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Break time Exchanges

Visual and Media Ethnography of Ethnic Identity Construction in the Vietnamese-Czech Community in the SAPA Market and Cultural Centre

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V době přestávek:

Vizuální a mediální etnografie konstrukce etnické identity ve vietnamsko-české komunitě v obchodním a kulturním centru SAPA

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Abstract

This thesis provides a snapshot of the social lives of Vietnamese-Czech immigrants, primarily the first generation who engage in small-scale merchant business at the SAPA market and cultural centre in Prague. Adding to the existing research on the Vietnamese immigrant community in the Czech Republic, the research shifts from studying the immigrant community's identity as business owners to their identities as cultural participants by observing the community's interactions during break-times. The shift allows an intersectional look at the lives of the Vietnamese and avoids the stereotypical understanding of Vietnamese immigrants as clothing and grocery store owners. Through qualitative research and visual sociological methodologies, the researcher explores how the first generation of Vietnamese-Czech immigrants in SAPA engage in community building and upholding a general sense of ethnic identity through the preservation and reconstruction of Vietnamese customs. This ethnographic study combines the use of participant observation, insider ethnography, visual mapping and visual and digital ethnography. The fieldwork reveals that the physical and digital rest areas of SAPA help facilitate ethnic identity construction and preservation among the community members.

Keywords: *digital ethnography/netnography, participant observation, visual sociology, visual mapping, transnational community, Vietnamese-Czech immigrants, cultural transformation, ethnic identity, daily rituals, digital interactions*.

Abstrakt

Tato kvalifikační práce se zaměřuje na společenský život vietnamsko-českých imigrantů, zejména zástupců jejich první generace, kteří provozují malé obchůdky v obchodním a kulturním centru SAPA Praha. Práce je příspěvkem k dosavadnímu výzkumu vietnamské komunity v České republice, od kterého se však odlišuje tím, že identitu členů této komunity nenahlíží ve vztahu k jejich podnikatelským aktivitám, nýbrž se soustředí na postižení jejich kulturní identity, která je v této komunitě významným způsobem reprodukována v době společně trávených pracovních přestávek. Cílem práce je vyhnout se právě stereotypnímu vnímání Vietnamců jakožto obchodníků s oblečením a potravinářským zbožím. Místo toho se výzkum zaměřuje na to, jak první generace vietnamských imigrantů uchovává a rekonstruuje vietnamské zvyky a tradice, a to rámci každodenních interakcí. Práce je etnografickou studií založenou na zúčastněném pozorování a technikách vizuální a digitální etnografie. Tento výzkum ukazuje, jak je kulturní identita Vietnamců udržována a rekonstruována zejména ve fyzických a digitálních místech určených k odpočinku, tedy v průběhu interakcí, jež se odehrávají v pracovních přestávkách.

Klíčová slova: *digitální etnografie/netnografie, zúčastněné pozorování, vizuální mapování, nadnárodní společenství, vietnamsko-čeští přistěhovalci, kulturní transformace, etnická identita, každodenní rituály, digitální interakce.*

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Introduction

Located in a suburban area on the outskirts of Prague, SAPA is a market centre with both large and small-scale commerce organised by the Vietnamese community. Compared to the other EU countries, the Vietnamese immigrant communities in the Czech Republic, mostly concentrated in Prague, are among the top five in terms of scale (Fiedlerová et al. 2016). Most of the first generation of immigrants came to the Czech Republic as communist cadres selected by the government to go overseas to receive education and technical training. This historical context set the Vietnamese ethnic group residing in the Czech Republic apart from other significant Vietnamese immigrant communities in the Western European regions and North America. For example, in the United States, the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants were predominantly refugees who fled the Vietnam War during the 1970s and 1980s (Grant 1979). Because of this, the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants there were mostly of Southern Vietnam origin. In contrast, Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic, and especially Prague, mostly originated from North Vietnam.

The different historical and political contexts of each community's formation would have different effects on how they function, develop and change over time. Because of such differences in the Vietnamese regional origins of various Vietnamese immigrant communities across the globe, it is important to notice the unique patterns in the way Vietnamese immigrant communities in the Czech Republic interact with each other socially as well as how they preserve Vietnamese rituals and cultural essences in everyday life. Researchers who studied personhood and social identities argue against viewing people as imprisoned in the social categories they are attached to during their life. I also agree that "identity can be understood as a relationship accomplished in and arising from social discourse" (Keevallik 2010; De Fina et al. 2006). Even though community members may share certain traditions or rituals from back home, there can also be newly established gatekeeping sanctions or new rituals unique to individual clusters of immigrants. In my research of the SAPA immigrant community, I particularly look at how SAPA members express these nuances and differences in everyday life interactions.

Immigration studies view the immigrant assimilation model as dimensional and thus advise future ethnographic studies to focus on the formation of immigrant identities that compromise between the traditional values of the country of origin and the host country (Hall 2004; Kivisto

2003). From 1985 to 1995, within the body of research literature focusing on the Asian immigrant community, there is a shift to view culture as fundamental, unchangeable, and enclosed (Camino and Krulfeld 1994; Nguyen 2016). These researchers shed light on how Vietnamese and other Asian cultures are dynamic, changeable, creative, and adaptive. These works emphasise identity, which is not fixed and unchangeable, but "is easily reinvented, modified, and negotiated in different contexts and situations" (Nguyen 2016: 444). Scholars view identity as part of the dynamic processes of history, culture, society, economy, and politics (Hall 1990). Recent studies of immigrants have also demonstrated "the diversity and variety of adaptation among Vietnamese and other ethnic groups and have shown that immigrants are not simply the victims of context, but people who have reconstructed their lives and identities creatively, and that their adaptations are not the same" (Nguyen 2016: 444). An example of this is the phenomenon of Vietnamese immigrant families hiring Czech nannies to take care of their children while they are at work, which reveals unique ways of how life in the new host country affects childcare arrangements and social norms about care work among the Vietnamese immigrant community in the Czech Republic (Souralova 2015).

The social identity given to the Vietnamese Czech as 'immigrants', and especially as grocery store owners, often reduces the members of the Vietnamese community to a stereotype and overlooks other aspects of their identity. Thus, the research provides an exploratory look at the Czech Vietnamese immigrants' socialisations within the SAPA ethnoburb outside the work sphere. Through observing and analysing norms or attitudes captured within a well-established refugee community such as SAPA, I show ways in which the community members choose to abandon or preserve certain ethnic values during their process of constructing self-identity and mediating between Vietnamese and Czech cultural values. The research provides another perspective on the discussions and representations of SAPA and highlights the importance of online socialisation to the immigrant community (Li 2005).

Furthermore, a close look into how the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants, who had spent large parts of their lives in Vietnam before migrating, practice traditional values would also provide another dimension to the existing literature about the cultural adaptation and preservation of Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic. As Hrebickova (2020) showed in her quantitative research of cultural orientation of Vietnamese Czechs, the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese Czechs who came to Czech before they were 12 years old were more in touch with

Vietnamese culture compared to those who were born in the Czech Republic. Even among the Vietnamese population in the country, there are also nuances in how they view their ethnic identity as exclusively Vietnamese or as a Czech and Vietnamese hybrid (Homolac & Sherman 2020). Therefore, the research adds to the existing literature on generational differences and super-diversification of identities among Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic. In my study centring more on interactions among the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants, I highlight the occurrences of rest areas and their significance within SAPA as a hotspot for community socialisation. Furthermore, I explore and discuss the phenomenon of emerging Vietnamese Facebook groups as alternative online rest areas parallel to the physical ones where identity construction and adjustments also take place.

Research Design

As the research intent is interpretive, I rely on ethnography fieldwork based on participant observation supported by visual techniques, such as photographic observation, to study how community members within the Vietnamese community in SAPA interact and contribute to the preservation of cultural memory, rituals, and traditions among themselves. For data collection, I took extensive field notes, diary entries, and photographs. During the first stage of the fieldwork, I utilised the discursive walking method combined with photographic mapping to explore and document interactions between the people and the space. This type of 'discursive walking,' as a "participatory mode of walking, during which we half-consciously explore the landscape while sensorially experiencing it passing by" (Wunderlich, 2008: 132), allowed me to gather data in two different layers: first, as a newcomer visiting and exploring the new space, and second as a Vietnamese expatriate who connects to the Vietnamese community with a sense of belonging. By analysing this exploratory data, I realised that crucial socialisation regarding cultural memory preservation occurs at rest areas, where community members interact with each other in intimate and backstage forms. As the study is focused on socialisation around rest areas in SAPA, I chose one specific location for further participant observation fieldwork to be able to establish stronger relationships with the place and the social networks based around it. From June to September of 2020, I visited the location three times a week; each visit usually lasted from three to five hours. During these visits, I observed, took notes, and participated in interactions occurring around the bench area. The notes and analyses were divided into three main themes identified during the process: communal meals, preservation of religious and traditional values and the expansion of networks. In certain examples, the rest area became the backdrop to deep interactions that contribute to one's ethnic identity construction. In other examples, the rest area helped facilitate and maintain the organic expansion of a social network.

From one contact I established a connection with during the fieldwork at the chosen location, I proceeded to do more in-depth qualitative interviews to get a subjective perspective on the adjustment process of a newly-arrived immigrant. With the fresh experience of adapting to a new place, environment, and community, the informant added another dimension to the research. The analysis of these conversations reveals the initial observations of differences between the

Vietnamese community in SAPA and one back in Vietnam where the informant was before. Such observations add to the overall stages of the adaptation and integration into the new society.

