NAVIGATING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: THE CASE OF URBAN YOUNG ETHNIC MINORITY MIGRANTS IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This cross-sectional study focuses on the relationship between migration mobility experience and evolving identities of young ethnic minority migrants (YEMMs) working and living in cities and industrial areas in northern Vietnam. Through in-depth interviews with 29 rural-urban YEMMs in cities and industrial zones, field visits, and observations at returning migrants’ households and communities, this research analyzes structural and interpersonal barriers they face while working and living in urban settings. Similar to the experience of rural-urban Kinh migrant workers, most YEMMs similarly experience market precarity and social marginality while negotiating the informal sector. In addition, YEMMs face particular barriers in forming social networks, integrating into urban social fabric, sustaining cultural practices, and conceptually framing their own shifting subjectivities and identity-based feelings of belonging. These barriers are not homogeneously experienced by all YEMMs, but are linked to differential socioeconomic status and, to some extent, the normative cultural characteristics of varying ethnic groups. These findings confirm that rural-urban ethnic migrants experience ethnicity-based social and cultural challenges compared to Kinh migrant workers when working and living in urban settings. As a result, we recommend that supporting services and policies need to take into account these differing needs and challenges when they are designed and implemented.

1 The term Ethnic Minority is used in this research with an intention to differentiate ethnicities and ethnic minority backgrounds of the researched participants (i.e. ethnic Kinhs and other ethnic groups in Vietnam). Ethnicity in this research refers to groups of people that share “characteristics, including geographical and ancestral origins, but particularly cultural traditions and languages” (Bhopal, 2004, p. 441). In the context of Vietnam and this research in urban areas, the terms Ethnic Minority and young ethnic minority migrants (YEMMs) are used to reflect the smaller proportion of people with different ethnic backgrounds other than the Kinh Vietnamese in the entire population.
PART 1. INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT (MDRI, 2018)

1.1. Overview of the research project

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, with the ethnic Kinh being the demographic majority and constitutive of 85.2 percent of the country’s 92.7 million people (MDRI, 2018, p. 10). The remaining 14.8 percent of the population is composed of 53 different ethnic minority groups that largely reside in upland and border areas (MDRI, 2018, p. 10). Despite tremendous successes in recent years by the Vietnamese government and civil institutions to narrow socioeconomic inequalities among regions and ethnic groups, indicators such as income, poverty, life expectancy, educational enrolment, access to health care and social assistance services continue to show significant gaps between the Kinh majority and ethnic minorities (UNDP & VASS, 2016).

Internal migration and associated urbanisation – seen as key drivers of socioeconomic changes in Vietnam since socialist-oriented market reforms (Đổi Mới) and the opening of the economy – play a major role in the distribution of incomes and opportunities. While the percentage of urban population in contemporary Vietnam is around 35 percent (Anh, Rigg, Huong, & Dieu, 2012, p. 1108), this trend is forecasted to rise in the future as more people will move to work and live in cities around the world. Taken together, the reform of land policy in rural area, the relaxation in rural-urban human mobility, and urban governance policies have resulted in a steady growth of urban migrants into cities and industrial areas in Vietnam. Defined as those who do not have an official residence permit (hộ khẩu) that “allows them legally to live permanently in the city”, urban migration accounts for 18 percent and 36 percent of the total population in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, respectively (Anh et al., 2016 cited in Haughton, Sun, & Loan, 2018, p. 212).

Compared to the Kinh ethnic majority, there are constraints and barriers to transition in the employment structure, including educational level, limited technical expertise, and disadvantaged social, economic and geographic conditions for ethnic minorities. About two-thirds of ethnic minority workers participate in “simple labour” at 67.66%, followed by “skilled labour in agriculture and forestry” at 17.59%, “manual labour” at 4.94% and “sale and service person” at 4.37% (UNW, 2017). When migrating out of their hometowns, YEMMs typically are employed in physically demanding, low income jobs. As these jobs in the informal economy lack upward mobility, long-term security, worker’s compensation, and corresponding social status, those YEMMs who take them up form the hidden backbone of the precarious proletariat in Vietnam (Allison, 2013, p. 46; Hewison, 2016). As a result, they tend to fall into the ‘missing middle’ encompassing the near-poor and the lower-middle-income group who are employed in the informal sector (UNDP & VASS, 2016). This leaves them specifically vulnerable to poverty as they are not eligible for social assistance and cannot access social insurance – the new face of employment precarity in Vietnam (C. Nguyen, Linh, & Nguyen, 2013; UNDP & VASS, 2016). Social discrimination also prevents YEMMs from claiming their economic and social rights (Oxfam, 2017). The comorbidity of these factors deepens deprivation and exclusion among YEMMs compared to their majority counterpart. While HDI, IHDI, GDI, MPI and relevant measures are meant to probe inequality, they tend to overlook marginal groups and the social factors of their marginalization.
There is a wide recognition of the role of youths in the global landscape of migration, as “migration becomes an expectation and a normal part of the life course, particularly for young men and increasingly for young women” (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008, p. 72). Yet so far there are no concentrated studies focusing solely on YEMMs, particularly the younger cohort who transition from “the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence” (UN4Youth, 2019, p. 1), as the main targeted group. Although there are some reports that discuss young migrants’ experiences (including challenges and opportunities they face in their destination), they present a partial picture. In the press conference introducing Human Development 2016 in Hanoi, representatives from the UNDP in Vietnam highlighted argued that “it is vital to improve our understanding of the core causes of being ‘left behind’, such as discriminatory attitudes, behaviors and practices that prevent ethnic minority people, especially women from becoming more active in their communities, in the markets and local/national political and economic processes” (UNDP, 2017).

The disadvantages that many ethnic communities are still facing, despite empirical progress in social advocacy and policy making, clearly demonstrates that there are still gaps to be addressed in current social policies targeting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. Taken together, these factors suggest that better understanding of the experiences of YEMMs should inform more inclusive and targeted policy interventions.

1.2. Research Objectives and Question

As discussed, while the experience of YEMMs in Vietnam is largely conflated into broader narratives of rural-urban migration (see M. T. N. Nguyen and Locke (2014); Rigg, Nguyen, and Luong (2014); Haughton et al. (2018); Karis (2013), Anh et al. (2012) for instance), their increasing number in urban centres have opened up new theoretical and practical questions.

Based on a review of scholarly source, media representations and the research team’s previous work experience, we contend that their everyday experiences navigating multiple social and material boundaries in urban areas, staying connected with their social networks, and adapting subjectivities and social identities, are different from rural-urban Kinh migrants. As it was later illuminated in the research, our YEMMs were not merely characterised by their migrant status, but also their backgrounds being a ruralite, coming from lower socioeconomic status and being constrained by their ethnicity. Explaining migrants’ status and sense of belonging, scholars such as Yuval-Davis (2007) and Bastia (2014) argue that a migrant’s experiences are essentially shaped by overlapping/intersecting factors rather than essentialist categories such as race, gender, class or socioeconomic status. And although it was not obvious when we first conceptualised the project, it was much more apparent after the first few interviews and observations that the manifested differentiations in the experiences of YEMMs, compared to our literature, was more than economic, social or cultural. It is also spatial, or in particular the way these YEMMs’ mobility, integration into urban social fabrics and sense of justice are influenced by urban social and material spaces. With this in mind, we contend that their urban spatial experiences are not necessarily passive or oppressive, but rather the mixed
outcome of institutional structures, social norms and agency-informed social-spatial production (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2016; Ortner, 2006).

Following this, we frame YEMMs’ experiences from the intersectionality approach and interdisciplinary (socioeconomic, ethnocultural, political-justice and spatial) perspective to look at their overlapping aspects of demographic characteristics (ethnicity, education background, gender, and occupation, among others) and structural factors (social norms, institutions, policies and laws). Consequently, the objective of this research is to understand how the impact of (i) mobility (social and geographic), (ii) shifting subjectivities² and (iii) various structural disadvantages and social injustices (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), intermittently restrict choice and open up new forms of YEMMs’ agency and practices in urban settings.

As such, we set out to answer the following research questions:

1. Why and how do YEMM migrants decide to migrate and work in urban areas?
2. What forms of mobility (social, economic, spatial, juridical) do YEMMs exemplify in urban areas?
3. How are YEMM demographically-specific characteristics (gender, marital status, ethnicity, place of origin, education, and occupation) impacted by prevailing policies of urban migration governance in shaping structural limitations and opening up new forms of agency through mobility?
4. How do urban migration experiences interplay with YEMMs’ adapting subjectivities? Are these experiences shaped by intersectional identities and fundamentally different (in kind or intensity) compared to Kinh ethnic majority migrants?
5. How do urban places integrate or exclude them from urban social fabrics?

1.3. Outcomes

This research is aimed at informing new programs and interventions to address the needs and expectations of YEMMs. The result of this research will shed new light to the long-standing discussion about ethnic minority and migration, as well as suggest practical recommendations to stakeholders, policy makers and the public.

The result will also be used to develop a 3-year intervention plan for iSEE through cooperation with the CCFD. The research finding will be shared with policy makers, the public and especially YEMMs in Hanoi. We plan to invite YEMMs to iSEE for consultation meetings and to explore new strategies for increased networking and social belonging. It is expected that the formation of new YEMM groups will become integral to our intervention design and coequal partners.

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² In the context of this research, we use the term Subjectivity (in lieu of Identity) to describe the capacity that individuals (i) see themselves as non-identical/unique and (ii) construct their “self” as the outcome of their negotiation between their agency and structural influences.
1.4. Research Methodology

As outlined above, this research study theorizes overlapping spheres of an individual in a comprehensive manner, thereby fully capturing a YEMM’s quotidian events, perceptions, thoughts, decisions and resource networks. The appropriate methodology being selected is qualitative, combining in-depth interviews, participant observation through home visits, and systematic reviews of existing relevant literature. A summary of how the selected research methods will correspond to the conceptual framework is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF ANALYSIS</th>
<th>TYPE OF DATA</th>
<th>RESEARCH METHOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Political context and Rights</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Market demand</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mezzo</td>
<td>Social networks/social capital</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social norms</td>
<td>Participant observation through home visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Human capital</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Socio-cultural norms</td>
<td>Participant observation during interview and home visits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural practices and Identity</td>
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<td>Social capital</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spatial awareness and mobility</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Summary of research methods

In terms of positionality, the research team consists of three members, one ethnically Hmong and two Kinh. The Hmong researcher is herself within the youth cohort, formal trained in anthropology, and experienced in social research. Her positionality is critical to this research. Being an ethic Hmong by birth and learning to speak Hmong language as an adult, her cultural backgrounds bear a certain influence on how she is viewed as an “insider” or “outsider” (Narayan, 1993) when relating to other YEMMs in this research. Nevertheless, her insights and reflections enrich our discussions and further our understanding of YEMMs’ views, particularly during data analysis. The second researcher is currently the director of iSEE, with ample experience in advocacy and policy-informed research, and a long history working with people from various ethnic backgrounds. The third researcher is a PhD student in human geography, with his research focus and experience relevant to this research.

Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese without interpretation, since informants were able to speak Vietnamese fluently. However, as discussed in the limitation section, while their excellent Vietnamese command facilitated our discussions greatly, it also presented potential issues with sampling bias.

1.5. Research Design

Piloting
Initially, we conducted a systematic literature review and developed a conceptual framework which informed the pilot questionnaire. We collectively conducted the first several interviews together, after which we reflected on the data collected and research lacuna. Subsequently, we used a revised questionnaire and observation form for the remaining interviews and home visits.

**Design of questionnaire**

To understand the linkage between structural factors and individual experiences, choices, obstacles and opportunities, we combined the Multi-dimensional Life Paths conceptual framework, adapted from Elder (1975, 1994)\(^3\) and the work on agency-power-culture of Ortner (2006) to inform our questionnaire development. In particular, we investigated how different elements at three levels – macro, mezzo and micro – influence a migrant’s life. The detailed questionnaire used for this research is listed in Appendix 1.

![Figure 1. The Multi-dimensional Life Paths conceptual framework for this research. Source: adapted from Elder (1975, 1994) cited in Kõu, Bailey and Wissen (2009) and Ortner (2006).](image)

**Participant selection/inclusion criteria**

Prior to the research, the research team developed inclusion criteria to help guide the selection of youth participants. Resonating with UN’s view that the indicative age range of youth is context specific (UN4Youth, 2019), the age of the young cohort in this research, as we used for our inclusion criteria, is between 18 and 35, with a few participant above this age range due to the pragmatic consideration when recruiting participants.

\(^3\) Kõu, A., Bailey, A., & Wissen, L. v. (2009). *Migrant biographies: A life course approach to high-skilled migration*. Paper presented at the XXVI IUSSP International Population Conference, Marrakech, Morocco. Initially we used this helpful framework to inform our questionnaire as it suggested a systematic way of examining an individual migrant’s life. Despite being helpful to create the questionnaire, it only partially influenced our subsequent analysis. Using an inductive approach, we argue that the framework was not sufficient to address the experience of certain forms of social intersectionality – such as low-skilled flexible laboring YEMMs – which became central to our research agenda.
The following demographics were used to engage participants for this research:

- Being a non-Kinh by birth or self-identification;
- Being between 18 and 35 years old at the time of interview. In case the willing participant is less than 18 years old at the time of the interview, a consent was required from both the participant and their immediate guardian or supervisor;
- Not a resident of any (North Vietnamese) first and second tier cities by certificate and was/are currently residing and working in urban areas;
- Not under any emotional, psychological and physical risks or danger as a result of being a participant in this research.

**Participant recruitment**

The research team initially employed a snowballing method to engage participants. The principle of snowballing is straightforward: our expectation was that invited interviewees would introduce the next person in their social network that fits the inclusion criteria. Our assumption was that migrants would be able to tap into their network in the destination, and this method would be favourable as there was already a level of trust when new informants are referred by someone they already know. But as soon as we started, we realised this method was not without methodological difficulties. Our first informants were sourced from our personal contacts, and the list was exhausted quickly as informants were not able to introduce us to more new informants due to their rather limited post-migration social networks. This observation prompted us to further investigate YEMM’s social capital and social network, and to change our recruitment method.

When we approached an interested participant and scheduled an interview time, we briefly explained about the research, their rights to participate and withdraw from the research, and verbally asked them for consent to audio record the interview. Each interview was compensated with a small remuneration as a token of appreciation for participating in the interview.

As the research progressed, our team constantly reflected on progress and outcomes. We reviewed our sampling and discussed strategies to ensure we could engage participants that would reflect demographic diversity in ethnicity, age, profession/occupation/sector, gender, and original destination. Eventually, we were able to reach 29 participants combining our personal contacts, NGO connections, and the snowballing methodology.

Of all the informants, we decided to accept two over 40 years old (and therefore not in a youth cohort) as their perspective provided invaluable comparisons on how advanced age and length of stay in Hanoi influenced their feelings and life choices. We also interviewed 2 ethnic Kinh informants to triangulate some data from previous interviews.

**Locations**
Out of 29 interviews conducted with YEMMs, 13 took place in Hanoi and the remainder in either industrial zones, small towns outside of Hanoi (including Hai Duong, Bac Ninh), and at participants’ hometowns in Hoa Binh and Thanh Hoa.

Most individual interviews were conducted in public places such as restaurants, cafés or street-side tea stalls. With home visits, our research team travelled to their hometown to conduct the interviews in a more intimate and familiar space. With participants that worked outside Hanoi, our research team also travelled to their towns to minimise their inconvenience.

Data analysis

The research used qualitative data from in-depth interviews, home visit observations and ethnographic fieldnotes. Interview data was subsequently transcribed. Verbatim transcripts and fieldnotes were subsequently analysed and developed into a codebook. The researchers co-coded all data and came up with an outline of the research report.

A preliminary workshop to present initial findings and consult relevant experts was conducted in Hanoi in November 2018. Feedback and comments from this workshop were subsequently incorporated into the final draft.

