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## YOUNG VIETNAMESE GENERATION IN POLAND: CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

In Poland, Vietnamese people are the largest immigrant community whose culture is not European. It is difficult to determine their number. It is currently estimated at 35 thousand. In Poland, which more frequently “sends” its citizens abroad than “welcomes” foreigners, the Vietnamese group attracts attention of scholars. What they find interesting is the manner in which Vietnamese people adapt to the Polish environment, diverse identity strategies of various groups, and the functioning of Polish-Vietnamese marriages. In the subject literature, it is highlighted that Vietnamese people usually enter the Polish community through group adaptation processes and, to a large extent, remain socially closed within their own ethnic group. Their social contacts with Poles are usually superficial and their cultural bonds with Poland are most frequently limited. Despite the above, there are Vietnamese immigrants who deeply relate to the Polish culture and have close relations with Poles, including Polish spouses.

It is possible to distinguish two waves of Vietnamese migrations to Poland with different social characteristics. In addition to the two waves, there is a third different group of the Vietnamese living in Poland. The third group consists of people born and brought up in Poland, who are the second generation of immigrants and most of them are children of the first-wave immigrants.

Issues tackled in this article concern the young generation of Vietnamese people who were either born or brought up in Poland since their early age. The main questions asked concern their level of adaptation and acculturation to the Polish society, their identity types and models, and internal group conflicts. Those people are in a specific psychological situation being under the pressure of both cultures which is well illustrated by the expression *caught between a rock and a hard place*. Intuitively, *a rock* is the culture of their destination country and *a hard place* is the native culture of their parents and grandparents. The situation of those young people is not easy. On the one hand, cultural differences within the Vietnamese society are huge while family bonds and traditions are strong. On the other hand, the young Vietnamese have a feeling that it is difficult for them to fully “melt” into the Polish society because of physical differences which Poles perceive as noticeable and big. I will

also try to show differences, which can be observed in the process of adaptation and acculturation to Polish culture, between young people who are the second generation, i.e. children of Vietnamese immigrants of “the first wave”, and “the second wave” Vietnamese, and between young men and women from both waves.

Research of anthropologists like P. Radin, H. Spicer, R. Linton, and N. Lourie suggests that when communities of native Americans collide with the Western civilisation, differences between sexes surface. That refers to the ways and intensity of adaptation and acculturation to a new Euro-American way of life. For men, that process is much more difficult and more frequently accompanied by pathological phenomena and dramatic psychological issues. For women, acculturation to Euro-American models is easier, *inter alia*, because their social status tends to improve rather than worsen, and traditional roles are maintained while daily life is easier thanks to technological advancements of Western civilisation. In contrast, men have suffered more because of being cut off from their previous social roles which granted them a higher place in the social hierarchy and enabled to demonstrate their manhood power.

Being aware that examples from the area of the United States described by anthropologists refer to a different setting than those of Vietnamese immigrants' encounter with Poland and the Polish culture, I use American examples only as an inspiration for my analysis of different reactions to Polish European culture. One of such contact situations is marrying a Pole, which requires trespassing principles essential to maintaining the cohesion of value systems and conduct patterns. The identity of children from mixed Polish-Vietnamese marriages is a separate issue beyond the scope of the present paper.

#### TWO IMMIGRATION WAVES AND TWO TYPES OF THE POLISH VIETNAMESE

The inflow of Vietnamese immigrants to Poland started in the 1950s and had its first peak in the mid 1960s to the late 1980s. The policy of the then Polish People's Republic was to provide educational support to young people from poorer socialist or pro-communist countries. The first wave of Vietnamese immigrants to arrive in Poland were students and young scientists who came here to study. Some of them have stayed in Poland, started families, and took up jobs. Those young people were the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants to Poland. All of them were selected to study in Poland while in Vietnam. They are graduates of Polish higher education institutions and their professional careers have been successful. As a group, they are the intellectual elite of the Vietnamese minority in Poland.<sup>1</sup>

The second immigration wave of Vietnamese people began in the 1990s. In contrast to the first wave, it was a massive labour immigration though some new im-

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<sup>1</sup> T. Halik, E. Nowicka (2002), *Wietnamczycy w Polsce. Integracja czy izolacja?*, Warszawa, pp. 23-24.

migrants were students, including doctoral students, who arrived in Poland to study, and people associated with religious or opposition movements who had been persecuted by authorities of the still communist Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> Poles, however, most frequently encounter representatives of the second immigration wave at open markets in large towns, in Asian shopping centres, bars and restaurants.

