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Exploring the Function of the Anti-communist Ideology in the Vietnamese American Diasporic Community

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Abstract

The anti-communist ideology in the Vietnamese American community is increasingly perceived as a destabilizing force. Specifically, there is a shift from a number of younger Vietnamese American scholars in imposing a “critical perspective” on particular formulas and narratives, such as immigrant assimilation, American exceptionalism, “we-win-even-when-we-lose,” and “refugees as a showcase for democracy.” From this perspective, the anti-communist ideology needs to be replaced by a new progressive ideology that can better promote the advancement of the Vietnamese people, here and elsewhere. In this article, the above call to cover the Vietnamese lives from more complex and critical perspectives is seen as an opportunity to revisit the function of the anti-communist ideology, which is embedded in the Vietnamese American diasporic community.

KEY WORDS: Vietnamese American anti-communist ideology, social capital, social movement, diaspora, critical perspective, and survey methodology.

Introduction: Reviewing the Critical Perspective on the Anti-Communist Ideology

According to a younger cohort of Vietnamese American scholars and activists, the anti-communist ideology in the Vietnamese American community is increasingly becoming the Achilles’ heel to community development. The anti-communist ideology has created social divisions or “structural holes,” which makes it difficult for the community to organize for common goals. For this cohort of scholars and activists, there is a need to cover Vietnamese lives here and elsewhere from more complex and critical perspectives. Only by doing so, it becomes apparent that politics within the Vietnamese American diasporic community is still controlled by the first generation. As noted by scholar Linda Vo (2003), “homeland politics is still of primary importance and adopting fervent anti-communism ideologies is mandatory” but this does not



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“necessarily represent the needs or voice of this extensive community” (p. xv-xvi). The problem is further exacerbated not only because the first generation of leaders garners the most media attention but also “a new generation of Vietnamese-American and other elected officials choose to fan the flame of hatred as the most convenient way to get votes” (Nguyen et al., 2004, para. 2).

Thus, a group of Vietnamese American studies scholars and activists has publicly spoken out against an extreme element in the Vietnamese American community, who had lobbied local officials in Garden Grove and Westminster—key cities of Little Saigon in southern California—to pass resolutions in creating a “communist-free zone” to prevent “high-profile stopovers” by members and officials of the Vietnamese government. Importantly, these individuals argue that while anti-communist proponents are right to point out the lack of freedom of speech and human rights in Vietnam, the anti-communism ideology “is compelled very much by an obsession about a war that ended a long ago, and [which] blinds us to many other problems today” in the Vietnamese American community (Nguyen et al., 2004, para. 3). This staunchly anti-communist ideology is believed to have marginalized progressive identity-based projects and transnational activities, such as coalition building with other ethnic American groups in further advancing civil rights or a call for “confluence” in integrating the best of Vietnamese and overseas Vietnamese cultures as a basis for collaborations (Duong, 2009; A. Lam, 2008; T. Le, 2009; Ngo, 1996; Valverde, 2003). Because of such marginalization, there has been an inability to transcend the cold war identity politics among Vietnamese Americans as well as to reconcile relations between the Vietnamese diasporic community and Vietnam, respectively. For the younger Vietnamese American scholars and activists, perhaps it is Vietnamese Americans who want to bring democracy and freedom back to Vietnam that should first take “civic lessons” and learn to practice democratic principles in their diasporic community, since they appear to have given into their hatred against communism and thus may be ruled if they continue to insist on community censorship (Duong, 2009; A. Lam, 2008; T. Le, 2009; Reed, 2004).

In many ways, the above reflects a shift in the study of Vietnamese American experience, which is to challenge the accepted formulas (i.e., immigrant assimilation, ethnic enclaves, “American exceptionalism” for not having a socialist/Marxist identity, etc.) or narratives (i.e., the “refugees as a showcase for democracy,” the model minority, “we-win-even-when-we-lose,” etc.) for understanding Vietnamese American lives today (Aguilar-San Juan, 2009; Espiritu, 2006; Thu-Huong, 2005; Vo, 2003). There is a younger cohort of Vietnamese American scholars who believe the trajectories of the Vietnamese American diasporic communities are changing—new subgroups such as gay, adoptee, and racially mixed Vietnamese Americans are marking their own histories, while a growing 1.5 and second generation of Vietnamese Americans are finding their own voices beyond the “survival and silence” mode of their parents’ generation. And consequently the accepted formulas and narratives are no longer sufficient in covering or reflecting current transformations and dimensions within the community (Duong, 2005; Espiritu, 2005; A. Lam, 2008; V. T. Nguyen, 2003; Thu-Huong, 2005; Vo, 2003).

Therefore, as advocated by Yen Le Espiritu (2005), there is a need to “impose a critical perspective” on particular stories, such as ones “that often remember South Vietnam as only free and democratic, North Vietnam as only ruthless and Communist, and the United States as only benevolent and powerful—and yet still bear witness to the ‘other truths’ behind these retellings” (p. xxi). And if a critical perspective were not imposed, according to Nguyen Vo Thu-Huong (2005), “the most simplistic anti-communist and pro-empire views” (p. 171) would dominate when Vietnamese Americans reprise their history in the U.S. Only by employing a critical lens, as noted by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2003), will it become clear that younger Vietnamese Americans

“often feel reluctant to voice contrary opinions” due to “political pressure and filial piety” (opinion section). As observed by Lan Duong (2005), this is why “mainstream” Vietnamese American filmmakers have tended to “distill the war and its after-effects through figuration, employing images that easily translate notions of misery, heritage, and history to a diasporic spectatorship” (pp. 2-3). It seems the fear that the Vietnamese diasporic community is not progressing toward being more tolerant of different political views—or not realizing that the anti-communist politics tends to privilege masculinity, heterosexuality, or the model of the “liberated and grateful refugees”—has led some of the noted critical scholars and activists to create or support new progressive identity-based projects.

One such project that aims to transcend the “survival and silence” mode and the anti-communist ideology of the first generation is a Vietnamese American art exhibit called “F.O.B II: Art Speaks.” This exhibit features the communist flag as a statement to launch a discussion about freedom of expression. For example, one of the art works was an interactive voting booth that allows visitors to decide which flag represents them: the flag of the former Republic of South Vietnam, the official flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, or their own flag which they created using crayons. The exhibit also features a “Black Room,” which has highly sensitive political materials (i.e., a defamed flag of the former South Republic of Vietnam with three lines of barbed wires) but with the purpose that visitors should detach themselves from painful memories of which such symbols may evoke as “one way for us to heal and move forward as a community” (Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association, 2009). The exhibit was open in the beginning of 2009 in Santa Ana, California but was forced to shut down earlier than scheduled due to community protest. The exhibit was organized by the Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association, which stated that the exhibit was designed to launch a discussion about freedom of expression.