For observations of the Vietnamese Facebook group, I employed a digital ethnography (or netnography) approach as I took extensive notes and screenshots of significant interactions or conversations that occurred within the Vietnamese online community in the Facebook group called *Cho Sapa tai Sec ("SAPA Market in the Czech Republic")* in September and October of 2020. This online ethnographic approach is also regarded by many researchers as 'netnography' (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010). By combining the collection of screen-captured posts and shares and running them through a discourse analysis and textual analysis approach, I took a closer look at people's engagement and interpersonal relations on these Facebook groups during rest time outside their work sphere. Within the digital ethnography process, I also followed reflexive forms of research practice as I collected and analysed the data. In this way, I gave recognition to how findings and knowledge about community interactions are produced through a combination of my field notes and my participation in the interaction (James et al., 1997, Pink et al. 2015).

The insider ethnographic approach is particularly helpful as my insider position, based on shared ethnicity, accelerates my socialization with others in SAPA as an outsider to this new immigrant community (e.g., Khan 2011). This initial outsider position also makes me more sensitive to identify newness and strangeness while observing the lifestyles and rituals of the people here (Hastrup 1987). Being able to mine the data gathered from surface-level interactions provides useful insights into how ethnoburb communities function and interact, especially in terms of exchanging and preserving cultural heritage or tradition. All the names of the community members observed during the physical and digital ethnography fieldwork have been changed to Vietnamese pseudonyms to respect their anonymity and remove any identifying factors.

Visual Methodologies to Study Ethnic Minority Communities

Spatialization of Culture and Visual Ethnography

In his study of humans' connection and experience with space, Tuan (1977) delves deeper into the awareness and consciousness one has when creating, modifying, and adjusting the space they live in. As a complete structure, man-made space provides an environment to be lived in and interacted with. In return, it can also affect the way one experiences their lives. According to Tuan, the "built environment clarifies social roles and relations" (102). That is, the space created serves as a kind of orientation for expected ways of interactions. Before buildings and structures are created, one already has a vague sense of public and private, of being "in" and "out". Nevertheless, the concrete forms of a space can make such distinctions more pronounced to one's awareness. For communities, especially ethnic minority groups, constructed spaces can serve educational purposes and even facilitate cultural rituals or the passing down of traditions.

In my research which looks at the socialization of the Vietnamese ethnic minority in SAPA, the ethnographic focus on studying space and place is critical as they are sites of social identity construction and compromises. Since the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic moved to the state after having their lives rooted in Vietnam, the relationships with the new place and space in the host country can carry added layers. The ways people make connections with new environments and construct their place-based identities after the move can be meaningful and significant. Previous ethnography scholarship has especially seen meanings in spatial arrangements and regarded constructed environments as fundamental to social life (Lawrence and Low 1990; Spier 1933; Koroeber 1939).

Not only that, contemporary ethnographic studies of space and place have moved past the implication of an indexical relationship between the cultural group and its location. This previous view of space and place, which focuses heavily on its material and physical settings, sees them as more confining than not. Thus, recent literature argues for a more "flexible and mobile conception of space, one that speaks to how space is produced historically and physically, as well as how bodies in motion, dreams and desires, social interaction and environment interrelations create it"

(Low 2016:2). Once researchers start investigating spaces and places as being embodied, they would be able to identify trans-local and trans-national spatial flows. The very ways humans contribute to place-making through daily movements and patterns of trajectories also make them part of the landscape itself (Massey 2005, Rockefeller 2009). By spatializing culture, the researchers produce and locate rituals, practices, cultural institutions, and social relations in space. Overall, the use of ethnography of space and place as a methodology to study cultural groups helps "integrate the materiality and meaning of actions and practices at local, translocal, and global scales" while providing "the flexibility and creativity to address the complexity of contemporary social relations and cultural settings" (Low 2016:2).

The introduction of visual means into ethnography is very appropriate to the study of cultural spatializations. In visual ethnography, the camera becomes recorded means of another kind of data which could balance the bias of words. In my case, the incorporation of photography in different stages of the research process helps me expand on the social phenomenon I want to study. At the beginning stage of the research, by analyzing the initial photographic mapping of the space, I manage to get a general sense of how socializations and interactions among the Vietnamese Czech community in SAPA are distributed as well as how they play out in different settings. With this necessary overview of the ways space and humans are interconnected in SAPA, I am then able to notice more subtleties in this relationship and identify certain 'hotspots' where people are more likely to gather.

The photographs aid the spatialization of culture in simultaneously showing all elements of the spaces: how people are scattered or distributed, how space is decorated, how furniture is arranged. In other words, with just a single image, the social scene and how it operates are revealed. For example, in sociological or ethnographic studies that make use of aerial photography for mapping and recording data, researchers would be able to track social and material changes of space through time. On the other hand, the ground-level view can result in a different set of coded data. So, the different vantage points that photography provides further show the changing shapes of a community. Different communities have varying patterns of social organizations. For a community that is more guarded, utilizing visual sociology and ethnography allows traditional sociologists to study them in more sensible ways. The imagery and visuals can even serve as a bridge between the researcher and the informant and support their communication with each other. The narratives conveyed through photographs in combination with fieldwork notes, especially in my case studies,

provide a much more comprehensive and descriptive picture of the culture portrayed (Harper 2012).

When using photography to collect data in visual ethnography, the researcher uses the means with intentionality through a sociological eye. That is, one takes photographs while looking for "'things people do,' 'elements that influence social action,' and 'sub-regions' and their social uses.'" (Harper 2012: 74). The process of taking photographs and analyzing them becomes a feedback loop where contexts and data collected from the first session can influence or help form the orientation of the next documentary sessions. Interpretation follows observations and vice versa. As the visual data collection goes on, one will see patterns, repetitions, or variations in how people interact with space. Social behaviors are intertwined with different factors, including the actors, the spaces, the occasions, the traffic, and so on. Visual data, when coded and analyzed, would contribute effectively to the reading of intentionality and meanings behind socializations of cultural groups in specific spaces.

The acknowledgement of my documentary photography process, along with my findings from the photographs, also underlines an amount of reflexivity in my ethnographic study. Reflexivity in the visual approach to ethnography "is an attempt to resist the universalizing claims of academic knowledge and to insist that academic knowledge, like all other knowledges, is situated and partial" (Rose 2001). In studies of cultural and ethnic group, the reflexive strategy reveals "the very processes by which the positioning of research and informant were constituted and through which knowledge was produced during the fieldwork" (Pink 2003:189). So, by using first-person narratives, I clarify my position as both a researcher and as someone who shares the same ethnicity and cultures as the informants. This position I have in relation to the community members allows me to bring into the analysis existing knowledge or new revelations regarding rituals or routines practiced by the Vietnamese in the new space.

Netnography and Considerations of Online Communities

Even before the rise of the likes of Facebook and Twitter, different theorists and researchers had weighed in on the relationships or interdependences between humans and technology. Some scholars such as Mark Pesce, Kevin Kelly, and Pierre Lévy argue for the notion that "technology will assist human evolution towards some sort of a positively utopian collective mind" (Kozinets 2010:23). However, it is equally important to consider the other side of the debate, which pushes

forward the idea that the relationship is co-determining: we adapt to new technologies and shape their roles in our lives just as they affect and influence our daily routines and lifestyles. The significance of this interconnection underlines the importance for researchers in fields of social science, ethnography, anthropology, and beyond to employ studies of also the online physical spaces and interactions happening within them. Thus, the unique approach of netnography, the ethnography of online groups, was devised out of the need to study online communities and computer-mediated social interaction as essential parts of the contemporary social world.

While one seeks to understand the ever-changing and ever-growing landscape of online communities and cultures, netnography would assist in the research of "abstract ideas, abstract meanings, social practices, relationships, languages, and symbol systems" embedded in socializations happening online (Kozinets 2010:25). Given that online communities offer accessibility and anonymity, among others special characteristics, to their members, interactions or development of group norms here can also carry unique styles compared to in-person interactions. Through this newly developed method of research, we can then acquire rich data sources to take a closer look at how such spaces enabled by rising technology can mediate and influence the formations of our institutions and our own social identities. The netnographic data can be produced and collected from a wide range of interactions among some individuals, snapshop-like, diaristic posts of some others, or as creations of software agents and bots. The data, in this way, can appear both in polished forms or raw and crude forms (Kozinets 2010:5). The new social environment online also enables the ability to combine mixed media during combinations: images, sound bites, video clips.

According to the Pew Research Report's survey (2001) centering on the vibrance of socialization on the Internet, the result revealed that most people used online platforms to deepen ties with local communities they are already a part of. However, the online spaces give them opportunities to find new connections with 'strangers' whose social identities might not overlap with theirs regarding occupational, generational, or economic backgrounds. With the constant increase in social networks and community formation online, it is important to acknowledge how such online communities influence our daily online and offline life experiences. Participation and interactions with other members of communities have become an integral part of one's online activities. In addition, ties and connections made online would get strengthened over face-to-face interactions, and the other way round also applies. Thus, the online and offline worlds also intertwine and

overlap. In his argument for the development of methods to conduct ethnography on the Internet, Kozinets (2010) had proposed that there has not been simply a quantity change but a qualitative change in how we use the Internet in our everyday lives. According to him, these communities "are becoming 'places' of belonging, information, and emotional support that people cannot do without" (Kozinets 2010:15).

Within the "growing corpus of 'ethnographic approaches to digital media' scholarship that Coleman (2010) divides into broad and overlapping categories", the netnography conducted in my research belongs to the overlapping categories of "Cultural Politics" and "Prosaics (Kozinets 2010:25). According to Coleman, the "Cultural Politics" group encompasses "ethnographies concerning 'how cultural identities, representations, and imaginaries' are 'remade, subverted, communicated and circulated through individual and collective engagement with digital technologies.'" (Kozinets 2010:25). In this group, the ethnography research focuses on cultural groups' digital production for its implications of the groups' "overall structure of priorities and issues" (Srinivasan, 2006:510; Horst and Miller, 2006). During my fieldwork, I discovered that the online Facebook groups of Vietnamese-Czech in Prague act as another space for resting besides serving business purposes. The close analysis of textual as well as visual posts of the community members would then discover any issues, grievances, or topics of discussions that are deemed important for the majority of them.

