

From 'Jarmark Europa' to 'Commodity City.' New Marketplaces, Post-Socialist Migrations, and Cultural Diversity in Central and Eastern Europe

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This article explores global bazaars run by migrants in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Socialist and post-socialist mobilities have made a fundamental contribution to the establishment of new trading centres since the collapse of communism. Marketplaces change over time and are shaped by migration regimes, neo-liberalism and increasing cultural diversity. In bazaars we can study how diversity and economy mutually impact each other. I argue that post-socialist migrations have contributed to cultural diversity, thereby promoting the creation of new marketplaces, while everyday encounters in these localities result in conflict and/or solidarity among various groups. These processes are embedded in state regulations and are affected by the spatiality of bazaars in CEE urban surroundings. I conclude by focusing on religious diversity in the CEE bazaars, as cross-border religious practices not only help migrants to cope with social and economic hardships but also generate global interconnectedness.

Keywords: post-socialist migrations; markets; diversity; religious practices; transnational Vietnamese

Introduction

New migration trends have arisen in Central and Eastern European regions since the beginning of the 1990s. In particular, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, thousands of former contract workers and students in Central and Eastern Europe, many of them from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, did not return to their home countries but became successful entrepreneurs in the respective host societies. Local markets and global bazaars, increasingly composed of diverse peoples, engage in cross-border business and play key roles in post-socialist economic development, while transnationally linking a variety of geographical and socio-cultural spaces. In this article I focus on global bazaars to investigate fundamental issues about the relationship between migration, economy and society in CEE countries.

Marketplaces change over time and are shaped by migration regimes, neo-liberalism and increasing cultural diversity. Bazaars are perfect places to study how diversity and the economy mutually impact each other and where the economic and social ties of migrants from former socialist countries may be observed. I argue that socialist and post-socialist migrations have contributed to cultural diversity, which in turn has

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promoted the creation of new marketplaces, while everyday encounters in these localities result in conflict and/or solidarity among various groups. These processes are embedded in state regulations and are affected by the spatiality of bazaars in CEE urban surroundings. As religion plays a crucial role in dealing with social and economic hardship in the diaspora, I conclude by focusing on the performance of religious practices in CEE marketplaces.

This article, which is based on ethnographic fieldwork in February and March 2012 in a new global trading centre in Wólka Kosowska, Warsaw, addresses questions of socialist and post-socialist pathways of migration and the maintenance of transnational social, economic and religious ties after socialism. Fieldwork in 'Commodity City' included visits to the marketplace, informal interviews with locals, traders and clients, encounters with market management, a visit to the newly opened kindergarten within the market's grounds, an interview with the government's foreign affairs representative in Wólka Kosowska, meetings with religious experts in a nearby pagoda, and invitations to dinner in the homes of some of the traders. In addition, I visited other markets in Warsaw, including the site of the 'Jarmark Europa' bazaar, demolished in 2008, and the former stadium that was still under construction in preparation for the European soccer championship in summer 2012. I conducted fieldwork with the help of a Polish and a Vietnamese research assistant. Throughout this article, I also draw on some of my findings in multi-ethnic bazaars in the eastern part of Berlin and in Prague, where I also carried out fieldwork.¹ Like 'Commodity City,' these places are run by transnational Vietnamese and migrants from other countries and are thus nodes of encounter and intercultural relationships.

Markets and diversity

Marketplaces, and global trading centres and bazaars in particular, are sites of exchange in which the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of everyday life and the transnational ties of people impact on the encounters between various groups, such as migrants, locals, clients, traders and political authorities. There is a whole range of different markets across various countries, including night markets, street markets, periodic markets and global trading centres. The present article focuses on multi-ethnic bazaars in CEE countries, both because they spread after the collapse of communism and because they form a microcosm of a set of processes and practices that have not yet been sufficiently researched.

As many scholars have highlighted, markets already existed in the communist economy and thus were important places for the distribution of goods (Hann and Hann 1992 on border markets in Turkey; Sik, Wallace 1999; Nyiri 2007 on Chinese bazaars in Budapest; Marcinićzak and van der Velde 2008 on bazaars in Poland). However, most of these were open-air markets (OAMs) where regulation was weak and where profit-making occurred through both legal and illegal activities, including pick-pocketing, speculation and the resale of stolen or smuggled goods. *As a consequence, OAMs in the communist economy were continually under the threat of police raids or – at best – tolerated as suspicious but irrelevant distortions of the production and distribution system* (Sik, Wallace 1999: 697). After the collapse of communism, some of these markets were transformed into more formal places, with territory that was bought by foreign investors. Generally a market's management is responsible for the private locality and local authorities attempt careful monitoring of the space (Hüwelmeier 2013b).

