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**The politicisation of social anchoring: language support and community building
within Vietnamese refugee-led organisations in London**

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Annabelle Wilkins

annabelle.wilkins@manchester.ac.uk

University of Manchester

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Abstract

This article explores relationships between language support practices and community development in the context of Vietnamese Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) in London, which were formed in the 1980s to meet the needs of Vietnamese refugee communities. Drawing on interviews with practitioners working within London-based Vietnamese RCOs, the article examines the multi-faceted role of language support in contributing to refugee adaptation. It draws upon the conceptual framework of social anchoring to analyse how Vietnamese RCOs support refugees' initial adjustment and longer-term adaptation through multiple language support provisions, including interpreting and translation, English as a Second Language (ESOL) and Vietnamese language classes. A key contribution of the article is its analysis of the ways in which language-related anchoring processes have been politicised through shifting state-led approaches to integration, reductions in funding for RCOs and a growing emphasis on English language over support for minority language practices. The findings also demonstrate how social anchoring processes within RCOs have been reconfigured in response to the diverse needs of refugee communities.

Keywords: social anchoring, language support, refugee integration, Vietnamese communities

Introduction

Exploring the development of refugee-led organisations invites consideration of how refugees interact with official institutions and demonstrate individual and collective agency¹, often within hostile contexts of resettlement. In this sense, Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) can be encompassed within the concept of ‘refugeedom’, which Peter Gatrell (2017: 184) defines as the ‘shifting matrix of relations and practices to which refugees themselves have contributed’. Vietnamese refugees arrived in Britain having undergone hazardous journeys; many then experienced cultural isolation and socioeconomic exclusion (Robinson and Hale 1989). Vietnamese RCOs provided vital support in the early phases of resettlement, and some have evolved into longer-term sites of belonging. As this article demonstrates, however, the activities of Vietnamese RCOs have been impacted by political agendas that have in some cases threatened their survival.

This article explores the organisation of language support and its relationship to wider processes of community building in the context of Vietnamese RCOs in London. There is a considerable body of scholarship on the work of RCOs, encompassing their focus on meeting refugees’ immediate needs alongside facilitating longer-term integration (Griffiths et al. 2005; Mayblin and James 2019; Phillimore and Goodson 2010; Piacentini 2012). Language support provisions such as interpreting, translation and English as a Second Language (ESOL) are often included in discussions of the functions of RCOs, yet limited attention has been paid to the broader role of language in their emergence and development. Even less attention has been paid to how the organisation of language support within RCOs changes over time and in response to external impacts such as shifts in funding policies.

This article draws upon the concept of social anchoring (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2016; 2018) to theorise how Vietnamese RCOs contribute to refugee adaptation and

¹ While there is not scope for an extended discussion of agency, in this article I draw on relational understandings of agency that address the capacities of actors (individuals and collectives) to effect change within diverse opportunity structures at micro and macro levels (cf. Van Hear et al. 2018).

² The Vietnamese Resettlement Programme was overseen by the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam

settlement, with a particular focus on the role of language support. The article analyses how Vietnamese RCOs have been impacted by shifts in integration policy since the 1980s, as well as the impact of austerity measures that have reduced the funding available for civil society organisations (Phillimore 2012; Garratt et al. 2020). While the concept of social anchoring has previously been applied to individual migrant adaptation, I argue that it has productive potential for analysing how language support contributes to a sense of cultural identity and stability, while also critiquing the agency involved in the development of social anchors.

Vietnamese Refugee Community Organisations

After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, thousands of refugees from Vietnam left the country, often enduring dangerous boat journeys before being resettled in third countries including the United States, Australia, Canada and France (Barber 2020; Duke and Marshall 1995). Britain was at first reluctant to resettle Vietnamese refugees, but accepted a quota of 10,000 from camps in Hong Kong in 1979 (Robinson and Hale 1989). Later arrivals through family reunion cases and the Orderly Departure Programme resulted in an estimated 24,000 refugees by the early 1990s (Refugee Council 1991, cited in Barber 2018: 3). The majority of the 'first wave' of refugees were from South Vietnam and were resettled in the United States, while the refugees received by Britain were predominantly from North Vietnam and included Sino-Vietnamese who left after the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (Duke and Marshall 1995). Vietnamese refugees arriving in Britain were diverse in terms of their linguistic and cultural background and circumstances of migration, presenting a challenge to community formation (Barber 2020). Vietnamese RCOs in London were established during the early- to mid-1980s in response to the needs of newly-arrived refugees. They often began as mutual support groups that evolved into formal organisations, with many receiving funding from local authorities and institutions including the Refugee Council. As this article goes on to explore, their formation was also encouraged by the British government as part of a broader approach that emphasised refugee self-sufficiency while minimising government spending (JCRV 1983).

The development of Vietnamese RCOs is situated within the wider urban political climate of the 1980s, when issues of equality and identity politics were growing in visibility. In London, the Labour-led Greater London Council promoted anti-racist campaigns and supported the interests of minoritised ethnic groups as part of its challenge to Conservative government policies (Garbaye 2003; Egan 2006). The politicisation of language support activities within refugee-led organisations has been shaped by local as well as national political agendas.

