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**IMMIGRANT BUSINESS AND THE RACIALIZATION OF WORK:  
A TALE OF TWO NICHEs IN TEXAS' VIETNAMESE COMMUNITIES**

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by

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this study to the women and men of the nail salon and shrimping industries who work with determination and dynamism in the spirit of entrepreneurship. They contribute to the nation's social and economic vibrancy and diversity. I am deeply grateful for their enthusiasm and commitment to participating in this study.

I also dedicate this study to my family. First is to my parents, Phat and On Ha. They survived as war refugees and then persevered as tireless workers and solid parents to provide an opportunity for my siblings and me to reach our fullest potential. Next is to my sisters, Hien and Hieu Ha. Their ability to achieve extreme successes in what they do motivates me to do the best I can do. Hieu also cooked many delicious and healthy meals for me during the most intensive times of writing, for which I am so appreciative. And last, but not least, is to my brother Jonathan Ha. His carefree and resilient spirit inspires me to stay calm and push through when life presents challenges. My family's love and support are priceless. I love you all!

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**IMMIGRANT BUSINESS AND THE RACIALIZATION OF WORK:  
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Thao Le-Thanh Ha, Ph.D.

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This dissertation will examine the Vietnamese communities of Texas and consists of two parts. The first part explores the circumstances that stimulated the growth and eventual dominance of Vietnamese immigrants in two entrepreneurial niches – the nail salon and the shrimping industry. This study is thus a sociological examination of private enterprise, and the first research objective is to investigate the roles of the various market and non-market factors that were crucial in fueling the development of these two businesses. In the sociology of entrepreneurship, a key concern is locating the causal determinants of entrepreneurship. That is, aside from regular market forces, the social conditions associated with patterns of entrepreneurship need to be investigated. This study therefore explores the political, institutional, and cultural circumstances that help to explain the development of the nail salon and fishery businesses in Texas that market forces cannot govern.

The second research objective of this dissertation is to use a racial formations framework to investigate the racial implications of the proliferation of these two entrepreneurial niches in their respective communities. The growth and spread of these

businesses have had consequences for the loss of traditional community, the construction of racial identity, and the maintenance or reconstruction of new racial identity in the context of a multicultural work setting that includes other racial and ethnic minorities. The following seeks to provide insight into these racial phenomena by way of the case of Vietnamese Americans engaged in entrepreneurship.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### *Overview*

When the Vietnam War came to a conclusion in 1975, refugees from Vietnam and surrounding countries of Southeast Asia permeated refugee camps in nearby countries with hopes of finding a new settling place. Hundreds of thousands were resettled in the United States, and in the initial relocation plans, they were purposely dispersed throughout the country in various communities. This intentional distribution served to avoid the clustering of the refugees in concentrated areas, as the Cubans had done before. In short time, however, the post-Vietnam War refugees posed a challenge to the aims of this policy. By the end of the 1970's, demographers and analysts noticed the movement of Vietnamese refugees out of these assigned places to more popular destinations such as the states of California, Texas, and Washington. As they gathered, they created distinctive ethnic communities by recreating the space of the homeland to the best of their capabilities.

In a timeframe of just six years, from 1975 to 1981, more than 600,000 Southeast Asian refugees relocated and settled in the United States (Lanphier 1983). As Vietnamese refugees attempted to resituate themselves in America, they faced particular hardships in adjustments, as most refugees do. Literature on Vietnamese refugees in America was abundant in the immediate years following this mass influx. What we can draw from this period of hyper-interest in Vietnamese American immigrants is the focus on their adjustment issues, their mental health status and needs, the kinds of jobs they took, where

they tend to congregate, their cultural identity, their assimilation patterns, and academic achievement of their youth (Haines 1989, Kibria 1993, Zhou & Bankston 1998). Contemporarily, studies that focus on Vietnamese Americans tend to follow the same areas of concentration: cultural identity (Lieu 2007), mental health and academic achievement (Nguyen and Anderson 2005), and job/career choices (Bui 2005, Phan 2003).

What these studies miss is the lens in which Vietnamese Americans are examined as representations of larger social forces. This research aims to fill in the gap by locating the subject of study at the macro-level analysis of industry. It seeks to highlight Vietnamese Americans as representation of entire business niches which they came to dominate in their respective communities. Eckstein and Nguyen's study (2011) demonstrates the formation of the nail salon as ethnic niche based on data from the Boston area, and they expand on the transnationalization of the niche. Similarly, this study illustrates the process in the state of Texas as representative of the South but in addition, aims to link this domination to the role ethnic niches play in the racialization of labor and community, a component not addressed by Eckstein and Nguyen. Race in the South has transformed beyond the black-white narratives, and Jones (2009) notes that various forms of the state are critical in shaping "racialized" work patterns; thus, examinations of southern labor should look beyond the historical focus on black and white workers. This study highlights the purposes, strategies, and implications of the formation of multiple racial ideologies that exist in the new South post 1970s, namely within the context of the nail salon and shrimp industries of Texas.

### *Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study*

This is a study of two business ventures and their influences on the formation of Vietnamese American communities and identities across Texas. One is the story of the rise and dominance of Vietnamese immigrants participating in the nail salon industry. The adventure traces the conditions that played central roles in catalyzing the growth of the “Vietnamese nail salon” and for the expansion of the storefronts throughout urban and rural spaces across the state of Texas. The second is the chronicle of the Vietnamese shrimping industry along the coastal communities of Texas. The account of this industry will map out how life back in the homeland before the end of the Vietnam War played a significant role in the immigrants’ decision-making process when they entered the fishery industry in the United States. It will also examine the challenges they faced when confronted by the majority white fishermen population, how they fought their adversarial challengers, how they rose to the pinnacles of economic viability, and how they battled developing tribulations with the rising competitive global presence in the fishery business. With these stories emerge analyses on the dynamics of how the two business ventures significantly contributed to the evolution of the Vietnamese community and race relations in Texas.

First, these stories must be told for the historical preservation of an immigrant community that has received scholarly recognition mainly in the areas of refugee resettlement and adjustment (Bankston and Zhou 1999; Haines 1989; Kibria 1993; and Von der Mehden 1982). Vietnamese immigrants have not been the focus of any in-depth single study on entrepreneurship, and are only briefly mentioned in comparative studies

of immigrant small business. Researchers assessed that the “history of Vietnamese refugees in the United States [was] too short and the circumstances of their arrival were too unique for them to be included” in studies of ethnic entrepreneurship (Kim et al 1989).

It is now over three decades since the influx of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. Their contributions as workers in the American economy should be explored and warrants a study of the Vietnamese immigrant entrepreneurial experience in two industries that they have come to dominate. The role of the two industries to the Texas economy is significant and Vietnamese participation is substantial. According to nail care industry experts, nearly forty percent of nail salon workers in the United States are Vietnamese, and in states with large Vietnamese populations, the percentage is even more significant. For example, Vietnamese dominate 80% of the industry in California, and according to a spokesperson from the Texas Department of Licensing and Registration over 60% of nail technician license applications in Texas are by Vietnamese. The demand was so high that examinations in Vietnamese were added in the 1980s to accommodate the growth. Nationwide, it is an industry that averages roughly \$6 billion annually, and *Nails Magazine* (a leading industry publication) recognizes the impact Vietnamese Americans have had on the industry over the last three decades. For example, the industry experienced a 67 percent increase in revenues and a 374 percent increase in the number of salons between 1995 and 2005, and the publication credits Vietnamese Americans for being major players in the expansion (Drummey 2007).

For the shrimping industry, it is imperative that the focus is on the shrimp industry in Texas and not the broad category of fishermen. The focus on shrimping is key due to the overwhelming significance of shrimp in the Texas fishery economy and because the vast majority of Vietnamese in Texas who work in the fishery economy are shrimpers. According to the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife (TDPW), trends in commercial fishery landings from the 1970s to present show that shrimp continue to be the most important commercial seafood product landed in Texas. For example, shrimp represented an average 84%, by weight, of all seafood landed from 1977 through 1986 and more than 93% of the total ex-vessel value. Reports as current as 2008 show shrimp to still be the dominant product, being roughly 70% of the catch by weight. This is even in light of the issues of over shrimping and the TDPW's efforts to reduce catch by buying back shrimp licenses. In terms of dollars and cents, an analysis of seafood linked employment and payroll in Texas (Haby et. al 1993) demonstrated that in 1989, Texas ranked fifth among seafood producing states with a commercial seafood harvest that valued over \$170 million that year. More significantly, Texas led the nation in price per pound at \$1.764. This top standing was due to the primary component of Texas' seafood production – large offshore shrimp. Texas fishermen alone produced 24% of the domestic shrimp harvest and generated 34 cents for each dollar's worth of shrimp.

Vietnamese shrimpers play a major role in this vital economy. Across the Texas coast, small towns where shrimping and fishing are the major industries, the influx of Vietnamese was significant. For example, 2000 census data show towns such as Seadrift and Palacios experiencing the influx in considerable numbers, with a surge in the

Vietnamese populations reaching double digits - 10% in Seadrift and 12% in Palacios. The Vietnamese living in these coastal towns were almost exclusively involved in the shrimp industry. While only a small percentage of Vietnamese American immigrants work in this industry, their presence is considerable in the Texas commercial fishery industry, and the impact of the industry to the overall economy of Texas is important.

Second, ethnic business is a topic of interest to social researchers due to its pathway for understanding the assimilation and socioeconomic adaptation processes of racial/ethnic minority groups. It has been argued that there is an established propensity for Asian immigrants, in particular, to enter into self-employment, and studies in the last three decades examined a single ethnic group or investigated comparative group business development (Kim et al 1989; Waldinger 1989; Bates 1994). In differentiating from previous studies of immigrant entrepreneurship, I set apart this study by the definition of ethnic economy versus ethnic enclave. In examining the causes and consequences of entrepreneurial activity among different ethnic groups, the definition of terms is a significant identifier of the problems at hand. Most scholarly studies of ethnic entrepreneurship usually lead researchers to *ethnic enclaves* as the research site (Lee 1998; Light and Bonacich 1988; Portes 1987; Waldinger 1989; Yoon 1991; Zhou 1992). Ethnic enclaves are distinctly bounded areas situated within a larger unit. They tend to be identified by a spatial arrangement of labor markets and industries. By that definition, the ethnic enclave is only a side story in this study. What sets this study aside from other studies of ethnic entrepreneurship is that the center of this study is the *ethnic economy*, which encapsulates the reliance on an ethnic network for the development and

maintenance of the entrepreneurial enterprise. How much do Vietnamese immigrant run nail salons and shrimping businesses rely entirely on co-ethnic ties and networks for the growth and maintenance of the businesses? This study aims to deconstruct the complex web of networks and factors that are most influential in these entrepreneurial machines.

Why study Vietnamese nail salon workers and Vietnamese shrimp industry workers? The two industries bring forth opportunities for comparison and contrast on many levels. Under the Interactive Model of Ethnic Business Development (Waldinger et. al. 2006), two different industries run by one common ethnic group may help to understand if *group characteristics* were important in business development, and how *opportunity structures* might have impacted business development in contrast. For example, what ethnic strategies did Vietnamese nail salon owners incorporate versus the ethnic strategies that Vietnamese fishermen incorporate? Was one more successful than the other? If so, what relevant factors were involved? Was it the opportunity structure, or was it a group characteristic? This study aims to tease out the details regarding each sector's unique circumstance in terms of blocked mobility, selective migration, close ties to co-ethnics, vertical integration, government policies, and so forth. The research aims to establish a clearer mapping of Vietnamese entrepreneurship, a contribution to the study of ethnic business development, and a discussion of the role ethnic business plays in community building. In addition, analyses of group characteristics give an opportunity to address the gendered work experiences in the two industries.

Next, using the ethnic economy framework, I attempt to connect it to the racialization of work. Using a racial formation framework, I draw attention to the

translation of an *ethnic economy* into a *racial economy* by those in the mainstream who encounter these industries and their workers. Vietnamese Americans are people whose sense of identity has been altered radically within the framework of disruption and displacement after the loss of a nationalist based war. Notions of the homeland are recreated as they regrouped themselves in the aftermath and gathered together to re-establish themselves, their relatives, their families, and their networks of friends and acquaintances in urban and suburban spaces across the United States (Freeman 1989). In the reconstruction of their new identities in the workplace, do ethnic businesses pave the way for the racialization of a category of workers? To address this question, it begets other areas for inquiry. What challenges do Vietnamese immigrants face when they flourish in an industry? What methods are used to overcome such issues, and which leaders emerge to direct the masses towards the formation of the ethnic business niche? Which cultural components are preserved and which are discarded when negotiating workplace challenges? Most importantly, how are these ethnic or cultural components translated into racial meanings and racial identities by others?

This study is an endeavor to pull immigrant entrepreneurship discourse away from an ethnic lens and moving it into a racial formation framework (Fulbeck 2006, Gaskins 1999, Root 1996). By analyzing race as the same as ethnicity, we are not able to explore variety in patterns of assimilation amongst people of different racial categories. This necessitates that we move immigrant entrepreneurship discourse out of the ethnicity model and base it with the racial formation process, where Michael Omi and Howard Winant define it as, “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created,

inhabited, transformed, and destroyed”, (Omi and Winant 1994, p.55). This process of socially constructing race relays that racial identity is defined by the meanings that individuals in a community come to understand as characteristics expressed by certain groups of people.

In the context of ethnicity and assimilation, absorption into mainstream culture may be enhanced by intermarriage as signified by acceptance through marital assimilation. But people who get manicures at nail salons or buy wholesale crab at docks of the bay are much further away in the social distance scale. So for assimilation in these particular scenarios, economic success signifies acceptance through economic assimilation. However, this paradigm does not recognize that the assimilation process is perpetually shaped through the concept of race because of the social limitations it imposes on these choices in our everyday lives. Therefore, people within the framework of these business communities are not the center of the analysis because they are some novel immigrant group that needs to be documented and studied, but because through the analysis of their lived experiences in the workplace we can begin to move the context of immigrant business away from the ethnic entrepreneurship paradigm towards a racial understanding through the social construction lens.

### *Literature Review and Conceptual Framework*

#### *1. Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Ethnic Economies*

Immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States has been the topic of profound interest since it has been suggested that for some immigrant groups, entry into ethnic small business is a means of economic adjustment (Glazer and Moynihan 1963). Ethnic

entrepreneurship in the United States has grown since the 1970's (Fain 1980; Waldinger et al 2006), and has prompted researchers to focus studies on factors influencing ethnic small business development (Waldinger 1989; Tsukashima 1991; Min 1990; Chin et al 1996). Studies have spanned across several ethnic groups, including Cubans in Miami (Portes 1987), Chinese in New York (Zhou 1992), Taiwanese in Los Angeles (Tseng 1995), and Koreans in Atlanta (Min and Jaret 1985), Los Angeles (Light and Bonacich 1988), and Chicago (Yoon 1991). These studies examined a single ethnic group, while others have investigated comparative group business development (Kim et al 1989; Waldinger 1989; Bates 1994). In Kim and colleagues' (1989) empirical investigation of probable sources of ethnic differentials in self-employment, Koreans, Chinese and Asian Indians were covered. Vietnamese immigrant business owners were left out because at the time of the study, researchers felt that the "history of Vietnamese refugees in the United States [was] too short and the circumstances of their arrival were too unique for them to be included." Vietnamese immigrants as a central focus in the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship has been minimal over the decades (Gold 1988; Huynh 1996; Eckstein and Nguyen 2011), and the studies have concentrated only on the business related aspects. These studies do not fully address the context of lived experiences and race relations which materialize as a result of participation in business niches.

Also, research in the area of Asian immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States has often related to the question of why certain racial groups have fared better in economic adjustment than other groups, whether immigrant or native minority. Some contend that Asian immigrant entrepreneurship has created benefits for the Asian

American community and the larger society (Light and Bhachu 1993; Waldinger 1989; Zhou 1992). In this framework, Asian immigrants find it difficult to enter the conventional labor market due to language barriers or lack of professional degrees that measure up to degrees from the United States (Zhou 1992; Kim and Sakamoto 2010). They enter into self-employment in untouched or underdeveloped business areas. They create jobs, increase commercial activities and revitalize inner city neighborhoods, pump money into their ethnic enclaves, and reach economic success for themselves. Evident of this are ethnic enclaves in California: Koreatown in Los Angeles, Little Saigon in Westminster, and Little Taipei in Monterey Park. In Houston, Texas, an area of thriving Asian commercial activity is more like Little Asia since there are no dominant groups of Asian businesses. There is an assortment of businesses owned and operated by Asians of various ethnic backgrounds.

In contrast to the former framework is the argument that Asian immigrant businesses are disadvantageous for both the Asian American community and the larger society. Bonacich (1994) argues that Asian immigrant entrepreneurship adds to the tension of urban race relations. What is created is a competition for urban space. Ong (1993) argues that Asian immigrant businesses spawn from the racial discrimination of Asians in the mainstream labor market. Asians then feel that they must enter into self-employment as was also described in an older analysis by Bonacich (1972). Unfortunately, most of these businesses are marginal in profit, are low-skilled labor intensive rather than capital intensive, are concentrated in undesirable neighborhoods, and are typified by poor working conditions. In other words, they create low quality jobs.

Asian immigrant businesses may present Asian American groups as a model minority with low rates of unemployment, but under the disadvantage framework it simply means they have a high number of essentially working poor. In addition, scholars of this paradigm assert that some Asian immigrant businesses are harmful to their owners due to reasons of exploitation or slow assimilation. For example, Min's (1990) study of Korean immigrant business owners found that among some of the many problems Koreans faced were being overworked, being exploited by clients and suppliers, and experiencing a slowing of assimilation.

Although both of the previously proposed frameworks explain outcomes differently, both ask the same question of which reasons impact immigrants' decisions to enter into business. Both theoretical statements seem to merge with the reasoning that immigrants face disadvantages in the mainstream labor market, and therefore turn to self-employment as a course to upward mobility. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) propose that in the development of immigrant business, there is a stage of resource mobilization. Thus, once immigrants have decided to enter into self-employment, what are the resources that they use to get started and become operational? Studies have found that different Asian groups utilize different resources at different rates (Kim et al 1989), and that some resources make for more successful immigrant businesses than others (Bates 1994). These are important studies because they show that Asian business owners have intragroup differences as well intergroup differences that determine business outcomes. So the question extends from why Asians as a whole fare better than other racial groups to include why some particular Asian groups fare better than their racial counterparts.

These questions, however, must be asked with the assumption that Asian immigrant businesses are more beneficial than harmful to their owners. Investigating possible answers to these questions with a study of the Vietnamese nail salon and the fishery business is one main goal of this study.

The examination of ethnic economies has given rise to two visions in the literature as well. One side views ethnic businesses as the undersized and financially unsteady undertakings. These businesses have been described as corner stores in poor neighborhoods with small inventories and random items. These shops are destined to fail or surely have low returns on investments for their owners. Aldrich and colleagues (1984) examined Asian shopkeepers in Britain and assert that self-employment may offer some minority groups different pathways to employment in a White dominated labor market, but the alternatives do not necessarily lead to a qualitative improvement. The other side of this debate views ethnic business ventures as encompassing little shops as well as rather large, financially stable companies. Portes and Bach (1985) contend that the Cuban population of Miami (as commonly referred to as the ethnic enclave by the authors) comprises a widespread division of labor and a vastly segmented entrepreneurial class. Companies in Miami's Cuban enclave may have small stores and minor operations, but also include banking, real estate, and construction businesses that transact business in the millions of dollars (Portes 1987). Which of these two views aligns most with the Vietnamese nail salon business? Which applies most to the Vietnamese fishery industry? These are two questions that will be addressed in this study.

Another component in the study of ethnic economies finds there is consensus in the literature that ethnic business owners rely on co-ethnics for help (Aldrich et al 1984; Lovell-Troy 1980; Zhou 1992), and that they rely on co-ethnics as a source of labor (Tseng 1995; Yoon 1991). This helps explain the notion that ethnic enterprises can be quite resilient. However, the argument exists that reliance on co-ethnics is not so simple. For example, there is evidence that residence in the Miami area raises the probability of self-employment not just for Cubans but also for other Hispanics (Light and Rosenstein 1995). A study of the garment industry in New York revealed that Dominican firms showed an inclination to employ from the broader Hispanic immigrant population (Waldinger 1986). However, some studies have shown that recruitment from a broader ethnic population does not translate to equal opportunities in getting all levels of jobs. Cobas (1988) found that Cuban operated business in Puerto Rico tended to employ co-ethnics in positions of trust such as management and accounting.

The foregoing studies suggest that there is a more complex process of co-ethnic business relations than simple reliance, and that relations between owners can often be competitive while interactions between employer and employee can be strenuous. Co-ethnic owners may engage in mutual assistance, but clarification needs to be made that competition and rivalries can exist. There are multiple possibilities for a depiction of the ethnic enterprise, which suggests that the borders of the ethnic economy are not as rigid as previously thought. This study hopes to address these questions by illustrating the complexities (or simplicities) that make up relationships in the Vietnamese nail salon and the Vietnamese fishery businesses.

One final theoretical notion about ethnic economies focuses on the firm's structure of governance. The theory of transaction cost economics (Williamson 1981) posits that governance structures can be differentiated and the various structures play a critical role in influencing the firm's efficiency. Transactions between the firm's members, rather than commodities, are the unit of analysis. In the context of this study, Williamson's ideas about managing human assets in a company can be implemented. Employment relationships are the unit of analysis, and like a machine, firms which exhibit agreeable transactions (relationships) between members run more efficiently than firms in which members have conflicts or divergences in ideas or ambitions. Conflicts, disagreements, or misunderstandings between members are transaction costs, and in the analogy of the machine, higher transaction costs mean less efficiency. This theoretical perspective raises the question of whether Vietnamese owned nail salons or Vietnamese run fishing boats have lower transaction costs than their non-Vietnamese counterparts.

Also, the immigrant entrepreneurship literature identifies many immigrant businesses as family owned and run, and from this aspect, the question arises about whether or not the family business could be more efficient than its opposite in terms of transaction cost economics. To extend this, in a cultural setting, the symbolic meaning of "family" is negotiable, as co-ethnics might feel more "familial" with each other than with non-co-ethnics. If so, do immigrant owned business (in which co-ethnics are the majority of employees) have lower transaction costs because of the likelihood that members can be more agreeable with each other? Could it also work against them, as familial relationships might disrupt the hierarchy of the organizational structure (i.e. son who is

the employer, parent who is the employee)? Answers to such question would shed new light on this theoretical perspective as Williamson does not theorize about whether or not the cultural/familial configuration of a firm can affect its transaction costs.

This study also approaches the examination of community building among Vietnamese Americans within the frameworks of ecology, systems, and conflict. The community in this project is conceptualized as the business community; hence, the nail salon and fishery industries are the communities of interest. The ecological approach refers to community as spatial, where “space” by definition means physical boundaries. It is a phenomenon that occurs when vast numbers of people assemble in a single physical area. Classic insights in urban ecology can be found in the works of Robert Park and the Chicago School of the 1930s, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. For Park, he postulated that the loyalties that bind persons together in primitive societies are in direct proportion to the intensity of the fears and hatreds with which they view other societies. This concept is developed as theories of ethnocentrism and in-group/out-group propensities. Group solidarity correlates to a great extent with animosity toward an out-group (Park 1969). These conceptualizations may apply to Vietnamese American business community building as issues of mainstream communities and other minority communities viewing the Vietnamese as an impenetrable “other” community or as an open abundant source of ethnic services. How does that articulate in the process of making the Vietnamese American business community?

Tonnies’ (1957) notions of rationalization and the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* interplay with Durkheim’s approach of mechanical solidarity (based on

similarities) and organic solidarity (based on specialization and interdependence). In application to the issue of Vietnamese American business community building, the connection lies between the modern rise of ethnicity and *Gesellschaft*-like communities. As societies like mainstream America shift from traditional to rational, (mechanical solidarities moving towards organic solidarities), how does business community building for immigrant groups like the Vietnamese persist and maintain, as classical theorists would predict that modernization would lead to the destruction of ties based on culture or tradition? Contemporary ecologists view the expansion and segregation of business communities as central because spatial patterns are the result of humans' dependence and interdependence on each other, as well as on the land or territories in which business communities exist. Technology aids in the reduction of social interaction problems on many levels (transportation, communication, etc.) and increase mobility and accessibility; thus, consequently, the idea that the city is a spatial element shaped by a convergence of social forces impacts the formation of the Vietnamese American business community.

The concept of *Gemeinschaft* from classical sociology relates to the aforementioned issue of transaction costs discussed by Williamson (1981). Although Weber generally believed that the shift from traditional to bureaucratic organization improved efficiency, the study of ethnic entrepreneurship illustrates the case where traditional organization may entail certain efficiency gains. One concern of this research is to delineate how Vietnamese ethnic enterprises may be able to economize on their operating costs by reducing their transaction costs due to a familial production system that is underlain by the traditional Asian cultural value of community over the individual.