Some of the core members/supporters of the above organization comprise some of the earlier mentioned younger Vietnamese American scholars and activists, including Linda Vo, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Andrew Lam, Lan Duong and Nguyen Vo Thu-Huong. Although the exhibit’s organizers sought to be “sensitive enough for the community,” they also wanted “to confront the fear head on,” as they saw themselves as bridging the gap between the first and second generation of Vietnamese Americans (M. T. Tran, 2009). For both mainstream and the Vietnamese American media, the “F.O.B II” was to “test” whether the community is ready to respect the freedom for which it claimed to seek when they left Vietnam. The exhibit, at least as reported by the media, did not effectively bridge the generational politics or facilitate a dialogue on freedom of expression. However, for the organizers, the exhibit did facilitate a dialogue which “occurred in ways that are not easily recorded or do not make good news events” (L. N. Le, 2009, para. 23). Notwithstanding, such project seems either to underscore or parallel the effort by a younger cohort of Vietnamese American scholars and activists to challenge the “accepted” anti-communist ideology and to replace it with a new progressive ideology in order for new trajectories to root themselves within Vietnamese American diasporic community.

For this article, the noted shift in the study of the Vietnamese American experience and the emergence of a new progressive identity-based ideology provides the opportunity to review the growing literature on Vietnamese American anti-communism as well as to revisit the function of the anti-communist ideology. First, the younger cohort of Vietnamese American scholars and activists—most of whom are part of the so-called 1.5 generation of Vietnamese Americans born in Vietnam, whose family came in 1975, whose academic backgrounds are primarily in ethnic studies, and who are disproportionately women—tends to analyze and view

the anti-communist ideology as a cause of something (i.e., an independent variable). That is, through the critical perspective, the anti-communist ideology is seen only as a divisive factor to community building or an anti-thesis to the development of Vietnamese American studies; at least implicitly, there is not a need then to explain or justify the anti-communist ideology. For the noted cohort, the priority seems to be a call in developing new analytical formulas or new historical narratives to effectively cover the growing complexity and diversity of Vietnamese lives, here and elsewhere, so that research, teachings, and artistic and cultural perceptions of Vietnamese Americans are reflective of the community's new trajectories in which social justice causes and multiracial alliance can take root (Vo, 2003). In addition, the rewriting, rereading, and retelling about the Vietnam War need to recover the "absences"—the women and the children and the men without ranks or guns from both South Vietnam and North Vietnam (Thu-Huong, 2005). And perhaps by recommitting to democratic principles and civic engagement, the Vietnamese diasporic community can be an effective agent of change and find new ways to influence the future of Vietnam (A. Lam, 2008). No less important, by dismantling the accepted formulas and narratives, there are particular exposures that will become more visible. For example, according by Yen Le Espiritu (2006), only by rejecting the narrative of the "good" Vietnamese refugees who are successful, assimilated, and who are "rescued" from communist rule can one see "the superiority of a white American middle-class way of life" (p. 341) that is unlikely to be extended to Vietnamese Americans, whereas accepting the "righteousness of rescuing projects" by the U.S. would warrant a right to American hegemony to any part of the world deemed "enemies to freedom." Or, as argued by Nguyen Vo Thu-Huong (2005), by freeing ourselves from the cold war rhetoric, ethical and political options will emerge, such as holding the current government of Vietnam "accountable for capitalistic exploitation of workers rather than communistic policies" (p. 171).

Clearly, in reviewing commentaries and essays by scholars and writers who have imposed a critical perspective on the Vietnamese American experience, many of the analyses are "underspecified." That is, the anti-communist ideology as an independent variable or as a cause of something carries the connotation of only "divisiveness," "intolerance," or "unprogressive." Or that it manifests only in political protests, demonstrations, boycotts, or "commercializing" for consumption. Interestingly, anti-communism is often not defined. Here, a definition by Thuy Vo Dang (2005) may become useful: Vietnamese American anti-communism is an opposition to the communist political ideology in general and to the current Vietnamese government specifically, while its affiliation is linked to U.S. democracy and capitalism. At least on the surface, this definition suggests, on the one hand, that divisiveness and intolerance can emerge when the anti-communist ideology regulates or censors community members who question anti-communism or who affiliate with the communist regime's projects; and even acts of violence can characterize such anti-communism. On the other hand, because Vietnamese American anti-communist ideology is linked to U.S. democracy and capitalism, such linkage can facilitate various aspects of adaptation, accommodation, incorporation, or assimilation.

For example, it was thought that the first wave of Vietnamese refugees had a distinct kind of "anticipatory socialization" to American society, giving them a distinct advantage over both earlier, pre-1965 Asian immigrants to the U.S. and other Southeast Asian refugees (Montero, 1979). That is, given the "Vietnamization" of American influences in the former South Vietnam's urban centers, Vietnamese refugees, particularly the household heads, had familiarity in dealing with Americans, the English language, American customs and popular culture. So compared to refugee populations that did not have such "anticipatory socialization," the first

wave of Vietnamese refugees had far superior levels of English language skills and were able to develop English proficiency in a relatively short time (Kelly, 1986). More recently, research suggests that the success of Vietnamese American entrepreneurship relative to Vietnamese entrepreneurship in today's Vietnam is due, in large part, to business environment. Both Vietnamese American and Vietnamese entrepreneurs share similar patterns regarding business decisions, but the latter is constrained and their entrepreneurial development is also distorted by poor business environment, including being crowded out by state-owned enterprises, lack of property rights and access to financing (Hung & Katsioloudes, 2005). With regard to political incorporation, Vietnamese Americans have utilized protests as the key available opportunity in American democracy to make claims, which focus primarily on homeland issues (Ong & Meyer, 2004). The focus on homeland issues, according to recent empirical studies, is positively correlated with naturalization and voting among (as well as bloc-voting) for Vietnamese American candidates (Collet, 2005; Collet & Furuya, 2005; Lien, Conway, & Wong, 2004). Moreover, mobilization on homeland issues (i.e., gaining recognition of the flag from the former Republic of South Vietnam and advocating human rights for Vietnam) can complement subsequent political mobilization on domestic issues, such as hate crimes, affordable housing, bilingual education, rebuilding neighborhoods, and ethnic unity (Bui, Tang, & Kiang, 2004; Vu, 2006; Wisckol, 2007).

In general, analyses that are underspecified are those that see the anti-communist ideology as having no positive attributes or don't consider other factors when assessing the anti-communist ideology as a cause of community disorganization. Also overlooked is that the practice of Vietnamese American anti-communism can inform the traditional formulas' explanatory power. By implication, essays that do not include some aspects of benefit-and-cost analysis or consider different levels of analysis would seem to uncritically justify the conclusion that there is a need to go beyond the anti-communist ideology. For instance, while fervent Vietnamese American anti-communist sentiment makes it very difficult for community development, the before-mentioned critical perspectives often exclude other underlying divisive factors which may be strongly linked to the "structural holes" in the Vietnamese American community. In qualitative surveys, Vietnamese American community members have cited traditional behaviors, cultural and language divide between members of the community and public institutions, the lack of ESL classes for parents, and the need for after school programs for children losing their cultural heritage, as impediments and barriers of economic mobility and community cohesion (Peranteau et al., 2004).