1.6. Limitations

As a cross-sectional study to understand contemporary experiences of YEMMs, this research faces several limitations.

First, due to problems of scale, the research did not explicitly focus on migration and mobility experiences of the rural-urban Kinh migrants. While we draw on relevant literature on the rural-urban Kinh migrants to compare with our studied populations, we understand that using secondary sources to substantiate our findings and conclusions has its own validity and relevancy issue.

Second, there were certain research impediments that prevented us from conducting participant observation in urban settings. For instance, many of our informants are full-time employees and could not take too much of their time to participate in the research. Due to their living arrangement (especially if they stay with their employer’s family), it was not convenient and sensitive for the researchers to visit them and observe their living conditions.

Last, despite attempting to enlist participants from diverse backgrounds - ethnicity, age, occupation, gender, socioeconomic status - to draw a more comprehensive picture of YEMMs, we were not able to communicate with participants with limited Vietnamese language (and presumably low level of social integration). Initially we approached an NGO to propose interviewing people with limited social and Vietnamese linguistic integration but to no avail due to ethical concerns. We tried to use snowballing and other contacts to reach out to this group but we met with difficulty. Perhaps extended
ethnographic fieldwork and a different participant engagement strategy will be needed in future research.

1.7. Scope and Structure

In this report, we specifically focus on the migration experiences of YEMMs in urban areas such as Hanoi. While we acknowledge the importance of building a well-rounded picture of YEMMs’ experiences – in both home and destination, with family and community members, and perhaps with their Kinh migrant fellows – due to the scope of this research we will only discuss data concerning YEMMs’ experiences in their destinations and, if relevant, when they return to their home.

It is imperative to clearly state that although YEMMs in this research are grouped together under one broad category of ethnic minority migrants (in juxtaposition with Kinh migrants), their experiences living and working in cities are categorically differentiated. As we will further elaborate, this study shows significant vertical (among individuals of the same ethnic group) and horizontal (individuals and groups across different ethnicities) differentiations in socioeconomic status, mobility, social networks and adaptation strategies in cities between the higher skilled group (professionals, creative workers, white collar labours) and the lower skilled group (blue collar labours, informal service workers, and former-migrants-turn-farmers). We are aware that this binary may oversimplify the comprehensive spectrum of horizontal differentiations of YEMMs status in this research, but we wish to adopt these categories as analytically salient for this research.

Concerning the structure of this report, we first present background information of the research before moving on with a brief review of current policy, literature review concerning ethnic migrants in Vietnaese urban settings, and our selected analytical framework. We then present four empirical sections that address various issues and experiences encountered by participants while working in Hanoi and surrounding industrial areas. In the conclusion, we offer our thoughts on targeted policies and interventions.
PART 2. ETHNIC MIGRANTS IN URBAN SETTINGS: POLICY AND RESEARCH

2.1. Overview of young ethnic migration in Vietnam from literature and media

According to recent statistics, the proportion of internal migration in Vietnam is estimated at 13.6% of the nation’s population, accounting for 17.3% of the population within the age group of 15-59 years old, and contributing about 7% of the national economy (UNESCO, UNHABITAT, IOM, & UNDP, 2016). Among the four types of migration (urban-to-rural, rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban), rural-to-urban migrant population is the largest groups compared to other migration flows, with approximately 2 million people in 2009 and projected to reach 6.4 million people by 2019 (GSO & UNFPA, 2005; UNESCO et al., 2016). These reports were based on data of people officially registered as permanent residents in urban areas, which implies that the accurate number is likely to be significantly higher if unregistered migrants are included.

Motivation for rural-to-urban migration

Migration scholarships in Vietnam generally agree that economic factors, including employment search and responses to new market opportunities, continues to be the main motivation for urban migration (Coxhead, Vu, & Nguyen, 2016, p. 5; GSO & UNFPA, 2005; UNESCO et al., 2016; UNFPA & GSO, 2016). At the same time, migration remains a household livelihood improvement and risk-aversion strategy for rural households in the face of consistent socioeconomic changes (Dinh, 2010; S. V. Le, 2014; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014).

Other factors for urban migration include the rural migrants’ needs to learn and improve their professional skills, particularly among young migrants, either through formal or informal training and education (Coxhead et al., 2016; S. V. Le, 2014; UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 3). In addition, several interlocking factors can be placed under the umbrella term of personal motivations, including: marriage availability, family networks, social stigma due to personal background, land dispossession and forced migration due to disasters (S. V. Le, 2014, p. 57; UNESCO et al., 2016, p. 2; UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 3).

The last major motivation for urban migration are lifestyle and aspirational changes that are partially the result of their exposure to a much wider world through internet connectivity and enhanced mobility (Cawthorne & Ha, 2017; Dinh, 2010, p. 77; Đỗ & Chu, 2018; L. D. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 5). Compared to research that focuses on the economics of migration, there has been less research on this topic in rural Vietnam. But the growing body of literature suggests the connection between cultural changes and changing subjectivity and life choices among ethnic minorities in youth cohorts. Notably, emergent research on ethnic minority youth and their interaction with social media in rural and upland Vietnam has provided critical insights into how social media is reconfiguring their social identity and expanding their understanding of opportunities outside their communities. For instance, research on rural youth by Cawthorne and Ha (2017) concludes that active and popular usage of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, among ethnic minority youth in Cao Bang,
Bac Kan and Hoa Binh provinces play a critical role in expanding their views of the world outside, connecting them with new circles of friends, and re-shaping their identities. Similarly, Đỗ and Chu (2018) conclude that social media has been closely integrated into everyday experiences of ethnic minority youth in Bac Kan province’s selected villages. Discussing ethnic minority youths’ increased mobility and interactions with people beyond their communities, the research of L. D. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) on evolving perceptions of young people suggests that they are undergoing a process of reshaping social patterns and modifying traditional values in order to adapt to the rapid social changes in modern society. It is also possible that social stigmas attached to them, as we later analyse, can be a motivation for these changes (Dinh, 2010, p. 77). A review of media representations suggests that ethnic people are generally constructed as being primarily in the agro-forestry sector and with negative connotations (backwards, low productivity). As a result, ethnic minority youth can break free from these stigmas by seeking new career opportunities and new experiences with the desire to “get out of poverty” or, more accurately, the expectation of overcoming discourses on poverty and backwardness that are imposed on them through migration.

**Demographics of rural-to-urban migrants**

YEMMs tend to demographically dominate migration flows and more are entering the work force each year (UNDP, 2016). This was reflected in the age structure and median age (25 years old) of rural-to-urban migrants (Dinh, 2010, p. 77; Haughton et al., 2018, p. 215; UNESCO et al., 2016; UNFPA & GSO, 2016).

Most research suggests that there are more female than male migrants, suggesting that there is a feminisation of Vietnam’s rural-to-urban migration (UNFPA & GSO, 2016). However, there are gendered differences in types of motivation (work or non-work reasons), occupational profiles and incomes between male and female migrants in urban settings (Coxhead et al., 2016, p. 17; Haughton et al., 2018, pp. 221, 223), suggesting that women still face social and economic barriers and are at higher risks of being exploited or abused compared to their male counterparts (S. V. Le, 2014, pp. 61, 62).

Not surprisingly, youth who decide to migrate are not the least educated or hailing from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds (Dinh, 2010; UNESCO et al., 2016; UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 2). Instead, the ones that migrate mostly come from larger households with more members (Coxhead et al., 2016, p. 17), with secondary education background (UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 2) and with income averages falling between lower middle to middle in a rural context (Coxhead et al., 2016, p. 17). The more affluent ones do not typically choose to migrate, most likely due to lower economic return from migration compared to their local livelihood and earnings. Statistics also show that migrants usually are single, married later and migrate alone to urban areas (UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 2).

**Mobility patterns**

Traditionally, the primary livelihood of many generations of ethnic minorities is agriculture, once providing them more than enough to maintain their lives. But with rapid population growth, shrinking farmlands and limited access to forests, many choose to join the migration flows seeking job opportunities in other provinces or urban areas.
As internal migration has become a viable means for rural households to sustain their livelihoods in the face of constant changes, literature on the urban-rural migration suggests that the major pattern of migration is to migrate temporarily or seasonally (Anh et al., 2012; Karis, 2013), not only to a fixed destination but multiple destinations, with circular returns to their sending community either due to economic reasons or moral obligations (Luong, 2018). As migrants still see them as part of the original household (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014), they choose to work in urban areas, send their remittance back and maintain their connection with their family through occasional visits (Dinh, 2010). A smaller percentage of migrants, usually migrating at a younger age for education or marriage purpose, would choose to settle in the city.

Research also points out that social networks play a critical role in linking migrants with migration opportunities, influencing their destination choices, and providing economic and non-economic supports for migrants in the host area (Karis, 2013; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014, pp. 867-868; UNFPA & GSO, 2016, p. 4).

**Issues and challenges in urban areas**

With regards to the challenges of urban migration, a number of scholars have pointed out some common challenges migrant workers face in their destinations in Vietnam, including economic, social, and political vulnerabilities (Anh et al., 2012; Haughton et al., 2018; Karis, 2013; Marx & Fleischer, 2010; Q. V. Pham & Tran, 2015).

In terms of service accessibility, migrants face issues such as work precarity, the lack of affordable housing, higher utility costs for electricity and water compared to urban residents, limited access to welfare services such as healthcare and education, and low participation in grassroots political and cultural organisations in their neighbourhood (S. V. Le, 2014; Q. V. Pham & Tran, 2015). Most scholars agree that the main reason for these crippling forms of social precarity is because the household registration/residence permit (or Hộ Khẩu) is set up that ties one’s residential status with local service access. They also face issues of unequal job opportunities, particularly in the public sector with regard to differentiated earning (Haughton et al., 2018). Apart from these “hard-ware” barriers, migrants also face “soft-ware” barriers - stigmas, stereotypes, and discrimination from both government agencies and urban residents towards migrants’ rural backgrounds (Anh et al., 2012; Karis, 2013; Q. V. Pham & Tran, 2015). This in return furthers their sense of social marginalisation and inequality.

**2.2. A research gap and the virtual invisibility of ethnic migrants in literature**

While there are a sizeable number of research and policy documents that discuss issues of migrants in Vietnam (see Dinh (2010), S. V. Le (2014), Q. V. Pham and Tran (2015), UNFPA and GSO (2016), UNESCO et al. (2016), L. D. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018), Haughton et al. (2018), Anh et al. (2012), M. T. N. Nguyen and Locke (2014), Karis (2013), for instance), research that specifically categorizes ethnic minority migrants in urban areas is largely absent. The exception is a paper by Coxhead et al. (2016) that partially discusses this topic, but it is limited to quantitative observations using 2012 data from the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey. Because of this research lacuna,
understanding of ethnic minority migrants in urban areas – their motivations, issues, challenges, opportunities and policy implications – is insignificant compared to that of the Kinh migrants.

A possible contributing factor is because of the lower rate of migration among many ethnic minority groups compared to the Kinh and Hoa/Chinese. Official data shows that while migration rate among the Kinh and Hoa/Chinese is about 4.58% in 2012, this average figure for other ethnic group is only 2.75% (Coxhead et al., 2016, p. 10). When coupled with the lack of segregated data for the remaining 52 ethnic groups, this idea becomes even more challenging. But beyond technical and data availability issues, we cannot rule out the fact that the lack of research on ethnic minority migration, both international and internal, can reflect the level of low priority of this topic to both policy makers and academics.

From limited primary literature and media 4 featuring urban ethnic minority migration, another issue has emerged which requires our scholarly attention: ethnocentrism in Vietnam’s ethnic politics. Research by A. Terry Rambo (2003), A Terry Rambo and Jamieson (2003, p. 150), Taylor (2008) and P. Q. Pham and Hoang (2012) point out that the ethnic politics in Vietnam is influenced by a nationalistic and Kinh-centric socialist framework. These scholars analyse state discourses on “ethnic minorities” in Vietnam and conclude that discriminative attitudes towards ethnic minorities are entrenched in Kinh ethnocentrism and social evolutionist ideology. But this Kinh-centrism and cultural evolutionist view of the state is not restricted to policy; they are perpetuated by media policy (ISEE, 2011) and translated into culturally insensitive interventions that condescend ethnic cultural practices and statuses (Pham & Hoang, 2012, pp. 72-75).

Comparing with literature on the experiences of urban migrants – the majority hailing from Kinh ethnic backgrounds as we speculate since there is no demographic data – we contend that cultural stereotypes are an issue particularly pertinent to non-Kinh migrants in urban areas (Q. V. Pham & Tran, 2015). The research of Coxhead et al. (2016) is perhaps the most comprehensive at this stage in shedding some light on the relationship between bias and labour mobility that ethnic minority migrants experience, but it is far from being exhaustive. As suggested by the authors:

“Members of Vietnam’s ethnic minority groups clearly face barriers to mobility that are not accounted for by our explanatory variables. Whether these are supply side (the pull of localized cultural and kinship ties, for example) or demand side (discrimination on the part of potential employers), or a mix of the two, remains to be discovered” (Coxhead et al., 2016, p. 22).

With current limited research on YEMMs migrating and working in urban areas, what we can be more certain of is how hổ khẩu as a discriminatory policy continues to

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4 For instance, this VnExpress article that featured the Hmong in Hanoi: https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/cuoc-phieu-luu-cua-nguoi-mong-trong-pho-3631259.html is one of the very few ones that address this topic. Compared to the sheer number of articles that feature transnational (illegal) migration of ethnic individuals, public awareness and understanding of the scale and issues of ethnic urban migration is severely low.
restrain mobilities of all non-resident individuals. We can also speculate on their limited access to grassroots socio-political entities, such as neighbourhood committee (tổ dân phố) and other mass organisations (women’s unions, youth unions and war veteran unions). But there is a huge gap in the current literature on cultural differences, social stigmas and stereotypes from locals to migrants, and how these will inhibit or enable YEMMs to devise new coping strategies. These are the areas that would be covered in this preliminary research.

2.3. Policy concerning (ethnic minority) urban migration

It is important to note that Vietnam does not have a specific law for domestic or ethnic migrants in the existing Labour Code, Residence Law or any other relevant laws and policies concerning migration. In this section, we elaborate on how the household registration system (hộ khẩu) enforced in urban areas continues to discriminate against non-urban residents, including ethnic minority migrants.

Household registration began in China and was implemented in Northern Vietnam during the 1950s before it was expanded to Southern Vietnam after the country’s reunification in 1975 (Anh et al., 2012). The system entitles an individual with accessibility to welfare services (education, healthcare, housing options, and utility price) and rights (house ownership and asset ownership such as personal vehicles) according to their original household registration areas. When an individual moves to another administrative area, their rights and access will accordingly be affected. This discourages them from relocating permanently. To restrict rural-to-urban movement, planners use hộ khẩu as a governance tool that effectively excludes non-urban residents from the city’s welfare system (Anh et al., 2012; Haughton et al., 2018; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014; Q. V. Pham & Tran, 2015). Not merely a tool to restrict their mobility across regions, hộ khẩu is seen as a tool for the state to conduct planning and control the population (Anh et al., 2012, p. 1109). Over time, the reinforcement of hộ khẩu has gradually become more relaxed and is planned for removal by 2020. At the moment, there are four registration categories, according to Anh et al. (2012, p. 1109):

- **KT1**: A person registered in the district where he/she resides.
- **KT2**: A person not registered in the district where he/she resides but registered in another district of the same province/city.
- **KT3**: A person from another province/city who has temporary registration in their place of destination for a period of one year, after which the KT3 registration must be re-issued. (Since July 2007 the requirement to re-register has been lifted.)
- **KT4**: A person from another province/city who has temporary registration in their place of destination for a period of six months, after which the KT4 registration has to be re-issued. (Since July 2007 the requirement to re-register has been lifted.)

