

Relational Bonds as Method: Oral History and Design within the Vietnamese Diaspora

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Abstract

Despite the Vietnam War becoming one of the most documented and publicized conflicts in recent history, nuanced discussion and intersectional historical data of the Vietnamese diaspora remains limited. Invisibility and erasure of this community has contributed to reductive and racist perspectives on the war and ongoing intergenerational trauma. Current archives prioritize American viewpoints while minimizing and often dehumanizing Vietnamese perspectives.

Historical archives on this conflict need to include more Vietnamese diasporic voices, not only to gain accuracy and insight into the past, but to also allow people of Vietnamese descent to process and heal generations of trauma caused by continuous imperialist occupation and civil war. The complex tasks of remembrance, decolonization, and possible Vietnamese reunification will become even more challenging once first-hand experiences are no longer available and survivors of The Vietnam War pass away.

The primary research question for this project explores how storytelling and oral history can decolonize, deconstruct and challenge typical archetypes, narratives and taxonomy related to Vietnamese refugees found in historical archives and current media resources. Secondly, this research work strives to understand how future generations of the Vietnamese community can move towards understanding multiple political and social perspectives of conflict through oral histories. Thirdly, the latter part of this project explores how time and relationship building influences research and design, with a focus on the Vietnamese diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area.

Land Acknowledgement

This project discusses the effects of silenced histories and forced migration on marginalized communities. This paper also cites Indigenous writers and frameworks of knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to first acknowledge the land on which the Ontario College of Art and Design is situated and where this work was conducted.

I am a settler of Vietnamese ancestry and a child of refugees. I am an uninvited guest on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. This meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. I am grateful for the privileges and opportunities given to me by living and working on this land. Beyond land acknowledgements, I recognize that there is still much more work to be done in dismantling colonial frameworks and white supremacy.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Vietnam War was a violent conflict that took place in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos between November 1, 1955 - April 30, 1975, officially fought between the regimes of Communist North Vietnam and (South) Republic of Vietnam (Mendand, 2018, para. 5). It is “the most chronicled, documented, reported, filmed, taped, and - in all likelihood - narrated war in history, and for those very reasons, it would seem, the least subject to understanding or to any American consensus” (Rowe, 2002, p. 197). Technological advancements have allowed shocked viewers around the globe unprecedented access to the conflict, playing out in real time.

This period was also the one when black and white photography grew and became a commodity for mass consumption...the convergence of technology, opportunity and the freedom to carry out the operation for journalists made Vietnam War a period when stories were told in a liberated manner, sometimes even against the narrative expected and desired by the state and its machinery. The images that became iconic were the ones that created a massive wave of emotional shock and identification amongst the public, especially in the west (Singh, 2016, 2).

As time has progressed, people living in a post-war Vietnam, displaced Vietnamese folks and their children absorb widely shared imagery, having to reflect on these portrayals and piece together narratives of their complicated history. Meanwhile, personal accounts of the Vietnamese perspective of the war remain limited and fragmented. This project aims to explore how oral history can help cross-generational communication and understanding. The original proposal for this project involved interviewing participants to collect stories for a digital archive. However, as time progressed, the immense effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other

political factors dramatically changed the initial objective of this work. Participant-led pivots turned the focus being shifted towards unexpected but crucial community building outcomes.

1.1 Historical Context

Upon examining popular media, memorial sites, academic texts and archives, there is a noticeable absent presence: the Vietnamese people. This particular side of the story and history has joined the “vault of tragic metaphors... we became exiles, enemies of history... what is epic in one country is inconsequential in another... no real biographies, no real history. Invisibility, it seemed, was our fate” (Lam, 2005, p. 30).

Over 3 million people became refugees after the Vietnam War. To self-identify as a refugee means to fundamentally view yourself through the lens of another. “Othering consists of ‘objectification of another person or group’, or ‘creating the other’, which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual” (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003, p. 187). Adopting the broad and often reductive “refugee” identity requires an individual to define themselves by what they are not: not a citizen, not normal, not wanted. Displacement and lack of belonging inevitably impacts one’s cultural identity, “an individual’s sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life” (Jameson, 2007, p. 1).

1.2 Refugees and self-definition

Refugees predominantly exist in the mainstream public consciousness in two ways: firstly, they are seen as “the other” and secondly, they are externally defined and connected through a perceived shared history of collective trauma, potentially leading to backlash and shunning once they enter and attempt to resettle in a new country (Sim, 2016, para. 5). As a result, refugees fleeing the dangers of poverty, violence, political persecution and/or climate disasters are typically exposed to a limited, imbalanced and socially constructed narrative about

their homelands, traditions and place in society. “If screen memories from movies like *Apocalypse Now* or *The Deer Hunter* are what Americans remember, they are what I and many other Vietnamese Americans want to forget: peasants massacred on a boat, prisoners playing Russian roulette with the Viet Cong” (Nguyen, 2006, p. 13). Displacement and violence can greatly affect memory, as personal recollections of past events become linked to popular media representations of Vietnam and the war:

Inevitably woven through with threads of others' memories, stitched with other images... This instability means that their individual memories, and the collective memory of their families or their communities, are literally shot through with American memories of the war as a violent spectacle, a bloodbath of epic proportions and staggering body counts. Whether Vietnamese Americans want to or not, they, too, must see through the sniper's telescope of American vision about the war, so vivid and narrow. Vietnamese Americans have the unnerving experience of seeing themselves in those crosshairs of American solipsism and American memory (Nguyen, 2006, p. 25).

Self-definition of one's identity is replaced with an external definition of oneself (as “the other”), accompanied by an unrelenting fear of scarcity, often working to survive through resourcefulness and assimilation. Over the last decade, there has been steadily growing literature on Vietnamese refugees and resilience. One longitudinal prospective cohort study of Vietnamese refugees arriving in Norway in 1982 examines the psychological distress of Vietnamese families after 23 years of resettlement and paternal predictors for their children's mental health. The study concludes that “children of refugees cannot be globally considered at risk for mental health problems. However, the preceding PTSD in their fathers may constitute a specific risk for them” (Vaage et al., 2011, Conclusion). Risks were determined to be significantly

lowered if parental figures were able to create social networks and participate “in a Norwegian network three years after arrival.” (Vaage et al., 2011, Results). From this, it can be assumed that opportunities for socialization, genuine connection to your new community and to an extent, assimilation decreases risk factors for refugees and their resettled families.

1.3 Note on researcher positionality

The history and current contextualization of the Vietnamese-Canadian diaspora is deeply personal, as my family are Vietnamese refugees who resettled in Canada and the United States. I identify as a second-generation Vietnamese-Canadian. My family members, including my parents, experienced reeducation camps, violence during the conflicts and forced migration both within Vietnam and internationally. My parents met aboard a refugee boat in the early 1980s and lived in a camp on a Malaysian island, before coming to Canada in the late 80s. I believe my positionality as a part of the Vietnamese diasporic community, paired with my ability to speak two dialects of Vietnamese have informed the tone and depth of this research.

Speaking in a Northern dialect allowed me to better connect to people from a region that likely experienced the Communist Party’s rise to power and eventual expansion. My Southern dialect allowed me to speak with folks who came from southern regions (particularly the Saigon area) to the Greater Toronto Area. Many people from the city were able to gain access to refugee status through affiliation with the South Vietnamese or American government. Hearing stories from both folks living in rural areas and those living in larger cities gave a wider range of perspectives on the governments of that time, the escalating conflict and what influenced their subsequent migration.

In addition, I began this project working in a corporate design setting. As my time in graduate school progressed, I left this design role and began to seek out design practices less centered in output creation and capitalism, examining how research and design could be less

extractive in nature. The research work presented in this MRP is a reflection of that exploration, striving to work with a more intersectional and anti-capitalist lens.