Moreover, there are essays by up-and-coming Vietnamese American scholars that have analyzed the interaction between anti-communism and the immigration assimilation process and how each can shape the other. For C. N. Le (2009), the anti-communist political activism among Vietnamese Americans has not only allowed the community to emerge as an influential political constituency (both at local and national levels) but also as a source of ethnic solidarity which can resist against the inevitable tide of assimilation. However, C. N. Le (2009) notes that forces of assimilation are likely to moderate the fervent anti-communist sentiment (i.e., less violence and less confrontation), particularly among younger Vietnamese Americans. Yet, the anti-communism as the foundation of ethnic solidarity within the Vietnamese American community will not necessarily be displaced. This is because anti-communism can be evolved into different forms, which is shaped, in part, by the degree of human rights abuses in Vietnam, and whether Vietnam's economic development will be accompanied by appreciable increases in economic and political freedom. Similarly, Thuy Vo Dang (2005) observes that Vietnamese American anti-

communism discourse over more than thirty years is “much more nuanced and complicated and has taken on many different cultural meanings” (p. 65). For sure, the first generation community leaders are not “ghosts of the past.” They are actively constructing a diasporic community in which anticommunism “becomes the vehicle for sustaining an identity and community in the present and serves as pedagogical tool” (p. 69) for the second generation, according to Thuy Vo Dang (2005) whose research focused on the Vietnamese community in San Diego, California. These scholars along with others (Bui et al., 2004; Ong & Meyers, 2004) have generally accounted for both negative and positive externalities from anti-communism. Such analyses tend to support the argument that anti-communism is still functional and its capacity to redefine may be taken for granted depending on who is organizing the anti-communism activities. The above perspective tends to come from Vietnamese American scholars who can be described as “community insiders.”

To be sure, there can be a critical perspective either by a “community outsider” or a non-Vietnamese scholar that accounts for both positive and negative externalities of the Vietnamese American anti-communism. A recent book by academic Karin Aguilar-San Juan (2009), *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America*, is illustrative of this. Although Aguilar-San Juan admits that prior to her research on the community she wanted to “expose and dismantle the assumptions behind the narratives of immigrant assimilation and American exceptionalism,” (p. 156) her utilization of the place-making concept allows her to see materials and discursive efforts by the community to stay Vietnamese in which assimilation narrative and anti-communism are essential components. That is, the “Little Saigons,” operating as a platform and an organizing device which hold (and perhaps increase) value, can shift and change so culture and identity can be recalibrated in order to find an “equilibrium state.” As a result, Vietnameseness is being redefined “to serve sometimes a myriad of simultaneous and sometimes contradictory social and historical functions” (p. xxvii). Importantly, such process will not be the same for all the “Little Saigons.” Yet, because Aguilar-San Juan believes that the ethnicity framework or the intragroup experience is limited, she pushes race as an analytical category for Vietnamese in which a larger panethnic construct of “Asian America” is an empowerment against racism.

Another critical analysis that is comprehensive and data driven is that of Roy Vu (2006). His doctoral thesis focuses on Houston’s Vietnamese community, whose Little Saigon is losing its distinctiveness because there are multiple Vietnamese business enclaves in Houston, although all enclaves are embedded with a “Southern Vietnamese Nationalism” which, in part, has been revived by anti-communist politics (Vu, 2006). Vu’s study is driven by a critical thesis attempting to disprove myths of Vietnamese Americans as an Asian “model minority” group (i.e., economically successful but apolitical). On the one hand, he finds that anti-communist politics had earlier bonded a bifurcated community, which over the years has been amended to develop a domestic agenda addressing socio-economic problems. On the other hand, Vu argues that staunch anti-communism (i.e., political red-baiting or a “Red Scare” environment) in the near future will hinder the maturation of the community’s development which does not correlate with American mainstream politics. Therefore, Vu (2006) advises Vietnamese Americans to realize that “a different historical trajectory exists,” organizing through “the history of noncommunist democracy” rather than the staunch anti-communism “to preserve the Southern Vietnamese national identity” (p. 407). This is because such ethnic identity is inevitable in that it “provides a safety net, a coping mechanism, and a strategy in settling a new country” (p. 403).

Overall, the noted critical perspectives on Vietnamese American anticommunism raise important questions: Is there a need to explain the anti-communist ideology? And is there a need

to transcend the anti-communist ideology? For critical scholars such as Yen Le Espiritu, Nguyen Vo Thu-Huong, Linda Vo, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Lan Duong, the answers are “no” and “yes,” respectively. Meanwhile, other critical scholars such as Karin Aguilar-San Juan and Roy Vu, the answer are “yes” and “no.” Though both Aguilar-San Juan and Vu call for further shifting and redefining so “Vietnameseness” could include pan-Asian Americanism and American progressivism, such calls are effectively insertions of the authors’ agendas without accounting their subjects’ voices on Asian American panethnicity and political progressivism. For example, Aguilar-San Juan’s (2009) call is based on her view of a “hegemonic racial order,” which will prevent most Vietnamese, no matter how suburbanized or successful, from fully exercising the privileges of “whiteness.” Vu’s (2006) call is based on his view that there is a legacy of participatory democracy within the “Southern Vietnamese Nationalism”—promoted during the Vietnam War by overseas students who joined anti-war rallies in the U.S., Southern Vietnamese communists and non-communist reformers in Vietnam—that should be revived within the Vietnamese American community today.

Although this article will address the above questions posed by the critical perspectives, its primary purpose is to introduce, explore, and generate interest so as to facilitate a potential study of theory and research on Vietnamese American anti-communism. In such spirit, the article proposes a framework that would allow the anti-communist ideology to be analyzed as both an independent variable and dependent variable. Specifically, the concept of social capital is utilized to assess the positive and negative externalities of the anti-communist ideology as a cause of something, while the concept of a social movement is used to understand the anti-communist ideology as an outcome of the Vietnam War. In accounting for the subjects’ voices, the article will utilize research-based surveys—including the author’s own exploratory and nonrandom surveys—but with emphasis on the limits of substantive interpretations from survey methodology. The article’s contribution is mainly to facilitate and to recognize the growing literature on Vietnamese American anti-communism, as well as encouraging and developing more research-based surveys to better examine the anti-communist ideology at different levels of analysis.

Viewing the Anti-Communist Ideology through Social Capital

In attempting to further conceptualize the anti-communist ideology, the concept of a Vietnamese American diasporic community is utilized, of which can be equipped with explanatory power. For instance, the diaspora component can be classified in ways that could provide new insights. Here, the Vietnamese American diaspora can be categorized as either “stateless” or “state-linked” to the current Vietnamese government (Sheffer, 2003), and the development within the Vietnamese American diaspora can be characterized as “mobilized” or “proletarian” (Armstrong, 1976). Meanwhile, the community component can be defined in terms of prevailing attitudes, so as to ascertain whether the community can offer the benefits and resources to those who seek it. Here, it can be determined whether the Vietnamese American community has two essential features: solidarity (i.e., sentiments that draw people together) and significance (i.e., a sense of achievement and fulfillment) (Clark, 1973). By many accounts, the Vietnamese American diaspora can be classified as “stateless” and does not link its lived experience—its history, heritage symbols, and political identity—to the current development policies of the government of Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnamese American diaspora can also be described as “mobilized,” in which the Vietnamese foreign born entering the U.S. in the 1980s, 1990s, and

2000-2005 have seen an increase in terms of English proficiency, proportion of college graduates, the number of owner-occupied housing, family median income, naturalization, and voting, while public assistance and the poverty rate have decreased over the same period. Lastly, through the “Little Saigon” the Vietnamese American community has been observed as being able to put back the “place” in displacement, which expresses needs and desires that were quite different from U.S. resettlement policy, that is, U.S. policymakers had wanted Vietnamese refugees to only take on an American identity, and they discouraged Vietnamese from forming their own ethnic communities.