In addition to the impact of changing policy approaches, Vietnamese community building has been shaped by the heterogeneity of the Vietnamese population in the UK, which now includes refugees from the former South Vietnam, refugees from the former North Vietnam, undocumented migrants, and international students (Barber 2018, 2020). These groups have been affected by distinct positionings in terms of socioeconomic background, immigration status and cultural identity, which have also impacted on the potential for a broader sense of collective belonging.

Experiences of collective identity among the Vietnamese diaspora have been profoundly shaped by their positioning within racialised discourses. In the United States, Lieu (2011) writes that Vietnamese refugees were situated 'at the intersection of two oppositional discourses that racialised them as both traumatised victims and model minorities' (Lieu 2011: 2). Parallels can be drawn in terms of how the Vietnamese have been positioned within British political discourse. Hirsch (2019) describes how 'colonial era stereotypes' were drawn upon to legitimise the Vietnamese refugees, including descriptions of them as 'obedient, servile workers' (Hirsch 2019: 95). As increasing numbers of Vietnamese arrived in Britain, discourses shifted towards viewing them as a threat to social cohesion that needed to be managed through dispersal (Robinson and Anderson 2003).

The Vietnamese Resettlement Programme is situated within a longer history of temporary quota-based refugee resettlement schemes in Britain, including the resettlement of Chileans in the early 1970s, as well as Bosnian and Kosovan refugees in the 1990s (Sales 2002; Robinson 1993). These programmes were instituted alongside increasingly restrictive immigration policies, and according to Dajani (2021: 61), they

‘inhabit an inherent tension between two discourses; humanitarianism and securitization’. The quota programmes have also coincided with times of economic crisis that enabled the government to justify the outsourcing of refugee determination to international humanitarian organisations, as well as transferring responsibility for the resettlement of refugees onto local voluntary sector organisations (Dajani 2021: 67). Several parallels can be drawn between the Vietnamese programme and the current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), which aimed to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria (later extended to other areas of the Middle East) by 2020 (see Dajani 2021). In both cases, refugees were pre-selected by UNHCR (often from camps in Hong Kong in the case of the Vietnamese refugees). Voluntary sector organisations have played a crucial role in the management of both resettlement schemes². However, unlike the refugees resettled by the VPRS, who are provided with local authority or private sector housing, the Vietnamese who arrived between 1975 and 1982 were accommodated in temporary camps or ‘reception centres’, often located in former military bases, before being dispersed around the country (Bailkin 2018; Hale 1993).

The British government’s response demonstrated a lack of preparedness for the needs of the Vietnamese refugees, particularly in regard to linguistic and cultural diversity. A shortage of Vietnamese-speaking interpreters resulted in charities relying on volunteers, several of whom were recently-arrived refugees themselves (Tipton and Wilkins, paper under review). An evaluation of the VPRS emphasised the importance of interpreting support, and the scheme has embedded Arabic-speaking caseworkers within resettlement teams where possible (UNHCR 2017: 12). Nevertheless, similar challenges in language support can be observed, with the evaluation noting that ‘working with locally-based freelance interpreters or volunteers had raised problems of confidentiality, specifically where the lines between interpreting, counselling and befriending had become blurred’ (UNHCR 2017: 12).

Government policies of refugee dispersal had a particularly damaging impact on Vietnamese refugees’ resettlement experiences. Refugees were placed in small clusters

² The Vietnamese Resettlement Programme was overseen by the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV) set up by the Home Office. The British Council for Aid to Refugees, Save the Children and Ockenden Venture were responsible for the running of the programme, with support from the British Red Cross and Women’s Royal Voluntary Service.

of between 4 and 10 households throughout the UK, based on the logic of 'burden sharing' and the availability of housing in dispersal areas (Robinson and Anderson 2003). Dispersal exacerbated problems of unemployment and isolation, and resulted in the secondary migration of Vietnamese refugees to London and other major cities (Robinson and Hale 1989; Robinson 1993). The growing concentration of Vietnamese refugees in London enabled the formation of social networks that gradually developed into community organisations (Griffiths et al. 2005).

The establishment of Vietnamese community organisations was also encouraged by the government as part of a strategy of minimising government expenditure through promoting refugee self-reliance. Towards the end of the Vietnamese reception programme, support groups were set up in areas of dispersal consisting of volunteers who provided practical and emotional support to refugees (Hale 1993). It quickly became apparent that the groups would not be adequate to meet the refugees' needs, particularly as they lacked members with the required linguistic skills (Hale 1993). During this time, the development of Vietnamese-led associations was also encouraged, though caution was expressed as to the extent to which they could provide for refugees' needs. A report by the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV) proposed that Vietnamese organisations could 'in the long run...provide a significant contribution towards certain aspects of the welfare of the community', but only alongside centrally-funded support (JCRV 1984: 20).

