

# POSTSOCIALIST BAZAARS: DIVERSITY, SOLIDARITY, AND CONFLICT IN THE MARKETPLACE

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*This article is based on research funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (HU 1019/3-1).*

**Prior to the collapse of communism, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese migrants arrived in various localities throughout COMECON countries by way of programs of mutual cooperation and “socialist solidarity,” including East Germany. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many former contract workers have become entrepreneurs mostly engaged in wholesaling and retailing. Local markets, increasingly comprised of diverse peoples, play key roles in postsocialist economic development while transnationally linking a variety of geographical and sociocultural spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in bazaars in Berlin, Prague, and Warsaw, this paper addresses questions of spatial continuities between the socialist past and the postsocialist present, mobility and transnational social and economic practices, and bazaars as sites of power and conflict.**

**Keywords:** Bazaar; Postsocialism; Transnationalism; Power; Conflict

This article focuses on migrants in postsocialist countries and explores their social and economic networks in bazaars<sup>1</sup> in Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague.<sup>2</sup> The majority of

<sup>1</sup> The term “postsocialist bazaar” is in dialogue with Geertz’s “bazaar economy,” which is characterized as “a distinctive system of social relationships centering around the production and consumption of goods and services” (Geertz 1978:29). In this article, I focus on migrants’ transnational social and economic ties and conceptualize bazaars as “a communication network” (Geertz 1978) across borders. The spaces I am describing might be more commonly known as markets (*rynok* in Russian), but my use of bazaar is conceptual for the reasons I mention.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, and Hanoi in 2012 and 2013. Parts of this essay were first presented at the conference on “Post-Socialist Bazaars: Markets and Diversities in ex-COMECON countries,” organized by Steven Vertovec and Gertrud Hüwelmeier at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, February 23–24, 2012, and at the European Association of Social Anthropologists conference in Nanterre, France, July 10–13, 2012. COMECON, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, was between 1949 and 1991 an organization for economic cooperation that included most Eastern Bloc countries and a few other socialist states around the world.

stallholders as well as clients in these covered markets are former Vietnamese contract workers.<sup>3</sup> Yet, an increasing number of traders and buyers hail from other countries as well. This essay adopts a transnational perspective (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and takes into account recent critiques of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer 2009), the tendency in migration research to limit the focus of analysis to the receiving country and to use the nation-state as a container, as the given framework from which to understand and assess the experiences of migrants. Moreover, this contribution will look “beyond the ethnic lens” (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Gulbrandsen 2006), a research perspective that has rarely been taken into consideration in previous scholarship on postsocialist marketplaces. Following this perspective, I will focus on nonethnic ways of living and working together in particular localities, namely the bazaars. As Vietnamese form the majority in terms of the traders and clients in the bazaars where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, there is an emphasis on this group within this contribution. However, by including Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Turks, Germans, Poles, Czechs, and many other groups who use the markets within its scope, this article aims to contribute to the research on diversification, mobility, cross-border economic practices, and marketplaces as locales of cultural encounter, new solidarities, and conflict in the postsocialist urban landscape. Finally, this article sheds light on a different kind of transnational connections, linked not to neoliberal capitalism but to Cold War political alliances. By taking into account *socialist pathways of migration*, I will analyze how transnational ties have changed over time with the implementation of new legal categories after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In the following, I conceptualize marketplaces as sites of exchange in which the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of everyday life and the transnational ties of people have an impact on the encounters among various groups, such as migrants, locals, clients, traders, and political authorities. In the first part I will focus on the spatial continuities between the socialist past and the postsocialist present by analyzing the sites of the new bazaars. Interestingly, these new global trade centers started in “empty” places, some of them on the grounds of former socialist production sites. The second part of this article deals with socialist migrations prior to 1989 and the social and economic uncertainties that Vietnamese former contract workers faced after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It explores socialist pathways of migration, arguing that social and economic networks that were created in the socialist period are still in effect today. In the last part of this article, my focus is on the restructuring of legal categories after the breakdown of communism and on how this is reflected in the bazaar’s everyday relations. Taking power relations into account, I investigate whether new solidarities between people from different ethnic and social backgrounds are emerging in these postsocialist bazaars run mainly by migrants from Asia.

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<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the differences between the three localities, there are a number of similarities. In this paper I will focus on bazaars in Berlin. However, as people and goods serve to connect places, I will include some details from Warsaw and Prague as well, particularly in order to strengthen the transnational perspective.

As many scholars have highlighted (Hann and Hann 1992 on border markets in Turkey; Sik and Wallace 1999; Hohnen 2003 on markets in Vilnius, Lithuania; Pieke et al. 2004 on transnational Chinese; Nyiri 2007 on Chinese bazaars in Budapest; Wundrak 2007 on Chinese markets in Romania; Marcinczak and van der Velde 2008 on bazaars in Poland; Nagy 2011 on the Red Dragon Market in Bucharest), open air markets (OAM) already existed in the communist economy and were important sites for the distribution of goods. They were also considered places where profit making occurred through both legal and illegal activities, including pickpocketing, speculation, and the resale of stolen or smuggled goods. "As a consequence, OAMs in the communist economy were continually under the threat of police raids or—at best—tolerated as suspicious but irrelevant distortions of the production and distribution system" (Sik and Wallace 1999:697). Nowadays police raids and control by customs officers are part of the everyday experiences of traders and clients in bazaars in Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague.

While OAMs were to be found in many socialist countries, such bazaars did not exist in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Hüwelmeier 2008). Nevertheless, people in East Germany found different ways of practicing exchange in order to deal with the economy of scarcity. A number of Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR, for example, were quite active in the informal economy in the 1980s, producing blue jeans and other textile items in the workers' homes and selling the goods to locals. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the contract workers turned to street trading as they had lost their jobs after the breakdown of communism. In some places in Eastern Europe, thousands of people were already meeting daily in OAMs at the very beginning of the 1990s, such as in the bazaar in the Warsaw Stadium or in the Chinese market in Budapest. In Berlin, wholesale markets were only established in 2004 and 2005, while smaller markets run by Vietnamese migrants existed as early as the 1990s.