The above typologies are not used to support or reject the immigrant assimilation formula or “we-win-even-when-we-lose” narrative. Rather, they are used to frame how the anti-communist ideology emerges from the Vietnamese American experience, embeds in the community’s place-making, and is shaped by internal and external factors. Moreover, these typologies can also be used to frame the overseas Vietnamese experiences in Southeast Asia/East Asia and Western Europe/Eastern Europe (H. Le, 2006; Wah, 2005). Indeed, the article proposes that in such framing the anti-communist ideology can be better contextualized both as an independent variable (i.e., as a cause of something) and a dependent variable (i.e., as an outcome of particular socio-political factors or conditions). In this section, the focus is on the anti-communist ideology as an independent variable, which not only can facilitate the development within the Vietnamese American diaspora but also can give rise to the essential features of the Vietnamese American community. In the previous section, the literature review shows that the anti-communist ideology can have positive attributes, such as: (a) helping to resist some aspects of assimilation in order to stay Vietnamese (Aguilar-San Juan, 2009; Dang, 2005; C. N. Le, 2009); (b) creating a bonded solidarity among diverse sub-groups, at least early on in the resettlement (Dang, 2005; C. N. Le, 2009; Vu, 2006); (c) sustaining an identity and community in the present and future (Dang, 2005; C. N. Le, 2009); and (d) facilitating political incorporation (Bui et al., 2004; Ong & Meyers, 2004). Some of the concepts utilized in the above works, such as the place-making of the “Little Saigons” and anti-communism as the foundation of ethnic solidarity, are indeed equipped with explanatory power but have not directly or empirically used to examine the function of the anti-communist ideology.

Here, in exploring how to measure both negative and positive externalities of the anti-communist ideology as a cause of something to the Vietnamese American diasporic community, social capital is employed. For our purposes, social capital is defined as a quality created between people in which social relationship provides the opportunity for individuals to claim access to sources possessed by associates (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992). Of course, in some social structures, social capital is created more efficiently and effectively and, thus, the amount and quality of social capital are given attention (Coleman, 1990). According to Alejandro Portes (1998), to possess social capital a person must be related to others, and that there must be a motivation of those others to make sources available. Fortunately, the sources of social capital are plural. This includes identification with one’s group or group solidarity, which can be a powerful motivational force in making resources available to members of the group and providing an effective antidote to free-riding by others in collective projects (Coleman, 1990). Another source of benefits is through extra-familial networks that have been invoked as an explanation of access to employment and entrepreneurial success (Loury, 1977). However, the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals and groups can have other negative consequences, including exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, and restrictions on individual freedom (Portes, 1998).

So how does social capital relate to the Vietnamese American diasporic community? At least in the early stages of resettlement both in the U.S. after 1975 and in the refugee camps in the Southeast Asian countries after 1978, Vietnamese refugees had sought for the presence of a Vietnamese community in order to cope with being physically, psychologically, culturally, economically, and intellectually displaced (Kelly, 1977; Reyes, 1999). For example, Adelaida Reyes's (1999) ethnographic study of a Vietnamese refugee camp in Palawan (an island province of the Philippines) found that the forming of a council community provided Vietnamese "the significance of a sense of community" and "the solidarity of its Vietnamese members," both of which "are hard to overestimate" because they "were essential if the asylees were to recover their equilibrium" (p. 31). At the same time, the council community's programs underscored not only the need for refugees to prepare for a western culture but also the need to "conserve a Vietnamese way of life that Communism has destroyed," (p. 30) including the weekly flag ceremony, the singing of the old national anthem, and the importance to uphold democratic values such as the elections of council members by camp residents (Reyes, 1999). And once in the U.S., Vietnamese refugees sought and relied on community support. According to a comprehensive survey conducted in major U.S. cities that hosted Vietnamese refugees, about 90 percent of Vietnamese respondents believe that Vietnamese should stick together in order to keep company with each other for mutual assistance, and about 73 percent disagreed with the statement that when in need of financial aid it is best to rely mainly on relatives (Starr & Roberts, 1982). However, expectations to the benefits of ethnic solidarity and community networks require individuals to be "upstanding" members, meaning not having any suspicion of communist affiliation (Hein, 1995; Reyes, 1999).

From the above, perhaps we can generalize that one of the sources giving rise to the Vietnamese American community's sense of significant and solidarity is the common experience of being "pushed out" by communist rule. In addition, we can generalize that the Vietnamese American community as a "stateless" diaspora is the result of community members' beliefs that communism was to blame for their displacement as well as for the lack of human rights and freedom in Vietnam that "forced" them to emigrate. Therefore, overall, one type of social capital that has characterized the social relationships and social structures of the Vietnamese American community is that of a bounded solidarity which may make Vietnamese refugees more tightly and cohesively organized than they were before emigration as well as at a particular period during the resettlement in the host society or which may enable the Vietnamese American community to organize more easily and effectively, at least on homeland issues, whereas other communities seem unable to organize resources. Moreover, the "zeal" from group solidarity may further grease the source for mutual assistance, information channels, patchworking and credit associations, and fundraising within the Vietnamese American community. To be sure, some forms of social capital has been observed and measured both within the Vietnamese American family and the Vietnamese American community (Collet, 2005; Gold, 1992; Haines, Rutherford, & Thomas, 1981; Hein, 1995; Kibria, 1994; Ong & Meyers, 2004; Starr & Roberts, 1982; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). However, social capital has not been used to examine the anti-communist ideology or examine how the anti-communist ideology can facilitate social capital.

To empirically test some of the above hypotheses, one could use past surveys to identify observable variables that can be used as proxies for both the anti-communist ideology and social capital. For example, one could test whether individuals who report that they had left Vietnam for "political reasons" or "for democracy" would also report that Vietnamese Americans should work together for mutual assistance, or have been involved in rotating credit associations and

patchworking. Here, a database that I have used in past research can offer some insights and may facilitate further research questions (L. Le, 2002). The Houston Area Asian Survey (HAAS), conducted in 1995 by the Department of Sociology at Rice University led by Stephen Klineberg, has information on reasons why individuals left for the United States. The survey identified 609 Asian households from a list of 36,300 randomly generated four-digit numbers attached to the prefixes serving Harris County Texas telephones. A total of 500 selected Asian respondents completed the lengthy interviews—a response rate of more than 82 percent. The valid margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent. The HAAS consists of 151 Vietnamese respondents, 127 Chinese respondents, 112 Indian and Pakistan respondents, 59 Filipino respondents, 28 South Korean respondents, and 23 others. Regarding the reasons for emigration, Vietnamese respondents stood out in which the overwhelming majority reported to have left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy. Among non-Vietnamese Asian respondents, the overwhelming majority reported to have left either for economics/work/education or visiting relatives/marriages. As such, the HAAS allows me to utilize Vietnamese who left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy as a proxy for the anti-communist ideology, while I use participation in Asian meetings and Asian festivals as a proxy for social capital. And because the HAAS is comprehensive, this provides me the opportunity to test some of the above assumptions.