The second case study of interactions on Facebook groups among the first-generation Vietnamese in SAPA also lies in the "Prosaic" category: it aims to highlight how the online engagement with the Facebook group has become an integrated part of their "everyday cultural, linguistic, and economic life" (Coleman 2010; Kozinets 2010). This is especially true for the findings regarding how community members of SAPA utilize the online space. Just as how the online sites' purposes can be flexible and changing, the types of social experiences happening there also vary. Kozinets identify them into four ideal groups: organizational social enterprises, social sharing expressions, mingling media enthusiasm, and having social experiences (2010). Depending on the different types of experiences identified, researchers can get an idea of the depths and strengths of relationships observed online. Thus, the opportunity to do close readings of communications techniques or strategies in these new spaces enabled by technology would help us see nuances in the ways people convey and portray themselves while interacting with others.

The Setting – SAPA as an Ethnoburb Model

The tradition of Vietnamese migration to the Czech Republic dates back to the early 1950s when diplomatic relations between Vietnam and former Czechoslovakia were established. Past research literature of Vietnamese transnational communities in Czech mainly focuses on the identities of the Vietnamese community members as business owners (Drbohlav and Čermáková 2016). However, this specific lens only allows viewing the Vietnamese immigrants' lives within the commercial and occupational area. In general, the growth of Vietnamese immigrant communities can be seen in two different directions: one that continues their ethnic isolation from the majority of the population and one that involves communication with the majority of business institutions. Because it is isolated due to the distance from central Prague and their business's independence, SAPA can be categorised into the first category of community growth. However, there can be points of contention within this categorisation, which emerged during the research.

SAPA, also known as Little Hanoi, is the name of the Vietnamese trading centre and market located in Prague 4 – Libus district of the City of Prague, Czech Republic. In the 2000s, the first generation of Vietnamese immigrant businessmen bought the land previously used for poultry farms on the outskirts of the city centre to establish a specific area dedicated to the Vietnamese immigrant community and allow them to do business and trade. At present, SAPA's geography comprises an area of 27 hectares. The whole area is divided into the wholesale business/hyper-market section and the restaurant –food groceries section with privately-owned stalls. Compared to the other EU countries, the Vietnamese immigrant communities in the Czech Republic, mostly concentrated in Prague, were among the top five in terms of scale (Fiedlerová et al. 2016). Most of the first generation of immigrants came to the Czech Republic as communist cadres who were selected by the government to go overseas to receive education and technical training. This historical context set the Vietnamese ethnic group residing in the Czech Republic apart from other significant Vietnamese immigrants in the Western European regions and North America, such as in West Germany and the United States, where the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants were predominantly refugees who fled the Vietnam War during the 1970s and 1980s.

Past sociological literature on ethnic community studies had been identifying other prominent immigrant clusters overseas as "ethnic enclaves," with one of the most well-known examples

being Chinatowns. An enclave is "a spatial concentration of newly arrived urban residents according to their ethnic identity" (Abrahamson, 1996; Marcuse, 1997). In this sense, what makes variations of the established Chinatowns and even Little Saigon globally categorized as enclaves is their close location to the central business district. Furthermore, in the Chicago School ecological model of ethnic enclaves, researchers defined them as self-sufficient "little worlds" with distinct characteristics of the "old world" in them (Park, et al., 1925).

Taking these distinctions into consideration, SAPA in Prague doesn't completely fit in with the sociological definitions of ethnic enclaves. First, the Vietnamese market center, situated in Prague 4- Libus district, is more on the outskirt of Prague; To travel to this destination would take a forty-five-minute trip from the city center. Also, different than other examples of ethnic community groups, SAPA has characteristics of being a multi-racial, multi-lingual community. Despite having a significant concentration of Vietnamese immigrants in SAPA as well as the surrounding areas of Prague 4- Libus, the place still sees usual traffic with Chinese and Czech merchants, among other merchants of different nationalities and ethnicities. In certain businesses and services running in SAPA, there is the presence of both Vietnamese and Czech workers. As a long-established immigrant community in Prague, most Vietnamese in SAPA speak at the minimal broken Czech for a basic level of communication. With these characteristics we see in SAPA, the place should fall into the category of "ethnoburb". As a more contemporary form of ethnic community compared to the ethnic enclave, "ethnoburbs express a set of contemporary ethnic relations involving interethnic group and intra-ethnic class tension or cooperation in a unique spatial form an internal socioeconomic structure" (Li, 2009).

Map of Socialization in SAPA

Distribution of Spaces

At the initial stage of the research process, I conducted extensive visual mapping of the space with photography while taking ethnographic walking trips to collect the overall details of how the space and people interacted (See Figure 1 and 2). This type of 'discursive walking', as a "participatory mode of walking, during which we half consciously explore the landscape while sensorially experiencing it passing by" (Wunderlich, 2008: 132), allows me to gather data in two different layers: first, as a newcomer visiting and exploring the new space, and second as a Vietnamese expatriate who connects to the Vietnamese community here with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the walking trip helped me navigate the networks of subjects, objects and spaces through which life in SAPA unites into a coherent existence (Latham & McCormack, 2007). The fragmented stories and narratives collected through the waking ethnography approach helped me see SAPA with its complexities, not just as an area of micro and macro merchant business but also as a social hub for Vietnamese community connections (Cheng 2013).

With the help of the photographs and field notes from these initial walking trips, I drew out a map of the socialization of SAPA. Within SAPA, there is a variety of building structures serving different purposes. The more large-scale merchant business belongs to the TAMDA foods hyper-market, which opened on March 29th, 2011 and now took up a large portion of SAPA toward the Northwest direction. The rest of the wholesale section occupies multiple rows of large warehouses and the covered market hall. Deep in the clusters of these metal warehouses is a collection of personal expandable stalls. In the early morning hours, merchants and sellers would arrive at the market and open their storefronts. They would take out inox racks and taped up carton boxes and place them on the ground right outside the perimeter of the stall. The racks and boxes are money-saving solutions as containers for their products of sales, for example: soft products like clothes, beddings, fabrics or hard products like electronics, small appliances, etc. These stalls exclusively serve as business space rather than combined with the businessmen's living space. Inside the stall, more racks are lining up in rows. Usually, on the walls of these stalls often hung a compact television for brief entertainment when there are no customers or a couple of rotating fans to combat the summertime heat. A rough path runs through the market space. Overall, the

construction and arrangement of these stalls strike a significant resemblance to how semi-open marketplaces in Vietnam are often organized.

Figure 1: Community members catching up with each other, captured in front of a restaurant entrance. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

Because of the stalls are grouped into big rectangle blocks in the warehouse, nearby stall owners are often at least remaining as acquaintances to each other; people usually gather and have conversations when there isn't much traffic within the warehouses. They would often either take out a plastic stool and sit at the storefront or leaning onto the store's supporting pole as they banter with one another. This friendly dynamic existing among fellow Vietnamese business owners is also evident in the interaction I shall temporarily call 'friendly store guarding.' This phenomenon happens when one store owner has some other events or tasks they need to attend to and thus needs to leave the store. They would often ask for the help of their neighboring stall owners, with whom they have already developed a close friendship, to look out for their store and even help them sell the products if the customers are interested. However, reaching this level of tight-knit relationship

would require more trust-building over time and even frequent out-of-work interactions. Additionally, it is also not rare for 'distant' friendships to form between far away stall owners. When there isn't much traffic, they would take the short travel to visit the other's stalls and chat the break time away.

The rest of the other smaller businesses, services, religious places, and restaurants are in the Eastern side of SAPA. This includes a range of private-owned Asian groceries, Vietnamese restaurants, coffee shops, event halls, and Buddhist temples. They roughly share the same size, and distinctions are through the decorations, choice of names, and signages. When mapping socialization paths, I observed that the previously mentioned informal interactions also happen very often throughout the working day in this area. Generally, in SAPA, you can travel using various modes of transportations, such as cars, motorbikes, and bicycles. For shorter travel routes and narrower paths, people often use their bicycles to move around to run errands and make deliveries within SAPA, greeting their friends in the market along the way.

Sightings and the Significance of Rest Areas

When entering the area with my camera in hand, I found myself drawn to capturing various instances of assortments of old furniture usually set up in the intersections of paths or along the edges of the commercial warehouses (See Figure 3 and 4). The collection and curation convey a sense of intentionality but also randomness. As I became interested in the functions of the 'furnished' corners, I particularly focused on those places for my next field trip and found myself witnessing the areas captured in the photos turn into a rest and socialisation area for the community members in SAPA. This deliberate construction of social and physical areas is necessary to be looked at, especially when studying immigrant communities in an ethnoburb such as in SAPA, as they are sites of identity formation and heritage maintenance (Li 2005; Hall 2004; Meciar 2014).

On the first impression, the sightings of these rest areas make SAPA even more familiar to me because of the memories I have of the markets in Vietnam that I have often visited since I was young. These areas take up space immediately next to the people's workplace; they are also usually under some roofs for protection against the summer heat. The place is a literal collage of collected items and worn-out furniture put together into one cohesive structure: a small table with a scratched surface, mismatched chairs or stools, a large standing umbrella, and aged couches. However, these

small, personalised rest areas are not usually for everyone to use. Only the people who set it up can invite people to socialise and chat with them. As the rest areas are in open spaces, the owners and their acquaintances also socialise near them quite often. In other words, frequent use helps assert their ownership of the place. On the other hand, there are rest areas that are more for public use, thus more accessible, so even visitors can sit down and take a brief break from walking. These rest areas for public use are more standard and uniform, with rows of long wooden benches and fitting tables. There are two such rest areas in front of the two Czech-Vietnamese cafeterias, which serve as eating for the cafeterias' customers and as a temporary rest area for others when the cafeterias are not so busy. Therefore, a person using the benches can be either a customer or a stranger.