Markets are places of many kinds of interaction and intersection. They are not just the places where traders meet clients, but localities where many people with different interests and backgrounds come together. Drawing on recent conceptual debates surrounding markets and diversity (Hiebert, Rath, Vertovec 2014) I outline several characteristics of everyday life in global bazaars that deserve more detailed scrutiny. First, most entrepreneurs in the markets I studied did not have any formal training before they started their busi-

ness. Nearly all had come from different countries and a majority had migration experiences before they started engaging in trading. Second, very often, traders do not have full command of the local language and therefore hire local residents. Third, unlike in street markets, traders have to pay high rents to obtain a permit to sell goods in a particular place such as in a global trading centre or a wholesale market. The markets I studied in CEE countries, such as the *Dong Xuan* Centre in the eastern part of Berlin (Hüwelmeier 2013b) and the *Sapa* market in Prague (Hüwelmeier, in press) are, like ‘Commodity City’ in Warsaw and a migrant-run market in Bratislava (Hlinčíková, in this volume), the most diverse parts of the cities. At the same time, as people with various backgrounds may live different and separate everyday lives in their respective host cities, markets are localities where they come together, bargain, eat and drink. Markets are nodes of social and economic encounter, where locals and non-locals interact in various ways. Therefore, diversity is a matter of *configurations of co-present ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions* (Hiebert, Rath, Vertovec 2014: 3) and, in addition, includes other variables such as legal status, gender and class (Vertovec 2007) that cannot all be addressed in this contribution.

In the following, questions include the impact of diversity on the establishment and operation of post-socialist bazaars. In particular, I ask whether bazaars play a role in learning how to coexist across differences, how engagement in markets influences inter-group relationships in the long run, and whether markets contribute to changing cultural landscapes in urban and suburban spaces. As the establishment of the *Jarmark Europa* in Warsaw is a result of the collapse of communism and closely connected with the growing complexity of global migration, the following section draws on socialist pathways of migration with a focus on Vietnamese in Poland and other CEE countries. I continue by analysing the creation of transnational social and economic ties after the fall of communism by focusing on Vietnamese in CEE countries, their work lives in global bazaars and their encounters with other ethnic groups and locals. In the last section I point to Vietnamese’s transnational religious practices in Poland, as these are important for economic success and thus closely connected to bazaar life.

Socialist migrations and post-socialist mobilities – Vietnam’s many diasporas

Central Europe has a long tradition of migration, predominantly from East to West, starting from the mid-nineteenth century. After the Second World War more than 15 million people were displaced, among them 12 million ethnic Germans. Due to the Cold War separation, about 14 million people left for the West (Wallace, Stola 2001: 13–14). During the socialist period, international migration in CEE was tightly controlled, with exceptions for politically motivated emigration from Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia and Poland. Migrant workers generally came within the framework of the COMECON, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Okólski 1998). This economic organisation under the leadership of the Soviet Union included countries of the Eastern Bloc and a number of socialist states elsewhere. However, beginning in the 1980s, short-term commuting and suitcase trading was carried out by many people from various CEE countries working in Greece, for example, and included, among others, Romanians, Ukrainians and Moldavians travelling between Italy and their own country, Russians visiting the bazaar in Istanbul, Ukrainians and Byelorussians in Poland, and various groups of migrants working in the informal labour market (Sword 1999). Such movements *are historically rooted in patterns of mobility in the COMECON space even before 1989* (Morokvasic 2004: 10). These mobilities are also true for Vietnamese, many of whom came to Eastern European countries on student exchange programmes from the 1960s on and were part of what I have termed ‘socialist pathways of migration’ (Hüwelmeier 2011; in press).