Lastly, the majority of this paper is written with a “we” pronoun, instead of a more individualistic “I”. This is in reference to “we” as a community of diasporic Vietnamese folks, but can also apply to “we” as a community of practice across inclusive design and research. The work written about is built off of existing ideas brought forth from influential scholars and designers. Some of this tonal choice can be attributed to many Asian cultures leaning more collectivist ideations (Newman, 2019) compared to Western cultures. However, it is worth noting that many other cultures would also be considered collectivistic (including many countries in Latin America and Africa), but limited writing and research has been formally published on these social practices (Newman, 2019, para. 27).

Chapter 2 - Postmemory

This chapter will explore the relationship between memories and PTSD within families. Vietnamese people have experienced the effects of imperialism and displacement over multiple generations, impacting the way families are shaped and navigated. Many researchers began exploring the effects of intergenerational trauma, which takes place when the cumulative effect of traumatic events “becomes inscribed psychically and even bodily by all social members, and wittingly or unwittingly gets passed on long after the last survivor” (Prager, 2016, p. 14). This occurs when massive traumas “continue to shape the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconsciously organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children” (Prager, 2016, p. 14). In ‘*The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*’, Hirsch writes, “these moments from their past were the stuff of dreams and nighttime fears for, as a child, it was at night, particularly, that I imagined myself into the lives they were passing down to me, no doubt without realizing it” (Hirsch, 2012, p. 4). We can see the cycle of trauma continue as the children and loved ones of survivors interpret and create “postmemory” and “received history” (Hirsch, 2012, p. 83). These concepts explore narrative hybrids that interweave both the primary traumatic events and the ways they are passed down (Young, 1998, p. 669). Analyzing the complex and long-term effects of both individual and collective trauma has shown that these memories are not just a recollection of the past, they precisely register the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned (Caruth, 1995). Therefore, traumatic memories are not “simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness” (Caruth, 1995, p. 168).

The price paid to survive atrocities can unknowingly continue cycles of collective trauma, affecting the quality of life and mental health of future generations who did not live through the initial traumatic event. Patterns of intergenerational acts of transfer have been observed in the

study of and media created about communities affected by documented violent events, such as the survivors of the Holocaust and residential schools in Canada. We can see examples of the manifestation of these traumas in popular media, ranging from the graphic novel *Maus* (Spiegelmann, 1980) to the book of essays *All Our Relations* (Talaga, 2020) to the popular children's cartoon *Steven Universe* (Lewis, 2020).

2.1 Postmemory and intergenerational trauma

The study of intergenerational trauma, memory and oral histories is not entirely new. But what happens to someone's emotional world when traumatic memories are not acknowledged and processed in private/internal and public/external spaces? In the case of the Vietnamese diaspora, these stories and experiences are minimized or not accounted for at all. Though large Vietnamese communities have resettled across North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, they are still constantly bombarded with the dominant American narrative, reminded that they serve as a background character in their own history, present in the public's knowledge of the war as an anonymous and disposable brown body, a sexual object, a piled up corpse, an impoverished refugee and as a part of a controversial and international embarrassment in America's history. "Stereotypes of corrupted officials to inept and effeminate warriors in the South Vietnamese army, invisible and/or superhuman and/or barbaric warriors in the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong, prostitutes, and simple-minded, backwards peasants" (Pike, 2018, p. 2). The names of the stateless and dead Vietnamese are not included in any famous, manicured and honored memorial sites in the United States, Canada, Australia or Vietnam. Their trauma and loss falls into "the dustbin of the unmournable or the ungrievable" (Butler, 2020, para. 1), not deemed as worthy of public mourning and remembrance, after a long civil war that killed over 3.5 million people and displaced another 3 million. The Vietnamese remain in limbo and invisible in history, as a distorted view of oneself emerges as "a history that literally has no place, neither in the

past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (Caruth, 1995, p. 151).

2.2 The role of storytelling

While some populations escaping conflict may see widespread acknowledgement of a large historical event (such as a war occurring), many cultures have normalized a lack of intentional effort dedicated to bearing witness to individual and community grief. Sharing of these painful experiences may even be stigmatized in some spaces. "While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and the documents in vast supply, the trauma - as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock - has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of" (Laub, 2013, p. 59). Without efforts to bear witness or opportunities and spaces to speak, resettled Vietnamese communities have for the most part, remained silent. During interviews with children of Holocaust survivors, researchers have discussed the role of silence. Children rarely asked and parents explained next to nothing, creating ambiguous and weighted spaces. "The forbidden memory of death manifested itself only in the form of incomprehensible attacks of pain, often concealed behind a screen of words, always the same words, an unchanging story, a tale repeated over and over again, made up of selections from the war" (Fresco, 1984, p. 237).

Symptoms of PTSD and C-PTSD (complex post traumatic stress disorder) state that survivors of trauma often experience carrying unprocessed, living memories, never fully shared but continuing in an internal loop. In the context of displaced Vietnamese communities, their stories were often erased from official histories. In addition, veterans who fled lacked recognition and were often cut off from their homeland for several decades. The symptoms of PTSD demonstrate that memory is a bodily experience that cannot be escaped, even if one is long removed from the land in which the trauma took place. Dreams, nightmares, guilt and both moral and physical wounds act as constant reminders of a painful past (Lacroix, 2013, p. 689).

Though The Vietnam War has been extensively photographed and filmed - producing iconic, widely shared images - the majority of these visuals are taken through a Western gaze, reporting on the American involvement in this conflict. They rarely contain the multitude of perspectives of a complex population trying to survive a civil war; they lack the individual stories, memories, nuances, contradictions, emotions and internal conflicts.

Conducting and archiving oral history can provide an avenue for release, witnessing grief and a more multi-dimensional sharing and recording of complex histories. For the individual participant, it is an opportunity to finally speak and process events, as traumatic memories are not “fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become ‘narrative memory’ that is integrated into a completed story of the past” (Caruth, 1995, p. 160). For the audience, it is a chance to actively listen to the lived experience of a typically marginalized voice and deepen understanding of an emotionally complex historical event.

On a systemic level, an intersectional lens to the creation and archiving of oral history can serve as a pathway to represent diversified voices in repositories and decolonize the current taxonomy of historical archives, which can often be “places of violence, reflecting state power and the voices of the powerful whilst silencing the marginalized - a kind of strategic ‘forgetting’” (Derrida, 1996, p. 50). We see examples of this in the few archives featuring Vietnamese artifacts, where the pejorative “gook” remains a key search term, while terms such as ‘courage’, ‘honor’, ‘service’ appear frequently when referring to American efforts in the Vietnam War (Bui, 2018, p. 46). The erasure and continued silence of the Vietnamese diaspora only adds to the cycle of shame and extreme loss this community is grappling with.

Therefore, by creating intentional spaces for marginalized people to speak and working to legitimize their personal accounts, we make space for the ‘mythic memory’ of the victims within the “overall representation of the past without it becoming an obstacle to rational historiography” (Young, 1998, p. 668). Instead of only prioritizing a hyper-precise, objective and sequential historical narrative, oral history allows its creators to infuse emotionality, opposing

viewpoints and multiple narratives into a multivocal history. These messier, non-linear stories create meaning through presenting how complex historical events affect both primary and secondary sources; “narrative and counternarrative generate a frisson of meaning in their exchange, in the working-through process they now mutually reinforce” (Young, 1998, p. 668).