### **THE TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN SPACE—"ASIAN" MARKETPLACES IN EUROPEAN CAPITALS**

Fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 2005, the Dong Xuan Center (which translates as "spring meadow"), a large wholesale market in Berlin, opened its doors in the suburbs of the eastern part of the city. The legal owner of the territory is a former contract worker from Vietnam, who built large halls with several hundred stalls and rents the stalls to wholesalers from various countries. Most of his employees, such as security guards, are German and some are Vietnamese. Located on the grounds of a former state-owned enterprise, the bazaar is surrounded by prefabricated apartment buildings, so-called *Plattenbauten*, built in the 1960s and 1970s. Thousands of migrants, a large number of whom arrived from the former Soviet Union and from Vietnam, live in these places, together with Germans. These buildings are typical of the architecture of the late socialist GDR, a traveling architecture that can still be seen in former "socialist brotherlands," such as Vietnam (Schwenkel 2012), and other places such as Tanzania, which was part of what was called "African socialism." The area of the Dong Xuan Center, situated a few kilometers from today's city center, was

already being used as an industrial site in the nineteenth century. Transformed into a global trade center in 2005, the wholesale market was mainly run by Vietnamese in the very beginning (Hüwelmeier 2008).<sup>4</sup> Today, people from China, India, Pakistan, Poland, Turkey, Germany, Mexico, and other countries can also be found among the wholesalers and retailers.

Bazaars of this kind exist in many Central and Eastern European countries. In Warsaw, for instance, the Jarmak Europa (called “Stadium” in the vernacular), Europe’s biggest bazaar, was the melting pot of the city after the fall of communism. Similar to other multiethnic bazaars, Vietnamese, Poles, and Russians sold goods in this market after the breakdown of the socialist economy, yet Africans, Chinese, Indians, and Central Asians were also represented among the traders. This trading location has since been transferred to the suburbs of the city as the Stadium market was recently closed down in order for the stadium to be rebuilt for the 2012 European Soccer Championship, which took place in Poland and Ukraine. As a result, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Turkish investors purchased huge areas of land in a small village about 20 kilometers south of Warsaw, literally on the meadows, and built new global trade centers, with several hundred people trading in each one.

In Prague, Vietnamese migrants founded a global trade center in 1999. The Sapa bazaar, named after a small mountain town in northern Vietnam, is located on the outskirts of the city and takes up 350,000 square meters. It is the largest and most famous migrant-run market in the Czech Republic. The majority of traders have a Vietnamese background, while about 20 percent of the traders are Chinese, Turkish, Indian, and Pakistani. Located in the Libus district of Prague 4, about fifteen kilometers from the city center, the bazaar was built on the grounds of a former poultry processing enterprise and a meat company. According to the Czech gatekeeper of the Sapa bazaar, the locality, which opened in 1977, was one of the most modern slaughterhouses in Europe during the socialist period. The business closed after 1990, and the grounds were purchased by Vietnamese investors in 1999. Another market had previously existed in the same district, near a residential home for “foreign workers,” but it was closed down by local authorities in 1996 (Martinkova 2011:155).

Compared to the “wild” markets that had sprung up at the beginning of the 1990s, the “new” bazaars in each of these cities are organized by a market management team on property that was purchased by foreign investors.<sup>5</sup> The market management represents the bazaar to the outside, negotiates with state authorities such as the mayor of the district, the police, or the firemen. Inside the market, the management collects rent from the traders as well as guarantees security by hiring personnel and, for example, expelling those people from the site who sell products without a market license.

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<sup>4</sup> Geographer Antonie Schmitz (2011) has described “migrant economies” based on research in the Dong Xuan Center in Berlin. Her focus was not on diversity but mainly on questions of the inclusion of migrants into the German labor market.

<sup>5</sup> Who exactly the investors are, whether they live in China, Vietnam, or elsewhere, was not easy to find out. In this article, I refer to the “management level” when talking about my contacts among market representatives.

All three of these places—Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague—are transnationally connected. First, bazaar managers from all three countries as well as managers and business people working in Slovakia, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries, meet on a regular basis in one of the cities and simultaneously maintain economic and political ties to their home country. Second, they support “cultural events” within the grounds of the markets, in which people from various countries are invited to participate. Next, traders travel to bazaars in neighboring countries to purchase or sell goods across borders. Further, clients move between bazaars, as these are places where they meet relatives and friends. Finally, Buddhist monks from Vietnam create religious ties between Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, and Hanoi visiting each place and performing religious rituals in the respective *bazaar pagodas* (Hüwelmeier 2013). As these examples indicate, a whole range of transborder mobilities between these new postsocialist bazaars simultaneously connects people and places.

The Dong Xuan Center in Berlin is a covered market with nine halls that opened its doors in 2005. About 250 people rent space for trading, while another fifty people are not wholesalers but service providers, running businesses such as tax advice offices, a driving school, hair salons, and nail studios. Approximately a thousand people work on the grounds of the bazaar, making the Dong Xuan Center one of the largest employers in the Berlin-Lichtenberg district. According to the manager of the place, the center’s wholesalers generate annual revenue of about three million euros, thus the residents of this district profit from the tax-paying traders. In contrast to other markets in former socialist countries that were founded shortly after the collapse of communism, the eastern Berlin bazaars—of which there were three (one was closed in 2009)—were not built until many years after the reunification of Germany. The uncertain legal status of thousands of migrants in the eastern part of Germany, unclear property relations after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and new legal regulations imposed by the government of reunited Germany, such as the need to enter a new commercial enterprise in the commercial register, tax rules, and specific hygiene rules controlled by the office of food inspection, contributed to the late purchase of the territory and the founding of the global trade centers.