Table 2. Four registration categories of the prevailing household registration

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<th>Four registration categories of the prevailing household registration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Source: Anh et al. (2012, p. 1109).</td>
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18
With this structural barrier that exists, a migrant’s rights and accessibility will be restricted – the level of their restriction reflecting their socioeconomic and residential status. There is no restriction for an individual to register themselves in any of the four categories, but one’s level of understanding of the system can greatly influence their choice and, consequently, their rights. While a formal system like this looks impartial (as long as one stay in their own registered place), it essentially generates “massive inequality”, as Karis (2013, p. 260) posits, given the unequal distribution of resources and development between urban and rural areas.

Beyond the urban context, we contend that policies targeting sending communities and rural populations also have impacts on human mobility and rural-urban migration. In the context of Vietnam, the government has orchestrated a series of poverty reduction programs in the past decades, with the more notable ones being Program 135 (P135) or Program 30A (P30A). Through the provision of subsidies, transfers and investments in infrastructures, development programs area aimed at lifting most advantaged communities out of poverty and subsequently stabilising human movements. But there is evidence that suggests that development programs such as P135 or P30A are synchronous, not really suited to specific characteristics of specific regions and localities and meeting the expectations of rural and ethnic populations (K. C. Do, Nguyen, & Luu, 2015; VCCI, 2014). Real examples include new market programs in Northwest provinces, aiming at facilitating better market access for ethnic communities, but are subsequently abandoned due to their culturally insensitive design and planning.

While the focus of this research does not look specifically at these development programs, the fact that most of our informants come from areas of P135 and P30a urged us to think about the relevancy and effectiveness of these development programs in future research.

2.4. Analytical frameworks

The complex dynamics of internal ethnic minority migration require multiple approaches and perspectives to capture and explain this phenomenon, but many studies are more likely to focus on an economic perspective without adequately addressing other socio-cultural and psychological aspects of being a migrant and an ethnic minority individual. To make sense of the complex experiences of YEMMs in this research, we proposed three analytical frameworks, namely social justice (Nancy Fraser, 1997; Fraser

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5 In particular, Program 135 is a socio-economic development program targeting the most disadvantaged communes in ethnic and mountainous areas, with an aim to help ethnic communities to stabilise social security in their area.

6 See, for instance, the National Platform of Poverty Reduction Programs under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) that details national programs at http://giamngheo.molisa.gov.vn/extendpages.aspx?id=0&CateID=8.


8 In this research, these include Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Hoa Binh, Dien Bien and Son La.
First, we posit that the concept of social justice is central to our analytical framework. Primarily built and developed from Nancy Fraser’s (1997) idea of social justice in the age of globalisation and inequality, a number of scholars argue that an individual’s experience of social injustice stems from an overlapping and compounded lack of resources, recognition and representation (Fraser, Dahl, Stoltz, & Willig, 2004; Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Since (in)justice is the interwoven outcome of interconnected and simultaneous paradigms (resources: socioeconomic; recognition: cultural and legal/political; representation: cultural/political and civic), this framework becomes highly relevant to this research to understand YEMMs’ vulnerability from a multidimensional perspective, and subsequently to design interventions to address these. Being both an ethnic minority and a migrant, in the context of urban Vietnam, one gets a bivalent status as a result of overlapping vulnerability factors and injustice, as illustrated below.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.** Analysis of how overlapping domains of justice interplay and influence YEMMs’ experience of social injustice in this research.

As this research unfolds in subsequent sections, what differentiates the experience of a YEMMs compared to a Kinh migrant is essentially the third paradigm: Kinh ethnocentrism, or the lack of cultural recognition and participation perpetuated by the majority on ethnic minorities. But this framework of social justice itself does not fully explain why some YEMMs may experience more injustice than the other, and therefore we need to bring the second framework of intersectionality to bear. In the context of urban spaces with power asymmetries, recognition of how various differentiations exist
in all groups can help explain how “simultaneously take into account the intersection of multiple social locations, each socially defined, with the constraints or opportunities that such a definition can entail” (Denis, 2008, p. 681). This is the reason we choose intersectionality as the second framework.

As we briefly explained when describing the research methodology, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2007) lend us a powerful lens to closely examine at the differentiation that exists within YEMMs groups in our research. Rooted in the feminist movement during the 1980s-1990s to further explain stratification issues that non-white women experience, intersectionality has since become a mainstream response to identity politics movement and essentialist categories (Crenshaw, 1991) that ignore intra-group differences (Bastia, 2014). But it is also important to remark that the context of earlier debates on intersectionality to oppose identity politics is within formalised structures and relations (mainly nation-state institutions and their citizens). Much less is discussed on how individuals (particularly migrants or ethnic minorities) experience differentiations within less formal institutions and at smaller scales (such as their own cultural community). Thus, the concept of multi-layer citizenship that Yuval-Davis (2007) offers another critical lens to understanding how YEMMs in this research may experience intra group stratifications.

Thirdly, we posit that ethno-cultural identity continues to play a critical role in shaping and informing how our YEMM participants navigate urban social networks and devise creative strategies in urban spaces that differentiate them with other Kinh migrants. In particular, we wish to highlight that there is room for discussion on how overall powerful actors (such as the state and the market) and governing tools (lňô kháu and its implications on urban citizenship) can be contested by YEMMs agency. By discussing agency, we do not intentionally mean agency-as-resistance, nor politicise or romanticise the struggle of people who encounter injustice. Rather, we wish to use the concept of agency that Ortner (2006) explains to shed like on how human actors in this research, as urban migrants, relate to other powerful governing system using various strategies. We also cannot ignore the fact that these YEMMs, apart from being urban migrants and dealing with new set of urban life adaptation challenges, also bring with them their Zomian culture-political identity (Scott, 2009) of “state evasion” as they move between spaces. Despite these, there are evidences that complicate Scott’s (2009) view of how the Zomians are playing with the market while continuing to exercise their “state evasion” feelings and techniques during socioeconomic integration in new “urban spaces” (see Herriman and Winarnita (2016), Turner, Bonnin, and Michaud (2015), or chapters two and three of the book Traders in Motion by Endres, Leshkowich, and Turner (2018) for example). Therefore, while viewing the Zomian cultural identity as a resilient cognitive and historical framework, we also seek stories that will illuminate a more comprehensive reality and transient identity of the “younger Zomians cohort” when they navigate opportunities and challenges in urban spaces.
PART 3. ZOOMING IN: WHO ARE THE ETHNIC MIGRANTS IN URBAN AREAS?

Before we started interviews, we asked several questions concerning the informant’s gender, ethnicity, place of origin, marital status, age, and occupation. From this demographic data, we established research profiles. From this initial analysis, some outcomes were expected and some were rather intriguing. Based on this, we continued our in-depth analysis of verbatim data and shed light on our observations in subsequent sections of this report.

3.1. Ethnicity

In terms of participants’ ethnic background, the research was able to cover nine ethnicities, with eight ethnic groups largely found in North Vietnam (Muong, Hmong, Tay, Thai, Dao, Nung, Kinh, La Chi) and one ethnic group (Co Tu/Katu) that is native to Central Vietnam and Laos. These informants belong to three major language families, and the majority (except for two Kinh and two Tay informants who do not technically speak their mother tongue) are bilingual in their mother tongue and Vietnamese language.

In terms of the number of participants per group, the largest sample comes from Muong and Hmong. While some of the Muong participants were invited and interviewed in Hanoi, most Muong informants in this research were former migrants who returned to their hometown. The recruitment of Muong participants was mostly from NGO networks and not from snowballing. This situation however is different with the Hmong – the second largest group in this research. Participants from this group were largely recruited through either the Hmong researcher’s network or snowballing, suggesting a tighter connection among the Hmong migrants in urban areas and cities compared to

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9 It is noted that we collated data from 29 non-Kinh and two Kinh informants, as explained in section 1.5.
other groups. With other groups, there was no single dominant method to engage them - they were either the researcher’s personal contacts, or referred from NGOs or other participants.

3.2. Places of Origin

![Figure 4. Breakdowns of participant’s places of origin. Image source: https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/choosing-sourcing-partner-vietnam.html/](image)

In terms of the place of origins of the researched participants, if we cross out two Kinh informants, the rest of them come from three main topographic areas, corresponding to their proximity to Hanoi.

- The first topographic region is lowland mixed with hills, including Thanh Hoa and Quang Ninh, with a distance of 160 km to 200 km from Hanoi.
- The second topographic region is Hoa Binh province, including mixed midland and upland terrains, with a distance of 120 km away from Hanoi.
- The third topographic region are the Northern upland, covering the majority of provinces such as Lang Son, Bac Kan, Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Son La. The distance between Hanoi and these provinces vary between 250 km to 500 km, making them the more remote areas to cities and industrial areas in the Red River Delta such as Bac Ninh, Hai Duong, Hai Phong or Vinh Phuc, as shown in Figure 4.

It is important to understand the points of origin of YEMMs in this study, not solely because of the physical distance they need to travel from their home to cities and industrial areas in the lowland. More importantly, various contexts in their original community - the social, cultural, economic and political distances that each of these communities embody - will have profound impacts on their physical and social integration in urban areas. We will come back to this in our further analysis.
3.3. Gender and Occupational backgrounds

In terms of gender and occupational backgrounds, we wish to compare these two sets of data because they suggest some possible associations between gender and economic opportunities in urban areas. First and foremost, there are more female than male participants in this research – indeed the percentage of non-Kinh male participants can be lower if we cross out two male Kinh participants. In terms of their occupational profiles, we categorise them into four employment sectors, with their constituent jobs, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Industrial sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Manufacturing worker</td>
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<td>• Installation (civil)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Category 2: Service sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Domestic helper</td>
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<tr>
<td>• F&amp;B staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Professionals (logistics staff, cosmetologist/beautician)</td>
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<td>• Office work (manager, coordinator)</td>
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| Category 3: Agriculture sector        |
|                                       |

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<th>Category 4: Creative sector</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Film maker</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Painter</td>
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Table 3. Four employment sectors in the research.

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of informants (72%) work in either service or industrial sector, with service being the majority (41 %). These two sectors are typically found in cities and industrial areas around big cities, and explains why most YEMMs chose to work in these sectors as they migrate.

It is also worth noting that while they are generically lumped into the service sector, this sector is in fact extremely diverse in terms of skills and income – and therefore
socioeconomic status. For instance, participants in this sector can be a domestic helper, a kitchen or restaurant staff, a café manager, a marketing officer, or an NGO manager. Due to this wide range of skills and qualifications needed to perform these jobs, this sector witnesses a stark difference in the level of formality/informality, income and social stratification. This is also a sector, opposite to the industrial sector that is dominated by male workers, that has an equal economic participation of both genders. In fact, the ones with higher income and greater mobility in this sector, and perhaps in the entire occupational profile of all migrants in this research, are female in their office managerial positions. But at the same time, it is also the most unequal sector, with migrants working with significant precarity and uncertainty (such as no labour contract, no health and social insurance, asymmetric power between employers and employees), and attract most of YEMMs when they migrate to cities (Allison, 2013, p. 46; Hewison, 2016). We will further elaborate on the YEMM’s choices to engage with the informal economic sector in subsequent sections.

Another sector that is uniquely found in cities is creativity – in this research, including film-making and interior painting. Only two (one male and one female) out of 29 participants choose this unique segment. Both are university degree holders and followed their passion to pursue their career in creative arts. Because these jobs are mostly found in cities, they currently decided to reside in Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh city, with a possibility to move closer to home when a suitable and viable option arises in the future.

The last sector that 21% of researched informants work in is agriculture. Not surprisingly, these informants, both males and females in the mid-20s and -30s, are former migrants who decided to return to their hometown. As such, they no longer reside in cities or urban areas, but their accounts play an important role in understanding the motivations to leave cities and return to hometowns, their adjustments and sense of belonging in either places.

As suggested, job opportunities and economic behaviours of YEMMs in urban centres are not necessarily gendered, particularly in the service and creativity sector. It is apparent that YEMMs migrate to urban centres and cities for non-farm jobs, but there seems to be limited livelihood options once they leave cities and return to their home. The higher income scale one moves up, the less important role their gender is in determining their career opportunities, if compared to other factors such as skills, previous work experience or education backgrounds. We will further discuss this in coming sections.
3.4. Age and Marital Status

Figure 6. Breakdowns of participant’s age and marital status.

By way of concluding the YEMMs demographics, we wish to compare our informants’ age structure and their marital status to understand whether their motivation for migration has any possible causes beyond economic and household livelihood reasons. To do so, we classify them into two age cohorts: the early working age (those between 18 and 24 years old in this research) and the prime working age (those from 25 and above). We also recorded their marital status and classified these into two categories: married (those who currently remain in a legal marriage, or with a deceased partner), and non-married (those who are legally single adults, but with possible relationship, divorces or non-attached status).

From the data we tabulated, more migrants (54%) are found in the prime working age when they are most economically productive, compared to 42% of migrants being in the early working age. The average age for our researched population (N = 27, after cleaning age data and removing two Kinh informants) is 26.8 years old. The youngest participant is 21 years old and the oldest 55 years old. These suggest that the young ethnic migrant we focus on this research largely fall into those more senior than what we anticipated (early 20s). Since generally marriage age¹⁰ in rural area, particularly among ethnic minority communities, is believed to be younger (around 18-20 years old) than in urban areas and cities, we presumed many of our participants are married and leave their family and children when they migrate to city. We also intended to understand whether they decided to bring their children to cities, and how they access services such as child care, schooling and healthcare for their accompanying children.

It is surprising when we compare data of our informants’ age structure and marital status. Out of 29 participants, the majority of them (81%) are legally unmarried. We do not specify their unmarried (whether they are dating or divorced) to respect their privacy, but this information generally came out as we discussed issues such as household

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¹⁰ By law, Vietnamese citizens can legally marry when they reach 18 (for women) and 21 (for men). Many youths residing in rural and ethnic communities continue to face early marriage (14-18 years old) pressures. These marriages are not legally recognised, and mostly facilitated by indigenous institutions and arrangements.
arrangements, remittances and future planning. The fact that our YEMM group has an average age of 26.8 while largely remaining unmarried suggests that there might be non-economic reasons of their migration decisions. We will elaborate this in greater details subsequently.
PART 4. LEAVING THE MOUNTAIN

This section provides a snapshot of the trajectory that an individual YEMM go through. Increasingly, evidences from YEMMs’ interviews show that rural-urban migration in most cases is not simply a household livelihood strategy. Motivations for youth migration to urban areas have transcended pure economic reasons and are more closely associated with individual aspiration for more freedom and personal development, similar to what is observed among male Nepalese YEMMs who embrace adventure, excitement and consumption as migration motivations (Sharma, 2013, 2014). Despite this, family connection and home attachment continue to play an important role as YEMMs live and work in cities.

3.1. Migration reasons

Economic motives and pull-push factors - a conceptual framework developed by Lee (1966) - in rural-to-urban migration dynamics continue to be evident in this study, but they are not the only motives. In the context of limited employment opportunities in mountainous and rural areas, insufficient incomes from semi-subistence agriculture to meet new consumer demands and provide a safety net in the event of adversity, livelihood diversification and delocalisation through urban migration becomes a prime choice for many in rural Asia (Rigg, 2012). One informant shared with us,

"Yes, I feel that I live in a remote area that is very difficult to make money. We can not trade nor sell anything, and thus can not earn any income. My parents struggled to raise our family, and so I want to be better than them. They could not go to school or were exposed to the world outside. As I am now more exposed than them, I want to strike hard to make a better life for myself and my family. I can’t be a worker for the rest of my life” (2_M; an ethnic Dao male worker).

From an economic perspective, it is rational for ethnic households to have at least one member in their most productive age to migrate and earn non-farm incomes. This person can be man or woman, as long as their absence from the household would have the least impact on other productive and reproductive functioning of the household. Migration in this case is a risk-aversion strategy for rural households, and thus there is a collective family rearrangement when a household member goes to work in urban areas (Rigg, 2007). A Muong former migrant worker shared with us how her and the husband made the decision to migrate to Hanoi as below.