The third group of Vietnamese people living in Poland are children of immigrants, usually of the first wave immigrants. That special category of young people born and brought up in Poland is the focus of this paper. Most of them have lived all their life in Poland or started to live in Poland in their early years and attended Polish schools. Children of the second wave immigrants usually spent their early childhood in Vietnam. Some differences between the three groups are well depicted in the following comment of a young Vietnamese woman:

All Vietnamese people of my generation learned a lot and now they study abroad or at some prestigious institutions, but these new generation pupils get mediocre grades. So that has changed somewhat; they are average pupils. My generation had parents who came here to study at universities, as my father did. In my family, much emphasis was put on education, and now the majority of Vietnamese people come from Vietnam to earn money only.<sup>3</sup>

The second wave of the Vietnamese came to Poland for economic reasons. This group exhibits a low level of acculturation and integration but they are well-adapted in the practical sense. They can rarely speak fluent Polish, are not much interested in Polish culture and therefore they know it a little.

The Vietnamese of the first “student” wave who settled in Poland differ also from the second (economic) wave in terms of awareness. They have a feeling of their distinctness. Their Vietnamese friends are mainly people they met at university. They have hardly any contact with the newly-arrived Vietnamese. When speaking about economic immigrants from Vietnam, they refer to them as “they”, i.e. “They are of a completely different line because they come here to trade and open restaurants, and I am doing something totally different, so we do not get along with each other. Sometimes, I buy something from them or eat at their restaurants but that is all. There are no contacts.”<sup>4</sup> It is very rare that they speak of their lively contacts with the new-comers, of an exchange of services and mutual assistance.

To understand the changes in the attitude to gender roles, it is important to observe differences in the social situation of both immigration waves. The residence status of immigrants from Vietnam varies much. Vietnamese people of the first wave are

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> I quote parts of interviews conducted during a research seminar I taught at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, and interviews conducted by my doctoral students (Grażyna Szymańska-Matusiewicz and Aleksandra Winiarska) and MA students (mainly Anna Małachowska). Footnotes accompany only interviews which have been quoted in other published texts.

<sup>4</sup> A. Winiarska, *Rodzina wielokulturowa, czyli małżeństwa polsko-wietnamskie w Polsce*, in: E. Nowicka-Rusek (ed.) (2011), *Blaski i cienie imigracji. Problemy imigrantów w Polsce*, Warszawa, p. 82.

well-settled, have jobs, and their stay in Poland has been fully regulated. The situation of immigrants of the second wave is different. Some of them stay in Poland illegally; others have been granted permanent or temporary residence.<sup>5</sup> In 2003, a new law provided for “abolition” of illegal stay in Poland. In 2007, 1,078 Vietnamese people took advantage of it and were granted a fixed time residence permit in the Republic of Poland. They were the largest group of foreigners seeking to legalise their stay.<sup>6</sup>

The Office for Foreigners suggests that during the next abolition planned to be announced shortly, as many as five thousand people will manage to legalise their stay, i.e. twice as many as during the two previous abolitions.

### **Cultural distinctness in the perception of the Vietnamese and Poles**

Cultural differences which separate Polish and Vietnamese societies are perceived by both the Vietnamese and Poles as significant. To Vietnamese people, some differences seem impossible to overcome. Poles find it difficult to deal with the Vietnamese because of their low expressiveness, i.e. not showing emotions and not expressing opinions, which is perceived as “secretiveness”. Vietnamese people, in turn, are surprised with the fact that Poles attach great importance to privacy which, from the Vietnamese perspective, makes Poland a sad country. Many deep differences between the two cultures are highlighted in the subject literature. One of them is the concept of a human being, his or her tasks, duties, and place in the world as well as the system of values which guides people’s actions. Those differences are also expressed in definitions of social roles connected with such criteria as age and sex.

