three pine trees. On the back of the poster, there is another photo with the sign

³⁰ *Universal Picture 3* by Ron Terada.

Vancouver welcomes you, which is also blocked by three trees of different types.

However, there are no signs of the city itself.

What is Vancouver is famous for? The American film and television industry has made the location famous. Known as Hollywood North, Vancouver is desired for its ability to stand in for a North American anywhere. It is attractive to the American film and television industry because of the variety of backdrops it can offer: oceans, mountains, lakes, wilderness, suburbia, upmarket neighborhoods, slums and malls. Crews can move easily from city to country locations. But above all, Canada's low dollar and tax incentives are the major reasons the shooting continues. Does this mutability expressed by Terada invite us to create our own interpretation on the city of Vancouver, similar to myths circulated by Hollywood? Or does he just simply deny the specificity of location?

I would like to think in this case, the city seems to win as it gives the subject for the artist. The artist, in his turn, urges us to acknowledge that placelessness gives the sense of place to Vancouver. Placelessness turns out to be a state of being, according to which the artist would like to characterize the city. Basso puts it this way:

Ubiquitously accepted as natural, normal, and unexceptional, sense of place is variously trained, variably intense, and, having grown to mature proportions, stoutly resistant to change. Its complex affinities are more an expression of community involvement than they are of pure [topography], and its social and moral force may reach sacramental proportions, especially when fused with prominent elements of personal and ethnic identity. Requiring neither extended analysis nor rational justification, sense of place rests its case on the

unexamined premise that being from somewhere is always preferable to being from nowhere. All of us, it asserts, are generally better off with a place to call our own. (Basso 1996: 87)

Globalization has brought profound changes to our perception to a place. However, even when globalization creates endless movements of people throughout the planet, and makes it more common for the phenomenon of being 'at home in the world,' this doesn't mean that globalization makes being 'at home in the world' a less anxious state. There are people who travel for their whole lives, wanting to go 'home' at one point. Maybe going 'home' is not for staying 'home', going 'home' is to prepare for another departure, because 'home' turns out not as what one expected.

My cousin dreams about his trip 'home' but just never makes it 'home'. However, it is important for him to talk about the trip to go 'home'. This is similar to other Vietnamese exiles, such as C., whose sense of 'home' is what she counts on in her negotiation with new contexts.

'Home' is indeed a structure which memory builds and 'home' is a concept that people carry around. A 'sense of home' truly reveals the notion of identity. However, the sense of 'home' and identity are not the same. Identity can always be described, even when it is believed to be concept which is not fixed and can be changed.

But, the 'sense of home' still appears abstract. It can come and leave instantly. It refuses to follow any well defined patterns of operation. There seems to be nothing mechanical in the relationship between 'sense of home' and identity. But they certainly inform each other. And indeed, as seen above, the Vietnamese 'sense of home' informs the Vietnamese identity, and vice versa.

If we search for the Vietnamese identity through the lenses of class, gender or race, the Vietnamese community in Canada appears as a visible minor group, or more particularly as angry political refugees, “boat people” with a sad legacy of wars.

The Vietnamese prime minister's visit brings out protestors.

Pictures taken June 27th 2005, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Canada.³¹

The images of the Vietnamese political refugees raising the flags on Parliament Hill, on June 27th, 2005 in Ottawa look clear and informative. But they may provide a superficial impression about Vietnamese identity. In addition to that, the thing that worries me is that by fixing a political identity on them, we, at the same time, make a statement: that battle is done; you are political refugees with legacy of war; that truth is fixed and will never be changed. Is there any way that battle can be “re-done”?

But we should leave behind this modern view of identity, which gives absolute importance to the primal territorial framework of ethnic groups and nations and

³¹ Source: < <http://www.vietfederation.ca/> >

The national flag of the Republic of Vietnam, which is also called the Saigon government.

dogmatically stresses biological and telluric characteristics associated with those origins, and move to postmodern conceptions.

Postmodernism acknowledges that the self is not a unified whole, and that identity is not a solid, identifiable thing; rather, the "self" is a mosaic of the different contexts, roles, and experiences the individual encounters. Accordingly, the identities of the Vietnamese – expressed in fragments and stories above – can be somewhat understood; these are Vietnamese Canadians who, on one hand, retain certain past notions of their own identities, while also contributing to the multiculturalism of Canada. This may help give some sense of identity to the Vietnamese community in Canada. The challenge still lies in the fact that those approaches at the same time too much and too little capture a specific portrait of that “unusual Diaspora.”

One of the major issues that have been discussed widely, especially after 9/11, is notion of “the West and the Rest.”³² Many authors make the argument that the root of world conflicts lies in the problem of categorizing “We” against “Others,” of labeling the

³² The concepts of the ‘West’ and ‘Western’ represent very complex ideas, which refer to a type of society, a level of development and its historical construct, rather than to a geographical term. The idea of the West first emerged in Western Europe but it is no longer only in Europe, and certainly not all of Europe is in “the West”. The concept of the West began when Europe began to describe and represent the difference between itself and “others” it encountered in the course of its expansion. Europe brought its own cultural categories, languages, images, and ideas to the New World in order to describe and represent it. It tried to fit the New World into existing conceptual frameworks, classifying it according to its own norms, and absorbing it into Western traditions of representation. Europeans took a new view of themselves and their relations to the other peoples of the globe. Maps are an important clue to this change...they are always more than mere factual statements; they are translations of reality; they are fictions and acts of imagination communicating more than scientific data. The world is not only what exists “out there”; it is also the picture we have of it in our minds which enables us to interpret material reality. (Roberts 1985; see also Hall 1996 and Wolfe 1982).

In order to understand the Vietnamese community in Canada through this approach, one can engage in the thick interpretation and presentation of the interplay between these two notions of the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’. The fact that Canada is located in the Western hemisphere and Vietnam is in the East doesn’t mean Canada or Vietnam would fall comfortably into the categories of the ‘West’ and ‘Rest’. There are many questions should be raised in here: How different is Canada compared to other Western societies? And how Vietnam should fall into the category of the ‘Rest’? In order to answer these questions, one will have to look back to understand how the concept of the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ came into play? Since when has the West become to imagine itself as “Western” with respect to the “Rest”?

identity of the 'Other'. It took me a while to realize that to enter that discussion, I, at the same time, categorize the Vietnamese community as the 'Rest' and 'the Other.' It is important to note that Vietnamese Canadians, especially political refugees, often express their gratitude towards Canadians who saved their lives. For example, D., a Vietnamese Canadian in Ottawa, said, "I have been working at the National Research Council for more than 15 years so far, I have never experienced racism, at least in my work environment. However, I believe Canada is not a melting pot either. It is the place you can be yourself by retaining your own cultural identity."