Researcher: How did he respond when you said you wanted to go and work in the city?

Informant: We discussed and agreed, because if I stay at home I will not know what else to do. We have always been planting cassava and sugarcane and corn. When my cousin told me I can work in the city with less hardship and can earn more money, and I can also experience the city life, then I think it is more promising and I follow them. But my husband and I never leave home to work in the city at the same time. We usually alternate because one of us has to stay back and take care of our children, or attend funerals or weddings in our village, which is an obligation (27_F; an ethnic Muong female returnee).
But other motives for rural ethnic minority youth to migrate and work in urban areas are evidently becoming equally important in the face of constant changes as market integration intensifies across spaces. Contemporary literature migration in Asia and Vietnam also suggests that non-economic reasons such as network-induced opportunities, or demographic-induced individualism, change in consumption pattern and material aspiration, and change in social relations in market socialism are at play in driving youth out of rural areas (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014; Rigg & Vanderveerget, 2012; Sharma, 2014).

Three non-economic motivations for ethnic migrants that emerge from this research are (i) an emancipation from restrictive social norms and cultural values, (ii) the motivation to learn new skills and get ready for the future, and other social or ecological distresses that require individuals or communities to move temporarily or permanently.

With the first reason, it is interesting to note that a number of migrants initially contended that they feel pressured if they did not migrate to city and work like their peers. For them, limited mobility as a youth can be considered “a failure”. The new rural identity that emerge as a result of youth migration, as explained by a number of scholars as “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt, 2000) “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Werbner, 2006, pp. 496-498) or “subaltern cosmopolitan practice” (Werbner, 2008), in turns become the pressure for others to take up this journey. But as our discussion soon unfolded, their decision to leave the community was not simply because of peer pressures. It later becomes apparent that local cultural norms and values, such as stability (tâm lý muốn ổn định), containment (an phận), early marriage, or limited mobility after getting married, can at times clash with ethnic minority youth aspirations, particularly for young adult women. As shared by one migrant who currently works as a film maker in Hanoi:

**Researcher**: Did you plan to return to your hometown after you graduated?

**Informant**: No, I never thought of coming back home after my study. When I was in high school, I always had this thought I had to leave my home. I never wanted to come back home.

**Researcher**: Why so?

**Informant**: There were some issues in my family and I did not want to be caught in this. I don’t want to face these people everyday. Then I had no choice but to leave if I were to avoid seeing them everyday.

**Researcher**: Have you ever changed your decision during your first year studying in the city?

**Informant**: No, I didn’t change my intention. I already know my parents would be sad if I told them I did not want to come back, but I also know I can’t come back and live with my family. I can only choose to live in the city and come back to visit them once in a while. After three years being away from my family and staying with my grandfather, I even didn’t feel very attached to my own family (25_F, an ethnic Tay female film maker).
Because of these restrictions, they decided to leave their hometown for the city. Getting out of their community is also a choice for them to develop their personal capacities and get out of the norms and values that restrict and confine them. This is how one of them explained their motivation,

“Back in my home village, most of my friends around my age are married now. They will get married early if they do not go to work in the city. If a woman is married, her husband or her parents will not let her go to work in the city, because she has to stay at home to take care of her children and rear the pigs. She will not be allowed to leave her home and work in the city” (2_M, an ethnic Dao male worker).

The second reason for youths to migrate to cities, apart from remitting the money back to their family, is because they want to gain new skills that would make them more financially secured in the future. While this is partially economic in its nature, their decision should be viewed within the context of rapid and constant socioeconomic changes in both their home and destination places. As urbanisation and industrialisation intensify in urban lowland areas as Vietnam becomes deeply integrated into the global economy, it is not uncommon to see multinational corporations recruit young labours to work in their manufacturing plants. In our other independent fieldworks and research in Ha Giang or Dien Bien provinces, labour recruitment advertisements from agglomerates such as Samsung or Brothers can be found even in the most remote communities as below.

Picture 1. A labour recruitment advertisement for workers to work in Brothers Electronics (a Japanese company) manufacturing plants in Hai Duong province. The picture was taken in November 2017 while the author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Meo Vac district, Ha Giang province. Source: author’s personal collection.

Social media, the penetration of global capitalism and new job opportunities in urban places, taken together, are present and shape the way ethnic minority youth, even in the most remote areas of the Northern upland, think about opportunities and mobility beyond their home. While YEMMs initially think about leaving and working in cities to earn some income, many of them also realise they can learn new skills and expose to new experiences and ideas. A future-forward thinking stemming from their increasing understanding of cities and its opportunities has fuelled motivations to go and learn, then return and apply these skills in the future.
Yes, back then I was working in gold mining sites and earning a good income. But I did not want to continue because being a truck driver is not my choice, I cannot develop myself any further. Then I called the person I know in the city to ask if he could introduce me to any jobs in the city where I can learn new skills. I wanted to learn some skills and use the skills I gain to make myself viable in the future (2_M, an ethnic Dao male worker).

This decision to migrate to learn some new skills and accumulate capitals for one’s own future comes with short term pain for long term gain. Migrating and working in cities can be less economically beneficial in the short run for ethnic migrants due to their unfamiliarity and unmatched skills as they move from rural to urban areas. Another reason might be that some youth decide to move out of local labour-intensive jobs, such as mining, which offers higher salary but often comes with dangers and hazards.

Now I earn about four million Dong, which is a lot lower than my previous job in the mining site where I earned about eight to nine million Dong per month. I worked in shifts back then. Sometimes night shifts can be so long and hectic. But now as I am working in the city, I can work during the day and have some rest at night. I like what I am doing, and the salary is what I expect when I work in this job” (2_M, an ethnic Dao male worker).

As migration is not entirely because of disadvantages or economic purposes, most of the working-age youth in this research see it as a temporary decision. When asked, they indicated that they have plans to return, or relocate closer to home in the future, where they can earn a living with new gained skills while staying not too far away from home. In a way, the decision to prioritise future possibilities and development over short-term gain can be seen as a strategy for YEMMs to calibrate risks and opportunities. Despite the context of precarity – a deep sense of uncertainty and disposability that (Allison, 2013) describes – there is generally a sense of hope that YEMMs exhibit. A Hmong painter in the following conversation shared with us his plans to return closer to home, but not his home village, for the following reasons:

“I am working as a painter trainee in a workshop in Hanoi. In the future, if I am good enough I will stay back in the city. But if this option is not possible, I will return to the province (Ha Giang city). I will not go back to my home village because it is not possible to earn a living there with my skills. I need a bigger space and a market that I can sell my artworks. The market in my district is too small because there are only a handful of people that will be interested in art” (19_M, an ethnic Hmong male painter trainee).

This idea of temporary and not permanent migration among YEMMs is particularly interesting, as based on the interviews it was not evident why/if there was socioeconomic pressure to force them to return home in the material and affective sense. While research in rural China and lowland Vietnam points out that middle-aged farmers express their strong interest for their children to migrate and later reside in big cities through employment, education or marriage, based on our research findings it does not seem to apply to YEMMs and their families (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014, p. 866). As

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11 Although the ethnic backgrounds of these informants were not fully disclosed in this research, from the way the scholars describe their work we speculate they were conducted among the Han Chinese and Kinh Vietnamese in lowland rural areas in Northern Vietnam and Southern China.
the research unfolded, we scrutinised YEMMs’ intention to return to home in Northern Vietnam through the lens of their home attachment and social justice in urban areas.

Concerning the third group of factors that fueled emigration - social or ecological distresses – we wish to emphasise that the scope of this research did not originally focus on these issues. In our questionnaire, we also did not include specific questions that explored the impact of adverse events on our participants since it was out of the inquiry scope.

However as our participants engagement progressed, we were led to contact some participants whose reasons to go outside the community were due to (i) gender-based violence, (ii) social stigma toward one’s personal trafficking-in-person backgrounds, or (iii) short-term responses to anthropogenic disasters.

Compared to participants whose reasons to migrate were either due to evading social norms or preparing for future opportunities, the entry point of migration of participants in the third group was rather different. They were not proactive and planning for urban migration in the same fashion that other participants were. Rather, their urban migration was a response to the unfavourable circumstance that flared up – social stigma, intense domestic violence or disaster-induced displacement.

But as we listened to their accounts, we realised that their urban journeys shared many similarities with the two previous groups. In particularly, they also leveraged on social networks, particularly those who had urban migration experiences or connections, to find out about urban opportunities.

The one remarkable exception that we wish to note here is the trafficking-in-person survivors group. After surviving the adverse event, they were supported by the local women’s union in their community, and later referred to a social agency in Hanoi. They were initial provided with safe housing, psychosocial recovery supports, continued formal education or vocational training, and job placement eventually. Because of these extra supports from the social agency, their intial journeys were presumed to be different.

We were bounded by both the research ethics and confidentiality protocols of the social agency and therefore we decided to only focus on their current social integration experiences. These gaps in our collected data did not allow us to extend further analysis on this group. But at the time of the interview, all three participants in this group were in their transition phase to independent living: they were getting over their past experiences, already working or resuming their education in Hanoi, and their adaptation journey became more convergent with the account of other participants.

3.2. Migration as physical mobility

This study also shows how YEMMs internal migration is similar to the migration pattern of the Miao in China (Tapp, 2014, p. 385) and the Kinh migrants (Karis, 2013) in Vietnam: their migration decision is facilitated by close social networks rather than formal channels.
Information on employment opportunities in urban areas is largely shared and introduced among people in the same network: family members, peers who have worked in urban areas and cities, or friends in the city. They are also the ones that support new migrants in the process of moving to urban areas and settling in in the host area. In some cases, they would travel down to the city with the new migrant or pick up the new migrant at the bus station and help them settle in when they first arrived.

The social network approach (rather than through brokerage or direct recruitment from the employer) is a risk-reduction strategy for young workers to access to employment opportunities. On the one hand, it is cost saving as they do not have to pay any fees to those who introduce the job to them. On the other hand, this approach that leverages on kinship connection and trust is essentially underpinned by social capital. The kinship or friend’s support to find jobs in the city usually does not stop when a new migrant is being placed in the first job in the city. In many cases it can extend to cover other forms of supports, such as accommodation, initial resettlement, emotional support and guidance, or future job opportunities. These are critical resources for new migrants as they may not have established social networks/limited social capital in the new environment. Their social capital, in this case, turns into economic capital (Karis, 2013, p. 266). As shared by one former migrant:

“I did not choose that job, but rather I was invited by my friends in the same village. I did not know anything about the job or the salary before I left my home. But I follow my friends and went to the city. I tried the first few days and then I got accepted. I did not know if the salary is good compared to other jobs. What I know is to follow my friends whom I know well in the home village when I decided to leave” (28_M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

Not surprisingly, one can gradually transition from migrant to migration facilitator/anchor. After some time staying in the destination, some migrants already form their own resourceful social networks and understanding of urban environment. All these make them confident and proactive in introducing this opportunity to other migrants back home, particularly when they start moving between their home and cities.

3.3. Home attachment as an emotional need and a safety net

As much as we see how YEMMs use their social networks to facilitate their entry to urban jobs and social life, we also realise that most of these migrants – particularly the lower skilled migrant group - develop a strong attachment with their own community and family back home. Home in their imagination is more than just the physical manifestation of familiarities and connections. Home is also symbolic, which include nostalgia, constructions of homeland, fantasy, memory, pride (or shame) and so on. The migration decision, for the most part, does not completely break family relationships. In our conversations, their sense of home attachment (and perhaps commitment) is constructed in exile through actions and processes such as sending remittances back, to regular communications via phone and social networks with family members, or periodic home visits. There are several explanations to this.
First, as we mentioned earlier, we did not come across any conversations – even during our visit to their hometown - where a migrant’s family strongly expressed their interest to totally let their children “free from the paddle field” as observed elsewhere in lowland Northern Vietnam (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014, p. 866). We hypothesize that urban migration for lower skilled migrants in this research was a temporal household strategy, but there is no pre-determined agenda for the young migrant to leave permanently and settle in cities. It could be because of the low possibility for the parents of these YEMMs to be relocated to cities due to the lack of urban resource accessibility. It could also be because without previous urban migration experience, coupled with community’s culture norms and moral obligations Luong (2018), families of YEMMs are unlikely to support the idea of their youths leaving and permanently settling down in cities. As such, previous limited experience of urban migration among YEMM household members can play a role in discouraging YEMMs’ decision making to permanently leave, thereby reinforcing their sense of home attachment. This argument is supported by research among the Kinh migrants in Hanoi, who express strong emotional attachment to their homeland, but very few indeed plan to return and live in their home due to their family’s past experience of temporal migration to Hanoi (Anh et al., 2012, p. 1128).

Second, we speculate that the length of urban migration experience has an influence on our participants’ home attachment. Of all interviews, we only came across three interviewees, all higher skilled migrants, who indicated low/no interest to return to their paternal hometown. These migrants\textsuperscript{12} share the same characteristics: they left their original home community from a young age, were educated in urban centres and subsequently found jobs as professionals. Their home attachment can get weaker as they went to school and then work, leading them to permanently leave their community.

But the pattern for the lower skilled is different. At the moment, they may not settle in the city, intermittently return to their home, and emigrate again when new opportunities arise. The lower skilled informants in this research, except for one being a university holder and the other being a migrant in the past seven years in multiple places, are relatively new to the urban migration experience. Their time working and living outside their original community is rather short, ranging from a few weeks to three years. Therefore, their home attachment should be seen both as an emotional attachment that defines their origin, while intermittently and practically providing them with a safety net. Home, for lower skilled YEMMs, becomes a space that “mediates between individual actors and larger structure forces” (Piché & Dutreuilh, 2013, p. 148), and a space to provide “the comforts of being somewhere and being normal” that can evoke hopes and keep YEMMs carry on in the face of constant changes and precarity outside their communities (Allison, 2013, pp. 33-34). One male informant shared with us his migration journey involving multiple destinations, with his home being the place that he returned to occasionally when he changed from one job to another.

*Researcher:* So where have you been to in all these years?

\textsuperscript{12} Among the higher skilled group, one has married, bought property in Hanoi and can be considered socially and legally a Hanoi resident. Their status being an ethnic minority migrant in this case can be challenged, but we decided to include their story in our discussion to understand how an ethnic minority migrant’s identity and status can change over time.
Informant: Prior to my last job, I was in Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Kontum, Dak Lak, then I returned to home and then Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Bac Ninh and then Son La (28 M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

However, we have not eliminated the possibility that in the future the home attachment among lower-skilled YEMMs will continue to diverge from higher-skilled or Kinh migrants. There are early signs of a decrease in the interaction between individuals and their home community and family, which suggests a mentality and value shift from collectivism to individualism among Vietnamese youths during Post War period and global integration (L. Do & Phan, 2002; S. L. Le, 2009). This is evident by the fact that youth are demanding more freedom to choose their life and career, spending less time at home and interacting with their household members, and seeing urban life as a strategy for them to be financially independent and less socially and culturally restricted. Reducing interactions with families and increasing new social interactions can lead them to start building new personal identities that fit into urban social space and integrate them into urban social fabrics, while erasing the feeling of being different.

In conclusion, we argue that migration among ethnic minority youth and young adults is increasingly less dependent on disadvantages, poverty or deprivation at the place of origin. Although a small proportion of migrants decide to go outside the community due to gender-based violence, social stigma toward one’s personal backgrounds, or short-term responses to natural disasters, the larger proportion of migrants choose urban migration as a mixed strategy that meets household livelihood goals while fulfilling their aspiration for personal development, freedom and future readiness. Migration does not sever their attachment to home, both for emotional needs, a safety net during transition phases, and a place of comforts and strengths that evokes hopes and fuels their sense of future optimism.
PART 4. FINDING A PLACE IN THE CITY

SOCIAL CAPITAL, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND DISCRIMINATION

This section discusses various opportunities and challenges as YEMMs relocate and find their place in the urban destination. In particular, the low SES of a migrant coupled with ethnicity-based and limited access to welfare services result in high marginality and vulnerability among lower skilled YEMMs. With the higher skilled group, their welfare and protection service access are mitigated by their socioeconomic status, but they still experience ethnicity-based stereotypes at times.

