

No Place like Home, a metastory by Carô Gervay and Cường Minh Bá Phạm

Dear reader,

Thank you for giving this book your attention.

You are about to enter a story that is embedded within this exhibition.

A heads-up: it involves time travelling, participation and staying with the trouble.

There is no recourse to linear time nor quick jumping to conclusions.

We would urge caution, because even the most skilled researcher would find it difficult to ascertain what happened in the past.

Talking to people from different perspectives may be required to assess the present and build our future. This conversation is still unfolding...

We hope that you enjoy the experience.

5 street walkers and a statue

Caro, when we, me and you, KV, Hoa Dung and Duong met up. As we were walking from the Museum of the Home to Hackney Archives where the An Viet Archives are stored, you brought up the issue. The issue of the Geffrye Statue. Of the controversy that it has caused. You asked what the group thought, these are important questions. You asked if I would like to address this. Over the years, since I have known you, we've discussed many topics, some will overlap, the details may blur, but there are questions we always return to.

I brought this up because I thought: what does it mean to be here? Invited to create a 'Vietnamese exhibition', creating from our delicate relationship to home, at the Museum of the Home. Why are we here and what is our position in this context? You and I reflected on the fact that, as Vietnamese, we are not really expected to comment on the statue, also because we were not commissioned to work with it directly. How we want to participate is still to be written.

We/Words

Why are words, meaning, and dialogue important?

Diaspora. What are the problems with this emotive term?

Diaspora gives us a sense of belonging, a sense of us, a sense of we...

It presents a useful resource for contesting racism and exclusion by recalling

historic and ongoing legacies of colonialism and exploitation, and offering resistance and alternative imaginaries of identity and belonging. This is useful as it gives us a language to contest racism and marginalisation, challenges how history is written, and how meaning is constructed. It can give us the words to recontextualise the past, understand our present and imagine new futures.

But diaspora can also create an opposite, of exclusion, a sense of 'them', a sense of 'they'...

How can we purport to be in the diaspora space and highlight the injustices we face, the marginalisation, and the racism, if we create an exclusionary inward looking identity? Are we erecting borders and barriers to those who we deem as outsiders? Gatekeeping the entry into what we perceive as our food, our culture, our customs, our arts, our language, our words, our worlds?

We are at risk of narrowing our gaze when we are only preoccupied with what "our" people need and want. This is a gaze that places greater importance on "our" homeland, whether real or imagined.

What happens to the other people and communities in our peripheral vision?

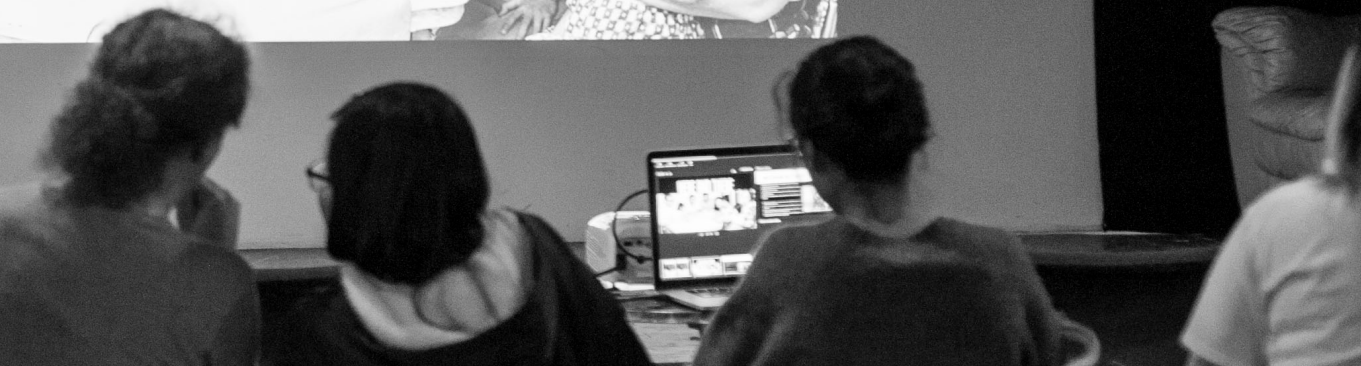


My move to the UK and multicultural heritage taught me a few things about being careful with 'we'. A few years ago, I remember asking you if you could tell me about some photographs that were precious to you. You brought a bunch of family photographs and I recorded you on a windy roof, at the Hive (a voluntary organisation promoting re-use of empty buildings by local communities, in Dalston, 2017). You were preparing for an event you were organising: Vietnam Now, an international film, music, food and art event, with Linh Phan (Here and There, Canada), Jan Luong (The Observatory, Switzerland), and Jan Hagenkoetter (Saigon Supersounds, Germany). That day I learnt that sound recording should not happen on a windy roof! I carried on recording stories based on photographs and called the series 'Chúng ta' (inclusive 'we'). I love that the Vietnamese language has several pronouns to say 'we' and it helps me question the very idea of the Vietnamese diaspora. You invited me to exhibit in *Vietnam Now*, and I chose to share what was becoming my body of work, *(re)Appearing Acts*, a photographic exploration of my family archive through darkroom printing.