As we have seen, a considerable number of Vietnamese migrated to socialist countries from the 1950s onwards as students, contract workers or experts providing expertise in such fields as science and industry,

as some did in Africa. They are therefore part of the global or ‘international socialist ecumene’ to be understood as imaginations of a *worldwide fraternal community forged by both states and individuals on the basis of enduring revolutionary solidarities and socialist ‘friendships’* (Bayly 2009: 126). At present an ‘enduring socialism,’ as West and Raman (2009) have called ongoing processes exists in a number of these countries due to former ties of ‘friendship’ among socialist states. To date, little is known about Vietnam’s many diasporas in CEE countries, the social, economic and religious ties of migrants and their ‘socialist pathways of migration’ (Hüwelmeier 2013b: 52). While tens of thousands of people from Vietnam arrived in the eastern part of Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other destinations such as Budapest and Moscow before 1990, students and contract workers alike, ethnographic studies about their everyday lives, migration experiences and transnational connections are still rare.

Therefore, in the following, I will briefly consider various groups of Vietnamese arriving in former socialist countries at different times. As much of the current discourse still refers to ‘the’ Vietnamese community in socialist countries, a term that assumes there is a single homogeneous group of Vietnamese with one distinctive culture, it is now time to refine the research lens to take into account the diverse groups of people from Vietnam who entered socialist countries at different times, with different objectives and in different places. Moreover, and this is important with regard to cultural diversity in the marketplaces that will be discussed below, Vietnamese from various regions in the country of origin, with different migration experiences, legal statuses and class background, meet other Vietnamese from different regions in Vietnam and migrants from various parts of the world. Hence, to begin with, it is important to look at the overall dispersion of Vietnamese worldwide in order to draw attention to Vietnam’s many diasporas.

During the second half of the 1990s an estimated 2.3 million Vietnamese were living outside their home country – around 1 million in the US, 300 000 in France, 200 000 in Australia, 150 000 in Canada and 115 000 in Germany, among others. There were different groups and different waves of Vietnamese refugees leaving Vietnam after the end of the war in 1975 (Baumann 2000: 38; Hüwelmeier 2008: 133; 2014; in press). At the end of the 1970s, the West German government (Federal Republic of Germany) declared its acceptance of a contingent of 10 000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. That same year, 1979, the contingent was increased to 20 000 and up to 1984 as many as 38 000 people from Indo-China had migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany, the majority of the refugees coming from South Vietnam.

Compared to the situation of the ‘boat people’ in the western part of Germany, the living and working conditions of the Vietnamese ‘contract workers’ in former East Germany were quite different. Starting in the 1950s, students from North Vietnam came to live in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the socialist ‘brotherland.’ Between 1966 and 1986, 13 000 Vietnamese students and experts were trained in the former GDR. From the 1980s on, on the basis of contracts between the socialist GDR and socialist Vietnam, tens of thousands of Vietnamese migrants, most of them from North Vietnam, came to live and work in East Germany. Many former Vietnamese who had studied in the GDR in the late 1960s and 1970s returned to East Germany to work as interpreters for the tens of thousands of contract workers from Vietnam. They stayed for four or five years and eventually went back to their home country. Incorporation into the host society was not expected. Thousands of Vietnamese who arrived in CEE countries, including the GDR, in the late 1980s as contract workers did not return to Vietnam, but stayed in the reunified Germany and many became successful entrepreneurs. Some of them established close business connections with wholesale centres in Poland and other parts of the post-socialist world, run by Vietnamese, Chinese and other migrants. And many heard about *Jarmark Europa* in the Warsaw stadium in the 1990s and early 2000s.

After 1989, new migration trends arose in CEE countries, and population movements, documented and undocumented, substantially increased. Many people arrived from as far afield as India, China and Vietnam due to growing economies. In addition to the diversification of migrant groups, there was also a diversifica-

tion of economic and political developments in various CEE countries. Migration scholars have drawn attention to the fact that until the beginning of the 1990s Poland did not accept foreign migrants (Okólski 2000). However, Poland became a country of transit migration and a whole range of ‘illegal migration’ strategies (Okólski 2000), in particular due to its location as an immediate neighbour of Germany, the most desired destination in Europe (Iglicka, Sword 1999; Okólski 2000: 60). Insofar as people from Vietnam were involved in trafficking migrants, there were indications of *semi-slave work at final destination to repay the ‘debt’* (Okólski 2000: 62). With regard to Poland as ultimate destination, *migrants originate mostly from Vietnam (ibidem: 63)*. In addition to Vietnamese migrants coming directly from Vietnam to Poland, a number of Vietnamese citizens also entered Poland from Germany. These migrants had been contract workers in the now no longer existent GDR and were threatened with deportation to Vietnam. This group of Vietnamese from Germany was not legally allowed to enter Poland, nor were they legally allowed to work there (*ibidem: 64*).