When talking about identity and cultural studies as raised by postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, many think of the notions; 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence'. According to Bhabha, "despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality" (Bhabha: 1990). Bhabha goes on to say that the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, or 'organic' ethnic communities – as the grounds of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition. Bhabha seeks to find the "location of culture" in the marginal, haunting, unhomely spaces between dominant social formations. He thus argues that cultural production is most productive when it is also most ambivalent. What is implied by Bhabha seems to suggest that to capture a culture means to evoke its ambivalent margins. To capture a culture is not about making a claim to any specific or essential way of being or addressing a form for it, but about addressing the process, in which that culture is being made.

The notion of 'ambivalence' is quite attractive to me. However, how to evoke that ambivalence is a challenge.

I've thus decided to move to an aspect that is integral to everyday life in order to fully apprehend the identity of the Vietnamese diaspora that I have traced throughout, and to capture the ineffable, corporeal experience of 'home' for the Vietnamese diaspora. Lefebvre posited that everyday life is quite simply lived experience, and in contemporary society, "modernity and everyday life constitute a deep structure" (Lefebvre 1987:11). But if it is a deep structure, everyday life is also an opaque one, defined by "what is left over after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis" (Lefebvre: 1991:97, as cited in Highmore: 2002:115). For traditional 'specialized' analysis, the everyday is at once too small and too big, too trivial and impossibly ambitious. Everyday life signals a frustration with philosophy and a desire to connect with the lived actuality of the present (a present seen as going through a 'consumer' revolution). As a Marxist, Lefebvre saw contemporary life as exploitative, oppressive and relentlessly controlled.

A quote from Hegel resonates across four decades of Lefebvre's writing: "what is familiar goes unrecognized". Lefebvre spent a large part of the century struggling to recognize the over-familiar world of the everyday. His critical perspective applies a dialectical approach to register the general in the particular. In bringing such attention to bear on the 'trivialities' of life, he dislodges their over-familiarity. It would seem that a critical attention to everyday life as an alienated reality requires an alienating perspective. Lefebvre explains:

Thus the simplest event – a woman buying a pound of sugar, for example – must be analyzed. Knowledge will grasp whatever is hidden within it. To understand this simple event, it is not enough merely to describe it; research

will disclose a tangle of reasons and causes, of essences and ‘spheres’: the woman’s life, her biography, her job, her family, her class, her budget, her eating habits, how she uses money, her opinions and her ideas, the state of the market, etc. [...] So now I can see the humble events of everyday life as having two sides: a little, individual, chance event – and at the same time an infinitely complex social event, richer than many ‘essences’ it contains within itself. (Lefebvre 1991:57)

The defamiliarization of the everyday requires a plurality of approaches, a range of attentions that places it radically within a framework of critical inter-disciplinarity. The everyday, Lefebvre insists, is not an ‘object’ or a place, but a totality of relationships.

Similarly, de Certeau’s writing can be described as both suggestive and evocative, and can be seen as textured by evocations that point to a sensory realm never fully mappable by images and words. For de Certeau, the turn towards studying everyday culture was not about finding new cultural texts to interpret, value and celebrate; instead it was an attempt to focus investigation on the way people operate, the way they ‘practice’ everyday life. For de Certeau, the popular culture of everyday life evidences “ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order” (de Certeau, 1984: xiii).

What characterizes the everyday for de Certeau is a creativity that responds to every situation. This occurs first in “making do” with ready-made culture, but also, and crucially, by “making with” this culture (through acts of appropriation and re-employment). In circumstances limited to materials at hand, everyday life witnesses the creative arrangements and re-arrangements of *bricolage*: creativity as “the act of reusing

and recombining heterogeneous materials (de Certeau 1997:49). But these assemblages are not just the products of an individual's will or actions; they are the products of heterogeneous culture, of culture in the plural. The heterogeneity of culture asserts itself not just through the inventive juxtapositions that people make, but through the stubborn insistence of the body, of childhood memories and cultural histories. The "resistance" of the everyday (de Certeau's leitmotif) is a resistance born of difference and otherness: "Bodies that are at variance to the machines that they operate; traditions that are unlike those being promoted; imaginings that are different from the rationale governing the present" (Highmore 2002:148).

If, according to Lefebvre, the practice of everyday life can be defined as a "deep structure" and "what is left over, after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis" (Lefebvre 1991:97), then looking at the deep structures of everyday practice promises to give some insight into what we temporarily call the Vietnamese identity. Regardless, it is a slippery concept and refuses to be captured despite many attempts. Among the practices of everyday life, food preparation and dining customs situate themselves at the most rudimentary level, and particularly, at the most necessary and the most familiar level.

Levi-Strauss was interested in all aspects of food: food stuffs considered edible and non-edible, ways of preparation, ways of consuming them, digestion and elimination. He made the hypothesis that all of these elements, all these networks of diverse information, of minor differences and frank oppositions, contain meanings, and cuisine forms "a language in which each society codes messages which allow it to signify a part

at least of what it is, indeed, a language through which a society unconsciously reveals its structures” (Levi-Strauss, as cited in de Certeau 1986)

In her piece, *Kitchen Women Nation*, Luce Giard portrays the everyday art of cooking as ‘a subtle intelligence,’ especially for women (de Certeau *et al.* 1998:158). But this celebration of women’s know-how is also haunted by reminiscence. Each gesture, each smell, each culinary trick is thick with the condensation of memories. ‘Cooking’ is never simply more or less than the inventive response to the limitations of circumstance; it always smells and tastes of the past. Cooking, like psychoanalysis, “recognizes the past in the present” (de Certeau 1986:4). Similarly, for Giard, cooking is situated within a ‘family stage’, reverberating with childhood memories and histories of migration. When political circumstances or economic situations force one into exile, what remains the longest as a reference to culture concerns food, if not for daily meals, then at least for festive times – “it is a way of inscribing in the withdrawal of the self a sense of belonging to a former land” (de Certeau 1998:184).

What is suggested by Lefebvre and de Certeau has inspired me to look at cooking, the most familiar practice of everyday life as a “deep structure” that may provide some insight into the discussion about identity and the ‘sense of home’ of the Vietnamese community. There were many times where I failed to sustain a discussion about belonging or identity with the exiled Vietnamese people I met. Most of the time, people refused to talk about it because the topic is too sensitive and too painful, or even unrepresentable through language. When the ‘official interview’ ended, many appeared that they had much more to say. And indeed, the most ‘angry’ political refugees often turned out to be the ones who had the sweetest memories of home. One can deny their

connection to a nation and its political regime; however, one can never forget the taste and smell of food prepared by one's mother and grandmother. Stories about the taste and smell of food often revolved around the topic of 'home'. Inspired by the cultural theory on the practice of everyday life by Lefebvre and de Certeau, combined with my own personal experience of being away from home, and meeting with the Vietnamese exiles in Canada, the idea of the *memory cookbook* was thus born. As I mentioned above, although the *memory cookbook* was created based in part on my memories of the tastes of 'home,' it is primarily inspired by the Vietnamese Canadians who weave their way in and out of this thesis.

Although the sophistication of culinary practices has been defined by Levi-Strauss as "a language through which that society unconsciously reveals its structures", it is not entirely my primary purpose to create the *memory cookbook* to reveal the thick structures of Vietnamese culture or society. It places emphasis on the connection between the unusual Vietnamese diaspora and the places mediated by memory and language, rather than an 'original' Vietnamese culture or society.