As previously mentioned, the territory of the Dong Xuan Center was being used as an industrial site by the Siemens Company beginning in the late nineteenth century. Siemens is well known to many people because of its modern-day involvement in global communication systems.<sup>6</sup> After 1880, the Siemens Company produced carbon brushes for electric motors on this site. During the First World War, Siemens became an important armament enterprise, and in the Second World War its carbon products were also of military importance. During the Second World War, the production was maintained by forced labor, first by Jewish workers, then by prisoners of war, and later by thousands of foreign forced workers (Badel, Herschel, and Karau 2009:85). After the end of the Second World War, the territory and its industrial

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<sup>6</sup> As early as 1847, Werner von Siemens invented the pointer telegraph, later building part of the production site on the grounds of a village outside of Berlin, in the municipality of Lichtenberg, which became a part of Berlin in 1920 and is today the location of the global bazaar (<http://www.siemens.com/history>).

production were transferred to the Soviet zone. In the 1950s, the Soviets handed control over the industrial site to the newly founded socialist German Democratic Republic, and it became a so-called *volkseigener Betrieb* (VEB), or state-owned enterprise in socialist East Germany. The VEB Elektrokohle, as the enterprise was called, employed about 3,000 workers and thus was one of the biggest factories in Berlin during the socialist period producing, among other things, carbon brushes which were necessary for the functioning of electric razors as well as for electric locomotives.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the *Treuhandanstalt*, a newly created state institution in reunified Germany, transformed all state-owned property in the former GDR into private property. Two thousand eight hundred workers in the VEB Elektrokohle lost their jobs, including a number of Vietnamese contract workers who had arrived in East Germany in the late 1980s. In 1996, a US company took over the site and the production; however, the factory was closed down soon after that.<sup>7</sup> Then, in 2005, the Dong Xuan Center opened its doors on the grounds of the former industrial site. Some of the former Vietnamese contract workers, who had previously been employed on these grounds, became entrepreneurs and wholesalers in the bazaar on the very same site, now located in reunified Germany. Thus on this site there is, according to Sik and Wallace (1999), at least some kind of continuity between capitalism in the past (industrialization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), socialism in the past (German Democratic Republic until 1990), and capitalism in the present.

Likewise, other places in the eastern parts of Berlin were transformed into global bazaars in the postsocialist present, right in the middle of thousands of apartments in prefabricated apartment towers. People living in these neighborhoods, Germans as well as Vietnamese, Russians, and others, also visit the Asia Pacific Center, another bazaar that opened in 2004 on the grounds of a former building of the East German security service (*Staatssicherheitsdienst*). This bazaar started out with about 100 wholesalers, but now only 40 to 50 traders are left. According to some of my informants in this bazaar, the competing Dong Xuan Center attracted a number of wholesalers from the Asia Pacific Center, who terminated their rental contracts and switched to the other marketplace.

## **SOCIALIST MIGRATIONS**

The second part of this article deals with socialist migrations in the 1980s and the social and economic uncertainties that former contract workers faced after the fall of the Berlin Wall. New forms of mobility in socialist countries existed prior to 1989 due to agreements between “socialist brotherlands” (Hüwelmeier 2010, 2011, forthcoming). With regard to the agreements between the GDR and socialist Vietnam, from the 1950s up to the end of the American War in Vietnam in 1975, children, young people, and students were “delegated” by the socialist government of Vietnam to live, work, and study in socialist East Germany. Groups of students, about 200 or 300

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<sup>7</sup> There is no official information about the investors of the place or about monetary transactions involved in establishing the market.

every year, were sent to East German universities to study economics, mathematics, and other subjects in order to help build up the home country after the war. In a way, these students, most of them children of cadre families, were expected to become leading figures in the reconstruction of Vietnam after the war. Once back in Vietnam, however, only a small number of them worked in positions that corresponded to their university training. A considerable number of these students returned to East Germany in the 1980s in order to become interpreters for the thousands of Vietnamese contract workers.

### TRAVELING PEOPLE

During the Cold War years, a number of Vietnamese migrated to various countries in Africa and Asia to provide expertise in fields such as science and industry, and were therefore part of the “international socialist ecumene” (Bayly 2009:125). This term refers to imaginations of a “worldwide fraternal community forged by both states and individuals on the basis of enduring revolutionary solidarities and socialist ‘friendships’” (126). Today an “enduring socialism” (West and Raman 2009) exists in a number of these countries due to former ties among socialist states. Such ties were also forged and maintained between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the GDR, but in an asymmetrical way. While East German experts, such as architects, traveled from the west to the east bringing specific knowledge and skills to Vietnam (Schwenkel 2012), East Germany did not often invite experienced Vietnamese doctors, engineers, or scientists to travel to the GDR. Unlike socialist countries such as Algeria, Mozambique, or Angola, which required specialists and expertise to build up their economies, the GDR was in need of foreign manual labor to work in industrial production.

I distinguish three main groups of Vietnamese entering East Germany at different times (Hüwelmeier forthcoming). The first cluster is known as the *Moritzburger*, about 150 children who arrived in the GDR, Vietnam’s socialist brotherland, in 1955. A second, larger group of Vietnamese in East Germany was made up of students who left Vietnam during the American-Vietnamese War, most of them between 1965 and 1975, studied in the GDR, and returned to Vietnam after some years. Former students are a very important cohort in terms of their excellent knowledge of the German language, which served them, as mentioned above, in securing translation jobs when many of them came back to East Germany in the 1980s. Even today, a number of former students are quite active in trading in Warsaw, Prague, and Berlin, as Poland and the former Czechoslovakia invited Vietnamese students as well. Finally, the third migration movement refers to the mass migration that occurred in the late 1970s and 1980s, when the economic situation in socialist Vietnam worsened and the GDR was in need of contract workers from other countries.

In April 1980, the GDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed a bilateral “Agreement on the Temporary Employment and Qualification of Vietnamese Workers in Companies of the German Democratic Republic” (Dennis 2005); as a result, tens of thousands of Vietnamese migrants, most of them from North Vietnam, came to live and work in East Germany. The GDR signed similar agreements with Poland and

Hungary in the 1960s, with Algeria, Cuba, Mozambique, and Angola in the 1970s, and with China and North Korea in the 1980s (Gruner-Domic 1999).