Migration scholars largely accept that migrants tend to maintain a certain degree of attachment to their home countries. However, a number of studies still focus on issues such as integration or adaptation to the host country, in particular when it comes to the economic situation of Vietnamese people in CEE countries (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2014). While the ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ debate is still very prominent in many policy-oriented studies, which often focus on one or several particular minority ethnic groups, there is a need to think beyond the ethnic lens (Glick Schiller, Caglar Guldbrandsen 2006) and to be aware of methodological nationalism (Wimmer 2009). This does not mean no longer studying single ethnic groups, but consciously taking into account the manifold relationships migrants create with their co-ethnics, with other migrants in and outside the host country, and with locals. Focusing on ethnic and cultural diversity and asking where and how people from various countries live and work together poses new challenges to anthropology and related disciplines. Taking a transnational perspective, exploring shifting boundaries and cross-border practices that are very much part of the everyday lives of migrants enriches our understanding of processes of migration. When the nation-state is no longer conceived of as the container model of society (although it will remain very powerful), research on migration will become more significant. By following the people, the goods, the ideas and the money across borders (Appadurai 1996) social scientists have been exploring the everyday lives of mobile people and their manifold transregional ties for about 20 years. As long ago as the early 1990s American scholars developed the idea of transmigrants, creating and maintaining *multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take action, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously* (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992: 1–2). Taking into account theoretical approaches to transnationalism (Levitt, Glick Schiller 2004) and cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 1990), I have argued elsewhere for the concept of ‘socialist cosmopolitanism’ (Hüwelmeier 2011) in order to better understand the creation and maintenance of Vietnamese cross-border ties during the Cold War period. However, migration was not just unidirectional. For example, a group of East German architects became transmigrants as well, living in Vietnam for some years while constructing a socialist city after the American War in Vietnam (Schwenkel 2012). Thus, the analysis of cultural and political encounters in the Cold War period contributes to our understanding of ‘socialist transnationalism.’

Although immigration to Poland, at least from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s, was statistically not significant (Iglicka 2000: 1243), government-sponsored programmes of ‘socialist cooperation’ with Vietnam generated a movement of students from that country with long-term consequences. The academic exchange programmes encouraged young Vietnamese to graduate in Poland and, like Vietnamese students who arrived in the GDR or in Czechoslovakia in the socialist period, many of them held important positions in their country of origin after their return. In Poland, ‘the majority’ of Vietnamese students (Iglicka 2000:

1245) went back to Vietnam. However, according to Ewa Nowicka (in this volume), some of them did not return to Vietnam, contrary to instructions from the communist authorities of their country. From the 1970s to the mid-1980s, about 200 students from Vietnam arrived in Poland every year, and, due to state policy, most of them returned to Vietnam after completing their degrees. In the 1990s, some of these Vietnamese returned to Poland, and from that time on, complex migration networks were established with subsequent migration from Vietnam (Halik 2000; 2001). There were no bilateral agreements about the sending of contract workers from Vietnam to Poland until the end of communism, but agreements were signed between the GDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Hüwelmeier 2014), and between Czechoslovakia and Vietnam (Hlinčíková, in this volume; Hüwelmeier, in press). An estimated up to 35 000 Vietnamese are living in Poland and of these, according to the Office for Foreigners, 11 696 do have residence permits. Between 1994 and 2001, between 3 000 and 7 000 Vietnamese arrived in Poland every year (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2014). However, due to ‘socialist internationalism,’ migration from Vietnam to Poland had started decades before (Szulecka 2012: 169) and probably some of the former students were among those who returned to Poland in the 1990s.

After 1989 an increasing number of Vietnamese citizens applied for work-permit visas, and therefore came legally to Poland (Iglićka 2000: 1248; Iglicka 2001a). By 1996 they were the second-largest group (after Ukrainians) by number of visas with work permit granted and since 1997 Vietnamese have been the largest. Those Vietnamese who came as non-documented migrants legalised their stay through marriage with a Polish citizen or applied for a permanent residence permit. At the end of 1995, according to sources from the Office for Repatriation and Foreigners in Poland, Vietnamese were the third-largest group of immigrants receiving residence permits, and from 1996 until mid-1999 they were the second-largest group (Iglićka 2000).