Although the project is entitled *memory cookbook*, it is the attempt to talk about the present and the future. In the shaping of our memories, much depends on the material sources available. Memories must therefore be localized in space and time because we apprehend our memories in relation to a given place and time or context. Context, however, does not mean an a priori setting, but the engagement with current circumstances, as well as the bias that that setting gives to the interactions that occur within it. In other words, it is not some preexisting place to be filled with objects, events

and ideas, but an emergent perception of those aspects of surroundings which give meaning to what one is doing.

The *memory cookbook* is constituted of twelve recipes: *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla*, *Cooked Rice*, *Sour Fish Soup*, *Lotus Stem Salads*, *Mango Salads with Shrimp*, *Table Salads*, *Dipping Sauce*, *Rice Noodle Soup*, *Spring Rolls*, *Grilled Shrimps*, *Grilled Fish*, and *Fish Wraps*. Significantly, like the above memory fragments, these recipes are not always completed. They are the written records of the attempt to capture some of the smells, tastes and flavors which constantly haunt the people who seek the taste of home.

The recipes selected in the *memory cookbook* represent the most common cuisine, available at any Vietnamese table. They can be described, along with Lefebvre, as those that are so familiar as to be unrecognized. At the same time, they are the ones that form “a language through which that society unconsciously reveals its structures.” Many of the Vietnamese dishes stem from rural cuisine, and so they thus still retain the aspects in which one can see how local conditions impose choices on ingredients or preparation methods.

Different from other cookbooks, which offer possible recipes to assist readers throughout the process of making foods, the *memory cookbook* doesn't mean to make cooking easy. Very few images of cooked dishes are offered to aid readers in trying to figure out these recipes. Most of the images depict only ‘raw’ ingredients. In a sense, these materials hide within themselves various layers of meaning about the culture of the place where they come from. They are the ‘raw’ materials used for the process of ‘cooking’ imaginations and memories.

I believe that seeking out a clear a clear sense of home is not as important as the process of working through this confluence of memory and taste, of experimenting with the connection between everyday material practice and the 'sense of home'. Cooking acts as a great metaphor through which complex subjects such as identity and belonging can be explored.

The idea of creating a cookbook came to me during the process of studying the Vietnamese community in Canada. Architecture is society's most public and visible art. Building a community house also means giving form to that community. And by creating a cookbook, rather than making an architectural structure, I have inclined toward producing a shape for the culture of a community by asking questions and experimenting with possible answers, rather than expressing them in a well defined and visible architectural form. I don't mean to create a cookbook in order to bring something vague into shape. Creating a cookbook is a way to address the fact that there is no shape. Taking shape is not a moment of arrival.

If, according to Lefebvre, the practice of everyday life can be defined as a "deep structure" and "what is left over, after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis" (Lefebvre 1991:97), the cookbook is the attempt to capture the numerous possibilities of reading the practice of the everyday. In the cookbook, ingredients are presented and addressed in a way that reveal different layers of meanings hidden in them. They thus form another level of language, the abstract level, layered in the concrete level which we usually experience in our daily lives. For example, 'eating' is a normal language, but in certain contexts, 'eating' means 'hunting' certain flavors and taste of the past. Thus, 'eating' presents itself in both the concrete and

virtual language of everyday life. If ‘cooking’ rice is always associated with a family souvenir such as a claypot, ‘cooking’ rice is thus an act of remembrance. In the same way, yearning for *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla* is recalling tropical afternoon rains, and hungering for *Sour Fish Soup* is remembering a sultry summer afternoon. Over all, the *memory cookbook* attempts to say that ‘home’ consists of a structure that memory builds.

The *memory cookbook* starts with *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla*. If eggplant is prized for its unique texture, which can absorb the flavor of other ingredients, *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla* is introduced to suggest the coherence of foods and their local conditions. Indeed, all the dishes selected for the *memory cookbook* reflect the local climate. At one level, all the dishes selected in the *memory cookbook*, will be prepared and cooked in a way where time doesn’t seem to matter at all. In other words, there is no quick version of the dishes. The ‘peaceful’ moments of the everyday life have been experienced as they have never been before. Personally, the strongest message that I hope to convey through the *memory cookbook* is a sense of hope for the future. Fortunately, I don’t have to look hard to find a metaphor to express the idea.

The thing which impresses me the most about Vietnamese cuisine is its flexibility. The final tastes in almost any Vietnamese meal are determined by choices made by you, the person eating, in a creative everyday practice. A table salad of assorted fresh herbs, salad greens, bean sprouts, some slices of fresh ginger, lemon grass, pineapple, green banana becomes as an accompaniment to almost every meal, and there are always condiments on hand. Indeed, one of the most pleasurable aspects of eating Vietnamese

food is the act of sampling, altering, and enhancing your food as you eat. This characteristic is especially true for *Sour Fish Soup*, for example.

The flexibility of Vietnamese food is also expressed in one main feature of Vietnamese cuisine: the roll-your-own rice-paper rolls. Take, for example, the final recipe presented in the *Memory Cookbook: Fish Wraps*. The basic ingredients for the wrappings are table salads, rice noodles, rice papers and the dipping sauces, and the taste of each roll or even each bite totally depends on the way you select the ingredients to make up your own rolls. Even in the same roll, the mouth is surprised with each bite.

Despite coming from a country that has experienced one of the most bloody and inhuman wars in the history of mankind, Vietnamese cuisine attempts to take out the greenest and the purest features from the soil. Throughout their four thousand year history, the Vietnamese have always lived in the danger of being assimilated by its huge neighbor, China, and from external colonial threats, like France. Vietnamese cuisine thus expresses the idea of flexibility and adaptability.

The flexibility and appreciation of various strata of ingredients, in which no single ingredient tries to be superior to the others, appear to me as an expression of hope. It is the symbol for the belief that the battle is not yet done and that things can be changed.

The *memory cookbook* begs the importance of a place. It finds the way to come back to the question, raised in part 1, *at home in the world*. It attempts to say, 'sense of place' is still important regardless of 'placelessness' brought by globalization. If *Eggplant with Red Perilla*, *Cooked Rice*, *Sour Fish Soup* and *Lotus Stem Salad* are nostalgic, *Green Mango Salad with Shrimp* and *Spring Rolls* aren't. At one level, the

memory cookbook expresses the excitement of leaving 'home'. Leaving 'home' stimulates the possibility of getting out of the self, and exile thus becomes a great source of inspiration and creativity. Perhaps, that is the manner in which the *memory cookbook* is created to be carried around. In other words, the *memory cookbook* attempts to express an attitude about nostalgia rather than being nostalgic.

'Home' consists of a structure that memory builds. 'Home' is a concept you carry whenever you go, whereas a 'sense of home' is the space associated with memories and with the sense of familiarity. Since 'sense of home' is the process through which the notion of home and identity can be realized and negotiated. Putting the question of 'sense of home' is the attempt to address the notion of identity in the process of its construction. A 'sense of home' is always about the present, how to handle the memories of the past in present contexts.