Research by Roberts (1998) identified that Vietnamese associations were established during three broad time periods. In London during the 'early' period (1979-1983), associations were set up in areas in which large numbers of refugees were housed, including in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Hackney. Outside of London, associations were set up in areas of dispersal, including in the cities of Sheffield (in the North of England), Cambridge (in the East of England) and Birmingham (in the Midlands). Those established from 1989 onwards reflected the emergence of communities on the outskirts of London, as well as associations which were set up to reduce 'out-migration' from dispersal areas (Roberts 1998). During the 1980s and 1990s, over 70% of Vietnamese refugees lived in a district where a Vietnamese association was operating, and the report listed 39 Vietnamese associations in total

(Roberts 1998). Since the 1990s, there has been a marked decline in the number of Vietnamese organisations. A 2007 report listed 24 Vietnamese organisations, 15 of which were in London (Sims 2007). The organisations listed in the 2007 report were contacted as part of this study; 13 were confirmed to be operating (8 of these in London), but none of the others could be traced.

The protracted decline in the number of Vietnamese organisations raises questions around longer-term community development. In addition to the challenges of policy changes and funding constraints, the sustainability of Vietnamese RCOs is affected by the differing needs and priorities of younger generations who have taken up fewer leadership positions within RCOs, reflecting broader issues of identity and belonging (Barber 2018: 22). This combination of factors raises important questions with regard to the long-term potential of Vietnamese community organisations as social anchors for the Vietnamese population.

Refugee Community Organisations, language support and integration

RCOs encompass a variety of groups that are developed by and for refugee and asylum seeking communities (Griffiths et al. 2005; Phillimore and Goodson 2010; Zetter et al. 2005). They are often formed to meet the needs of specific ethnic, national or faith groups, although some work with refugees of multiple ethnic, national and religious backgrounds. RCOs have been understood as a response to gaps in statutory support for refugees and asylum seekers (Mayblin and James 2019), as well as being conceptualised as agents of longer-term integration (Griffiths et al. 2005; Phillimore and Goodson 2010; Zetter et al. 2005). Language support is a key area of activity for RCOs, many of which offer non-professional interpreting and translation services (Griffiths et al. 2005; Piacentini 2012). Some organisations offer ESOL classes and other activities to support English language learning (Phillimore 2012). Others support the preservation of language heritage through providing classes in refugees' primary languages (Duke et al. 1999). Existing studies of RCOs largely focus on their language support activities as facilitators of economic and social integration, overlooking the complex relationships between migration, language and cultural identity (Temple 2010).

Much of the scholarship on RCOs is framed by the concepts of social capital and integration. RCOs have been theorised as contributors to integration through their role in developing bonding capital (relationships between co-ethnic, co-national or co-religious groups) and bridging capital (connections with other communities in the receiving society) (Zetter et al. 2005). However, studies of RCOs have found that the extent to which they can influence integration policy is limited by having to prioritise refugees' immediate welfare needs (Carey-Wood 1997; Griffiths et al. 2005). Phillimore and Goodson (2010) identified that RCOs' capacity to engage in policy transformation has been damaged by reductions in funding and the failure of institutions to adapt to the needs of refugees. Other studies have identified how dispersal policies have impeded RCO's work on longer-term integration (Zetter et al. 2006; Griffiths et al. 2005).

Critiques of research on RCOs have called for increasing attention to the heterogeneity within and between refugee groups. In a study of Francophone and Anglophone African refugee associations in Glasgow, Piacentini (2012) argues that much of the literature is 'constructed around a fixed notion of 'refugeeness'' which neglects the multiple and shifting priorities of refugee organisations:

Despite many groups originally organising around shared concerns with welfare related to immigration status, the aims and foci of such groups nonetheless evolve over time...[T]his is suggestive of a fluidity and malleability of collective identity, and a life-cycle of and within associations that often fails to surface in studies that centre upon RCO practices and experiences (Piacentini 2012: 8).

In addition to interrogating assumptions about the work of RCOs, the above points raise wider questions with regard to ideas and practices of community. The concept of community has been critiqued for its emphasis on bounded categories of identity and belonging (Neal et al. 2019; Studdert and Walkerdine 2016). Scholarship has since drawn upon concepts of encounter and conviviality to capture the unstable and negotiated nature of urban social interaction (Askins and Pain 2016; Neal et al. 2019). In research on Polish communities in Glasgow, Botterill (2018: 540) develops a relational perspective on community, defining it as 'a dynamic, interconnected and power-laden process involving multiple temporalities'. This approach is relevant to

considering how community practices within Vietnamese-led organisations are changing over time and in response to the priorities of different generations.

The activities of Vietnamese RCOs have been directly impacted by shifting political attitudes towards refugee integration. While understandings of integration are contested, a substantial body of scholarship conceptualises it as a multi-dimensional process involving migrants and the 'host' or receiving society (Ager and Strang 2008; Court 2017; Phillimore and Goodson 2010). Literature on integration policy in Britain has identified a predominantly linear progression from assimilationist approaches in the 1950s towards multicultural policies involving an acceptance of cultural diversity (Ashcroft and Bevir 2017; Phillimore 2012; for critiques of this linear framework, see Shain 2011). A number of scholars have observed a return to a more assimilationist stance within British politics, linking this with race-related disturbances in the North of England in 2001, the London terror attacks in 2005 and associated concerns around segregation among minoritised communities (Casey 2016; Phillimore 2012). D'Angelo (2015) notes that ethnic minority-led organisations were increasingly targeted based on perceptions that they reinforced social divisions, leading to reductions in funding for these groups. Similar processes have been implicated in recent funding reductions that threaten the viability of Vietnamese-led organisations.