From *Jarmark Europa* to Commodity City²

Vietnamese represent the biggest immigrant group in Warsaw (Górny, Grabowska-Lusińska, Lesińska, Okólski 2010: 157) and have transformed *the urban space by rendering it conspicuously multicultural* (Piekut 2012: 209). One of the reasons why Vietnamese and other migrant groups became economically successful was the establishment of a huge market in Poland’s capital. The *Jarmark Europa* in the Warsaw stadium was one of the first huge markets created in an East European city after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It provided employment for more than 6 500 people, about 3 000 of them considered to be foreigners (Iglićka 2001b). Moreover, about 60 000 people found work linked to bazaar activities, such as in factories producing goods for trading (Okólski 1998: 16). Many of those who later became successful entrepreneurs had their first experiences of trading in this place (Sword 1999). Bazaars of this type exist in many CEE countries. In Warsaw, the *Jarmark Europa* near the city centre (called ‘stadium’ in the vernacular), Europe’s biggest bazaar, was the melting pot of the city: Vietnamese, Poles, Russians and others sold goods in this market after the breakdown of the socialist economy, yet Africans, Chinese, Indians and Central Asians were also among the traders. The place was built between 1953 and 1955; its name, 10th Anniversary Stadium, refers to the then ten years of the existence of the Republic of Poland. In the 1980s it lost its significance as a sports centre and after 1989, the government rented the stadium to a company which ran the *Jarmark Europa*, visited by 100 000 people every day (Sulima 2012: 241). This trading location has since been transferred to the suburbs, as the Stadium bazaar was demolished in 2008 to make way for a new stadium for the European soccer championship of 2012, hosted by Poland and the Ukraine. Some years before the demolition, Chinese, Vietnamese and Turkish investors purchased huge areas of land in a small village about 30 kilometres south of Warsaw, in Wólka Kosowska, literally ‘on the meadows,’ but with excellent access by road to other regions

and countries. The investors established new global trade centres, with about 2 000 stores (for a detailed description see Klorek and Szulecka 2013).

Whether the *Jarmark Europa* was originally established by members of the ‘Vietnamese intelligentsia,’ university graduates and doctoral students who had been living in Poland in the socialist period and who in the early 1990s saw an opportunity to make some easy money from street trading, is not yet clear. During my fieldwork in Wólka Kosowska, Vietnamese people told a somewhat different story. Some female Vietnamese traders in today’s huge bazaar in Wólka Kosowska claimed to be the first to have started *Jarmark Europa*. According to their narratives, a group of several hundred women arrived in Poland from Vietnam in the year 1989 to work in the garment industry in Łódź. Although there were no Vietnamese contract workers in Poland before 1989, as there were no contracts at state level, Mrs Ha, one of my informants in Wólka Kosowska, reported that about 300 Vietnamese came to Łódź shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall under a private agreement between two companies in Poland and Vietnam. As these women had rapidly established production and trading networks in the textile industry, they quickly moved to Warsaw after the collapse of communism, appropriating public space in the former stadium, together with some successful Chinese traders.

Jarmark Europa soon became a multicultural site in the middle of the post-communist city of Warsaw, attracting thousands of vendors and customers as well as tourists, and becoming known as Europe’s largest open-air market. Thousands of traders sold pirated CDs, T-shirts, video tapes and even weapons. Minze Tummenscheit’s movie *Jarmark Europa*, first screened at the Berlin international film festival in 2004, illustrated some of the results of the eastward enlargement of the EU in 2004 from the perspective of those who remained outside. Many female traders also came from various parts of the former Soviet Union, travelling long distances as suitcase traders to transport their goods to Warsaw. Called *tschelnoki* in Russian, they embarked on a mobile existence between home town and bazaar; many were academics on low salaries who decided to become small-time traders, others were retired or unemployed. Some of the female traders travelled as far as 700 kilometres, for example from Penza, southeast of Moscow; or from Brest, the border city between Poland and Belarus. As these cases illustrate, gender issues are of great importance in researching processes of economic integration (Kindler, Szulecka 2013). Women who became traders in post-socialist bazaars (Hüwelmeier 2013a) created ‘transnational spaces of empowerment and agency’ (Morokvasic 2004: 19).