Figure 2: A small corridor with plastic chairs set up outside a barbershop as a waiting area for customers. The appearance of resting furniture in front of the barbershop can have an inviting effect on foot traffic surrounding this area; people are more likely to stop by and have a seat to chat with the business's owner or people they know. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

By setting up the corners and collecting furniture for the rest area, the Vietnamese Czech merchants have carved out a more intimate and personal area separated from their workplace. Furthermore, the position of these rest areas within the working area further represents the overlap between the people's public work sphere and their private sphere. With a large part of their day spent at SAPA, community members manage to differentiate between work time and social time through the designated spaces. The co-workers they do their daily business with are usually also their close friends. When the sellers in these warehouses interact, the relationships grow deeper. They practice code-switching, from broken Czech to fluent Vietnamese. Their interactions are not only limited to talking but also include other forms of shared entertainment, such as playing cards, watching television together, and even chiming in when someone is on a video phone with a mutual connection. As members of a long-developed immigrant community, the nature of their conversations and interactions with each other also differ significantly.

Figure 3: A rest area set up right across from the working place of one merchant. During break time, tea from the kettle can be offered to facilitate more intimate conversations between friends and close acquaintances with the merchant. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

Using Goffman's (1978) framework on role enactment and role distance, I could identify the sightings of the constructed rest areas as a form of backstage where the Vietnamese businessmen and businesswomen can 'truly be themselves,' or at least display their true emotions. These backstage interactions show part of their identities, which are often hidden during their roles on the front stage as business owners and merchants. On the front stage of work, the priority is to do business and thus the work of impression management is necessary. The Vietnamese businessmen would often initiate the interaction themselves with casual chat and make an effort to give a likeable and welcoming impression to their customers. Thus, it is important to differentiate between such impression management strategies versus a personal act of comfort in the backstage spaces.

Figure 4: An example of a rest area. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

In the work areas where the Vietnamese immigrants in the SAPA ethnoburb spend most of their day doing business, one can still see the distinction between the public and private spheres and how they overlap and coexist. The rest areas are where the members of the Vietnamese Czech community can keep a comfortable distance from their public identity as merchants and service providers. During break times, the people leave the front stage of working life to interact with each other as members of the Vietnamese immigrant community in SAPA. Since one's membership of different categories is "ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times" (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998a, p.2), one's identity would "emerge in practice, in the ways of going about everyday business" (Keevallik 2020). It is then necessary to study and observe community members in their everyday interactions during rest times and in these places. In this setting, one can identify and analyse which behavioural patterns or rituals are part of their strategy to maintain their ethnic identity. The knowledge and information they exchange and relay to one another over time can contribute to the overall preservation and construction of the Vietnamese identity of Vietnamese immigrants in SAPA.

Study of Interactions Around the Wooden Benches

SAPA has multiple main entrances, but the route I often take to get there is by bus 113 to reach Sidliste Pisnice station. It takes another seven-minute walk to reach the restaurants and smaller groceries section at the centre from that entrance. Visitors to SAPA, especially first-time visitors just like I was back then, usually stop by the small grocery store at the corner of an intersection of three different paths leading to the warehouses and open market sections. In front of this store are eight sets of wooden benches and tables lined up in four rows for public use as a rest area. The small grocery store owners are an elderly couple in their early sixties, Mr. and Mrs. Tran.

The Trans previously lived in a different city in the Czech Republic and only moved to Prague and opened their grocery store a few years ago. People from outside the SAPA area frequently stop at the store to ask the couple for guidance to their destinations, usually a restaurant serving the specific dish they have been craving. When I met Mr. Tran for the first time, I asked him for his recommendation of somewhere to get *bun bo hue ("spicy Vietnamese noodle soup")*, a signature dish from the central region of Vietnam. Even though he and his wife do not eat out so much themselves, he pointed me towards a restaurant he had heard good things about. From this initial topic of conversation, I established a friendly connection with Mr. and Mrs. Tran and became a regular visitor to their grocery store. From this connection, they gradually introduced me to some of their friends who frequent their store each day.

For the case study, I chose the rest area around the wooden benches in front of their store and observed the interactions within their 'social network' (See Figure 5 and 6). Within a society or community, a 'social network' can refer to an ego-centred set of relationships, or "a person-dependent kind of social system, which depends on continuous activity to be reproduced" (Eriksen 2010: 100). Within their socialised circle, Mr. and Mrs. Tran interact most frequently with Ms. Thu, a resident at SAPA even longer than the couple. She is the owner of a clothing and accessory store in the alley right next to the Tran's store, so they are in very close proximity to each other daily. Because of this and their close relationship, which has developed over time, then during break hours the three of them, occasionally joined by other people, often share their lunch.

Communal Meals

Communal lunch break is one of the main phenomena I observed at this rest area. Compared to the more informal breaks that people can take from their business, lunch break is a more official break time. Due to the variety of businesses run by SAPA community members, the traffic for each business also differs. For example, Miss Minh, an employee at the hair salon just 50 metres away from the benches, is usually occupied with customers until lunchtime. On the other hand, Mr. and Mrs. Tran have more uneven customer traffic due to the nature of their grocery business. However, when the lunch break comes, which is around late noon until two in the afternoon, they have the opportunity to gather with other people for lunch.

The meal that Mr. and Mrs. Tran share with the others loosely resembles the concept of a potluck. In a potluck meal, everyone who joins contributes a dish to the table, which can be as flexible as one pleases. Usually, the host would make one of the larger portions. For a lunch set up at the front of the grocery store, Mrs. Tran would prepare a pot of the main dish while also preparing rice in her rice cooker. At other times, she would prepare a large pot of rice porridge to eat with other condiments. This food is first for her husband and herself. However, the couple would almost always offer it to whoever was joining them for lunch. "We have blood sausages today to eat with hot porridge, do you want some?", Mrs. Tran called out to Miss Minh one day when she went inside their store to complain about the lack of customers that particular day. The people who sit with the old couple during lunch do not join exclusively for the free food. Most of the time, they have prepared the food themselves for lunch. It is the experience of having company while eating and having someone to talk to during lunch that is more the focus. They usually also offer what they prepared that day to the table, with the same generosity as Mr. and Mrs. Tran do with their food. The lunch table itself is not particularly fancy or has extravagant dishes but instead contains rather homey and familiar Vietnamese food.

By frequently visiting the benches in front of their grocery store, I made myself known to the circle of acquaintances of Mr. and Mrs. Tran and the nearby community members who often pass by during their work trips in SAPA. The casual conversations I often had with Mr. and Mrs. Tran started with surface-level topics such as the weather and visitor traffic, then later moved to more informational and intimate topics such as our backgrounds and personal history before coming to SAPA. The couple would accept my offer to help Mrs. Tran with clean the mung beans she grew

Figure 5: The wooden benches chosen for the case observations. The photos were taken during one of the lockdown restrictions given by the Czech government. I chose not to take photos of this location during fieldwork due to the resistance from the observed community and the potential disrupting effects on the ongoing fieldwork itself. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

Figure 6: The wooden benches chosen for the case observations. Photo: Quynh Nguyen, 2020.

to get them ready for selling. When we were sitting on stools behind the shop counter and cutting the ends off the mung beans, Mrs. Tran would tell me about her daughter and her relatives back at home.

The transition from a casual conversation near the benches to conversing inside her store facilitated the natural exchange of more intimate information about our lives to each other. To my subjective impression, the process of mutually sharing personal information helped us become more comfortable with each other. After this period of getting to know each other, I was then often invited to share a meal with Mr. and Mrs. Tran. They would hand me a bowl and utensils, then tell me not to hesitate to eat freely. "No need to be shy, just eat what you want. We don't insist you eat anything, so just take what you like to eat, okay?" Mrs. Tran told me while Mr. Tran urged me to take more food in. Another time, Mrs. Tran called out to me when she was sitting by the bench: "Little Duck, do you want some blood sausage porridge?". Name-calling is another old custom in the Vietnamese tradition, which is more prevalent in the older generation. When people gave birth to children, within the first 100 days of the babies' lives, the parents or grandparents called them by undesirable names so bad spirits would be deterred from taking them away. In this instance, the meal sharing ritual marks a stage in socialisation between people where they move beyond the casual stranger stage. To have shared meals, people need to converse frequently and exchange more intimate, private information to reach a certain level of comfort and closeness with the other. The shared meal then becomes a means of socialising to sustain and deepen the existing relationship between the community members.

Religion and Belief Systems

During my fieldwork, I witnessed another form of community building and ethnic identity preservation through the passing of folk religion knowledge. One day, a young lady passed by the grocery store and proceeded to greet Mr. and Mrs. Tran out loud as she stood by the bench I was sitting at. Due to the informal nature of the talk and the couple's readiness to chat with her, I soon figured out that they had already established a close relationship. While talking, Mr Tran directed the topic back to a favour the young lady had asked them a few days previously about advice on preparations for a ceremony. It turned out that the young lady and her family were moving into a new house they had just purchased. As she was not sure what to prepare for the ceremony of

offerings to the Land God and the spirits occupying that land, she asked Mr. and Mrs. Tran for help.