Vietnamese ethnic enterprises thus represent a case study for the investigation of the circumstances under which certain efficiency gains may be promoted by a *Gemeinschaft* type of organization, in contrast to Weber's general prognosis of an increasingly "iron cage" of rationality in the modern economy. At the same time, this analysis will address more specifically how the Vietnamese have been able to gain significant market share in these two industries that are characterized by significant market competitiveness.

From a broader theoretical point of view, the systems context is usually without reference to space as it views community as a micro social system. In Parsonian fashion, the ideas of "interactional fields" involves individual actors who interact and construct shared structures and symbols, and an underlying postulation of the interactional field perspective is that "the substance of community is social interaction" (Wilkinson 1991). Communities also must produce and sustain boundaries (in this context symbolic markers that indicate boundaries) in order to create unity, solidarity, and allegiance among members, while also maintaining ties with the larger society as they are subject to macro-systems as well. The systems approach can assist in analyzing the Vietnamese American community as the views of its community leaders may reflect the need to utilize a dialogue of structured and shared symbols to solidify its members. As an ethnic enclave and an ethnic economy, systems of interactions where individuals rely on social networks are inevitably necessary as the literature has documented the continual reliance of ethnic persons on each other for small business start up, maintenance, and growth.

Finally, the conflict approach concentrates on the relations of authority, power and inequalities within a community, and in regards to ethnic minority communities,

inequalities in relation to other ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority. It is not surprising that many conflict theorists approach community with class conflict as the central theme arguing that divisions among and within communities are based primarily economic and political processes. The conflict paradigm notifies us to the notion that Vietnamese Americans build their communities at a disadvantage, as they are not on a level playing field. As refugees, their immigration story reveals partitions within the group in status, wealth, education, connections, and resources. Did the process of business community building in America reproduce these already existing inequalities? Were the inequalities lessened or were they intensified? How were the processes of ethnic entrepreneurship a product of the inequalities, and did business ownership lead to sense of “making it in America”? Also, class terms cannot simply be the only component affecting the internal and external rifts existing among Vietnamese Americans. The community may also be illustrated by schisms based on ethnicity, immigrant wave, generation, gender, political orientation, and social status. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the multiple issues that reflect the conflict approach in immigrant community building in reference to business ownership and community leadership.

## *2. Race Construction in Entrepreneurship*

The paradigm of racial formation that occurs through social interaction draws from discourse in the social sciences that suggest race is a social construction rather than some innate or pre-coded biological or phenotypic meaning (Lopez 1996, Lipsitz 1998, Spickard 1992). Comprehending race this way allows us to connect how macro and micro level social forces give meaning to racial categories by assigning social implications to

these categorized groups. A method for connecting these forces to social meanings in the analysis of immigrant entrepreneurship is through the exploration of assimilation in this context. Contradicting the established beliefs of the time that placed non-white people as incapable of assimilation into the American mainstream (Fong 1971), Robert E. Park (1950) proposed a *race relations cycle* that would eventually lead to the full integration of people of color, particularly noting that it is a progressive cycle that is irreversible.

Milton Gordon (1964) supplemented the race relations cycle by creating stages of assimilation. He suggested seven elements to assimilation: cultural assimilation (changing to cultural values), structural assimilation (inclusion into secondary groups), marital assimilation (inclusion into primary groups), identification assimilation (identity within the mainstream), attitude-receptional assimilation (absence of prejudice), behavioral assimilation (absence of discrimination), and civic assimilation (absence of power conflict). Park understood assimilation as a linear progression, but Gordon's promulgation of assimilation does not necessitate such a linear approach. He even suggests that some stages may be relevant to a particular group while others may not (Hirschman 1983), which consequently leads to a paradigm of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993).

Under the segmented assimilation model, three possible patterns of adjustment are most likely occur among contemporary immigrants and their children (Portes and Zhou 1993). One of them duplicates the traditional pattern of integration into the white middle class. A second pattern is a path in the opposite direction and leads to assimilation into the underclass. A third illustrates the rapid economic advancement with conscious

maintenance of the immigrant community's values and firm cohesion. Under this model, important theoretical questions arise of what makes some immigrant groups successful and others not so successful.

To place a framework for this study of Vietnamese workers, both Park and Gordon's paradigms leave more to be desired in an economic context of assimilation, as both widely accept marital assimilation as the culmination of the assimilation process (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1997). Both Park and Gordon's models don't invite the complexities of assimilation in different contexts. This leaves room for studies that focus on the economic aspect. The goal of this study is to focus on the economic context through business niche participation by Vietnamese immigrants whose lives are reconstructed as they engage in the nail care and shrimp industry and assimilate into their lives in America. Through the exploration of these experiences, the aim is to tease out the racial construction of such experiences in American society.

Ethnicity is prevalently defined as a population of people whose members identify with each other, either on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry, and are culturally distinct (Ore 2006). However, what clearly differentiates ethnicity from race is how the two concepts are understood socially. This can be demonstrated within the assimilation process and its three possibilities: 1) Anglo conformity 2) the melting pot and 3) pluralism (Hirschman 1983; Feagin and Feagin 1999). Each of these suggests that ethnicity is something people are willing to surrender to become acculturated into the mainstream, that the dissolving of new ethnic cultural traits gives way to its absorption into the mainstream society, and perhaps any remaining ethnic peculiarities are

considered equal. But unlike ethnicity, it may be argued that race is something we cannot surrender. The two concepts are different, but they overlap. This gives an opportunity for this study to flesh out where ethnicity and race overlap, and where they diverge as two separate experiences in these actors' lives.

Given the way that most Americans typically seem to conceptualize race, it is viewed as constant during the process of assimilation. It is during these processes of assimilation that the racial identities of new ethnic individuals are created, and with time, it is fitting for the dynamics of racial formation to begin working. Racial formation is defined as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (Omi and Winant 1994). Acknowledging these dynamics locates the current project. Racial formation is the approach in which racial projects connect social meaning to racial categories. What will be demonstrated in the latter half of this dissertation is how the experiences of Vietnamese business owners (along with their competitors, their clients, and their community) construct, enforce, perpetuate, and even reconstruct racial assumptions of business niches, and although their business and success may translate into economic assimilative progress, the racialization of their industries impedes the social assimilation process.

Consequences of industry racialization may lead to ethnic and racial tensions, but the tension may be conflated with economic or social class tensions. Unequal access to resources (whether perceived or real) creates a sense of unfairness, and in business, access to markets, goods, supplies, etc. can be studied to understand the experiences of actors in relation to their levels of access to such business goods. With the conflation of

race and class, what may be a class issue is often perceived as a race issue. In immigrant business niches, competition creates a racial hierarchy, and for Asian immigrant workers this is informed by what Lowe (1996) points out as a “yellow peril”, where they threaten to displace white workers. She notes that even though Asian immigrant workers have contributed to the construction of this nation, they are still viewed as the “foreigner-within”. In addition, she gives context to an emerging labor market in the post 1965 immigration era, when Vietnamese immigration flourished. The economic restructuring during this period gave rise to what she assesses is a double front, where a racialized anti-Asian dialogue created and sustained the notion of part Asian threat and rival on the one hand, and on the other, a necessary labor supply for the domestic economy. For Vietnamese immigrant workers in the nail care and shrimp industry, this double front concept is a place to explore the complex issues of ethnicity, racial formation, and its connection to hierarchy in both the social and economic contexts.

### *Methodology*

Biddle and Locke (1997) discuss the strategies of convincing qualitative work and note the importance of authenticity. Authenticity is referred to as being genuine in the experience of the field from actually being there. To adhere to authenticity, I spent time observing five different nail salons and the docks of Seabrook and Galveston. I also traveled to small Gulf Coast towns where I spent three to four days in each town (Palacios, Seadrift, and Beaumont). Spending such time gave me intimate familiarity with my participants’ daily lives and the world in which they exist. In my attempt to document

the business development process of the two industries and the subsequent racial/ethnic discourses of such development, I try to carefully note the whether my methodology is a constructivist or objectivist approach in grounded theory (Charmaz 2003). The section of the study on the process of business development leans more towards an objectivist approach, while the discussion on race and ethnicity come from a constructionist approach. Overall, I believe the essence of this study can be best framed within a symbolic interaction perspective, where I attempt what Charmaz states as “an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 678). The study is based on my learning of my participants’ meanings of their experiences to build a conceptual analysis of the experiences. I use existing data gathered from my Master’s thesis on the Vietnamese nail salon business in Houston (Ha 2002) and data from a study of Vietnamese fishery workers along the Gulf Coast (Ha 2005). The Institutional Review Board gave approval in August 2009 to proceed with the dissertation study.

In the defense of use of this data set, I contend that one of the first endeavors in an observational study is to choose a site that is appropriate for finding answers to the research question. Esterberg (2002) recommends observations on a small-scale site where interactions can be documented. Since I am interested in the process of business development among Vietnamese immigrants, it was essential to find participants who live in a sizeable Vietnamese community and conduct business in the nail salon or fishery

industry. Documenting the history and the present conditions of these respondents in their process of business building adds a longitudinal element that illustrates the process.

The nail salon and the fishing communities along the coasts of Texas are the sites of interest. The nail salon and the fishing docks have clear boundaries where I can observe workers engaging in daily activities.

I am documenting a *particular ethnic group*. Emerson (1995) tells us that researchers interested in ethnicity should carefully choose a site for field research where he/she expects the process of ethnicity to be particularly salient. The visuals and smells are a unique feature of the Vietnamese nail salon and the fishery docks. The drson (or lack thereof), the set up, the interactions (between workers, between employee and customer, between customers), and the sounds of these immigrant business sites are unique in their own way, which adds the element of ethnicity in this research, making it a distinctive feature. The Vietnamese American community is a site for reconstruction of ethnic place, as the sights, smells, sounds, and symbols of the homeland are replicated in the assembling and construction of the community. An in-depth exploration of members of such a community gives voice to their lived experiences in very particular sites and situations.

Collins' (1986) Black feminist approach reminds researchers that there are marginalized groups whose voices need to be heard. It is the outsider within context that we can learn from Vietnamese immigrants and their host communities as they engage in their lived experiences in the workplace. As a Vietnamese immigrant myself, I came to

the United States as an infant and grew up in Houston, Texas. My father, mother, and I arrived as part of the first wave when we fled on the day of the Fall of Saigon, April 30, 1975. My father was a pilot for the Vietnamese Air Force, and when we finally settled in Houston in 1978, my family was very involved in the Vietnamese American community. My father is a member of the *Khong Quan* (Air Force) organization and found many friends and military comrades through membership in the organization. Many of his comrades' female relatives (wives, sisters, daughters, etc.) ended up in the nail care industry. My mother is a seamstress but many of her friends ended up working in the nail care industry, too. I visited many of these shops when I was growing up. We lived in a working class neighborhood in the southeast part of Houston, and we were approximately 30 minutes from Seabrook and Kemah. Growing up, my parents formed friendships with the shrimpers in those areas. I recall the many coolers of fresh shrimp and other seafood that my parents would buy directly from these individuals. In many cases they gave away the part of their catch they couldn't sell (for example, mackerel fish). My parents were happy to receive these freebies. As a graduate student of sociology who grew up and was so heavily exposed to workers in the two industries, these experiences informed my curiosities as I began my studies in sociology. As a member of the Vietnamese American community who observed the relationships my parents had with workers in the two industries, I felt like an insider. These workers knew me. I am the daughter of Phat (the air force pilot) and On (the seamstress) Ha. No one ever pressed me to consider working in a nail salon or on the docks of Seabrook, though. It was expected that I go to college

and become a working professional. In this sense, I'm an outsider. I'm the next generation. It is these multiple statuses that make me feel like an outsider within the Vietnamese American nail salon and shrimping industries.

To ground my argument in theory, let me begin by restating the research agenda, and that is to document the *process* of Vietnamese immigrant business development and Vietnamese American community formation. These are processes that are not always linear. Decisions are debated back and forth, and there are push and pull aspects that are negotiated by the social actors. Bourdieu (1988, p.782) informs us that, "true scientific theory and practice must [be] the analysis of the experience of social agents and the analysis of the objective structures that make this experience possible." A survey or an analysis of Census data cannot capture these experiences in a multidimensional fashion. A qualitative approach, to extend on Bourdieu, - a "soft" sociology - allows the exploration of social actors' experiences and realities, unlike the positivist or "hard" sociology which "hinder[s] direct contact between the researcher and this reality he or she claims to describe empirically." Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also advise on *habitus* and *field*. *Habitus* is a matrix of attitudes and expectations that individuals negotiate to respond to conditions in the field. Qualitative, exploratory research allows the researcher to unravel this matrix and illustrate the process of the social actor's negotiations.

Moving to the field, it is space external to the social agents. It is the framework or domain within which people act. It is structural in the form that a set of rules that permit expectations to be predicted, but it is fluid in the sense that it is always intertwined with the *habitus*. This structure can be created through positivist approaches, but there is a danger in that. Surveys, data sets, questionnaires and statistical models can be constructed to explore a social phenomenon by constructing the field, but along the lines of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), this objectivist position “slips from model to reality.” Objectivist approaches “reify the structures it constructs by treating them as autonomous entities endowed by the ability to ‘act’ in the manner of historical agents. [O]bjectivism ends up projecting into the minds of agents, a (scholastic) vision of their practice that, paradoxically, it could only uncover because it methodically set aside the experience agents have of it” (p.18). In qualitative approaches, the researcher allows the actors to give voice to their daily experiences and the set of rules they follow or not. Only in the creative realm of the soft sociology can the actors themselves shape the field. This is crucial in the examination of immigrant business as a developmental concept and highly significant in the exploration of community building as a multidimensional process because of the nature of “community” as “field” itself.

Field notes exist as a source of information for the nail salon workers, and such notes are available for the fishery workers. Field research is important in this study

because they allow the researcher to “grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others. In this respect, field notes offer subtle and complex understandings of these others’ lives, routines and meanings” (Emerson 1995). I build on this argument by expanding on the *meanings* that we as researchers seek to explain. In this light, Blumer’s (1986) symbolic interaction approach illustrates the delight in taking field notes because of the observation of *interactions*, and it is the process of interaction that is the formation of meanings for individuals. The first core principle of meaning is that humans act towards people, objects or experiences based upon the meaning that they have given to those people, objects or experiences. Field notes capture the meanings that actors create through interaction.

Field notes were taken and documented immediately following the observation. It is pertinent for the preservation of the account. More than this preservation is the theoretical importance of reflexivity in documentation. Referring back to the earlier discussion of Bourdieu’s *habitus* and *field*, reflexivity is the relationship between the habitus and field. Moreover, as a researcher, one must be aware of one’s own place in this habitus and field of the social actors. As we interact with our respondents, we are a part of their habitus and field. It is imperative that we document our field notes with reflections of ourselves as social actors as well. Keeping in mind, though, the balance that should be met when writing personal reflections. These reflections would be useful to

serve as a legitimizing function: establishing a professional researcher that is thorough, transparent, and authoritative yet empathetic (DeVault 1997). To honor reflexivity, I will address the concept by applying elements from the theory of segmented assimilation in the conclusion and discussion section. I will discuss my own status within the community and share my own experiences along with the dynamic relationships that were formed during my time with my participants.

Information from in-depth interviews compliment the field note observations. Field notes elicit information on what actors do, and interviews give voice to these actors by allowing them to tell us directly why they do things the way they do; that is, it elicits information on what actors say and think. This information allows for an external reflexivity of the respondent. That is, they are *dictating* their habitus and field negotiations. Interviews are also an interaction between the researcher and the respondent; therefore, there should be careful considerations about the relationship that is built upon those interactions. In order to gather in-depth information, there has to be a trust between the two people. The researcher should trust that his/her respondents are telling the truth at least as they see it. The respondent should trust that the researcher will maintain any confidentiality agreements, and moreover, that the researcher will accurately give voice to the respondent's experiences.

Esterberg (2002) suggests building enough rapport to where the respondent will open up to the researcher, but not so much that a friendship actually develops. This is a matter of keeping a certain distance between oneself as a researcher and the respondent

qua respondent. As a Vietnamese immigrant who grew up in Houston, I was able to make contacts easily through snowball sampling. This insider status helped recruit many of the respondents, and it provided an entryway into creating trusting relationships with them. Because most of the Vietnamese respondents have low levels of English proficiency, my fluency in Vietnamese opened opportunities for their participation and for the observations of daily work life to be authentic when workers spoke in Vietnamese. In addition, when I shared the goal of this research (a school project), respondents were either very enthusiastic in supporting me to reach this goal or at least sympathetic to the endeavor. The academic objective also made it possible to speak with industry experts who recognized the significance of the Vietnamese in their industries, and with non-Vietnamese workers who seemed to be willing to speak as they tried to make sense of their own place in the broader stories of the industries within which they work.

I have observation field notes from 5 nail salons in the greater Houston area and interviews of 36 nail salon workers from 12 different nail salons in the greater Houston area. I have observation field notes from the fishing docks of Seabrook, Texas, and Galveston, Texas, and interviews of 14 fishery workers, 4 boat owners, and 2 wholesale seafood business operators. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. I used personal networks of Vietnamese nail salon and fishery workers, and then recruited through their networks of Vietnamese nail salon and fishery workers.

A key informant in the nail salon data is a wholesale supply operator. This individual allowed me to sit in the supply store on Sundays (their busiest day) and recruit customers for the study. Additionally, a key informant in the shrimp industry is the owner

of a wholesale seafood business operator in Seabrook, Texas, who allowed me to spend time in the dock area where daily catches were received. I recruited individuals who came through the dock area for interviews. I also have interviews with 5 individuals who are considered leaders in the Vietnamese community, with 3 who are specifically regarded as leaders of the Vietnamese business community. In depth interviews included information on basic demographics and open-ended questions. This information was used to develop a greater understanding of how Vietnamese American nail salon and fishery workers experienced their daily lives in the workplace.

For non-Vietnamese participants, I have 15 interviews with non-Vietnamese customers who frequented the 5 nail salons where I conducted observations. I have 6 interviews with non-Vietnamese nail salon workers/owners from competing beauty salon businesses. I have 11 interviews with white fishermen from various small fishing towns in Texas (Seadrift, Port Arthur, Kemah, and Palacios) who were either still working or have retired from the industry. These interviews contribute to the knowledge of interactions and perceptions of Vietnamese Americans in their respective industries. This outsider perspective is important in the exploration of race relations and the meanings attached to the experiences. Pseudonyms are used in reference to any participants whose responses are used in this document.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Opportunity Structures in the Development of the Vietnamese Nail Salon and Shrimping Industries**

To begin dissecting the web of immigrant business development, I begin by examining opportunity structure. The concept of what constitutes as an opportunity is empirically slippery (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) as opportunities may be born out of ideas. How a researcher manages to measure ideas is a challenge itself. For this study, I begin with an application of the Interactive Model of Ethnic Business Development (Waldinger et. Al 2006) as the backdrop of how I determine opportunity structure, but I also include components of technological developments, and a discussion of match between entrepreneur skills and the opportunity structures presented. Researchers have given four conditions under which ethnic businesses can grow in an open market: underserved or abandoned markets, markets characterized by low economies of scale, markets with unstable or uncertain demand, and markets for exotic goods (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). This chapter will address opportunity structure (market conditions, access to ownership), and will highlight open markets that are underserved, and low economies of scale, as these are the two that are most applicable to the cases of Vietnamese manicurists and shrimpers.

Market conditions play an important role in the opportunity structure for immigrant businesses. Groups can only use what is available to them, and that is dependent upon the market at any particular time in history. In the case of customer base, market conditions either favor ethnic clientele or non-ethnic clientele, which in the

former case growth is limited and in the latter, there is more prospect for development. For Vietnamese nail salons, they addressed the underserved/open market. The market access was ripe for clientele outside the upper class and across all ethnic and racial lines. Vietnamese nail salons did not cater so much to their co-ethnics (like a Vietnamese restaurant or Vietnamese grocery store would), but rather to a racially and socioeconomically diverse consumer base. This market condition allowed for the burgeoning of the business within and outside of the Vietnamese community. In the case for the Vietnamese fishery worker, their products are also popular with both ethnic and non-ethnic clientele. Seafood products are not just consumed by Vietnamese Americans, although cultural variations exist in the type of seafood or parts of the seafood that suit cultural tastes (fish eyes, crab liver paste, sea snails, etc.). Cultural tastes will be important in the discussion of harvest, as Vietnamese shrimpers are able to sell the majority of their catch while their white counterparts threw them back or discarded the by-catch. This addresses the condition of exotic goods. In this context, although most of the shrimp catch gets sold to a diverse market, the demand by co-ethnics for by-catch made co-ethnic customers more important for shrimpers than it did for nail salon workers.

The significance of the ethnic enclave also plays a role in this demand, since Vietnamese enclaves in major metropolitan areas across Texas (Houston, Dallas, Austin) were sites of demand for these exotic goods. As such, noting the ethnic enclave is a good segue way into the discussion of low economies of scale. Nail salon workers and shrimping crews in Texas initially developed in areas of Vietnamese concentration.

Evans' (1989) study of the effects of ethnic market size and isolated labor pool on immigrant business show that the larger the immigrant group, the more likely are its members to start their own businesses. Vietnamese nail salons emerged in the early 1980's in ethnic enclaves like Houston, Texas. For shrimpers, the coastal locations closest to the Houston enclave include Kemah, Seabrook, and Galveston.

Ethnic residential concentration generally means opportunity for ethnic businesses to cater to their co-ethnics, and in the case of the Vietnamese nail salons, while the ethnic enclave was not heavily significant as a customer base, it did provide a large pool for recruitment of workers and for social support networks. However, for the shrimpers, co-ethnics as buyers of seafood would be an important revenue stream and were also important as an industry network. Vietnamese women who started their nail salons were able to help friends and family members by giving them advice on the business, showing them techniques, and giving them their first jobs as nail salon technicians. Soon, those who started as nail technicians saved enough money to start their own shop. Ads in Vietnamese newspapers showed Vietnamese women where to go to school, and how to apply to those schools. For fishery workers, Vietnamese boat owners recruited co-ethnic workers who lived in the Houston area but could easily commute to the coastal docks for work. Because of the extended time out at sea, many of these workers were gone from their home for months at a time during season. During the off-season, they could return to their families and still operate their daily lives within the enclave.

Over time, as the businesses grew and were viewed as profitable enterprises, manicurists and shrimpers expanded to areas outside of the ethnic enclave. Small towns across Texas saw nail salons emerge in shopping plazas and retail marketplaces. In my road travels across the country for leisure, I would regularly stop in on nail salons I saw along the way just to see if they were Vietnamese owned. In Texas alone, I stopped by 16 nail salons during my travels, and every single one was owned and operated by Vietnamese. Nationwide, nail salon industry studies (Drummey 2007; Federmen et. al 2006) showed that over 40% of industry workers were Vietnamese. With nearly 350,000 nail techs in the United States that means over 150,000 Vietnamese nail technicians. Texas nail technicians represented 16% of U.S. nail technicians (only third to California and Florida), and housed nearly 9% of the nail salons (only second to California). As mentioned earlier, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations reports that roughly 60% of the nail technician licenses applications are from Vietnamese. This gives an estimate of over 14,000 Vietnamese in Texas who are nail technicians.

As for shrimpers, many Vietnamese moved their families from Houston to small coastal towns along Texas to partake in the shrimp industry. Many had worked as fishermen in Vietnam, and many had experience from working in the docks of the locations near Houston. As mentioned earlier, these small towns along the Texas coast experienced significant increases in Vietnamese migration. With populations between 1000-2000, an arrival of 50 or 100 immigrant workers in a dedicated industry had a substantial impact on the majority white population. In the shrimp industry, small towns

across the Texas coast received between 100-150 Vietnamese immigrants during the early years of resettlement.

Most of the shrimpers were adult immigrants, and many were shuffled into the industry upon arrival. While they were not the owners or captains of boats at the time, they became an integral part of the industry within the space of their new communities. More importantly, by way of law, Vietnamese shrimpers automatically became entrepreneurs. The Texas Tax Reform Act of 1976 redefined shrimpers as self employed workers and excluded them from employment withholding tax (Maril 1995). Under this definition, all of the Vietnamese shrimpers along the Gulf Coast of Texas were self employed, and rough estimates of 1000-1200 Vietnamese in Texas worked in the shrimp industry as shrimpers. According to a seafood employment study in 1993 in Texas, an estimated 5800 workers were deemed as supply input (Haby et. al p. 3). This gives us a good idea that roughly 20% of shrimpers in Texas were Vietnamese during the 1990s.

With the heavy presence of Vietnamese in both of these industries, they developed in a market where the concept of economies of scale was a factor. To be clear, for nail salons, the exchange is for services, although products are also a percentage of sales. For shrimpers, the exchange is for commodities, although the service of cleaning, scaling, filleting, etc. of the seafood accounts for part of the exchange. As Vietnamese immigrants grew in number, their recruitment of co-ethnics into the manicure and shrimping industries increased. The expansion of a labor participation in these industries gave Vietnamese entrepreneurs the advantage of economies of scale. The mass increase of Vietnamese immigrant workers in the two industries significantly lowered the price of

both goods and services dramatically. They began what is known in the as the “discount Asian nail salon” and the “Asian seafood sellers”. The creation of the two markets separated Vietnamese workers from their non-Vietnamese (mostly White) counterparts.