Table 1 has two indices that I created that measure for “liberal” tradition beliefs and “Asian” cultural beliefs in which each tradition is thought to be important in terms of having the “right” values that correlate with upward mobility. I then examine how Vietnamese who left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy would score on both these indices in comparison to non-Vietnamese Asians who left either for economics/work/education or visiting relatives/marriages. Table 1 shows that Vietnamese who left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy has the highest index score, based on the aggregate means of the rating scale, on both the “Asian Cultural Beliefs Index” and the “Liberal Tradition Beliefs Index.” If having the “right” values are conducive to upward mobility, Vietnamese who left for politics/war/democracy is tentatively correlated with both “Asian” and “Western” values. Prior ethnographic studies also found that Vietnamese refugees’ cultural ideals were able to co-exist with views that the American way of life was progressive, modern, and scientific (Freeman, 1989; Gold, 1992; Rutledge, 1992).

Table 1

Proxy Variables for Anti-communist and Liberal/“Asian” Beliefs

PROXY VARIABLES	Asian Cultural Beliefs Index ¹	Liberal Tradition Beliefs Index ²
Left for Politics/War/Democracy	2.76	3.46
Left for Economic/Work/Education	2.39	3.45
Left for Relatives/Marriages	2.73	3.34

Note. For more information on the Houston Area Asian Survey, visit <http://www.houstonareasurvey.org/>, then click on 2005 Report.

¹ Agree wishes of family priority over personal wishes; agree that woman with young shouldn’t work; very often teach younger family member about background; religion is very important; and very often participate in Asian holiday or cultural events

² Agree if work hard one will succeed; agree few jobs without college; yes voted in the last federal election; definitely will become citizens; and agree everyone who wants to work can find a job

In Table 2, I attempt to examine whether Vietnamese who left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy are likely to participate in Asian meetings and Asian festivals. Table 2 shows that Vietnamese who left Vietnam for politics/war/democracy had the highest percentage score in both measurements in comparison to Vietnamese who either left for economics/work/education or visiting relatives/marriages. Prior ethnographic studies also found that Vietnamese refugees with limited resources were able to organize themselves more tightly and cohesively by the three networks of family, community, and politics (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1989; Hein, 1995; Kibria, 1993; Rutledge, 1985; Starr & Roberts, 1982).

Table 2
Proxy Variables for Anti-communist and Social Capital

PROXY VARIABLES	% Participated in Asian Meetings of Asian Organizations	% Participated in Asian and Festivals Holidays
Left Vietnam for Politics/ War/ Democracy	55	86
Left Vietnam for Economic/ Work/Education	51	85
Left Vietnam for Relatives Marriages	31	70

Note. For more information on the Houston Area Asian Survey, visit <http://www.houstonareasurvey.org/>, then click on 2005 Report.

A substantive interpretation from the above descriptive results would be that if leaving Vietnam for politics/war/democracy is a “good” proxy for the anti-communist ideology, then the anti-communist ideology may not be an impediment in terms of contradicting values that are thought to be correlated with upward mobility. In my doctoral thesis (L. Le, 2002), I demonstrate through logistic regression with control for other variables that leaving for politics/war/democracy had no negative effect on predicting employment and annual income. However, it did have negative effect on predicting education and language levels. Not unlike previous studies, my regression models find that leaving for politics/war/democracy was positively correlated with naturalization and voting. Another substantive interpretation would be that if participation in Asian meetings and Asian festivals are a “good” proxy for social capital, then the anti-communist ideology may not be an impediment to some forms of social capital to emerge. While more rigorous examination is required, the above descriptive results do not necessarily rule out the hypothesis that the anti-communist ideology can have some positive attributes, specifically the ability to generate social capital. If there is an agreement that social relations and social structures within the Vietnamese American community facilitate some forms of social capital, then it is necessary to further explore the relations between anti-communist ideology and social capital, both theoretically and empirically. In part, this is because Vietnamese American anti-communism has been invoked to shape and affect particular outcomes. It should be noted that descriptive results from the HAAS are in no way presented as definite answers on the strength of the correlation or the causality between the anti-communist ideology and social capital. However, the discussion of the results is intended to inform future

empirical research so that it can be more effective and efficient in answering how social capital can be shaped by the anti-communist ideology or how the anti-communist ideology motivates actors to create resources and networks for others and what the effects of the created sources and networks are.

Not to be overlooked is that utilizing social capital would also lead us to examine its negative effect. That is, the same mechanisms underlying social capital, such as “closure of social networks,” can have other less desirable consequences. Here, one of the functions of social capital, social control, can provide analytical insights on how the anti-communist ideology can be a divisive factor. That tight social control as result of fervent anti-communism can restrict personal freedom, exclude or silence individuals who do not adhere to certain pillars of the community. For example, according to journalistic accounts, there have been five suspected assassinations of Vietnamese American journalists from 1981 to 1990 who had questioned the financial spending and political tactics of a leading anti-communist political group in the early 1980s, the United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (Carney 1993; Kolker 1995; Zuniga 1994). Of the five suspected assassinations, one was in Houston (TX), two in California, and two in Fairfax (VA). According to Roy Vu (2001), “the greatest tragedy was that not only did the murder cases remain unsolved” but “in the long run, the idiocy behind the fervent anti-communist sentiment has blinded the Vietnamese American community and derailed any real democratic course of actions” (p. 131). Tight social control can also restrict the benefits from extra-familial networks to be extended to Vietnam’s development or restrict the trustworthiness of social relations and social structures in reconciling the political divide between the Vietnamese American community and the current Vietnamese regime. For example, in reaction to the political leaders of the “Little Saigons” who came out against the abolishment of U.S. trade embargo on Vietnam in 1994, academic Thanh Nhan Ngo (1996) argued that “the anti-communist ideology, which reigned supreme over the community for years, is the cause of such division, i.e. it is forced, it is repressive and it is unpopular” (para. 16). Similarly, in attempting to facilitate more investment to Vietnam after the bilateral trade agreement between the U.S. and Vietnam in 2001, former South Vietnam’s Prime Minister Cao Ky Nguyen (2006) pleads that “it is time for the so-called anti-communist Vietnamese, the older generation now living most in exile, to let go of their pain and anger and allow the younger generation, our sons and daughters, to have their chances to bring Vietnam together” (p. 366).

The above does seem to suggest that the anti-communist ideology has caused some “structural holes” or internal divisions within the Vietnamese American community. However, at the same time, it is not clear how deep and wide those “structural holes” are and whether the anti-communist ideology is inherently unprogressive, such as leading to intolerance of attitude toward other dislikes, privileging masculinity and heterosexuality, or impeding coalition building with other minority groups. Again, referencing back to social capital can be advantageous in terms of examining whether the network of ties within the Vietnamese American community is capable of acting in concert. That is, if a community has been portioned into clique organizations or its social structures have been fragmented, there is a need for actors or leaders to have “weak ties” in order to bridge the divides; the more “local bridges,” the more cohesive the community (Granovetter, 1973). Thus, it is important to analyze individuals/groups that are organizing or transcending the anti-communist ideology, as well as understanding the context that those individuals/groups are acting under and for what purpose. Perhaps doing so, the projects of such individuals/groups can be better understood regarding how or who they include or exclude and whether they produce some form of optimal outcomes or create greater division.