The ceremony they talked about is something I have been familiar with since I was small. My mother also prepared this ceremony back in Vietnam when we moved into our current house a few years ago. According to traditional Vietnamese beliefs, one needs to serve a table of offerings to the gods and spirits whenever they move and settle in a new place. The preparations include details regarding food, fruit and materials to purchase and the specific arrangements on the table placed in front of the house gate. The offerings are given to the spirits as a gesture of good faith and respect so they will not disturb the new tenant of the house. In line with this practice of respecting the spirits and praying to the gods for luck and fortune, I saw repeated appearances of small altars in the corners of restaurants in SAPA. According to Vietnamese customs and folk beliefs, the altar represents your respect to _Thổ địa_ *("Land God")* and *Thần tài ("Fortune God").* While the altar for praying to ancestors is kept in one's own home space, this specific altar is essential to Vietnamese businesses to wish for success and good fortune for their work. In these two instances, the maintenance of certain aspects of the Vietnamese belief system shows how community members in the SAPA ethnoburb mediate the new environment by practising customs original to their ethnic identity. In other words, ethnic traditions serve as a framework for them to interact with space and the new lands they are in. The transfer of knowledge of traditional customs from the first generation of immigrants to younger generations is a key factor in preserving the core of Vietnamese culture within the immigrant community in SAPA as they adapt to their new environment and culture.

For many people, such practices and faith can contribute greatly to their ethnic or national identity. Most people often regard Buddhism and Catholicism as the most popular religions in Vietnam. However, it is, in fact, folk religion, an ethnic religion of Vietnamese people, that has the most followers. According to research conducted in 2014 by the Pew Research Center (2014), 45% of the Vietnamese population practice folk religions such as the worship of ancestors and supernatural spirits. The Vietnamese folk religion is not an organised system; it can have different branches of belief systems. In fact, one of the important characteristics of Vietnamese cultural identity lies in its religious syncretism. Many Buddhist followers still practice customs related to folk religion in their daily lives. When I visited Mrs. Tran in their shop, I often heard the Buddhist teachings in

meditational music played from their old computer as background sounds when she was resting or doing other tasks behind the counter. The peaceful music and calm teachings of Buddhist helped her feel more at peace and in sync with herself. For most Vietnamese, Buddhism is not an organised religion but rather a way of life based on a system of beliefs. This characteristic is an integral part of the syncretic worldview of the majority of the Vietnamese community (Pelzer 1992).

Since 2011, the celebration for Hung Kings Commemoration at SAPA has been an established annual tradition that people join regardless of their religion. Hung Kings Commemoration Day is a national holiday in Vietnam when everyone pays tribute to the Hung Kings, traditionally regarded as the founders and the first emperors of the nation. The event is the most representational example of how the Vietnamese cultural identity is embedded in remembering and worshipping our ancestors. Even though the event was cancelled this year due to the COVID situation, in 2018, the event was attended by approximately 1,000 Vietnamese from overseas including those living inside the Czech Republic (Vietnamplus 2018). Together with the appearance of larger scale traditional events such as the celebration of Kings Commemoration Day, the emergence and establishment of religious buildings by the Vietnamese shows that as they settle and gain economic stability, the Vietnamese immigrant community can further strengthen their practice of traditional culture and introduce it to the younger generation who were born in the Czech Republic.

Expansion of Social Networks

By analysing the construction of the rest area and its purposes, I was also able to identify its influences on the traffic around the area. People are more likely to stop by or pause their walking to check if someone they know is resting at the benches to have a quick chat. The benches area is also a special area where relationships between different people can intersect and expand. I was also not just an observer, but one of the participants in this phenomenon. At the beginning of the fieldwork process, I only had Mr. and Mrs. Tran as my casual acquaintances due to my frequent visits to the benches next to their store. However, by the end of these field trips, I found myself within a loose network of socialisation circulating this rest area. Not only did I recognise other frequent visitors to the place, but I was also informally introduced to them by Mr. and Mrs. Tran and also formally introduced during the times I shared a meal with them.

In the social network around the wooden benches that I observed, the group membership was created by being in the same ethnic community and through sustained interactions centring on the resting place itself. The routinisation of such interactions surrounding this rest area ensures that the social network of the area is constantly maintained, created and expanded. By repeating encounters with each other, such as saying 'Ahoj' to each other as people do when passing by the benches near the Tran's store, mutual recognition is improved (Goffman 1963). Besides, because the daily lives of the community members in SAPA are concentrated on doing business in the market, it is important to see that routine actions, which are seemingly only work-related on the surface, can also act as an opportunity to socialise with others. For example, the opportunity for socialising can arise from routine 'necessary activities' (Gehl 2011) such as riding a bike to deliver food orders in the markets. Therefore, even 'work' trips within SAPA play the double role of community building and strengthening strategies. Within this place alone, not only are social ties preserved, but the social network within the community is also greater transformed over time.

The social identity as Vietnamese immigrant community members of the SAPA ethnoburb, rather than the identity as Vietnamese businessmen, is evident in the unique nature of the interactions at break times by the benches. I use Goffman's important analysis of the presentation of self in everyday life to interpret how Vietnamese immigrants utilise the rest areas as their backstage for off-work social interactions. According to Goffman's discussion of social-self construction (1963), the social self is present "in interaction with others, through 'gatherings' (incidents in which individuals are present, but not necessarily in interaction with each other) and 'encounters' (social events with temporary and spacious borders, where interaction is likely to occur) (Henriksen & Tjora 2014). Such interactions are closely connected to both social and physical structures. The appearance of the areas accessible for groups of people to rest helps facilitate and reproduce place-specific social life, as seen in the case study of the benches in front of Mr. and Mrs. Tran's grocery store. In turn, the social interactions that the community members engage in during rest times are valuable for maintaining one's social network and for overall community building.

When Henriksen and Tjora (2014) discussed the typology of neighbourhood community through empirical research of three different neighbourhood communities in Norway, they examined how 'focused interaction' (Goffman, 1963) is developed from 'interaction pretexts'. By their definition, interaction pretext refers to a "common reference or concern that legitimises an encounter, small-

talk or conversation, on the basis of passing-by or gathering in a shared physical space" (Henriksen & Tjora 2014: 10). As the SAPA community is a unique commercial centre in which community members only do business and reside in a different place, at the standard level, they already share one common interaction pretext, which is business-related interactions. However, it is important to differentiate between formal conversations serving business purposes during work time and informal conversations that use the business topic as a starting point then later deviate from it. Even though their working life takes up most of their day, the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants in SAPA has carved out places and opportunities for connecting with others and maintaining their ethnic essences by transforming the working sphere into a backdrop for the private sphere during break times.

Newcomer Perspectives on Adaptation of Customs and Traditions

Mrs. Hoa is one of the connections I gained as part of my own social network expansion during the fieldwork. One time, when I was hanging out at my usual spot on the bench, Mrs. Hoa joined me. It was our first time meeting each other. She introduced herself as a newcomer to the Czech Republic, so she did not know many people yet. "My husband came here first for a job, and he was here for two years before I joined him through the family reunification visa this year," she would tell me. Back at home, she went farming like other people in her regions of the countryside. "I just sold my plots of lands and closed down the rice wholesale business; then I could come here to join her family." Her daughter had been a university student in Germany for some time. So, for a while, the family members were separated from each other except for a few rare visits. Mrs. Hoa then excitedly told me about the place where her husband was currently working. "Do you know Pho TA? They have really good chicken and beef pho!". In the restaurant, her husband was a waiter and was able to communicate on basic levels with customers with his beginner Czech.

Out here in the SAPA ethnoburb area, Mrs. Hoa and her husband shared a flat with someone else. After some talking, it turned out that her flatmates were the family of miss Minh, who works in the salon in the short alleyway right next to the resting area. This was not the first time I had heard of this mode of cohabitation between two Vietnamese immigrant families. In fact, when visiting another acquaintance I made during my SAPA trips, I also found out that her small family life was compacted into one single room, while in the other single room was another family; in between the two rooms was a small size shared kitchen for both households. Since Mrs. Hoa and her husband lived with another family in their flat, Mrs. Hoa already had someone to talk to and get acquainted with when she first arrived. Sometimes, Mrs. Hoa also helps keep an eye on Miss Minh's eight-year-old girl when her mother was busy working at the hair salon. In a smaller community such as the diaspora community in SAPA ethnoburb, the social network of one person is much denser and can overlap with another's. Such living arrangements between community members, who have not yet been able to afford their own flat, further facilitate this overlapping of connections and relationships. As a result, very frequently, "'everybody' knows each other in many different ways – through kinship, common friends and neighbours, shared school experiences, professional life and/or intermarriage" (Eriksen 2010: 101).

The next time I came to the bench, Mrs. Hoa was also there. As I sat down at the bench, Mrs. Tran asked Mrs. Hoa again if she wanted to eat anything with them since it was already past lunchtime. "I ate breakfast at like 10, so I'm still not hungry. Just eat without me!" Mrs. Hoa replied. Despite not directly witnessing how the relationship was formed, I could already assume that they had also already gone past being just casual strangers to each other. This is because when Mrs. Tran was acting concerned that Mrs. Hoa had not been eating even though it was late, she even slightly scolded her for being stubborn and not eating anything. Besides, Mrs. Tran also informally invited her to the communal lunch they always have with their friends at noon. Thus, they must have already conversed with each other a few times. Mrs. Hoa also confirmed this when, later that day, she admitted to me that she often came to SAPA during the day. Being home alone was quite lonely and boring for her since everyone else is at SAPA working. Because her husband had not yet found her some lightweight jobs to do that do not require complicated Czech language level, she often walked around the market center to check out the area and then sat down at the wooden resting benches to chat up with Mrs. Tran.

Multiple factors have contributed to Mrs. Hoa's natural expansion of social network just briefly after her arrival in the Czech Republic. Firstly, she already has Ms. Minh and her family as the first established connections when she arrived since they lived in the same flat. Furthermore, she also benefited from the social network of her husband, who also maintains friendly relationships with his co-workers in his workplace at the pho restaurant. When I went with her and Ms. Minh's younger daughter to the pho restaurant for lunch, everybody who works there knows that she is Mr. Hoa's wife. One younger waiter also offered to give us free hot tea and later two glasses of iced lemon juice. Another one stopped by for a brief chat and jokingly agreed with Mrs. Hoa about the slight addiction Ms. Minh's daughter has for iPhone games since she would not leave the phone for just one second despite Mrs. Hoa's berating. During this lunch, Mrs. Hoa also naturally expanded my own social network with the SAPA community as she introduced me to her husband and the guys working at the restaurant as well. My informal background information that I gave her previously became part of the conversational threads that help facilitate further their familiarization with me. On the other hand, the resting space by the grocery store also provides a great environment for organic relationships to be built among newcomers and residents of the SAPA diaspora community. Just like how I got acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Tran, Mrs. Hoa also formed a friendship with the couple through conversations they had with each other while she was

sitting at the benches. As the conversations got deeper past the formal casualness, the relationships also grow.