Considering the role of language within integration emphasises the ways in which different forms of language support are politicised (Tipton 2019). English language proficiency has long been regarded by policymakers as a key facilitator of successful integration (Ager and Strang 2008; Court 2017). English language learning was prioritised during the reception of the Vietnamese refugees, although ESOL provision was often under-resourced and inconsistent (JCRV 1984). A growing emphasis on English language as part of a broader vision of British national identity was observed in the years following 2001, when poor English language proficiency was constructed as a threat to social cohesion (Aspinall and Hashem 2011). Alexander et al. (2007) propose that 'English language is used symbolically as a cultural boundary marker, which both defines minority ethnic "communities" and excludes them from the re-imagined national "community"' (Alexander et al. 2007: 783). Despite the emphasis on English language proficiency as a marker of integration, government funding for ESOL was

reduced by approximately 50% between 2008 and 2015, which has had particularly negative consequences for refugees and asylum seekers (Refugee Action 2016, cited in Court 2017: 397; see also Casey 2016: 97).

As part of the increasing policy emphasis on English language acquisition, interpreting and translation provisions have been increasingly viewed as inhibitors of integration (Easton 2006; Aspinall and Hashem 2011). This is despite recognition that translation and interpreting are compatible with a two-way view of integration, and that both are important in enabling integration, particularly due to the time needed to develop English language proficiency (Ager and Strang 2008: 182). Tipton (2019: 20) argues that language support should be viewed as a continuum rather than a zero-sum game, explaining that inappropriate support can result in individuals 'retreating' into familiar linguistic communities. English language learners are affected by multiple challenges, including a lack of ESOL provision at appropriate levels and the prevalence of unregulated interpreting services, both of which may lead to a greater reliance on non-professional sources of language support (Tipton 2019).

The politicisation of language support is situated within broader processes that have both enabled and constrained the work of RCOs at different times. Drawing on the theory of social anchoring as an alternative to traditional concepts of integration, this article analyses language support activities as anchors through which migrants forge new social connections that ground them in the receiving society. This approach has relevance for exploring Vietnamese community organisations as facilitators of stability and cultural identity, as well as examining how social anchors are embedded within wider political processes.

Social anchoring

The concept of social anchoring developed by Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016; 2018) refers to 'processes of finding significant footholds which enable migrants to acquire socio-psychological stability and security and function effectively in new life settings' (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018: 252). Social anchoring is situated within scholarship on ontological security in the context of increasing global mobility (Castles

and Miller 2009; Giddens 1991). Social anchoring highlights the importance of identity and psychosocial stability, which the author argues have been under-explored within theories of integration (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018: 254). The framework of social anchoring shares common features with the concepts of embedding, belonging and integration, all of which explore how migrants develop social connections in 'host' or majority societies (Barber 2020; Ryan 2011, 2018; Ryan and Mulholland 2015). Grzymala-Kazłowska argues, however, that social anchoring more effectively captures the 'simultaneous, multiple connections of immigrants to different places' and how social anchors or sources of stability change over time (2016: 1134).

The theory of social anchoring encompasses a range of social, cultural, material and cognitive dimensions. Language is defined as an example of a 'cultural anchor' alongside 'cultural transfers, norms and values' (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2016: 1131). In a study of Polish migrants in the UK, Grzymala-Kazłowska distinguishes between 'anchors contributing to the maintenance of Polishness' and 'those facilitating inclusion to British society' (2018: 258). Speaking Polish is discussed as an anchor that enabled participants to 'ground' their lives through connections within the Polish community (ibid.: 260). Learning English is analysed as a mechanism of anchoring in British society through facilitating connections beyond the Polish community (ibid.: 261). Although the author identifies individual and structural factors that impact upon English language learning, this does not extend into examining how language-related anchors become politicised.

Experiences of community building among the Polish migrants in Grzymala-Kazłowska's (2018) article differ markedly from those of the Vietnamese refugees in this study, reflecting fundamental differences in their migration circumstances, socioeconomic backgrounds and status in Britain. In Grzymala-Kazłowska's study, participants discussed how their lives were anchored through transnational connections with Poland, as well as through support from the established Polish community in the UK. In contrast, the majority of Vietnamese refugees had undergone traumatic experiences of displacement before their arrival in Britain. The dispersal of the Vietnamese refugees heightened their social isolation and resulted in secondary migration to London and other cities (Robinson 1993). These circumstances have

resulted in very different processes of social anchoring to those observed among Polish communities.

Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016) observes that theories of integration were developed in relation to permanent settlement in a receiving country, and are less adequate for understanding the adaptation of migrants within 'fluid' migration contexts. Anchoring is contrasted with concepts of uprootedness, which are often associated with the displacement experienced by refugees (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2016: 1134). However, other scholars have been critical of the assumptions of a territorialised relationship between identity and homeland (Malkki 1992). For Vietnamese refugees in Britain, relationships with the Vietnamese homeland are particularly contested, emphasising the need for a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses the multiple attachments that are formed by refugees in contexts of resettlement.