4.1. Securing a job: tales of the two groups with differentiated skills

To start with, we wish to emphasise that the two terms higher skilled and lower skilled in this research do not only imply income or occupations of the ethnic minority migrants in this research. These two analytic concepts denote relatively differentiated socioeconomic status that YEMMs possess as they relocate to urban spaces. For instance, the status of one informant with a university degree in pedagogy would be much higher if he worked as a school teacher in his community, compared to his current status as a factory worker in Hai Duong province. Another example would be one informant who is working as a painting trainee in an interior design workshop in Hanoi and earns as much, if not less, as another informant who works as a domestic helper in Hanoi.

Using social justice as the framework to shed light on the experiences of ethnic migrants, we contend that generally higher skilled group enjoys higher socioeconomic status compared to the lower skilled group when they are in Hanoi. Their socioeconomic status, in this case, is defined by the urban-centric system of reference in urban contexts.

For ethnic migrants of higher skills (generally those with professional degrees) in this research, they occupy formalised jobs, either in state-owned companies, non-governmental organisations (NGO) or multilateral development institutions, perhaps with working conditions and benefit packages higher than an average Hanoi resident. After they finished their degrees, either in cities or overseas, they entered the formal/primary job sector. Their jobs are contract-based, standard 8-hours from Monday to Friday, come with insurances and benefit packages (non-paid leaves, complementary health insurance etc).

At the surface level, there is also no record of ethnicity-based discrimination in their workplace, nor difficulty in establishing and building professional relationships. But as we will further analyse in the coming section, they may encounter situations where they are suspected of being inauthentic minorities because they do not fit with social stereotypices (appearance, costumes, Vietnamese accent or personal capability). At the time of conducting interview, most of our higher-skilled participants were all females, highly mobile in their career choices, with stable incomes, high social status and work in rather culturally-inclusive environments. Arguably, their career opportunity and choices...
are not dependent on either their ethnicity or gender, but rather their social networks, education and qualifications, work experience, and capability. There appears to be a strong sense of meritocracy among the higher-skilled ethnic minority migrants.

Contrastingly, the journey for the lower skill group to land a job in urban areas is rather different. As they often arrive from rural areas to the city, there was virtually no break or opportunities for formal skills upgrade or conversion. The first thing they need to do, even before they started to explore the city or host place, is to find a job and start sending money back home. These jobs are often introduced by their networks, or they are directly recruited by their employer. Their original social network in this case links lower skilled YEMMs and the urban job market, and increases the chance of them migrating to cities (Piché & Dutreuilh, 2013, p. 148). It is not clear from our interviews whether our participants have to borrow some money for their transportation and initial settlement when they migrate. But there is a good reason to believe that some initial costs of migration (such as recruitment fees and physical fees) are saved due to the social networks and direct recruitment (Karis, 2013, p. 266).

4.2. Disparities in income and security due to ethnicity-based discrimination

In terms of income, we were not able to obtain data from the higher skill group.

For the lower skilled groups, our data suggests that there is a 40-50% income disparity among migrants in this group. But this figure is not significantly higher than the income disparity (42% in 2009) between migrants and urban residents in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city (Haughton et al., 2018, p. 211). However, as we will explain, the experience of lower-skilled YEMMs is intriguing because they face multiple barriers, rather than income disparity, that differentiate their experience from other groups, including higher skilled YEMMs, urban Kinh migrants and urbanites. The following table highlight these relative differentiations\(^\text{13}\) from data collected in this study compared with two recent studies of Anh et al. (2012) and Haughton et al. (2018, pp. 214-215).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>YEM LOWER SKILLED (^\text{14})</th>
<th>YEM HIGHER SKILLED (^\text{15})</th>
<th>URBAN KINH MIGRANTS</th>
<th>URBAN RESIDENTS (HANOI/HO CHI MINH CITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance in formal sector (secured, insurances, union rights)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance in informal sector (uncertain, no insurances, no union)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant participation in public sector</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant participation in private sector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant participation in development sector</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{13}\) The numbers indicate the level of positive correlation. Scale legend: 0 being *Not common* and 3 being *Very common.*

\(^\text{14}\) Data tabulated from interviews.

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>YEM LOWER SKILLED</th>
<th>YEM HIGHER SKILLED</th>
<th>URBAN KINH MIGRANTS</th>
<th>URBAN RESIDENTS (HANOI/HO CHI MINH CITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High hourly wage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard working hours (8-5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working two or more jobs to supplement incomes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of identity-based discrimination in job search, hiring, task allocation and performance review</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4. Differentiated characteristics of YEM compared to other groups.**

Differentiated characteristics of YEM compared to other groups.

*Source: Anh et al. (2012) and Haughton et al. (2018, pp. 214-215).*

Salary of lower-skilled segments tend to range between 3-4 million Vietnamese Dong (kitchen assistant, restaurant staff, and civil installation worker) and 8-9 million Vietnamese Dong (machine operator, and beautician). These salary scales, put in perspectives, are not particularly high when compared with higher paying jobs such as mining (with a monthly salary range between 12-15 million Vietnamese Dong) and the cost of living in cities. For a migrant at the lower end of the salary spectrum, earning 3 to 4 million Vietnamese Dong per month is indeed highly vulnerable because realistically there is no saving if they spend their salary on their living expenses and remit some back to their household.

The situation becomes exacerbated when most of YEMMs in the lower-skill segment also engage with the informal job market. Except for a few who work in factories or big restaurants, the rest are engaged in precarious informal jobs, characterised by no formal contracts or insurances, practically no weekend or non-paid leave; firing decision is at the employer’s discretion; and employers can keep parts of the salary as employment bonds to prevent them from quitting their job. No formal contract and no protection services become a norm for many under the times of precarity (Allison, 2013). One participant shared with us,

**Researcher:** How many days will you work per week?

**Informant:** I work everyday. If there is work, then I will work and there is no day-off fixed.

**Researcher:** So, they don’t really have weekend schedule?

**Informant:** No, as a small business they don’t have weekends.

**Researcher:** So, if you get sick or need to go back home for a visit, they will not pay you for those days?

**Informant:** Yes, that’s correct. If I visit my home, I won’t get paid for those days. If there is no work on a particular day, they will still cover my meals.

**Researcher:** So, the four or five million salary you said is for a 30-working-day month?
Informant: Yes, that’s for 30-working-day month with no day-off.

Researcher: So, if you are sick, they will still cover your meals but do not pay you for the sick days?

Informant: Yes, no payment for my sick days, but my boss bought me medicines when I was sick before (2_M, an ethnic Dao male worker).

It is noted that not all participants in the research were provided with free meals and accommodation in the city. Therefore, their salary, coupled with living expenses in the city, remittances, practically no savings and no safety net (health and social insurances) in adverse events, all render low-skilled YEMMs extremely vulnerable to domestic or workplace abuses, poor health conditions, and unsafe housing without any protective measures. Rather than gaining new skills and moving up in the salary scale, low-skilled YEMMs are stranded in a vicious and downward cycle due to their limited social networks, disparities in skills, lack of access to support services due to their rural household registration (hộ khẩu) - the same barrier Kinh urban migrants face (Anh et al., 2012; Haughton et al., 2018; Karis, 2013). As Anh et al. (2012, p. 1106) explain, current urban governance regimes in Vietnam that use urban residence permits (hộ khẩu) to restrict urban migrants’ access to welfare, property/asset ownership and other civil rights (such as voting in national election), is essentially a socially unjust administrative and legal governing tool.

It is important to note that subtle ethnicity-based discriminations, or ethnic-based microaggressions as Jones and Galliher (2015, p. 5) explain being “subtle, create inequities, and are often unintentional”, from the Kinh to ethnic minorities, occur in everyday settings. Microaggressions shape rampant stereotypes about YEMMs and subject them to economic precarity and social exclusion, and further perpetuate their marginal status. This happen in both higher- and lower-skilled groups: with higher-skilled groups they happen more often in social interactions, and with lower-skilled groups they happen in both social and professional settings. For the lower skilled YEMMs, sometimes repeated discriminative labelling can provoke strong reactions and violence can erupt accordingly, as shared by one participant, as a response to microassult attempts (Sue et al., 2007). A participant shared with us a situation whereviolenced flared up as a result of constant labelling and triggers,

Researcher: Did you experience any discriminations because you are an ethnic minority person?

Informant: Yes, many times. For example, when I worked in a construction site in Hoa Binh, there was this group of (Kinh) construction workers from Ninh Binh province. The two groups hardly interacted, but then they started calling us name such as toqc, and then we eventually fought (28_M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

On the one hand, the manifestation of the lack of recognition, or microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007) in other words, affect the employability and career progression of the lower skilled YEMMs groups. We found out that this lack of recognition can happens in
all steps of employment. As one participant shared his experience when she was applying for jobs in Hanoi:

“When I attended the interview and handed in the resume document, I realised the interviewer noticed my ethnic background. After the interview and when I was leaving, I heard some of the staff speaking to each other about my ethnic background and wondering if I would be able to work competently because I am an ethnic minority” (13_F, an ethnic Muong female café manager).

Another informant shared with us how they were collectively targeted for work-based discrimination, resulting in having to take more night shifts than an average factory worker.

“We Hmong are discriminated in our work place. In my factory the supervisors always assign us to work in night shifts. It does not matter if you are a new or old staff, if you are a Hmong you will be assigned to work in night shifts. For the Kinh colleagues, they can choose day or night shifts according to their own preferences, but as Hmong we are assigned to night shifts by default” (7_M, an ethnic Hmong male factory worker).

On the other hand, the experience and impacts of everyday microgressions that the YEMMs have in this research also fits with what Goffman (1986) explains. Their disclosed ethnicity, appearance, accented Vietnamese or their ethnic (sur)name can render them socio-culturally different and subject them to social stigma social unacceptance (Goffman, 1986). The lack of resources (contracts, insurances, benefit packages, protection services etc) coupled with the lack of recognition (stereotypes and assumptions of YEMMs’ background and status) have resulted in lower-skilled YEMMs being susceptible to social injustice - abuses, discriminations, heavier workload and unfair treatment. In particular cases, the impact of social injustice can lead to an individual with a university degree to downgrade their qualification and take up jobs at lower skill level. This does not only affect their income prospects, but also make them internalise and normalise the injustice as a coping mechanism to socially fit in and handle personal embarrassment (Goffman, 1986), as shared by one informant:

“I am just embarrassed that I have an university degree but I work in the same line of jobs as my colleagues who do not have a degree. I kept telling myself that I have a degree but eventually I only can work with others who finished their secondary school, then I am just like them, then I felt embarrassed” (7_M, an ethnic Hmong male factory worker).

The situation of low-skilled YEMMs is what Fraser and Honneth (2003) explain as social injustice. With low-skilled YEMMs, their lack of equal access to services and resources as a migrant (education, relevant skills, job readiness training) is intertwined

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16 During our consultation workshop with stakeholders and the public in Hanoi in mid December 2018, a participant shared that there are rural-to-urban Kinh migrants that she knew that also chose to hide/downgrade their education qualification to socially fit in in their workplace, and to cope with embarrassment of their low socioeconomic status. While we will need more data to conclude on this, we contemplate that both Kinh and ethnic minority urban migrants may experience the same social stigma due to their non-urban citizenship and socioeconomic status.
with their low status as an ethnic individual, and an urban migrant, and their underrepresentation in all social-cultural-political realms.

4.3. Gendered division exists but does not result in disparity

In terms of employment opportunities, YEMMs engage in a wide variety of jobs. As we discussed when comparing gender profiles and occupational choices, job opportunities for the lower-skilled groups are highly gendered but not necessarily stratified – and are closely related to skill and educational attainment.

Talking about gendered aspects of urban job market, the table below summarises how different genders take up different occupations when they migrate to cities or industrial areas. From the table, it is suggested that the more service- and creativity-based the jobs are, the less gender-specific they become.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial sector</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Dominated in machine operation, civil construction or metal installation jobs</td>
<td>▪ Popular in factories as factory workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Factory workers (less popular than female, some at supervisory level)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service sector</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Marketing officer</td>
<td>▪ Kitchen assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Motor taxi driver</td>
<td>▪ Domestic helper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Security officer in factory</td>
<td>▪ Beautician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Restaurant staff and supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creative sector</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ No gendered difference between men and women in this sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5. Summary of gendered division of labour in this research.*

While we did not encounter any informants whose jobs are generically 3D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning), we suspect there are such stories we were not able to capture in this research. Generally, however, jobs that are physically demanding and technically-intensive (machine operators, civil construction workers, security officers, and motor taxi driver) tend to be dominated by male migrants. This is similar to findings among Kinh migrants that (Haughton et al., 2018, p. 223). Female migrants tend to occupy jobs that are less labour-intensive and require some basic training (except for domestic caregivers).

Surprisingly, we also did not come across any informants who are self-employed and take popular sector jobs (*nghề tự do*) that many Kinh (female) urban migrants in big cities choose to do, such as running a street-side food stand, street vending or junk trading etc (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014, p. 867). These self-employed occupations, while can be physically demanding and precarious, also indicate a high level of migrants’ agency in using and appropriating urban spaces (Flock & Breitung, 2016). In a research
of how urban migrants participate in various economic activities and spaces in Ho Chi Minh City, Gillen (2016) contends that their participation in urban spaces is critical in shaping the city’s characteristic (the dissolving urban-rural clear distinction) and urban residents’ perception of migrants. The absence of YEMMs working in these occupations and urban public spaces in Hanoi, while its causality being left unanswered for this research, can therefore limit and hinder social interactions between Kinh urbanites and ethnic migrants. So far, what we speculate of the causality of this pattern is due to the power asymmetry between the Kinh and ethnic minorities in Vietnam, although further research needs to be done in urban areas to validate this phenomenon. There is an emergent body of research on different spatial patterns and use of public market spaces between the Kinh and ethnic minority groups in upland towns that can suggest the dynamics discussed here. In particular, the power asymmetry between the Kinh immigrants and Hmong and Dzao street vendors perpetuated by the market logics and the Kinh-dominated leadership at the local level play a critical role in shaping socio-spatial inequalities in Sapa town and market places in Lao Cai provinces (Endres et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2015).

Within this study, since the number of female high-skilled YEMMs outnumbers their male counterparts, it is not possible to draw any conclusions in term of gendered income disparity among the high-skilled group. Evidence from the Kinh migrants suggest that qualified male migrants earn 20% more than their female qualified migrants, suggesting a stronger gendered income disparity among higher skilled Kinh migrants (Haughton et al., 2018, p. 221). Future investigation of this topic can advance our understanding of how gender, ethnicity, and status interplay.

4.4. Friendship, romance and stereotypes

Network, as argued by migration networks scholars, links lower-skilled YEMMs with migration opportunities, reduces risks of migration, increases benefits, and transforms their role from migrant to facilitator (Palloni et al., 2001 cited in Piché & Dutreuilh, 2013, p. 148). Being an ethnic minority and a migrant, YEMMs suffer from both legal/structural restrictions (civil rights are being limited as one holds KT3 or KT4 residential status in cities), and social barriers (stigma, discrimination, gatekeeping exclusion). Social networks thus become a currency to buffer/negate these impacts and mitigate the vulnerability and marginality of YEMMs, particularly among lower-skilled groups. But again, this currency ties in closely with one’s status as an ethnic minority migrant in urban spaces, and more often than not it is in favour of the higher skilled.