When asked about her experience with Prague and the Vietnamese community in SAPA, Mrs. Hoa could not avoid making comparisons with the previous life she had in Vietnam. "It's quite sad here when I just arrived", Mrs. Hoa complained. "Everyone here just works all day long and then goes home, don't they?". It was not like this in the village where she was from. In her hometown, the communal social activities are much more varied and exciting. "We would break out backs working so hard out on the fields under such intense heat, but when evening comes, everyone gathers and have fun, you know?" According to Mrs. Hoa, the town members hang out in the early evening. Some would be playing kicking racquetball. Someone would always bring a portable radio, and the middle-aged countrymen would dance in the park in the music under the night sky. "Nothing seems to happen hereafter the workday ends..." Mrs. Hoa commented. In her perspective as a newcomer, Mrs. Hoa regarded social life of the community in SAPA ethnoburb as lacking compared to that of the previous community she was living with.

In fact, to Mrs. Hoa, the lack of explicit post-work daily social activities that she recognized further reflected the life of Vietnamese immigrants here. When I asked for her opinions of the reasons behind many Vietnamese suburban residents' decision to find a new life in Czech lands, Mrs. Hia contemplated: "If you worked hard here, you would be able to a save good amount of money for yourself and your family. With the same kinds of jobs like those available in SAPA, most people back in Vietnam would spend their salary on entertainment and enjoying themselves and end up with not much savings left". In both her subjective remarks about life in Vietnam and in Prague, specifically SAPA, I found a correlation between the social life differences and economic opportunities. That is, taken into consideration the purpose of finding personal economic development as reasons for immigration, the decrease in habitual social life in previous host society becomes one of the sacrifices immigrants would make to achieve the goals they set when immigrating into the Czech Republic.

Through recognizing the different forms of socialization existing within the Vietnamese diaspora in SAPA, Mrs. Hoa is gradually making sense and adjusting to the new lifestyle and social rhythms. The transition into a new host of cultures and dominant norms often leads to conflicts between existing valued identities of immigrants and the expected normative expectations from

the host country – a phenomenon called "identity dilemmas" (Charmaz 1994; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Compared to Mrs. Hoa, who was at the beginning stages of living in the new environment and society, the other long-term community members in SAPA had already made adjustments to their ethnic identity foundations and community organization, hence the differences that Mrs. Hoa had noticed. Such adjustments and reconstruction of identity are influenced by various external social structures in the dominant society. Systems of stratification exist in every society, and in such systems, stigma is an inherent factor (Goffman 1963). Similarly, in the case of the Vietnamese-Czech diaspora, the identity of an immigrant or a newcomer from different cultures carries values that can be considered different, and in some cases stigmatized negatively (Goffman 1963). The process of integration or immersing into the new society, therefore, involves significantly the work of identity management from the immigrant community in order to resolve potential stigmas they might carry (Hunt and Miller 1997; Kolb 2011; Snow and Anderson 1987).

According to Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's discussion about the essential role of identity work, identity management "gives people a sense of belonging, feelings of personal significance, a sense of location relative to others, a sense of continuity and coherence, and feelings of worth" (1996:122). In other words, this emotional and social work is necessary for diaspora members to not feel isolated within the host society while also preserving the essence of their own ethnic identity as Vietnamese. In the case of Mrs. Hoa who just arrived in Prague recently, she has only started her process of integrating into not only Czech society but also the rhythms of life in the SAPA ethnoburb. It is also worth noting that since Mrs. Hoa had already spent more than half of her life in Vietnam, the values and habits already established and maintained there could be more strongly rooted in her. The identity work is both a personal and communal process. *Therefore, it is curical to see how the Vietnamese diaspora community in SAPA manage strategies of identity construction in different settings and deal with the balancing of being both a member of the Vietnamese community and the Czech community.*

The data collected from the several extended informal interviews with Mrs. Hoa revealed valuable information about the way previously established traditions, customs, and habits changed and transformed for newly boarded Czech immigrants like Mrs. Hoa. The narrative got from this in-depth interview provides a personal account of a newcomer to Czech lands. Narrative, in this instance, can be regarded "as a discursive practice that creates, reproduces and continuously shapes

'the social relationships and socio-cultural constructs that individuals use to make a sense of their reality'" (De Fina 2000:133).

Online Rest Area: Outside of Work Online Socialisation and Interactions among Vietnamese immigrants

Towards the end of the research process, the outbreak of COVID peaked for the second time, and the whole of Prague, including the commercial sections of SAPA, went into lockdown. The closing of non-essential shops within SAPA eventually prevented the ongoing fieldwork for data collection, besides the need to take safety precautions for everyone. The sudden halt of my travels to SAPA directed my attention to the active Facebook groups run by Vietnamese Czech immigrants online (see Figure 7). I have been a member of these groups, soon after arriving in Prague last year, because of their resourcefulness. When putting in straightforward Vietnamese search terms in the Facebook search bar, a Vietnamese newcomer in Czech can easily identify several major active Facebook groups serving different purposes, each with thousands of members to connect with: "Hom nay an gi – Ngay mai an gi – tai Sec" *("What to eat today – What to eat tomorrow – in the Czech Republic")* as a group for promoting and reviewing food and restaurants in the Czech Republic, "Hiep Hoi Potraviny Cz" *(" Association of Potraviny Cz")* as a news source and connecting point for the majority of Vietnamese merchants across
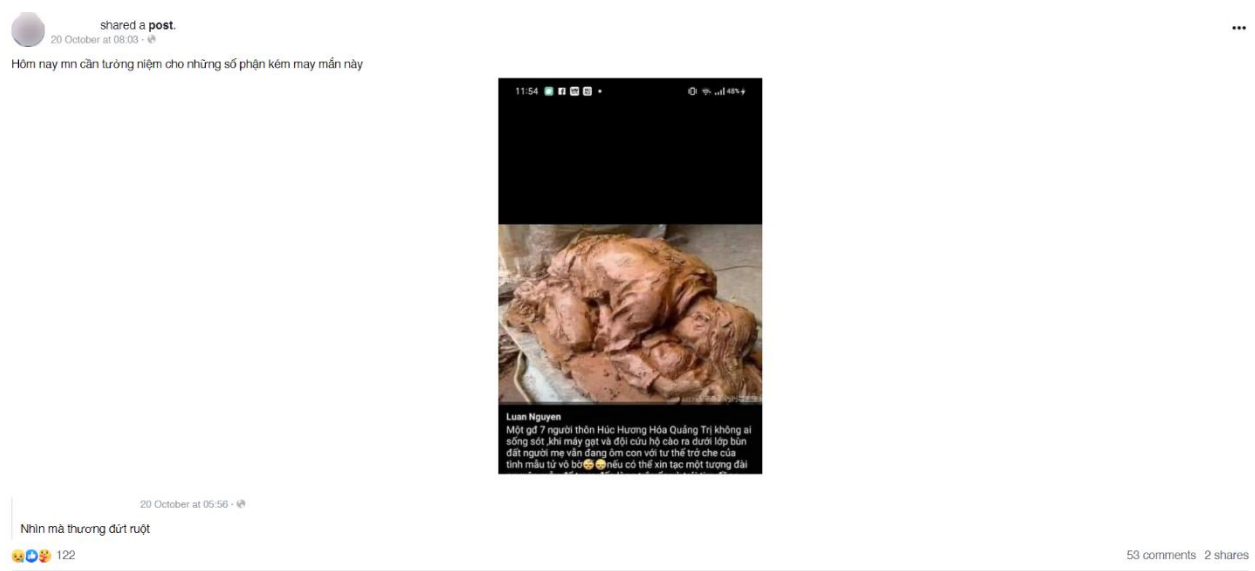

Figure 7: A shared post in the group *Cho Sapa tai Sec ("SAPA Market in the Czech Republic")* in commemoration of the lives lost during the flood season in Central Vietnam.

the country, "Cho SAPA Praha" *("SAPA Market Praha")* as a specific group for the community in the SAPA ethnoburb, etc.

Roles of Community Facebook Groups

Daily, these Facebook groups get updated very frequently. In the case of the Facebook group "Hiep Hoi Potraviny Cz" *("Association of Potraviny Cz")*, which currently has fifty-four thousand members, the average number of posts per day can total nearly one hundred posts. The active participation in such Facebook groups, which use Vietnamese as the primary language of communication, is especially prevalent among the first generation of Vietnamese. The majority of them utilize the space to promote and do online business targeting other Vietnamese-speaking members. Digital technologies and media (and the things that people can do with them) are interdependent with the infrastructures of everyday life. Using digital ethnography on social media platforms besides non-media-centric research and ethnography methods helped me balance the acknowledgement of physical environments' role and the decentralization of the focus on media in the research of identity construction through community exchanges. The field notes taken while participating in the Facebook groups and studying how daily routines or interactions played out among the members can reveal insights that direct, individual interviews cannot uncover. This reveal emphasizes how online spaces are an essential part of their lives, and thus, interaction in this digital landscape also needs documentation and analysis.