Social anchoring theory was developed in relation to individual processes of migrant adaptation, raising questions in regard to whether the concept is applicable for theorising macro-level processes of community formation. However, other scholars have drawn upon the concept of anchoring in relation to community organisations, including Botterill (2018), who describes a Polish community centre as 'an anchor for social bonding that is structural, interactional and emotional' (2018: 545). Operationalising the concept in relation to Vietnamese organisations involves a shift away from analysing the cognitive, behavioural and social actions of individual migrants to the policies and practices within organisations. This approach enables a critique of the politicisation of social anchoring through examining the relationships between government approaches to resettlement and refugee-led activities.

Research Methods

The research on which this article is based forms part of a wider study on language support provisions for asylum seekers and refugees in Britain since the 1940s (Tipton and Wilkins, under review). This article draws upon semi-structured interviews with senior staff members and activists from 6 London-based Vietnamese RCOs (8 interviews in total). These include organisations that provide a range of services, as well

as those with specific areas of focus including mental health and housing. Interviews were conducted between May 2019 and May 2020, following ethical approval from the University of Manchester (approval number 2019-6203-10204). Interpretation was offered to all interviewees, but those included in this article opted to be interviewed in English. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews conducted during May 2020 took place via online platforms. 24 Vietnamese organisations around the UK were initially contacted, but only those based in London responded. The London-based focus also reflects the author's long-term connections with Vietnamese communities in London that were developed during doctoral research (Wilkins 2019). London is also a centre of concentration of the Vietnamese population in the UK, with Census data showing that of the 29,459 people born in Vietnam living in England and Wales, over half (15,337) are living in London. While the small number of interviewees places some limitations on the data, participants were purposively accessed from different types of organisations, and include RCOs that were established during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

In contrast to studies that ask participants to reflect on their own language practices, this research aimed to understand how language support has been organised within Vietnamese RCOs and how this has changed over time. In this sense, the study aimed to capture the 'organisational biography' from its formation through subsequent stages of development (Fairbairn 2001: 25). Interview questions included motivations for setting up the organisation, how it evolved over time and the impact of policy changes on its development, as well as specific questions relating to language support. Participants had worked within each RCO for varying lengths of time (between 3 and 30 years), resulting in differing levels of organisational knowledge. Interview questions were designed to facilitate a balance of discussion of past and present-related topics. For interviews that took place in 2020, however, the profound impact of the pandemic meant that the present was a significant topic of discussion. Participants described how RCOs were struggling to ensure that particularly isolated Vietnamese people were receiving practical and emotional support. Organisations were also working to ensure that information about COVID-19 was translated into relevant languages.

Interviews focused primarily on topics relating to the practices of organisations, though some participants also offered personal reflections on their memories and experiences

of resettlement and how their senses of integration and belonging have changed over time. While this paper is focused on practices of language support and community building within organisations, the personal reflections of participants have also informed the analysis; indeed, the concept of social anchoring is highly relevant to the experience of individual Vietnamese migrants and refugees across different generations. In order to protect the identities of participants, pseudonyms have been used alongside references to the main activity of each organisation.

The remaining sections of this article extend concepts of social anchoring to explore the organisation of language support within Vietnamese RCOs. The empirical discussion begins by exploring the development of Vietnamese organisations, engaging with the concept of social anchoring to analyse the agency involved in their formation. The findings demonstrate how the politicisation of language support has impacted on Vietnamese RCOs and on wider processes of community building.

The role of language practices within social anchoring

This section combines data from interviews with staff members from Vietnamese RCOs and excerpts from the autobiography of Vu Khanh Thanh, who worked as an interpreter in a reception camp for refugees and later founded a Vietnamese RCO in the London borough of Hackney. The context in which the first Vietnamese RCOs were formed highlights the multiple challenges that were faced by newly resettled refugees. One participant described this period as a 'state of emergency' in which refugees arrived in London without housing or employment (Duong, housing organisation, May 2020); their limited English language proficiency also posed a barrier to seeking help from mainstream services. Prior to the establishment of formal organisations, Vietnamese people with bilingual language skills provided informal support to fellow refugees. These individuals were frequently at the forefront of developing formal organisations. Recalling his work with refugee families in London, Vu (2016) describes the sense of rupture felt by refugees and the significance of language within this experience:

We did not simply interpret the words of the fieldworkers, we had to...explain concepts and processes to the new families who were used to a Vietnamese way

of doing things...Everyone I would take from the resettlement camp had a similar look in their eyes...a type of disconnection, as if they had discovered that they were no longer anchored to a shore but were now adrift in the sea again (Vu 2016: 160).

In addition to meeting refugees' immediate resettlement needs, language support was crucial in addressing ongoing social isolation. As one participant recalled, 'even after several years, some refugees were anxious about leaving their homes because they did not know how to communicate with English people' (Duong, housing organisation, May 2020). Vietnamese associations provided practical and psycho-social support that enabled refugees to develop new connections within an uncertain and often exclusionary environment, thus providing mechanisms of anchoring in the receiving society.