2.3 Unpacking exilic memory

In addition to witnessing pain and surfacing marginalized voices, the sharing of diverse stories across communities can help unpack common narratives of Vietnamese ‘exilic memory’, a term used in diaspora studies to describe the collective tropes and traumatic conditions that pushed refugees and migrants from their homelands to become a part of a shared, broad refugee identity (Lacroix, 2013, p. 687). Though ‘exilic memory’ can serve to create bonds for displaced peoples, there is also a risk of these tropes producing a monolithic image of a diverse population. When looking at Vietnamese resettlement in Canada, the majority of Vietnamese refugees entered between the 1970s to the early 1990s. The first wave occurred between 1975 - 1978, resettling wealthy and educated professionals and high ranking government officials in Quebec, as they likely spoke French. Between 1978 - 1982, Vietnamese “boat people” started becoming a part of the Canadian public consciousness as newspapers covered incidents such as Hải Hòn, where a refugee boat with over 2,654 people aboard was refused dock in Malaysia was then hit by a hurricane (Lam, 2008, p. 2). Coverage of these events significantly affected public opinion, leading to the formation of private sponsorship groups and increased support from the Canadian government. Over 50,000 Vietnamese refugees arrived in Canada during this time period, with more diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds now being accepted. The later wave of Vietnamese refugees were classified from 1982 onward, with migration rates slowing in 2001. When compared to the first and second wave of refugees, this “later wave” group is considered less fortunate, as they received much less government support during resettlement (Lam, 2008, Table 2). Analyzing these waves of refugees in Canada, it is

apparent that the Vietnamese diaspora is not a homogenous group. Age, economic and social class and access to support greatly impact one's war, escape and resettlement experience.

2.4 Research questions

It has been 46 years since the Fall of Saigon and we still see many diasporic Vietnamese communities connected by their intense fear of the perceived political "other" oppressing them once more. These misconceptions and anxieties are magnified by repressed and infrequent communication about what occurred during the conflict. In addition, popular media often ignores or misrepresents nuanced Vietnamese perspectives on the war.

This project investigates these perspectives through an inclusive design lens. This research explores what stories and themes Vietnamese people can relate to, in order to honor and remember their cultural roots and homeland, without internalizing a political identity which requires a strong and united front against a common enemy. How can inclusive design play a part in connecting geographically distant actors in a diasporic community to connect and understand one another?

Chapter 3 - Inclusive Design Framework

This chapter looks at the expanding field of inclusive design and how oral history practices can play a part in decolonizing how knowledge is gathered, organized and published during research and design processes.

Inclusive design aims to work beyond solutioning for maximum efficiency and adoption. It is a practice that focuses on diversity, variability and complexity. Instead of research and design conducted in a more traditional and linear fashion, inclusive design models itself after a framework similar to a trellis; supporting organic growth. The three dimensions of this framework are:

1. Recognize, respect, and design for human uniqueness and variability.
2. Use inclusive, open and transparent processes, and co-design with people who have a diversity of perspectives, including people that can't use or have difficulty using the current designs.
3. Realize that you are designing in a complex adaptive system. (Treviranus, 2018).

3.1 Emerging issues in inclusive design and co-design practices

As inclusive design grows as an intersectional and multifaceted practice, the complications and contradiction of working within a gatekeeping and legitimized space (eg. an academic institution) will inevitably emerge. Inclusive design aims to design with (and sometimes for) segments of the population which are often sidelined and overlooked. Commonly utilized practices such as user research, facilitation and co-design encourage input from affected communities, but can sometimes blur the boundaries between sharing and exploitation. New writing and thinking around design justice principles raises questions

regarding how designers can validate and center participant input without unintentionally continuing the extraction of knowledge and resources from oppressed communities. Many inclusive designers reach out and conduct research with typically ignored groups. This is a form of ‘subaltern design’, an intentional design process working with social groups excluded from dominant power structures and spaces. Subaltern design aims to identify and remove “(neo)colonial, socio-economic, patriarchal, linguistic, cultural and/or racial” barriers (Coghlan, 2014, p. 1). Though engaging with marginalized communities during a design process is important, it is also crucial to reflect and consider what ‘design’ processes have already been created by these communities, and what impact participatory research and design could have on their group of focus. Design sites, processes and communities have always existed outside of more traditional and privileged spaces. Overlooked communities have their own design ideas, design practices and design spaces, though some may not be characterized and recognized as such by more traditional design authorities (eg. finding workaround solutions within homes, garages, repair shops and community centres etc.). These design solutions can often be deemed as less valid or not as innovative “technology”, as they are evolved and executed by an oppressed group, operating “within microsites...many important sociotechnical practices are designed, developed and shared through constant, small-scale interactions within the home, the family, kinship networks, and within communities” (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 140). There is a continued erasure of designs created by oppressed populations, despite ‘hacker’ and ‘maker’ culture “originat[ing] in working class communities, center[ing] women and femmes, and/or are based in communities of color that don’t receive the resources, visibility, validation, and respect that those centered on on white, cisgender, heterosexual men do” (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 141).

Therefore, recognizing that the communities being asked to engage with research and co-design may already have their own structures and ideas on how their histories should be represented and shared, this project must be rooted in the principles of design justice; “urging

us to explore the way design relates to domination and resistance at each of these levels: personal, community and institutional" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 21). My research and design process will shift away from focusing on looking at content through a solutionist lens and towards working within speculative frameworks. This intentional shift is to avoid power imbalances that lead to extraction of knowledge, which can often serve to make incremental improvements on potentially oppressive outputs. Instead, the focus will be on keeping an open mind, allowing for community led processes to explore the complex root issues and propose changes. "Design can produce a shift toward action that models alternative presents and possible futures in material and experiential form... the design process itself becomes an exercise in radical visioning... design becomes a praxis of liberation" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 220).

3.2 Design justice and intersectional practices in publishing

In addition to examining established design practices, this project aims to extend a critical lens to common publishing processes. Working in academic research and design means one will be expected to follow "best practices" within the industry; which dictate the general look and feel for written content and visual elements displayed when published for a wider audience. This can include the tone of writing, the structure of the paper, the fonts and format chosen for interfaces and the sources cited. Research and design outputs are often judged and legitimized by their ability to conform to these guidelines. The further away one's published work sits from these standards, the less likely it will be deemed credible and true.

Traditional research and design practices are often rooted in a "banking model of education", in which a party positioned as an expert teaches a passive audience their knowledge. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues that there is no education without communication, as humans need dialogue to think critically. "Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple

exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants" (Freire, 1970, p. 89). Education can only be a practice of freedom when those positioned as the 'teachers' do not seek to impose their worldview on the audience, but to willingly accept that dialogue with 'students' will transform their position and reality. What could it look like for research and design practices to evolve from a banking model toward a 'problem-posing' model of education that encourages increased dialogue, critical analysis and transformation? How could iterative design practices allow for increased participation from their intended audience - not only in the early formation and iterations - but even after work has been released? Rooting design work in problem-posing frameworks could mean success in research and design becomes less contingent in its alignment and proximity to accepted industry best practices. Instead, design practices would focus on intentionally creating ongoing and interactive dialogue. In the context of oral history, moving from a goal of creating sequential and objective narratives to accepting and weaving in multi-faceted and evolving stories could shift the way history is recorded and taught. "One challenge of oral history lies in the social purpose of history; why events and memories need recording, to fill gaps and challenge silences within other forms of documented history" (Moore, 2018, p. 107).

Highlighting practices in publishing is vital when discussing historical archives. How and where work is presented hugely influences how an audience will consume and perceive content. The preferences of participants - people who shared their deeply personal stories - culturally appropriate design and other factors must come into play. As a result, some audiences may find aspects such as lack of translation, varying emotionality in language and tone and a lack of 'explanatory comma' (pausing to explain cultural context, often assuming it is a white/western majority audience) more difficult and requiring higher efforts to navigate when compared to a simpler, standardized template design made for easy user experience. Another layer of complexity is how an audience defines and accepts 'truths', as oral history can require those listening to hold complicated and sometimes contradicting truths at the same time. "Listening

without instant interpretation is not without its difficulties. The listener needs to shed preconceived or culturally determined ways of seeing and knowing, and adopt a self-reflective response to understanding other cultures, a dialogue between the past and the present" (Moore, 2019, p. 108).