#### **Communitarianism, hierarchy and obedience**

Different ways of thinking of Polish and Vietnamese people were discreetly and to an extent secretly shaped by different philosophical/religious systems. In Poland, that system was Catholicism while in Vietnam, it was shaped by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and older but still present animist beliefs, including the socially important cult of ancestors. Despite the inevitable dynamics of changes in both areas, foundations of the aforementioned normative systems have survived. Vietnamese society is characterised in communitarianism/collectivism categories. The importance and value of community in the social life of an individual is emphasised, while values related to manifestations of individualism, typical of the Western culture, are not recognised as important. In Vietnam, an individual is defined by his/her belonging to the State, society, and family, while his/her tasks consist in duties, loyalties and activities for the benefit of the family, a local community, and the State. Western individualism is disapproved of. It is viewed as selfishness and the in-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> [http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34862,10921581,Ukraińcy\\_i\\_Wietnamczycy\\_legalizuja\\_pobyt\\_w\\_Polsce.html](http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34862,10921581,Ukraińcy_i_Wietnamczycy_legalizuja_pobyt_w_Polsce.html).

ability to sacrifice individual goals for the success of a group, which might pose a threat to the orderly and harmonious functioning of a community.

Social hierarchy plays a huge role in the Vietnamese society and is present in almost all spheres of life. The hierarchical structure is essential in families, religious communities, institutions, the labour market, and politics. That feature can be described aphoristically in the following way: in Vietnam, there are no equal people: each person has its place on the social ladder with strictly ascribed roles and positions. The principle on which one's social status is based is worth emphasising. It includes most simple and archaic criteria of social divisions which determine the place of an individual in the social structure and which refer to biological differences between people, i.e. their age and sex. Secondly, the place of an individual in the social structure is determined by his or her financial situation, professional status and job position. In addition, a higher position is connected not only with privileges but also with some obligations like providing assistance to people lower in the social hierarchy. Inviolable principles include the sense of obligation and obedience. According to Vietnamese people living in Poland, Poles do not understand the Confucian principle of absolute obedience to the elderly and the obligation to assist one's broadly understood family. The Vietnamese culture strongly emphasises showing respect to the elderly. Children are to be completely subordinated to parents and never question what parents say. The hierarchy is there to ensure harmony among people.

### **A man and a woman**

Female and male roles are strictly defined and there are no doubts what is proper or appropriate, what should guide one's conduct, and which tasks should be performed by women and which by men. Now, along its modernisation, the communist regime tries to promote gender equality in the labour market and more women take jobs outside their homes. That does not mean, however, that women's workload at home has been reduced or that traditional expectations towards women have changed in any significant way. Only the situation of labour migration has a considerable impact on changing women's traditional roles, and that applies to Vietnamese women of the second immigration wave. Nevertheless, the belief that a man is obliged to earn his family living and a woman should raise children and do all housework still holds strong. Differences between norms of the Vietnamese and Polish cultures are visible also in informal relations between the sexes. For the Vietnamese, it is natural and obvious that a woman opens the door for a man, serves him food, and manifests her humbleness and devotion (in particular in public places). The courtesy of men towards women, which is typical of the Polish culture, seems strange to the Vietnamese e.g. paying compliments to a woman, helping her get seated, opening doors for her, or helping her to put on her coat. In contacts between women and men, in particular in public places, no emotions should be expressed, i.e. kissing or hugging are not appropriate according to the Vietnamese. The private/family life and the professional life are clearly separate spheres. Private or family affairs are not discussed at work.