The majority of interpreting and translation offered within Vietnamese associations was non-professional. Some staff members had worked as interpreters in reception centres, but most had been recruited without training or qualifications. Some Vietnamese RCOs employed in-house interpreters, but most participants reported that interpreting and translation work was often carried out by staff members with other responsibilities, not all of whom had professional training or qualifications. Participants emphasised the importance of trust and personal relationships in giving refugees the confidence to access language support. Even as professional interpreters became increasingly available thanks to the availability from the mid-1980s of interpreter certification and training schemes, many Vietnamese people would continue to draw on the non-professional interpreting support provided by Vietnamese RCOs because of their prior relationship and reputation within the community.

Vietnamese associations developed relatively rapidly from informal mutual support groups into formal organisations. Several participants recalled that there were around 40 Vietnamese organisations in London in the early 1980s. Vietnamese RCOs could access funding from the Refugee Council until 1987, which marked the end of the funded Vietnamese resettlement programme. Local authority funding was also available, reflecting the multicultural policies of the time in which support was offered to minority

ethnic groups (D'Angelo 2015). Participants discussed how the concerns of Vietnamese refugees gradually changed towards pursuing employment and learning English while maintaining a sense of Vietnamese cultural identity. Vietnamese language classes were established as a response to communication problems within families and a fear that the second generation would lose connection to their language heritage. One participant recalled that there was a 'strong network' of Vietnamese language schools, with 'at least one Vietnamese school in every borough' during the 1980s and 1990s (Hien, Vietnamese language school, May 2019).

The impact of the trauma of forced migration and socioeconomic exclusion were manifest in the growing visibility of mental health problems among some members of the Vietnamese population. A specialist Vietnamese mental health organisation was founded in 1989 to offer linguistically and culturally sensitive support. Its founder emphasised the importance of bilingual counselling in enabling refugees to express their emotions, commenting that feeling unable to communicate was often linked with a broader crisis of identity. While the above example is more relevant to individual than collective identity, it also emphasises the importance of specific language practices as anchors in terms of supporting psycho-social stability.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Vietnamese RCOs received funding to provide ESOL classes, often through grants that were oriented towards English for employment. One participant described how refugees preferred to go to ESOL classes at a Vietnamese organisation rather than at local colleges because they felt more supported and viewed classes as a 'chance to make friends with people in the Vietnamese community' (Sang, welfare organisation, May 2020). This contrasts with Grzymala-Kazlowska's (2018) study, in which English classes offered the opportunity to make connections across diverse communities, although it is not clear whether the classes were provided by Polish community organisations. Attending ESOL classes exclusively within the Vietnamese organisation could be seen to restrict opportunities for wider social connection.

In a discussion of the provision of ESOL classes among Vietnamese RCOs during the 1990s, one participant described how organisations were required to ensure that

service users attended ESOL classes and to report any non-attendance to the authorities: 'anyone who refused to attend English classes got told that their benefits would be stopped' (Sang, welfare organisation, May 2020). This finding highlights the conditionality of relationships between ESOL provision, employment and welfare benefits, and connects with the broader politicisation of language-related anchors within Vietnamese community organisations.

The politics of social anchoring: policy changes and funding constraints

Access to government funding and support from large resettlement institutions resulted in the development of Vietnamese RCOs throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Tensions were already becoming apparent during this period, however, as competition for funding and resources became more acute. This becomes clear in an excerpt from Vu's memoir, in which he describes how Vietnamese RCOs felt that they were being forced to compete with larger organisations:

The Home Office stated that it had created the national resettlement programme to develop Vietnamese self-help groups and...they were happy to see we had made 'considerable progress'. They could not comprehend that we were competing against agencies like the British Refugee Council or Refugee Action for funding to achieve similar aims (Vu 2016: 184-185).

The above excerpt is situated within a wider critique of the relationship between the Home Office and refugee-led organisations, in which RCOs felt that their aspirations for self-determination were being ignored. This points to a contrast between the priorities of Vietnamese RCOs and the government's more instrumental view of their role, providing an early example of how the activities of Vietnamese RCOs were being shaped and constrained by the politics of refugee resettlement.

The majority of participants pinpointed the early 2000s as a period in which the financial positions of RCOs became increasingly insecure. The changes that took place during this period can be summarised as an increase in the complexity of funding processes, greater competition for funds, and a restriction in funding for single-ethnicity

groups and minority language speakers. Participants described how the increased bureaucracy of the funding process restricted the language support that community organisations could provide. Applications had to specify what percentage of the budget would be used for interpreting and translation, which often led to language support being under-resourced despite being vital to the majority of projects. RCOs that had previously contracted professional interpreters shifted towards a reliance on in-house staff who spoke relevant languages but were not professionally trained interpreters. This raises concerns with regard to how the politicisation and under-resourcing of particular forms of language support has affected refugees' access to effective interpreting and translation provision within RCOs.

External constraints on the funding of Vietnamese organisations have intersected with changing language needs and dynamics within Vietnamese communities. Participants described how some refugees 'no longer need the same level of support' with welfare, employment or housing-related needs (Son, cultural organisation, May 2020). Vietnamese RCOs remain an important source of social and practical support, however, particularly for older people of Vietnamese heritage. Despite the increasing availability of interpreting within statutory services, older and isolated people often prefer to seek language support from within RCOs. This suggests the continued presence of an informal economy of interpreting and translation within Vietnamese communities.