Another emerging topic in publishing is data feminism and the politics of citation. As papers and other design works are published, researchers and designers must consider what individuals and institutions have created the works they are referencing. Listening, reading and highlighting the language and ideas created by voices usually neglected by powerful institutions are necessary to create work in a design justice framework. Selecting the sources to publish is a political act, as data is "all too often wielded as an instrument of oppression, reinforcing inequality and perpetuating injustice" (Data 4 Black Lives, 2018, para. 4). Therefore, researchers and designers should strive to hold themselves accountable, and evaluate how the creators and publishers may have influenced the framing and content of the data they choose to reference.

3.3 Inclusive design and oral history

Evolving digital platforms and growing accessibility to technology is changing the way audiences process and consume historical data. Increased engagement with primary sources, enriched editing capabilities and the development of customized interfaces have changed the way history can be transformed and presented. Oral history archives are one piece of this diverse tapestry. An impactful feature to oral history has been making audio files searchable. This feature makes navigating audio artifacts significantly more user friendly and easier to leverage for research. The ability to hear a primary source speak to their experiences enriches one's understanding of complex histories. Tones of voice, pauses, silences and background noise add to the emotional context of the story; this context may have been missed when reading a transcript or similar text based artifact. "Researchers who only read transcripts are

uninformed of the significant meanings conveyed only through the aurality of speech.” If the medium is the message, then having sound be the primary medium would allow users to gain further understanding and interpretation of unique and often conflicted points of view (Bradley, 2016, p. 77). In addition, evidence provided by primary sources are much easier to locate and absorb. With a few clicks, users can gain access to this content, instead of digging through footnotes and bibliographies. “The imperative to treat a source with interpretative care and integrity may be stronger when a reader can listen to your evidence with the click of a mouse” (Bradley, 2016, p. 89).

A core goal of the medium of oral history is increased agency for those with lived experiences and creating more nuanced representation in historical archives. In more traditional formats of historical documentation and archiving, primary sources will speak to researchers and historians. Both digital and physical archives are intentionally designed spaces. They serve as a window into the past, with boundaries, definitions and overall content influenced by those involved in the archive’s creation. By gathering and placing historical records together, those forming this conceptual space define a shared view of events, actors, historical scholarship and the institutions housing the archive (Blouin, 2004, p. 194). These teams are then expected to collect, interpret, edit and present the data to a larger audience upon completion of their work. More recent work in oral history aims to de-center the voice of the researcher while increasing the participants’ control over the design process and narrative presented, centering voices from primary sources. This shift in power dynamics affects the entire researching and archiving process, from the content generated to the overall look and feel of the archive itself. An example of this can be seen in Annette Henry’s work while creating a Black oral history archive at the University of British Columbia. Henry’s work was initially built off of existing and established learning objectives and interview protocols. Upon review of her work with her participants, issues regarding transcripts and how different dialects and colloquial language were presented became a point of concern. As concerns about representations of language arose, so did

questions around labelling, housing and ownership of the archive. The community group working with Annette were aware of Black voices being underrepresented in historical records and stated “we want credit, we want our name on it”. These overlapping issues highlight the need for longer term relationships, earned trust and more public, non-academic accessibility to artifacts and spaces designed with marginalized communities (Henry, 2018, p. 94).

In addition to access, participants acting as primary sources need space to voice what they deem as most important to record and what the bigger themes of the archive should be. During this process, they are able to greatly influence what is presented and how it should be arranged for their audience. Centering participants’ perspectives can help surface unseen themes and additional areas for exploration (Linthicum, 2006, p. 312). In the past, historical “objectivity” and rationalism have been seen as strengths, ensuring historical content contained accurate facts. Whereas, oral storytelling and oral history is intertwined with human memory. This raises issues of contradiction and emotional bias. Storytelling and oral history allow the narrator to prioritize and surface what matters to them most, even if these topics do not fit into a more linear and formal account of a historical event. Introducing emotionality can make personal accounts seem like unreliable conjecture or unreliable narrative. However, infusing historical events with human feelings and reactions can help give meaning to what occurred (Linthicum, 2006, p. 311).

The way research is shaped and directed is also altered by increased participant input, as events and themes that may have been overlooked or judged as unimportant come into the spotlight. The lived experiences of participants allow the scope of research to expand and redirect into areas that were previously unknown or ignored. These pivots also help to highlight the researchers’ own assumptions, blind spots and positionality which can affect the research outcomes. In an example of a project collaborating with physio-diverse people, the researcher states “it became apparent during a recorded interview with a blind interviewee that body language to convey that the interviewer was listening was of little use. Unfamiliarity with ways of

verbally affirming the interviewee without undue sound interruption resulted in an unfortunately short interview" (Linthicum, 2006, p. 314). This is one of many experiences that suggested the need for alternative interviewing strategies. Engaging in a design practice that makes time for long-form storytelling, co-creation and building relational bonds repositions the interviewer and researcher, challenging them to become more speculative and exploratory in their research and design process.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

This project began with historical research to contextualize the content being created. Exploring primary and secondary sources gave an overview of the narratives that currently exist in academic and popular media about the Vietnam War and resulting diaspora. Informing work with the historical context would allow both the designer and participants to process and deconstruct knowledge, ideas and events that previously appeared unconnected, universal and/or inherited (Bauder, 2014, p. 77). Following this, snowball recruitment and semi-structured interviews were conducted between autumn 2020 into early 2021. After the interviews, follow up conversations and early iterations of language cards were prototyped with participants.

4.1 Recruitment

Research participants were people identifying as Vietnamese and living in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area), ranging from 30 - 80 years old. 10 people were interviewed, including first and second generation Vietnamese-Canadians. Recognizing that the Vietnamese refugee experience is not monolithic, I decided to focus the scope of my project in this region, to explore memories of Vietnam and resettlement in Southern Ontario in a meaningful and nuanced way instead of researching a more broad (national or international) Vietnamese refugee experience.

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. If someone expressed interest in an interview, I called and gave an overview of my intended project, outlining the type of questions that would be asked and addressed privacy, technology and language concerns. If someone agreed to an interview, we set a time and date to speak for about 60 minutes on the phone or over video chat (Google Hangouts). To logically and emotionally prepare participants, an interview guide with questions was provided at least 7 days before our planned conversation. I made clear that should the participant be willing, I was open to multiple

interviews for the purposes of relationship building and gaining further insight into their experiences.

4.2 Qualitative research: semi-structured interviews

I conducted qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with participants living within the Greater Toronto Area. This loose structure is intentional for “shared authority”; leveraging semi-structured interviews would give space for participants to assign meaning to their answers and have greater agency to determine the direction of the conversations. This type of dialogue not only allowed for more complex and non-linear answers, but also helped to build trust over time.

As time passed and communication with participants deepened, the project concept and proposed methodology began to pivot. A number of factors contributed to this; the typical social science based, linear research process (which usually involved gathering qualitative data, determining the most important categories for coding, then feeding data into prototype creation) started to feel too rigid. The narratives and themes being discussed did not fit neatly into broad categories. Most importantly, it simply did not align with what participants expressed as being meaningful to them. This misalignment warranted a reevaluation of the goals and structure of the project, proceeding with care to avoid contributing to resource extraction from a marginalized community.

4.3 Participant-led pivoting

The original proposal for this project involved interviewing participants to collect stories for a digital archive. Audio files would be displayed in a digital space (eg. website), where users could explore and search through different perspectives of the Vietnam War and subsequent migration to Ontario, Canada. As the project progressed, questions arose about logistics and feasibility during this timeframe. These questions also surfaced how project planning and

deadlines could influence power dynamics and control; would time and format pressure participants to react quickly and give amiable answers? During the start of the project, some participants expressed initial interest and excitement about the opportunity to connect with second generation Vietnamese folks who expressed curiosity into hearing and recording their stories and histories. In addition, some participants felt positively about telling their story in a more complete, longer format. It gave them control over the narrative of their life, instead of simply being viewed through a tragic snapshot of a displaced refugee.