The “Equilibrium State” of the Anti-Communist Ideology

Because the focus is on the function of the anti-communist ideology, a key question is whether the Vietnamese American anti-communism can be redefined so as to be still capable of not only drawing people together based on sympathy and trust but also creating a sense of achievement and redemption. There are observations that the anti-communist ideology is not diminishing. This could be seen in the campaigns to urge state governments and municipalities to pass resolution in making the flag of the former South Vietnam the “*Heritage Freedom Flag of Vietnamese Americans.*” Since February 2003, there have been more than 85 resolutions that have been passed, including fifteen states (L. Le, 2010). In this section, the focus is on the anti-communist ideology as a dependent variable or as an outcome of particular socio-political factors or conditions.

Framed in this way, the “origin” of anti-communist ideology can be traced back to earlier reform movements of the late 1890s in Vietnam led by Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chau Trinh. Both men were well-known non-communist nationalists who believed that Vietnam had the rights to learn from the West and from the East in order to modernize and revitalize Vietnamese culture and institutions. And both separated themselves from their communist patriots who refused to acknowledge that French colonial rule had had or could have provided positive contributions and who would revile anyone who associated with western colonialism (T. B. Lam, 2003). This would explain, in part, why the Vietnamese American diaspora has “memorialized” these two figures and not communist figures from the nationalist movements during French colonization. When the 1954 Geneva Accord divided the country into two halves, initially some million in-country refugees fled to the “non-communist” south and, thus, an official “non-communist” heritage was inaugurated with the establishment of the Republic of South Vietnam. According to Louis Wiesner (1988), the southern migration in 1954 was driven by “ideological reasons or because they could no longer stand the exactions in men and material support of the Communists” (p. 224). With the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, the anti-communist ideology had emerged, which was associated with the mass refugee exodus to western countries. That is, through the wealth of personal experiences communism has been blamed “for painful separation from families, the loss of property and prestige, the risks that they had to take to escape, the loss of life at sea, the pirate attacks, and the rape of women” (Reyes, 1999, p. 116). Now in the post-cold war era, the anti-communist ideology appears to be undergoing some strategic shifting and changing. For example, a survey conducted in 2000 showed that a growing number of Vietnamese Americans traveled to Vietnam, and that 60 percent of Vietnamese Americans said they would return to live in Vietnam if the country was free and democratic (Brody, Rimmer, & Trotter, 2000). On the one hand, such refinement is necessary to serve purposeful functions—socially, historically, and politically—but it has always been imperfect and fragile due to the very conditions that made the refinement necessary on the other.

Here, the concept of a social movement is introduced in order to better contextualize the anti-communist ideology as a dependent variable. That is, framing the Vietnamese American diaspora as a social movement, its engagement in a political conflict or struggle across space and time can be examined. As noted by Adelaida Reyes (1999), Vietnamese refugee movements are triggered by cataclysmic events that result in an eruption of emotional behavior, rupture with homeland’s government, loyalty to the status quo ante home, and a professed longing to return home. Analytically, the Vietnamese American diaspora as a social movement brings into focus the ideology of its activists in which there is a self-identity, a consciousness of the movement’s

opponent, and a theory of totality (Touraine, 1981). Of the three components, self-identity is of particular interest. That self-identity can offer analytical points of view, including the fact that individuals are in a social movement when they see themselves as a part of one (Eagleton, 1990). Moreover, when self-identity is viewed across time, the unit of analysis becomes a practice or a pattern of activities carried out by individuals (Kashima, Foddy, & Platow, 2002). From this view, identity can be shaped by a process of “meaning making” of symbolical activities by specific individuals acting in context. By implication, the question becomes whether there is a “meaning making” process among the anti-communist ideology’s activists or by individuals who see themselves as part of an anti-communist ideology’s movement. If so, what are the practices and patterns of the anti-communist identity and what aspects of those activities are being reproduced and have been persistent? And how do such activities affect the opponent and theory of totality of the anti-communist ideology’s movement?

According to the before mentioned scholars associated with the critical perspective, the anti-communist identity rising from the Cold War era does little in facilitating the representation of the diverse interests of the Vietnamese American community today or having anything to say about contemporary Vietnam beyond blaming communism. For example, Andre Lam (2008) argues that a Vietnamese living abroad “will be sidelined if he fails to go beyond flying the flags of South Vietnam in shopping malls, erecting war memorials for fallen soldiers, organizing anti-communist protests and, lately, renaming business districts,” which “have no apparent effect on Vietnam itself” (para. 10). From the above perspective, Vietnamese American anti-communism as a discourse or as a movement is outdated and increasingly becoming irrelevant to today’s realities. To be sure, in the early 1980s some American scholars had also thought the Vietnamese refugee collective identity would be of limited help, and would be instead, “by definition, now part of another people’s national consensus” (i.e., Vietnamese are now a part of the American national consensus whose mobility is linked to “Americanization”) (Haines et al., 1981, p. 311). Others reasoned that complete assimilation was desirable for Vietnamese refugees to better meet their needs and, due to government dispersal policy, predicted that the embrace of Vietnamese enclaves “will probably be short-lived compared to other Asian immigrants [pre-1965]” (Montero, 1979, p. 644). In the post-cold war politics, scholars such as Douglas Pike suggest that anti-communism will erode with time when “the older [Vietnamese] people die off and younger [Vietnamese] people don’t buy into it. Like any bad memory, it will fade within each generation” (T. Tran, 2000, para. 21).

The key difference between American scholars and Vietnamese American scholars associated with the critical perspective is that the latter calls for Vietnamese Americans to assimilate to a progressive Asian American movement’s identity; that is, taking part in Asian American panethnicity and political progressivism would minimize the effects of the anti-communism discourse, which usually drown out domestic concerns in the community and impede reconciliation projects with Vietnam. In part, because scholars view anti-communism as a divisive factor within a period of time or within the construction of symbolic meaning, their unit of analysis is of individuals who are persistent about their identity but who should let go of that identity. From this view, time may not be on the side of the anti-communism because, in part, younger generations will come to terms with the Vietnam War and its aftermath in their own ways, extending themselves beyond the cold-war politics of their parents’ generation (Vo, 2003). In general, the above view emphasizes that particular Vietnamese American subgroups are unable to let go of the past and would highlight recent Vietnamese American protests as evidence. For example, a protest in San Jose was organized in 2007 against a Vietnamese

American elected official who was perceived to have gone against the wishes of the community to name a Vietnamese American business area as “Vietnam Business District” instead of “Little Saigon District.”

However, when Vietnamese American anti-communism is viewed across contexts or across time, it takes on a different quality. This has been noted by recent scholarships, including those whose research is based on a critical perspective. For instance, Karin Aguilar-San Juan (2009) argues that staying Vietnamese, which is embedded in anti-communism, is a “thoughtful and deliberate recalibration of culture and identity” (p. xxvii). As such, Vietnamese Americans can find a new “equilibrium state” that could serve a myriad of simultaneous and sometimes contradictory social and historical functions (Aguilar-San Juan, 2009). Similarly, seeing Vietnamese American anti-communism as a discourse, individuals within Vietnamese America can be understood as constructing “community and identity in everyday practices and through not only political but cultural and personal spaces,” according to Thuy Vo Dang (2005, p. 68). Therefore, Vietnamese America “is not forever bounded to an immutable past” but can actively deploy “anti-communism as a signifier for ‘freedom and heritage’ and as a pedagogical tool for the second generation” (Dang, 2005, p. 83). From this view, leaders or activists can produce and reproduce the underlying identity of anti-communism. The question then becomes what aspects of their situated activities have been reproduced and which have been persistent.