Historically in the United States, the nail industry provided the majority of services to wealthy, upper class, elite white and celebrity women. Services started between \$50 and \$75, and required weekly to bi-weekly maintenance. The Vietnamese were willing to provide these services for less than half that price, if not even at a larger discount. They created the discount nail business as they opened up service to the masses. This shaped a clientele base that crossed all class and racial lines. Middle and working class women; black, Hispanic and white women; and adult women and teenage girls could all afford to have their hands decorated not only for special occasions such as proms or weddings, but also for regular maintenance for work or just simple beauty pleasure.

In the shrimp industry, shrimp size is a factor in the cost per pound. An increase in size means increase in cost. Tiger shrimp and jumbo shrimp are commonly known as larger sized shrimp and command higher prices. Vietnamese shrimpers did not usually offer lower prices in the cost per pound unless they sold to co-ethnic wholesale buyers for ethnic markets. For example, a Vietnamese boat captain explained, “When we sell to the buyer for Hong Kong market, we want to give them the best price because we help out our fellow Vietnamese to make money. It is not a big difference, but say for Tiger shrimp I will sell to Hong Kong market for 20 cents less per pound. I can still make good money

but I want to help Vietnamese people, too.” Lowering price per pound helped to sell to co-ethnic wholesalers and retailers, but the sale of exotic goods to these buyers is also important. While lower price per pound helped in terms of gaining buyers, a driving force of the Vietnamese shrimp industry (as opposed to their White counterparts) was volume. Vietnamese manicurists were lowering prices for services and the costs to deliver those services from the economies of scale, and Vietnamese shrimpers were increasing their service time and products (longer days out at sea to increase catch size, utilizing all of their catch) in order to increase the volume aspect of the economies of scale. When a seller has more volume, he or she is willing to part with some of that volume for lower prices to particular buyers without disrupting the overall market price of the commodity because sales of exotic goods could make up for any lost revenue from lowering price per pound for shrimp. Vietnamese crews are able to sell a large proportion of their catch, including undersized shrimp (which could be used to make shrimp paste or salted dried shrimp), crab, eel, conch, snails, squid, seaweed, etc., all items considered unsellable or undesirable by White shrimpers. This gave Vietnamese shrimpers more revenue streams over their White counterparts.

#### *Access to Ownership*

With the knowledge that a market existed for Vietnamese immigrant workers to capitalize on, the next step in entrepreneurship was to look for ways to become owners. Vacancy is an area noted in the model of business development. In the case of nail salons, vacancies in the discount nail salon business were wide open. Before the Vietnamese entered into this business, there were only upscale salons. The discount nail salon simply

did not exist in Houston, therefore, vacancies were abundant, and there was practically no competition for those vacancies. Vietnamese refugees were willing to work for lower costs, thus charging clients half the price of upscale salons.

Hahn, a 27 year old nail tech who has lived in the United States for 2 years, shares, “We charge \$27 for a full set, and I am making about \$250 a week. That is more than I can ever dream of. That is how much I would make in one year in Vietnam!”

Working 6 days a week for 8 hours a day to make \$1000 a month is less than acceptable for most native workers. Current and potential non-Vietnamese salon owners were not willing to lower the price, and therefore, competed only in the upscale salon market.

Vietnamese nail salons in California (Hammond 2004) involved the direction of Hollywood actress, Tippi Hedren, who undertook the task of recruiting young Vietnamese women from a resettlement camp in southern California. She convinced her own manicurist as well as a local beauty school to train these young women, many of whom went on to own their own salons and other businesses within the industry including wholesale beauty supply stores and beauty schools that catered to the Vietnamese American community. One of the earliest Vietnamese nail salons in Houston was opened by a woman who was a hairdresser in Vietnam. Hue arrived in San Antonio, Texas in 1975 and moved to Houston in 1979 with her husband and close friends. Her husband found work as a machine operator and she dabbled in hairdressing.

In 1980 Hue went to Westminster, California (home to the largest Vietnamese enclave in America) to visit her cousin who had been recruited by one of the original

women who were trained by Heddren's manicurist. Hue learned about the business and returned to Houston to obtain her manicurist license. She got her first job with Merle Norman in 1981. In two years she saved enough to open her own hair and nail salon – Rosie's. She charged 40% less than Merle Norman for a manicure and pedicure services. Within 3 years, she recruited 6 additional nail technicians and moved her business to the Galleria area, a well to do neighborhood in Houston. Business was very good, and all of her technicians went on to open their own nail salons. She shared that she had no problem finding new workers as word got out about the nail salon business to the Vietnamese community. Her social network (having friends and family who knew newly arrived Vietnamese immigrants) was very similar to what other Vietnamese nail salon owners reported to me. These networks made it particularly easy to recruit new employees.

Vacancies in the shrimp industry were different in some ways and similar in others to the nail salon in terms of access to ownership. Government resettlement programs allowed sponsorship of Vietnamese immigrants by owners of fishing and shrimping businesses in the Galveston Bay area. These sponsors worked with charitable organizations such as the Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston to bring in Vietnamese immigrants who were willing to work for minimum wage. Because many of these workers had fishing and boating experiences in Vietnam, it was a natural match of skills and the available labor market. In both cases, charitable outreach was key to occupational access, and in most cases, the job opportunities led to entrepreneurship opportunities.

An initially perceived difference between nail salon shops and shrimp boat crews was that shrimpers were entering an industry where creating a “discount” business did not seem to be the avenue to pursue. There is nothing glamorous or upscale about shrimping. It is hard manual labor that can be dangerous or even deadly when dealing with high winds, torrential rains, and heavy sea storms. So how does one create a “discount” in an industry where the size of your catch determines your earnings? The answer lies in condition of boats. Bigger and more expensive boats with sophisticated gear and nets yield larger catches more efficiently. I found that for shrimpers, while not a glamorous occupation, open vacancies came from the area of cheaper boat access/ownership and hence, creating the “discount” level of entrepreneurship did come into play. For Vietnamese immigrants, large new boats were not what they had in mind. Shrimp boats did not have to be very large, usually less than 5 tons. The Vietnamese were very innovative in rigging used boats in order to make them workable condition for commercial use. The cost of the enterprise was roughly \$3000-\$4000, considered too cheap for American fishermen, but very high for new immigrants.

However, the informal loan system used by Vietnamese immigrants (discussed in detail later) gave many of them the opportunity to come up with the funding. With the older but newly converted boats ready for trawling, the Vietnamese began to see impressive earnings. Cuong, a nearly retired shrimper from Texas City shared that his first season as a shrimper in Galveston (roughly 1978) brought in almost \$800 a month. While white shrimpers saw this as relatively low (the poverty threshold in 1978 for a

family of four was ~\$8000 a year or ~\$665 a month), for Vietnamese refugees it was very exciting. He states, "That was like a lottery ticket. I could never imagine I could make so much money. It is hard work, but it is worth it." Starr (1981) documents Vietnamese shrimpers in Florida and noted that the initial earnings were over \$1,000 a month, and many who were inspired by this were followed suit. The earnings spoke for themselves in the recruitment of new crew members.

In addition, when the old boats began to fall apart, Vietnamese captains simply discarded them, then bought and rigged another used boat. The turnover in boat ownership was high for Vietnamese shrimpers (which would be one of the causes of racial conflict to be discussed later). Chanh, a shrimp boat captain for 17 years, shared that over the course of his career, he owned over 7 different boats. Shawn, a white shrimp boat captain for 21 years in Galveston, has owned only 3 boats during the course of his career.

Occupational succession, which affects access to opportunities for ethnic business owners (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990), played a vital role in the growth of both the Vietnamese nail salon and shrimping business. It allows access within kinship networks. In the case of Vietnamese, occupational succession did not necessarily mean transfer to their own children, but a vast majority of the participants in my study passed their businesses on to someone in their kinship network (sibling, cousin, niece/nephew, etc.). This was elevated by special provisions based on their refugee status which fed into the immigration of kinship networks. For example, the Orderly Departure Program of 1980

allowed roughly 500,000 Vietnamese to immigrate to America based on the purpose of family reunification. Family sponsorship was a key element of the program where the sponsoring family member had to provide an affidavit of financial responsibility. Among the Vietnamese manicurists and shrimpers in my study, every one of the participants had a connection to the ODP in one form or another (as sponsors of family members or as having been sponsored by family member).

In addition, small businesses continue by means of established owners recruiting new owners from lower social classes (Bechhofer and Elliot 1981). This seems to be the application in the two industries. The kin being sponsored and recruited were new immigrants who enter the country with lower status than their established kin. Recruitment of new immigrants who were family members simply made sense. For the new immigrants, it was an ideal situation to arrive in the new country with a job waiting for them and an entire network of people who could help with the challenges of settlement and job training/licensing. For some Vietnamese nail shop or boat owners, this was an avenue for making more money. The practice is to open, operate and then sell to someone else who is looking for the opportunity to own their own business. The following excerpt is from a Vietnamese nail supply owner who gives advice about the discount nail business:

The pattern over the past eight years has been: spend \$10,000 to open a discount shop. Work in the shop yourself, plus, it's nice to work with your spouse, sister or cousin. Hire any additional needed workers on a 60/40 split. Declare a loss for the first year of the business. Declare a breakeven for the second year. Sell the shop to another Vietnamese for \$20,000 who is hungry for the opportunity to be able to pay cash for a new car. Then begin the cycle all over again, only a find a better location and nicer décor. Spend \$18,000 on the new shop, and sell it in two years for \$40,000.

The established nail salon owner will continue this and hope to make enough money to quit the business and retire, or enter a new business. When stiff competition arises in the business, more money can be made from selling shops rather than operating shops. The stability of ownership is lacking, and as mentioned earlier, this occupational succession method keeps the children of Vietnamese nail shop owners from entering the business. Their entrepreneurial parents never own a shop long enough to pass it on. And if nail salon ownership were as easy as this above quote makes it sound, why not pass it on to their children? Several things should be considered.

One, among the Vietnamese, there is a stereotype about a Vietnamese “*tho mong tay*” (nail technician) or a Vietnamese who “*danh tom*” (catches shrimp). Although they can be economically successful, they are often looked down upon by some in the community as uneducated. Since the Vietnamese emphasize education (Zhou and Bankston 1998), it is expressed by most in the Vietnamese community and Vietnamese nail salon/shrimp boat owners that second or third generation children should not enter into this business. A recent labor study on Vietnamese manicurists in California assessed that while Vietnamese displacement of non-Vietnamese manicurists was relatively low, it “appears to have been primarily due to a reduction in the number of non-Vietnamese entering the occupation rather than to an increase in the number of current manicurists leaving” (Federman et al 2006, p.302). For shrimp workers, occupational succession also did not mean transfer to their children. Anderson and Ditton (2002) found that for

shrimpers in Texas overall, nearly 70% discouraged the next generation from entering the business.

While the succession does not pass from parent to children, the fulfillment of new buyers and operators of the existing nail salons comes from new immigrants who arrived throughout the decades under the family reunification programs. Transfer of business was aimed at the new supply immigrants eager to access the industry. Hanh, who owned two nail salons during the time of the interview, owned three other salons in previous years.

She says:

I had five stores and sold three of them to three different people who came to America recently. They worked first as nail techs then saved enough money to buy my stores. One girl is my cousin on my mother's side. The other two are sisters who are second cousins on my father's side. I sold the cheapest locations and used the money to move to two newer and better locations to make bigger profit.

As fresh new Vietnamese immigrants flowed into the United States over time, and as news of the lucrative nail salon and fishery industry passed on to the new immigrants, there were always a supply of willing buyers to fulfill the occupational succession process. As for growth, while occupational succession alludes to one generation passing to the next, which implies the person passing on the business retires or leaves the business, in the application to Vietnamese nail salons and shrimp boats, the sellers didn't leave, they simply passed on the established businesses to new immigrant kin networks and established other shops or boats in other locations (usually newer and better shops in higher social class neighborhoods, and newer and bigger boats to do both bay and Gulf shrimping).

### *State Policies*

Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) maintain that Western societies generally sustain rules and regulations that hinder ethnic business development. According to Aldrich and Waldinger, the regulations that oversee business and labor markets (e.g., licensing, certification, hours of training requirements, health standards, minimum wages laws, etc.) increase the expense of entry and operation for all small business, not just ethnic ones. This section will address how rules and regulations impacted the nail salon and shrimp industries for Vietnamese workers.

In the nail salon industry, state licensing regulation has had both positive and negative effects on Vietnamese workers. In one study, the English proficiency requirement by some states hindered access to the industry for Vietnamese immigrants, noting that "the English proficiency requirement flattens the natural gradient between Vietnamese manicurist and initial Vietnamese concentration in states with an English proficiency requirement" (Federman et. al 2006). In states where there is no such requirement, the same study found manicuring in those states to be an attractive occupation. Texas is one of three states that offers exams in Vietnamese making it one of the top places for Vietnamese immigrants in the industry. This policy contributed to the growth of Vietnamese nail salons in Texas.

Another regulation that impacts manicurists is the number of required hours of schooling. In Texas, while required hours have increased over the years, currently, a nail technician license requires a little over a year of schooling (600 hours). The study mentioned above found that "states requiring an additional 100 hours of training reduces

the likelihood of having a Vietnamese manicurist by 4.5 percentage points" (p. 240). In Texas, an additional 80 hours was added recently to address safety issues, namely ventilation. Participants in my study addressed the issue of licensing by attending schools that are owned and operated by Vietnamese. They told me that there were many instances where people simply just paid more and did not really fulfill the required hours. Only two women admitted to me that they had circumvented the requirements by doing so, and while most of the women said they had not done so themselves, they knew of several people who had. The common practice of selling licenses or paying more to not actually train all the required hours has not surfaced as a legal issues, and I found no reports of fraud or abuse by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. However, from anecdotal evidence, it seems to be understood as a viable option.

I called a Vietnamese owned cosmetology school in Houston to inquire about the opportunity to pay extra in order to avoid attending the actual hours required for training. The person I spoke to said they did not do that. However, one of the participants who admitted to paying more to not attend the required hours says that is where she went to school. She was able to do so because her aunt knew the owner. In addition, my mother's friend who owns two nail shops in our Southeast Houston neighborhood told me that two of her workers (one her niece and the other her cousin) went to that same school and did not attend all the required hours of training. So while the policy of required hours may seem to hinder entrance into the industry for Vietnamese immigrants, the establishment of Vietnamese owned cosmetology schools created ways to partially circumvent this.

However, access to such illicit opportunities is limited to close networks among those in the industry. It also requires a vibrant and well established niche over time where the industry has moved towards something I argue is similar to the concepts of horizontal integration (when companies merge and consolidate, often leading to monopolization) and vertical integration (when companies in a supply chain are united through a common owner). For horizontal integration, the “monopolization” of the nail salon industry is not so much about market prices, but more about the sheer number of Vietnamese in the industry (particularly in the discount nail salon sector). For vertical integration, the common owner is being represented by co-ethnics (Vietnamese) and the supply chain is represented by the various sectors of the industry where it goes beyond just an ethnic niche. From nail technician to nail salon to nail supply to nail school... all spaces are occupied by Vietnamese. I refer to this phenomenon as ethnic industry integration, and it includes both horizontal and vertical elements.

It seems that when an industry is entirely integrated by one ethnic group, the networks that crisscross the various positions of that industry allow for the relaxation of strict applications of rules and regulations. This in turn propels growth in the number of ethnic workers in that industry who might have been disadvantaged as a new immigrant but were able to gain relatively easy access into the industry. When all the spaces are occupied by Vietnamese, it is much easier for a Vietnamese immigrant aspiring to become a nail tech to get into the industry. Vietnamese shrimpers will also be addressed

in relationship to this concept in later passages when I will discuss the use of “paper captains”.

Federmen and colleagues also looked at the impact on dispersion. They found from the 2000 Census that "Vietnamese manicurists are more than twice as likely as other Vietnamese workers with similar characteristics to have moved between states in the past five years [and] that Vietnamese manicurists are more dispersed across the country than any other Vietnamese" (p.240). The dispersion affect accounts for the expansion and growth of the business. This explains the observation of Vietnamese owned and operated nail salons in places all over Texas. Texas' sheer size and population gave Vietnamese access to a large market that was virtually untapped in the industry.

Mai, a 38 year old owner of 3 nail salons, shares that, "I can have more than one store because I can drive from one to the next in a short time. I have a shop in north Houston, and one in Conroe, and one in the Woodlands. My shop in north Houston lost business because a few others opened close by, but I make up for it by having the other two." Conroe is a town 40 miles north of Houston that is part of Montgomery County and the Woodlands is a master planned community 32 miles north of Houston. Both are considered part of the Houston metropolitan area. The dispersion from Houston to the all the outer lying areas was a common theme from some of the owners in my study.

Mai's sister also owns a nail salon, and she realized the market in the large cities of Texas was saturated. So with Mai's help, she moved to Lubbock, Texas and opened a successful nail salon there. This entrepreneurial spirit of going to untapped markets is

something Vietnamese nail salon workers in Texas embraced and used to expand their presences in the industry. The expansion of Vietnamese nail salons is good for the industry as a whole. Sales of manufacturers, distributors, marketers and educators have risen steadily. The licensing and regulations in Texas make it a friendly and advantageous place for the nail salon business. Linh, a 40-year-old nail supply shop owner says, "It makes good business sense to continue to allow people an easy way into the business. We make a good living and care for our families and help others, too." More so, Vietnamese nail salon workers make noticeable economic contributions to the overall economy of the Texas cosmetology industry. It is no coincidence that when calling the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations information line, there are three language options: English, Spanish, and Vietnamese!

Policies can also hinder immigrant business. In some cases, new regulations emerge from interethnic competition. Ethnic dominance in the discount nail business is costly for the luxury, non-ethnic salon; thus, upscale salon owners turn to state regulations as ammunition to close shop on discount salons. In an example, it is illegal to use blades as a method for removing hardened skin on customers' feet. Servicing this can result in a stiff penalty of fines and loss of license. Upscale salon owners have accused discount shops of practicing this service. There has been a demand by upscale owners that state inspectors take note of this service being given in the discount shops. From personal observations, I did witness this practice in some, but not all, discount shops. It was never observed in the more upscale Vietnamese shops. Discount shops that do not follow this regulation are likely to be relying on it as a valuable source of profit. When

asked of one nail tech who completed this service on a client about why she did it, she responded, "It's what the customer wants. I don't really understand why we can't because it is a good way to make the feet smooth." None of the nail salons in my study had been cited for the practice.

While state licensing regulations played more of a positive role in the development of the Vietnamese nail salon business, the story is very different for the shrimp industry. The discussion of the nail salon industry focused on the state level. Discussion of policy implications for shrimpers crosses both state and federal laws. One of the most notable issues in this context is a 200 federal year old law that requires owners and operators (captains) of commercial fishing vessels over five tons be United States Citizens. Citizenship requirements for these individuals were created by the First Congress and was dictated as "an Act for Registering and Clearing Vessels, Regulating Coasting Trade, and for other purposes" (Bennet 2004 p. 292). The law did have a clause that allowed crew members to be "any other alien allowed to be employed under the Immigration and Nationality Act", but it did not allow more than 25% of the crew to be "aliens". The law did exclude boats under five tons, so Vietnamese shrimpers who had smaller bay shrimp boats were not affected.

Larger Gulf shrimp boats were, however, impacted. In the initial phases of Vietnamese shrimping in Texas, many of the immigrants did indeed obtain U.S. citizenship when they learned of this law through the charitable agencies that helped settle them. Several studies show that Vietnamese shrimpers in Texas and other states worked towards citizenship in order to legally own and operate their boats (Starr 1981;

Maril 1993; Bennet 2004). The same studies also mentioned how Vietnamese shrimpers were able to circumvent the law by hiring what they referred to as "paper captains" who were simply a body on the boat and had no involvement in the actual shrimping. Two of the respondents in my study admitted when they first started in the industry in 1981, they had a "paper captain", but they said it was only temporary while they wait for their opportunity to become a U.S. citizen. They said they also knew of at least 2 or 3 crews that used a paper captain. A permanent resident alien is required to wait 5 years before applying for citizenship. Depending on the situation, processing the application can take anywhere from 1 to 3 years. This leaves a 6 to 8 year waiting period that shuts out Vietnamese immigrants from the industry.

Again, this issue was applicable only to larger boats. In the beginning, Vietnamese shrimpers were mostly safe from this law. They were bay shrimpers whose boats were usually less than five tons. As their participation in the industry grew over time, the issue arose, but enough time had passed where many of them were able to apply and attain citizenship. The enforcement of the law is important in this discussion. While the law has existed for over two centuries, enforcement in the early years of Vietnamese participation in the industry was very low. One reason is that many of them were just starting off in the industry and could not afford to own boats or were not given opportunities to be captains yet. Second is that boat owners and captains in the early years were exempt due to boat size. Chanh, a boat owner in Seabrook, explained, "My brother and me know you need citizen paper, but only for boat going out far because it is bigger. I have small one, but when I want to buy a big one then I do the citizen paper. I

did when I'm here 8 years because I save my money for boat to go far and when I take test then I got citizen paper."

As more Vietnamese entered the small port towns and the tensions increased with local fisherman and shrimpers, rumors spread among the Vietnamese that they were being targeted by "the water police" because the locals were reporting them for not being U.S. citizens. Indeed, the law had existed well before the Vietnamese arrived, and it had hardly been enforced during the early years of Vietnamese participation in the shrimp industry. The enforcements and citations of non-citizen Vietnamese shrimpers were increased heavily in the late 1980s. The Vietnamese rallied together and filed a civil lawsuit asking for a permanent injunction to allow permanent residents the ability to captain their boat and crew. In 1990, legislation passed in the 101st Congress which gave an exemption to the 200-year-old law. It opened the doors for fishermen who are not American citizens to legally own and pilot commercial fishing vessels. State policies impact business, but they also shape the actors affected by such policies.

The political mobilization of the Vietnamese shrimpers should not be ignored and will be discussed in-depth in chapter 4. In this current discussion, the case of Vietnamese shrimpers illustrates the informal pathways to work that included the use of "paper captains". These individuals were understood by the Vietnamese shrimping community as valid and necessary to do the job. As mentioned before with the nail salon example, ethnic industry integration allowed for the successful implementation of the "paper captain". Everyone on the docks knew who the paper captains were, and when new crews formed when more boats were purchased, the shrimpers knew where to find the men who

were willing to hold such a title. It was also much easier to sell the catch to buyers at the docks who were Vietnamese. They knew many of the crews consisted of non-citizen Vietnamese, but no one was going to sell out their fellow Vietnamese, especially when the buyers rely on the daily catches for their own business. Nga, a female owner of 3 boats and a dockside seafood wholesale company in Seabrook, put it this way:

We know the law, but we all trying to help each other out until someone can get the citizenship. And if they don't, and the coast guard security doesn't catch them, then I am ok with it. I own three boats and it is hard to find good workers. You do not want to mess up your business with bad workers. So if I can hire someone who is legal to just sit there so the good people can work, I will do it. I used to have them (paper captains) for a couple of my boats. And when I buy from them, I don't care who is legal or not. If they bring in good stuff, I will buy because it is good for business. We Vietnamese stick together because we care but also we just want to make money.

So like the nail salon industry, the shrimping industry became entirely integrated, and the networks crisscrossed the various positions of the industry: deckhand, rig man, captain, boat owner, buyer, wholesaler, processor, etc. This led to the relaxation of strict applications of rules and regulations, which allowed Vietnamese who were disadvantaged as new immigrants (technically illegal boat owners and operators) but were able to gain access into the industry.

In conclusion, under the Interactive Model of Ethnic Business Development, Vietnamese nail salons tapped an open market – the discount nail salon that catered to both co-ethnic and non-ethnic customers, but the vast majority towards the non-ethnic base. Increased participation by Vietnamese immigrants in the industry allowed for low economies of scale, which in turn helped them offer low prices for goods and services. Vietnamese shrimpers also opened up the market for themselves by going the discount route as well. While they could not control the price of their goods (like the manicurists

did), they rigged old, dilapidated boats into useable condition (discount boat), worked longer hours (controlling/lowering the “cost” of their services), and utilized a higher percentage of their catch to increase profits. Unlike the manicurists who relied heavily on non-ethnic customers, shrimpers relied on both, non-ethnics for the shrimp demand and a vast number of co-ethnics for the exotic goods demand. Their growth and expansion led to participation in other sectors of the industry, and ultimately all sectors across the industry, which is what I refer to as ethnic industry integration.

This integration across all sectors “loopholes” the policies and regulations that should disadvantage new immigrants. A language proficiency rule was addressed with the examination in Vietnamese, and the number of hours of schooling was addressed by the illicit practice of “buying” time from Vietnamese owned and operated cosmetology schools. In the shrimp industry, the citizenship law was bypassed with “paper captains”. When government enforcement increased, the political mobilization by hundreds of Vietnamese shrimpers and their supporters across the industry (their crews, buyers, processors, etc.) led to a legal victory that allowed them exemption from the law.