While initial social networks help lower-skilled YEMMs secure guaranteed jobs when they first arrived in cities, there is little evidence that their social networks are extended over time. In our interviews, the informants indicated they have a few friends in their circles, some are from their workplace and some are they knew before going to cities. When being asked how they relate to people in their network, most of informants indicated that they sometimes meet with their friends for meals, hang-out or go to sing karaoke. Some decide to make friends and move in with YEMMs from other groups – their similar status as YEMMs binds them together in this case. But generally, there social network is rather small and confined within a few close friends. We started to realise this
as we were not very successful with a snowballing methodology to enlist more participants.

As for individual migrants, they do not seem to be able to leverage these networks for career progression in the same manner Kinh migrants do; for instance, the case of a group of motorbike taxi drivers from Nam Dinh in Hanoi helping each other with employment, housing and social support (Karlis, 2013). Even when there is a group of ethnic minority migrants coming from the same native home (đồng hưởng) and forming an ethnic enclave in urban spaces, their social capital in urban spaces do not seem to work the way Kinh urban migrants utilise their networks. We will come back to this when discussing YEMMs spatial strategies.

With the minority who can capitalise on their network, they usually turn their understanding of the job market and urban life into opportunities for people from their original home community, or sometimes extends this to other urban migrants. For instance, a domestic helper shared with us she has helped others in her community to find similar jobs as domestic helpers in Hanoi.

For YEMMs from both higher- and lower-skilled groups, their exposure to everyday stereotypes of their ethnicity—subtle or overt, intentional or accidental—has become part of quotidian life and impacted their professional and personal lives. Markers such as their accented Vietnamese, local/dialectical vocabularies, appearance, ethnic languages, or names can be easily harped on by their friends, employers, colleagues or service providers in urban centres. As shared by one informant:

“Initially they did not know that we are Hmong. There is a nearby market where we usually go and buy food. When we go in a group, we will speak in Hmong language. When hearing us speaking in our own language, market sellers looked at us and wondered if we are Chinese. They stopped doing what they were doing and observing us with curiosity. But now they know already, and they do not find it curious when we speak in Hmong language anymore” (7_M, an ethnic Hmong male factory worker).

These in turn put them in situations where they are uncomfortably interrogated regarding their identity, ridiculed because of their non-Kinh traits, or “positively discriminated” by people around them. A couple of informants have shared that they are often associated with traits such as being “more honest”, “more trust-worthy” or “less corrupted” than their Kinh colleagues. While these are generally positive characteristics, it is also problematic because these positive discrimination normative patterns render and constrain YEMMs to a certain set of expected behaviors and characteristics (D. S. Lopez, 1998; D. S. Lopez, Jr., 1994, pp. 36-43), similar to what Ortner (1995, pp. 173-193) argues as the benevolent side of Orientalism when writing about the Sherpas.

Turning to intimacy, it is an important aspect of an adult migrant’s life, particularly when they are at their prime age to get married and aspire for new life choices through migration. As previously discussed, we realised that while our informants’ average age is 26.8 years old, 81% of them are unmarried. This is an

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17 This is slightly older than the median age of migrants being 25 years in 2009, according to Haughton et al. (2018, p. 215).
unexpectedly high number, and it prompted us to understand if YEMMs are in fact
dating while migrating, who they date, and what their dating experiences are within an
intersectional identity.

As for the first question, some informants share that they are seeing or interested
in a potential intimate partner. The intimate partner they are seeing, or are interested in,
is often someone within their own social network and share similar background and
status. This is usually the case for lower-skilled groups and reflect their limited social
networking in urban areas.

In terms of the ethnicity/nationality of their intimate partners, there is a wide
spectrum of choices that suggests the scope of their social networks. Some YEMMs choose
to date someone from the same ethnic background; others date across ethnicities but not
Kinh, or with Kinh migrants or urban residents – extending to dating non-Vietnamese, in
the case of higher-skilled migrant.

For those dating non-Kinh migrants, their plan is to stay in the city to earn some
money, and eventually return to their home and start a new life. There is a sense of
accepting ethnic differences when they date across ethnicities. Interestingly, possessing
higher education or social status does not necessarily equate one with greater sense of
cosmopolitanism. Comparing higher-skilled migrants who may have been educated in
Vietnam and overseas, and are much more exposed to the world outside, a lower-skilled
migrant can boast their sense of subaltern cosmopolitanism or grounded cosmopolitanism
that Werbner (2006, 2008) explains. For many of these YEMMs, their sense of
multiculturalism seems high as they grow up in mixed ethnic community and speak
more than one languages.

The intimacy of YEMMs become much more complicated when they date with a
Kinh partner. They usually meet their partner through their friends or at the workplace.
When they started the relationship, some chose to disclose their ethnic backgrounds
upfront, while others chose to do it after some period. As a migrant in a city, they were
subjected to second-class citizenship discourses that portray rural populations as being
poor, backward, ignorant, uncivilised, and lacking manners (dân trí thấp) (M. T. N.
Nguyen & Locke, 2014, pp. 862-863). These are in contrast with urbanites’ qualities, such
as civility, law-abidingness, and sophisticated consumption – thereby placing migrants
on the lower rungs of social status. As a non-Kinh, they are subjected to a second set of
Kinh-centric discourses that is based on socialism and cultural evolutionism that place
ethnic minorities in the lower rung of modernity and civilisation (P. Q. Pham & Hoang,
2012). It is worth to note that Vietnam is not an exception when it comes to how the
dominant demographic discriminates tribal groups (see, for instance, accounts of
Michaud (2009), Michaud and Forsyth (2011), Bora (2010) and Turner (2013) on China,
Southeast Asia and India handle ethnic minority groups through discourses and
development projects).

As Vietnamese ethnic politics, heavily popularised through the state media, view
the non-Kinh population as uncivilised, backward, environmentally destructive and
superstitious (P. Q. Pham & Hoang, 2012), these discourses become desensitised and
normalised as facts. As a result, inter-ethnic intimacy between YEMMs and Kinh partners
did not last long. In one interview, the informant shared with us how the partner’s family
disapprove of their relationship because they believed that the YEMM had cast a “love charm” (bò bùa or bùa ngoại: a widespread belief that ethnic minority girls and women use various magic spells and witchcrafts to possess the spirit of lowland Kinh men so that they cannot resist these women and eventually marry these women) over relationship. In another interview, the informant expressed her disappointment when the partner’s family asked her to change her surname because it is too exotic. These break-ups subsequently have long lasting impacts on YEMMs because they have to come to terms with rejections because of their ethnic background, as well as their ability to trust in relationships in the future. As one Thai ethnic girl reflected on the break-up with the Kinh boyfriend and its impact,

**Researcher:** Did you ever think of getting married with someone of different ethnicity before?

**Informant:** After this break-up, I felt scared. I don’t dare to marry a Kinh husband here. My mom is an ethnic woman who has gone through a lot in her life. My dad does not quite know how to bring up the family and he beats my mom once in a while. I feel scared of getting married to a Thai husband like that. I am also scared of getting married with a Kinh husband. I am scared of love now (15_F, a Thai female hair-dresser).

### 4.5. The scales of economic (in)justice

As we have discussed, the framework of social justice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) allows us to see how the overlapping lack of civil, social, cultural and political rights constrain lower-skilled urban YEMMs. They restrict YEMMs in terms of their upward social mobility, expose them to precarity and vulnerability, and all together trap them in an underserving status. The question, then, is who are the forces or actors responsible for this injustice perpetrated on lower-skilled YEMMs? Governments at the central and city level should be held accountable at the *macro level* for their exclusionary human mobility and urban governance regimes, the hô khẩu. If hô khẩu is essentially the largest barrier for YEMMs at the macro level, what role do companies and employers in urban areas play, and how do they deepen social injustices against YEMMs at the micro level? When being asked about his former boss, a former migrant replied:

“The boss that I worked for many years under him, he is really kind. When I was sick and on my own, I don’t know who else would take care of me, but he was certainly the one. He took care of me as if we share the same blood (máu mủ ruột thịt), which I really appreciated (28_M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

Cities, for Marxist scholars like Fraser and Honneth (2003) or Harvey (2013) are the node for intergenerational social production, capital accumulation, exploitation, and marginalisation. Cities in the 21st century are heavily marked by neoliberalism, with the welfare state withdrawing their centrality and free market capitalism shaping new social relations and structures. This results in widespread precarity, or as Rigg (2018, p. 169) terms it, *new poverty*. The economic relationship between capitalists/employers and migrants/employees mimics the bourgeois and proletarian relation in the past, but in a different historical context. To illustrate this, we highlight the words of our informant when he talked about the relationship he developed with his employer (who owns a small family business).
“I visited his family many times in Bac Giang province. After these times, we both trust in each other. When we work together it is because of the trust. He trusted in me and I trusted in him. We work and live together and talked to each other about almost everything. He asked if I am learning something and encouraged me to learn new skills. He said he started out just like me, knowing nothing and starting from scratch. I also told him about my family, and he also told me about his mother who passed away when he was young. I believe he is a kind man. He cares about me and therefore I also share my thoughts with him. When I share my story, he told me to work hard and learn to become a boss one day. He told me to build my future so that I can get married when the time comes (2_M, an ethnic Dao male worker).

What underpinned our informant’s thoughts of the employer and the job is rather intriguing. In the migrant’s words, he optimistically saw the informal, contract-less, ununionised and low paid job he is doing an opportunity to learn and to become a boss one day. He describes his relations with the employer in an almost intimate fashion, and he repeats one word in many occasions during the interview: trust. How, then, should we understand this paradox where one precariously engaged within an exploitative capitalist/bourgeois system – and yet still appreciate? Is it because they lack better choices and must take up this opportunity at all cost?

It is certain not, at least in this case. The informant in this case used to work in the mining industry where he earned a salary almost twice as much as he is earning now. And he is not the only one. Elsewhere in the northern uplands of Vietnam, hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority youth from villages along the Sino-Vietnam border left their home, crossed the border and travelled to as far as a few million kilometres into Southern China. They are also engaged with precarity, and risk injuries, police raids, abuses, and deportation, because the payment in China is as much three time as what they can earn in Vietnam. The YEMMs in this research are perhaps an odd number of the bigger picture of youth migration in Vietnam. And by no means their decision to migrate and work in Vietnam lowland urban areas is uninformed, without consideration or by chance. From the interviews, we can see that YEMMs understand their choices and consider their engagement with urban precarity in relation to their skill profiles, their life choices (to learn something, to experience city life) and their mobility patterns (a formal contract is more secure, but also more restrictive if they need to leave when new opportunities arise or when they return home).

We argue that the trust component in their relations with their urban employers is not purely a pragmatic choice, but rather a relationship based on mutual trust and genuine human connection. It is important to understand that small scale/household business owners in cities do not always understand labour laws, as they themselves run their business with their own experience and market understanding. For many of them, there is a good reason to believe that the history of urban migration can be relatively new within their family, and they may as well be the first or second generation of urbanites/Hanoians. In their research on urban citizenship and class among urban migrants in Hanoi, Anh et al. (2012, p. 1123) conclude that “one does not have to dig very deeply into the past to uncover rural origins of most of the city’s population.” For many informal business owners in cities, their sense of class and status is not greatly different from urban migrants, which may explain the genuine relationships that emerge with new migrants. In one circumstance, our domestic helper informant shared that the family she was working for trusted her so much that after the husband and wife got divorced the wife kept her as company although her job was essentially useless.
Of course, we do not imply that all employer-employee relationships in this research are based on mutual trust, nor do we mean to suggest that a trusted relationship will be the most important aspect that YEMMs consider. Many of them indeed decided to change their jobs or circulate into different urban areas when good opportunities arose. It appears that their income is of equal importance to YEMMs because they have an obligation to send home remittances. However, we argue that our data shows that overall YEMMs in urban centers have positive experiences in their daily lives. They may have to work long hours, without contracts or benefit packages, and sometimes not fully paid before they finish their commitments as their employers fear they would leave. But engaging with the informal job sector and employers whose social status may have some resemblance to theirs, YEMMs show that they calibrate their position as they deal with job opportunities in urban centres. With this note, their micro level experience is rather empowering despite the precarity of their working conditions.

By examining how YEMMs develop and leverage social networks to enter and excel in the job market, and how they navigate different layers of social relations in cities—some are supportive, some are discriminative—we want to emphasize that social injustice does exist among YEMMs in urban areas. But social injustice is multifaced and has multiple scales. While we agree that macro level injustices occur because of the exclusionary nature of urban governance in Vietnam, we also agree that at a micro level the relationships between employers and their migrant employees are generally positive.
PART 5. NAVIGATING THE CITYSCAPE

This section discusses the spatial implications and strategies of YEMMs working and living in Hanoi and surrounding industrial centres. Broadly speaking, their physical and spatial mobility shape how they view, understand and consume the city. Urban spaces, in their experiences, represent both fears and hopes, danger and security, challenges and opportunities, marginality and inclusivity.

5.1. City as a space of glamour and unfamiliarity

One spatial pattern we recognized as we conducted interviews is that a migrant’s geographical location in urban areas is closely associated with their status. Our interview sites were mostly public or semi-public places (such as cafés), but we attempted to move as close to where the informants stay or work as possible to minimise their inconvenience to travel and meet us. While interviews with the higher skill groups were conducted in urban core districts (Ba Đình, Đống Đa), we had to travel to city fringes (such as Cầu Giấy, Cầu Thăng Long, Tây Hồ, Nguyễn Trãi/Hà Đông) or even nearby industrial centres (Hải Dương, Bắc Ninh) to conduct interviews with lower skill migrants. The reason many live in the city fringes is because they choose to rent accommodation near their workplace or to stay with their host family. This option is pragmatic, as cutting back on rent and travel saves money for other purposes. As we will explain, their location in the urban space shapes their understanding of the city, as well as their spatial behaviours. Compared with the higher skilled YEMMs working in the city core areas, the spatial experiences and socio-spatial mobility of the YEMMs working in informal jobs in Hanoi or in industrial towns around Hanoi are rather different in materially and social senses.

Urban heat, chaos, vibrancy and danger

City-fringe lower-skilled YEMMs shared that they find Hanoi and the surroundings physically different from their original rural homes in the upland. For them, the density of people and settlements, and the heavy traffic flows in urban areas intensified their senses and make them see the city as being overcrowded and chaotic. Some described how Hanoi is physically hotter compared to their home. Put together, the perceived heat and chaos of the city are not only sensational, but also physiological. Some of them shared their physiological reaction as they moved to Hanoi, such as the sudden presence of acne.

Despite the city being crowded and chaotic, many shared that they actually liked the city’s exciting vibes. Frequent interactions with new people or the city landscapes with amenities such as supermarkets and walking spaces are some of the reasons informants think life in the city is exciting and lively.
In addition to these, YEMMs also come to realise that the city is also dangerous. As much as their novelty to the city excites them with new adventures, it can also expose them to risks and scams. One informant shared with us when they were cheated at the bus stop, just when they arrived in Hanoi.

“When I returned to Hanoi from my home village I was scanned. I then told my friends back home to be careful when they travel to the city. If someone offers to sell them something, they must now buy. I was scammed to offer to buy a counterfeit mobile phone. I also told my girlfriend to be constantly cautious. If someone wants to sell something to her or borrow her some money, she must not accept it. Back in my home village, they will pay you the debt, but in the city they will not pay you once they have the money” (2_M; an ethnic Dao male worker).

A new social experience

Apart from how they feel the city materially different, others emphasized the differences between lifestyle and social interaction between the city and their rural homes. For many, the most striking feature of the urban social experience is that social connections and ties in the city are much less intimate compared to that of their sending community. While they can break free from social values and norms that constrain their freedom when they move to the city, they also experience a clear sense of individualism (the mind-your-own-business attitude), and perhaps a sense of isolation that permeate in the urban social fabric. For example:

“Back it my home village, social relations are more intimate (sống tình cấm) than in Hanoi. In my village we are surrounded by relatives, and the feeling is very homely. In Hanoi it is different, each family mind their own business. I do not go out often or mingle with others, but back in my home village we can go out and visit each other’s house and talk until really late” (2_M; an ethnic Dao male worker).