Transnational ties were maintained by a multitude of agents; the multi-ethnic dimension of global post-socialist bazaars is thus of special interest. ‘Commodity City,’ which replaced *Jarmark Europa*, hosts traders from various world regions and is run by Vietnamese, Chinese and Turks. Similarly, Prague’s *Sapa* market, run by Vietnamese, includes many wholesalers from various other countries (Hüwelmeier, in press). In Berlin, the *Dong Xuan* Centre, a global bazaar in the eastern part of the city, is run by Vietnamese and accommodates traders from India, Pakistan, China and many other countries (Hüwelmeier 2013b) These places are all characterised by ethnic and religious diversity, with occasional mutual animosities on the one hand, and solidarities on the other hand, according to the local, regional or global issues. Tensions and conflicts, even protests and strikes within marketplaces challenge the somewhat exotic image of these localities, and this is particularly true in regard to ‘ethnic’ conflicts.

In ‘Commodity City’ in Wólka Kosowska, friction between Chinese and Vietnamese flared when the Chinese management of one of the three huge bazaars in this locality raised the stall rents, leading to organised protests in 2009, 2010 and 2011 by market traders, and even a one-day strike. On that day, Polish, Turkish, Vietnamese and some Chinese traders blocked the main road to the wholesale area. Security guards financed by the Chinese management used batons and tear gas to break up the demonstration. The protest highlighted the fact that migrants from various backgrounds are willing to gather collectively in a host coun-

try to protest against unjust rent increases by the management. Issues such as power and class are also highlighted: different status groups such as the Chinese management on the one hand and a multi-ethnic group of traders on the other hand do not share the same interests. This is also true of new protests: in July 2012 a strike was organised by Vietnamese stall holders against the Vietnamese board of one of the bazaars in Wólka Kosowska, whose managers were planning not only to raise rents but also to demand a new deposit (Klorek, Szulecka 2013: 16).

Similarly to markets in Berlin and Prague, in Commodity City, the Vietnamese employ not only their co-ethnics, but also local people. For example, Vietnamese traders hire Polish shop assistants from the nearby villages. Relations between village people and foreigners seem to be quite relaxed, as I was told by some of the traders and by the local representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Wólka Kosowska, who reported that even marriages between villagers and Vietnamese had taken place. A number of Vietnamese families have settled in Wólka Kosowska or nearby villages, and their children attend the local kindergarten and school. However, according to a report on the ‘migrant economic institution’ in Wólka Kosowska, there are also negative voices from Poles regarding the presence of ‘foreigners’ (Klorek, Szulecka 2013: 26).

Recent transborder mobilities include not only new migrants, particularly from the centre of Vietnam to CEE countries, but also Vietnamese who had been living in the Czech Republic and then moved to Poland, as trading conditions had been poor in recent years. Due to intra-EU mobility, *in the year 2009, 69 out of 71 Vietnamese arriving to Poland from other EU countries were former residents of the Czech Republic* (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2014: 5). This information accords with the experiences of some of the traders I met in the bazaar in ‘Commodity City.’ After business deteriorated at the Czech border – not least due to new border politics following the accession of the Czech Republic to the Schengen area in 2007 – a number of Czech Vietnamese decided to live in Poland and to work as shop assistants in the bazaars. As these cases illustrate, the nation-state remains important in the decision-making processes of migrants involved in trading (Iglicka 2008). To ward off bad luck and economic failure, many Vietnamese turn to religious practices to be blessed by the spirits.

A Ho Chi Minh shrine in the bazaar pagoda

Like many other migrants in the global world, Vietnamese transfer their religious practices across borders (Hüwelmeier, Krause 2010; Hüwelmeier 2015b). Temples and pagodas are established in post-socialist diasporas (Hüwelmeier 2013a), and small altars are erected in the traders’ places of business to ask spirits and gods for protection. In some of the stores in Wólka Kosowska, as in Vietnamese shops in the *Dong Xuan* Centre in Berlin and in the *Sapa* market in Prague, the visitor will recognise small altars – normally placed near the till or the entrance – where the spirit of the place (*ong tho dia*) and the spirit of wealth (*ong than tai*) are venerated (Hüwelmeier 2008: 140). In addition to these popular religious practices, parts of the Vietnamese community in Warsaw established a Buddhist pagoda and a ‘house of culture’ near *Jarmark Europa* in the 1990s, in an area rented by a Vietnamese businessman very close to the river Vistula, where many of the retailers left their goods in small storerooms and containers. After the demolition of *Jarmark Europa*, the area was abandoned. In March 2012 I visited this desolate place near the newly built stadium. This urban space looked like a kind of ghost town, where the ruins of the pagoda and the ‘house of culture’ could still be seen, just two minutes’ walk from the most famous new soccer stadium in the city of Warsaw.