#HIVEDALSTON



HERE AND THERE







At the Albany, Deptford, during Tết Trung Thu.
Sơn carefully displaying his series of photographs.
Previous page and above, at the Hive, Dalston, London

Has the story started yet?

It's really hard to know where to start. I've probably never said this to you, but you were the first friend I made upon returning to the UK. That was back in 2016. We both attended a dinner at Viet Rest, after Nguyen Trinh Thi's talk, of which you missed. Hoa, my partner, spoke to you over dinner. It was only when we (the larger group) all parted ways, that we, me, you and Hoa walked towards the station, we spoke. As we began to introduce ourselves to one another, we realised we had a mutual friend in Hanoi. We decided to keep in touch.

I remember walking towards Deptford Bridge station with you and Hoa, long after dark. I also remember part of Nguyen Trinh Thi's 'Letters from Panduranga (In Smoke and Clouds)' projected in the university lecture room. I must have arrived late, and I missed the other 2 shorts. When I reflect on my relation to time, I wonder what has prevented me, over the years, from being on time. My eagerness to learn and meet people who may share a fragment of my story, may listen, or have some curiosity about the complexity enclosed within, has often met with resistance. As if, emotionally, something was stopping me from being fully there. But there is also something authoritative about institutional time that I am struggling with.

Yes, being late is almost a form of resistance.

The second vivid memory I have of you, was when we went to that talk by Stephen James at the LSE. And it was at the pub you asked me about my family

history. You've never been afraid to ask those uncomfortable questions. I think that's a quality many of us do not possess. It is because of the uncomfortable questions you ask, I sit here late at night, 03:36 am to be precise, typing away a response, some sort of response. At the time, I was just beginning to understand my own place in the world, to understand how my family got here, what were the micro & macro events, the push & pull factors, understanding the mentality, the agency, the desire to leave that led them to being here.

Three films by Nguyen Trinh Thi, followed by a Q&A,

309, Richard Hoggart Building

Goldsmiths, University of London

10 Mar 2016, 5:00pm - 7:00pm

A little later, we went to Paris with a version of *Vietnam Now*, and were hosted by Foyer Vietnam where we met many people from *l'Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France (UGVF)*. This was a big deal for me, I had been working with my family archive in the UK for a while, but had never presented it to a French audience. I grew up in the Paris banlieue and my family are politically quite far from the organising of *UGVF*, so it was a vital moment for me. Later on, we travelled to Berlin and also Vietnam with various projects.

Vietnam Now, Foyer Vietnam, Paris





I relate to the ongoing personal and collective enquiry you are describing. I have sometimes blamed myself for being insensitive when asking questions, but asking questions for me is a way to connect and stay with the complexity and multiplicity of a situation. I recently took part in a workshop you facilitated with Dora Lam, in which you asked us to engage with and learn from the An Viet archives. You said you did not want to impose any narrative on those documents, that you were not an expert and that we needed to rely on each other as a group to make sense of histories and transmit knowledge. One way this happened for me was when you gave us a couple of notes written in Vietnamese, which we translated in our group. No one in my group was fully fluent but together we could decipher the meaning of it. Similarly, when looking at pictures, we looked for clues to hypothesise about dates, places etc. That morning, the experience left an imprint of what we are capable of in our bodies, and to me that is very important. A lot of the stories we are looking at, including our own, bathe in trauma and silence. I go back to my relationship to time and the resistance I encounter with learning. In my life it has been hard to accept the gaps, the loss and ask for help. I know that this will echo in various ways within the diaspora. I wonder about the obstacles to our learning and home-making, historically. And the intrinsic ways we have countered them.