### TRADING ACTIVITIES

Vietnamese contract workers stayed in East Germany for four or five years and eventually returned to their home country. Incorporation into the host society was not expected. Aside from a German language course of only two months, the contract workers were not “integrated” at all. Living in specially designated housing, they were ghettoized and controlled. The socialist government of East Germany surveilled the activities of Vietnamese contract workers, namely smuggling and other “illegal” activities. However, the contract workers were not simply passive victims of the intelligence service but also proactively participated in various economic activities in order to improve their living and working conditions in the former GDR (Dennis 2005). For example, besides their jobs in East German companies, a number of them bought sewing machines in the GDR and sewed blue jeans and other clothes for East German citizens during their leisure time in the workers’ homes. With their earnings they were able to support their spouses, children, and parents who were not allowed to join them in the host country. However, as scholars have noted, remittances are not just about money (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011), and the Vietnamese migrants also brought with them social remittances, to be understood as practices, ideas, and skills that shaped their encounters with their host society. Sewing and selling clothes and thus economic exchange exemplifies at least one kind of positive relationship between former Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR and East Germans during the 1980s. Racist sentiments in the GDR notwithstanding, various kinds of business and economic exchanges occurred between locals and Vietnamese in many places.

In order to maintain transnational connections with friends and relatives in Vietnam as well as with coethnics, kin, and former classmates in other former socialist East European countries, Vietnamese contract workers relied on personal and economic networks. After 1990, some Vietnamese women from the former GDR married Vietnamese or Polish men in Poland, and Vietnamese from Russia settled in the Czech Republic or in Germany. These global socialist networks, or what I have called “socialist cosmopolitanism” (Hüwelmeier 2011), were forged and maintained through visits, letters, and in particular through the sending of consumer goods to the country of origin. Due to the conditions of the agreement between the GDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam from April 11, 1980, and the new agreement from July 1, 1987, Vietnamese in the GDR were allowed to transfer part of their net income as well as goods to Vietnam. Many Vietnamese preferred to send consumer goods (for example, household items, textiles, and electronics) as the exchange rate between GDR marks and the Vietnamese currency would have led to great losses in value.

Former contract workers whom I met in Hanoi as well as in Germany told me that nearly all Vietnamese in the GDR prepared huge wooden boxes with consumer goods, such as motorbikes and bicycles, and sent them back to Vietnam. According to Mike Dennis (2005:21), each contract worker was permitted to send a package worth 100 East German marks to Vietnam 12 times a year, one duty-free postal shipment without



value limit six times a year, and a wooden box of at most two cubic meters and weighing one ton at the end of his or her stay in East Germany. Contract workers who visited their families in Vietnam were allowed to take along one crate with a volume of one cubic meter and a weight of half a ton. There were no limits on duty-free shipments sent home until 1989. Siblings and parents were happy to receive these goods, as they could sell them on the black market and earn money to buy food and medicine, which were still scarce in the 1980s.

Besides their work in state enterprises, Vietnamese in the GDR were quite busy and successful in “trading” even during the socialist period. Trade took place in Poland as well, where thousands of Vietnamese, mostly students, lived in the socialist period. The Vietnamese government did not send workers to Poland. However, after 1990, thousands of Vietnamese came to Poland as irregular migrants. According to my informants, it was very easy to organize documents on the black market. Unlike Poland, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) signed bilateral agreements with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam about sending contract workers. In the socialist period, “a characteristic feature of the Vietnamese ethnic group on the territory of the then CSSR became its illegal trading in scarce commodities and attractive goods (digital watches, Walkmans, jeans, down jackets, etc.), which they sold to the majority population” (Martinkova 2011:134). After 1990, Vietnamese continued engaging in trade in many former socialist countries, based on networks they created during the socialist period.

In the German case, immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former contract workers from Vietnam started trading on the streets of the eastern part of Berlin. After the end of the socialist period, they lost their jobs and did not know what would happen in the near future as they no longer had a legal status in the new country and no money. According to the reports of my Vietnamese informants, they put blankets on the sidewalks to sell everything they bought in the western part of Berlin in the early morning. As consumer goods and textiles were not available in the eastern part of the city, migrants traveled to the west, bought rice cookers, batteries, and electronics, and sold these items within a few hours to people living in eastern Berlin neighborhoods. A number of Vietnamese petty traders purchased their goods, in particular textiles, from Turks who had already established their businesses in the western parts of Berlin.

In the first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, trading in the streets of eastern German cities was very popular and, according to many Vietnamese, they earned a lot of money and even labeled it “gold rain.” Those who became successful bought or rented a car and traveled to Poland on a weekly basis to buy goods there and to sell them in Berlin. At the end of the 1990s, a number of former contract workers opened small shops, such as food stores or nail studios, in various parts of eastern Berlin. Some Vietnamese in the eastern part of Germany, in the Czech Republic, and in Poland established companies, invested money, and opened wholesale markets. They then rented stalls to other traders, mostly to people from Vietnam but also from China, India, Pakistan, and Turkey. As a result, some of the Vietnamese became “capitalists” in former socialist countries soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall by working very

hard and by relying on former networks, while others became economically dependent on their former comrades as they were less successful, had limited networks and only poor language skills.

#### **PRIOR TO AND AFTER 1989**

Mass migration by Vietnamese to the GDR in the 1980s differed from previous migrations of Vietnamese students in particular with regard to the groups' language skills and knowledge about the culture and history of Germany. The most important difference, however, was that contract workers in the 1980s had one common interest: earning money, buying goods, and sending them back to Vietnam. Doing business was their primary motivation for living and working in socialist Germany for a certain amount of time.