Cảm giác thật khác khi kể rất nhiều câu chuyện này cùng một lúc. Thường... tôi
ngẫu nhiên nhớ lại những khoảnh khắc, tôi nói điều gì đó trong những khoảnh
khắc ngẫu nhiên. Tất cả cùng nhau, nghe giống như một bộ phim phải không,
haha. Nhìn xem tôi đang ở đâu bây giờ." / "It feels different to tell many of these
stories at once. Usually, I just have little memories or say something in the
moment... All of this combined, doesn't it sound like a movie, haha. Look where I
am now. (Participant N, 2020)

As an individual researcher, I set the scope, timelines and overall output of the project. I wanted to increase participant input and control by introducing co-design sessions. In practice, co-design as an intervention for researcher control was not as straightforward as I may have hoped. The language, cultural and generational gaps immediately became apparent. There were numerous time and cultural issues that needed to be addressed before moving on to co-design.

Bác chưa làm điều này bao giờ nên khi con hỏi bác làm, bác thực sự không biết
bác làm có đúng không." / "I've never done this, so when you ask me, I really
can't tell if I am doing it right. (Participant V, 2021)

Relationship building and increased trust is paramount not only for richer and nuanced storytelling, but also to encourage collaboration and active participation in co-design sessions. When discussing intersectional approaches to co-design with historically marginalized and underserved groups, there needs to be space and time to acknowledge and unpack the intersecting axes of privilege and oppression. “Workshop participants suggested the need for long-term community partnerships, not relationships established only for the duration of a project. Through long-standing relationships, trust will emerge as the community’s and researcher/designer’s needs transform over years” (Erete et al., 2018, para. 5). Unfortunately, the timeline constraints of this project did not allow for the appropriate and effective trust building to occur before moving on into the co-design stage. When approached about co-design throughout the year, participants stated screen exhaustion and/or hesitation about the technology required for remote work.

Nếu bác muốn nói chuyện với con, con có thể gọi điện thoại cho bác được không? Bác không dùng nhiều chuyện video trước đây.”/”If I want to chat with you, can you just call me on the telephone? I haven’t used all this video stuff before. (Participant D, 2021)

Another complex concern surfaced was worry about whether their stories may interact or be displayed with other anonymous participants. Would their politics align? Would appearing on the same platform look like endorsement or forgiveness for another’s potentially opposing political views on the conflict? Would placing these testimonials together (even if in a digital space) inadvertently “flatten” the voices and lived experiences of a complicated diasporic

community, reducing them once again to a homogenous “refugee” identity? Participants became increasingly emotional about this issue.

What do you think they'll say? I don't want to feel so vengeful and hateful. I lived through it all and I am a victim of their practices! I don't know how to be more open... maybe I have to look at them less as the enemy to be destroyed and more as someone to save? Is that how we live together peacefully? I have to love them to wish for them to change into decent people? (Participant L, 2020)

I know I need to look at them as human beings, who also deserve love and care. It's very hard for me because the regime is still in power and I think people are still suffering under them, as I did. So it's very hard to accept. (Participant V, 2020)

After much consideration, efforts were pivoted to relationship building instead of facilitating more traditional co-design sessions for a digital product. This pivot was gradual and unexpected, but led to important community building outcomes. Considering timelines and other logistical constraints, the platform could not respectfully represent the true heterogeneity of perspectives. Deepening trust and comfort levels took precedent over creating a platform - anything short of this felt like it would add onto the silencing and dismissal of an already oppressed community.

4.4 Limitations

The proposal and concept of this project was iterated on multiple occasions between late 2019 and early 2020, due to the growing concerns over COVID-19. The logistical and emotional

constraints of a pandemic meant having to reshape research and design plans to work around everchanging and compounding limitations. The visible and tangible manifestation of this was the practice of social distancing - thinking about how one could effectively interview and maintain communication with those involved while in lockdown/remote settings. Many solutions required increased use of technology, which was a major barrier for certain subsets of potential participants lacking experience, appropriate spaces with private rooms to speak, or reliable internet connections. Parallel to these hurdles, challenges in relationship building arose. Typically, speaking about sensitive topics requires a foundation of trust and the ability for the researcher to emotionally connect and “read the room”. All interviews being done remotely meant there were only digital rooms or the momentary silence during a phone call to interpret participants’ non-verbal cues. Working remotely greatly impacted how and when participants felt safe enough to open up and share stories during the interview process.

Compounding these issues were the growing frequency of news stories reporting hate crimes against Asian Americans and Asian Canadians, escalating at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing into early 2021. According to early data, the Greater Toronto Area reported the second highest rates of hate crimes in Canada (behind Vancouver, British Columbia) with approximately 65% of the cases containing verbal assault and 30% of cases involving physical assault, including being coughed or spit on (Liu, 2021, fig. 2). Elderly populations were particularly harassed at this time. The combination of remote work being a barrier to trust building, paired with intimidating and stressful news decreased the emotional capacity of some participants. As a result, a handful of participants withdrew from the study, despite being given pseudonyms to protect their identity. It can be difficult to revisit memories of conflict, forced migration and navigating life in a new country.

Bác mệt và nói về những điều này sẽ khiến nó càng thêm lộn xộn!"/ “I’m tired and I feel like speaking about these issues now... it makes it messier. (Participant D, 2021)

The added stresses of racialized violence and uncertainty during the pandemic (eg. screen fatigue) affected the way participants engaged with this project over time.

4.5 Emergent strategy and adopting a research creation lens

As these issues surfaced over time, a significant pivot was needed to “move at the speed of trust” (Brown, 2017, p. 27). In *Emergent Strategy*, Brown discusses principles to guide emergent thinking during collaborative project work. “Moving at the speed of trust” in this context meant choosing to focus on critical connections with participants. The slow building of trusting relationships through shared experience is required to build resilience, as “The web of connection needs each of the connecting strands to be strong... what our movements would look like if we focused on critical connections instead of critical mass?” (Brown, 2017, p. 15). These bumps in the road surfaced a useful and more experimental methodology: research creation. The expressing and sharing of research data in sequential fashion is rooted in the sciences; it is expected that academic journals will use standardized metrics to measure the relative value of research. However, emerging platforms and experimental practices in knowledge sharing (including mixed media projects, performance and social media) show that “new modalities for the presentation of research to reach a broader audience may be necessary” (Chapman, 2011, p. 7). Though many aspects of research-creation can still fit within various social sciences methods, it does not rely on the scientific method to ensure legitimacy. Therefore, researchers and designers working within a research-creation process have more space to reveal different contexts and methods for cultural analysis (Chapman, 2011, p. 11). Expanding to include “research-for-creation” in particular, allows for a more iterative and

open-ended working process, where an art practice could be a part of knowledge mobilization. “Research for creation” may appear to be similar to a linear social science research process, but in practice allows increased room for collaboration due to its iterative/trial-and-error process. Importantly, the result of “research-for-creation” can be a cluster of ideas or experimental prototypes, not a full-scale production of a product (Chapman, 2011, p. 12).

“Research for creation” also overlaps with many of the principles of Emergent Strategy. Firstly, it embraces change as a constant and therefore allows researchers to adjust to having less prepared work going into a project. An unintended consequence of heavy reliance on background/preparation work can be the limiting of possibilities coming out of the interaction between researchers, designers and participants. Putting less focus on preparation can result in participants and facilitators being more present and in the moment. This can be an active way of creating space for transformational thinking, as attention and effort is poured into how we might “host” or facilitate gatherings with the most potential for transformative collaboration. Secondly, both methods highlight that smaller and meaningful interactions being repeated fractally can eventually become a larger pattern, leading to a bigger picture solution (Brown, 2017, p. 32). This leads to participants having a more significant role in determining the goals and outcomes of a project, as they may speak up and pivot at multiple points and researchers have the freedom to deviate from the original plan. “Different potential outcomes may emerge at any stage and diverge from the initial ‘research-plan.’ Too much emphasis on a ‘first A (research-for-creation) then B (streamlined production)’ approach can stymie creative spontaneity and research freedom” (Chapman, 2011, p. 12). Researchers and artists engaging in initial research-for-creation have less expectations on making a final, full-scale production, and may focus instead on iterative, experimental prototypes (Chapman, 2011, p. 12).