Scarcity and the critical lens

In that light, I want to go back to our initial question: how can we deal with Vietnamese homeness in an institution that celebrates crimes against humanity? The Museum may have a new name but it has kept its statue of the slaver Robert Geffrye, proving its allegiance to systems of symbolic and structural racism. People have called for the removal of this symbol of African enslavement, yet, in July 2020 the trustees voted against it. Hackney Stand Up to Racism have held at least eight demonstrations outside the Museum of the Home under the hashtag #GeffryeMustFall and have called on Hackney residents to boycott the museum. I think about our exhibition, as we have decided not to boycott. Dear friends and colleagues of ours who boycott it will not come to see the show. I try to come up with spaces where Vietnamese communities can share a moment of authentic sharing in the public space, there aren't many. This exhibition might be one of the very few 'Vietnamese' exhibitions in London, maybe even the first one of its kind in a publicly funded venue? That scarcity is painful, and it also means that when something does get organised, it is difficult to be critical about it. As if, because the opportunities are so rare, we had to seize them, and have a good time at all costs! Except that this denial is not sustainable and I also believe that we are abundant in many ways. It is difficult to accept that we are taking part in this system and may be complicit in the violence it inflicts. It is hard to have those conversations among ourselves and face the degree of indifference or discomfort. But discomfort can move us in unexpected directions. What is the past and the future of solidarity between ESEA communities and Black communities in this country?



Dis-orient gathering, Berlin, 2017





Choice and Certainty

I wanted to share with you a quote, from the book *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that has really got me thinking, I think it also applies to the larger Vietnamese community in the UK:

Alexa, flush with red wine, her eyes red below her scarlet hair, changed the subject. "Blunkett must be sensible and make sure this country remains a refuge. People who have survived frightful wars must absolutely be allowed in!" She turned to Obinze. "Don't you agree?"

"Yes," he said, and felt alienation run through him like a shiver.

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty.

This is not to belittle those who left because of atrocities, many have indeed. But I think the narrative we love to tell ourselves we come here for better lives. When I look at my parents I don't think that was the case for them.

So when the UK dispersed the Vietnamese migrants across the British Isles, many Vietnamese families chose to reject this and come to the bigger cities. The narrative is that they lacked the community, the jobs, or services to cater to the newly settled people. And so An Viet was a response to that, as were the other community centres we visited on our Asia Art Activism Research Residency in 2018: Centre 151, CRV East, the Bow Chaplaincy, Evelyn Community Centre, and VMHS. They were instrumental in helping migrants settle in an unknown land.

I now think that's too simplified. As the quote above tells us, people are hungry for choice and certainty. Why do I think that's simplified? We have evidence that Vietnamese people are willing to leave the big cities. Look at the modern nail industry, every major town up and down Britain has a nail parlour, which is filled with Vietnamese workers. Many of my parents' generation, many of our generation, many who came here on irregular migration routes. It comes back to the hunger for choice and certainty.

What you are describing reminds me of our exhibition. People are reading our words as part of their experience of *No Place Like Home*, probably sitting at or standing by the low, curved table. I imagine the room conveying a sense of hospitality- as immigrant family meals are important moments of connection and cultural transmission- but also something strange/off. What you are talking about adds another layer of hunger to our experience.

Home, Housing, & Agency

So, An Viet played a major role in helping migrants settle in London. One of the important aspects was the Housing Association that was set up. The An Viet Housing Association, eventually merged with Ujima and later on re-named Lien Viet. In April 2019, just before Lien Viet closed down, you negotiated seed funding from Islington and Shoreditch Housing Group (ISHA)/Lien Viet to create the event *Resettled Spaces: examining the home: the Vietnamese experience in the UK*. A team of us took part: Will Pham (artist), Moi Tran (artist), Vanessa Yim (psychologist) and myself, to develop some responses to that history. I ran a couple of pinhole camera workshops with local Vietnamese residents on the theme of our relationship to home and neighbourhoods. We built a pop-up darkroom in the toilet of one of the meeting rooms at ISHA/Lien Viet and dried the images on a line at the back of the building.

If anybody wants to see the exhibition text for *Resettled Spaces*, you can scan here:













We asked people their thoughts about home-making and called the project: *Shadows, Highlights and Furniture*.

Home is such a poignant topic for many people who live on the periphery, inbetween, and at the margins. It's a topic we can spend many hours pouring over. I know you just bought Vu Khanh Thanh's memoirs, which I read back in 2017, so you might know more than me about An Viet Housing Association and its beginnings.