## Chapter 3

### **Group Characteristics of Vietnamese Nail Salon and Fishery Workers**

Group characteristics give researchers insight into what inclinations immigrant groups bring with them into the host country. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) have given two components of group characteristics in their Interethnic Model of Business Development: predisposing factors and resource mobilization. Predisposing factors include selective migration, blocked mobility, and aspiration levels. Resource mobilization describes the ways that immigrant groups use what they have for their benefit. The differentiated predisposing factors and methods of resource mobilization among ethnic and immigrant groups can be dissected to present a profile of ethnic strategies. This following section explores the predisposing factors of the Vietnamese experience, the resources available to them, and how they negotiated both of these facets to form their ethnic strategies of working in the Vietnamese nail salon and shrimping businesses.

#### *Migration Experience*

In the literature of immigrant business, researchers affirm that the conditions under which immigrants arrive affect their integration into society. Waldinger (1989) set his study on immigrant business development in New York under the premise that the immigrants in his study were permanent settlers, rather than “sojourners”, a term used by Bonacich (1973). Sojourners come to a host country with the intent to return to their home countries, which may sway them to open businesses that can reap quick returns. Waldinger found that the immigrant groups in his study entered into self-employment at

fairly high rates, and only a small portion of them had the intent of returning to their homeland.

The Vietnamese migration experience is unique amongst post-1965 Asian immigrants. The Vietnamese were the single largest group of Asian immigrants to arrive in any given year. In 1978 alone, 88,543 Vietnamese immigrants entered the United States. In the next several years, from 1979 to 1982, another 194,213 Vietnamese entered the country. Unlike many of the other Asian immigrants, Vietnamese immigrants came as refugees and had no choice of return to their homeland. They were the largest group of Southeast Asians fleeing political persecution and even death in their homelands. Their permanence in the United States was clearly situated in their migration experience.

The Vietnamese entered the country fleeing from political oppression, and at the time of arrival, they faced disadvantaged situations in the United States. They came from an extremely underdeveloped country. They came during a time when the United States was undergoing economic turmoil, and jobs were limited. They had no large established Vietnamese populations to aid them. The government stepped in to ameliorate this dire situation. They were given refugee status which granted them access to federal aid. This refugee status has been described by Rumbaut (1989) as the “structure of the refuge”. Under this construction, voluntary social service agencies, or VOLAGS, were part of providing Vietnamese refugees with access to federal aid and resettlement. They provided information on job training, English language classes, health services, and helped locate housing for refugees. Kibria’s (1993) study of Vietnamese families in

Philadelphia revealed that the assistance available to Vietnamese immigrants was an important part of their “economic boost” as it generated not only cash and medical assistance, but social capital as well. The refugee status as a predisposing factor benefitted Vietnamese immigrants in many ways. However, the benefits were only fully available to the first wave of immigrants as federal assistance programs declined over the years.

For the second (1979 via Orderly Departure Program) and subsequent waves, they relied more on their family members for aid. The second and subsequent waves of Vietnamese immigrants faced changing federal resettlement programs. For the first wave, refugee status was given and American citizens were the majority of sponsors. Afterwards, Vietnamese immigrants still entered the country as refugees, but under the process known as “family reunification”. Sponsorship had to be made by family members and required an Affidavit of Relationship as well as a statement of financial support. As family members began to arrive, the Vietnamese American population grew rapidly.

But as the number of Vietnamese grew in Houston, the number of jobs there decreased. An important part of Houston’s economic livelihood was and still is oil and energy based. The city was severely affected when the energy crisis of the 1970’s and 1980’s created recession, unemployment, and inflation. Those of the first wave (1975) had better opportunities for quality jobs, a better command of English, and more experience than the subsequent waves so they were more likely to keep their jobs than

those of the subsequent waves. Many of the Vietnamese from the subsequent waves who had jobs eventually lost them, and those who were looking for jobs were unsuccessful in finding them. Many of them eventually turned to entrepreneurship as a means of economic adjustment.

Through immigrant entrepreneurship, Houston developed its own Vietnamese business district. The largest Vietnamese business centers are in Southwest Houston and downtown Houston. In Southwest Houston, the street of Bellaire and its vicinity contain hundreds of Vietnamese restaurants, groceries, private medical offices, legal services, auto repair services, churches, temples, realtors and investors, and community services. Vietnamese businesses in this area, however, share the market with other Asian groups. It is more accurate to call this area "Little Asia" rather than identify it with any specific Asian immigrant group. In downtown Houston, however, the streets of Milam, Travis and San Jacinto are lined with the mostly Vietnamese businesses. The downtown business area is unique in that downtown Houston is not a Vietnamese residential area like Southwest Houston. The Vietnamese have revitalized this area, and the importance of this to the city is evident in that street signs in this area are designated with American and Vietnamese names.

As refugees, the data supports Waldinger's (1996) idea of permanent settlers, rather than Bonacich's sojourners, who entered into high rates of self-employment. The ethnic enclave of Houston supports Waldinger's idea that ethnic niches can thrive when

there is an overrepresentation of an ethnic group in an area's economic activity. Houston's "Little Asia" on Bellaire street and the surrounding blocks, and the Vietnamese downtown streets named "Tu Do" (freedom) and "Thanh Cong" (success) for example, make the domination and overrepresentation of ethnic businesses visually apparent. Hence, the establishment of a thriving ethnic enclave is one of the predisposing factors that assisted in the growth of the Vietnamese nail salon. The implications of this will be discussed in the discussion of resource mobilization.

The case of Vietnamese shrimpers is quite different. While many of the shrimpers in the port areas on the outskirts of Houston lived in surrounding Houston neighborhoods, there were also many in this study who are from small port towns like Palacios that are hours away from Houston's Vietnamese ethnic enclave. While Waldinger's ideas don't match with the experience of Vietnamese shrimpers in terms of the presence of the ethnic enclave for ethnic business growth, Boyd (2001) fills in this gap by showing that the importance of ethnic communities in the creation of ethnic niches is over emphasized and that indeed location is important, but location within an ethnic enclave is not. He states:

Russians, Italians, and Poles, the groups most heavily concentrated in niches in street peddling and retail merchandising, had their highest niche concentrations in those cities where they had small shares of the workforce; and Russians, the most entrepreneurial group, had their highest niche concentrations in the smaller cities. In addition, the cities in which these groups were most heavily concentrated in retail niches were cities located well beyond large urban places. Some of these cities may have provided these enterprising ethnic groups with exceptional opportunities for the formation of niches...because they were important transportation centers, with ports and railway terminals that afforded access to the country's hinterlands (p. 105).

For Vietnamese shrimpers, the coastal location is the core of the industry. Boyd's reference to the country's hinterlands matches the case of Vietnamese shrimpers. The fact that many of the shrimpers were fishermen in Vietnam made it easy for them to transition into this line of work. The skills of a coastal industry matched the skills of the Vietnamese in this case. Beyond the fishery skills, the adaptability to the unique elements of the job must be discussed in the current context. Not just anyone can do this line of work. The conditions of the job are demanding in unique ways: extreme heat and humidity, the powerful pungent smells of the sea and sea life, the unpredictable motions of the waves, the feel of salt and sea water splashing on and clinging to the body with an unusual griminess.

I spent one full day trip and one full night trip on a shrimp boat in the bay, and I have never felt sicker. I experienced severe motion sickness, vomiting, headache, and utter misery. I so badly wanted to head back to shore, but the effort, the burning of fuel, and the wasted time of getting me back that could be spent dragging the nets and snagging the shrimp were all compelling reasons I had to endure the extreme discomfort. I admire these shrimpers incredibly for what they do to earn a living. Because these men and women had experienced all the aspects of this job as related to its "location" in their homeland, their newly settled "location" was a good fit. The growth and success of Vietnamese shrimpers along the Texas coast supports Boyd's findings that ethnic niches

need not be in urban spaces and that location indeed was important, but the location did not need to be within the confines or even close proximity of an ethnic enclave. In addition, location can be conceptualized beyond the spatial aspect by considering the environmental and ecological aspects as important factors in the success of immigrant adaptation, entrance, and growth in an industry.

Another predisposing factor related to the Vietnamese migration experience that can affect entrance and expansion into a business is the *timing* of their immigration. The bulk of Vietnamese immigrants entered the country in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Continuing chain migration followed through the 1980's and into the 1990's. In the case of Vietnamese nail salons, the immigration arrival time is important in relation to technological advances in the manicure business. In 1979, Dr. Stuart Nordstrom, an American dentist, created the acrylic nail using a compound normally used in dental crowns. The acrylic nail is stronger and more natural looking than the plastic nail tip that was conventionally used before. He launched his own business, Creative Nail Designs, Inc. in 1979, and included in the advertising campaign was a free training kit on how to use the acrylic system.

The process of acrylic application is labor intensive. It involves attention to detail and fine tune precision in 1) mixing the powder with the liquid to create a soft gel and 2) applying the gel evenly and smoothly onto the nail bed. High end salons saw this as an opportunity to increase their profit margins. Cheryl, a white manicurist for 12 years and currently with Merle Norman, shares, "When I went to training for the acrylic system, I

knew it would change the way we did things. It was way better stuff and we could charge higher. The cost wasn't that much more than glue and tips so we made more profit. Clients loved it. They are okay with paying more because the color lasted really long and they didn't have to come back so often."

The owners of the non-Vietnamese nail salons that I visited shared that the profit margin for the acrylic system was great for their business. When I asked Cheryl how she felt about the nail salons that offered lower prices for the same service, she responded, "Well, they can make their living on what they want, but the customers who want a full salon service won't go there. Their nails will be done, but I think a lot of people want to have the experience of being pampered, you know, and a clean place is important. I'll take those customers. They can have the ones who don't want to pay for the experience."

Cheryl's sentiment was echoed by several other non-Vietnamese nail techs. For the Vietnamese, the product allowed them to capitalize on the service of giving more natural looking, stronger nails for a lower price. This was appealing to the average woman who before could not afford the expensive service. The demand was evidently out there.

The product made nails highly resistant to cracking and chipping, and the polish adhered incredibly. I observed all lengths, colors, and designs that did make each woman's set of hands very aesthetically pleasing to my eyes. Lisa, a regular at Honey

Nails in southwest Houston told me in a charming Southern accent, “I just love the way my hands look, so gorgeous, don’t you think?” She spread her fingers out to show me the French manicure she just received and continues, “It’s just a great price here with Lily and she is very good at it. It’s quick, too, compared to the spa I used to go to.” I asked her if she felt she was missing out on the pampering experience by going to Honey Nails instead of the spa. She responds, “Sweetheart, this ain’t like a massage or somethin’, it’s gettin’ my nails done and movin’ along so I can get outa here and run my errands. It’s convenient and cheaper than the spas. And the stuff ain’t no different. It’s the same thing here as there. So I save money and that to me, darlin’ is pamperin’ myself. I love it.”

Although rather comical, the point that shared was quite profound. Several other customers of the Vietnamese shops mentioned the same key words: quick, convenient, cheap – constructing, in effect, the Vietnamese “McNail” business which will later be addressed in chapter 4. The ability for the shops to be quick, convenient, and cheap, was set against the backdrop of good timing. The immigration period coincided precisely with the invention of the acrylic nail system, thus lending to the notion of selective migration as a predisposing factor which assisted in the development and expansion of the Vietnamese nail salon niche.

As for Vietnamese shrimpers, timing and migration were not auspicious factors together. The economic downturn on the late 1970s along with the tension from the Vietnam War made for a difficult resettlement experience. While they were able to capitalize on the “location” aspect, the timing made for challenges and obstacles in the shrimp industry. Partly as a consequence, racial tensions and conflicts ensued as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### *Gender and Migration*

In the study of immigrant business, feminist researchers of recent decades have tackled the noted lack of gender, power, and privilege in the historical analysis of migration patterns. Immigration is one of the most forceful experiences of disruption and reconstruction of everyday lives for its actors; hence, examination of the dynamic ways that gender operates throughout the process is significant in the study of immigrant business and ethnic niches. Because gender is understood as a fundamental social organizer of life, it permeates all aspects of life, including work life. Immigrant workers arrive with gendered ideologies and expectations in their personal lives, and at the same time they resettle and reconstruct their personal lives, they resettle and reconstruct within the sphere of their everyday work experiences, too. The aim of this section is to ask, what were their gendered ideologies and expectations in the home country, and to what extent were these ideologies and expectations reorganized in the workplace of the host country, if at all? To set the context for such an examination, I begin with a broader discussion of a gendered perspective in migration studies and then narrow down the ways that gender organizes and influences experiences for participants of Vietnamese men and women in

the nail salon and shrimp industries, specifically within the context of the macrolevel forces of globalization, economic restructuring, and state policies.

Pessar (1999) clarifies in her review of studies on gender and new immigrants in the United States that “a gendered perspective demands a scholarly reengagement with those institutions and ideologies immigrants create and encounter in the ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries in order to determine how patriarchy organizes family life, work, community associations, law and public policy, and so on.” (p. 577). In addition, she points out that when feminist scholarship gained traction in the 1970s and 1980s, empirical studies of migration treated gender as a variable rather than as a central concept that contributes to the theoretical knowledge of migration patterns (p.579). Under this general approach to treat gender as more than just a variable, this section of the dissertation will explore gender as a central concept and address the way gender operates as a social organizer of the Vietnamese nail salon and shrimp industries.

Specifically, several aspects need to be considered for analysis. If gender is to be explored as fluid and dynamic experiences, as displays of characteristics, ideologies, and expectations that shape and are also shaped by participation in the two industries, then what are the particular spaces that need to be addressed to accurately articulate these gendered experiences? One way to conceptualize the multiple spaces is adapting Silvey’s (2004) discussion of the politics of scale. From the discipline of human geography, she asserts that “Marxian geographic examinations of the political construction of scale have

shown that scales are socially constructed, and... meanings come into being through ...socio-spatial hierarchies and processes. [Feminist] migration research is specifically interested in analyzing the power-laden socially constructed and gender inflected nature of spatial scales” (p. 3). Her scales include the body, the household, the region, the nation, and supranational organizations – all of which she argues are tied to the politics of gender and difference. Examining gendered experiences of Vietnamese immigrants in the nail salon and shrimp industries in the spaces of the household, region, nation, and supranational organizations clarifies some of the complexities of that Pessar (1999) raises as she “encourages the examination of the ways that migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its many forms” (p.577).

Tackling the various politics of scale also addresses what Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) argues are the shortcomings of some second-stage gender and migration studies. To be clear, she defines second-stage research as the movement from studies of “women and migration” to “gender and migration” (p.7). For her, one of the weakness of second-stage research stems from exclusive analysis of what she calls mesolevel institutions - family, household, community organizations, or social networks. Areas that she asserts are neglected include the “gendered and racialized nature of labor markets in the nations of origin and destination, and the ways these are conditioned by globalization, cultural

change, and economic restructuring”, and in addition, “jobs, workplaces, labor demand, notions of citizenship and changing immigration policy, public opinion, immigration and refugee policies, state agencies, sites of consumption, media, and the Border Patrol... were ignored by feminist research” (p.9).

As researchers gained awareness of these gaps in the literature, studies began to move toward an approach that placed gender as a central element of immigration and moved the analysis beyond the mesolevel. For example, researchers explored the global contexts of gendered labor migration (Tyner 1999), gendered ethnicity (Kurien 1999), immigrant sexuality (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005), transnational marriages (Thai 2003), and gendered environmental relationships (Davis and Gerrard 2000), to name a few. This section of the dissertation aims to contribute to the knowledge of gender as a significant element in ethnic business niches. The focus is to go beyond the mesolevel institutions and to address the gendered experiences of workers in the Vietnamese nail salon and shrimper industries who are impacted by globalization, economic restructuring, state policies and agencies, and social location.

To begin, it should be clarified that the nail salon industry is a predominantly feminine workplace, and the shrimp industry is a predominantly masculine workplace. The nail salon is a space of beauty services that are done by mostly women for mostly women. The coastal docks and shrimp boats are chiefly spaces of arduous and demanding manual labor, and performance of these tasks calls for strong and solid bodies which are most often associated with the male form. These opposing images of how one does

gender in the workplace sets the stage for a rich discussion in the ways that gender plays out in traditional forms in some instances while it shifts to more progressive forms in other instances, specifically for Vietnamese immigrants. In addition, it allows a discussion of how larger social forces that impact industries translate to outcomes for the workers in those industries. If industries are gendered, as they are in the nail salon and shrimp industries, then when entire industries are impacted (i.e. supported, weakened, decimated, etc.) by large social forces, the status of industry participants shifts on a large scale, providing a sociological opportunity to dissect differences in experiences and outcomes for men and women in immigrant business niches. These experiences and outcomes then influence the way actors engage in their gender ideologies, expectations, and interactions. The first layer of this dissection will address gendered experiences in the support and growth of the business niche.

The growth of Vietnamese nail salons in Texas relied heavily on co-ethnic workers and social networks. Access to ownership and occupational succession were fueled by the continuous flows of new Vietnamese immigrants. Espiritu (2008) notes in her study of gender and labor among Asian immigrants that the goals of the 1965 Immigration Act generated a female dominated immigrant flow from Asia. Linked to this gendered phenomenon is the demand for Vietnamese nail salon workers that was fulfilled by the supply of young Vietnamese women immigrating to America through refugee policies of family reunification. During these processes, the aspirations and pathways for Vietnamese immigration to America became an engendered process. In my sample, transnational marriages played an important role in this migration pattern. More than

two-thirds of the Vietnamese female nail salon workers in my sample immigrated to the United States through spousal sponsorship by their *Viet Kieu* (overseas Vietnamese) husbands. All but 3 of them met their husbands through a social network of family or friends. Transnational marriage as a gendered experience is both important in the overall immigration story of Vietnamese Americans and in the role as an organizer of the gendered aspirations and ideologies of Vietnamese women who desired to immigrate to America. These gendered desires to immigrate are coupled with an aspiration to work in the feminized workplace of the nail salon.

These transnational experiences have roots in national policies tied to globalization and the diffusion of Western capitalist ideologies. In 1986, the ushering in of Western economic principles to Vietnam's historically socialist regime led to the establishment of a national policy called *doi moi* (renovation). It aimed to transform Vietnam into a socialist-oriented market economy. It opened the doors to the world, fostering relationships with foreign investment entities as well as encouraging its citizens to reconnect and build relationships with *Viet Kieu* (overseas Vietnamese). These relationships infused the economic rebuilding of the country, with foreign capital and investments to meet the needs at the macro level, and with *Viet Kieu* to meet the needs at the micro level. The micro level relationships with *Viet Kieu* led to the macro level establishment of the institution of transnational marriage, almost exclusively between *Viet Kieu* men and Vietnamese women. An analysis of such an institution includes exploration of the interpersonal relationships developed between *Viet Kieu* men and Vietnamese women. Within the context of the Vietnamese American nail salon industry,

the institution of transnational marriage and the experiences of its actors illustrate a gendered experience in immigration and work. In addition, the female dominated immigration flow to the United States, that resulted from the institution shaped the structure of remittances in dynamic ways. After all, encouraging relationships with *Viet Kieu* under *doi moi* was meant to stimulate Vietnam's microeconomy through remittances. The following sections will discuss the institution of transnational marriage and the dynamic structure of remittances, both of which result in gendered outcomes within the context of the Vietnamese American nail salon industry.

Thai's (2003) study of transnational marriages between Vietnamese American men and Vietnamese women highlights some of the motivations for choosing partners transnationally. He shows that Vietnamese American men opted for Vietnamese wives because the men believed these women were more respectful of family and patriarchal traditions than Vietnamese American women. In an interesting twist, Vietnamese women aspired to marry *Viet Kieu* men because the women believed these men were more "modern" and "egalitarian" than local Vietnamese men (p.58). While Thai's study fascinatingly demonstrates what he calls the "double gender revolt", where the men and women face a mismatch in the expectations of their spouse's gender ideologies (Vietnamese woman looking for modern man, *Viet Kieu* man looking for traditional woman), it falls short of discussing the economic motivations of the women in depth.

This has to do with his sample demographic, as Vietnamese brides in his study are formally educated and at the least economically sufficient, if not affluent.

My participants contribute to the knowledge on transnational marriages to include women who married *Viet Kieu* husbands but were much different from Thai's participants. The women I learned from were not educated, and they mostly came from large families in rural villages and small towns. Their motivations for preferring *Viet Kieu* men were only slightly ideological (they hardly mentioned that these men were more modern or egalitarian) and were more heavily financial (they often mentioned the men were good providers and were a gold paved path to America). The financial dependency drives traditional patriarchal ideologies since women's economic reliance on men relegate them to subordinated positions in their relationships.

The dichotomy of Thai's sample and my sample illustrate the larger framework of globalization and capitalist infusion (motivators of *doi moi*) as creators of economic opportunity while at the same time architects of increased inequality. One of the goals of *doi moi* was to decrease poverty, and while poverty reduction in Vietnam had been on the upside since its implementation, the benefits have been unequal. Litchfield and Justino (2004) examined poverty reduction in Vietnam during the periods of 1992-1993 and 1997-1998. They show that while overall poverty decreased, inequality increased, and households most associated with poverty were those "living in remote rural areas and endowed with low levels of human capital" (p.162). Most of the female nail care workers

in my study fit this description, setting them in conditions that foster economic motivations in the choosing of a marriage partner.

While in Vietnam, they had heard the many success stories of young women in their towns and villages who married a *Viet Kieu* and then arrived in America with a job waiting for them – a nail salon job. For these poor, uneducated, rural young women, it was the Vietnamese American Dream. When asked to speak about their thoughts on the Vietnamese American Dream, Thi, a 28 year old nail tech, responded:

My cousin, Nhi, married a man, Tam, from Georgia. They met through his sister who was from our village and knows my aunt. Tam had a good job, a house, a car, and paid for a very nice wedding in Vinh Long. She is a nail technician in Tam's sister's salon. She sends money to our family in Vinh Long. Everything was successful for her. I was hoping to have the same. When I was 21, I was introduced to Tien, Tam's cousin. We married in Vinh Long, too, and when I came to Houston, I studied for my license in Vietnamese. I got work at this salon through Tien's family friend. He bought me a car so I can go to work. I feel very lucky so I try my best to take care of him, too.

Thi's response echoes many of the young Vietnamese immigrant women nail care workers in my sample. The dream of coming to America and having a nail salon job lined up is clearly gendered, as multitudes of young women in Vietnam aspired to have the dream come true for them, and for Vietnamese men, such a dream is non-existent. The 6 male Vietnamese nail salon workers in this study immigrated under harsh conditions as boat people who arrived after lengthy and strenuous experiences in refugee camps.

When I asked the young immigrant nail salon workers if they believed men in Vietnam wanted to marry a *Viet Kieu* woman, many replied with the question of, "Why would a

*Viet Kieu* woman want a Vietnamese man?” This line of questioning demonstrates an established understanding of traditional ideologies of gender where a man can provide for a woman and be her ticket to a better life, but in reverse, the idea is incomprehensible. So this version of the Vietnamese American Dream (marry a *Viet Kieu* and have a nail salon job waiting upon arrival) is only in the hopes and aspirations of Vietnamese women.

Exploring this version of the Vietnamese American Dream through cultural reproduction addresses the context of transnationalism and “mind work” that Mahler and Pessar (2006) note in their pursuit to bring gender from the periphery to the core of migration studies. Regarding the role of “mind work” or “imagination”, they specifically assert the need to “examine how ‘ideoscapes’ and ‘mediascapes’ are gendered, interpreted, and appropriated by women and men...in varied sites in ways that promote or constrain mobility” (p.43). A discussion of cultural reproductions via Vietnamese transnational entertainment contributes to and reinforces the imagery of the gendered Vietnamese American Dream. Productions of *tan nhac* (popular modern music) such as “Paris By Night” feature famous Vietnamese and Vietnamese American singers and actors. These “Paris By Night” productions showcase both music medleys as well as parodies about Vietnamese and *Viet Kieu* life. Valverde’s (2003) study of Vietnamese transnational entertainment shows that besides entertainment value, these productions

served as a way for refugees and exiles to connect to the homeland. After Vietnam opened its economic doors to the world in 1986, these productions reached the homeland and became popular sources of entertainment as well as a depiction of what *Viet Kieu* life was like. In a reversal of cultural diffusion, Valverde documents that in the decades following *doi moi*, *Viet Kieu* performers were viewed as less talented than Vietnamese performers. Productions from Vietnam overtook *Viet Kieu* productions and became the dominant source of entertainment for Vietnamese and *Viet Kieu* communities. With cultural reproductions coming mainly from Vietnam, satires and spoofs depicting nail salon workers and their lives were created from a Vietnamese perspective, not a Vietnamese American one.