Reductions in funding for minoritised ethnic groups exemplify the politics of social anchoring, whereby activities that are oriented towards the maintenance of ethnic or cultural identity become viewed as threats to social cohesion. This has had a particularly damaging impact on organisations that are focused on preserving the Vietnamese language, which were compatible with the multiculturalist approach prevalent when they were established, but were caught up within shifting political ideologies. Following the 2008 financial crisis, third sector organisations underwent dramatic reductions in funding. One participant described how the funding cuts generated a sense of competition between different ethnic groups:

Now in this district there are over 100 different ethnicities. If they give funding to one group, others begin to ask, 'why did they get it'? The government only

help those who do not know English...but they cannot afford to help Vietnamese people learn Vietnamese (Hien, Vietnamese language school, May 2020).

In the context of austerity, reductions in support for minority language speakers have been justified as a way of strengthening communities through reducing divisions between groups. Interrogating local authority discourses of 'resilience' that emerged between 2009 and 2014, Garratt et al. (2020) argue that the removal of support for minority languages has resulted in increased separation as the needs of diverse groups are ignored. The authors argue that the construction of the English language as neutral and other languages as a threat to the resilience of multicultural communities '...acts to veil how other languages are marginalised and their users remade as foreign and separate, even as they engage in shared public spaces' (Garratt et al. 2020: 12). Although there is not scope here for an expanded discussion of resilience, the above point is relevant for understanding how language-related anchors are politicised. In contrast to ESOL, which is regarded as an anchoring mechanism because it facilitates connection between groups, other language practices are frequently regarded as impeding anchoring as they are oriented towards supporting cultural identities that are regarded as 'Other' or 'non-British'. Participants in this study did not regard speaking Vietnamese as an impediment to integration; instead, being multilingual was viewed as an 'important skill' and 'connection to Vietnamese identity' that should be preserved alongside learning English (Ly, Vietnamese language school, May 2020). This demonstrates that movement between language practices can be understood as enabling rather than preventing or slowing integration, recognising the multi-dimensional nature of social anchoring.

Moving beyond the 'Vietnamese community': alliances and tensions

Vietnamese RCOs have responded to policy changes and funding constraints in a variety of ways, from those who have formed alliances with other groups to others who have aligned themselves with broader integration agendas. The trajectories of different groups can be understood in relation to theories of the life cycles of community associations. Of particular importance to this article is how organisations evolve from an 'associative network' towards 'ideological convergence' in which they align with

other minoritised groups (Werbner 1991, cited in Piacentini 2012: 10-13). Ideological convergence often includes moving away from the 'refugee' label and mobilising around 'ethnicised' identities (ibid.: 15). Viewed from the perspective of social anchoring, alignment with other organisations can be understood as a process of connection within the broader landscape of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) third sector organisations. An examination of the recent history of relationships between Vietnamese community organisations and other minoritised groups reveals the complexities involved in this process. A London-based Vietnamese organisation was facing closure in 2018 following years of shrinking funding and the retirement of key staff. The organisation was encouraged by the local authority to join forces with two Southeast Asian diaspora organisations, based on the premise that a combined association would enable the groups to access more funding. However, the heterogeneity between the three groups made the merger problematic:

The experiences of the groups were extremely different – Filipino migrants are often younger; their English is often at a higher level...but they also face issues like domestic violence, exploitation, trafficking. The three groups have very different languages, cultural backgrounds, which made it harder to bring them together (Toan, second generation activist, May 2020).

The differing backgrounds of the three groups contributed to divisions that ultimately resulted in the failure of the collaboration, and the Vietnamese organisation has since closed. Some of its former users now attend a Chinese-led organisation, but this is largely dependent on whether they speak Cantonese. Piacentini (2012: 18) observes that the impact of decreasing funds and policy changes will result in a number of possible outcomes: some RCOs may redefine themselves as a social or cultural group, while others may develop into broader BAME-focused organisations. One participant in this study observed that 'sticking too closely to the refugee label' risked alienating people who wished to distance themselves from memories of displacement, as well as younger people who feel disconnected from the refugee experience (Le, cultural organisation, May 2020). In this sense, alignment with other communities may be part of a process in which groups identify with different anchors (such as their Vietnamese or refugee identity) in different ways at different times, emphasising anchoring as a

fluid process. The case of the stalled merger between the three Asian organisations may reflect externally imposed expectations of convergence that overlooked the different needs and goals of each group. Processes of change within Vietnamese organisations are intertwined with the emergence of new practices of social anchoring that are marked by tensions, yet also articulate new possibilities for the future of Vietnamese community formation.

Intercultural engagement and changing practices of community

The changes that have taken place within one Vietnamese RCO exemplify what Botterill (2018: 546) describes as 'overlapping experiences of community' in which diverse histories of migration, inter-generational tensions and structural issues have come together to influence change in organisational practices. A staff member recalled how the impact of austerity had brought the organisation under threat of closure in 2015:

We had to find a new mission for the centre - still ensuring that the Vietnamese members are at the core, but other diverse communities are being brought in (Le, cultural organisation, May 2020).