Casual observations suggest that what appears to be persistence is the belief that Vietnam should be a non-communist, democratic nation and that the heritage of the former Republic of South Vietnam must be commemorated and honored, at least symbolically. Meanwhile, what is subject to change is how to make Vietnam into a “free and democratic” nation. This would better explain that activities relating to Vietnam now include travel, work, volunteering, social connections, and retirement. In particular, “fighting communism” is no longer pursued by military means but by peaceful means, such as utilizing the political process and lobbying for human rights and democracy in Vietnam. It is thought that sociopolitical factors or the international conditions have “enticed” the anti-communist ideology’s activists to redefine anti-communism. That is, military means to advance anti-communism—in light of normalization between U.S. and Vietnam and in the post 9/11 environment—is not politically or legally viable. In fact, in recent years, anti-communist projects have focused on “the future of the people [of Vietnam] not of a contemporary political regime” in which social justice is promoted and information through the diasporic media is designed to encourage ordinary Vietnamese to be active rather than maintain a passive stance or the “wait-and-see” attitude (Q. M. Le, 2006, para. 13). Moreover, there are discussions about the need of bridging the past and future and between the overseas Vietnamese community and Vietnam, particularly the “differences of views and opinions between young and old need to be addressed” but the objectives must consider “national sovereignty, multi-party politics, respect for human rights and social justice” (T. L. Lam, 2000, para. 7).

It is also probable that in the near future building relations with private entities—including academic, cultural, and economic—will be accepted but only if such entities are more or less “independent” from the state. There are now a number of Vietnamese Americans who are on the front line of this movement. For example, scholar and community activist Xuan Khoa Le (2005) notes that overseas Vietnamese “haven’t really been calm and objective enough . . . in reviewing the past to learn new lessons,” (para. 16) while the communist government “has changed its attitude toward Vietnamese refugees, from denouncing them as ‘traitors’ to ‘an important resource’ for the development of the country” (Do, 2005, para. 21). However, Xuan

Khoa Le also recognizes that the communist regime has yet to admit its past mistakes and has not allowed an environment conducive to reconciliation. That government's policy toward the overseas communities remains simply a strategy "designed by the winners trying to convert the losers to their side" (para. 21). In turn, contributions by the Vietnamese American diaspora are "directed only toward in improving the lives of people in the country and facilitating the process of change, not to support the government or regime" (Do, 2005, para 22).

To be sure, the Vietnamese American diaspora is made up of different migration vintages whose ethnicity is always in a state of flux. This further contributes to the "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" in which the anti-communism may not be able to maintain an "equilibrium state." A particular challenge has been that of generational division. One study, focusing on the generation gap in the Vietnamese American community in San Francisco Bay Area, found young Vietnamese American adults to be lukewarm to the affairs of Vietnam and do not put a high priority on human rights issues there, compared to the older members who are more attentive and passionate about both issues (Collet & Selden, 2003). Some young adults are afraid to be a leader in community activities because they can be accused of being a "communist sympathizer" if they don't confirm to the anti-communist politics. The concern then is whether the gap between generations will grow in the near future or whether the indifference or fear of young Vietnamese Americans will continue to be drowned out by older members who are more intensive and conservative about homeland politics. Thus, a key question might be whether the change and persistence that are parcel to the anti-communism can be organized for other purposes or reproduced to bridge divisions.

Here, I have conducted two exploratory, nonrandom surveys that could provide insights. Both surveys were conducted through the Politics Research Center at California State University at Bakersfield, and their discussions are meant to facilitate further research. These exploratory surveys target young Vietnamese Americans who I describe as "consumers" of the Vietnamese American community's social and political activities. That is, one group that might play a role in producing and reproducing anti-communism is younger Vietnamese Americans who either see themselves or will see themselves as a part of the anti-communist ideology's movement. I assume that such individuals are likely to be "consumers" of activities organized by anti-communist projects. Young Vietnamese Americans who would fall under such categorization are those who would attend or participate in political protests or be involved in organizations that associate themselves with leaders and activists of the Vietnamese American community. By implication, it would not be surprising then that some of the future leaders and activists of the anti-communist ideology's movement would come from such individuals or organizations.

The first is an e-survey of Vietnamese Student Associations (VSAs) from 15 universities: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Harvard University, California State University at Long Beach, North Carolina State University, University of Buffalo, University of Oklahoma, Wichita State University, University of Maryland at College Park, Kansas State University, University of California at Santa Barbara, Washington State University, Indiana University, University of South Florida, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of Washington. This e-survey was nonrandom and was conducted in spring of 2004. Its sample size was 102 and all respondents are members of VSAs from the noted universities. According to the e-survey literature, one of the key challenges is the response rate in which the "best" is about 40 percent. The response rate of the e-survey was 31 percent, short of the ideal but considered to be above the "typical." The second survey was conducted at the Vietnam Freedom March in Washington, D.C. on April 30, marking the 30th anniversary of the fall of South Vietnam. Its

sample size was 94, and about 94 percent of the respondents were under the age of 34. About a third of the respondents were born in the U.S., while almost two-thirds came to the U.S. sometime between 1979 to 1999. Respondents' state residency spanned 10 states.

Table 3

Survey of Young Vietnamese Americans on Protest Politics

1. Would you say that most Vietnamese in America can be trusted or that you need to be careful in dealing with Vietnamese?

Most Vietnamese can be trusted: 42%

Some Vietnamese can be trusted: 58%

Most Vietnamese cannot be trusted: 0%

2. Would you agree or disagree that Vietnamese in America should work together for mutual assistance?

Agree: 100 %

Disagree: 0 %

3. Please indicate how you personally would define the word “anti-communist” to mean today?

Fighting communism: 19%

Fighting for democracy and pluralism: 38%

Encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights, democratic norms and practices: 38%

Other: 3%

4. Please indicate how you think Vietnamese leaders in America today would define the word “anti-communist”?

Fighting communism: 47%

Fighting for democracy and pluralism: 29%

Encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights, democratic norms and practices: 18%

Other: 3%

5. Generally speaking would you say that mobilization on homeland issues provides a foundation for subsequent political mobilization on domestic issues or whether it serves as a distraction from it?

Provides mobilization on domestic issues: 50%

Serves as a distraction: 8%

Don't Know: 36%

Note. For more information on this survey, visit

<http://www.machsong.org/english/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=59>

The survey conducted at the Vietnam Freedom March focused on issues related to protest politics. This survey found a considerable gap between how the young would personally define “anti-communism” to mean today and their perception of how Vietnamese leaders in the U.S. would define “anti-communism.” Table 3 shows that 19 percent of respondents define “anti-communism” as fighting communism, 38 percent as fighting for democracy and pluralism, and 38 percent as encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights, democratic norms and practices. By contrast, 47 percent of respondents think that Vietnamese leaders define “anti-communism” as fighting for communism, 29 percent as fighting democracy and pluralism, and

18 percent as encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights, democratic norms and practices. On the question of whether mobilization on homeland issues provides a foundation for subsequent political mobilization on domestic issues or whether it serves as a distraction from it, 50 percent of respondents say that it provides mobilization on domestic issues, 8 percent say that it serves as a distraction, and 36 percent do not know. Table 3 also illustrates a great deal of trust and social obligation. No respondent marks that “most Vietnamese cannot be trusted” and all respondents agree that Vietnamese in America should work together for mutual assistance.