## Family

Both Vietnamese and Polish people consider family to have the highest value in one's life, which does not mean that family-life models in the two cultures are identical. In the traditional Vietnamese model having its sources in Confucian conceptions, the wedding was, in the fact, a ritual honouring family ancestors. A marriage was concluded because of family needs and it was the parents' decision. Today, that tradition is commented upon in the following way: "Family was considered the superior value and its interests prevailed over the fact that it was a woman and a man who were getting married"<sup>7</sup>. Generally, a Vietnamese family is multi-generational and relations between family members have been based mainly on the patrilineal authority as the head of the family has been the oldest living male. A wife has had a lower position than a husband due to his sex, and a lower position than her mother-in-law due to age. The aim of a marriage is to ensure the continuity of the family. That reflects the Vietnamese world-view in which the cult of ancestors is very important.

In contrast, in Poland, the family model now is that of two generations living together (parents and children only) and spouses' partner relations and, to some extent, also a partnership of parents and children. In Vietnamese families, children are introduced to the hierarchy at a very young age and they are not taught that people are equal, including family members. Children are awarded for their obedience to people who have a higher social status and not for voicing their own opinions, being assertive or thinking independently. From a very early age, the Vietnamese are taught the etiquette, i.e. specific conduct towards family members and subordination to the clear hierarchical structure. The etiquette observance is to ensure an orderly and harmonious functioning of the community at all levels of social life, including family. Traditionally, a multi-generation family was part of the local community which constituted an economic unit of people working together on the land. It was only the French colonialist authorities that introduced the acceptance of emigration which required leaving the family and the home village.<sup>8</sup>

### The value of education

The attitude towards education is another difference between the Vietnamese culture and the Polish one. Education has, traditionally, played a more profound role in the Vietnamese culture than in European countries where practical goals are set for education. In Vietnamese culture, education has been important to ensure that an individual would become a respected citizen and member of the commu-

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<sup>7</sup> T. Halik, *Nowe podejście do starych wartości*, in: A. W. Jelonek (ed.) (2004), *Wietnamczycy. System wartości. Stereotypy Zachodu*, Warszawa, p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> T. Halik (2006), *Migrancka społeczność Wietnamczyków w Polsce w świetle polityki państwa i ocen społecznych*, Poznań, p. 17.

nity. Through education, individuals learned to coexist with fellow citizens and to respect the authority.<sup>9</sup>

The observed cultural (social and religious) differences between Polish and Vietnamese people must manifest themselves most strongly in a marriage. In such a relationship it is not possible to avoid collisions of different concepts of female and male social roles. Thus it is important to study how those differences are overcome and resolved in a marriage. That includes communication patterns between spouses, passing norms and values to children, and relations of both spouses with their Polish and Vietnamese relatives.

#### CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS: ACCULTURATION

The concept of acculturation is differently understood in social anthropology and inter-cultural psychology. In anthropology, acculturation refers to communities and value structures. In psychology, it concentrates on processes transforming the system of values of an individual.<sup>10</sup> It is no surprise that Vietnamese people who left their homeland in their early years are more deeply connected with Poles and the Polish culture than those who arrived in Poland as adults. Usually, children who have been brought up in Poland have (or at least declare to have) stronger ties with the Polish culture than with the Vietnamese heritage, regardless of whether they have been raised in ethnically mixed families or in Vietnamese families in which parents are strongly attached to tradition.<sup>11</sup> Emigration and immigration always entail, to a larger or lesser extent, the aware disposal of cultural capital accumulated in the country of origin.<sup>12</sup> Poland and Vietnam are culturally very different. Ignorance of the cultural code of the country of residence results in practical problems and the feeling of being lost in the environment of unfamiliar institutional rules. At the same time, the Vietnamese unknowingly violate Polish norms which leads to conflicts with the Polish law and Polish society.<sup>13</sup> Both Polish and Vietnamese people perceive their communities as distinct from each other and that marks their mutual contacts with “strangeness”. The same applies to every-day life when the two are in touch. Vietnamese men who married Polish women are in a particularly difficult situation. They have assumed that they have no other choice but to adapt. “There is a Vietnamese saying that when you enter a new family, you must accept its customs.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> P. Boski (2009), *Kulturowe ramy zachowań społecznych. Podręcznik psychologii międzykulturowej*, Gdańsk.