The organisation developed a range of activities designed to bring Vietnamese and other communities together, including dance workshops, alternative therapies and gardening groups. Undertaking such significant change has entailed some tensions and anxieties. The name of the organisation was changed as part of 'opening to other communities', yet several members found it difficult to accept this change (Le, cultural organisation, May 2020). More recently, the organisation has been supporting Vietnamese people who have experienced trafficking and exploitation. For these young people, the opportunity to receive linguistically and culturally sensitive support has been important, yet they have very different experiences and backgrounds to other Vietnamese members.

In some respects, the above changes can be understood as a pragmatic response to funding constraints in which the diversification of activities has secured a more viable future. However, the emphasis on intercultural contact also connects with approaches

to understanding 'meaningful encounters' between different social groups (Askins and Pain 2011; Mayblin et al. 2016; Valentine 2008). Scholars have drawn upon Pratt's (2002) concept of the 'contact zone' to theorise how different groups form new ways of relating to one another, often in contexts of conflict (Askins and Pain 2011; Mayblin et al. 2016). When applied to the framework of social anchoring, these perspectives shed light on how intercultural practices can act as anchors that bridge social and cultural difference, enabling a sense of connection between diverse communities. For Vietnamese organisations, maintaining the anchors that have enabled a sense of stability and cultural identity must be balanced against those that contribute to anchoring within the wider community.

The future of Vietnamese organisations: reconfiguring social anchors

Reflecting on the future of Vietnamese organisations, several participants emphasised that engaging younger generations and recently arrived Vietnamese migrants will be crucial for ensuring their sustainability. Practical changes to the structure of organisations are already taking place, including appointing members of the second generation to steering boards. These changes form part of a broader view of community development as shifting towards a more diasporic perspective in which boundaries between different groups within the Vietnamese population are increasingly recognised as fluid rather than fixed. This recognition was regarded as an important aspect to incorporate into activities that aim to bring people together, particularly those involving shared language heritage. Some participants emphasised the role of community organisations in supporting language and communication in the longer term, particularly with regard to the preservation of the Vietnamese language.

Alongside considerations relating to the future of Vietnamese organisations, participants drew attention to advances in digital technologies that are influencing broader changes in community practices. Some participants observed that younger generations are members of multiple online communities and are less likely to prioritise a physical meeting place. Another described a Facebook group that offers informal English language tuition for Vietnamese migrants working in nail salons. For some members, however, face-to-face contact is likely to remain a key source of support.

The emergence of online communities echoes Grzymala-Kazłowska's (2018: 265) observation of the 'simultaneity of anchors in different geographical, cultural and social spaces', as migrant communities maintain connections with various types of 'footholds' which change over time and between different generations.

Conclusion

This article has traced the development and language support practices of Vietnamese RCOs in London since their formation in the early 1980s, highlighting their multi-faceted role in providing practical and emotional support to refugees, as well as their ongoing significance as sites of collective cultural identity for the London-based Vietnamese diaspora. Through the application of social anchoring theory to practices of language support within RCOs, the article has demonstrated that interpreting and translation, ESOL and Vietnamese language classes are important mechanisms of social anchoring that work alongside one another and change over time.

The article has extended the conceptual potential of social anchoring by demonstrating how social anchoring processes operate within and between refugee-led organisations, as well as providing new evidence of how language-related anchors change in response to the needs of multiple generations within the Vietnamese diaspora. It has also explored how anchoring practices have the potential to connect refugee-led associations across different ethnic and cultural identities and migration histories, while also drawing attention to the challenges of this work. For the Vietnamese communities supported by the organisations in this study, the ongoing provision of interpreting and translation support and Vietnamese language classes alongside English language support is regarded as crucial for the maintenance of cultural identity and connections between generations. These findings support previous studies that advocate for multiple forms of language support within two-way approaches to integration (Tipton 2019; Ager and Strang 2008). The concept of social anchoring captures the multi-dimensional complexity of adaptation and settlement processes, and enhances our understanding of how social connection takes place within and beyond refugee communities.

The article has not only shed new light on the multi-faceted role of language in social anchoring, but has also shown how language-related anchors become politicised. The politics of social anchoring are revealed in the early tensions between government-led resettlement policies and the objectives of Vietnamese organisations, as well as in more recent shifts that have resulted in the marginalisation of specific forms of language support. RCOs have been impacted by the (re)turn to assimilationist approaches to integration combined with austerity, placing the future of some Vietnamese RCOs into doubt. The threat to language-related social anchors is also bound up with the continuing racialisation of immigration policy, within which language functions as a marker of difference that acts to legitimise restrictive immigration controls, and minoritised groups who do not speak English are portrayed as threats to social cohesion (Blackledge 2006; Erel et al. 2016). The findings of this article are relevant to the challenges of supporting migrants and refugees in the context of hostile immigration policies (Humphris 2019). Recent studies have emphasised the complexity of migrants' social anchoring within the context of Brexit (Trąbka and Pustulka 2020), yet further research is required to examine how multiple anchoring processes are impacted by state-led policies and wider power relations.

The findings of this research have implications for policy, particularly with regard to integration and the linguistic and cultural needs of refugee communities. The article highlights the importance of RCOs in providing multiple forms of language support, including those that facilitate stability and ontological security alongside activities that are oriented towards connecting with the receiving society. At the same time, the article emphasises how language support for refugees is enabled and constrained by shifting political agendas.

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