When studying the purposes and functions of the major Facebook groups for the Vietnamese transnational community in the Czech Republic, and in SAPA specifically, then to some extent, the online space operates similar to that of the physical space: a combination of business operations and more informal, casual non-business-related interactions that occur side by side. Businesses in Facebook groups were often presented by female members who dominated the share of homemade, home-produced products and Eastern medicines. The scale of such a business is usually not large since they are often either a home run business or convenient extensions of the physical stores in SAPA (see figure 8). Most of the groups allow advertising posts; therefore, a large part of the group is inundated with such posts. The advertising posts help remind the members of the services and products while also sharing updates of new offers or operational changes depending on the time period. Usually, for advertising posts that appear daily in the group, there is little to no interaction with them; this observation only accounts for public and direct

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engagement with the posts since I was not able to track whether personal messages were sent to the seller's inbox nor the number of people who viewed the posts. Direct replies are mostly business-related, with potential customers asking for prices and telling the shop owners of their messages for purchasing and ordering.
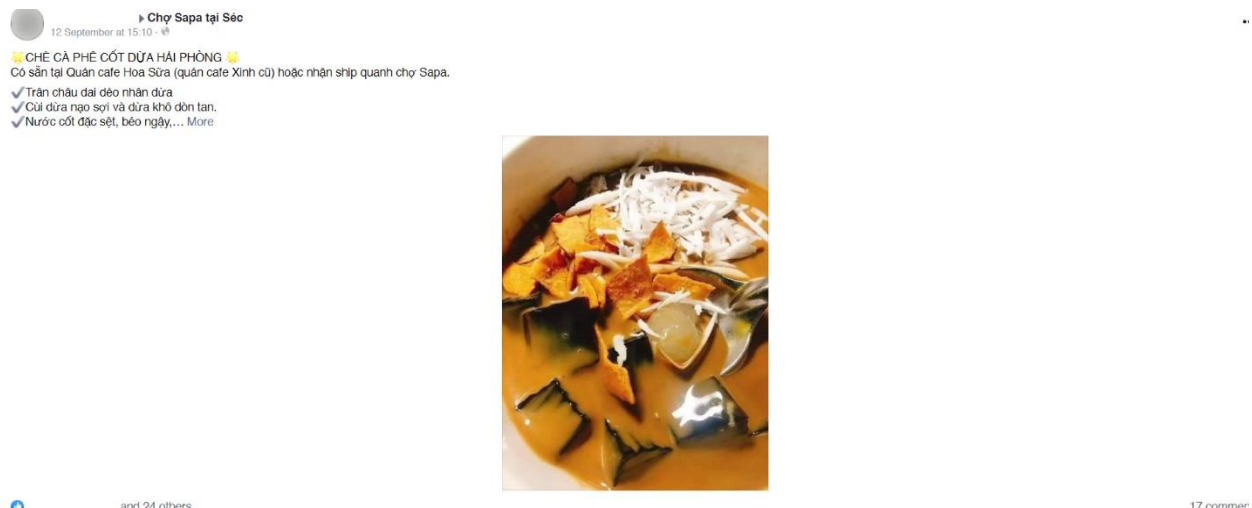

Figure 8: An advertisement post from a home-based food business owner for a traditional sweet dessert from Hai Phong province, Vietnam.

Even though such advertising posts lie in the business realm, there are still certain overlapping features of the private and public realm in Vietnamese immigrants' lives. Therefore, it's still worth noting the sales and marketing of culturally and ethnically significant and familiar products as they also play a role in maintaining ethnic identity through the reproduction of traditional routines. On September 14th, 2020, one post showed pictures of multiple individually wrapped mooncakes with the main promotional caption in bold, "BANH NUONG TRUNG THU CHINH HIEU DONG PHUONG – HAI PHONG" ("*BAKED MOONCAKE TRADEMARKED DONG PHUONG HAI PHONG*"). In the body of this post, the seller guaranteed the durability of the brand as an authentic mooncake brand from Hai Phong, a major port city in Northeast Vietnam. In Vietnam, the sales and eating of mooncakes happen traditionally during the Mid-Autumn festival, a traditional festival celebrated by Vietnamese alongside residents of a few other East and Southeast Asian countries. The festival happens on the 15th day of the 8th month in the Chinese lunar calendar,

which often corresponds to mid-September or early October of the Gregorian calendar. The brand of mooncake called Dong Phuong is also a long-lasting household name when it comes to mooncake production for the past sixty years in Vietnam. Another post in the group made on 24th of September 2020 also promoted the sales of custard apples and persimmons as essential fruits to make a table of offerings during the Mid-autumn celebration. Traditionally, on a table of offerings during this celebration, custard apples represent growth, while persimmons represent fulfilment. Moon cake is also another essential component of this offering table. So, the relevant sales of mooncake and related products within the SAPA ethnoburb community during this time of the year should not be considered solely business activities but also as an enhancer of cultural activities. By facilitating the unchanging routine of getting mooncakes during the occasion, it helps maintain the traditional Vietnamese celebration within the ethnoburb community.

Besides business-related posts, the rest of the posts provide content that supports the socialization and connections within the community. In the category of entertainment posts, live streaming videos of singing sessions and the reposting of such are done by multiple groups and individuals. At times, different Facebook groups of Vietnamese music and entertainment would share their live streaming of performances in the general Sapa ethnoburb group. Other times, individual music shows through the form of live streaming videos also get posted. The setting for these kinds of mini 'shows' is not super complicated. On the computer screen, one would often see one or two singers, with the backdrop of a plain wall dotted with lights from a moving disco ball or a small band who would provide live music with their stage keyboards and guitars. The music choice is predominantly in the Vietnamese language, catering to the first generation of older Vietnamese immigrants who are usually more mature and not much interested in contemporary foreign modern music. *Bolero* is a popular genre that singers often live-stream themselves singing. The Vietnamese bolero is a peculiar genre to Vietnam, often colloquially known as "yellow music", which takes its influence from the Hispanic originator during the 1950s and traditional Southern music during the Vietnam War era. Bolero songs are romantic, slow, and sad, often used to express themes of love and daily life poetically. As the genre was born in Vietnam out of war times and political unrest from the 50s to 70s, it was more directly connected with the upbringing and childhood of the older generations of Vietnamese immigrants out of nostalgia.

The online platform in the Facebook groups allows large-scale communication and engagement among a large group of people simultaneously, despite different levels of familiarity with each other. Thus, it is easier to spot rules and sanctions within a community in its online manifestation. As with every social system that exists, the Vietnamese immigrant community, though online, also establishes certain norms or rules and the following sanctions to reinforce them. As one forms their ethnic identity as a member of SAPA specifically and a member of the Vietnamese immigrant community at large, their identity formation also takes influences from a larger social structure, such as the community in SAPA, alongside Czech society. Unique to particular ethnic groups is a kind of "toolkit" – as Swidler (1986) called it in his research – that comprises the basic materials that are used to construct meaning and interpret systems for ethnic meaning construction (Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989). Thus, certain cultural values and historical values from one's country of origin can affect the appropriation and rejection of a particular ethnicity's content and further designate the belief system, traditions, and lifeways that constitute an identity (Nagel 1994). In other words, the reinforcement of norms and social sanctions occurring online within the aforementioned Vietnamese transnational immigrant Facebook group, in turn, would help reveal the values that are upheld within the community and that are essential to the ethnic identity construction of the community members.

Development of Stigmas within the Online Community

While employing critical discourse analysis, the close study of texts on the Facebook group, just like verbal social interaction in the case of the physical rest areas, include examining written materials from both micro levels of word choices and macro levels of the overall structure and content (Fowler 1991; Kress and Hodge 1979; Fairclough 2000). Among the interactions occurring online in the chosen Facebook group, sexual unfaithfulness is deemed an extremely sensitive matter whenever it occurs and is reported in the groups, which is something that happens rather often. It is also among the posts with the highest engagement rates, averaging 100-200 comments. However, the admin would later delete them as they are of personal matters. As a witness and reader of multiple posts of this type during the fieldwork and even before my research, I observed certain patterns. The accusation posts included textual explanations and also digital media evidence ranging from screenshots of messages, video recordings, and voice recordings. The

poster would use the cheating couple's personal Facebook profiles while not blurring out their faces in the photos.

The reactions to these posts were that infidelity is unacceptable, especially if the discussed person already has children with the marriage partner they cheated on. One post I collected during digital fieldwork in the group "Cho Sapa tai Sec" ("*Sapa Market in the Czech Republic")* brought up the case of a husband taking out collateral mortgages to finance his wife's immigration process to the Czech Republic, only for her to leave him and their two children for another man she met in her new country. As I read through the comments, the consensus was against the cheating woman. "This woman is a hussy", one commented. "Acting as if she didn't have a husband or any children =)) Can any sisters share with me this girl's Facebook?", another inquired and her request was met with an immediate screenshot image of the cheating woman's personal Facebook profile. Another commenter advised, "I recommend that you do not regret leaving night moths like this one; they do not belong to the human category. If you are honest and kind, there are nice women out there in the world for you. Find a better mother for your two kids. I wish the three of you great health and peace. Live calmly. Consequences will come to those who do not appreciate what they had"; the comment gathered six thumbs up in agreement. In this instance, the commenter had used an analogy of a creature active at night, comparing it to the sneaky cheating woman. In the Vietnamese language, this analogy is very commonly used with a negative connotation to refer to call girls who are active at night, standing by the street pavements and waving at male passers-by to offer sexual services.

The scene and engagement with these types of posts resemble an online public trial in which the accused is shamed and has their identity publicised to others. Through observing the consistencies of how posts exposing infidelity were presented and the online public engagement in giving strict criticism, I was able to identify sexual faithfulness or fidelity as an upheld value and a powerful norm established within the SAPA ethnoburb community. A person needs to adhere to this acceptable group conduct, and those who went against the expected norm would suffer from informal social sanction as in the discussed case. The social sanction for violation of such norms includes involuntary public exposure of personal information, as well as online public shaming.