Chapter 5 - Outcomes

This chapter will discuss how project pivots impacted the design work produced. It will examine how designers might avoid extractive practices, highlighting the necessity for longer term relationships and trust building to effectively engage and collaborate with participants. The last section of this chapter examines the role of language and cultural context when engaging with marginalized communities.

5.1 Model of engagement and relational bonds

The priority of this project pivoted and evolved to create a model of engagement, examining the approach to interacting with this particular community. What cultural contexts needed to be taken into account beforehand? Further, what timelines and expectations should be set to ensure that meaningful and lasting relationships could form, while working to avoid co-creation as data extraction? The way participants were being included needed to be reframed, from a vertical calibration to a more “horizontal” model. Artist Elwood Jimmy states,

Like all Western structures, the contemporary art system as we currently know it is calibrated toward a vertical plane. I would humbly offer that this is at odds with an Indigenous sensibility and way of being, which is often horizontal in calibration. In the vertical calibration, a particular kind of mobility and movement is privileged. It is often one of transcendence - of transcending surroundings, of mastering them, of surpassing them, of cultivating separation and separability - whereas an Indigenous sensibility honours and strives to deepen entanglements with each other, with the non-human and with the beyond-human. (Jimmy, 2020, para. 5)

The intensive and slowed down act of relationship building as resistance and “radical decentering” (Lagense & Ng-Chan, 2020, 77) became a crucial and central part of this project.

True collaboration needs to begin with friendship... Relationships need time to develop trust, in order to articulate and understand different perspectives and ways of being together, and thus relationship-building (friendship) challenges colonial and capitalist models of engagement. (Lagense & Ng-Chan, 2020, p. 78)

5.2 Relationship building as resistance vs. typically facilitated co-design practices

A condensed timeline requiring accelerated trust and a handover of stories during interviewing and co-creation to create an artifact simply placed participants into an existing academic model, holding little space to acknowledge diverse ways of knowing and being. In more conventionally practiced co-design, researchers and designers may invest time and money in allocating a specified time and space to run walk-throughs and workshops. The objective of these activities usually focus on gathering, sorting and building out various design concepts. Concepts can range from services, products, feature build outs or areas that may require further investigation. These concepts are then often ranked by user needs vs. feasibility. ‘Feasibility’ in this context is used to encompass factors such as how much time designing and producing this concept may take, how many people/teams would be needed and what financial investment would be necessary (Kumar, 2013, p. 259). The benefit of having efficient and structured co-design activities can often serve as measurable proof to various academic or business leadership; the qualitative data being collected will have a return on investment, the data being collected will ultimately contribute to a tangible and profitable product. However, structured and time-boxed and methodical co-design activities can have limitations if practiced while trying to navigate nuanced issues of trauma, memory and respectability politics. Some

participants struggled to recall what was said in the initial interviews, needing additional time to refresh sentiments expressed and how their statements might affect future co-design. Some participants' lack of familiarity with academic and technological spaces resulted in needing additional reassurance about their contributions. Multiple offhand comments similar to this were expressed:

Con là người đang học cao học, con nói tiếng Anh, con hiểu rõ hơn bác. / Oh, you're the one in graduate school and you speak English, so you would know much more than me. (Participant N, 2021)

This mentality plays into the dynamics of respectability politics, which are rooted in colonial belief systems. When discussing the Black community in the United States, Damon Young of *The Root* writes of respectability politics "...the idea that if we walk a little straighter and write a little neater and speak a little clearer, then white people will treat us better" (Young, 2016, para. 3). Concerns over respectability politics could be common in Vietnamese communities due to a history of segregation and imperialism, where adapting to Japanese, French or American standards could serve as a valuable tool for survival.

5.3 Design and research practices to build trust

To ensure the project did not veer into practices which could be oppressive and extractive, it was crucial to refocus the work on relationship building, even if this meant extending timelines. More time was needed to make participants feel comfortable, valued and heard, outside of a 'conducting research for an academic project' context.

Therefore, the time scheduled to conduct multiple rounds of co-design sessions was given to community and relationship building. This could be done over time in a number of unstructured ways that are not usually seen in conventional co-design facilitation, such as social

visits (where the project is seldom, if ever, discussed), sharing food, acts of mutual aid or playing a small game. Though the return on investment is more difficult (or not possible) to measure in these activities, these non-design related shared moments could be particularly impactful for this community, as first and second generation folks face cultural and language barriers, preventing possibilities for further conversation and understanding. Taking the time to earn trust would ensure participants were given space and agency to express their full experiences: explaining the context of their past and current life, and how and why they navigate through their memories. This can create a more uncomfortable and nebulous project for the researcher, as they must manage and continually balance institutional expectations while community relationships evolve and change. However, the priorities and boundaries of this project needed to expand and flow as the relationship dynamics shifted. Importantly, it allowed the participants to discuss what they want and in their own time and space. Creating a genuine and caring relationship means an investment of time and emotional labour from the researcher to understand and represent the fuller picture; the struggles, joys, motivations, contradictions, hopes and fears that contextualized traumatic experiences, not just drawing out and recording retellings of isolated memories of war and forced migration to form a design output. It was evident that sticking to traditional co-design models and timelines would allow for rapid product design, but it became apparent that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to practice design that explores anti-racist pedagogy, decolonialization, and reconciliation. A large part of this is due to the typically legitimized and upheld ways of understanding and demonstrating knowledge within academic institutions. Common practices in research, dissemination and lecturing are reflective of colonial mechanisms favouring Western cultural ideas, impacting how we learn and unlearn (Lagense & Ng-Chan, 2020). In *On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s*, Chandra Mohanty discusses the politics of knowledge:

Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces.

Resistance that is random and isolated is clearly not as effective as that which is mobilized through systemic politicized practices of teaching and learning. Uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledge is one way to lay claim to alternative histories.

But these knowledges need to be understood and defined pedagogically, as questions of strategy and practice as well as of scholarship, in order to transform educational institutions radically.

Revisiting and growing critical engagement with inclusive design in academic spaces (including facilitating co-design as a human centered design practice) is necessary to push forward and expand the definition of inclusive design. It can be a design practice that not only works to include the voices of typically underrepresented communities, but also actively evolves to challenge and dismantle widespread and normalized design processes and practices that were formed and upheld through historically colonial and capitalist power structures in our institutions.

5.4 Language cards

As a model of engagement became prioritized, the high value of having a shared language for friendly and sometimes intimate conversation became apparent. The majority of these interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Participants stated that having the option to speak in their mother tongue reduced the cognitive load of translation and their nervousness about the conversation. This gave interviewees more freedom in expressing complicated emotions when reflecting on their pasts and their journeys coming to Canada. Not having to navigate speaking and explaining in English also meant participants assumed cultural references and contexts would be understood by the interviewer. As interviews progressed, the

value of having a shared language between both generations became abundantly clear. Participants commented on feeling more encouragement to continue speaking and expanding on their memories and thoughts, without having to give frequent pauses for linguistic or cultural clarification. When speaking to a second generation participant about her parent's interviews, they stated:

Hearing (my parent) speak... it seems like a memory that she suppressed and found through some sort of trigger when you spoke. When she starts to storytell, I can see the memories start to link together for her. She'll move on from one story to another story...I think that is what she needs. Someone to understand and listen, to acknowledge and understand her hardships. (Participant J, 2020).

The ability to speak in their chosen language was not just a novelty or bonus for the participants, it was a crucial and necessary component to them sharing honest, complex and emotional stories of their life experiences. The researcher could ask questions in their preferred language and create space for participants to speak comfortably without having to dilute and pause to explain - this allowed for greater trust building and more nuanced conversations. Small language and cultural barriers meant the interview process was imperfect, however participants still stated feeling more support and openness when they could be addressed in their native tongue.