In French language people say that when they can't put a book down they 'devour' it. I am devouring *Catholic with Confucian Tendencies, the true story of the extreme adventures of a Vietnamese boat person*, Vu Khanh Thanh's biography. I have wanted to read it for a while but now it is timely. In Will Pham's film *An Viet (Well Settled)*, we watch Toan (Vu Khanh Thanh's son) read a passage from it. It is an inspiring and emotional moment all at once. In the book, I have reached the moment of Vu Khanh Thanh's arrival in the UK but no mention of An Viet yet. He describes the few years he spent on Thorney Island before coming to London, in a former military air base turned camp for the Vietnamese refugees at the end of 70s. Relevant to our enquiry about spaces and homes, there is a passage where he recalls: *"The rice wine was in great demand at Thorney Island and when a family learned that they were allocated housing and got notice of a leave date, they would immediately organise a party. (...) English staff were so concerned that they'd make announcements saying 'don't spend so much money on parties, you'll need the money in your new accommodation'. What they did not understand was that a*

Home is where I can
feel comfortable and relax.

Hồng Búi
26/03/2019

Quan Trọng Thông
Ngôi nhà bếp Tủ
Lạnh giường Tủ
nồi Chưng điều gì
Cũng Quan Trọng

Trần Thị:

- ① - Tình yêu thương tâm ấm, sự
lạc đàn ta vui vẻ... →
Khả năng sống như... →
 - ② - Chạy ý kiến của cá nhân tôi
nhà bếp Kê bếp là
quan trọng trong đời sống
gia đình sống
26/03/19
- Thống Nhất.

1 - Home is a house and a family.

2 - A good family is a good
foundation.

● Home!

- Home is where I was born and grew
up with.
- Home is lost if you're forced to
leave where you're belong.
- Home is where your heart is.

● Home is where I can relax
+ be with my family.
Home is where I can be
completely myself.

1. gọn gàng sạch sẽ
 2. Sự ấm cúng và
Hạnh phúc
 3. diện kiến dễ ra
 4. Nhà của tôi là
cuộc đời của tôi
Tôi yêu quý nhà tôi
- Nhung

A safe shelter,
which is full
of comfort
and happiness.
A shelter which
protects you
from harm,
and danger.

A home is
where we can feel
free to be ourselves
and invite who we
wish to welcome.

Resettled Spaces,
ISHA/Lien Viet

leaving party like this was so important to the Vietnamese.” This brings me back to thinking about the spaces we go to or end up in, and our potential agency.

Another event I wanted to highlight was the Lunar New Year that was co-organised in 2018 by Hackney Chinese Community Services, An Viet, and Kanlungan. When I initially started to volunteer with HCCS, who became the custodians of An Viet, one of the first things that we were tasked with was to put on an exhibition highlighting the achievements of the Vietnamese community and specifically that of An Viet. It was going to be a big event, jointly held by HCCS, An Viet, and Kanlungan. It was Lunar New Year, and we had a lot of people turn up, Vu Khanh Thanh was there, Hackney’s Mayor and The Speaker of the Council came too. We, myself and Will Pham, were tasked by Jabez Lam and Tom Cheung, the managers at HCCS, to put on this exhibition. The nature of the exhibition was celebratory and congratulatory, which I



Hana and Sam browsing
the
An Viet library



Record, Retrieve, Reactivate (Cuong Pham, Will Pham, Hau-Yu Tam, Hana Le, Ha Vu, Daikon, Sung Tieu), 2018, An Viet Foundation

think sometimes we do not do enough. But of course looking back, there was little room for nuance or complexity. We called it *From Saigon to Hackney*. A few weeks later we wanted to re-organise the exhibition *From Saigon to Hackney* to let friends and family see it, as the above event was sold out. So this gave us a chance to slowly unpack An Việt's work with intentionality. We re-arranged some of the materials to encompass some of the challenges we

failed/deliberately chose to exclude. That was the result of *Record Retrieve Reactivate*. The reformatted exhibition encompassed talks, performances, and moving image.

An Viet> Lien Viet> Isha> Geffrye Museum> Museum of the Home> Hackney Archives: the complex situation we're sitting in

An Viet Housing Association was set up to provide housing for Vietnamese families in the UK. And at some point in history they were encouraged (I use this term in the loosest sense) to join with another housing association. It was Ujima they chose, another BAME organisation. Again, I use BAME in the deliberate sense, because if I use any of the newer terms, such as POC, marginalised community, or residual communities (as taken from an interview with Trinh T Minh Ha¹), they feel anachronistic. Whereas BAME was an important umbrella term at the time.