<sup>11</sup> T. Szlendak (2011), *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*, Warszawa, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> T. Bauer, K. Zimmerman (1999), *Assessment of Possible Migration Pressure and Its Labour Market Impact Following EU Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe*, Department for Education and Employment, Bonn.

<sup>13</sup> I. Koryś (2009), *Kobiety-migrantki. Warunki udanej integracji*, Warszawa, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> A. Winiarska (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

A considerable number of Vietnamese people come to Poland with their families.<sup>15</sup> Usually, husbands living in Poland are later joined by their wives and children. Nevertheless, men are the dominant group of Vietnamese immigrants, constituting two thirds of the Vietnamese population in Poland. Due to traditional family and household obligations, Vietnamese women feel more attached to their country.

### Vietnamese female immigrants

The situation of women living in Vietnamese communities in Poland appears to be more complex than the situation of men regardless of whether they come to Poland alone, with their family or friends. A Vietnamese woman who has children, faces a number of challenges connected with the regulation of the immigration status, a decision about separation from her children and leaving them under the care of strangers. The situation of those women in the labour market is more complicated too. They face negative biases against employing women and immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

Vietnamese women who have their family and friends in Poland can count on their assistance in finding a job, accommodation, and resolving every-day difficulties. Women are subject to the acculturation pressure to a lesser extent than men as most women do not need to speak any other language than Vietnamese.

Recent research<sup>17</sup> demonstrates that Vietnamese women, because of their roles at home, are more attached to their native language and conduct patterns than men. Frequently, Vietnamese women are less fluent in Polish and are dependent on their husbands, family, and friends. Usually, they are not strongly motivated to learn Polish because they are not required to be fluent in Polish at work and, in their every-day life, they are usually in touch with people of their own nationality. That applies to women from the second immigration wave but also from the first wave. Only graduates of Polish universities from the first wave of immigrants and their children, who were brought up in Poland, can speak good or fluent Polish, and that is true both in the case of men and women.

Major difficulties which are faced by Vietnamese female immigrants are related to balancing their employment duties and family responsibilities. The majority of them left Vietnam to work, to improve their own and family situation. Both single and married Vietnamese women take jobs which they have to reconcile with daily chores at home. Cleaning, laundering, washing dishes, babysitting, cooking, and shopping take much time, as required by the Vietnamese tradition. While in Vietnam, it is a man who is responsible for earning the family living. Female immigrants,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> I. Koryś (2009), *Kobiety-migrantki...*, p. 1; A. Titkow, D. Duch-Krzysztożek, B. Budrowska (2004), *Nieodpłatna praca kobiet*, Warszawa.

<sup>17</sup> A. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2007), *Od zbiorowości do społeczności: rola migrantów osiedleńczych w tworzeniu się społeczności imigranckich w Polsce*, Centre of Migration Research, Faculty of Economic Sciences, UW, Warszawa.

however, must both have a paid job and manage family responsibilities at home. In richest families, both spouses have jobs and employ a babysitter or a person who looks after their house or flat. It is not rare that children are raised by grandparents who come from Vietnam especially for that purpose.

As in all emigration cases, there also instances when emigration is for women a way to escape conflicts, tensions in their families, or a crisis after the end of a relationship or marriage.<sup>18</sup> Going abroad is an opportunity to start a new life.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE YOUNGEST GENERATION OF VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANTS: THE THIRD GROUP