These storylines depict scenarios similar to Thi's response above, but with satirical and comedic twists on the gender roles of husband and wife. The tensions involve violations of traditional patriarchal gender roles, but with most comic relief, the tensions are resolved with humor and a happy ending. For example, one parody highlighted the issue of patriarchal tensions stemming from a young immigrant wife "telling her *Viet Kieu* husband what to do". The young woman (a nail salon worker in America) tells her husband she needs him to clean and sharpen the nippers and clippers. The husband (a machinist) at first cringes at her tone and complains under his breath that she is "telling him what to do." But he does it anyway, telling himself that being "fearful of your wife leads to a happy life." His male friend in the scene gives him a hard time for

allowing his wife to boss him around. He responds by stating that as a machinist, he is merely crafting his trade by “working on tools” while allowing his wife to believe he is doing it on her behalf. He ends that if his friend were as crafty as he was, he could pull this trickery off, too. His friend is then called on by his nail tech wife to dump the dirty water from the pedicure basin and clean out the hose. He looks to the audience and says, “Good thing I’m a plumber.”

Skits like these contribute to the cultural imageries of female Vietnamese nail salon workers and their *Viet Kieu* husbands engaged in gendered interactions in the workplace. These imageries instill notions of gendered work roles (wife as nail tech, husband doing a masculine job) and gendered relationship roles (patriarchy and violations of such standards). What they also illustrate are the ways men and women attempt to deal with gender role clashes, showing that such conflicts exist, but because it is entertainment, the conflicts are resolved through humor. These imagined lives feed the aspirations of young Vietnamese women looking to find economic survival through love and work in this version of the Vietnamese American Dream. These experiences and ideologies portray the intersection of gender, class, and migration that are within the context of the Vietnamese American nail salon industry. Gendered meanings imply the dream is only for Vietnamese women. Socioeconomic conditions foster the dream as most desirable for young, uneducated, poor, rural Vietnamese women. For Vietnamese men, the dream does not include representations of them, and therefore, constrain their chances of migration and mobility. For *Viet Kieu* men, as illustrated in Thai’s (2003)

transnational marriage study, the preference for Vietnamese women over Vietnamese American women promotes the chances of migration and mobility for Vietnamese women, adding another layer of migration opportunities for them over their male counterparts. At the macro-level, the labor demands of the burgeoning Vietnamese American nail salon industry feeds into the feminization of migration from Vietnam.

In addition to questions of mediascapes that shape gendered migration, Mahler and Pessar (2006) also beg the question of a gendered approach to the study of remittances, stating, “that there have been very few studies that even disaggregate remittances by the sex of remitters and senders, let alone work toward a comprehensive gendered analysis” (p.44). While the discussion of gender and remittances in my study is by no means a comprehensive gendered analysis, I will attempt to tease out some preliminary observations of gendered structures in the remittance practices of Vietnamese nail salon workers.

In the nail care industry, Thi’s story, and her cousin Nhi’s story, include a side story of the financial opportunity to send money home to family. Part of Thi’s Vietnamese American Dream encompassed the desire to help her family, as she herself remembered how happy she was to be receiving remittances from her cousin Nhi. All of the female nail care workers in my study sent money to family in Vietnam. The male nail care workers had family in Vietnam, but they were less likely to send money to them, and if they did, they did so less frequently and in smaller amounts than their female counterparts at work. Some of the men also reported that they had their wives take care of

the remittances. Thus, from my sample, remittances from nail care workers is very heavily supplied by the women. The sample demographic plays a role in the heightened activity of remittances by the women. They came from poor, rural living conditions, and their families are still in these conditions.

Remittances were also a common topic of conversation among female nail care workers. Listening to the shop talk that occurred during my observations in the nail salon revealed chats about the freedom that it allowed the women to send money to their families – that they did not need to ask their husbands for permission. But some women were in more subordinated situations than others as they revealed the conflicts they had with their husbands when it came to remittances. Oanh, a 34 year old nail tech, shared:

My parents really need my help. My mom has a gambling problem and she owes a lot to the *xa hoi den* (black society). If I don't help her, they will hurt her. She is hiding in my cousin's house in a nearby village. It's so bad she can't leave so she sends my brother to the city to receive the money I send. I told her she has to stop. It's so much money! Last year I took a loan from Chi Hanh (her boss and nail shop owner) to save my mom. My husband does not know about the problem last year. He does not want to give her any more money because she has a gambling problem. So sometimes I had to lie and tell him I had a slow week, only to hide my cash tips and loan from Chi Hanh. If I did not have this job, I don't know what I would do. I am glad it can give me freedom to help my mom even though she is doing a bad thing. I think it is an addiction. I am trying to sponsor her here to solve her problem.

When Oanh shared her dilemma with me, two other women in the shop interjected with strategies to help her, which included coming in to work on her usual day off while telling her husband she would be out shopping with her friends. One co-worker went on to say that when she “got home from shopping” her husband would be pleased that she did not buy anything.

When I returned to the salon a month later, Oanh said she indeed worked on two of her days off and told her husband she was out running errands or shopping. I asked if her husband noticed that she had not bought anything. She replied that her husband did not mention it but that she did bring it up to convince her husband that she was indeed a “good wife” for not spending any money. This scenario illustrates the gender dynamics of a woman’s duty to send remittances to her needy family and her secret ways of hiding income in order to remit amounts unknown to her husband. The secrecy implies a privilege the husband has over his wife, where she cannot simply tell him she will send money that *she earned* to her mother. The made-up scenario further instills a gendered interaction where the wife goes on to remind him that she is a “good wife” by not spending money. While this scenario was acted out by Oanh, her female co-workers collaborated in the creation of this secret. Their advice echoes their own experiences, as they went on to give several other indications that they indeed used some of these strategies themselves in order to remit unknown amounts to their families.

The anecdotes about remittances among Vietnamese American nail care workers illustrate that the feminization of remittances in this context is connected to social status in the homeland. The gender and class elements in the context of remittances shed light on the issue of migration and emancipation. Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1999) review of the literature on migration and emancipation show that generally, immigrant “women’s greater access to wages and their greater contribution to the household sustenance

frequently lead to more control over budgeting and other realms of domestic decision making” (p.27). Was this the case for my sample of women? For them, was migration emancipatory or subjugating? The answer is a complex mix of yes and no. In order to unravel the complexity, these women did experience economic emancipation. Without migration to America they would likely still be living in the rural impoverished conditions they came from. Their migration and access to U.S. wages freed them from these impoverished conditions. In addition, the psychological self-esteem is liberating. Many reported “feeling good” or “feeling proud” that they contribute to their household, they shop for personal goods like make-up and clothes, and they send remittances to their family members. These opportunities make these women feel good about themselves and their abilities to contribute to the livelihood of others and their own livelihoods.

In the household domain, their liberation is not up to par with their economic gains. Because of their class background in the homeland, they have told themselves that they are fortunate to have a better life. They owe this to their husbands, who were the pathways to their current lives. They should be good wives, and being a good wife means being financially responsible and listening to their husbands when it comes to financial decision making. In this way, they’ve reconstructed relationships that reinforce the subordinate position of women to their husbands, but what the nail salon job did was to provide avenues for strategies to circumvent their husbands’ authoritative privileges. While the literature on this issue points to liberation and a reversal of patriarchal

relationships when immigrant women enter the workforce, the homeland socioeconomic status of the Vietnamese nail salon workers in my study bind them to patriarchal systems, while their workplace allows them to navigate the system in ways that make gender dynamics for them very fluid and adjustable. This multifaceted explanation contributes to understanding that when it comes to immigrant women's lives, experiences of gender, class, and power are not clearly delineated in a systematic way but in fact, bring forth many inconsistencies and contradictions.

Do these variations and contradictions manifest in the other immigrant business niche of this study – the Vietnamese shrimping industry? To explore the issues of gender, class, and power, I move the focus of this industry towards a macroeconomic analysis of government and corporate structures, as they play a significant role in the livelihoods of Vietnamese American shrimpers. Before I move towards that framework, I want to clarify that one of the important aspects of this business niche is the geographic location of these workers. To be clear, workers in the shrimp industry are part of the primary sector of work; they are aquaculturalists who harvest commodities from the sea. Feminist studies focusing on the migration framework tend to locate studies in “global cities”: Parrenas' (2001) Filipina domestic workers in Los Angeles and Rome, Lopez's (1999) Caribbean young adults in New York City, Gonzalez-Lopez's (1999) mothers and daughters in Los Angeles, Kibria's (1993) Vietnamese immigrants in Philadelphia, to

name a few. Small coastal Texas towns anchored in the fishery industries tend not to be conceptualized as “global” locations, and the global economy model tends to highlight studies of immigrants in America into the metropolitan spaces of “global cities”. I move away from the urban, metropolitan spaces and examine gender and migration in the aquaculture communities of Texas.

This examination pays particular attention to the impact that government and corporate entities have on the aquaculture communities of Texas, specifically the shrimp industry. In this section of migration and gender, I explore the gendered experiences of Vietnamese immigrant aquaculturalists as they undergo drastic changes in their livelihoods due to the expansion of global markets in the aquaculture. Foreign shrimp exports to the United States have decimated the domestic shrimp industry and have brought challenges to the shrimpers as they adapt to the crisis. Vietnam’s shrimp industry is a forerunner in the international shrimp trade, a direct result of Vietnam’s *doi moi* policy. As Vietnamese American nail care workers’ lives were shaped by *doi moi*, so were Vietnamese American shrimpers’ lives. While this study showed that *doi moi* provided mixed outcomes for Vietnamese American immigrants (women in particular) in the nail care profession, it has shut down opportunities for Vietnamese American immigrants in the Texas shrimp industry. I will discuss how these negative impacts shaped the lives of Vietnamese shrimpers in Texas and the way gender affects how actors responded to the changes.

In reaction to the international shrimp market's growth, American shrimpers mobilized political action and filed an anti-dumping lawsuit against specific international markets. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Commerce found Vietnam (and 5 other countries) guilty of dumping shrimp into U.S. markets. Tarriffs were imposed, and the domestic shrimp industry felt encouraged by their victory. Even with the victory, as late as 2010, the Commerce Department's investigations found that Vietnam was still dumping shrimp in 2008 and 2009. To add to the problem, the World Trade Organization reviewed a lawsuit by Vietnam against the United States. To the detriment of the U.S. shrimp industry, the WTO in 2011 ruled in favor of Vietnam due to the way the United States calculates prices. The U.S. calculation is based on the argument that Vietnam is yet to be a market economy, and therefore, rejects the prices proposed by Vietnamese exporters. Instead, America uses reference prices of a similar market as Vietnam's. The WTO deemed that the calculation method used by the U.S. DOC goes against WTO agreements. Under these economic and legal conditions, Gulf Coast shrimpers continue to see declines in their business.

Texas' aquaculture communities were not the only ones affected. Across the continent and internationally, fishing villages on both sides of the North Atlantic also felt the squeeze and decline of their livelihoods as a result of the expansion of global fishery markets. In addition to global markets, issues of overfishing and exploitation of natural resources also affect these communities. In a special series of studies, feminist scholars siezed the opportunity to explore the gendered impacts of the North Atlantic fisheries crisis. One common theme emerges from this series of studies. In a review of the series,

Davis and Gerrard (2000) assess that the “concentration of rights to and control over a scarce and limited resource into the hands of corporate, multinational fishing enterprises seems to leave decision making in the hands of men whose leading value is profit.” They assert that this shift leaves women and small scale fishers with less access and fewer alternatives to such limited resources (p. 282). What studies show, though, are that affected actors do not respond similarly across the board. Gender, class, states, and supranational institutions matter in the outcomes that unfold as a result of environmental concerns and global capitalist expansion. In the following sections, I use some of the insights from these studies to compare and contrast the data from the participants in my study. Using this methodology moves the exploration of my local site to an analysis of broader regional contexts.

Skaptadottir (2000) documents Iceland’s governmental commitment to market solutions in the fishery industry by implementing the individually transferrable quota system (ITQ). The system’s goal is to increase efficiency in fishery productions and to respond to resource preservation due to over-fishing. The quota system attempts to keep the fishery industry sustainable, while the transferrable mechanism allows the trade of quotas between vessels. The creation of quota shares has resulted in the concentration of shares moving into the hands of large corporate entities who can afford them. The result is a squeeze in the access to catch for small, individual fishers. The ITQ’s quota system is similar to the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife’s commercial fishery license buyback program, intended to reduce the number of license holders in order to address overfishing problems. The program is limited to bay shrimpers, not gulf shrimpers,

meaning small boat owners are affected. These systematic changes affect entire communities and families involved in the shrimp industry, and research has pointed out that gender plays a role in the way aquaculture communities and families respond.

Skaptadottir examines the Icelandic fishing village of Eyri, and demonstrates that the fishing community illustrates a clear division of labor, where men fish and women prepare the men and process the catch. The domain of the home belongs to the women, and because men tend to be out at sea for long periods of time, women become the heads of households. One result is that financial accounting and decision making (both in the business and in the household) are left in the hands of women. Skaptadottir argues that the financial acumen of these women led them to adaptive strategies that were more collective (while men were more individualistic), particularly through the establishment of a handicraft center. The center was a place of employment for women, who made local crafts as part of the larger tourism industry. Women were able to supplement family incomes but were also able to be players in the cultural reproductions and presentations to outsiders visiting the area as tourists.

The division of labor among the Eyri fishing families is similar to the structure of Vietnamese shrimping families in Texas. Vietnamese men shrimp, and women help with the processing while also maintaining the home. Women were in charge of both the boat and household finances. The gendered budgeting skills manifested in my observation of the rotating credit system known as *hui*. This informal finance practice allows individuals to pool money and then allocate them in a rotation, where individuals who tap the pool earlier pay a higher interest rate (based on bidding) while those who tap the pool later

earn on the interest. Everyone in the system can access a large amount of money without the hassle of paperwork and credit requirements for loans through formal banking institutions. Those who can afford to wait can even make money from the interest rates agreed on by those in more desperate situations who bid for access to the pool. *Hui* is a gendered credit system. All of the respondents in my study (both nail salon workers and shrimp workers) who were active in either organizing or participating were women. When I asked them why it is this way, many of the responses note that women are more “trustworthy” and that men might use the money for vices such as drinking (alcohol) or gambling.

Tsai’s (2002) study of informal banking practices among entrepreneurs in China also show a gendered rotating credit system. She shows that *hui* is particularly popular among women due to the sexual division of labor, and in some agricultural regions of China, men tend to migrate out of the area to work or take extended fishing trips while women are left to tend to the fields, take care of the children, and maintain work in the household. In addition, she argues that the “small” amounts collected from *hui* may even be viewed as demeaning to men who have larger aspirations for entrepreneurship. Discussions of financing among Vietnamese male shrimpers in my study were confined to the realm of the boat. That is, they knew how much it cost to buy, repair, maintain, and update the boats. Most of them did not, however, focus on where the money was coming from. The wife, sister, aunt, mother, etc. were the ones they relied on to produce the money that was required to run the business. The women produced the money when the husbands requested it. The power of financial decision making was still in the hands of

the men, but women were at the center of collecting the money, keeping it safe, and distributing it when their husbands needed it. Because the women were running the household, it made sense to them to keep the money in their homes. In addition, participation in *hui* and limited knowledge of English kept them away from formal banking institutions. Hence, it became common practice and knowledge that Vietnamese immigrants maintained cash in their homes.

One of the latent dysfunctions of this practice was the rise in violent home invasions by Vietnamese American gangs, with heightened incidences in the 1980s. In a study of the Born to Kill gang, one of the most notorious Vietnamese gangs in America, English (1995) documents the gang's motivation in targeting co-ethnics through violent home invasions as one of their main sources of revenue because they understood the nature of cash hoarding in the homes of Vietnamese immigrants. On a more positive note, *hui* has been the source of several Vietnamese nail salon and shrimp industry workers in this study. The dominance of Vietnamese immigrant women's participation in *hui* also replicates the collective nature of Skaptadottir's Eyri women. Networking, organizing, and building trust are fundamental in making *hui* a successful activity. It requires a collective mentality, where the individual can gain economic benefits, but only through a mutual trust of the collective community.

Moving the social location from household to boat deck provides another opportunity to examine the sexual division of labor. Unlike the women of Eyri's fishing community, Vietnamese women in Palacios, Seabrook, and Kemah were also members of boat crews. On the boat, the sexual division of labor is maintained. In Munk-Madsen's

(2000) study of power relationships when women board a fishing vessel, she shows that men's authority is actively created by their wives as they fish together. In a fascinating analysis of presentation of self and the symbolic values of masculinity and femininity, she contends that the boat is a very masculine stage with masculine performances of work. While on a shrimping boat out at sea, I returned from the misery of the experience with the mental and physical comprehension that the work is indeed *tough!* Munk-Madsen argues that the tough and masculine nature of such a space creates "an arena which is devoid of positive symbols of femininity"; hence, for a female deckhand "[to] care for her husband's masculinity by presenting herself as submissive to his authority is an indirect way of achieving an image of herself as feminine. This strategy makes her presentation of a feminine self-dependent on his presentation of a masculine self" (p.339). The result is an interdependency that requires the maintenance of traditional gender roles and characteristics on the vessel.

The maintenance of such gender roles was evident in my observations. Women who were members of boat crews did not engage in the active work of catching the shrimp. They were on board to care for the men - to cook, clean the living quarters, maintain laundry, handle minor injuries, etc. When the work was done, the men played cards. They continued to play cards even when they were back on land. The one female crew member on the boat I was aboard seemed very happy that I was there with her. She asked if I would come again soon since there were many other things I could observe if I came back. Her enthusiasm for my visit along with my observation of her gendered performance on board the vessel left me believing that she must feel very lonely and

isolated as the sole female member of the crew. The maintenance and ideologies of this sexual division of labor holds strong, even among younger shrimpers. Quoc, a 29 year old 1.5 generation immigrant and shrimper, clarified the gender norms for me from his perspective as a young man who was born in Vietnam, arrived in the United States when he was 5, and became a shrimper at the age of 23. He states:

Shrimpers are old school. They're not educated. They're stuck in the old ways. I see the way my dad and uncles treat my mom and aunts. Dating around lets me see that Americanized Vietnamese girls aren't going to take that kind of treatment. But my mom and my aunts, what can they do? They're old school, too. They focus is the family. They gotta do what they gotta do the keep the family. So if they gotta keep the peace with the husband, then they're gonna do it, you know what I'm sayin? The kind of woman I want should have some of that understanding, but I'm gonna try to be better about us sharing everything, like money and decisions and things that make a couple work together. But seriously, the shrimp work is hard, you know what I mean, right? You didn't look happy when you was out there! So I gotta be a man and do the work, and if I find a girl who can help me take care of everything else, she would be the dream girl for me.

While Quoc mentions that he wants to attempt being more egalitarian, as a young shrimper (a third generation shrimper in his family), he is part of the socialization process that leads him to believe his “dream girl” is someone who can maintain the gender roles of shrimp work. The maintenance of such gender roles is more traditional on the boat, while in the home, women are in charge of the finance, and yet still, the financial decision making is left to the husbands, and the wives are merely the bookkeepers. In this context, the Vietnamese shrimp enterprise preserves a patriarchal system, both in the household financial system and on the vessels out at sea. One consequence of this structure, though, is that women are more attuned to the economic crisis that has plagued their livelihoods. The men notice the price decreases and are affected by the impositions

of quota systems, but the women holding and reviewing the finances are more likely to react in ways that seek alternatives for money making.

Like the women of Eyri's fishing communities, Vietnamese immigrant women in Palacios and Seabrook turned to entrepreneurial adaptive strategies to offset the economic loss of their husbands' decline in shrimping revenues. Some of them reached out to social networks to sell shrimp catches to individuals, cutting out all the middle parties such as processors, distributors, and retailers. Most others, though, in a crossing of the two industries in my study, turned to the nail care profession. At the time of my research, nearly a third of the women who were either wives, aunts, or sisters of the shrimpers in the study became nail technicians within the last decade as a way to supplement the household income. Four of these women were married to shrimpers through a transnational marriage and are the subjects of earlier analysis. In an a contradiction to masculinity, unlike the fishermen of Eyri (who were individualistic in their response to crisis), three of the men from the nail care worker sample were former shrimpers. They left the shrimper life to enter the nail care profession. When asked for their thoughts of being in a feminine field of work, the men responded with emphasis that if their wives were part of the household work team when they were shrimpers, they could overlook any gender issues to be part of the new household work team as nail care professionals. Their interest was in making money and in an easy entry profession such as nail care, these men could look past the gender violation of working in a predominantly feminine workplace.

While they overcame this level of gendered inconsistency, the sexual division of labor in the nail shop preserved traditional patriarchal systems. Men did actually perform nail care on customers, but they were also the ones who picked up supplies, did maintenance and repairs on file machines and pedicure stations, and handled issues with customers. When customers had complaints, the women would look to the men, who would then handle the situation. I asked the women why they did that, and Mai, a 31-year-old nail tech stated, “I’m too nice. My husband doesn’t have a problem talking back to the customer and telling them they are wrong sometimes. I think a man can be better at dealing with customers because it means sometimes you have to tough with them, and I am not good at that.” Other women in other nail shops agreed that having a male deal with customer service complaints helped because men can be tough with the customers. Their perspective solidifies the masculine defined ability to confront, to be tough, to not be “too nice”. This activity, along with other masculine tasks assigned to men in the nail shop, show that the sexual division of labor in the nail shop reproduces a patriarchal system in the workplace.

When it came to finances, though, in salons with both male and female workers, the women handled the money at the end of the day. They closed out the credit card machines, they counted the cash, they paid the workers, and they distributed the tip shares. Before heading out to the supply shop, the men would ask their wives for money, and the women reached into their plastic bank bags of cash, count the amount, and hand it to the husband. Many times, the women reminded the husband, “Don’t lose the receipt!”. One money task that was reserved for men was taking money to the bank. Holding large

amounts of cash is dangerous and makes one a target for criminals. Even in shops where there were no male workers, the female owners waited for a male family member (usually husband or son) to arrive to escort them on days they made large deposits to the bank. This was a similar gendered activity among shrimpers. While the women were handling the cash earned on the docks and taking it home, large deposits at banks were done by the husbands.

The descriptions of gendered activities in the nail salon and shrimp industries have provided illustrations of the various states of gender - sometimes fluid, sometimes rigid, and sometimes mixed ideologies as a result of various conditions. By exploring the feminine workspace of the nail care profession and the masculine workspace of the shrimp industry, issues of gender, class, globalization, and economics (macro and micro) emerge. In the nail care industry, globalization and *doi moi* policies played a major role in the transnational marriage institution. This lived experiences of this institution manifest in the nail care industry, showing that preferences for mate selection and the gendered lives of transnationally married couples are driven by gendered ideologies which are tied to notions of culture, socioeconomic status, and cultural reproductions that build imageries and expectations of men and women across borders. Moving these relationships into the fiscal analysis of remittances shows that the unique mixture of conditions which are the foundation of these marriages result in a pattern where immigrant female nail techs are bound to patriarchy by way of their homeland status and their marriage to a *Viet Kieu*, but they use the workspace of the nail salon to manage remittances on their own terms without having to seek permission of their husbands.

Moving from the nail salon to the coastal docks of fishing villages provides illustrations within the context of the masculine workspace. Fishing villages around the continent feel the pressure of globalization and the expansion of global markets. As fishing communities and their workers try to cope, studies show that women and men respond differently to the crisis. Women's collective tendencies provide responses that lead to collective alternatives for income such as direct sales of catch to individuals from personal networks or organizing *hui* to access lump sums for their business or for financial emergencies. In the masculine space of shrimping, the sexual division of labor is clear, traditional, and patriarchal. As crew members, one can state that a females are equal. A female shrimper is viewed as breaking the work barriers because she is a woman doing man's work. But observation of her actual work on the boat shows a reproduction of traditional gender roles, where she cooks and cleans after the male crew. This sexual division of labor is also maintained in the household, where wives of shrimpers cook, clean, care for children, and manage household finances.

The notions are so normalized that even younger generations of shrimpers who grew up in America are socialized to desire the maintenance of such roles. While this traditional structure promotes patriarchy in these households, it has resulted in the financial acumen of Vietnamese immigrant women. It is this skill that allows them to be good at organizing and maintaining the rotating credit systems. It has also allowed them to move into the nail salon business as a response to the devastation of the domestic shrimp industry, at times taking their husbands with them. In a full circle of analysis, a move back to the social location of the nail salon shows that the sexual division of labor

is reproduced there as well. While it is a feminine space, men who participate in the business often take on tasks that are understood as masculine, and even the financial tasks that are more likely to be women's work are given to men when the task becomes one that might be dangerous.

One last note of the two industries will be on a macrolevel. The foundation of the gendered analyses in this study rely on the growth of the nail care industry and the decline of the shrimp industry. The economic restructuring of America and the impact of expanding global markets play a role in the divergent outcomes of the two industries. Nail care providers are service workers, and in the new economy, service work is mostly protected. The outsourcing of nail care isn't feasible. Because the nail care industry is a predominantly feminine one, Vietnamese immigrant women in this business have not seen the decline of their livelihoods on a vast level. Local competition and saturation of markets can reduce profits, but nowhere near the levels of decimation that shrimpers face with the powerful corporate and industrialized structures of the international modern shrimp business. American shrimpers have to respond the macroeconomic shifts from global shrimp supplies that are strikingly cheaper. They must also contend with the environmental concerns of sustainability. They are caught in a bad situation, where they have to increasingly rely on more catch to increase revenue, but increasing the catch leads to overrecruitment of sea life, to which governments respond to by implementing quotas. To add insult to injury, some systems allow quotas to be purchased, leaving little room for small time shrimpers an equal chance in the playing field against large corporate entities. For the participants of this study, these conditions have resulted in the upward

mobility for Vietnamese immigrant women and the downward mobility for Vietnamese immigrant men. This reflects Sassen's (1999) perspective that in a global society, ways of making a living and making a profit are "realized on the backs of women" and leads to what she calls the "feminization of survival" (p.55). From this study, gender and migration contribute to a richer understanding of the lived experiences for actors in the two industries.