Regardless of what happened in Vietnam, women like my mother and grandmother managed to keep life going with hidden inventions and creativity in preparing daily meals. I thank them for that. However, I am more indebted to my grandmother for beckoning me by her side to teach me how to cook; however, she didn't teach me that the delicacy of cuisine can change the world. It may not be essential for me to develop a philosophy; I don't have to hold the belief that modest things, offered by nature, such as herbs, possess the power to heal the world. My grandmother just said, "these ordinary things such as cooking can bring you joy, a minor joy in realizing that each day is valuable..."

Text version of the *memory cookbook*

<1>

<monday>
 <the lady in Chinatown>
 <mango, green>
 <rain until the end of the week...>
 <china town>
 <rice>
 <red>
 <colours>
 <two teaspoons of fish sauce>
 <sugar>
 <sweet>
 <bitter>
 <leaves>
 <wrapping>
 <rice papers>
 <water>
 <fire>
 <noon>
 <yellow>
 <rolling>
 <hammock>
 <rice>
 <afternoon>
 <transparent>
 <bamboo>
 <happy>
 <grilled>
 <fish>
 <garlic>
 <basil>
 <small>
 <green>
 <sunny>
 <layer>
 <quiet>
 <noodles>
 <dry>
 <remember>
 <grandmother>
 <white>
 <pink>
 <sauce>
 <dipping>
 <6.30pm>
 <morning>
 <texts>
 <catch>
 <lotus>
 <cutting>
 <knife>
 <sweat>
 <clear>
 <bitter>
 <light>
 <rice noodle>
 <pot>
 <tongue>
 <onions>
 <boiling>
 <meat>

<chopsticks>
 <galangal>
 <near>
 <hungry>
 <words>
 <there>
 <redness>

 <2>
 <...>

The journey down memory lane

Place the rice in grandmother's claypot, the very old one left for her by her grandmother, so long ago no one can even remember. Cooking rice with that claypot will add a deep smoky flavour, accumulated over hundreds of years, to the rice...
 .. .

Perhaps, the elegance of eggplant lies in its texture, and it doesn't just work as an absorbent of everything it is exposed to. Not merely a sponge, it takes only enough flavour of red perilla to suggest the fragrance of the garden, when the late afternoon rains are falling.

.. .

Garnish with chopped cilantro, green onions, dill and rice paddy herbs.
 .. . Pour the soup over a sultry summer afternoon.

.. .

The lotus stems from 'home' are quite different from the canned stems available in Canada. The lotus stems from 'home' are steeped in the tranquility of small village pagodas, of the place where they came from.

.. .

Many of my childhood memories are associated with redness. Sometimes, I'm astonished at how such a simple flower can transform itself in such a way. . .

 <3>
 <grandmother>

...Regardless of what happened out there, the women like my mother and grandmother managed to keep life going with hidden inventions and creativity in preparing daily meals. I thank them for that. However, I am more indebted to my grandmother for beckoning me by her side to learn how to cook; however, she didn't teach me that the delicacy of cuisine can change the world. It may not be essential for me to develop a philosophy, based on the art of drinking tea. I don't have to hold the belief that modest things, offered by nature, such as herbs, possess the power to heal the world..

My grandmother just said, "these ordinary things such as cooking can bring you joy, an minor joy in realizing that each day is valuable..."

 <4>
 <pot>
 <clear>
 <unclear>
 .. .
 <memory>
 <forgetfulness>
 .. .

 <5>
 <rice paper>
 <transparent>
 <see through>
 <real>
 <>true>

 <6>
 <water spinach>
 <splitting>
 <red blouse>
 <old song...
 I return to the old city in the afternoon downpour,
 Where is the red blouse of yesterday?>
 .. .
 <the lady in Chinatown>

 <7>
 <flowers>
 <sweet>
 <taste>
 <noon>

 <8>
 <fish>
 <dry>
 <salty>
 <broken>
 <knife>

 <9>
 <chilies>
 <burning>
 <angry>
 <fragile>

 <10>
 <there>

 <11>
 <words>
 .. .
 <old song...
 the wind blows fiercely on the deserted shores,
 I keep looking at you in silence. I cannot find the words.>

...*Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla*

 <12>
 <overcast>
 <monday>

 <13>
 <red perilla>
 <purple>
 <rain>
 <wet>

 <14>
 <texts>
 <describe>
 <poem>
 <washed by rains...>

Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla is a truly gift from the countryside. Although green is the typical colour of paddy fields, purple is an important and special colour in rural areas:

O straw and stubble, I come back to you,
 A hard wind blows heavy with the odor of mud,
 Along a fence morning glories bloom in simple purples,
 Straddling the bamboo twigs, a magpie calls my name.
 Back to the Field, Nguyen Duy

Purple appears in the above poem, *Back to the Field*, as the colour of wildflowers, which are abundant in the countryside. The purple of the country also refers to water lilies in the numerous ponds, red perilla in the yards, eggplant flowers, and the smoke wafting from the kitchens, tinged with the violet hues of the sunset.

Indeed, a small bowl of this soup can suggest a whole countryside landscape: the purple vegetation, brownish red pork the colour of soil, and the plain whiteness of the tofu, which suggests the tranquility of the countryside markets at noon. Turmeric is yellow like golden sunsets. Perhaps, *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla* is a gift from the countryside because of its visual associations.

Eggplant, when stir-fried with pork, tomatoes, grilled tofu, and turmeric, becomes tender and develops a rich, complex flavour thanks to its ability to absorb great amounts of cooking oil and the flavours of the other ingredients. While pork gives eggplant the sweetness of meat, tomatoes provide it with light sour-sweetness and turmeric adds a pungent flavour to it.

Perhaps, the elegance of eggplant lies in its texture, and it doesn't just work as an absorbent of everything it is exposed to. Not merely a sponge, it takes only enough flavour of red perilla to suggest the fragrance of the garden, when the late afternoon rains are falling.

Delicate and fine, *Eggplant Soup with Red Perilla* absorbs within itself the fragrance of the soil and anything belonging to countryside, including the golden sunsets and the tropical rains that arrive in the late afternoon.

Ingredients:

eggplant
 pork
 grilled tofu
 tomatoes
 green onion
 turmeric
 sesame oil
 fish sauce

red perilla, washed by the afternoon rains...

 <15>
 <eggplant>
 <seeds>
 <transparent>
 <clear>
 <noon>

 <16>
 <far>

 <17>
 <plain>
 <quiet>

... Cooked Rice

 <18>
 <claypot>
 <grandmother>
 <stir>
 <smoke>

<burn>
<late>

<19>
<tongue>
<attempt>
<hungry>
...

While the main course sometimes offers hot, sour, salty, sweet or sometimes, bitter flavours, rice provides a plain taste and texture to balance the meal.