Trading between socialist countries was a common practice for Vietnamese nationals in the 1980s. A Vietnamese woman in Hanoi who was allowed to visit her husband, a contract worker in Russia in the late 1980s, transported hundreds of lipsticks from Thailand, which she had bought in Vietnam, to Russia in her suitcase. Russian ladies, she told me, were quite happy to buy these consumer goods. With the money from this transaction she financed her airplane ticket from Vietnam to Russia. Another example illustrates business practices in East Germany. In 1988, a worker in a leather factory situated in the northern part of East Germany traveled to East Berlin every weekend to meet people from Russia and Poland at the main train station to purchase "illegal" music cassettes with West German pop music and then sell the cassettes to East German colleagues in his workplace after his return. Moreover, Vietnamese contract workers were producing so-called "irregular" goods, selling them to locals, and, in addition, sending tons of wares to their home country (Dennis 2005). Likewise, though not officially permitted, people in Ukraine (Transcarpathia), in particular local agricultural cooperatives, organized "tourist trips" to Prague and other cities in Bohemia and Moravia during the socialist period. People participating in these trips sold products to middlemen in Bohemia and bought other goods to be transported back to Ukraine (Uherek 2009:278). Thus, cross-border ties in COMECON countries were forged and maintained among individuals taking part in the shadow economy prior to the breakdown of communism.

With the collapse of the communist world many countries have abandoned controls on the exit of their populations, which led to the growth of xenophobia in many regions, in particular with regard to migrants and asylum seekers. As racism and hostility against foreigners did not officially exist in the GDR, a number of racist attacks came up in the 1990s. After the reunification of Germany, interestingly, Vietnamese nationals from the eastern part of Berlin contacted Turks in the western part of Berlin in order to get information about their experiences with economic and legal issues, as Vietnamese were reluctant in trusting state institutions in the new Germany, because the state wanted Vietnamese nationals to return to Vietnam.

After 1989 the legal status of those thousands of contract workers and interpreters who had arrived in East Germany in the late 1980s was completely insecure as the GDR no longer existed and the agreements it had signed were suddenly

invalid. About two thirds of these Vietnamese accepted a “gift of return” from the German government in the form of 3,000 German marks and a flight ticket back to Vietnam. At that time, one could buy a piece of land in Hanoi and build a house with this amount of money. However, a number of former contract workers later traveled back to Germany “illegally,” becoming traders or engaging in some kind of other business, such as selling smuggled cigarettes. Based on their longstanding transnational ties forged during the socialist period, it was quite easy for many of the “returnees” to incorporate into the German society and to simultaneously connect transnationally, for example, by contacting relatives in Poland or former classmates in Prague in order to create new trade networks.

Further, after 1989, electronic communication, such as phone calls and later via fax and Internet, made it much easier to connect with families and friends at home and in other countries. During the Cold War period it took up to three or four months to send and receive a letter from spouses or parents. In East Germany, phone calls were not possible for most of the Vietnamese contract workers. For sending quick messages, for example to inform each other about where new goods such as motorbikes can be bought at what day in what shop, they used the telegram. For example, after receiving a telegram, Vietnamese from Rostock in the northern part of East Germany travelled by train to a city in the southern part of East Germany or to East Berlin to buy these products. After the reunification of Germany, communication became much easier as everybody could make phone calls.

When Germany reunited, the West German mark was introduced into the former East Germany immediately. From this time on, Vietnamese, many of them earning a lot of money by trading, could save money, change marks into US dollars, and carry this money back home in the suitcase. Sending money via Western Union was too expensive and took too long, so many people transported huge sums of money for friends and relatives on the airplane while traveling back home.

Moreover, traveling to other countries was easier after 1989, as passports were no longer “collected,” compared to the socialist period when the movement of people within the socialist bloc was strictly monitored. After 1989, Vietnamese migrants brought spouses, children, and extended family members to Germany and to various former socialist countries, relying on “distinguished connections” to people in the embassies, in the airports, and other places in order to enable this travel.

## **POWER RELATIONS IN THE BAZAAR**

Issues such as global financial crises, the EU enlargement, and the trafficking of migrants in recent years have had an impact on postsocialist bazaars, as these sites are characterized by multiethnic groups, by transnational networks, and by global flows of goods and money. In the following, I will focus on the level of agency and social and economic practices, therefore conceiving postsocialist marketplaces as research sites in which everyday practices and power relations generate not just cooperation between people from various backgrounds but also conflict, stereotypes, and misunderstanding. First, bazaar life raises questions about interactions and

language skills. Further, everyday life in postsocialist bazaars is about diversity or “superdiversity” (Vertovec 2007), class and gender issues (Leshkovich 2011), and, moreover, about religious practices (Hüwelmeier 2013). As multiple encounters occur between Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Chinese, and others in the everyday life that takes place in postsocialist bazaars, disputes also arise between locals and migrants, between state authorities and market management, as well as between traders with long-term residence and irregular migrants.

### STATUS OF RESIDENCE

Diversity of legal statuses, implying a variety of entitlements and restrictions, is a crucial issue in postsocialist bazaars, as people without papers may have difficulties in becoming traders. However, there are numerous undocumented people in bazaars working as porters, helpers, and carriers. In the Sapa market in Prague, for instance, migrants from Ukraine were living in a tent on the grounds of the bazaar and doing construction work. During my fieldwork in Prague, I met some Vietnamese who had been former contract workers in Germany but then had problems with the German law, left the country, and became successful businessmen in the Czech Republic. Yet, most of the immigrant wholesalers have a long-term residence permit and, depending on their status of residence and financial situation, may be able to employ recently arrived migrants or relatives. As the variety of legal statuses has an impact on power relations in the bazaar, I will focus on the importance of residence permits by taking Vietnamese in the eastern parts of Germany as an example.<sup>8</sup>

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the legal situation was totally unclear for the 60,000 former contract workers from Vietnam in Germany, as they had no residence status after the breakdown of the socialist government (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit 2007; see also Dennis 2005). The East German state-owned enterprises had been responsible for all issues concerning residence permits, work, housing, and health care for the foreign contract workers. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, some former contract workers applied for asylum, while others went to court after their residence permits were not extended. They asked for equal treatment, comparing their situation to former guest workers (from Turkey, Italy, Spain, and Greece in West Germany) and asking for work permits, which were denied by the authorities. Moreover, Vietnamese former contract workers from Bulgaria, Russia, and Czechoslovakia fled their host countries after 1990 and arrived in Germany. Asylum applications by former contract workers were denied in most cases. But, unlike contract workers from other countries, such as people from Cuba, Vietnamese could not return to their country of origin as Vietnam refused to take its citizens back after 1989. In particular, those who applied for asylum could never return to Vietnam because their home country refused to grant them entrance visas.