From Vu Khanh Thanh's chapter 'Negotiations' p211: *"In spring 1993, An Viet had to decide what housing association we would 'merge' with. This wasn't easy. The large white housing associations were national, and this was something that we wanted. However, many within An Viet believed that a minority organisation would really help other minority organisations. For example, the really large associations clearly wanted to take over An Viet completely. One plainly stated they wanted to replace all of the Vietnamese committee members, leaving only three Vietnamese members who would only be used as*

1 Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Speaking Nearby", *Visual Anthropology Review*, Spring 1992

'interpreters'. I wasn't interested, and their proposal was rejected out of hand. In the end, we decided that what was most important was to join with a parent association which, regardless of whether or not it was national, would work towards empowering An Viet, and to give us access to private funding.(...) It took a full year of negotiation before the two associations agreed on how they would work together. Kuumba² and An Viet drafted a blueprint, but the Housing Corporation rejected the proposals because they gave An Viet too much freedom and independence."

Unfortunately this partnership did not work out. The details are blurry as I only have the memoir, the political cartoons, and my poor memory to go by. We know this did not work out as Ujima went bankrupt, Vu Khanh Thanh was removed/resigned from his post at An Viet Housing Association, and the organisation renamed themselves to Lien Viet and partnered with ISHA.

From what I can read in the autobiography, the Housing Corporation forced An Viet to accept a deal they did not want, by threatening to withdraw all funding. They had to appoint a new chair (John, a British man) who facilitated a process where Ujima took on An Viet's properties so that "it could acquire development money on behalf of An Viet". This reduced An Viet's scope of action and their hope to regain future independence from the parent organisation. Page 215, we understand something of the power dynamic: *"An article in Black Housing magazine, the one that included the sketch depicting John as*

2 "Not the organisation's real name", footnote p212, *Catholic with Confucian Tendencies*, Vu Khanh Thanh (2016)

Judas, noted that in order to fully understand the concerns, one has to remember the history and nature of the black housing association movement. The author explained that: 'unlike a number of white associations which were formed either by wealthy philanthropists or benevolent employers, the black housing association movement was forged in the various communities of black people throughout the country'. And these communities are often concentrated in certain towns and cities, so their 'initial strengths lay in the community activism at a local level.' And community based housing associations are set up by groups with a common identifying factor. In the case of An Viet, it was race, language and a shared traumatic past. To ignore this principle, especially when justified by another minority association saying: 'we are all black anyway', is not acceptable, continues the author. 'No community should have their identity subsumed within a larger amorphous collective.'" Vu Khanh Thanh was also very critical of the role played by the Housing Corporation in that it failed to create or enforce accountable leadership. In 1999, he took the Housing Corporation to Court.

My understanding is that Lien Viet housing association closed in 2019. They had a large fund of £277,000 that they made available through a call out to 'create a lasting legacy from Lien Viet to the wider community and to the younger generations of people who have Vietnamese heritage', which the Museum of Home was successful with submitting their proposal. This fund has created a 3 year role to facilitate this as part of an ESEA program at the Museum of the Home. £2500 was allocated to commission the curatorial team of this exhibition for them to create a community-led exhibition, of which £1000

was spent on repainting the room white. This explains how we got here.

Yes, £277,000 looks like a large and generous amount. In effect, this money has come from a saving that ISHA & Lien Viet made in their working process (administrative, accounting, legal) when they officially merged. In reality they have not dipped into their income or sold off any assets to put out this money. I also want to step it back a bit, as the context upon which we find ourselves in is complicated, it is intertwined with the macro changes of the political landscape. The same sort of dilemma: should we (An Viet Steering Committee, Hackney Chinese Community Services) be working with the Museum of the Home because of their statue?

Whiteness playing communities off against each other again. One of the reasons why we are here is because a lot of artists and communities do not want to be here. This creates a climate of mistrust and competition.

I want to share the conversations I have had with Jabez Lam who is the centre manager at Hackney Chinese Community Services. He used to work for Hackney Council, and most significantly he worked for Tung Sing Housing Association (set up by Peter Shui in 1984, which initially was set up to provide social housing for the Chinese community³). This housing association went through a similar process to An Viet/Lien Viet, in that it was subsumed/incorporated into a larger entity. If I may, I would like to take it back to the 1970s when large populations of Vietnamese started coming to Britain, about 30% of

3 Chui, David (2012) Peter Chui obituary, The Guardian

households were living in council accommodation. And a significant number of them were labour supporters. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher won the general election, and she set her eyes on dismantling this demographic, arguably one of the most radical shifts, demographically, politically, financially, for the future of this country. There were 3 major policies:

1) Right to Buy - this meant selling council homes to tenants at a huge discount. The effect being that it created a group of working class people who became aspirational home owners, and with it a shift in their politics. One big consequence of this was, now they became concerned about how their house could rise in value. Which generally means you vote along more conservative lines, as they tend to be the party that protects generational wealth. And you become less concerned about how local and central governments tend to the council housing stock. This is important as the Labour local councils in the early 70s were buying up large swaths of unused dilapidated land and/or housing stock from private hands and converting them into council houses⁴.