Meanwhile, the objective of the e-survey was to fulfill a gap in the study of public opinion of Vietnamese American students on a variety of issues. Table 4 shows that student respondents expressed considerable interests (top priority/very important) in encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights (61%) and fighting for democracy and pluralism (60%). The top concern was making money for themselves and their family (82%), followed by the desire of eliminating crimes in one’s neighborhood (76%) and making sure Vietnamese children retain their culture (66%). Table 4 also shows that respondents believed that involvement in the Vietnamese community was a priority. Confidence in leaders in the Vietnamese American community (50%) far exceeded the amount of the lack of confidence (32%), and the desire of cooperation between those leaders was relatively high; among various leaders and organizations, confidence in Vietnamese American elected leaders was the highest. Moreover, eighty percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that “People like me don’t have any say about what the Vietnamese American Community does.”

A substantive interpretation from the above descriptive results would be that if individuals from Vietnamese Student Associations and those who had participated in the Vietnam Freedom March are roughly reflective of young Vietnamese Americans who “consume” the social and political activities of the community, then some continuity of the anti-communist sentiment or identity among the younger generations is quite possible. That is, both surveys’ respondents indicate that they would support a non-communist, democratic heritage, especially one that emphasizes human rights, democracy and pluralism for Vietnam. Another substantive interpretation would be that if individuals from Vietnamese Student Associations and those who had participated in the Vietnam Freedom March perceive differently regarding what is “anti-communism” relative to the current leaders of the community, then redefinition of anti-communism is quite possible among younger Vietnamese Americans. That is, both surveys’ respondents indicate that they would support a non-communist identity, especially one that includes concerns for domestic issues and for more cooperation among community leaders. Descriptive results suggest or can’t rule out that if young Vietnamese Americans from the two surveys were to become community leaders and activists, they might be capable of organizing projects that reflect the concerns and needs of the growing and diverse members of the community on both domestic and homeland issues. And if these young Vietnamese Americans were to follow through on their beliefs regarding the need to work together for mutual assistance and to have cooperation among community leaders, they might be able to create a type of social capital that could bridge the noted “structural holes,” so as to maintain an “equilibrium state.” However, the above discussion of the results is not to establish the strength of correlation or causality. Rather, it is intended to inform future empirical research so that it can be more effective and efficient in answering how anti-communism can be organized for other purposes or reproduced to bridge internal divisions.

Table 4

Public Opinions of Members of Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) on the Vietnamese American Community

	Please indicate how important the following issues are to you personally.			
	Top Priority	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important At All
Making money for yourself or your family	37%	45%	5%	0%
Eliminating crime in your neighborhood	29%	47%	11%	0%
Making sure Vietnamese children retain their culture	32%	34%	24%	0%
Encouraging Vietnam to improve its policy on human rights	32%	29%	24%	0%
Fighting for democracy and pluralism	42%	18%	26%	0%

	Please indicate how much confidence you have for the following Vietnamese American organizations.			
	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very Much	Not at all
Vietnamese religious organizations	21%	24%	26%	8%
Vietnamese press	5%	21%	50%	10%
Leaders in Vietnamese American Community	21%	29%	24%	8%
Vietnamese American leaders in US Government and State/Local Government	29%	34%	13%	8%
Vietnamese political groups or organizations	24%	13%	39%	13%

	Please indicate whether you agree or disagree to the following statements.	
	Agree	Disagree
“People like me don’t have any say about what the Vietnamese American community does.”	16%	80%
“People like me don’t have any say about what the U.S. Government does.”	18%	78%

Note. For more information on this survey, visit

http://news.ncmonline.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=3d6af203641f552ae5dc9437176a19c0

Conclusion

After the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there has been a keen interest by the mainstream media to report on Vietnamese Katrina evacuees, who were initially and disproportionately among the first to return and to have rebuilt their community in East New Orleans. In fact, by the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, more than a majority of the residents and businesses had come back. However, many of the media reports tended to view the recovery by the Vietnamese Versailles Community through the Asian American model-minority myth. Vietnamese refugees and immigrants have come to rely on their culture of self-reliance (as associated with Asian Americans in general) to overcome Katrina. However, many members of the Vietnamese Versailles Community drew parallels to their migration displacements associated with the Vietnam War in reacting and responding to Hurricane Katrina. Consequently, they “put to use” and “drew on” the tales of overcoming “forced” migrations and catastrophic loss that their ethnic group experienced in 1954 when the country was split into “two countries,” and again in 1975, when the country was “reunified” under the communist regime (Leong, Airriess, Li, Chen, & Keith, 2007).

This could be seen through the Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, whose leadership not only spearheaded the rebuilding but was also transformed in post-Katrina. In the initial months after Katrina, a city’s rebuilding commission had recommended that a moratorium on construction in the heavily damaged neighborhoods be in place. In response, the church’s leadership decided to challenge the commission. It began to re-knit the community without permission. This strategy is paying off, demonstrating to the city that Vietnamese have intent to return. As a result, a city urban planning team is now working with community leaders, looking beyond the rebuilding phase, such as a future plan for a community center, a retirement home, and the area’s history and culture museum. The Vietnamese community has also shown the ability to build and lead community coalitions—including African Americans, environmental groups, and younger Vietnamese Americans—in getting the city to close a landfill that had opened near Village de l’Est after Katrina. Moreover, such community organizing created an opportunity for one particular leader, Joseph Anh Cao Nguyen, to successfully run as and become the first Vietnamese American U.S. Congressman. Not surprisingly, Congressman Nguyen’s policy towards Vietnam echoes the community’s persistent stance that the current Vietnamese regime needs to respect human rights, religious freedom, and political pluralism.

The above would seem to underscore the need to account for the fact that anti-communism can still be a unifying force and whose identity can still be reproduced by individuals or sub-groups acting in context in addressing the need of Vietnamese Americans. Indeed, as noted earlier, a trait unique to Vietnamese Americans is their high levels of ethnic solidarity. On the one hand, this solidarity facilitates the ability of Vietnamese Americans to organize protests and demonstrations easily and effectively in stating policy preference, especially on homeland issues. On the other hand, the same mechanisms that allow for strong group solidarity can result in volatile internal divisions and differences. Therefore, a key question is whether ethnic solidarity and mobilization on homeland issues provides a foundation for bridging the community’s “structural holes” and for subsequent political mobilization on domestic issues, respectively. It appears that the answer to the above depends on who is organizing or transcending the anti-communist ideology and for what purpose. In this article, there has been an attempt to explore a framework that can analyze anti-communism as a divisive factor and a unifying factor, as well as a social movement in which persistent and change are

parcel to anti-communism. By doing so, analyses on Vietnamese American anti-communism can be better understood, including how or who they include or exclude and whether they produce a form of social capital that bridges or creates internal divisions.

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