As it is necessary for ethnographic data to be interpreted against the background of a societal context, I have located the patterns of discourse found in these recorded texts within a wider social

context to see the relationship with the existing Vietnamese Czech immigrant social structures (Burawoy et al. 2000). Infidelity is a sensitive issue and guarantees large engagement from the online community in the Vietnamese immigrant Facebook group because it closely relates to immigration patterns and work cultures among the whole Vietnamese immigrant community. In the many instances of infidelity occurring in the SAPA ethnoburb community, a person was often cheated on during the couple's separation period. Within the Vietnamese immigrant community, it is not rare that initially, a family would separate for a certain time.

In many families, the husband is the first one to emigrate to the Czech Republic to work, earn money and obtain a stable work visa before his wife and children join him later from Vietnam on a family reunion visa. Thus, the separation can become a contributing factor to the possibility of infidelity among men and women in the Vietnamese immigrant community in the Czech Republic. The issue is especially sensitive for the female community as they are more often on the receiving end of sexual unfaithfulness. Additionally, the work culture among the Vietnamese immigrant community is significant for its long hours of work and hardly any holidays. In the case of Vietnamese grocery store owners, running these is one of the most popular business choices, and there is great competition within the community of these self-made businessmen. Thus, it is common knowledge that grocery owners never take any days off during the Czech national holidays, unlike the other businesses. As a newcomer, during the interview, Mrs. Hoa also took notice of the lack of post-work socialization or variety of forms of entertainment for the SAPA community. It could be interesting to see whether there is any correlation between this common work culture with recurring incidents of infidelity within the community in SAPA ethnoburb.

Discussion

The initial critical discourse analysis of active online interaction within the community in Facebook groups shows its contribution to accumulation interaction pretext in an online context: community members engage productively with each other on many aspects, supporting each other's food business, discussing matters and viewpoints, or even sharing about scandals happening within the community. So, on the one hand, the case study of break time interactions at the bench area shows how the place facilitates activity pretext in which a high level of conversation takes place physically. On the other hand, the off-work interactions online show the interaction pretext that the platform maintains. According to the framework of Henriksen and Tjora (2014) in

categorizing neighborhood's connection strength, this combination of a high level of activity and a high degree of interaction pretext qualifies the SAPA market community as a tight community with a mix of weak and strong social ties. Thus, the community is a good example of the relevance of the 'community saved' argument in urban studies (Lupi and Musterd, 2006). The "community transformed" arguments often express the view that suburbanites are very keen on privacy, and the reasons for living in a chosen area is based on functionality. However, the SAPA ethnoburb as a community of Vietnamese immigrants aligned more with the 'community saved' model: there exist stronger social ties in the neighborhood, and members are also more willing to share their personal lives with each other on online platforms as one of the community building strategies. Because their sense of belonging is partly constructed out of exchanges that help preserve the Vietnamese ethnic identity, there are also more favourable attitudes toward community involvement overall (Rothblatt, 1986, Bell 1958).

When reviewing the ethnography of Internet users, researchers often brought up questions regarding the strength of binding commitments made in online settings as opposed to offline settings. Some researchers viewed the Internet as a decentered, and unlocalized 'network of networks' (Hannerz 1996). However, when combining the data from the online ethnography work with the data I collected from fieldwork, I identified the connection between online social activities and physical social activities. In Miller and Slate's combined ethnographic study on Trinidadians (2000), they found that Trinidadians do not distinguish the two spheres but see both activities as a seamless whole. Furthermore, in this example, the Internet helps enhance both their religious and national identity as Trinidadians (2000).

The interactions of the SAPA ethnoburb community in Facebook groups also echo this sentiment. Online, the sense of community is not only preserved but further extended. I view the Internet community existing in the Facebook groups as an extension of the rest area I observed physically since it also facilitates more intimate and personal sharing among an even larger network of people. In other words, the interactions between community members online help fill the gap left by the lack of larger-scale physical socialisation after work. While the case study of interactions centring on the benches shows how interactions play out within a personal social network, the Facebook group observations reveal how it functions within a larger network of community members. In the digital world, community building and ethnicity identity construction go hand in hand: "unique

characteristics of communities of immigrants – such as shared histories, cultural values, experiences, common country of origin, and offline interaction – help shape the nature and dynamics of their interactions online" (Navarrete 2006).

Active online communities, such as the Facebook groups I observed and participated in, have emerged more and more concentrated across many platforms and for every conceivable type of community for people to find their "own" (Goffman 1963). Such communities act as a safe space and closed environment as they facilitate important *collective* identity work (Dunn & Creek 2015). It can be argued that membership of both the physical place of SAPA and the online space of the Vietnamese immigrant community contributes to the ongoing process of "creating new identities through the creative appropriation of parts of each contradictory identity" (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004; Creek 2014a;). The cultural routines and habits that I observed during my fieldwork were likely the characteristics of the Vietnamese identity that is more salient and more amplified through community interactions (Creek 2013; Marti 2009). Part of the previous identity that one has as a Vietnamese citizen in the country of origin can be modified and changed, sometimes removed, as the person emigrates to new places (Creek 2013; Creek and Dunn 2011).

A point of discussion relevant to the field of digital ethnography argues that technologies and material objects also shaped our everyday practices. In analyzing the data collected from fieldwork in the Facebook groups, I took a 'non-media-centric' approach to media studies as this approach is necessary "to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other" (Couldry 2012; Morley 2009). The interactions Vietnamese Czech immigrants in SAPA had on social media groups and communities are just as reflective of they, as community members, reproduce cultural memories and knowledge and help build upon it. Previously developed practice theories have emphasized how social order is being produced and established through daily routines and practices rather than existing prior to them. Thus, the focus of the research is on what people are doing with the media platforms in the context of daily life sharing as well as knowledge sharing.

Because the time span for digital ethnography work is limited, the observations mostly serve to offer a slice of daily life interaction on Facebook among SAPA ethnoburb community members. As such, the findings are also not to be overgeneralized but rather regarded as an initial critical look into the ethnic identity construction process happening online for immigrant communities off

working hours. Nevertheless, the decision to apply the approach helped me further expand on established practice theory since it allowed me to investigate and analyzed the media practices that are habitual for the Vietnamese immigrants in SAPA and essential to their everyday routines outside of work time. Furthermore, the combination of photographic documentation of their daily live interaction with physical space and observations of their online activities also help portray a diaristic view of what a complete day of a Vietnamese community member in SAPA looks like. Through this diaristic view, I was able to really see how cultural memories and routines took part and which roles it plays in people's daily lives as they go back and forth working and interacting with the Czech and Vietnamese communities alike.

Conclusion

Identity, especially ethnic identity previously constructed in the host country, is often reflected in mundane notions such as kinship relations, beliefs, and values systems, and calendar traditions. For the study of the ethnic identity of a diaspora community, it is particularly relevant to focus on the mundane and informal in-group interactions as well as communication as these are the main locus of identity construction (Keevallik 2010). The combination of different ethnographic research methods and a variety of primary and secondary materials is effective for studying the smaller scale communities of SAPA where most essential activities occur within the local boundaries of the market centre (Pink et al. 2015). Furthermore, due to the smaller-scale localities and the business nature of its function as one of the first priorities, almost everyone knows each other, thus making it more feasible to map out certain networks of connections and interactions. With the observations and close analysis of how people treat each other in the backstage environment, such as the rest areas during break times, I noticed certain reoccurring patterns and shared value systems about the Vietnamese ethnic identity as they are maintained within a group.

As the working life of the Vietnamese Czech community members in SAPA takes up large parts of their social life, ethnic identity and traditions are often preserved and constructed through shared activities and interactions within a network of relationships. Field notes and personal experience during research reveal a sense of community established not only in instances of communal meals but also passing ethnic rituals and customs between each other during out of work socialisation. In this sense, the role of the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants is important in that they help carry the values and beliefs from their country of origin to transfer to younger generations of Vietnamese immigrants who are not as familiar with and not as connected to such Vietnamese traditions.

The observations of how ethnic identity construction and preservation occur daily in out of work settings highlight the significance and role of rest areas as a facilitator. These places provide a temporary backstage away from the demanding working life where the network of the Vietnamese Czech community in SAPA is constantly expanded and enforced. For new immigrants in the Czech Republic and to the SAPA community, the rest areas provide opportunities to form new friendships

via routinised interactions while providing a look at how socialisations work and the rhythms of life in SAPA.

At the end of the research process, the shift to focus on the online landscape of SAPA opens up a potential direction of ethnographic work that views online Facebook groups as an alternative digital rest area for immigrant communities. The Facebook groups of Vietnamese Czech immigrants in SAPA, among others of a larger scale, are parallel to the physical space in that it hosts a mix of business and a more casual intimate level of interactions among the community members. The field notes gathered from online interactions outside the working sphere show other ways that shared cultural values and rituals are enforced in addition to the observations made at physical rest areas.

In an environment such as the SAPA market centre, where various ethnicities and cultures interact and co-exist, identity construction with its ethnic component is a major point of orientation in the society (Meciar 2014). The research offers an exploratory look at Vietnamese Czech immigrant socialisations within SAPA ethnoburbs outside of the working sphere. However, even though the Vietnamese diaspora in SAPA belongs to the smaller-scale society of Vietnamese immigrants in Czech, the data and analysis should not be representational of how the other ethnoburbs in other parts of the Czech Republic behave. Thus the case study focuses more on the social organisation aspect of this community, especially in observing how social life happens rather than seeing it as something static and fixed (Firth 1951). Through observing and analysing the norms and attitudes captured within a well-established refugee community such as SAPA, I show how the community members choose to abandon or preserve certain ethnic values during their process of constructing self-identity and mediating between Vietnamese and Czech cultural values. The research offers another perspective on the discussions and representations of SAPA in various other contexts while highlighting the potential importance of online socialisation for the immigrant community (Li 2012).

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