2) Housing Revenue Account - this was introduced to make all council housing related activities to be self-financing, and as a result this reduced the councils' ability to borrow money to build new council homes. Coupled with the above, council houses were being sold off in large numbers and were not being replaced.

4 Beckett, Andy (2015) The right to buy: the housing crisis that Thatcher built, The Guardian.

3) Housing Associations - housing associations were originally set up by Victorian philanthropists to alleviate homelessness and poverty in Britain. They are essentially charities that provide housing. Thatcher really pushed for them to have a greater input into helping resolve social housing, thus taking up the role the council has increasingly vacated. The government incentivised this by providing cheap land and grants. They especially encouraged ethnic minorities to establish Housing Associations to provide culturally sensitive housing provisions for BAME groups. It is against this backdrop that the An Viet Housing association was founded.

What does this mean for Vietnamese people? Well, many of the people who tended to not be able to purchase homes under the right to buy scheme, were economically precarious, single parent households, younger tenants, people living on their own, those who were unemployed or so called "low skilled". Then there are those who have psychological barriers, such as taking on mortgage debt, they were afraid of taking responsibility for repairs, or they did not think that owning a property was suited to them. So you could imagine Vietnamese migrants tended to fall within the above mentioned categories. Hence why Housing Associations were pivotal in the settlement process in the UK. An Viet was pivotal for another reason, the UK government sought to encourage dispersal, which meant settling families right across the British Isles, but when they rejected living in isolation in favour of moving back to the big cities, it was organisations like An Viet that assisted in this demographic change.



From Saigon to Hackney, photo by Hana Le

So by the 1990s the Tories successfully dismantled the large groups of Labour supporting voters who lived in council homes. Housing Associations, politically, were no longer needed, so they started implementing politics to push them to be self-financing, reducing the amount of public subsidies, introducing various rules and accounting restrictions. As a result the smaller Housing Associations were not financially viable and thus sought to merge. An Viet, one of the smaller HAs, sought to merge with Ujima HA, but of course this did not go well. So when Ujima went bankrupt in 2007, it then sought to merge with ISHA and change its name to Lien Viet Housing Association.

In 2019, at the time of the formal merger, Lien Viet had 150 homes in North and East London. According to the Office for National Statistics, the average price of a London home stood at roughly £475,000⁵. Giving us a rough estimate of £71,250,000 for the housing stock that Lien Viet held. From the Lien Viet/ISHA merger they found £277,000 to put out as the Lien Viet Legacy Fund. The Legacy Fund, represents 0.3% of the value of the estimated housing stock that Lien Viet held. It also is worth spelling out that some of Lien Viet's housing stock would have been in Hackney, I think the aforementioned London average of £475,000 is a conservative estimate for this area. Anyway, you would be pressed hard to find any housing in that borough going for £277,000.

5 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/housepriceindex/november2019>

Naming and pointing at

Evoking history is not possible without risk. Not mentioning it is also impossible. As we are sitting here, in the (dis)comfort of this Vietnamese exhibition, these are the stories we are choosing to tell. They may create new possibilities for imagining how to celebrate our practices, be critical of them and the contexts we're in, and create/sustain homes, all at once. What's in a (re)name? Which uncomfortable conversations will set history in motion?

The Museum of the Home was previously called the Geffrye Museum.

The statue of Robert Geffrye still stands outside the museum, beneath the clock, above the door. You can see it from Kingsland Road. Robert Geffrye whose legacy was used to set up the almshouses that now house the museum, was involved in the East India Company and Royal African Company, invested in the slave trade and part-owned a slave ship. Activists groups have denounced its presence at the entrance of the museum and are calling for a removal or to move it inside the museum. The almshouses were built on this site in 1714 to house the widows of ironmongers. Almshouses are charitable housing provided to people in a particular community, to benefit those in poverty and/or old age who lack resources. The word has various origins connected to: 'act of relieving the needy', 'pity', 'mercy', 'compassionate'.