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<sup>8</sup> There is another group of Vietnamese living in the western parts of Berlin and Germany, the so-called boat people, who left Vietnam after the end of the American-Vietnamese War. As many of them arrived as refugees, they may be labeled the political “other” of the former contract workers, who were “delegated” by the socialist government of Vietnam (Hüwelmeier 2010).

In the first years after 1990, former Vietnamese contract workers in Germany received the status of *Duldung*, exceptional leave to remain. A number of Vietnamese had to earn their livelihood by selling cigarettes on the black market, which led to Vietnamese migrants as a group being represented in the press as a cigarette mafia for many years (Bui 2003). Temporary residence permits were given to all Vietnamese former contract workers who were able to provide evidence of a job within a year, but this happened only after the German government passed a new regulation in 1993.<sup>9</sup> In order to receive a temporary residence permit, Vietnamese had to cancel their asylum applications, prove that they were not involved in illegal cigarette smuggling and other criminal activities, were not allowed to be dependent on welfare, and had to have arrived in the former GDR before 1990. They were issued special work permits, even if they could not prove that they fulfilled all of the conditions. In many cases, people could stay for another two years and then had to apply anew.

As a result of the legal regulations in 1993 (*Bleiberechtsverhandlungen*), the majority of the Vietnamese former contract workers became small entrepreneurs and petty traders by renting shops and snack bars. According to German law, any foreigner is allowed to own property in Germany. However, most Vietnamese had no money at this time to buy shops, and for many of them it was still not clear whether they could stay in the long run or become German citizens. A number of Vietnamese informants still hesitate to apply for German citizenship, which is only possible once they had been living in Germany for more than eight years. Some have aging parents in Vietnam and, in the case of illness or sudden death of a family member, none of them want to be dependent on the visa application procedure to return to Vietnam. Second, until recently Vietnamese who decided to apply for German citizenship lost the right to buy a house in Hanoi or elsewhere in Vietnam. These regulations were changed only in 2009. For these and other reasons many Vietnamese have not applied for German citizenship.

At the end of the 1990s, former contract workers who had made some money by selling goods as suitcase traders opened small restaurants and snack bars in the eastern part of Berlin, while others rented flower shops or retail shops where they sold fruit and vegetables, and a number were also busy in trading secondhand clothes. In 2000, for example, only one-sixth of all Vietnamese living in Berlin according to official records (about 11,000) were workers or employees, while the majority of Vietnamese, residing mainly in the eastern part of the city, were entrepreneurs (self-employed) or unemployed (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit 2007).

In 1995, Germany and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed a repatriation agreement, on the basis of which 40,000 Vietnamese citizens were to return from Germany to Vietnam by 2000. However, only 10,000 people were deported to Vietnam during this time. In 1997, the modification of the German Foreigners' Law (Deutsches Ausländerrecht) guaranteed a nontemporary residence permit to all those Vietnamese in Germany who could provide proof of employment and who had not become

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<sup>9</sup> Decree of the German Interior Minister Conference of May 14, 1993 (Bleiberechtsregelung der Innenministerkonferenz vom 4. Mai 1993).

delinquent. From this time onwards, a number of Vietnamese started their own businesses as the nontemporary residence permit allowed them to settle in Germany in the long run.

According to my Vietnamese informants, thousands of irregular migrants from Vietnam have arrived in Europe over the past few years. Similar to those arriving from Africa or Latin America, many Asians came via human trafficking networks, thus "resisting the Fortress Europe" (Zontini 2008). There are myriad different ways to enter an EU country illegally. It is said that some of the new Vietnamese migrants are working in the Dong Xuan Center in Berlin. The same rumor was going on in the Warsaw bazaars and in the Sapa market in Prague. For the last five years, most of the new migrants arriving in Europe have been coming from the very poor regions of the middle of Vietnam and no longer from big cities. According to stories I was told in the Sapa market in Prague, certain people, in particular Vietnamese with longstanding "socialist connections," act as middlemen. According to informants, news magazines, and online reports, thousands of visas were issued by the Czech embassy in Hanoi until 2008. Between 2006 and 2008, 14,000 out of 17,000 visas were issued based on bribes, while so-called mediators received \$2,700 per visa (*FOCUS Magazin* 2008). As a result, the Czech ministry of the interior ceased all visa assignments in Hanoi until the end of 2008. During my fieldwork in Prague in 2012, Czech informants reported that the whole group of employees in the Czech embassy in Hanoi had been replaced. Furthermore, it was said that Vietnamese interpreters, who had studied in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s, have excellent language skills and to this day maintain distinguished connections (*quan he*) to former Czech costudents who hold high positions in the Czech government.

Bazaars are places where networks of smugglers engaged in human trafficking regularly bring people. For example, Vietnamese migrants wait in Eastern European cities such as Moscow and are transported on trucks directly to Berlin. According to informants, smugglers open the cargo area of the truck in front of the bazaar, throw the people out, and drive away. Some of the newly arrived people will find jobs as porters or workers in the bazaar, a place where others speak the same language and will take care of them. Whether this support can be labeled as new networks of solidarity is questionable. Power relations and control in the migration context are quite clear, as newly arriving people are subjects of exploitation: as irregular migrants, they have to pay back thousands of euros in debts to their relatives and covillagers who financed the trip. Simultaneously, they have to make their own living, and in most cases they are expected to send back remittances as well.