Thật khó để thảo luận với một người không hiểu báci đang nói gì, điều mặc dù
đôi khi có vẻ như người Syria đang trải qua một điều giống như Việt Nam...
những bức ảnh thuyền tị nạn... nhắc tôi... / It is hard to discuss these things with
someone who can't really understand what you're saying... though sometimes it

seems like Syrians are going through something similar to Vietnam... when I see photos of the boats, it reminds me of that time... (Participant N, 2020.)

Another notable component of the process was the flow and order of questions asked. Shared language helped break the ice, but equally important was the level of comfort and trust created by easing into the questions.

Thực sự chưa ai hỏi tôi điều này, nó giống như một bóng ma./ No one has really asked me this... the memories feel like ghosts that visit. (Participant V, 2020.)

Creating a space for conversation on perspectives and memories outside of trauma inflicted by war and poverty meant that participants were able to paint a more complete story of their complicated lives. This also meant the interviewer did not spend a limited amount of time with participants, extracting traumatic memories, followed by exiting the relationship. Intentionally fostering slower and more sustained relationships as interviews progressed allowed participants to receive additional support and social/non research related check-ins after discussing potentially difficult memories. This form of mutual aid can be particularly impactful for marginalized communities having issues with regard to trusting and accessing traditional mental health resources.

When iterating on the language cards, the factors taken into consideration were:

1. How the first generation (born in Vietnam) participants emotionally reacted to the questions; their responsiveness to answer and what feedback they provided about the subject matter.

2. Questions that the second generation (born in Canada) stated they were most curious about but yet to ask older folks in their life.

Early stages of designing the card deck involved indirect conversation about these questions. This engagement could involve chatting about family dynamics, language classes, shared time/hobbies with family and memories of Vietnam. After these initial conversations, simplified language cards were created using paper and markers. These cards could be quickly color coded, numbered or disposed of depending on participant reaction. Most participants preferred a simple phone call. For those who resided close enough and opted for video chat, I dropped off small care packages which included something related to an interest or hobby and small, culturally appropriate packaged snacks to share (reducing risk during COVID-19).

The cards are presented in four colours, representing four sequential categories of questions, designed to become more reflective and intimate as the game progresses (please see Figure 1). The colour scheme and design are intended to give a visual link to a popular childhood activity; colours are pulled from the popular Vietnamese card game ‘Tú sáć’, from the ‘rummy’ family of card games. These games are relatively cheap and easy to produce, making them accessible to most households. The deck begins with broader and lighter questions (targeted small talk) before advancing into questions that typically require more personal reflection and established trust between users.

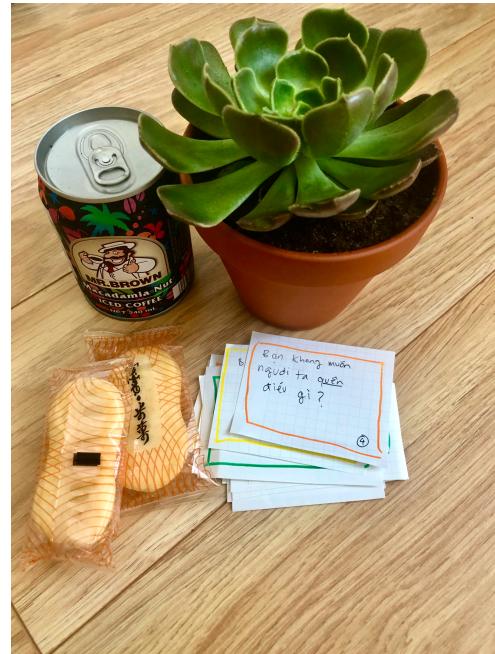


Figure 1. Language Cards Example

Image by the author (2021)

This first iteration of questions is primarily meant to foster intergenerational communication, and for tackling the common age, cultural and language barriers that many resettled Vietnamese communities experience. The game is simple: a small (and ideally multi-generational) group (2 - 4 people) begin the activity, aiming to engage first generation/elders with a series of questions/conversation starters. Both languages are on the cards to clarify if a language gap occurs while asking a question. This is to help bridge a conversation, as it was observed during interviews that it was common for second generation folks to have a firmer grasp of understanding Vietnamese (as they were raised in a Vietnamese speaking household) but often had some trouble or shyness around speaking, reading and writing.

The question asker starts at the top of the deck (green cards with broader questions) and then progresses through the deck. During the later stages of the deck (yellow and orange cards), the questions progress to become less event or place focused. The inquiry becomes

about the participants' internal world, how they feel and reflect on their lived experiences. This allows space for both participants to review and consider aspects of their conversation before ending the activity.

5.5 Direct observations

Approximately three rounds of testing were conducted with participants at varying cadences, facilitated over video chat platforms (Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger) or over the phone. Remote testing added a few extra barriers to the game, as players found it more difficult to "read the room" to follow non-verbal cues compared to speaking in person. Apart from bridging language gaps, first generation participants expressed increased feelings of openness when a time-boxed, intentional space was created for them to speak. The topics discussed did not always arise in daily, functional conversations. When they did, some participants expressed not wanting to burden someone they knew with their story, or put someone in an uncomfortable position.

Nói...làm gì? Nói làm sao đứa nhỏ hiểu được? / Talking about it... for what end? Talking about it, how can the kids understand [what happened] (Participant D, 2020).

It was observed that most participants increased how much they spoke and the content of their answers after the question asker shared a related short story about themselves or their family. This appeared to be a key part of relationship and trust building during co-design; if the researcher/designer took a more passive role in the experience, they were more likely to receive more passive and cautious answers. Sitting back in a more passive, detached and observational role also runs the risk of extractive design practices, where the participant is asked to engage and carry the heavy load of emotional labour. A more natural conversational

flow (with pauses, off topic tangents, check ins) allowed for the question asker and participant to move at a comfortable pace. The cards are designed to pause and end where needed, without pressure to ever “finish” the deck or get through all the questions in an allotted time slot.

Participants stated feeling encouraged to come back for another round of testing, despite some not being able to see the question asker through the phone. Putting extra effort into verbal communication helped to reassure participants and help them feel “seen” in the absence of a visual/person in the room to respond to. Additional in-person testing of the cards when possible could reveal more about participant needs.

These conversations are meant to facilitate opening lines of communication between generations. Understanding the past can be impactful not only for first generation refugees, but also for the second generation. In *Sacred Instructions - Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*, Sherri Mitchell reflects on “The Love of Thousands”. She explores how hearing stories passed down through families allows younger generations to hear voices of “all those who have lived before us”, providing an unbroken link. Connecting with ancestors allows communities to put their wisdom into action, evolving their future consciousness. The ancient truths of our collective past can be transported into our futures. What is created from those truths “extends the wisdom of all who have gone before us, and provides a guide for all those who follow” (Mitchell, 2018, p. 13). Communication, healing and transformation is still a work in progress for many Vietnamese communities, who have been traumatized and divided for a better part of a century. Intense and long term exposure to traumatic events can often lead to silencing, as anger, guilt and shame create enormous wounds. As a second generation Vietnamese-Canadian, I have witnessed various manifestations of these wounds and their reverberations. Though many people would like to pave over our differences, or to find a way to quickly bridge the gaps, it is evident that small acts of witnessing and processing our history is necessary to begin North and South and intergenerational reconciliation. Mitchell writes about difficult communication and pain as a teacher in her own community (Penobscot Indian

Reservation), stating that properly addressing pain can help mobilize and lead communities toward the healing they so desperately need. “If we can find the courage to face it openly and honestly, it will heal us” (Mitchell, 2018, p. 67).

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will review the work done, why pivots were made and explore future directions for this work.