After the demolition of the stadium, a Buddhist lay group started thinking about a new place for a pagoda. In 2012 they bought a plot of land, a meadow with a barn on it, close to the new Commodity City and therefore near the multi-ethnic market in Wólka Kosowska. The barn was transformed into a religious place and a group of elders, according to my interviewees, took care of the Buddhist statues which were transported

from the very first pagoda to the barn after the demolition of the stadium. When I visited the ‘barn pagoda’ in 2012, I talked to a monk from Vietnam and the chairman of the Buddhist Vietnamese community. The chairman told me that a new pagoda is planned for the meadow near the barn, but the congregation was still waiting for more donations and for permission from the authorities to construct the building. Plans of the new pagoda, designed by a Vietnamese architect, were prominently displayed, together with photos from the inauguration ceremony of the temporary barn pagoda. The monk from Vietnam was also travelling to other Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas in Eastern European countries, such as Berlin, Dresden and Prague. That way he was creating and maintaining transnational religious ties, connecting people and places (Hüwelmeier 2013a). During our encounter, which took place in the barn pagoda, a group of about 30 Vietnamese women, most of them traders from the Wólka Kosowska bazaar, were sitting on the floor, waiting for the monk to continue the religious ritual.

In March 2014, as part of the Global Vietnamese Diaspora pre-conference programme in Warsaw, I had the chance to revisit this place. A bus tour was organised by the conference planning group to places where Vietnamese were trading, among them Wólka Kosowska. We also visited two new places of worship near Commodity City. One was the newly established pagoda on the site of the barn pagoda that I had visited two years before. It had been renamed *Chua Nhan Hoa* and was at the bare brickwork stage, while the community was still waiting for more donations, as the chairman, whom I had also first met two years previously, told me. They had already spent 2 million US dollars on the purchase of the plot of land and the partial construction of a new two-storey building. A monk from Vietnam was still living in the barn and the religious ceremonies were being performed in the makeshift place. After having been invited for a cup of tea, fruit and cookies, and having taken photos from a shrine dedicated to recently deceased Vo Nguyen Giap (in October 2013), who was a General in the Vietnam People’s Army and a politician, the group left for the second pagoda.

Unlike the *Chua Nhan Hoa* barn pagoda, the second place, called *Chua Thien Phuc*, was already fully functioning as a ‘proper’ pagoda. In an ordinary family house at the margins of a village, some kilometres away from the first pagoda, about 20 members of the lay community received the group of scholars warmly. The owner of the place, absent during our visit, is a Vietnamese who had established the very first pagoda, *Chua Thien Viet*, and House of Culture near the Stadium bazaar in the 1990s. After the demolition of the stadium he became bankrupt and returned to Vietnam, according to rumours within the Vietnamese community. However, it seems that he had come back to Poland again. I was told that his daughter died recently and he donated this place in her memory and transformed it into the *Chua Thien Phuc* pagoda.

After lighting incense in front of the Buddha altar on the first floor, we were taken to the garden, where we gazed at the altar of the *hung kings* as well as the adjacent altar for Ho Chi Minh in one of the two garden houses. In Vietnam, the *hung kings* are celebrated as the religious and political leaders until 258 BC, ruling an area of what is now North Vietnam and part of southern China. Every year, high-ranking politicians visit the temples of the *hung kings*, about 80 kilometres from Hanoi, to pay their respects to the ancestors and founders of the Vietnamese nation (Lauser 2008: 148). As recently as 2007 the Vietnamese government announced a new public holiday to celebrate the *hung kings* and to express gratitude to the ancestors of the Vietnamese people. Seeing an altar dedicated to the *hung kings* in Poland came as something of a surprise for most members of the group, as the non-Polish scholars attending the conference had never seen such a shrine in the post-socialist world before. In the same garden house an altar is dedicated to ‘Uncle Ho,’ as Vietnam’s revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh is called by many Vietnamese. Flowers had been laid on his altar, and incense burnt as our group arrived. Particularly impressive was a larger-than-life statue of the prime minister (1945–1955) and president (1945–1969) of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) erected in the garden of the pagoda at the edge of a remote village about 20 kilometres from Poland’s capital. Ho Chi

Minh in fact visited Poland in 1957, but it has taken many decades for the spirit of Uncle Ho to truly arrive in this former ‘socialist brotherland.’