New dependencies and uncertainties have recently emerged in this situation, partly as a consequence of the EU membership of Poland and the Czech Republic, among others, in 2004, and the extension of the EU's external borders to the Polish-Ukrainian border. I met traders in the Warsaw bazaars who in the late 1990s had established their shops at the Polish-German border, and others, whom I met in Prague, were trading at the Czech-German border. They all complained that business had been quite bad over the last few years and they ascribed this to the global financial crisis and to the extension of the EU. Today, their shops no longer exist and

some former traders are now working as employees in the stalls of other traders in the Warsaw or the Prague bazaars.

The date of arrival of different groups of migrants and the variety of residence statuses, along with the resulting power relations in postsocialist bazaars, are of particular interest, challenging the somewhat harmonious perspective on marketplaces as sites of encounter and of social and economic exchange described in regard to British marketplaces (Watson 2009). Yet, multiethnic bazaars in Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague are also sites where conflicts among various groups emerge; localities where citizens with and without a migrant background encounter Vietnamese, Chinese, Pakistanis, Indians, Turks, and other people with manifold interests; and places where tensions and frictions are negotiated.

### **STATE AUTHORITIES AND MARKETPLACES—COOPERATION AND CONFLICT**

Power relations and control are also crucial issues between state authorities and market management. In Prague a number of conflicts have arisen between the market management and the mayor of the Libus district in recent years. For a long time, there was almost no contact between people working in the bazaar and the locals living in the neighborhood. However, after Vietnamese began to purchase houses or apartments near the bazaar, they got in touch with neighbors, schools, and kindergartens. According to Vietnamese traders, relationships with Czech neighbors are friendly and without problems. But some local politicians are quite critical of the bazaar and the people working there. The bazaar became a big issue in the Czech press, with negative reactions from some people, in particular, due to a large fire that occurred in 2007. As the mayor told me in an interview, since then the bazaar has begun to slowly open its doors to the public in order to do damage control against negative press. Some events, such as a “children’s day,” are organized collectively by the market management and politicians for residents and traders in Prague Libus.

In order to further smooth the interactions between the traders and the host society, the district of Prague Libus, together with local politicians responsible for integration issues, organized EU-financed economics courses for immigrants. The aim was to give more information on how to open a business, how to obey Czech rules regarding matters such as hygiene, and how to deal with tax issues. All courses took place in separate language groups, for Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russian speakers, respectively. I was part of a ceremony in which all participants, mostly traders, were present in order to receive their certificate for completing the course. The representatives of the Sapa market, the mayor, members of the embassies of the respective countries, and other officials took part as well. Each of the participants in the course I spoke with appreciated their participation and reported that they had learned many new aspects with regard to trading rules in the Czech Republic. Yet, although these courses aimed to improve economic integration as part of integration in general, the participants of the various language groups did not get into contact during the courses and gathered collectively only for the closing ceremony.

While some of the local authorities approach Vietnamese and other immigrant entrepreneurs in the Sapa market in order to foster relationships between them and the city, others do not support the market or the presence of foreigners. The deputy mayor, for example, had been removed from office two months before my visit due to xenophobic comments she made. She herself lives in the district in which the Sapa market is located and was complaining about the thousands of cars that drive daily through the area to and from the market. According to the mayor of Prague Libus, many locals in his district complain about the noise and fumes from the many cars and trucks. The municipal administration is now planning a new bypass road so as to avoid these kinds of problems in the future.

Language problems also cause friction between migrants and the host society. Some traders in Prague, for example, prefer to supervise their children in the market rather than send them to the public kindergarten. As these parents work long hours in the market, they are often unable to pick up their children from public daycare institutions on time. A daycare facility does exist within the market, but the employees are not certified educators and the children are not taught to speak Czech there. According to teachers I have spoken with, when some of the children enter school, they do not have Czech language abilities, which can lead to them being further excluded from the community.

#### **POWER, PROTEST, AND NEW SOLIDARITIES IN THE MARKETPLACE**

As postsocialist bazaars are places where various groups of people act on different interests, conflicts and tensions are part of daily life within the markets. At the top of the market organization is the bazaar management. This group is responsible for the daily routine of the market, for security, cleanliness, and for collecting the rents. Security in particular is a big issue, and in all of the places I visited I noticed practices of surveillance, such as cameras installed in the halls. In addition, security guards, hired by the market management and dressed in uniforms, can be seen throughout the markets. In Warsaw as well as in the Prague and Berlin bazaars, fences and gates symbolize the borders of the marketplace. Security guards control the arrival of each car in Warsaw as all cars have to pass through the main gate, but there are no security guards in Prague or Berlin to be seen at the entrance gates of the marketplaces. While security guards are part of the internal hierarchies of the bazaars, police and customs officers on the grounds of the markets are part of the external power structure.

In Berlin, I noticed police cars and police officers in the Dong Xuan Center checking people's passports. Simultaneously, but unnoticed by the police, the Vietnamese, mostly women with big bags of small goods, entered the halls of the market to sell leather jackets, blue jeans, and other consumer items in the aisles of the halls, without renting a stall. Everybody who is familiar with the market recognizes people with these kinds of goods, and some even ask them whether they have special "deals" that day. Other people go so far as to place special orders, such as for watches, asking these "traders" to bring the wares another day. Some Vietnamese sit in front of the halls, outside, selling shampoo and beauty products such as lipsticks and nail



polish hidden in plastic bags. For people without papers, this is one of the ways to economically survive in the host country. In Warsaw and Berlin, Vietnamese and other migrants are to be seen in the streets of the inner city or in other special places selling undeclared cigarettes.

In the Sapa market in Prague, I witnessed civil police all around the market. When I asked traders about this, they explained that these officers look for stolen goods, drugs, and for people who are evading taxes. According to the mayor of Prague Libus, police and customs officers are “officially,” meaning with the consent of the bazaar management, controlling this place in three shifts a day. The Vietnamese bazaar manager told me that he agreed to allow the police and the customs officers to enter the grounds after the big fire in 2007. According to the gatekeeper, who already worked on this site as a doorman when the chicken and pig slaughterhouses still existed, prior to 2007 nobody could enter the Sapa place without written permission. In other words, this place was only for traders, not for locals, not for tourists, and not for state authorities.