Plain rice sounds simple, but it not easy to make "just right." A good silk dyer must be able to differentiate among hundreds of shades of black when he dyes black silk. Cooking perfect plain rice may be not as sophisticated, but it does require subtle skills and nuanced senses to adjust the water, heat, rice and time to bring out the full flavour of the rice.

Ingredients:

rice
water
fire
...
the old claypot

Place two cups of rice in a bamboo strainer; wash the rice with several changes of cold water until the water runs clear.

Place the rice in grandmother's claypot, the very old one left for her by her grandmother, so long ago no one can even remember. Cooking rice with that claypot will add a deep smoky flavour, accumulated over hundreds of years, to the rice...

Add two cups of water, bring the pot to a boil and let it continue to boil for several minutes, until the fragrance of newly harvested rice, blended with the smell of the smoke from the burning straw, starts to permeate the air. When the steam starts to push the pot-lid up, open the pot, stir gently once, and then cover the pot.

Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover until all the water is absorbed and then the rice is done. Let the claypot sit on the ash of burned rice straw for a while. When the stove cools down, as the sun descends and the air is filled with the fragrance of fresh cooked rice, the kitchen is filled with the peace of a late afternoon, like many others?

...

*After this time, there may be others,
the clouds as high, the sun as warm.
then too the winds may blow away those afternoons to come,
but this day all the world dances on images of windswept hair.*

*This afternoon a cow grazes by the river,
unaware the afternoon is dying.
The cow and I, a pair of old friends,
Look gently out over the Perfume River.*

*A peaceful afternoon, peaceful afternoons on a river bank,
Things I have lived and I have not lived.
An afternoon in whose fading light
I see through the waters clearly for the first time.*

An Afternoon on Perfume River
Nguyen Khoa Diem

<20>
<rice>
<grains of rice>

<21>
 <far>
 <near>
 <rain until the end of the week>

 <22>
 <fish>

 <23>
 <catching>

... *Sour Fish Soup*

 <24>
 <skin>
 <yellow>
 <pineapple>
 <chilies>
 <sweat>

 <25>
 <green>
 <sour>
 <blend>
 <water>
 <summer>
 <hammock>

 <26>
 <5 to 6 pods peeled tamarind>
 <3 sour bamboo shoots, sliced>
 <cut>

...

Many wonder why people enjoy spicy food in hot and humid climates. When the weather is hot, sour soup is a good idea because sweating cools down the body's temperature. On hot days, a sour fish soup eaten with fresh herbs and a dipping sauce with a lot of chilies peppers can drive you crazy. True, dishes like this are intense for a moment, but soon, you will feel a release because the soup makes you sweat, cooling down your body.

Sour Fish Soup has a distinctively rich sweet-sour flavour. While tamarind provides the soup with a pungently sour layer, tomatoes give it a mildly sweet-sour taste. As well, bamboo offers the dish slightly bitter-sour undertones. When the soup is almost done, some slices of green pineapple will be added, which do not really contribute to the soup in terms of taste, but rather in terms of smell. Green pineapple can be sour when eaten fresh; however, after a minute of boiling in the broth, when the soup is almost done, the green pineapple becomes rather sweet. It is as though the essence of the pineapple is transformed to its smell when it is cooked. This smell brings to the fish soup another sour nuance, fresh and exotic. As well, lemon juice adds another layer of flavour to this complexly sour soup.

Acting in almost the same way as the green pineapple, rice paddy herbs give the soup a sweet-sour smell, yet another sour layer of flavour. Slightly cooked by the hot broth, the chopped herbs act as little fireworks, bringing momentary, beautiful and magical tastes. During these short moments, fabulous fragrances arouse the nose. Since these fragrances are fleeting, *Sour Fish Soup* must be eaten hot and immediately. It must also be eaten all at one time, since the taste is altered when the soup is reheated. Although the fish is sweet and tasty, the best part of *Sour Fish Soup* is the broth, with plain rice and fresh herbs dipped in a fish sauce made with garlic, ginger, chilies and lemon juice. Without the dipping sauce and fresh herbs, the *Sour Fish Soup* is not complete. Do all the sour ingredients blend together in this soup? Sour ingredients go well with fish as they take away some of the fishy smell. In its turn, the sweetness of fresh fish moderates the sour ingredients.

As for the colour, green predominates and flourishes in this dish. The ingredients, when mixed, manage to retain some of their distinctively sour flavours, which are associated

with different shades of green. At the same time, they become somewhat anonymous as they form a harmonious greenness overall...

...

Perhaps, *Sour Fish Soup* should be portrayed as a landscape painting of a waterpond in summer since the freshness of the soup cools one down in a manner similar to the clear, green water. *Sour Fish Soup* recalls summer moments, when, if you are quiet enough, you will hear:

...

*The hammock chirps, the hammock sings,
The summer noon spreads everywhere.
Settled on a single foot,
A bird nods drowsing on bamboo.*

*The hammock chips, the hammock sings,
The custard apple tree sleeps:
Its fruit looks through half-open eyes,
The sky burning blue.*

*The hammock chips, the hammock sings,
The hammock softly sways.
There at the open window
A bird taps out a rhythm*

...

Song of the Hammock
Tran Dang Khoa

<27>

<...cut into 3 sections>

Ingredients:

Serves 4 to 6

1 whole freshwater black bass, cut into 3 sections
4 ripe red tomatoes, cut into 1/2-inch dice
5 to 6 pods peeled tamarind
3 shallots, sliced
¼ fresh pineapple, peeled, cored and sliced
3 sour bamboo shoots, sliced
8 cups water
3 to 4 tablespoons fish sauce
1 to 2 chilies
1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
½ teaspoon sugar

Garnishes:

½ cup chopped green onion
½ cup chopped cilantro
½ cup chopped rice paddy herb
½ cup chopped dill

Table salads for sour fish soup:

10 sprigs of fresh rice paddy herb
10 sprigs of fresh basil
5 sprigs of fresh cilantro
5 sprigs of fresh mint
1 pound bean sprouts
6 red chilies cut into thin rings
1 lime, cut into 6 thin wedges

Ginger-lime dipping sauce:

Makes 1 cup

5 tablespoons fish sauce
 1½ tablespoons fresh lime juice
 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
 2 tablespoons sugar
 ½ cup warm water
 4 garlic cloves
 3 tablespoons of minced ginger, or shredded ginger
 5 red chilies
 ½ tablespoon of freshly ground white pepper

 <28>

<cut 1 chili into thin rings>

Making dipping sauce:

Cut 1 chili into thin rings and set aside 2 whole chilies for garnish. Place two chilies, garlic cloves, ginger and sugar in a mortar and pound into a coarse, wet paste. Transfer to a small bowl and add lime juice, vinegar, fish sauce and water. Stir well to dissolve. Add the reserved chilies and ground pepper. Make this sauce when you are ready to serve in order to enjoy the sharpest ginger flavour.

Making the soup:

Season the fish with salt and pepper and let stand in a cool place.
 Put the fish head in a pot with 8 cups of water and bring to a gentle boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat to a medium-low and simmer until the liquid is reduced by 2 cups of fish broth. At this time, you may discard the fish head if you wish.
 Put the tomatoes into another pot.