Socio-spatial immobility

Although these YEMMs do travel in the city, they do not seem to be particularly spatially adventurous. One reason is because many of them do not have a motorbike or bicycle, and thus their mobility is restricted if they only use public transportation. Another reason is because they aim to save entrance and transportation fees as remittances rather than spending the money for themselves in urban areas. As a result, they are mostly confined in their workplace and only commute between their home and work place. For example:

Researcher: So where have you been to in Hanoi?

Informant: I was first in Bac Thang Long (the neighbourhood). Then outside of the construction site where I worked, I also visited some community parks. I can only visit these places and cannot go to other places, such as the zoo, because I have to pay for the entrance fees. I have to save money and send the money back to my children at home, and therefore I can’t see much here (27_F; an ethnic Muong female returnee).
Their sense of urban immobility is also reinforced by their occupational choices. As previously mentioned in the analysis of occupational choices of YEMMs, all of our informants (with one exception) chose jobs that do not require them to move around (like street vending and junk trading). Instead, their jobs are mostly indoors, except for one that used to work as an Uber motor-taxi driver. Their rather different pattern of (im)mobility in urban spaces, while left unanswered in this research, deserves future investigation. This can be particularly significant if we compare this observation with how some ethnic minority street vendors appropriate and dominate informal retail spaces in China’s city of Guangzhou (Flock & Breitung, 2016), or the street vending practices of the Hmong and Dzao vendors in Sapa town and marketplaces in the northern upland of Vietnam (Turner et al., 2015).

Despite their perceived changes in the physical and social environment, the experience of YEMMs being in the city is generally positive or neutral. This can be explained from the perspective of individual choice - they have decided to choose the city and may have subjective and objective reasons to view their decision with optimism.

“After living here for a while, I am already enjoying the city. Back in my village, people can go to bed at around 8 pm as it is too far from anywhere. If it rains, the roads will be muddy and slippery, and we can not go anywhere with our motorbikes. I like life in the city because it is dynamic, it has a lot of things to see whenever I go out on the streets. Back in my home village there are only mountains and corn fields” (2_M; an ethnic Dao male worker).

5.2. Ethnic boarding house enclaves: a creative strategy with mixed impact

With YEMMs who worked as manufacturing workers in industrial areas around Hanoi, their different social environments in the peri-urban area allows them to devise a spatial strategy to strengthen their networks and reinforce their presence in urban spaces.

To start with, we took three field visits (Hai Duong, Bac Ninh and Thai Nguyen) to interview informants who worked in different factories in these provinces. Particularly, in Hai Duong and Thai Nguyen, we realised that the sizable number of YEMMs from the same ethnicity (the Hmong in Hai Duong and the Thai in Thai Nguyen) has allowed them to form an enclave (xóm trọ dân tộc) of more than ten rooms in a boarding house block.

To understand the implication of this spatial strategy, we have to take a step back and look at the politics of urban space and power. Briefly speaking, urban space is the canvas for spatialised human activities and contestations to be unveiled. Inspired by the original idea of Lefebvre (1968) in his book Le Droit à la Ville, scholars such as Harvey (2013), in analysing role of cities in the age of globalisation, argue that cities are intrinsically production and reproduction spaces where capitalism is
accumulated, power is concentrated, and thus inequalities in urban spaces is an inevitable by-product. The scholar, advancing Lefebvre’s 1968 slogan “Right to the city”, argues that cities in the 21st century have an opportunity to change this reality of inherent inequality and power hierarchy by treating all residents equally and transforming public places. Transforming urban public spaces, or rather the the politics and power of place names and place making practices, to ensure democratic participation of all city residents, therefore, are the goals of this political project to gain social justice for all (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2011, pp. 34-41).

The space we would wish to discuss here are two ethnic boarding house enclaves (xóm tro dân tộc) with their bottom-up approach to gain recognition. In the following section, we will present why and how it exists, and discuss how these enclaves can contribute to or limit the potential of increasing recognition of ethnic minority culture and status in urban spaces.

It is important for us to be reminded that both xóm tro dân tộc exist in a peri-urban area of industrial towns around Hanoi. We did not come across any such arrangement while conducting our fieldwork in Hanoi, but we would wish to further explore their existence. The reason why we think this topic is important is because this kind of settlement is usually conceived by both the city government and local residents as unruly, disorderly, dirty or dangerous, and thus subjected to be cleansed (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014, p. 868).

The formation of these enclaves was rather organic and unorganised. It started with a few people who came down to work together, and gradually more migrants join them and took up vacant rooms in the block.

**Researcher:** So, this boarding house was formed when you moved in here?

**Informant:** It was already occupied by the Hmong students from a nearby university. After graduation, they returned to their home villages. After a while, factory workers started to move in and dominated the block. Our of 14 rooms in this block, only one room is occupied by a student. The rest are migrant workers like me (7_M, an ethnic Hmong male factory worker).

Compared to the large-scale enclave founded by Nam Dinh migrants in Thinh Liet Ward that Karis (2013) studied in Hanoi, the two enclaves in our research are far more restricted in terms of their scale and public visibility. Nonetheless, we contend that it is a spatial strategy for YEMMs to appropriate urban space and reproduce a space of familiarity.

Elsewhere in Asia, other scholars such as Swank (2011, pp. 50-73), Anand (2000, pp. 271-287) and Anand (2002) discuss how urban migrants develop adaptationist strategies and reproductions of homeland in exile for various needs and agendas such as literacy, emotional supports, identity and representation and voices. In this research, this strategy is pragmatic in the sense that YEMMs reproduce cultural and social spaces which minimise the disadvantages of migration. It is a way for migrant
workers to mitigate shocks and adaptation challenges induced by the different cultural practices in the new environment, and to make them feel part of their community in a miniature village space. Within each enclave, the trust system is quite strong as social networks are *inwardly fostered* while migrants move into this space, since most of the residents in these enclaves are connected either by kinship or long-term friendships. With the networks they form within this enclave, they can provide supports to each other. They live in the same boarding house, continue their cultural practices (such as speaking their own language, cooking their own food, gathering and conducting their rituals during important events).

![Picture 2](image)

*Picture 2. A Hmong migrant resident living in the ethnic boarding house enclave (xóm tro) in Hai Duong province. A 10-minute documentary movie on this enclave was produced and uploaded on Youtube with the permission of informants at https://youtu.be/bbEoAbvElcY. Source: ISEE, 2018.*

The enclave itself is not only a material and spatial presence of these migrant groups in their new communities but also a micro space where their cultural and linguistic practices can be continued beyond traditional context and space, and a sense of *home farway from home* that supplies them with hopes to carry on in the context of constant precarity, as Allison (2013) posits. However, it is worth noting that their current scale makes it difficult to believe that these enclaves can somehow influence the identity of their neighbourhood in the same manner that urban migrants’ everyday practices in urban spaces can reshape urban identity in Ho Chi Minh city (Gillen, 2016).

In itself, the existence of such communities in an area dominated by the Kinh majority also highlights how minority groups can assert their presence and identity in
urban spaces. But our observations also point out that this *inward strategy*, while benefiting members of the same ethnic group, can be problematic as it does not seem to effectively facilitate their interactions with other ethnic groups or residents, and therefore does not practically help to increase their cultural recognition in either formal or informal sense by the host community. In one of the two ethnic enclaves we visited, none of the Hmong residents of this enclave has ever visited a temple that is opposite their boarding house. One Hmong resident also shared with us he was never invited to a local meeting despite he had stayed in the boarding house for the last few years.

Although we find such living arrangement a creative strategy to help ethnic minority migrants continue their cultural practices and foster their bond, we also contend that it presents another set of challenges: how this model can potentially hinder their interactions with other groups, limit their social capital in the receiving community, and put them at a higher level of spatial and social marginality. We recommend that more research on these socio-cultural enclaves to be conducted in the future.
PART 6. ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN TRANSITION

This section discusses the last puzzle of social justice: identity is multifaceted, multidimensional, and constantly changing as one migrates. One’s identity is the result of both internal and external processes. In the case of YEMMs, their multidimensional and transient identity is often being challenged or judged, making it more difficult for them to assert their rights and claim for recognition in urban spaces.

6.1. Identity markers raise curiosity and social-cultural adaptation strategies

There are markers that would easily let others know of a YEMM’s ethnic identity, including their physical appearance (costume, skin complexion, facial features), language (vocabulary and accented Vietnamese), and names (particularly surname). As they shared with us, being recognised as non-Kinh by their Kinh colleagues or people around them in public places (on the bus, in a bank, ad in a hospital) raise others’ curiosity (remarks on vocabulary or accented Vietnamese, surnames and costumes), as well as assumptions (one’s behaviours, thoughts, socioeconomic conditions or capability), and stereotypes (cultural practices, charms or magic). The next question needed to be answered is whether these Kinh Vietnamese that interact with YEMMs intend to create or hurt from their curious questions about ethnicity?

As shared by two Kinh Vietnamese informant and other YEMMs informants, there is a good reason for us to believe that more often that not, these actions stem from a sense of unfamiliarity, curiousity, stereotypes, mystified characteristics and romanticised imagination of ethnic minorities and their culture in popular media. For instance, one of the two Kinh informants who was hiring a Hmong painter trainee shared with us,

*Researcher*: So when you first heard that he is a Hmong, were you reluctant that he was not capable, or he could not fit in the environment in your workshop?

*Informant*: Because you ask me, I would be bluntly honest that I did not think so. Our work environment is very open and we do not discriminate people of different backgrounds. The fact that he comes from the mountain (ở trên núi) is even better. I think he would bring a new exciting vibe which is important in our line of work. (31_M_Kinh, an ethnic Kinh painting workshop owner)

Or when he shared with us how he thought growing up and living in the mountain can be an issue for YEMMs adaptation when they moved to work in the city:

*Informant*: First and foremost, like you said, it is because of their worldview or system of reference which is different from us. They left home with a different frame of reference and point of view, and now they have to adapt to life in the city with different sets of
values. This is what I can assure. Imagine if you are to live in their area, you will also face the same adaptation challenge to fit in a new culture and environment. Second, it is their intellectual capability. Like I mentioned before, when I teach them the same amount of knowledge, the Kinh intern will catch up much more quickly. I don’t mean all of them but the majority of them, except for those who are abnormal. The third barrier is language but I don’t see this a challenge for T (the intern) (31_M_Kinh, an ethnic Kinh painting workshop owner).

But at the same time, both interviews with the Kinh Vietnamese informants showed that they display a high level of sympathy with the backgrounds of YEMMs they work with. As such, these curiosities, assumptions and stereotypes of their ethnic background do not necessarily lead to social discriminations in social setting. But for some lower-skilled groups, these curiosities, assumptions and stereotypes can either take a subtle form of ethnicity-based microinsult (Sue et al., 2007) that puts a YEMM candidate in the less favourable position during hiring process, or imposes certain positive discrimination normative patterns on them as we explained earlier.

Often the use of regional or ethnic dialects or vocabularies coupled with accented Vietnamese language can be a communication barrier when YEMMs communicate with an audience unfamiliar or unaware of regional and ethnic differences. As a result, some informants start to internalise how others think of their ethnic background, and actively cover their identity markers to avoid differential treatment and unnecessary attentions. These strategies include projecting a non-ethnic view of self by not wearing traditional costume in everyday situations, linguistic code switching when speaking with their friends or family members in public places (such as in the bus), picking up words and expressions used in the city, and altering their accented Vietnamese – all social practices and cultural meanings that YEMMs intentionally choose to mask or display (Ahearn, 2017). Not all informants decide to be publicly open about their ethnicity unless directly asked. All these attempts, as YEMMs explained, are to avoid stigma and better integrate into the urban social fabric – an attempt that Goffman (1986) explains as a strategy for socially stigmatised groups and individuals to “fit it” with social normative values.

**Researcher:** So, when you speak in Hmong language, do people around you ask you about that?

**Informant:** They did not know what language was that. They asked what language we were speaking, or whether we were talking bad about them. Now we try to limit our conversations in our own language. I worked in this place for five months already but they did not know that I am a Hmong.

**Researcher:** Because you don't speak Hmong or talk about you?

**Informant:** I don't talk about me being a Hmong. My parents and friends told me to not tell anyone that I am a Hmong. But a friend of mine in the group missed his family so much and he decided to call his family and spoke in Hmong language, hence everybody knew.
Researcher: Did you intend to hide your own identity?

Informant: I don't want to but if they know that I am an ethnic minority, they will look down on me.

Researcher: So, how did they treat you after they know about you?

Informant: They laughed and asked whether in my village we still practiced “túc bất vợ” (the authors: a young Hmong man will approach a girl he is interested in, and drag her to his house to make her his wife) (4_M, an ethnic Hmong male civil construction worker).

From the perspective of YEMMs interlocutors, these adaptations are necessary and do not make them deny their ethnic background because they are still connected to their culture through social networking and occasional home visits. These adjustments are pragmatic choices so that their integration into a new environment would be more seamless. Yet, while it makes sense that they somehow intentionally adapt their markers for better social integration into the urban society, it also raises questions about the difference between adaptation and conformity, and thus injustice, in an asymmetric relation between the powerful and affluent urbanites and the marginal migrants. One could argue that it is not necessarily the case, and that their strategy is agentive and similar to migrants from Nghe An and Ha Tinh. Migrants from these provinces are known to have an ability to code-switch and soften their accent while communicating with people from other regions, but still use their local phonetics to communicate with each other.

Due to the mixed responses of YEMMs interlocutors, the answer seems to be somewhere in the middle. Multiple dimensions in their adaptation and identities along the lines of residence status (local/migrant), class (rich/poor) and ethnicity (majority/minority) are interwoven. But one thing we can conclude is that compared to their Kinh migrant counterparts, YEMMs will have to handle an extra set of challenge being in the city: their ethnic identity that continues to be stigmatised by the Kinh Vietnamese.

6.2. Being and Becoming an Ethnic Migrant in Hanoi

As diverse as their skills and occupation choices, we also realise there are multiple ways to be and to become an ethic migrant in Hanoi. For our discussion on the multiple ways of being and becoming, we would propose to scrutinise the level of cultural practices and attachment of the two groups: the “old” YEMMs - those who have left their home since young and do not speak their mother tongue fluently, and

\(^{18}\) Mother tongue is this research is understood as any of the languages spoken by the ethnic groups in this study outside the Vietnamese language.
the “new” YEMMs those who just left their community recently and speak their mother tongue fluently.

The “being” and “becoming” processes of the new YEMMs

At the surface level, there is an association between how fluent one is in their mother tongue, and how long their exposure to a particular cultural background, that shape their understanding of their being an ethnic minority individual. As one informant shared with us,

Researcher: So, you think language is your root of identity?

Informant: it is the first marker because they will immediately recognize you before they notice how you will behave. Even when someone (authors: the Kinh people) behave in a clumsy, they can be free from being judged. But if it is an ethnic minority behaving in a clumsy manner, they will judge and say it is because we are ethnic minorities (â hoa ra Đây là bọn dân tộc). For instance, despite many years in Hanoi, I am still not used to using fork and knife while dining. Generally, people would not notice this. But when I told them I am from Lang Son province, then they will conclude because of my background from Lang Son, I do not know how to use fork and knife properly” (3_F, an ethnic Tay female NGO leader).

While we realise there is an association between the length of time one is brought up in their own cultural space and mother tongue fluency in most cases, we also admit that using mother tongue fluency as a marker of cultural identity can be problematic – there are a lot more dimensions to one’s sense of identity. Being an ethnic minority is not static. Indeed, there is a process of becoming – the shifting subjectivity that we mentioned – that constantly requires the subjects to negotiate and construct their “being”. For the “new” YEMMs, whose physical mobility and exposures to urban life are fairly recent, their everyday experiences and interactions with different people in the new environment continue to shape their understanding of their self. But inevitably, their mother tongue fluency, at least in this study, is critical for them to continue their attachment with their family, community and cultural heritage.