The word well-settled is an 安居. Bình an 平安 means peace and an can mean safe as derived from the word an toàn 安全. Việt 越 is the name of the

most populous ethnic group in Vietnam, it originally comes from an old word to mean 'the people from the land beyond'. An Việt has multiple meanings for multiple people, but one could say for the 'people beyond the land', where the Việt people have left the Việt land, and moved to a foreign land, through the An Việt Foundation and the Housing Association they have been able to find safety, peace, and settled well. The Lien Viet website states: "An Viet Housing Association (now Lien Viet HA) is formed to specifically address the housing needs of refugees from Vietnam. Its mission was to provide a "safe haven" in the form of affordable, culturally sensitive housing." An Viet was renamed to Lien Viet. We can also look at this symbolic name change and what can we linguistically deduce from it, if anything at all. As Vietnamese is a polysemous and homonymous language one word can have multiple meanings. The first meaning of Liên from Lien Viet, can be taking to mean 聯 can mean two things, united, as in 聯盟 liên minh. United here being 'to be linked together into a block to coordinate actions for a common purpose'. Or 聯結 liên kết, which means association, in other words, 'brought together from many separate components or organisations'. Or even liên lạc 聯絡, which means 'to communicate, to exchange communication with each other to keep in touch'.

The other meaning is 蓮, which is the lotus flower, a symbolic national flower of the Vietnamese people. The being symbolic as the lotus rises from the mud yet is untouched by the mud, to become a beautiful plant. The lotus leaves can be turned into tea and the root can be eaten, allowing for spiritual and literal nourishment.





From Saigon to Hackney, photo by Hana Le



Making labour and generations visible, *From Saigon to Hackney*,
photo by Hana Le

"No Place like Home, a metastory by Carô Gervay and Cường Minh Bá Phạm" is part of **Unfinished Books** by Carô Gervay.

This is a response to *No Place Like Home (a Vietnamese exhibition) Part II*,
Museum of the Home, London, 19th April-11th July.

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Annexe



nhuxuanhua

thierryphung

triplelumi





phambinho



phambinho [Part 1] Recently, my friend Luke sent me this pic that brought me back. It was taken before the pandemic. I had yet to learn Xiao Tu Zi Guai Guai 小兔子乖乖, a nursery rhyme about a well-behaved bunny, to sing on demand for my little one. I just started my NTS residency. ONY (Lumi & Nhu Xuan came out too) & I were about to have the wildest trip to VN. Too much ^{01F} 999, too many 📍, too little sleep soundtracked to Vinahouse. It was October 2019. Yes, I am a lot more sensible now.

A year before this picture was taken, the squatters had been trying to get into the An Viet Building. I remember knocking on the doors of all the houses that surrounded An Viet, updating them about the centre, warning them about squatters, & answering questions. Many of the residents reminisced about the Huong Viet restaurant, & I also left my contact details. In Oct 18, one of the residents sent me an email. I'll keep him anonymous. He said, "...We will be sure to keep an eye on the property & notify you if we see anything. Recently, we have noticed lights on inside the property, upstairs & downstairs late into the evening. Please let me know if this is NOT members of the An Viet Community."

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I responded later that day, "Yesterday & the day before might have been myself, as I was there until 11pm. We left some of the lights on all evening as a deterrent. Tonight I left the lights on via a timer they should turn off at 12. & they will turn on & off until 2am."

By about April 2019, the squatters had permanently settled in. I know as I had co-curated an exhibition: "Resettled Spaces: Examining the Home", and it hung over the opening like storm clouds. Here we had this exhibition where the central theme was home, whilst a few miles away we had lost access to An Viet. Here's another update from our anonymous neighbour: "The squatters are starting to become a real menace. The police were called Thursday eve. They are using hard drugs & playing loud music into the night & keeping the neighbourhood up at night. Is there no way you can make the place more secure, or get a security company in when the place is empty? At least until they lose interest and move on."