As it is usually the case with economic immigrants, that group of Vietnamese people in Poland is young and 73% of that population is 20 to 49 years old. Thus they are in working age. About 12% of that group is 19 years old and younger, and only 4% is over 60 years old. At the same time, research done suggests that there is a direct relation between the duration of contact with Polish cultural models and changes in beliefs about what is right and what is wrong. With time, the foreign (destination country) normative system begins to be accepted and even considered to be a better one. For women, as they admit it less or more openly, it appears to be more attractive, favourable and comfortable. The second generation of immigrants and subsequent generations often have their own cultural specificity and their own strategies of living and integrating.<sup>20</sup> Differences between generations in the Vietnamese minority are considerable when it comes to accepted norms. Traditions cultivated by older generations are far less important to young people although they are not able to avoid the pressure of their families. Their perception of the role of women is different too. Out of necessity, the patriarchal model of a Vietnamese family has eroded to an extent, particularly in the second generation. That model can hardly be reconciled with the role of a working woman who has to work hard as all female labour immigrants do in Poland.

#### Identity dilemmas

Identity is best described as “all self-defining acts of a human agent”.<sup>21</sup> Teresa Halik asks the following questions pertaining to the identity of the Vietnamese living in Poland:

Deliberations on the ways of identity forming can be summarised in a simple conclusion expressed in the question: who am I? Undoubtedly, members of the Vietnamese community will have one answer: “A Vietnamese!”. What does it mean, however, to be a Vietnamese? What is the measure

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<sup>18</sup> I. Koryś (2009), *Kobiety-migrantki...*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the Vietnamese identity? Is it the same in the case of a Vietnamese child raised and educated in a community in which the Vietnamese culture is not the dominant one and in the case of his or her parents?<sup>22</sup>

Differences in the length of stay in Poland and in the time of arrival to the destination country in one's personal lifeline are causes of significant differences in identity choices in the Vietnamese diasporas. And again, the division into the three aforementioned categories appears to be relevant. Those whom we include into the first wave of immigrants (who arrived in Poland as students) describe themselves as "a Polish Vietnamese", "Vietnamese Poles", and "a Vietnamese with the Polish soul"<sup>23</sup>. The Vietnamese of the second wave, however, would not describe themselves in the same categories. Those who have come to Poland only to earn and save money and do not plan their future in Poland, have no doubts concerning their Vietnamese identity and consider themselves to be the Vietnamese without any adjectives or other qualifiers. What deserves special attention is the identity situation of the third group, that is of people who were born or/and raised in Poland. Some research on Vietnamese students who belong to the third group was done.<sup>24</sup> The survey covered only students who completed at least part of their education at Polish schools: a primary school, a lower secondary school, or an upper secondary school. The objective of choosing such a sample was to select persons who, despite coming from Vietnamese families, have to a certain extent been subject to social adaptation to the Polish culture which affected them *via* the education system. The collected material consisted of seventeen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young people who arrived in Poland at the age of 2 years at the earliest and at the age of 14 years at the latest. It was assumed that the impact of Polish schools and Polish friends was considerable in their case. That assumption seemed to be justified in the light of arguments of psychologists according to whom adolescence is the period particularly important for the formation of one's identity and self-image.<sup>25</sup> Szymańska quotes comments of her interviewees which, in her opinion, suggest that the Vietnamese identity is considered to be an "optional" feature and not an "ascribed" one, and thus one which is attainable but also one that can be lost. Such an interpretation of the concept in question can be inferred from comments of the persons interviewed, according to whom an individual may both "become a Vietnamese" and drop out from that category, i.e. lose their "Vietnamese identity". "In that sense, being born a Vietnamese is not a factor which determines being a Vietnamese for the entire life of a given person".<sup>26</sup> A personal individual decision or an act of will becomes the most

<sup>22</sup> T. Halik (2004), *Nowe podejście...*

<sup>23</sup> I. Koryś (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> G. Szymańska, *Tożsamość etniczna studentów wietnamskich wychowanych w Polsce*, in: E. Nowicka, S. Łodziński (ed.) (2006), *Kulturowe wymiary imigracji do Polski*, Warszawa.

<sup>25</sup> E.H. Erikson (1959) *Identity and the Life Cycle. Selected Papers*, New York [Polish translation: *Tożsamość a cykl życia*, Poznań 2005].