### *Ethnic Resources*

Differentiated migration experiences can translate into segmented sociocultural orientations as reactions to immigrant experiences (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). One aspect in the literature of Vietnamese immigrants is their commitment to hard work and strong cultural aspirations. The Vietnamese have been described as having high cultural aspirations. They strive for middle class status through the acquisition of consumer goods such nice cars, expensive electronic items, and most importantly, they strive for home ownership (Kibria 1993). They value accomplishment and success, are highly motivated, and their work ethic and self-esteem are related to hard work (Rutledge 1992).

The respondents in this study are highly motivated individuals who work long, hard hours. Vietnamese nail salons are open six or seven days a week, with an average of nine to ten hours a day. They are willing to work longer hours with lower profits than upscale salons. Vietnamese shrimpers work much longer hours than their white counterparts, and native workers acknowledge this. Don, a white shrimper from Seabrook, explains, "They are out there day and night. There are limits on how much

weight we can bring in, so I'm thinkin' they max out the catch 'cause I see the same guys on the docks in the early morning when I get here, but then when I'm headin' out home, they are leaving again for night rides." Light (1984) affirms that immigrants are more likely to be satisfied with lower profits than their native-born counterparts due to the better wages in their host country. This is true in the case of Vietnamese nail salon workers and shrimpers. The overriding theme on this issue from interviews is that the money they make is "very good", they are happy because they "came to the United States with nothing", and now they have "a business, nice cars and nice homes".

An additional conceptualization of cultural aspirations is placing human capital within this framework. Literature that suggests that immigrant business owners are more likely to succeed if they have more financial and human capital, and Light (1984) segmented the capital resources that immigrant entrepreneurs could work with into "class" and "ethnic". Class resources refer to financial capital and human capital such as bourgeois values, attitudes, knowledge and skills. Ethnic resources are cultural endowments, reactive solidarity, and sojourning orientation. The cultural endowments of Vietnamese immigrant workers provide for an analysis of role ethnic resources play in business outcomes.

In studies that have attempted to differentiate immigrant business outcomes by dissecting ethnic and class resources, results generally show that those groups with more

class resources prevail in business. Kim and colleagues (1989) reported that native college graduates can mobilize resources better than non-college graduates. In their model, the majority of Korean, Chinese and Asian Indian entrepreneurs who had higher education levels had higher individual earnings. Bates' (1994) study compared small business outcomes of several Asian immigrant groups as well: Asian Indian, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Although many Asian immigrants have been successful in self-employment, those who were educated and wealthy before opening their business were more successful. The Vietnamese had the lowest percent of college graduates, and the highest percent of those with less than four years of high school. Vietnamese also relied most heavily on co-ethnic clientele and had the highest percentage of minority employees. The end result is that Vietnamese firms were the smallest, and they suffered the most from business termination.

For Vietnamese manicurists in this study, the relationship between levels of education and success don't corroborate past research. The playing field is level for workers since every nail technician must be licensed by the state, and there is no requirement for any level of formal education so long as they can pass a valid examination administered by a certified testing agency that measures the person's ability to benefit from training. The only indicator of native advantage of over Vietnamese is that four of the native salon owners have some type of business related degree (management, marketing, finance); however, the remaining native salon owners did not have a formal education. Still, this was insignificant in terms of success, though, because

seven of the Vietnamese nail salon entrepreneurs in this study owned and operated multiple locations, while none of the native workers owned and operated more than one.

For Vietnamese shrimpers, similarly, licensing and operating a commercial vessel requires no formal education. In addition, the Vietnamese and their native counterparts are in relatively similar educational positions (with the majority of natives having no education beyond high school and no Vietnamese shrimpers having education beyond high school), so the case for formal class resources does not apply. Informally, though, the skills required for shrimping and fishery work are assets that Vietnamese immigrants came with from their experiences in Vietnam. So while they have no formal education, that specific resource doesn't matter in this industry. The resources they did come with leveled their playing field with native workers. It explains why education or formal class resources don't make a difference in the success of Vietnamese immigrants in the nail care and shrimp industries.

An analysis of ethnic resources provides results for explaining some of the ways Vietnamese immigrants in these two industries use social ties to their benefit. One, co-ethnic employees are an advantage to the business, as they profit from the lower wages being paid to their minority employees. As mentioned before, the acceptance of lower wages by immigrant workers helps employers with increased profit margins. Two, social support systems provide an aspect of intrinsic job satisfaction. Salon owners and boat owners/operators reported that they "feel good" that they are helping their family and friends by providing them with jobs. It also makes the business of being in business more

tolerable when your employees are your friends and family members. They are more likely to be loyal, and they provide a personal social outlet that can create a “fun” or “enjoyable” work environment which leads to lower turnover (lower transaction costs).

The ethnic social ties also provide non-business related assistance, such as child care.

Minh, a shrimper from Port Arthur, explains, “My wife and I both work. But Dinh, my cousin who I work for on his boat, his wife is not so she is helping to watch my three sons. I want to pay them but they say no because we are family. So when my wife has time, we try to cook for them to let them know we are very thankful for them. And if we don’t have to worry about the kids, then we can work longer and I can do more for Dinh.” Nail salon workers reported that working with family members made it easier to ask for time off or for short-term loans during emergencies. For the salon owners, they report that having co-ethnic employees makes it easier for them to train their workers, to negotiate compensation terms, and to coordinate scheduling. Mai, a multi-salon owner, shares, “When your group is close, like family and good friends, things are just easier to do. We trust and help each other. We know it’s good for the business to help each other because we are a team. If I can help my workers, they will do good work for me, like take someone even if they are eating lunch. Or it’s almost time to close but someone comes in, they will take the customer.” Mai’s perspective is typical, and in both industries, social

ties among the Vietnamese provided many benefits for the operation of business, whether it be a nail care salon or a five man boat crew in the Gulf of Mexico. Workers are willing to work longer hours or take an extra customer five minutes before closing time because they know it will benefit themselves and the overall business environment.

Among non-Vietnamese nail care workers, the structure and interactions were different in several ways. Employees are viewed as employees, and co-workers were co-workers. In the context of support network, none of the workers asked their co-workers to assist them with childcare, and none had ever even considered it as an option. Some of them socialized with each other outside of work (happy hour, going to movies, etc.), but none reported that their co-workers were like family to them. One of the most striking differences was the idea of lending money to each other, and specifically, an employer lending money to an employee. Non-Vietnamese nail salon owners balked at the idea, and one stated, "It's a bad idea to lend money to my workers because actually, they are their own boss and they rent the booths from me. If I lend someone money and she can't pay me back, I could let her go, but then I lose my source of income and have to spend time finding someone to fill the vacancy." In addition, workers in the non-Vietnamese shops were not willing to work beyond their scheduled times. Because they are booth renters, they set their own time and were more likely to turn down clients. Repeatedly, I observed Vietnamese nail techs take customers even as the tech was about to walk out the door to go home. In the non-Vietnamese shops, the end of shift was the end of shift. Nail

techs were less likely to take walk-in customers, especially if they were nearing the end of their shift.

In the shrimping industry, native workers were more similar to the Vietnamese in terms of social ties. Most of the boat crew's members felt they were like family to each other, and in some cases, they were indeed family members. They relied on each other for many of the same things that Vietnamese shrimpers relied on from their co-ethnic social network – childcare, family meals, and microloans. The differences in co-ethnic social network utilization appears to only hold true in the nail care industry, while in the shrimp industry both Vietnamese immigrant and native shrimpers share the same practices of using social ties to their benefit.

## Chapter 4

### The Racialization of Work

The Vietnamese in America arrived during the post 1965 Immigration era - a period where notions of race and its biological significance had been popularly dismissed, notably in the academic and intellectual realms. The era brought in a multitude of new groups that contributed to the discussion of race relations outside of the black-white binary, and categorizing the various groups in the honor of civil rights meant recognizing and respecting differences (multiculturalism). In the process, ethnic groups became the center of focus more than racial groups, and while racial categories still exist, we saw more recognition of things that made groups ethnically unique from one another, focusing on cultural difference (language, customs, holidays, foods, etc.).

It may seem that studying Vietnamese immigrant entrepreneurs in America defaults it to the study of ethnic entrepreneurship; however, I argue that the actions and reactions of competing groups in the nail salon and shrimping industry led to a racialization of work and the actors in those spaces. To ground my argument, I begin with Fenton's (2010) work, *Ethnicity*, which asks sociology to explore the dynamic nature of ethnicity and the way it overlaps with race and nation. Fenton's reasoning is not to connect ethnicity to race and nation, but rather to explore the complexities of ethnicity that provide pathways where ethnic categories overlap or even become one in the same as race or nation. Fenton states that "the task for sociology is to [understand] how and when these categories are deployed, especially within relations of power and inequality"

(p.112). In this study, I argue that racialization is not about Vietnamese being viewed as a race (in other words, Asians), but that the actions and reactions of their competitors, white manicurists and shrimpers, racialized them. These actions are not based on the desire to oppress or subordinate the Vietnamese, but rather as a context of actions that are bound up in the struggle for power and status. As a result, one of the aims of this study is to demonstrate that the interactions between the two groups led to the construction of Vietnamese immigrants as a *racialized other*. To clarify, the concept of a *racialized other* needs to be teased out from the notions of *race and racism*.

America's understanding of racism focuses on the idea that one group justifies acts of suppression, exclusion, and subjugation onto another group based on the group's race (separate physical, inheritable characteristics). These acts can be subtle or overt, and they occur in attempts to maintain the status quo (dominant position of one group over another). In the case of Vietnamese immigrants in the nail salon and shrimping industries, white manicurists and shrimpers held the dominant position prior to Vietnamese participation. Over time, as Vietnamese workers proliferated their presence in the both industries, the once dominant white workers engaged in criticisms and attacks (verbal, social, political, physical) as a reaction to the changing status quo. These occurrences highlight explanations from competition theory. The attacks were meant to subjugate and suppress based on the uneven playing field of the market that was to the advantage of the Vietnamese, both real and perceived. Because many white shrimpers and manicurists lost out on market shares and became the "minorities" of the industries, either through the demographic domination of Vietnamese in the industry or through

instances of extremely wealthy Vietnamese in the industries, the attacks were methods to bring down the Vietnamese in order to achieve a sense of leveling the playing field.

Exploring these kinds of motivations and actions under the framework of Omi and Winant's (1993) racial formation theory makes a case for the racialization of work and entrepreneurship. Racial formation theory tasks us with understanding the dynamics between whites and Vietnamese in the nail salon and shrimping industries in order to dissect the social meanings that are transformed not only by their interactions with each other upon first encounters but also their actions and reactions when faced with economic and/or political struggles. The politics of work and competition give context to the notion of *racialized individuals* rather than just race itself. Race implies a natural or inheritable category while racialization emphasizes that racial or ethnic categories are social constructions that change over time and that are intertwined with power and status. In the racial formation process, actors use what they understand about *race* to provide clues about who these others are, often assigning racial labels and stigmas (stereotypes) to the behaviors and activities of the other. This mental exercise of attaching race to status is the *racialization process*.

In the context of ethnicity, the formation of a racialized other includes the exercise of seeing physical difference and attributing *cultural* labels and stigmas. To fulfill the process, the linking of physical difference to labels and stigmas is activated and heightened when conditions lead to the struggle for status and power between groups; thus, returning to a discussion of competition theory is in order.

### *Group Competition*

In a capitalist market, competition is championed, but unfair competition in its most extreme form is monopolistic, which then becomes illicit competition. Group competition in business is tolerated as long as the playing field is level. Group relations become strained when one group believes their competitor(s) have some unique advantage to which they do not or cannot have access. Using both these broad paradigms, consequently group relations become strained when the conditions of competition are unfair, either perceived or real. When I attempt to illustrate that group relations becomes strained under certain economic conditions and under perceived unfairness, I should clarify that not all white manicurists and white shrimpers shared a negative sentiment about Vietnamese participation in their respective industries. I will refine the analysis by categorizing workers using Bonacich's (1972, 1973, 1975) class analysis and the division of labor.

The strained relations between the groups in my study illustrate the conditions in which some groups take actions while others don't. Three of Bonacich's four categories in the division of labor are important to my case of racialization: business (employers), high paid labor, and low paid labor. While her middleman minority is a place for the study of ethnic entrepreneurs (e.g. Chinese in Africa), Vietnamese in America are not temporary settlers seeking entrepreneurial gains at the expense of the local markets; rather, Vietnamese are refugees who are permanent resident aliens and citizens of the United States and cannot or do not wish to return to Vietnam. In the remaining three statuses, all of them can be occupied by both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese workers in the two

industries. There are wealthy Vietnamese and white nail salon owners (business class), Vietnamese and white deckhands who are exploited (low paid labor), Vietnamese and white boat captains who command higher shares of profit from the catches (high paid labor), etc. In dissecting and placing these individual actors in these places, I highlight the motivations and actions for which groups of actors activated the particulars that contributed to the racialization of Vietnamese nail salon and shrimp workers. In addition, these struggles triggered group mobilization, where status and identity activation became central to overcoming legal or political obstacles. The foundation of my contention lies within the economic and political struggles faced by Vietnamese Americans in the two industries.

To demonstrate the racialization of work, in the nail salon industry I highlight the case of methyl methacrylate (MMA), the construction of the discount nail salon, and the eventual acceptance of Vietnamese workers as a critical component in the manicure and pedicure industry. In the shrimping industry, I focus on the 1979 death of crabber Billy Jo Aplin, the Ku Klux Klan activities in 1981, and the global market transformations driven by the European Union's 2001 zero tolerance policy on antibiotic laced shrimp from China and Vietnam. Each of these circumstances showcases the economic, political, and social forces that shape workers as actors in a competitive field contesting for access to resources. In the course of examining these circumstances, competitive threats emerge when access to resources is disrupted or reduced.

To be clear, two types of competitive threat must be established. In one type, the threat was *between* workers in the industry where white workers saw the new immigrant

group, the Vietnamese, as a threat to their success. The second type is the external threat to *all* workers the industry, where both white and Vietnamese workers see outside (international) competitors as a threat to their internal (domestic) livelihood. The distinction of the two types of competitive threat is key to my assessment that racialization of the workplace is fluid and changing depending on the economic, political, and social conditions of the industry at any given time and place.

Methyl methacrylate, (MMA), is a chemical used in acrylic nail procedures. The product is currently prohibited for use in acrylic nails in 30 states. It is criticized for its bonding properties that create harmful conditions for the users. It has a strong, unpleasant odor and has been blamed for skin allergies, damage to the nail bed, and respiratory system afflictions. When I entered the Vietnamese nail shops, there was a distinct smell of chemicals. I don't know what MMA is supposed to smell like, but still, the smell was overwhelming and often, after my visits, I experienced mild headaches. For the workers, it is something they've become accustomed to. Trang, a 27 year old nail tech, says, "It is strong, but it goes away. After you do this for some time, you don't even notice anymore." Use of 100% MMA has been banned by the FDA since 1974, but it is used in the process of making other chemicals such as plastics. Ethyl methacrylate (EMA) is the legal substance used in artificial nail products. According to some in the nail business, discount shops are continuing to use MMA in lieu of the legal EMA which is more expensive. The accusation of MMA use by discount nail shops was regularly mentioned by non-Vietnamese nail shop workers.

To highlight Bonacich's division of labor, it is important to note that in my study, white nail salon technicians (low wage labor) were the ones who complained about this supposed practice. Given that MMA is used in the process to make other products, it would be quite difficult to obtain pure MMA. Nail salon owners would only buy it in small quantities and that would raise red flags about its use. So while it would be logistically very difficult for Vietnamese nail salon owners to purchase MMA, it was still mentioned and perceived as the way that discount nail salons could offer such low prices for their services. The reaction to the MMA issue from white nail salon workers depended on their position in the industry. The white salon owners (business class) did not voice as much contempt, and rather, saw the market as two tiers – their upscale salon and the Vietnamese's discount salon. The working nail technicians were the ones who mentioned the illegal use of MMA by Vietnamese nail techs and told me they shared this information to their own clients to persuade them from going to discount shops. Nina, a 32 year old nail tech, said, "The Asian places use the cheaper materials, which some of them may even be against the law to use, so that's how they can charge such low prices. We use only the best and are very careful about how the stuff we use affects our clients."

While white nail salon owners did not voice to me their concerns about Vietnamese nail salons using MMA, or cheaper/illegal materials, some did share that they participated in actively supporting tougher and more frequent state inspections. For

example, Sandy, a white beauty salon owner, shared, “When I attend trade shows, I always make sure to stop by the state and license booths. I go there to share my concern about customer health and safety, and I make it a point that the licensing boards not only consider more frequent visits to shops, but also to be more thorough with their inspections.” I asked her what they needed to be more thorough with, and she replied, “With making sure things are as they seem, like labels of things are accurate, that sterilization is thorough, you know, things that people can do to make it seem like they’re doing their job right but they’re really not. So you have to really inspect deeply.” Sandy’s sentiment highlights the ways shop owners never outright state that Vietnamese shops are doing something illegal, but that if one looks more carefully, inspectors can discover licensing infractions. Her response, along with other similar ones by non-Vietnamese nail salon owners, highlights the undertones of political participation by some who want to see more enforcement of the rules, believing this is the appropriate way to address concerns about the discount Vietnamese shops.

The reality of it is that MMA is used in the process to make other products, especially in the cosmetic dental industry, so it would be quite difficult to obtain pure MMA if you did not plan on using it in bulk to create complex compounds. For a person running a nail salon, purchase of the material would only be in small quantities, and that would raise red flags about its use. So while it would be logistically very difficult for Vietnamese nail salon owners to purchase MMA, it was still mentioned and perceived as

the way that discount nail salons could offer such low prices for their services. Also, non-Vietnamese workers consistently referred to the Vietnamese run salons as “the Asian discount place”, “Asian chop shop”, or the “In and out Asian place”. Even industry experts weighed in on the racial theme. Jennifer Hajali of CA Chemicals, which manufactures MMA and EMA, believes that the dilemma is ignited not because of health or safety concerns, but by upscale salon owners who are upset about losing business. Hajali stated, “People are using the MMA issue as a way to try and scare people out of going into the competition’s store.” The class and racial/ethnic boundaries are clear, as Whites are associated with the upper class clients and high end products, while Vietnamese are associated with lower class clients and illegal, cheap, unsanitary goods. The class and racial division are even recognized by some Vietnamese nail salon workers themselves. The following is piece of advice from a Vietnamese nail supply business owner:

Remember, if you are working as an American style nail tech, you have little chance of competing with the discount store on prices. Lower prices can only be possible with volume. If you haven’t already, gain your skills and experience: for you don’t stand a chance if your nail work doesn’t even measure up to the local discount shop. Then base your business on clients, not customers. If the role of a discount shop nail worker is behaving like a cashier at McDonald’s, then your role as a professional nail technician is to behaving like a chef at a five star restaurant.

The Vietnamese discount shop is likened to a McDonald’s where the service is fast and convenient but cheap and not of high quality. American style shops are likened to a “five star restaurant” where the service is of the best quality. This statement also

makes an impression about identity, as it is un-American to have a cheaper discount nail salon. The role of the nail technician is decided by whether the worker is “an American style nail tech” or not. The American way is related to the upscale salon, and thus, the immigrant way is related to the discount salon. Beyond advice to nail techs and nail shop owners, manufacturers competing for retail business understand the racial and class division. A writer for a trade magazine stated, “I certainly think it’s turned into a matter of race. I’ve heard sales reps of certain manufacturing companies tell nail salon owners and technicians how their products can help them compete with the Asian salons.” Such a statement implies that there is some sort of battle between races, Asians versus others, to acquire business.

#### *Culture, Nail Care, and Mobilization*

Adding to this racial separation is the culture component. Some in the industry feel that immigrant owned businesses do not follow the American culture of adhering to rules and regulations. Licensing and following industry standards in chemical use are issues that some feel the Vietnamese do not understand. Again, it is such a prevalent theme that even among the Vietnamese, there are issues about the practices of Vietnamese nail salon workers. One Vietnamese woman stated, “Some store owners have all their family working. They can let them work without having license. They can do easier jobs like polish. Only the acrylic and pedicure is what I think one needs to have a license.”

Another Vietnamese nail tech stated, “I know there are some Vietnamese who don’t always follow the rules. For example, nail shops cannot use blades to cut off hard, dried skin on feet. But the Vietnamese don’t care. They do it anyway. The American shop will not do that for a customer, no matter what.” Throughout these examples, the following patterns emerge: an established racial vernacular, the connection of Asian salon to a type of salon or salon characteristic, and the depth of this racialization throughout the various positions in the industry place the context of the Vietnamese nail salon in a subordinate and racialized space.

Over time, the Vietnamese nail salon industry moved towards mobilization in order to combat the issues arising from the negative rumors and stories emerging from the community and beyond. For example, the Vietnamese Nail Care Professional Association was established in 2009 in Houston, Texas. Kim Chau and Hoai Phong, two spokespersons for the organization, described the organization as a statewide association where Vietnamese nail care professionals gather at meetings and conferences in order to network and assist one another with issues regarding the industry and state board issues. Their hope is to educate Vietnamese nail care workers in order for them to be more successful in their business and to avoid citations and legal sanctions against them.

Neither Chau or Phong work in the nail industry, but they advocate the organization’s goal to assist the Vietnamese community in keeping up a professional reputation in an industry. They shared the perspective that they see this organization as a

way to help the Vietnamese community maintain a good reputation. Chau states, “Even though I don’t do nails, I know a lot of people who do. And they represent the Vietnamese community. We don’t want our community to look bad. We must have a good reputation as hard workers who follow the rules.” Following rules is so important that representatives from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation are also invited to attend the conferences in order to speak directly with nail salon workers and to distribute educational materials pertaining to policies and licensing. The social and political goals of the organization are aimed at attempting to keep the Vietnamese nail salon industry in a positive and professional status, highlighting the need to avoid having the community be viewed with a low or negative status.

### *Burning Boats and Racial Violence*

Moving to the shrimp industry, in order to set the backdrop for the stories of Billy Joe Aplin and the Ku Klux Klan, it is important to note the shift in the racial structure of small towns across Texas’ coastline. This new community structure in the 1970s angered many white fishermen and shrimpers whose racial ideologies about Vietnamese immigrants were shaped by the portrayals of Vietnamese people during the U.S. conflict with Vietnam. The war had only recently ended, and with over 58,000 dead American soldiers at the hands of the Viet Cong, the negative images and perceptions related to people of Vietnamese descent were transferred to the newly arriving shrimpers from Vietnam. The prejudices towards Vietnamese immigrants that transpired from the war

only exacerbated the tensions created by economic competition. Many shrimpers reported that they were often called “Viet Cong”, “VC”, “Charlie”, and “gook”. These racial slurs were terms produced during the era of the Vietnam War to describe Vietnamese Communists, but even after the war, they were being used in America to address Vietnamese immigrants, some who had even fought against the Communists and risked their lives to leave the Communist rule.

The tensions were never ameliorated due to miscommunications and misunderstandings, and consequently hostilities amplified resulting in violent confrontations that emerged between Vietnamese and White shrimpers in Texas. In 1979, Seadrift, a town with a population of 1,250 on the southern Texas coast, was the scene of an argument that ended with the violent death of a White crabber named Billy Joe Aplin. On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Aplin accused two Vietnamese crabbers of crabbing in his territory and destroying his traps. When Aplin confronted the two men, the threats escalated into a violent confrontation. Aplin was shot to death by Sau Van Nguyen, who claimed self-defense during his prosecution and was later acquitted of murder charges and his brother, Chinh Nguyen, was acquitted on charges of being an accomplice.

Following Aplin’s death, tensions intensified when four Vietnamese owned shrimp boats and a trailer home were set on fire. City officials imposed a curfew due to the mounting conflicts, and soon, hundreds of Seadrift’s Vietnamese fled for Houston and New Orleans. With the loss of workers, the local crab-packing plant shut down, and because local law enforcement had not addressed the concerns of the Vietnamese community, many of them feared for their lives. One major issue was the lack of a

Vietnamese interpreter within law enforcement. The local Catholic Church eventually assigned a priest and a layman from Seadrift to mediate between whites and Vietnamese. The church and law enforcement became the two institutions that were central the facilitating mediation between Vietnamese and white fishermen in the area. The problems were far from over.