A highlight of our visit to the *Chua Thien Phuc* pagoda was the performance of a *len dong* spirit possession ritual, or to use the term currently preferred, a *hau dong* (Endres 2011: 13) ceremony in a second garden house, where a temple dedicated to the mother goddesses, was established. The religion of the mother goddesses, *Dao Mau*, and its accompanying spirit possession ritual *len dong* (mounting the medium) or *hau dong* (a medium’s service) was long considered superstition by the Vietnamese government. However, it is now tolerated in contemporary Vietnam and even performed in the US Vietnamese diaspora (Fjelstad 2010; Fjelstad, Thi Hien Nguyen 2011). During my fieldwork trips to Hanoi over the past few years, I have taken part in a number of *len dong* ceremonies, which sometimes last up to ten hours. These popular religious rituals involve groups of followers in public and private temples. Votive paper offerings, burnt for the spirits, food offerings and *chau van* musicians are an integral part of the performance in Hanoi (Hüwelmeier, in press). The majority of participants were women, most of them traders. Mrs Mai,³ who began her initiation as a medium in Vietnam, has lived in Poland for many years, and is both a trader and a medium in the Warsaw pagoda. Four assistants were helping her to dress up during the ritual, and the *chau van* music, a crucial element of trance singing and dancing which is performed by a group of musicians in Vietnam, was played on a cassette recorder in the garden pagoda in Wólka Kosowska. Similarly to the performances in Hanoi, the medium, the incarnation of the deity, distributed goods and money, throwing US dollars and Vietnamese dong to the visitors. Having received *loc* (blessed gifts) from the spirits and shared a meal with the group of followers, the conference participants left for Warsaw.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese have used ‘socialist pathways of migration,’ to forge and maintain social, economic and political ties with their home country and with people in many other places, both before and after the collapse of communism. Multi-ethnic bazaars in Berlin, Warsaw and Prague, created after the fall of the Berlin Wall, are transnationally connected by travelling Vietnamese businesspeople and market managers, and also through ‘cultural events’ such as beauty contests. Transregional ties are strengthened by personal contacts between traders in neighbouring countries, and finally, Buddhist monks from Vietnam create religious ties between Berlin, Prague, Warsaw and Hanoi, visiting each place to perform religious rituals in the bazaar pagodas (Hüwelmeier 2013a).

As this contribution has illustrated, there is no such thing as *the* Vietnamese diaspora. Rather, Vietnamese in all Eastern European countries are characterised by diversity at many levels (Vertovec 2007). They are internally divided by class, political activities, access to power, education, gender, family background, region of origin, and time of arrival. Vietnamese are not an isolated group to be studied without taking into account the manifold social relations with locals, as well as with Chinese, Africans, Pakistanis and Indians.

This ethnographic study has indicated that transnational social practices and globe-spanning political solidarities in the Cold War period and after the fall of the Berlin Wall were established long before new communication technologies, and the reduced costs of transportation intensified cross-border ties. According to ongoing debates on ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2002), the study of social and historical processes cannot be contained within the borders of individual nation-states. Transborder activities between countries in the socialist bloc were already quite significant, but after 1989, traversing multiple cultural spaces became much more important in what are now called post-socialist societies. The thousands of Vietnamese from rural areas who arrive as new migrants in former socialist countries or as students in places such as London, Paris and New York, are contributing to an ever-widening diversification.

Notes

¹ This article is based on the research project *The Global Bazaar – Marketplaces as Localities of Social and Economic Inclusion*, funded by the German Research Foundation (HU 1019/3-1). I carried out multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in marketplaces between 2011 and 2015 in Berlin, Warsaw, Prague and Hanoi.

² I noticed the term ‘Commodity City’ on a display board near the road in Wólka Kosowska.

³ This is a pseudonym.

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