The next questions we asked is how their urban migration is shaping their becoming process, and whether it has any disruption of their culture practices? When asked about their cultural practices, responses from our informants, regardless of the group, suggest that cultural practices undergo significant change. While most of the participants in the study were aware of some of their cultural practices, they shared that they practically did not practice them either when they move to urban areas or when they were back home. But when we asked if they still feel strong connection with their own culture, we started to realise varying degrees in the answers. For the new YEMMs (including one informant who is in her mid 50s), who spent most of their time in their communities before migration, they expressed a much higher attachment to their own culture. For them, they use the mother tongue to intimately and comfortably communicate with other members of the family or friends of the same
ethnic groups. The younger YEMMs in this group, who might not be as fluent in their ethnic language as their older cohort, still express that they valued their ethnic group’s celebrations, evidenced by their familiarity with rituals, the urge to visit their family during these occasions, and a strong sense of being an ethnic minority individual and belonging to a particular cultural root.

Before moving on to discuss the being and becoming processes of the “old” YEMMs (those who spent a substantial amount of their life time outside their original community), we wish to reiterate that the new YEMMs’ ability to use their mother tongue, familiarity with rituals, attachment to their own community’s culture and sense of cultural belonging continue to overlap with their being with their becoming processes.

The “being” and “becoming” processes of the old YEMMs

The second group of YEMMs are those who have "escaped", including those moving out of their community since childhood and living in cities for a long time, and are exposed to multiple cultures through overseas travels or study. What characterised this group is their internal struggle to define and reconnect their subjectivity with their legal ethnic identity. Scholars such as Scott (2009) or Middleton (2016) explain that the ethnicity classification project is a technocracy that the states use to govern their subjects. In Vietnam, the state followed the Soviet nationality framework (Itō & Sato, 2013; A. Terry Rambo, 2003) and as such assigns each individual with a particular legal ethnicity.19

When questioned about their cultural attachments— their familiarity with their mother tongue and rituals, in-group cultural practices and values— interlocutors highlighted a mismatch between their legal ethnic identities and their self-embraced subjectivity. As one informant shared with us,

Researcher: Does being an ethnic Tay somehow influence your work, for instance, does it create any barriers or opportunities?

Informant: I don’t really know, because perhaps I am only aware of my ethnic minority identity when I look at my personal documents. The thought of me being an ethnic minority individual has never existed in my mind outside those legal documents. I do not see barriers and opportunities in my work as a result of me being an ethnic minority person. But there are incidents that remind me of my ethnic identity. One being when I worked for a local NGO and support people from ethnic minority backgrounds. I realised when I tell people that I am also an ethnic minority person, the Hmong person

19 Rambo (2003) and Itō & Sato (2013) explain that the framework Vietnam adopted to classify 54 ethnic minorities in 1979. Ethnic classification forces a citizen to legally belong to a specific ethnic minority despite their mixed background. This bureaucratic approach to ethnic classification ignores any opportunities for an ethnic transactional approach to ethnic identity, and continues to exist until today.
I was talking to suddenly became more relaxed and open to talk to me. Another time was when I was taking the university entrance exam, I was aware that if I had a proof document of my ethnic minority identity, I would be entitled with extra scores to enter the university. Although I did not need those extra points to get into the university, I think having these documentations that proof that I am an ethnic minority can be beneficial for those lacking a few points”.

**Researcher:** So, now do you often remind yourself that you are an ethnic Tay?

**Informant:** I don’t honestly know how I am when I am an ethnic Tay. I don’t know how I can define what being an ethnic Tay means, because I never know how being an ethnic Tay actually is (16_F, an ethnic Tay female UN coordinator).

How should we understand this cultural and identity mismatch? Firstly, this state-led ethnic classification project, as A. Terry Rambo (2003) explains, is political rather than scientific, akin to what Middleton (2016) explains of the situation of the Gurkhas in India. Due to its political nature, ethnicity is reduced to certain categories deemed necessary by the state, leading to groups being mislabelled or collapsed within broader category that they have little or no ethnocultural connection with. One good example is the Mieu in Lang Son province that V. T. Nguyen (2007) describes in his book *Ambiguity of Identity: The Mieu in Northern Vietnam* – they infact are the Hmu, not the Hmong, through careful linguistic analysis. Secondly, there are multiple layers of ethnocultural identity that an individual can embrace to be their chosen identity. Tapp (2014), when conducting research with Miao migrants in Shanghai, notices a phenomenon that he later termed “sub-ethnic” identity. The Miao he worked with were in fact the Khanao/Hmu who were grouped into the broader Miao ethnic group due to the state’s ethnic classification project. The detachment of his Miao participants to the Miao culture, as he explained, is because their ethnic attachment operates at the sub-ethnicity level – “their sense of connectivity to kinship, to place, and to a local and personal history and not the authorised history of the Miao people” (Tapp, 2014, p. 396).

Returning to the story of our *identity-mismatch* ethnic migrants, if we see their identity from the sub-ethnic identity that Tapp (2014) asserts, then things start to make sense. Their attachment to their cultural heritage (and thus their identity) stems from their sense of connectivity with the micro cultural environment of the family when they grew up. Explaining their sense of mismatch between their own identity and legal ethnicity, they contend it was either because of their moving out of the community when they were young or their mother tongue was not reinforced in their family and they have lost it. From this perspective, we argue that they did not derail or detach from their identity and heritage. They grew up following the norms set by their micro cultural environment – their family – which as they explained did not neatly fit with normative cultural norms of the broader ethnic group. Their ethnic identity therefore operates at the sub-ethnic level and explains the disconnection they have with their legally-assigned ethnicity. For them, not speaking the legally-assigned mother tongue fluently, in turn, keeps them further away from learning and reproducing cultural practices of the group they legally belong to. But it at the same time allows them to
build their own value system and craft their own identity that is neither based on their ethnicity or their residence alone.

But despite their autonomy to choose their own identity, these identity-mismatch individuals are occasionally brought back into the debate. They are challenged by the people who highlight how their legal ethnic status does not match their expressed identity. This can be as subtle (and arguably part of the “positive discrimination” described earlier) as someone complementing them: “You do not look ethnic enough!” As Cooley (1922) explains with her theory of looking-glass, perceptions of self and forms of self-confidence are impacted by social interactions and judgement, particularly from those with high social prestige or normative values. Being occasionally exposed to social judgements bruised their confidence and sense of belonging and made them internalise the idea that they are inauthentically ethnic as a minority individual (đân tộc giả hiểu).

Researcher: So, when you attended university, were your friends curious when they found out that you are an ethnic minority?

Informant: Yes, they were curious when they knew, but they did not ask much afterwards. Some asked if I can speak Tay language, to which I said no. They then suspect because I don’t have anything that can show that I am truly an ethnic Tay (16_F, an ethnic Tay female UN coordinator).

It is also interesting to note that the transitioning identity of YEMMs as they struggle to belong in Kinh-dominated urban areas (impacting behaviour, appearance, and participation in key community events) are picked up by members of their own community back home when they return.

Researcher: Do you think you disconnect yourself from your own root?

Informant: When I was back home, I used Muong language in our everyday conversations. When I was away, I did not know some of the events that happened, and thus I cannot participate in part of the conversations concerning these events. Then people pointed to me and asked if I am still a Muong. I think I only disconnected from events I did not witness, but not my own root and culture. I still converse in Muong language when I talked to other Muong friends in the city.

Researcher: But earlier you said you were angry sometimes when you felt different?

Informant: At times, when I joined the same meals and toasted with people in my home community, I spoke too fast and not clearly, then people around me started to stare at me. I felt suffocated and uncomfortable (28_M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

While some do not face any challenges as they return to their home, others may feel uncomfortable as there might be unrealistic and unreasonable expectations
(migrants are more well-off than those who stay back) that local people have projected on them.

“There were mixed responses. Some looked down on me. Some praised me for hosting meals and inviting others when I returned. They commented on my dyed hair as I chose to do so when I migrated. When they looked at my wallet, they said I am just a pathetic migrant as I only had small notes in my wallet” (28_M, an ethnic Muong male returnee).

There are other aspects of YEMM’s identity in transition that we observed but were not able to cover within the scope of this research. Some of these includes the use of social media in regenerating and projecting ethnic identities (Cawthorne & Ha, 2017; Đỗ & Chu, 2018), changes in consumption patterns and material aspiration, and a paradigm shift from collectivism to individualism that is becoming increasingly common among youths in the Post-War period in Vietnam (L. Do & Phan, 2002; S. L. Le, 2009). We recommend that this topic to be explored in future research.

To conclude, we argue that there are two overlapping process of being and becoming an ethnic minority that an individual YEMM experiences when they migrate. The being process is linked with their ethnic language and cultural familiarity, and is extended beyond their home community environment. While migrating to urban areas and exposing themselves to new social and cultural environments, the becoming process – their negotiation and construction of their subjectivity – takes place and shapes their urban migration experiences.

We also conclude that there are several scales of cultural injustice that YEMMs experience that reflects each individual’s socioeconomic status. Generally, the Kinh-centric ethnic politics continues to render ethnic minority migrants to stereotypes and social stigmas. Their interactions with Kinh migrants or residents in urban centres either challenge YEMMs with everyday stereotypes, or judgement as to whether their ethnic identity is genuine enough. Coupled with migrant’s socioeconomic status, new YEMMs – those with more recent history of urban migration – experience stereotypes and social stigmas that affect their economic and social well-beings much more profoundly compared to the long-term ethnic minority migrants. Upon returning home, being a former migrant, one may also face stigmas and unrealistic expectations from their own community members.
PART 7. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research has pointed out several trends of YEMMs in urban areas in northern Vietnam.

First, urban migration continues to be a household livelihood strategy to negate adversity and thrive as globalisation and market penetration intensify in rural upland areas. The out-migration of ethnic minority youth to industrial areas and cities reflect their pragmatic considerations to supplement household income by leveraging the formal and informal jobs available in urban areas. But there are other motives, such as future preparedness, material aspiration and increasing individualism among youths that are at play. The exposure to the wider world, facilitated by enhanced mobility among ethnic minority youth, the popularisation of smartphones, and penetration of internet, all contribute to their improved understandings of opportunities and material life beyond their villages.

Second, accounts of YEMMs show that their mobility patterns are much more complex, including regular visits to sending villages, circular migration or onward migration to other places (Luong, 2018), but very few want to settle down in cities. They occasionally visit their home and reside at home when there are unforeseen changes in the urban job market. Urban areas then become a space of transition rather than permanent residence. In the long run, most YEMMs aspire to relocate closer to home when opportunities arise. Their choice to relocate and home attachment essentially differentiate them with many Kinh youth who migrate to cities for education with the intention to reside permanently in cities.

Third, as an ethnic minority and migrant, YEMMs are subjected to double layers of discrimination. The formal structural barrier that discriminate equal rights of YEMMs is essentially the current stringent human mobility and urban governance regime through hổ khẩu. It continues to be the structural barrier that denies rights of YEMMs (including political-civil, economic, social and cultural rights) when they migrate to cities. But there are hopes that things may change by 2020 when the hổ khẩu system will be lifted and there are opportunities for city governments to be more flexible in managing urban migration. The second informal but very significant barrier stems from social stigma. Similar to all migrants that migrate to urban areas, they suffer from stigma due to socioeconomic backgrounds and class (người ngoại tỉnh/người nhà quê versus người thành phố). But as ethnic minorities, they are restricted by Kinh-centric stigmas and discriminations towards their ethnicity. As a result, young ethnic minority migrants face higher risks of being socially stigmatised and economically discriminated against. The situation is less pronounced among higher-skilled ethnic minority migrants, but it is undeniable that their higher SES does not make them immune to social stigmas and uncomfortable questions about their ethnic identity.

Last, there exists a significant difference between Kinh and ethnic migrants in terms of how each group navigate and use urban spaces to empower them socially.
and economically. Generally, Kinh migrants are far more successful in using public spaces and spatial mobility strategies for their economic and social purposes. While there are some ethnic enclaves outside Hanoi that allows some ethnic groups to form their own micro space of social networks and supports, this strategy can be counterproductive if no further social interactions with residents occur beyond the enclave. There has been little evidence, except for some sports activities around industrial areas, that suggest that ethnic minority youth can access and use public space to improve their socialisation and interaction with other groups. There is currently no evidence that ethnic minority migrants can leverage on streets and pavements spaces to generate some income in the same manner that many Kinh migrants do. As they live in cities but do consume urban spaces the way Kinh migrants do, their spatial immobility in urban areas will have implications on their economic, social, and political status and marginality.

With these in mind, the research team recommends the follow:

(i) Further research on basic needs such as housing, healthcare, gender dynamics, consumption, and groups with most disadvantages such as cümle văn, sex workers, construction workers in urban areas, needs to be conducted in the future.

(ii) Advocacy and interventions should be designed to avoid being polarised. On the one hand, there is good reason to avoid reductionism in identity politic when advocating for more just policy. By not labelling issues that are specifically Kinh and ethnic minority migrants, there is an opportunity to address and remove structural barriers that affects all migrants at all levels, corresponding to Fraser’s call for status politics, not identity politics. But on the other hand, there needs to be a parallel process that specifically address issues of stigmas and social exclusion that target and marginalise ethnic minorities in both social and economic spheres. To sum up, we propose that:

- At macro level: remove ho khau; advocate for the Human Rights City Initiative.

- At mezzo level: (i) assigning agencies and coordinating mechanisms to support and (ii) preparing both migrants and urban residents for the age of urban migration/planetary urbanisation to come.

  - Agencies to hold accountable for migration rights: NGO or government agencies, at city or national level,
  - NGO: safe migration at sending villages, training on labour rights and inclusiveness for employers and migrants,
  - Gov: housing subsidies, lifelong learning/skills enrichment services at both sending locations and urban areas, unionisation of labours in informal sector.
• At micro: awareness raising, grassroots movement (Kindness Movement); skills enrichment training provision made available for migrants.
APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE & OBSERVATION GUIDELINE

This Guideline provides a semi-structured framework to work with research participants. Informal discussions, interviews and observations requires one-off verbal consent from the research participant.

Please indicate the participant’s consent for recording □ Discussion/Interview □ Photography □ Audio

Please indicate if the participant is less than 18 years of age at the time of participation □ Yes

Part 1. Particulars
- Full name:
- Year of birth:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Hometown:
- Number of household members:
- Education level:
- Current occupation:

Part 2. Questions
1. What is your current job? How long have you been working in the current workplace? Where have you worked before working here?

2. What are the reasons for you to choose to leave your home town and work here? How did you choose and find this job?

3. How did people in your family respond to your decision to move and work here? How do you keep in touch with them when you are away? How often of when was the last time you visited your hometown?

4. Is your job safe and satisfying? How is your salary and benefit packages (if any) now? How is it compared to your previous jobs?

5. What aspects of working and living here that make you feel easy and difficult? Do you encounter any challenges accessing to social services such as health, education, safe housing and residential registration, protection and legal supports, or your rights to vote, assembly or mobility because of your gender and ethnicity when you live here?

6. What others in your workplace and neighborhood tell you as they know of your ethnic background? How do you respond to their remarks? Can you continue to speak your language or practice your cultural practices as you live here? If you have to modify some of these, how does that affect your being an ethnic individual?

Part 3. Observation
Please provide your (relevant) observatory remarks of the participant in terms of:

1. Sense of attachment to their hometown and destination
2. Reasoning/rationalizing of their significant life choices
3. Responses to significant life events
4. Gendered experience
5. Social network/capital in their hometown and destination and the use of social media
6. Current living conditions and social service accessibility (housing arrangement, life quality, education, health, legal service, protection, political rights)
7. Ethnocultural identity, sense of self-satisfaction, esteem
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