6w



georgeandclark Amazing historical photo 🙌🏻



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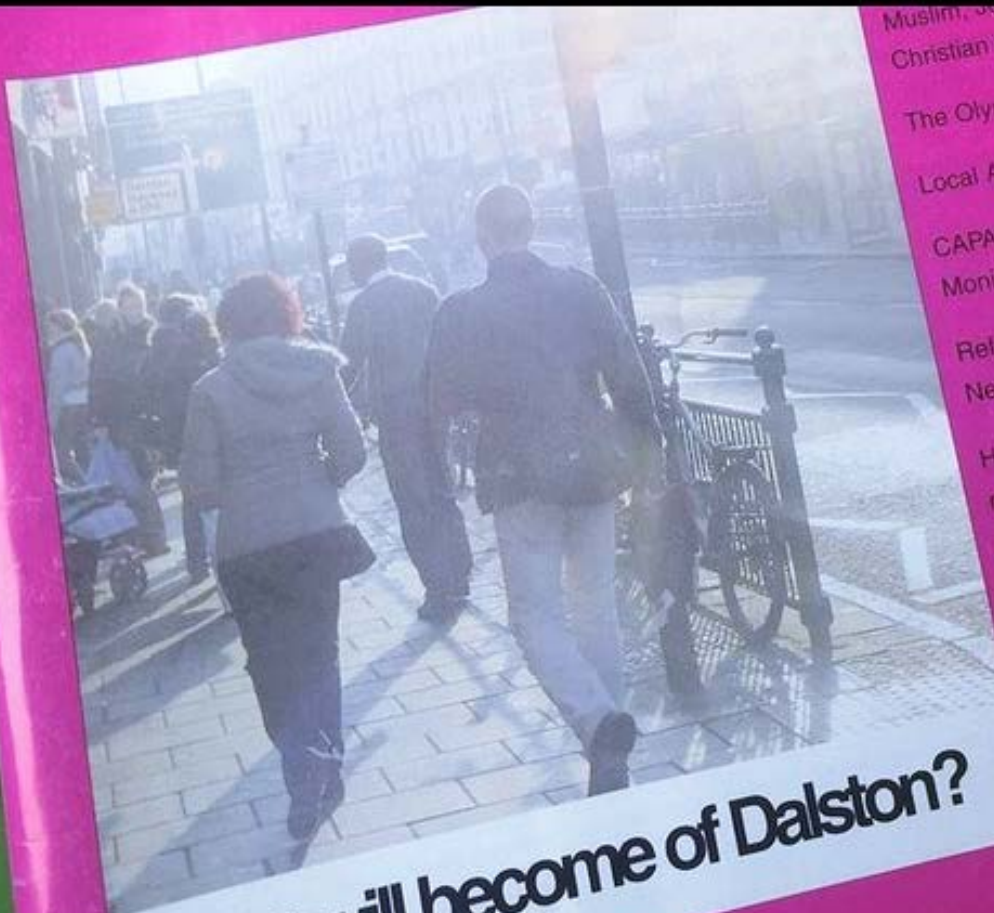
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phambinho [Part II] The last few months prior we had played games w/ the squatters. We tried to spend as much time as we possibly could there. I would invite friends over, & hang out late in the night, catching up, eating takeout while the Champions League played in the background. I remember having to pour boiling water inside a lock to melt the superglue they injected trying to render our keys useless & bolt cropping random locks they put onto the gates & doors. My partner & I even took Han Viet classes with Nguyen Huu Su there. Jabez & Chun (a former HCCS Management Committee member) installed sensor lights, anti-climbing paint, changed all the locks, & boarded up potential openings. But the squatters persisted & eventually got in.

From Jabez's encounters, clues our anonymous neighbour left & the personal documents they forgot to take, we knew the squatters were not from here. Some may have been, we will never know. What's ironic is, the An Viet Foundation was set up to, in large part, was to respond to the housing needs of the Viet & Viet-Hoa communities in the UK. It then grew into the multi-faceted centre of community. There was learning, eating, socialising, documenting, training, you name it. So, to see a group of young people, presumably priced out of



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London's housing market set up in An Viet Building, was so sad. Two groups of housing-precarious migrant communities fighting for this 1 creaky dilapidated building.

When Jabez called me in Oct 19 finally, after months of going back & forth w/ the council, courts, & police, he said the squatters were evicted. We were given 3 days by the council to take what we wanted, I was relieved. Luke who was living with us at the time, came down to help me. When we saw the state of the building, I was furious, they had destroyed the place, the library scattered everywhere, furniture was stacked up high repurposed as room dividers.

I was livid, but we couldn't dwell, 3 days is not enough to pack up 40 years of history, but we had to rush. In amongst the documents strewn across the building here was a magazine I found that day, I believe it was called 'Spark', it questions: "What will become of Dalston?".

Edited · 6w



joonlynngoh So important to read this 🙏



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What will become of Dalston?

News from the sector



Liked by carogervay and others

phambinho This is a win for apathy. Well done to rising house prices and rent in London. Well done to inconsiderate squatters, you could have respected the building and cared for its items. Well done to the local council, your inaction has led to this. Well done to years of austerity. 40 years of community history at risk.

What will become of Dalston?