Disagreements concerning working days are a very recent development. Since the Sapa market opened its doors in 1999, traders and other people in the market, such as porters, have been working very hard every day without a day off. They do not even have time to spend a day with their children, and in many cases both parents are working in the bazaar. Recently, representatives of the traders tried to negotiate one day off with the management. The group of managers argued that they might be willing to agree if the traders were to pay the same amount of rent even with a day off. But the traders argued that they would lose a lot of money by closing the stalls for one day, therefore they wanted to reduce the rent for the stalls. Other traders reported that the manager of the Sapa market did not agree to close the bazaar for one day as his relatives are also engaged in trading in the market; they run a big supermarket with Asian food and are therefore not interested in making any losses. In the end, the traders were not successful in convincing the management to close the bazaar for one day a week.

Conflicts within marketplaces challenge the sometimes “exotic” image of these localities, and this is particularly true in regard to “ethnic” conflicts. In the wholesale center near Warsaw, tensions between Chinese and Vietnamese flared when the Chinese management of one of the three huge bazaars in this locality raised the prices for the rent of the stalls. As a result, market traders organized protests in 2009, 2010, and 2011, and even carried out a strike for one day. On that day, Polish, Turkish, Vietnamese, and even some Chinese traders participated in blocking the main road to the wholesale area. Security guards, financed by the Chinese management, used batons and tear gas to break up the demonstrations. This protest highlighted the fact that migrants from various backgrounds are willing to gather collectively in a host country to protest against unjust rent increases by the management, in this case against the Chinese manager of one of the wholesale markets in Poland. Political activism among migrants is well known from other countries and other sectors as well, in particular with regard to domestic workers (Constable 2007; Zontini 2008). Depending on issues such as power and class—in this case the Chinese management

on the one hand and the political protest of a multiethnic group of traders on the other hand—different status groups do not share same interests.

## CONCLUSION

Postsocialist bazaars are transnational trading points, attracting buyers and sellers from various countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia. By traveling to various places to conduct business and by ordering goods from as far away as China, Thailand, Vietnam, India, and Pakistan, traders and clients transgress geographical, social, and cultural borders on an everyday basis simultaneously maintaining social, economic, political, and religious ties with friends, relatives, and business partners in their respective home countries and elsewhere. Although the current freedom of movement and communication between these countries maintains and strengthens these cross-border ties, many transnational connections in postsocialist marketplaces are based on socialist pathways of migration. Prior to the breakdown of communism, economic transactions formed part of migrants' experiences in a number of socialist states, in particular between countries that signed bilateral agreements, as did the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the GDR. These agreements contributed to the emergence of transnational ties linked not to neoliberal capitalism but to Cold War political alliances. Thus, ethnographic research in postsocialist bazaars highlights the relationship between transnational networks and postsocialism.

Cross-border relations continued to be quite important for migrants after the fall of the Berlin Wall, due to networks previously created during the socialist period, which they reactivated and intensified after the fall of the Wall and have maintained and fostered up to the present. Multiethnic wholesale markets in the eastern part of Berlin as well as in Warsaw and Prague are places where bargaining and trading takes place among various groups of migrants and locals. Besides the goods on offer in the markets, a number of services also attract individual visitors. Manifold ways of encounter and exchange take place on the grounds of postsocialist bazaars, such as healing, performing religious practices, gambling, and celebrating wedding parties; beauty shops, medical treatment, and economic exchange exist side by side in these cosmopolitan places. Hence, marketplaces in postsocialist countries are localities of intense social interaction (Humphrey and Skvirskaja 2009).

The historical shift contributed to the transformation of transnational connections, as family reunion and travel resulted in new trade ties and intensifying economic activities for many migrants in postsocialist countries. At the same time, power relations emerged among various groups in postsocialist marketplaces due to the implementation of new legal categories after 1990. Status of residence, citizenship, tax rules, registration of business, and the arrival of different groups of new migrants altered social and economic relationships. Tensions and conflicts between people with different class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds must be negotiated in the bazaar, while at the same time new solidarities between traders and clients emerge. Links between surrounding multicultural neighborhoods and

marketplaces in urban settings are established, and local authorities and bazaar management discuss issues of security. Thus, postsocialist bazaars, conceptualized as nodes of cross-border activities and as localities of cultural diversity, play an important role in the process of coexisting across national, religious, and ethnic differences.

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## БАЗАРЫ В ПОСТСОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ: РАЗЛИЧИЯ, СОЛИДАРНОСТЬ И КОНФЛИКТ НА РЫНКЕ

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*Статья основана на исследовании, поддержанном Немецким фондом научных исследований (DFG) (HU 1019/3–1).*

До падения социалистических режимов сотни тысяч мигрантов из Вьетнама переместились через страны-члены Совета экономической взаимопомощи (СЭВ) по программам взаимного сотрудничества и «социалистической солидарности» в различные части мира, в том числе в Восточную Германию. После разрушения Берлинской стены многие мигранты, работавшие по контрактам, стали предпринимателями, занятыми в основном в сфере оптовой и розничной торговли. Местные рынки, которые я анализирую как базары и для которых характерно большое (и постоянно увеличивающееся) разнообразие народов и этносов, играют ключевую роль в постсоциалистическом экономическом развитии, поскольку служат транснациональным связующим звеном между различными географическими и социально-культурными пространствами. В статье на основании этнографического полевого исследования базаров в Берлине, Праге и Варшаве рассматриваются вопросы пространственной преемственности между социалистическим прошлым и постсоциалистическим настоящим, проблемы мобильности и транснациональных социальных и экономических практик; базары рассматриваются в работе как пространство властных отношений и конфликтов.

**Ключевые слова:** базар; постсоциализм; транснационализм; власть; конфликт