Add shallots, tamarind, chilies, fish sauce, sugar, and the two cups of fish broth. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium and cook for about 20 minutes.
 Add the fish and cook until just done, about 5 minutes.

Add some slices of sour bamboo. Taste the broth and adjust seasonings. Add slices of fresh pineapple. Bring the soup to a vigorous boil for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Garnish with the chopped cilantro, green onions, dill and rice paddy herbs.

.. .

Pour the soup over a sultry summer afternoon.

 <29>

<chilies>

<hot>

<a sultry summer afternoon>

 <30>

<the lotus>

The Lotus

 <31>

<the lotus>

.. .
 The lotus is my beloved plant; I love it for its sense of purity, perfection and beauty.

There were the days when the afternoon sun became less intense in the inner courtyard, and my grandmother found herself a little chair, a bamboo basket, a small kitchen knife with very thin, sharp edge and a bunch of lotus stems. Lotus flowers bloom in July and August. There are so many flowers to enjoy in the summer, but nothing is as special as the lotus.

I never remember seeing large quantities of lotus flowers available at the markets. My grandmother went shopping very early in the morning, around 6 am. In hot climates, days

start quite early, but the main reason for her early visits was that she wanted to make sure that she could buy some of the rare lotus flowers, seeds or stems. The few bunches of lotus stems or flowers available at the markets usually came from pagodas or temples in the surrounding region. In Vietnamese pagodas, monks and nuns usually practice some other profession for their living, such as traditional medicine, and the lotus, especially the stamens and the seeds, are believed to work as a mild sleep enhancer. One in a while, there are some available for sale.

Every part of the lotus plant can be eaten or used. The beautiful white and pink flowers grace temple shrines and family altars. The stamens are made into an aromatic tea. The seeds are dried and then boiled and made into candies or added to puddings and cakes. The large round leaves are used to wrap sticky rice and other foods for steaming. As well, the lotus has a long stem connecting the main plant to its many leaves and flowers.

My grandmother used to prepare the stems by peeling the skin and slicing them into pieces. I used to wait to see the beautiful lacy patterns she created when she sliced them crosswise. After the stems had been cut, my grandmother placed them in a large bowl and then covered them generously with water and a little lemon juice. I remember seeing her using bamboo chopsticks to stir the water continuously while she explained that the rough surface of the chopsticks would catch any remaining fibers. When all the fibers were wrapped around the chopsticks, she then gently drained the white stems to prepare them for the salad.

In another large bowl, grandmother prepared the dressing, which was the mixture of garlic, chili, fish sauce, lime juice, and sugar. After adding lotus stems to the dressing, she tossed them gently, and set the salad aside to allow the stems to marinate.

When we were about sit down to eat, she added grilled shrimp, chopped roasted peanuts, chopped green perilla, mint, and coriander. My grandmother liked lotus stems for their crunchy texture and the ability to absorb the flavours of other ingredients. The dish sounds simple but I have tried many times without success to obtain that memorable taste. The moment after the first bite into those crunchy stems, the mouth is saturated with the sauce of so many flavours.

The lotus stems from 'home' are quite different from the canned stems available in Canada. The lotus stems from 'home' are steeped in the tranquility of small village pagodas, of the place where they came from..

<32>

<the lotus>

<33>

<the lotus root>

< *"My children are happy here; they will enjoy an excellent education and speak perfect English without any accent, but I also find it important to look for one's roots..."*

(B., Vancouver)

<34>

<mango>

<tropics>

<exotic>

<35>

<shrimp>

<many colors>

<multiple>

<shiny>

<36>

<"worldly">

<Ottawa>

Green Mango Salad with Shrimp

If you find it difficult to find lotus stems that come from an ancient Vietnamese pagoda, don't worry. I will show you to how to make a green mango salad with grilled shrimp. It will work just fine and you will like it. Green mangos are available in Canada throughout the year. As strange as it sounds, in the tropics, the land of mangos, they are sometimes not available. There is plenty of exotic stuff to enjoy when you are living in a "worldly" city such as Ottawa.

Ingredients:

1 firm, green mango peeled and cut into thin 1" by 3" rectangular pieces

Grilled Shrimp:

¼ cup minced lemongrass
 1 teaspoon minced garlic
 1 teaspoon soy sauce
 1 teaspoon fish sauce
 ½ teaspoon ground chili paste
 1 teaspoon sugar
 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil
 1 pound of fresh shrimp

Combine the lemongrass, garlic, soy sauce, fish sauce, chili paste, salt, sugar and oil in a bowl. Add the shrimp and let them marinate for 15 minutes. Thread the shrimp onto skewers and set them aside.

Set the charcoal grill on moderate heat. Just before serving, grill the shrimp by turning the skewers, until done (about 2-3 minutes total).

Lemongrass-lime dressing:

1½ tablespoons fish sauce
 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
 2 tablespoons sugar
 2 teaspoons minced garlic
 1 stalk of lemongrass, with outer leaves and tough green tops removed, root ends trimmed, and stalk finely ground
 2 red chilies, minced
 ½ tablespoon of freshly ground white pepper

Garnishes:

½ cup chopped cilantro
 3 teaspoons chopped roasted peanuts

Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and stir well. Add the green mango to the dressing, toss gently and set aside to marinate for 5 minutes.

Add the shrimp to the green mango salad, toss several times, transfer the salad to a serving plate, garnish with cilantro and peanuts and serve.

 <37>
 <shrimp>
 <net>
 <catch>

 <38>
 <chinatown>
 <rice>
 <silk>

< "...You see, in addition to the fact that I speak Vietnamese, I eat rice and fish sauce, we have an altar in our house to worship ancestors [...] I believe this is what characterizes Vietnamese culture..." > (D., Ottawa)

 <39>
 <chinatown>
 <sauce>

 <40>
 <chinatown>
 <bowls>
 <chopsticks>
 <spices>
 <noodles>

 <41>
 <rice noodle soup>

 <42>
 <rice noodle soup>

Rice Noodle Soup

Rice Noodle Soup has a somewhat more urban character. Many people eat noodle soup in the morning, afternoon, and even in the evening. It is perhaps the most common and unexpensive meal, found everywhere on the streets of cities. A normal meal is constituted of rice, a bowl of soup made out of green vegetables, and meat. *Rice Noodle Soup*, or "Pho," is a simplification of a meal. Fresh beef or chicken and tender (but not too soft) rice noodles are important; however, a clear and flavourful broth is the essential part of this recipe. Broth for rice noodle soup is made out of simmering meat and bones, and takes several hours in order to extract all the flavour. However the secret which gives the broth its fragrance lies in the addition of star anise, cinnamon, cardamom, shallot and ginger, which give it a rich and complex flavour, unique not only in term of taste, but also fragrance.