Many aspects of this project did not go as expected, from the logistical challenges of an evolving pandemic to the rise in hate crimes against Asian communities, to the complicated emotional challenges of engaging with an older community who have often been forced to normalize stoic silence. This can be linked back to the previously introduced concept of “post-memory” - where strong memories of formative past experiences live on and affect the internal narratives of an individual and/or community, but receive little to no public acknowledgement or sites of mourning. I hope that my engagement with this community has not only contributed to how research and design might be conducted in the future, but also to build thoughtful connections between generations that can often feel estrangement through painful silence, language gaps and cultural barriers.

When forming the concept of this project, a primary goal was to take an existing solution (digital archives) and design with an inclusive lens. My idea of working “inclusively” meant working within a process that included increased co-design. I wanted to examine ways to make the platform accessible and put a special focus on how the archive was tagged and organized to create more accurate terminology. In retrospect, this plan was overly outcome focused. Direct communication with the community (even if remote) quickly highlighted the importance of flexibility, not only to create bonds of trust but to intentionally create space for active listening. As stories of conflict and forced migration unfolded, feelings of uncertainty and reluctance emerged. It was crucial to read between the lines and deeply understand these hesitant emotions, even if that meant pausing and refocusing the design work away from the original tech-oriented solution.

6.1 Questions and Future Work

The research and design work of this project became more experimental as time progressed. A model of engagement was prioritized over a tangible output delivery in the end. However, there are still questions and opportunities to further explore. What could storytelling and oral history reveal within a community that has experienced complicated segregation and conflict for many decades? Could hearing a multitude of personal perspectives encourage more understanding and transformative justice? How can established institutions support research for this type of non-linear inquiry? In addition, how could these oral history accounts be collected, edited, tagged and stored in a way that honors the multitude of perspectives from the diasporic Vietnamese community? How can researchers, designers and participants align on questions of ownership over the content itself and where it is stored? I recognize these are nuanced questions that will take an enormous amount of reflection and time to answer.

Though a digital archive (an online platform storing accounts) did not emerge at the end of this project, the relationship building that occurred pushed me to consider themes discussed in *Nirmal Puwar's Carrying as Method: Listening to Bodies as Archives*. While exploring archival work done in numerous diasporic communities, Puwar observes that archives can exist in many non-tangible ways. She argues that humans 'carry' experiences from the past, embedded into their bodies. Puwar writes about carrying in a double sense (as an intergenerational-researcher-daughter), carried transnationally, seeing herself as a living diasporic archive. If the body itself is an archive, then intergenerational modes of carrying can include not only passed down material items (paperwork/documentation to be placed and organized within a physical archive), but also includes "ephemera, music, cooking, objects, landscapes, buildings, feelings..." (Puwar, 2021, p. 7). Building off of this, I hope that intergenerational participants learning languages, asking questions and "carrying" experiences and memories they have listened to can act as living archives, honoring what has been shared.

In my own future work, I want to challenge myself to keep experimenting, though it is greatly uncomfortable at times. Various interactions throughout this project have stressed the importance of being able to think and work outside of the Western framework for a typical research structure following the scientific method. Gathering qualitative data helps to add to the richness of the information we share by highlighting observations and characteristics that numbers alone usually cannot show. The way humans navigate relationships, memory, and healing is non-linear. To truly acknowledge these nuances and work toward decolonizing how future inclusive design work is structured, conducted and disseminated, non-linear ways of thinking and knowing need to be honored. Research and design stand to benefit by acknowledging and working with these complexities.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Cards



Appendix B - List of Questions & Guidelines

List of Questions

Part 1

What was your hometown like?

What are some of your first memories of Vietnam?

What was/is your favourite thing to eat? How were you introduced to this food?

How would you describe yourself when you were my age?

Part 2

What were your favourite things to do as a kid?

Can you tell me about your relationship with your parents and elders? What was it like?

What do you wish you could tell your younger self?

Who or what has been healing for you?

Part 3

What were your first days in a new country like? What did you do?

What were some of your goals when you arrived in a new country? How do you feel about those goals now?

What are some of the happiest moments of your life?

Looking back, what are you most proud of?

Part 4

What are you scared of people forgetting?

What do you wish people knew about you?

Who do you miss?

How would you like to be remembered?

Card game guidelines

- Start in a small group (2 - 4 people) to begin the card activity (ideally there is a mix of elders/first generation and second generation)
- The question asker starts at the top of the deck (green cards with broader questions) and then progresses through the deck, as much as both parties feel comfortable speaking. Skip, return to or add questions as needed.
- The later stages of the deck (yellow and orange cards) allow both participants to reflect on their conversation before ending the activity.

Appendix C - Recruitment Letter/Email

You are invited to participate in a research study for an oral history archive; a collection of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life using audio interview content. The purpose of this study is to understand and document the resilience, cultural evolution, loss and successes of the Vietnamese diaspora following the Vietnam War/American War in Vietnam.

This project is looking for individuals who identify as part of the Vietnamese diaspora, residing in the Greater Toronto Area. As a participant, you will be asked to share your experiences living in Vietnam, reflecting on the past and what your life and perspectives are now, living in Canada.

Participation will be a 1-hour interview, conducted remotely through Zoom, Google Hangouts, or over the phone.

In preparation of the interview, high level questions will be provided a minimum of 1 week in advance to allow participants to review.

Possible benefits of participation include adding your voice to historical and cultural records on the Vietnamese diaspora, hearing other narratives from your community and working towards complex reconciliation and healing for future generations.

There also may be risks associated with participation upsetting memories and topics related to conflict and migration.

After interviews are conducted and transcribed, they will be transformed into an oral history archive, as part of an MRP (Major Research Project) for the Inclusive Design Graduate Program.

Participation in this project will remain private and participants will not be identified in the MRP (Major Research Project). Final edits will be approved by the participant. The final day to opt out of this project will be March 1, 2021.

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator Jennifer Cao or the Faculty Supervisor Dr. Ayumi Goto using the contact information provided above. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through research@ocadu.ca.

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Bạn được mời tham gia vào một nghiên cứu nghiên cứu cho một kho lưu trữ lịch sử truyền miệng. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là để hiểu và ghi lại khả năng phục hồi, sự phát triển văn hóa, những mất mát và thành công của cộng đồng người Việt hải ngoại.

Với tư cách là một người tham gia, bạn sẽ được yêu cầu chia sẻ kinh nghiệm sống ở Việt Nam, suy ngẫm về quá khứ cũng như cuộc sống và quan điểm của bạn hiện tại khi sống ở các quốc gia khác.

Tham gia sẽ là một cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài 1 giờ, được thực hiện từ xa thông qua Zoom, Google Hangouts hoặc qua điện thoại.

Các lợi ích có thể có của việc tham gia bao gồm thêm tiếng nói của bạn vào các ghi chép lịch sử và văn hóa trên cộng đồng người Việt Nam hải ngoại, nghe những câu chuyện khác từ cộng đồng của bạn và làm việc hướng tới sự hòa giải và hàn gắn phức tạp cho các thế hệ tương lai.

Cũng có thể có những rủi ro liên quan đến việc tham gia làm đảo lộn ký ức và các chủ đề liên quan đến xung đột và di cư.

Sau khi các cuộc phỏng vấn được thực hiện và sao chép, chúng sẽ được chuyển thành một kho lưu trữ lịch sử miệng, như một phần của MRP cho Chương trình Sau đại học về Thiết kế Hòa nhập.

Người tham gia sẽ ẩn danh và có toàn quyền kiểm soát các tệp âm thanh được ghi lại này và chọn không tham gia bất kỳ lúc nào.

Nếu bạn có bất kỳ câu hỏi nào về nghiên cứu này hoặc cần thêm thông tin, vui lòng liên hệ với Điều tra viên chính Jennifer Cao hoặc Người giám sát Khoa, Tiến sĩ Ayumi Goto bằng thông tin liên hệ được cung cấp ở trên. Nếu bạn có bất kỳ nhận xét hoặc thắc mắc nào, vui lòng liên hệ với Văn phòng Đạo đức Nghiên cứu qua research@ocadu.ca.

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