In 1981, the Ku Klux Klan was called upon by White shrimpers in Texas to aid them in their state of affairs with the Vietnamese. The disgruntled White shrimpers were fed up with their diminishing opportunities to sustain a livelihood in the industry. They blamed the Vietnamese, claiming they “overfish” and didn’t follow informal rules about encroachment in certain territories established by long-time local shrimpers. The KKK made threats towards the Vietnamese, and conducted a boat ride along the docks of Galveston Bay that terrified not only the Vietnamese but also many others in the area. On the boat, led by Louis Beam, Grand Dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, they donned white hoods, fired from the cannon, screamed racial epithets, and displayed a figure of a Vietnamese fisherman hanging from his neck.

According to reports, Beam stated that it was “time to reclaim this country for white people. If you want it, you’re going to have to get it the way the founding fathers got it – blood, blood, blood” (Tang 2003). Beam continued his hate speech while demonstrating the right way to burn a shrimp boat by torching a boat they had labeled “USS Vietcong”. Over the span of the spring season, Beam and the Klan distributed propaganda along the coast and two Vietnamese owned boats were set on fire. By this point, the Vietnamese shrimpers and fishing community felt the need to mobilize. They

gathered local support and Kim Nix, a community activist and advocate for the shrimpers helped the group reach out for legal assistance. The Southern Poverty Law Center intervened and took the KKK to courts, filing that they infringed on the Vietnamese shrimpers' civil rights. The courts ruled in favor of the Vietnamese, and the KKK as well as the shrimpers they attempted to help could do nothing but to leave the Vietnamese alone.

The lawsuit against the KKK was a victory for the Vietnamese shrimping community, and for the next decade, they reached the pinnacle of their economic success in the industry. Vietnamese families along the coast were buying more boats and equipment, establishing retail and wholesale seafood businesses, purchasing new homes and cars, and sending their children to college. However, their struggles weren't over yet. By the mid 1990's, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department became concerned with the dwindling wild shrimp population in the Gulf, and a plan was installed in the spring of 2000 to retire 50 percent of inshore commercial shrimp licenses. Director for TPWD's Resource Protection Division, Dr. Larry McKinney, explained that, "The fishery is headed for a collapse." Plainly stated, recruitment over-fishing was the problem. It meant that shrimp were being taken from the waters faster than they were being replaced. In time, it would hit an all-time low mark and it may never recover.

This was devastating to the Vietnamese shrimpers who relied on the business for their sole source of revenue. Nix noted the situation that Vietnamese would face. She says, "Many can't speak English and have no other skills. They have nothing to fall back on." Some left the business and moved to larger cities like Houston and Dallas, relying

on their college educated children to care for them. Those who did not have back up plans, like Chanh Le, were forced to stay in the business. Their profits were marginal, but they managed to continue doing the only thing they knew. They had fought fiercely on many levels with different challenges to maintain their work in the industry, and they were going to stay.

### *Global Competition and Shrimper Identity*

Towards the end of twentieth century, Vietnamese American shrimpers faced another adversary that, could potentially remove them from the industry entirely. Competition shifted to a global level with competitors thousands of miles away - shrimp farmers in foreign countries. In the last half decade, U.S. shrimp imports rose rapidly, while dock side prices of domestic shrimp went steadily in decline. The sudden rise in imported shrimp into the United States in the last 5 years was a consequence of the European Union's and Japan's decline in demand for imported shrimp. The EU's and Japan's stringent testing standards for illegal antibiotics and chemicals in nearly 100% of imported seafood resulted in too much of the imported shrimp testing positive. This decline in demand forced shrimp exporting countries to go to one of the few major markets left, the United States. Shrimp exporting companies from Asia and Latin America lowered prices substantially to lure American importers. America's testing standards for illegal antibiotics and chemicals are just as stringent as or stricter than the EU's and Japan's; however, it tests less than .5 percent of all imported seafood and approximately 2 percent of imported shrimp, leaving a wide open opportunity for shrimp from Asia and Latin America to enter the U.S in record breaking highs. With lower prices

bottoming out domestic shrimp prices, shrimp consumption in America soon relied heavily on imported shrimp, and this left domestic shrimpers in an economic dilemma.

Vietnamese shrimpers felt the squeeze and many questioned how much longer they would be able to stay in business. Some families sold their businesses and went into other ventures. Dung Tran and his wife Ngoc own several boats and a wholesale seafood business in Kemah, Texas. Their losses in the last 5 years have them seriously considering a new business altogether. “We know a lot of people who left. We plan on selling our boats to buy chicken farms. We don’t make the money like before. We will close the wholesale business at end of this year. The only way we stay alive now is from people who live in Houston and come to our boats to buy direct from us.”

Dung and Ngoc are unique because they have the resources to get out. The majority of other Vietnamese shrimpers do not have the funds or assets to leave. Shrimping is a way of life for the majority of Vietnamese American shrimpers, and they have no other alternatives. Dang Nguyen entered the business as a shrimper on his brother’s boat when he came to America in 1982. He recalls the turmoil of the past, but has never left the industry because he was more concerned with making money to bring over his wife and two children he left behind when he escaped Vietnam. Now he, his wife, and eldest son work alongside the docks in Galveston, Texas. “This is our life. This is the only thing I know how to do. I don’t have education. My wife doesn’t have education. We don’t have the money and are too old to start something else.” Their second son dropped out of college to work full time as a retail manager to help his family

make payments on the loan they took out years earlier to buy the boat. They wondered what they would do if things didn't get better.

It was not just the Vietnamese who were struggling. The entire domestic shrimp industry was affected by the increase in the U.S. importing of shrimp. The value of the U.S. shrimp harvest was \$1.25 billion in 2000. Only in the next few years, American shrimpers watched the value of the U.S. shrimp harvest plummet to \$560 million, a 50 percent drop. The average dockside price for one count size of Gulf shrimp dropped from \$6.08 to \$3.30 per pound during the same period. American imports from six foreign countries have increased so drastically; to the extent that in 2003, 90 percent of the shrimp consumed in the United States was imported. American shrimpers are distressed with their economic plight and are angry with foreign competitors, whom they believe are exporting the shrimp at below their normal market value. In a study conducted by researchers at Texas A&M University's department of wildlife and fisheries sciences, a majority of the fishermen in Texas who participated in the survey strongly agreed with the statement that, "Imported shrimp cause dock side prices to be lower."

The domestic shrimp industry felt they could not compete with foreign pond raised shrimp exporters, but they couldn't sit back and watch their livelihoods get washed away. They took aggressive action and requested help from the government. In 2003, a shrimp industry trade organization, the Southern Shrimp Alliance, asked the federal government to impose tariffs against six countries that it accused of deluging the U.S. market with cheap and chemically tainted shrimp. The petition named Brazil, China, Ecuador, India, Thailand and Vietnam as the six countries that have devastated the

domestic shrimp industry by exporting shrimp to America at unusually low prices. The organization was established as a non-profit coalition of members of the shrimp industry in eight states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas) dedicated to the cause of precluding the continual decline of America's domestic shrimp industry.

With a large number of U.S. shrimpers being Vietnamese, it is no surprise that the SSA has two Vietnamese board members from each of the eight participating states as well as two members from the Vietnamese American Fishermen's Association. According to Deborah Long, spokesperson for the SSA, "The Vietnamese American shrimpers are very supportive of the antidumping cases against six countries. [Their] story is similar to that of the entire U.S. shrimp industry. Entrepreneurs, many with a long family history of fishing for their livelihoods, have witnessed a sudden and dramatic drop in prices for their catch since 2000 as six countries engage in an illegal trade practice."

Although there is support for the petition from members of the Vietnamese American fishermen communities, most of them are reluctant to be too vocal against Vietnam; a country some still consider home. To this, Long affirms that Vietnamese American representatives of the SSA have declined to participate in press stories that single out Vietnam; rather, Vietnamese American shrimpers protest the foreign shrimp industry as a whole. Thanh Nguyen, a shrimper in Kemah, TX, for over fifteen years says, "It is hard to think about because I know some people in Vietnam from my village who make money in shrimp business. If we cut off the business for Vietnam, I am afraid

for them. They will have to look for other work again. But it is same for me, too. I will lose my job if we can't sell the shrimp we catch for a good price.”

Vietnamese American shrimpers seem to blame China more than any other country. This is not surprising, as Vietnamese Americans have historically had negative feelings towards China. First, China has been perceived as a supporter and enforcer of Communism in Vietnam. This disapproving sentiment is extremely profound to Vietnamese American shrimpers from Phuoc Tinh who had twice fled the Communist regime. Second, the ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam before the end of the Vietnam War were predominantly merchants who were disliked for their avaricious business practices. These negative ideas are reinforced in the rumors that have spread among the Vietnamese American community about China. Vietnamese American shrimpers expressed that they believe China is doing the most damage to the domestic shrimp prices. According to several Vietnamese American shrimpers in Seabrook, TX, they believe China exports much of its shrimp through Vietnam; thus, it is not Vietnam that is dumping the shrimp. It is China that is guilty of dumping.

The Department of Commerce announced in 2004 that the six countries named in the petition had indeed participated in dumping activities. By the end of 2004, the DOC set tariffs against all six countries, with China's duties substantially higher than Vietnam and the four other countries named in the lawsuit. In a determination made in December 2004, the U.S. Department of Commerce issued duties in a range of 4 to 25 percent for Vietnam, while China was imposed higher duties in the range from 27 to 112 percent. For

the Vietnamese American fishermen, their suspicions about China were somewhat verified.

Although the Department of Commerce has ruled in favor of the domestic shrimp industry, some experts believe the case has no merit. American Enterprise Institute trade scholar Claude E. Barfield argues against the decision. In a Washington Post article, Barfield points out that in several instances, producers in foreign countries are basically able to harvest shrimp for less than American shrimpers can because it's cheaper to produce it there. Others have argued that the lawsuit is not warranted since comparing imported and domestic shrimp product is like comparing apples to oranges. Imported shrimp is harvested on farms while domestic shrimp is wild caught.

One of the most vocal opponents to the decision is the American Seafood Distributors Association, a group comprised of some of the biggest seafood buyers in the United States. ASDA President Wally Stevens expressed in various press publications that his group is fighting to maintain the nearly 100,000 American jobs created by imports. The ASDA suggests that technological advances in shrimp farming in recent years helped shrimp aquaculture in exporting countries gain competitive advantages over U.S. wild caught shrimp. The ASDA also states that it seeks to protect lower shrimp prices to consumer. Their claim is that lower prices for shrimp have caused a high demand in imported shrimp. Anti-dumping supporters rebut that organizations like the ASDA are concerned about American shrimp consumers since they have only profit to gain. They point out that even as the wholesale value of shrimp has plummeted to the lowest levels in four decades, the Wall Street Journal reported that the mean price for

shrimp entrées at major restaurant chains actually *increased* by as much as 28 percent. Simply, the consumer has not benefited from the lower import prices.

While for-profit organizations battle over the profit driven issue, non-profit and non-governmental organizations are also entangled in the debate. Some NGOs have opposed the tariffs on shrimp producers in Asia and Latin America. They argue that duties will decrease production in third world shrimp exporting countries, and this has only negative consequences for hundreds of thousands of workers who are employed in shrimp exporting. Without the shrimp export industry, third world workers will have no other means of employment and will be forced back into a life of poverty. Action Aid Vietnam, an arm of British non-governmental organization, Action Aid, has launched a campaign against the lawsuit. The campaign began with a 10-day survey of shrimp farming and processing for export in Vietnam's central and southern regions. The aim was to collect evidence for the campaign in hopes of showing that Vietnam was not dumping shrimp. Whilst NGOs join forces with shrimp exporters from third world countries, the SSA point out that it was "a variety of financial incentives provided by national governments and international institutions over a number of years that have over-stimulated the production of farm-raised shrimp in countries like Vietnam and India". The World Bank has estimated that during the 1990s, the world's shrimp farming industry outside the United States received a total of nearly \$9 billion in subsidies and other forms of public assistance. The U.S. government provided another \$1 billion in indirect and \$17.6 million in direct assistance to third world shrimp producers as a foreign aid.

As a combination of several factors created a burgeoning shrimp export business in countries like Vietnam, India and China, it translated into a depressed American domestic shrimp industry. Fortunately the industry, in late 2004, the U.S. International Trade Commission deemed that 6 countries had indeed dumped shrimp, and as the Department of Commerce imposed tariffs against these 6 countries, it is not a far-fetched concern that the duties imposed on Vietnam's shrimp industry could hurt the Vietnam's economy by driving away U.S. importers. Seafood products ranked as Vietnam's fourth largest export earner, and the United States is its biggest market. However, with the final duties set quite low for most shrimp export companies in Vietnam, they were back in business. According to the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia Pacific's December 2004 newsletter, the president of the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers (VASEP) told local reporters that business contacts between US customers and Vietnamese seafood companies have returned as usual. In another instance reported in the newsletter, an order worth US\$2 million was placed by a U.S. customer with the Ho Chi Minh City Coastal Fisheries Development Corporation a few days after the final tariffs were determined. Its director announced that 23 other regular customers of the company began seeking information for future orders through e-mails.

News of resumed business between the United States and foreign shrimp companies brings anxiety back to the domestic sphere. Although duties will constrict some of the buying between America and foreign countries, it is unclear if they will be enough to help the domestic shrimper in the long run. Although the government has helped U.S. shrimpers with anti-dumping proclamations, domestic shrimpers have only

begun to embark on the journey to rebuild their industry. They realize they must restructure the industry in order to compete against foreign rivals. One idea is to market domestic shrimp as “American wild shrimp” versus foreign pond grown shrimp. The campaigning strategy conveys a message that domestic shrimp caught in its natural habitat is a better product than farm raised shrimp. It sounds promising. Van Ngo, a member of the Vietnamese American Fishermen’s Association and a long time fisherman from Port Arthur, TX, has high hopes for the reorganization. He states, “I always thought I have to do what I do because I don’t have an education. I had no chance to learn something new. But now we need to learn how to do our business better so people will buy our shrimp again. I have a chance to learn to do something in a new way. I am excited and hopeful.”

### *The Racialization Process*

To tie both these stories together, themes of the racialization process emerge. In the nail salon industry, the reputation and status of the Vietnamese nail salon worker are at stake. The industry itself was relegated to the discount shop which was unsanitary and provided very little service or care. Terms like the “Asian discount nail shop” are used to separate and demote the status of the workers and the service environment. The racialization was so profound that it is understood within the Vietnamese American community itself. As a result, political and social mobilization to counter the stigmas developed and examples such as the Vietnamese Nail Care Professional Association (VNCPA) exist to raise the reputation of the Vietnamese nail care industry. The economic significance of the Vietnamese nail care industry is understood and

representatives from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation fully support the community in its efforts to raise the Vietnamese nail salons from the undesirable “discount shop” status.

Powerhouses in the trade also recognize the significance of the Vietnamese nail care industry, with OPI, Creative Labs, and *Nails Magazine* being regular attendees of the conferences put on by the VNCPA. Representatives from these major players acknowledge the economic presence of the Vietnamese in the industry, which bypasses any racial or ethnic characteristics that may have played out from the lower rungs of the industry ladder. Industry leaders view the Vietnamese as a valuable supply chain, not as any special racial group, but just as a large supply source to whom they sell their goods. To the average white nail tech, the Vietnamese are viewed very differently. They provide poor service and often break laws. Customers who pay the lower prices are going to get poorer service and perhaps have illegal products used on them. This illustrates the fluidity of when “Vietnamese” matters. It demonstrates that the status of the Vietnamese nail salon industry depends on whom you ask, and the responses are connected to places of power and resources.

In the shrimp industry, the same stigmas emerged as themes about Vietnamese shrimpers. They didn’t follow the rules. They did things backwards. They didn’t respect American values and norms. The Vietnamese shrimpers were soon associated with negative stereotypes. The white shrimpers felt the squeeze of their livelihood, and it was easier to blame the Vietnamese than the external forces of a shifting economic structure and international trade policies. Racialization of the industry plagued the Vietnamese as

they became the targets of racial slurs, hate propaganda, harassment, threats, and violence. The reaction from white shrimpers was motivated out of competition and perceived economic threat. The instability of their own livelihoods led white fishermen to racialize the issue by targeting the Vietnamese. White shrimper mobilization occurred both legitimately and illicitly.

Reinforcing a 200 year old law in order to eliminate the chances for Vietnamese immigrants to own and operate commercial boats was an attempt to exclude. Inviting the KKK to harass and threaten the Vietnamese was an attempt to frighten them in hopes they would just simply leave the area. What is core to the foundation of racial formation and racialization in these two examples is that looking at the stories over time, we end up today with the convergence of Vietnamese and white workers in both industries collaborating in order to address the contemporary contexts of their respective industries.

Today, the Vietnamese nail salon industry is attempting to move away from the racialized reputation of the cheap discount Asian salon. Professional organizations and the support of the industry overall moves the Vietnamese nail salon industry towards acceptance by the cosmetic and beauty industry overall. The Southern Shrimp Alliance is a formation of Vietnamese and white shrimpers who removed racial lines and merged together to work in unison to combat the international markets that threaten the stake of the domestic shrimp industry. The anti-dumping lawsuit exemplifies political mobilization and action by both Vietnamese and whites acting as one cohesive unit. Racial status no longer mattered, and the historical struggles of us versus them became a thing long forgotten. To close, these stories tell the process of how “Vietnamese” became

a label for an occupation and an industry, what characteristics became attached to that label, why that label mattered, and most importantly, when those labels were activated or deactivated. The activation and deactivation were contingent upon factors of time, place, biography and the larger social forces of economics, war, migration, U.S. policy, and the markets in a capitalist society – all significant notions outlined in Mills’ sociological imagination and supporting Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Studies of ethnic businesses have provided great insight into relationships between enterprise and group dynamics. The interweaving of market and social forces come together to provide assessments of the broader topics of immigration, assimilation, and group relations. This study investigated Vietnamese American representation in two businesses in which they participate in quite heavily. During the process of dissecting market and social forces at play in Vietnamese immigrant business development, the study also aimed to explore the sets of conditions which link to the formation and political uses of ethnic identities which contribute to the understanding of the racialization of work.

In the broader context of Vietnamese immigrant studies, the post-Vietnam War period produced hyper-interest in Vietnamese American immigrants, their settlement patterns, adjustment issues, mental health needs, occupational outcomes, cultural identity, assimilation patterns, and academic achievement of their youth (Haines 1989, Kibria 1993, Zhou & Bankston 1998). More contemporary studies that focus on Vietnamese Americans considered similar issues including cultural identity (Lieu 2006), mental health and academic achievement (Nguyen 2005), community formation (Tran 2002), and job/career choices (Bui 2005, Phan 2003, Do 2000). Although informative to some degree, what these studies miss is the perspective in which Vietnamese Americans are examined as representations of larger social forces relating to workforce conflict and stratification.

In immigrant business studies, researchers highlight Vietnamese immigrants' experiences in entrepreneurship (Gold 1988) and motivations for going into self-employment (Huynh 1996). Most recently, Eckstein and Nguyen (2011) address the development of the Vietnamese manicurist industry and the transnational context of the occupation in other countries. While these studies have provided a refreshing diversion from historical studies of Vietnamese immigrants, what they lack is the exploration of implications for group relationships in the context of enterprise, entrepreneurship, industry, and community. This dissertation attempted to fill in that gap by exploring the dynamics of group relationships in the course of business development. The relationships, interactions, and shared experiences in the course of labor force participation were examined to shed light on the process of racial formation and racialization in the workplace.

Studies of immigrant entrepreneurship lead to questions of benefits and disadvantages for immigrant groups as they attempt to resettle into a new country and culture. In the case of Vietnamese manicurists and shrimpers, what were the benefits and costs? Did participation in the two industries force acceptance of low wages? In the case of manicurists, the establishment of the discount nail salon did indeed seem to result in lower wages for workers. For shrimpers, the industry is not glamorous or high paying to begin with. So while one industry (nail care) provides an opportunity for high wages while the other (shrimping) does not, a great preponderance of Vietnamese immigrant workers in the industries do experience lower wages and marginal profits. But in the context of immigrant work, alternatives for these workers who had low level English

skills and low educational attainment, their wages were not perceived to be low by their own standards.

Were the working conditions poor? For manicurists, one can understand that health outcomes from chemical exposure are a cause for concern, but to the workers themselves, nail salons are viewed as a positive work environment. Workers reported satisfaction in their work environment, and community activists rose to the challenge when faced with issues of licensing and worker safety regulations to address health concerns about chemical exposures, establishing groups like the Vietnamese Nail Care Professional Association. For shrimpers, most of them worked as fishermen in Vietnam, so they were familiar with the work conditions, and while many did not want their children to work in the industry, they themselves viewed it as a viable opportunity given their refugee and immigrant status. They understood that the work conditions were harsh, but this was their livelihood in Vietnam, and for them to be able to transfer those skills in the United States gave them a positive outlook towards their occupation.

Did the ethnic dominance in the industry impede assimilation? That is, working with mostly immigrants like themselves, were they blocked from assimilating into mainstream society? To answer this question, one must consider the type of assimilation being addressed. No doubt economic assimilation occurred, as Vietnamese manicurists and deckhands became salon and boat owners, thereby avoiding poverty and serious economic deprivation. They also became wholesale suppliers, seafood processors, and beauty school owners, occupying the various positions available within the entire industries. Vietnamese shrimpers in small coastal towns built entire community villages

with new construction homes and places of worship. Vietnamese nail salon owners expanded to establish chains and exclusive relationships with retailers like Wal-Mart. Economically, Vietnamese immigrants advanced and expanded their participation in the two industries.

In terms of social and cultural assimilation, the results yield a different picture. Participation in these two niches provided avenues to avoid social assimilation in the context of English proficiency and adaptation to cultural norms. This created problems in the areas of group relations and interactions. Many of these workers were not forced to learn English in order to succeed. State manicure license testing is provided in Vietnamese, and as they expanded to occupy other spaces in the industry (ethnic industry integration), there was less pressure to learn proficient English. From studying to become a licensed manicurist to owning one's own salon to running a nail care supply store, all these could be possible with knowing very little English. In the case of shrimping, boat crews consisted of all Vietnamese members. When problems developed, translation services were provided by religious organizations and community leadership emerged to represent the voice of shrimpers. And like the nail salons, once ethnic industry integration developed, all the spaces – from catching the shrimp, processing them, selling them to retailers, to owning retail fronts – are possible to occupy without a strong command of English. These linguistic luxuries allow for workers in the two industries to succeed in their business but at the cost of reduced assimilation due to not learning the language of the host society.

Benefits and costs of business niche participation can also be explored through a feminist lens. In the migration and emancipation model, this study demonstrates that there is no stark black and white answer to the question: are women better or worse off as a result of migration and participation in immigrant business niches? In the nail care industry, globalization and *doi moi* policies fostered the lived experiences of the transnational marriage institution, which allowed Vietnamese immigrant opportunities to live in improved conditions, but saddling them to obligations that are anchored in patriarchal systems. However, the workspace of the nail salon allowed them to act in autonomous ways, such as managing remittances on their own terms without having to seek permission of their husbands.

Moving from the feminine nail salon to masculine coastal docks of fishing villages, pressures of globalization and the expansion of global markets force workers to cope with the decline of their livelihoods. Research demonstrates that men and women tend to respond differently. For example, women's responses are collectivist approaches, which have led to entrepreneurial alternatives. This study demonstrates that they've turned to the nail salon as one of those alternatives. This is an option for Vietnamese immigrant shrimpers to which native White shrimpers don't have access. This ethnic resources is very valuable in the context of ethnic mobility.

In the masculine space of shrimping, the sexual division of labor is clear, traditional, and patriarchal. A female shrimper is rare, but they exist, at least in title. They are crew members of the shrimp boat enterprise. But her actual work shows a reproduction of traditional gender roles, where she cooks and cleans after the male crew.

This sexual division of labor is also maintained in the household, where wives of shrimpers cook, clean, care for children, and manage household finances. Management of household finances has resulted in the financial acumen of Vietnamese immigrant women. They use the skill to organize and maintain rotating credit systems that are useful in obtaining lump sum loans without the formal steps of going through formal banking institutions. In some cases, the lump sums were used to enter the nail salon business as a response to the devastation of the domestic shrimp industry. Both wife and husband engage in nail care work together, and moving the analysis back to the social location of the nail salon shows that the sexual division of labor is reproduced there as well. Men who participate in this feminine workspace often take on duties that are understood as masculine such as supply pick-up, equipment repair, and tough customer service.

On a macrolevel, economic restructuring of America and the impact of expanding global markets created opposing outcomes of the two industries. Globalization, protections of service workers, and continued decline of primary sector workers translate into conditions that have resulted in the upward mobility for Vietnamese immigrant women and the downward mobility for Vietnamese immigrant men in this study. So have Vietnamese immigrant women and men benefitted or lost out as a result of migration and participation in these business niches? The answer is reflective of the feminist lens, which asserts that gender is fluid and dependent upon the conditions surrounding its actors. It is socially constructed, as actors produce ideologies and expectations in one space, while reproducing some of the same or new ideologies and expectations in other spaces.