The best way to find a good noodle soup is to look for shops which specialize only in Pho. The broth for chicken noodle soup should be slightly different from the beef broth. It should be lighter, due to the reduction of star anise, cinnamon and cardamom in order to make more space for the taste combination of chicken and ginger. Also different from the beef broth, some dry mushrooms should be added to the chicken broth when it is nearly done. In addition, shredded lemon leaves also create a slightly gentler flavour in chicken broth.

Most noodle soup shops in my home town are run by families, and each develops its own recipe to make a perfect broth. These shops don't need signs to get customers' attention. They invite customers to come in with the attractive fragrance of the broth and the presentation of garnishes and toppings displayed in the window.

The owner of my favorite noodle soup back in Hanoi once told me his secret: "the broth that we serve is more than one hundred years old. It dates back to the time my father opened this shop. Each day, we keep one bowl of broth for the next day...when the day's broth is almost ready to serve, we add yesterday's bowl to the new one. A good broth must have a sense of freshness, but at the same time it must have the sense as if it has been simmering forever...forever..."

 <43>
 <rice noodle soup>

...
 There are no busy commercial districts with old and narrow streets in Ottawa as in Hanoi. However, sometimes, walking on the streets in Chinatown, one can amazingly feel a sense of 'home' from the fragrances. The combination of several smells, the scent of the broth from the noodle shops, the incense from Asian grocery stores, and the smell of coffee...

Today, it is not easy to find such an Asian combination of smells, even in Hanoi. When I went there last year, I found that people were more interested in trying *Cali Noodle Soup*. California has the largest Vietnamese population in North America, numbering approximately one million. *Cali Noodle Soup* is similar to soups found in other North American Chinatowns, a soup originating in Vietnam, but re-created in North America by Vietnamese exiles. A *Cali Noodle Soup* producer opened a restaurant in Hanoi in order to meet the demands of Vietnamese Americans and Canadians, especially second generation immigrants. These people staying in Vietnam for business or visiting find that the noodle

soup offered by original local restaurants is interesting but weird. Locals who have never been to California who try a bowl of *Cali Noodle Soup* find the soup is less spicy than usual. Many wonder why in North America everything has to be so big!

<44>

<rice noodle soup>

Ingredients:

Makes 6 dishes servings

Broth:

5 pounds beef marrow or knuckle bones
2 pounds of beef chuck, cut into 2 pieces
3 (3-inch) pieces of ginger, cut in half lengthwise and lightly bruised with a flat side of a knife, lightly charred
2 shallots, peeled and charred
10 whole star anise, lightly charred
2 cardamom, lightly charred
1 cinnamon stick, lightly charred

¼ cup fish sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon pepper

Noodle assembly:

1 pound dried rice sticks, soaked, cooked and drained
½ pound beef sirloin, slightly frozen, then sliced paper-thin across the grain

Garnishes:

½ green onion, sliced paper-thin
3 scallions, cut into thin rings
½ cup chopped cilantro

Table salads for rice noodle soup:

1 pound bean sprouts
10 sprigs Asian basil
6 red chilies, cut into thin rings
1 lime, cut into 6 thin wedges
Freshly ground black pepper

<45>

<rice noodle soup>

Making the soup:

Wash the bones and beef chuck well. Place in a large stockpot and add cold water until they are covered. Boil vigorously for 5 minutes. In a second large stockpot, bring 6 quarts of water to a boil. Using tongs carefully transfer all the bones and beef chuck from the first pot to the second stockpot. Discard the water in which the meat was cooked. This cleans the bones and meat and reduces the impurities that can cloud the broth. When the water returns to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer. Skim the surface often to remove any foam and fat. Add the charred ginger and shallots, together with the fish sauce and pepper. Simmer until the beef chunks are tender, for about 40 minutes. Remove one piece and submerge in cool water for 10 minutes to prevent the meat from darkening and drying out. Drain, then cut it into thin slices and set aside. Let the other piece of beef continue to cook in the simmering broth.

When the broth has been simmering for about 1 hour total, wrap the star anise, cardamom and cinnamon in a spice bag and add to the broth. Add salt and sugar and continue to simmer, skimming as necessary, until you are ready to assemble the dish.

The broth should taste a bit salty but will be balanced once the noodles and garnishes are added. Leave the remaining chuck and bones to simmer in the pot while you assemble the bowls.

To serve, place the cooked noodles in preheated bowls. If the noodles are not hot, dip them briefly in boiling water to prevent them from cooling down the soup. Place a few slices of the beef chuck and the raw beef into each bowl. Garnish with yellow onions, scallions and cilantro. Serve immediately, inviting guests to garnish their bowls with bean sprouts, herbs, lime juice and black pepper.

. . .

Making 'fragrance' for the broth:

Place 10 whole star anise, 2 cinnamon sticks, 2 whole cardamom directly on a medium-hot electric burner for about 2 minutes, then place the rest of the combination consisting of ginger and shallots on the burner. While turning, char until they slightly blacken and become fragrant, for about 4 minutes. Peel and discard the blackened skins of the ginger and shallots, then rinse them and add to the broth. Nicely wrap the combination of star anise, cinnamon stick, cardamom in a spice bag and add to the broth after it has simmered for 1 hour.

. . . wait . . . until the broth is fragrant...

<46>

<grouping>

<47>

<fastening>

<48>

<layering>

<49>

<wrapping>

<50>

<wrapping>

<51>

<wrapping>

<fish>

<galangal>

<lemon grass>

<turmeric>

<onion>

<chilies>

<ginger>

<52>

<wrapping>

Wrapping

Grilled Fish:

Ingredients:

A whole fresh fish: black bass, salmon or any kind of fish which is oily and won't dry out while grilling.

1½-inch piece of fresh galangal
 1½-inch piece of fresh turmeric
 ½ cup minced lemongrass
 ½ cup minced shallot
 1 teaspoon fish sauce
 1 teaspoon minced chili
 1 teaspoon honey
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon ground pepper
 2 tablespoons of sesame oil

The marinade:

Peel the galangal, cut it into thin slices and pound in a mortar until mushy. Using your fingers, squeeze the pulverized galangal to extract as much juice as you can from the pulp. Peel the turmeric, cut into thin slices and pound in a mortar until it is mushy enough to create a paste. In a bowl, combine the galangal juice, turmeric paste, lemon juice, sugar, rice vinegar, shrimp sauce, salt, fish sauce, minced chili, minced lemongrass, ground pepper, and sesame oil.

Preparation:

Clean the fish by slicing open its stomach with a sharp knife and removing its internal organs. Rinse the fish well under cold, running water, and pat it dry. Cut diagonal 1/4-inch deep slits on each side of the fish. Cut slightly deeper toward the back fin of the fish. The slits will help the fish to cook more evenly throughout.

Baste the fish with sesame oil. With your fingers, work the paste into the slits, rubbing some into the cavity as well. Lay the fish on a platter to marinate for about 30 minutes.

<53>

<wrapping>

Cooking:

Start a large charcoal fire. A smoky charcoal fire is best for fish grilling as it brings out the naturally sweet flavours of the fish.