In addition to the benefits and costs analyses of immigrant entrepreneurship, past research and theoretical perspectives have examined issues such as group background characteristics in order to explain immigrant entrepreneurial behavior. Such examinations steer towards a focus on an internal approach (cultural values, ethnic networks, etc). Portes' (1987) examination of the Cuban enclave economy in Miami asks researchers to go beyond looking at such internal, single-factor theories. His case study is an "example of the limitations of single-factor theories of entrepreneurial behavior" (p.366) as he notes that "little has been said about theories that emphasize external rather than in-group contextual factors" (p.367). Discussion of the external factors is a central concern of this dissertation.

Three important external factors impacting the development of Vietnamese nail salon and shrimp industries may be discerned in the results of this research including: (1) favorable reception by members of the host community; (2) industry accommodations to Vietnamese immigrants; and (3) entrepreneurial policies at multiple levels (state, national, and global). The first discussion is reception by host community. Portes' study shows little evidence that self-employment was regarded as a last resort for occupational adjustment, and he states that perhaps the opposite is more probable, "as a favorable reception in the United States allowed the autonomous economic development of this community" (p.367). While Portes is referring to an ethnic enclave and this study focuses on ethnic niches, the conceptual framework is similar.

Vietnamese manicurists and shrimpers received a favorable reception by many in the United States who were sympathetic to the tragic experiences of expulsion from their

country as a result of war. Actress Tippi Hedden was heavily responsible for the original cohort of Vietnamese manicurists in southern California, establishing a graduating class of manicurists who would go on to expand their opportunity and share their knowledge to a vast ethnic network of Vietnamese immigrant women (and men) eager to provide nail care service. Catholic Charities, such as the Archdiocese of Galveston, provided translation services and assistance in filing citizenship papers to Vietnamese shrimpers. One could argue that these external entities connect to the Vietnamese refugee status as an internal background characteristic; however, the fact that these forms of assistance were charitable shows that they *did not inevitably have to be*, but because they did exist, they ended up playing a vital role in the success of Vietnamese manicurists and shrimpers.

A second discussion is industry accommodation to immigrant workers and entrepreneurs. In the nail care case, access to literature and materials in the Vietnamese language made entry into the industry extremely accessible. With the growth of Vietnamese workers in the nail care profession, trade professionals recognized the sheer size of Vietnamese participation and reacted by producing training materials (for example Creative Lab's acrylic nail system training manuals) and industry publications (for example *Nails Magazine*). Manufacturers and suppliers recognized the Vietnamese market and targeted them as a unique target demographic for sales. In the shrimp industry, seafood processors and distributors recognized the efforts and successes of Vietnamese shrimpers. Native processors, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers hired Vietnamese workers, recognizing their talents and work ethic, but more importantly,

recognizing the advantage of having someone who could relate to Vietnamese shrimpers and speak the language. These accommodations extended to the recognition that the substantial Vietnamese population in Texas was a sizeable market share of consumers. Host community reception and industry accommodations are two external factors that impacted both industries similarly. Both played a positive role in the development and growth of Vietnamese participation in the industries.

A third external factor, entrepreneurial policy, shows a divergence between the two industries. The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations made several accommodations for Vietnamese participation not only in the nail care business but in the beauty industry overall. Specific to Vietnamese manicurists, the lack of English proficiency as a Texas license requirement was one hurdle removed. In addition, licensing examinations offered in Vietnamese opened the doors for immigrants to successfully become licensed manicurists and shop owners. The TDLR also provides literature (pamphlets, fact sheets) and media services (phone prompts and website information) in Vietnamese. These immigrant friendly policies and practices gave way for increased Vietnamese participation in the nail care industry.

Unlike the friendly nail care policies, the shrimp industry faced more adversarial regulations. The 200 year old citizenship law initially exempted all Vietnamese shrimpers from owning and operating large commercial boats. Vietnamese shrimpers in Texas were informed of these laws early in their settlement, and they were prompt about obtaining citizenship in order to become boat owners and captains. Still, in ideal situations, it would take a minimum of 5 years to even be eligible for citizenship. Tack on the time to process

the application, and it could take anywhere from 6 to 7 years. To combat the external influence of such a policy, I turn our analysis to an internal factor - that Vietnamese shrimpers relied on co-ethnic networks to circumvent the law by implementing “paper captains” – Vietnamese who were American citizens and were paid to simply sit with the crew in case officials came on board to ask for papers. This activity put Vietnamese shrimpers in a precarious situation and was not the ideal, but they felt they had few other choices until they were able to obtain citizenship. In the early years of Vietnamese participation, the likelihood of enforcement of such a law was minimal, but as racial tensions increased, efforts to enforce the law ramped up. Vietnamese shrimper mobilization had to occur, and as a result, legislation passed in 1990 lifting the exemption. While this was a victory for Vietnamese shrimpers, domestic policy was only a small scale factor that impacted the industry.

The Vietnamese nail care industry is still going strong today, with very little news about any severe challenges facing the industry. Issues of worker health are the latest obstacles, but with a strong and viable presence in the industry along with established trade associations, the Vietnamese nail care industry looks to be able to overcome. The story is different for Vietnamese shrimpers. External forces of licensing reduction by the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife in 2000 have reduced opportunities. More significantly, the external force of global competition has hit the industry with a heavy hand. Because the nail care industry is focused on service and part of the tertiary sector of work, America’s economic restructuring of work hasn’t impacted them as it has shrimpers, which is focused on product and part of the primary sector of work.

Overseas shrimp supplies have directly impacted market prices, cutting into domestic profit margins. Government action brought some relief with the victory of the 2003 anti-dumping lawsuit against eleven countries, including Vietnam. However, in 2011, the World Trade Organization declared that U.S. imposed tariffs on Vietnamese shrimp exporters violates global trade rules. As a result, the United States agreed to change their method of market price calculations, but as of spring 2011, the U.S. International Trade Commission decided to continue import duties for five more years on shrimp from Vietnam. The continuing battle at this macro-level has direct impact on the participation and livelihood of American shrimpers, regardless if they are Vietnamese Americans or not.

Examples of external forces provide support for Portes' claim that minority entrepreneurial success not only depended on internal group characteristics, but also on varied external circumstances. His study of Cubans in Miami did not disregard social networks, rather, suggested that "ethnic networks will not produce by themselves an ethnic economy" (p. 368), highlighting the importance that immigrant entrepreneurship studies need to explore the external factors that contribute to the ethnic economy and to ethnic niche formation, development, and maintenance. By examining Vietnamese immigrant entrepreneurs in two different niches, the varied outcomes of success are established. In particular, the examination of entrepreneurial policies shows variation in the experiences and successes of Vietnamese workers and entrepreneurs depending on the industry in question.

While external forces are crucial, the formation of ethnic businesses also relies on internal group factors. Structures of governance determine the dynamics of how workers interact with one another, and examining these interactions under such structures provides clues whether or not they help or hurt business development. A discussion of transaction costs conceptualized as relationships and interactions among workers sheds light on the “efficiency” of the operations. Comparing and contrasting the work relationships of Vietnamese immigrants to native workers (within and between each other) provides differentiated results of work transactions, and these differences translate into the ability of Vietnamese immigrants to overcome some of the challenges they face in their industries that natives do not. To elaborate, the conceptualization of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* communities helps clarify the differences.

Tonnies’ (1957) *Gesellschaft* is understood as associations are motivated by interests of the individual self and less on the value on the larger group. I assign these associations to native workers who represent the capitalist values of individual merit and achievement. *Gemeinschaft* societies, in contrast, are associations motivated by interests of the larger group over the interests of the self. In the context of employment in this study, I conceptualize these associations as ethnic social ties among Vietnamese immigrant workers. Research on immigrants’ reliance on social ties shows they help immigrants gain employment in multiethnic labor markets (Sanders et al 2002), help establish mutual cooperation and trust in economic transactions (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) and are important in the development and continuation of

immigrant firms (Waldinger et al 2006). Vietnamese immigrants in both the nail salon and shrimp industries relied heavily on each other in many instances from entrance to these labor markets to the development of the niches and to the establishment of complete ethnic industry integration. In addition to the business related assistance, social ties also provided benefits for issues such as childcare, microloans for personal emergencies, and flexibility in asking for time off for vacations or to run personal errands.

Among non-Vietnamese run operations, the interactions of workers in the nail care industry fall in line with the *Gesellschaft* type associations, while White shrimpers were more in alignment with their Vietnamese counterparts, exhibiting *Gemeinschaft* associations. The implications for this show that as far as transaction costs go (Williamson 1981), the nail care industry illustrates a case where *Gemeinschaft* organization seems to yield some efficiency gains, and this contrasts Weber's prognosis of an increasingly "iron cage" of rationality in the modern economy. Vietnamese nail salons seem to operate more smoothly because workers are willing to share in the burdens that, at times, take place outside the workplace.

The idea of a larger group benefit and the use of co-ethnic social ties set the tone for how most Vietnamese nail salons are structured, while in the non-Vietnamese salons, the rigid status of employee, employer, and co-worker set the tone for the type of self interest based associations in which the workers engage. The familial work environment of the Vietnamese nail salon provided multiple responses of work satisfaction, while the enthusiasm was apparently less among non-Vietnamese nail techs. In addition,

Vietnamese nail techs were willing to go the extra distance to take walk-ins and customers right before closing time, resulting in increased revenue for themselves and the store. Non-Vietnamese nail techs adhered more strictly to schedule and shift times. The results from the nail salon case support the knowledge base that “ethnic” resources such as co-ethnic social ties provide some benefit for immigrant business niches and that *Gesellschaft* environments don’t always lead to operations that run more smoothly. It also supports Weber’s prediction that in *Gesellschaft* environments, workers report less satisfaction than those who operate under *Gemeinschaft* structures.

The data from the shrimp industry illustrates that one cannot automatically deem a group of immigrant workers as having “ethnic resources” such as ethnic social ties when comparing them to White mainstream competitors or even other ethnic competitors. White native shrimpers also utilized social ties in the same ways that Vietnamese shrimpers did. Further research on immigrant or ethnic labor should consider that even dominant, mainstream groups (notably Whites) can partake in interactions that have been traditionally considered “ethnic” in the immigrant or ethnic labor literature, such as ethnic social ties or ethnic social support networks. In this particular case, they both utilized social support networks and close social ties, but to categorize the Vietnamese interactions as “ethnic” and the interactions among White shrimpers as something else would be inaccurate.

The complexity of using the term “ethnic” provides a segue way for the discussion of racialization. The lived experiences of workers in the nail care and shrimp industry demonstrate the fluid nature of identity, and more importantly, the activation or deactivation of such identities depending on social, economic, or political contexts. Fenton (2010) contends “that in the ‘context of ethnicity’, it is the context that matters more than the ethnicity”, and that “the salience of ethnic identities is ... influenced by external coordinates of ethnic action rather than by internal characteristics of the ethnic identity itself” (p. 188). When this idea is interwoven with Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory, it provides a guiding paradigm for how this study examines workers under particular contexts and how different contexts yield the negative, positive, or indifferent actions and interactions of workers to frame an illustration of circumstantial and instrumental ethnicity. Both stories of Houston nail salon workers and Texas coast shrimpers provide examples of the racialization process.

In the nail salon industry, Vietnamese nail salons were relegated to the discount shop which meant they were unsanitary and provided poor or no customer service. The “Asian nail shop” separated and demoted their status. The linking of quality level to a particular group was so profound that it was understood internally within the Vietnamese American community itself. Organizations like the Vietnamese Nail Care Professional Association (VNCPA) emerged as political and social mobilizers to counter the stigmas and to raise the reputation of the Vietnamese community.

External to the community, the reputation depended upon whose perspective you look through. The broad and heavy presence of Vietnamese gives legitimacy at the

institutional level. The active participation of the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation in educating Vietnamese nail care professionals illustrates the perception of them as a significant group. Other organizational contexts show the same sort of acknowledgment, such as trade manufacturers and publishers. Representatives from major trade organizations recognize the economic impact of the Vietnamese, and this clears out any stigmas about the Vietnamese and how they operate their businesses. As long as they are viewed as a revenue stream, their ethnic association simply means catering their materials in ethnic friendly ways, such as translating materials in Vietnamese.

At the individual level, the Vietnamese “discount nail shop” stigma is prevalent among sentiments of the white or non-Vietnamese nail technicians. To them, the Vietnamese provide poor service and often break laws. Customers who pay the lower prices are going to get no customer care and perhaps have hazardous products used on them. For customers, those who have the resources to go to upscale salons have bought in to the stereotypes and avoid the Asian nail shops. Customers from lower income backgrounds are happy that the Asian shops are providing them a luxury service without the premium price. Internally or externally, and at the institutional or individual level, these contexts matter in dissecting when the racialization of when “Vietnamese” matters and in what ways. It demonstrates that the status of the Vietnamese nail salon industry and its workers is fluid and depends upon who is asked.

For Vietnamese shrimpers, the fluid nature of ethnic identity and racialization also emerged as a theme. However, the nature of the industry is different from the nail care

profession. Nail care professionals provide a service, which means they mostly protected from the consequences of globalization. They are also immune from environmental elements such as natural disasters, hazardous material spills, or ecological considerations. For shrimpers, there are multiple, larger external forces at work that shape their experiences and outcomes. Because of this, at the institutional level, while the Vietnamese are recognized as an important group of workers and license holders, the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife hasn't made any special concessions or considerations that cater to Vietnamese shrimpers or fishery workers in general. Decisions at the organizational level, such as the retirement of nearly half of all commercial licenses, has hurt workers, regardless of their ethnic background. So in this example, ethnicity or race did not matter. On the other hand, legislatively, special consideration of the Vietnamese ethnic background helped in the ruling to exempt them from a law that required commercial boat owners and operators be U.S. citizens. This did not come easily, though, and political mobilization was necessary. The Vietnamese community activated their ethnic identities to make this happen.

At the individual level, racialization occurred in the contexts of economic tensions, leading to racial tensions. White native shrimpers viewed the Vietnamese as foreigners who received special treatment from the government. This activated what Jacobs and Tope (2007) refer to as the politics of resentment, where class politics become racialized as native shrimpers believed Vietnamese shrimpers were the beneficiaries of redistributive policies. In addition to resenting them for their perceived beneficiary status, they didn't like the Vietnamese because they didn't follow the rules, they were

backwards, and they didn't respect established norms of the shrimping community. Combine this context with the influence external forces, and it establishes a high level of discord for white shrimpers. When white shrimpers experienced economic threat and a contracting economic livelihood, it was easier to blame the disrespectful, backward, government supported Vietnamese immigrants than the external forces of a shifting economic structure or international trade policies.

Racialization thus beset the Vietnamese. White shrimper reactions and group mobilization occurred, even to the extent of illicit actions. Activities spanned from using racial slurs and spreading hate propaganda to harassment, firebombs, burning of racial effigies, and personal violence. While attempts were made to mediate the tensions, they were so extreme that they remain active in the minds of shrimpers today. Both Vietnamese and white shrimpers retell the story with vivid details and hold on to the trauma of a condition that was in the past yet remains in the current lived experiences of these longtime workers who stay because it is the only thing they know how to do and believe that they can do well. Notably, though, the negative sentiments were not spread throughout the industry. Boat owners, operators, captains, deckhands, and rig men (Bonacich's low wage labor) felt most of the threat and participated in the targeting of Vietnamese. Dockside processors, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers (Bonacich's employer class) viewed the Vietnamese favorably and commented on their hard work ethic and their production levels. So like the nail care industry, sentiments about Vietnamese immigrant workers depend on who is asked.

In the individual's mind, traumatic experiences may remain as memories, but when the influence of external forces is significant and broad enough, it can replace historical memories and long held notions. The organizational formation of the Southern Shrimp Alliance provides example of this. To compete with the aggressively priced international markets that were a result of international trade policies, Vietnamese and white shrimpers removed racial lines and merged to protect the stakes of domestic shrimp industry. The introduction of this external force recreated a context in which Vietnamese and White shrimpers now viewed the industry as a shared one. Political mobilization by both Vietnamese and whites acting as one cohesive unit led to a victorious 2003 anti-dumping lawsuit. To conduct this successfully, racial status was deactivated and no longer mattered. The historical struggles of us (Whites) versus them (Vietnamese) was replaced by a contemporary struggle of a new us (domestic shrimpers) versus them (international shrimp exporting countries).

What lessons can be drawn from the study of these two industries? The examples show the importance of the economic and political contexts in the process of racial formation and the understanding of ethnic economies, in particular immigrant business niches. They respond to Portes' (1987) request that researchers go beyond looking at internal, single-factor theories to explain entrepreneurial outcomes. While internal group characteristics are important, such as use of social ties in nail care or selling exotic products to co-ethnics from seafood catches, they do not fully explain outcomes. Both the nail care and shrimp industries share similarities in ethnic resources and ethnic characteristics. These similarities helped them enter and grow their respective industries,

but the eventual long term success and maintenance of their industries are heavily influenced by external factors. Further research in immigrant or ethnic business could consider that outcomes are not solely from internal group characteristics or even market conditions. External decisions by governments, institutions, or organizations can influence business outcomes. These outcomes can play a role in the racialization of work. Fenton's (2010) assertion that economic and political conditions are "intimately linked to the formation and political uses of ethnic identities, and to occasions of severe ethnic conflict and violence" (p. 140) is supported by the way nail care workers and shrimpers reacted to economic and political conditions, creating group tensions that varied from rumors and stereotypes to full fledged acts of hate crimes and personal violence.

Examining both internal characteristics and external forces provides a richer explanation of immigrant business outcomes. In the examination, we see how race and gender formed as labels for occupations and industries. In regards to gender the masculine label of shrimp work and the feminine label of nail care work socially constructed the lived experiences of workers in gendered ways. Since my research is focused mainly on the business aspect of immigrant niches, my analyses tend to lean towards an economic focus. For example, remittances are discussed in a gendered framework, but my study is by no means a comprehensive gendered analysis of remittances, so future research in this area could take a broader and more expansive approach. My discussions of gender and the sexual division of labor in the two industries focus mainly on household economics and finances. My study falls short of exploring other negotiations of household division of labor such as sex, children, extended family,

etc. In the examination of transnational marriages, my sample, while rich in exploring the gendered experiences of these couples, is by no means a larger representation of the gender ideologies or expectations of all transnational couples. Other couplings should be studied for comparison and contrast, as this was the approach I took when comparing my sample to Thai's (2003) study.

Regarding race, the label of “Vietnamese” formed – Vietnamese nail salon and Vietnamese shrimpers. As the labels formed, racial formation theory tells us that certain characteristics became attached to that label. Economic and political contexts explain why the labels mattered, and most importantly, when those labels were activated or deactivated. The activation and deactivation were contingent upon factors of time, place, biography and the larger social forces of economics, war, migration, U.S. policy, and the markets in a capitalist society – all significant notions outlined in Mills' sociological imagination and supporting Omi and Winant's racial formation theory. Further research on race, ethnicity, and race relations should continue to examine the motivations of individual actors and collective group behaviors that initiate or dismiss racial and ethnic identities. To substantiate the social construction of race and ethnicity, researchers examining the adaptable nature of such identities can provide further insight more holistically when adding in the context of external macrostructures that trigger such adaptations.

To end, while this study focused on business development and racialization, one broad impression must be addressed. This is a study about Vietnamese immigrants at work in America. It provides an illustration of truly unique communities and highlights

that these communities are distinctive spaces where researchers can explore lived experiences that are not like the mainstream community but are not like homeland communities either. The lived experiences are intricate and complex, and do not reflect classic theories about assimilation and adaptation. Segmented assimilation theory allows us to explore the patterns of idiosyncratic experiences which form immigrant communities. In reflection, it informs the prospects for future research in this area. As a Vietnamese immigrant who came to America as an infant and grew up in Texas, I come from a unique place to observe and examine the lives of Vietnamese immigrants whose assimilation experiences are similar in some ways as mine but in many ways are so very different.

While spending time in the nail salons of Houston, on the docks of Palacios, and on a shrimp boat in the Gulf Coast, I can reflect back on how the workers' reacted to my presence. They were excited to help with my "school project". They said they admired me for what I was doing...that I was going to tell the story about Vietnamese Americans and how hard they work, and that it was nice I was not going to be a pharmacist, engineer, lawyer, dentist, or medical doctor. Some of these workers didn't even know sociology (*xa hoi hoc*) existed as an area of study, but they shared that they believed the study of society was important. They were pleased that I was doing what I was doing, and that being educated would free me from having to do the kind of manual labor that they were doing. Their perspective is understandable, as the data showed consensus among the workers that they did not want their children to work in their respective industries. While this was the workers' intentions, I did observe second generation Vietnamese Americans

working in these industries. To examine these workers in particular (examine their decision making process to enter the business, their experiences as workers in the industry, their views on gender, race, class, etc.) would contribute to the literature on second generation immigrants in the workplace.

Again, as this study focused on business development and racialization, it only began to explore the intricate issue of gender as a central theme. There is much room for development in this area of examination. As a woman, workers in the nail salon included me in their “shop talk” as if I was just like one of them, but their questions at times revealed the way they viewed me as someone quite different from them, too – a formally educated and Americanized Vietnamese. They wanted to know what I thought about men, relationships, career choices, filial piety, and American society. We also talked about clothing trends, hair styles, make-up, accessories, and other fashion related topics, and their comments tell me they viewed me as a modern woman, while they viewed themselves as immigrants *trying to modernize* (adapt/assimilate). I reflect on how these conversations may have been different if a male were conducting this study.

My female status was also significant on the docks and on the boat. In these spaces, workers wondered how I would handle the harsh conditions. As a student, they welcomed me in their workspace, but as a petite woman, they wondered why I *wanted* to be on site (especially going out to sea with them) and suggested they could just simply tell me about it. After the first trip out to sea, I told them I would pass on going a second time. They applauded me for making it through the day and night, but they completely understood that an “educated city girl” like me couldn’t handle those kinds of work

conditions. The dialogue and interactions with my participants, and their perceptions of me (a 1.5 generation Vietnamese American female researcher studying Vietnamese immigrant workers in the community where I grew up) all reflect the complex dynamics of ethnicity, gender, and class. Therefore, much like the way Schrover and colleagues' study (2007) tackles ethnic niches, labor market segregation, ethnicity and gender, or the way Valdez (2011) approaches the study of contemporary immigrant workers in Houston, further exploration of the ways gender, race, and class intersect within the space of Vietnamese immigrant ethnic niches is a place where this study can go further,

## Appendix A. Nail Salon Interview Questions

This is a sample of questions to be asked of workers in the nail salon business. The format is unstructured and questions outside of this list of sample questions may be asked.

### BASIC INFORMATION

Name:

Age:

Male or  Female

Are you  married  single  separated  divorced  widowed

Ethnicity:

Where do you currently live (city and state)?

Where were you born (city, state, country)?

If not born in country where you currently live, how old were you when you moved to your current country of residence?

Education level:

Do you have children?

Yes or  No

If "yes," please write in each child's age and sex:

	Age	Sex
--	-----	-----

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

Child 5

### RESEARCH TOPIC QUESTIONS

How long have you been in the nail salon business?

How did you begin your occupation in the nail salon business?

If you are a business owner, what strategies did you use to grow your business?

If you are not a business owner, what strategies do you know or understand from your employer that were used or are using to grow your business?

If you are not a business owner, would you like to become one? Why or why not?

What is your relationship like with the people you work with?

What is your experience like with your customers? How do the experiences make you feel about customers? Do you have any general conclusions about customers drawn from your experiences with them?

What is a typical day at work for you like?

What do you like about your job? What do you dislike about it?

## Appendix B. Fishery Industry Interview Questions

This is a sample of questions to be asked of workers in the fishery industry along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The format is unstructured and questions outside of this list of sample questions may be asked.

### BASIC INFORMATION

Name:

Age:

Male or  Female

Are you  married  single  separated  divorced  widowed

Ethnicity:

Where do you currently live (city and state)?

Where were you born (city, state, country)?

If not born in country where you currently live, how old were you when you moved to your current country of residence?

Education level:

Do you have children?

Yes or  No

If "yes," please write in each child's age and sex:

	Age	Sex
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Child 1		
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Child 2		
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Child 3		
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Child 4		
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Child 5		
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### RESEARCH TOPIC QUESTIONS

How long have you been in the fishery industry? Do you specialize in type of catch?

How did you begin your occupation in the fishery industry?

Are you a boat owner? How did you finance your boat purchase? What strategies did you use to recruit workers? What strategies did you use to grow your business?

If you are not a boat owner, what strategies do you know or understand from your employer that were used or are using to grow your business?

If you are not a boat owner, would you like to become one? Why or why not?

What is your relationship like with the people you work with?

Do you work with retail customers? If so, what is your experience like with them? How do the experiences make you feel about customers? Do you have any general conclusions about customers drawn from your experiences with them?

What experiences have you had with fishermen of other races or ethnicities?

What do you know about the KKK incident with Vietnamese fishermen in February of 1981? How do you feel about it?

Please describe a day at work out at sea. Please tell me about anything extraordinary that occurs out at sea that you have experienced.

What is your life like during the off season?

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