Carefully lay the fish on the grill. Cook the fish until a thin crust forms on the skin. Turn it around with a bamboo spatula. Reduce the heat for the last several minutes to keep the outside from becoming too dark.

While the fish is cooking, prepare the dipping sauce, the table salads and set the dinning table.

Making lemon grass-lime dipping sauce:

Makes 1 cup

5 tablespoons fish sauce
 1½ tablespoons fresh lime juice
 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
 2 tablespoons sugar
 ½ cup warm water
 4 garlic cloves
 1 stalk lemongrass, with the outer leaves and tough green tops removed, root ends trimmed, and the stalk finely ground
 5 red chilies
 ½ teaspoon of freshly ground white pepper

Cut 1 chili into thin rings and set aside 2 whole chilies for garnish. Place two chilies, the garlic cloves and the sugar in a mortar and pound into a coarse, wet paste. Transfer to a small bowl and add the lime juice, vinegar, fish sauce, water and lemongrass. Stir well to dissolve. Add the remaining chilies and ground pepper. Make this sauce when you are ready to serve in order to enjoy the sharpest flavour from the ginger.

Table salads for wrapping:

The table salads for the fish wraps include: lettuce, mint, coriander, basil, rice paddies, dill, green and red perilla, some slices of fresh ginger, galangal, star fruit and green pineapple. Arrange the herbs in an attractive manner on one side of a large platter. Place the slices of ginger, galangal, star fruit and pineapple on the other side. Place the platter in the center of the table and serve.

Set the dinning table with a plate of rice vermicelli, a plate of chopped roasted peanuts, a bowl of dipping sauce, a bowl of hot water, rice papers and a platter of table salads.

Provide each guest with a small bowl, a plate, and chopsticks.

<54>

<wrapping>

Serving:

Soak the rice paper in hot water for several seconds to get it completely wet. Place the rice paper on your own plate and arrange the ingredients in the way you want with the fish, noodles and table salads. The final tastes in the roll are determined by choices made by you, the person eating, by sampling, altering and enhancing the combination of the ingredients as you create and eat more rolls.

The soft texture of the rolls is balanced by the crunchiness of the peanuts. The rich taste of the grilled fish will be balanced with the sour taste of star fruit and lemon juice in the dipping sauce. The starches provided by noodles and the proteins provided by the fish compose the *yang*, or hot energy, of the meal. This is balanced by the cool energy, or *yin*, provided by the herbs. The freshness of some ingredients will be reduced through the process of cooking. The selection of fresh green ingredients for the table salads, then, acts as compensation.

The very thin rice paper looks transparent, but it is opaque enough to hide a slice of fresh ginger, which gives the bite a shocking, fiery surprise, especially when you happen to pick up a shred of hot chili from the dipping sauce. In the next instant, the shock will be balanced by the plain taste and texture of the noodles, or be calmed down by mild lettuce. If fire still remains, green pineapple will come to soothe the palate with its fruity flavour. . .

<55>

<wrapping>

<56>

<dipping>

<57>

<dipping>

<58>

<crispy spring rolls>

<59>

<making>

< "My children are happy here..."> (B., Vancouver)

Crispy Spring Rolls

Spring rolls always create a festive mood because of their fabulous smell. Since spring rolls can be shared as finger foods, they are excellent for parties. You can just pick them up, dip them in a sauce, and eat them out of your hand while you are moving around

talking to people. And when you bite into one of those crispy and golden rolls, you create a cheerful sound...like a happy laugh.

<60>

<making>

Ingredients:

Makes 30 rolls

Filling:

½ pound of coarsely chopped raw shrimp
 1 pound of ground lean pork or beef
 2 eggs
 7 wood ear mushrooms, soaked in warm water, cut off and removed any tough bits, trimmed and finely chopped
 5 dried mushrooms, lightly rinsed, soaked in warm water, finely chopped
 2 oz of cellophane noodles, soaked in warm water for 15 minutes, drained and cut into 2-inch pieces
 2 shallots, finely chopped
 2 medium carrots, cut in julienne shreds
 1 teaspoon sugar
 1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
 ¼ teaspoon of salt

30 pieces dried rice paper
 vegetable oil for deep-frying

Making spring rolls:

Mix all the ingredients in a large bowl. The secret is to pat dry all the ingredients when you mix it. Avoid having water mix in with the ingredients.
 Dip rice paper into a large bowl of warm water; place it on a plate for 1 minute until it is soft and flexible. Put stuffing on the rice paper. Start folding the left and right side of the rice paper into the center, then roll up from the bottom edge away to the far end. Do not roll too tight, as this will cause the rolls to split. Deep-fry over medium heat until golden brown.

Table salads for serving:

Lettuce, mint, coriander, and basil
 1 cucumber, cut into thin rounds and served plain with spring rolls
 Rice vermicelli (optional)
 1½ cups bean sprouts, served fresh (optional)

Dipping sauce for spring rolls:

Makes 1 cup

5 table spoons fish sauce
 1½ tablespoons fresh lime juice
 1 table spoon rice vinegar
 2 tablespoons sugar
 1 cup warm water
 4 garlic cloves
 5 red chilies
 ½ tablespoon of freshly ground white pepper
 3 teaspoons finely shredded carrots (optional)

Cut 1 chili into thin rings and set aside 2 whole chilies for garnish. Place two chilies, garlic cloves and sugar in a mortar and pound into a coarse, wet paste. Transfer to a small bowl and add lime juice, vinegar, fish sauce and water. Stir well to dissolve. Add the reserved chilies and ground pepper. Set aside 10 minutes before serving.

<60>
<making>

<61>
<making>

<62>
<making>

<63>
<Hoa Hien>

<64>
<Hoa Hien>

My grandmother used a flower named *Hoa Hien* to marinate foods: meat, fish, vegetables and desserts. *Hoa Hien* is an ingredient that gives food a reddish colour and a unique taste. There are many ingredients that can colour food. However, *Hoa Hien* provides dozens of different shades of red, depending on slight differences in the way my grandmother treated it...

Many of my childhood memories are associated with that redness. Sometimes, I'm astonished at how such a simple flower can transform itself in such a way...

<65>
<remembering...>

<66>
<remembering...>

. . .

Since I may not be able to carry with me the lotus stems that come from a small pagoda, or the tropic rains that arrive in the late afternoon, I've created this *memory cookbook* to carry around. . .

The cookbook helps me to remember the sweet taste of 'home'... to remember the small pagoda, which I have never visited, and the clear water before the afternoon rains. . .

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 Hà Lan Phương, Thơ: Miên thuy, Anh Là Quê Hương Trong Em
 Trịnh Công Sơn, Bài Ca Dành Cho Những Xác Người
 Trịnh Công Sơn, Em Còn Nhớ Hay Em Đã Quên
 Trịnh Công Sơn, Tôi Sẽ Đi Thăm
 Trịnh Công Sơn, Ngày dài trên quê hương
 Việt Dzũng, Mời Em Về
 Song Ngọc Hà Nội ngày tháng cũ

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