<sup>26</sup> G. Szymańska (2006), *Tożsamość etniczna...*, p. 285.

important factor in reflecting on one's identity, which makes thinking about one-self close to Bauman's concept of a liquid identity without any stable determinants<sup>27</sup>. The conclusion drawn from the analysis of interviews with Vietnamese students who as children and teenagers attended Polish schools (socialisation) is that their national/ethnic identity is complex, non-uniform, and multi- or at least bi-cultural. It is striking that in opinions of young Vietnamese people about ethnicity of their peers, there is the tendency to describe their peers referring to the quality or state of being both Polish and Vietnamese, i.e. a person can be simultaneously called a "Vietnamese" and a "Pole". The Vietnamese identity, however, concerns a different level of reflection or awareness than the Polish identity of an individual who can feel comfortable a Pole but at the same time cannot "sign off" from being a Vietnamese. The fact of being born of Vietnamese parents, being culturally competent and feeling comfortable in both systems of cultural codes, all define the Vietnamese identity of that group which is complex. The trouble is rooted in the multilayered thinking about the Vietnamese identity. Although that identity, according to the interviewees, is a matter of choice, it is not acceptable to refer to a person born to Vietnamese parents in a different way (e.g. a Pole). Such a person is described as "a Vietnamese who does not feel being a Vietnamese". In the analysis of that type of ethnic identity, constructivist categories of ethnicity<sup>28</sup>, which provide for its free choice by an individual, are insufficient to determine one's Vietnamese identity. Other culturally acquired but also substantial elements are needed too.<sup>29</sup>

The way in which young Vietnamese people think of themselves has also been shaped by their and Poles' perception of each other. Both Polish and Vietnamese communities treat each other as profoundly different not only in cultural but also in physical terms. The survey from 2000 (designed by Ewa Nowicka and Teresa Halik and carried out on a representative nationwide sample by the OBOP, a public opinion research institute) revealed that in response to the question "What are Vietnamese people like?", a substantial group of respondents (14.3%) mentioned characteristics associated with their physical distinctness: "a different look", "racial distinctness", "short stature", "slanted eyes", and "yellow skin colour".<sup>30</sup>

Vietnamese people living among Poles have no doubt that they are perceived as different by Poles and notice their distinctness themselves.

Among acquired elements of cultural competence, i.e. not ascribed at birth, which determine one's Vietnamese identity is the ability to speak the native Vietnamese language. What is more, for the Vietnamese, speaking Polish and not Vietnamese as one's first language seems to be decisive about moving to the ethnic category of

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<sup>27</sup> Z. Bauman (1993), *Ponowoczesne wzory osobowe*, "Studia Socjologiczne" No. 2.

<sup>28</sup> A.D. Smith (1991), *National Identity*, London.

<sup>29</sup> S. Ossowski (1939), *Więź społeczna i dziedzictwo krwi*, Warszawa.

<sup>30</sup> E. Nowicka, *Wietnamczycy w oczach Polaków*, in: M. Kempny, G. Woroniecka (ed.) (2003), *Wymiary globalizacji kulturowej. Wyzwania badawcze*, Olsztyn, pp. 184-195.

Poles. “Those little kids, you know, are simply Poles [...]. My sister is also like that, 15 years old, she is already also such a Pole, isn’t she?”<sup>31</sup>

Having analysed comments of her interviewees and using the emic concept, Szymańska introduces the category of “atypical” Vietnamese people to describe those who were raised in Poland, have lively contacts mainly with Polish people, and feel their own specificity. The above distinguishes them from “typical” Vietnamese people raised in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that those “atypical” Vietnamese people come from families of “typical” Vietnamese people. What is more, their development as children was constantly influenced by their “typical” families which remain a permanent reference point also in their adult life. Thus, young Vietnamese people raised in the Polish environment by their “typical” Vietnamese families are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to adhering to values which cannot be practically reconciled. They face expectations and requirements of their “typical” Vietnamese families (mainly their parents) and, at the same time, they are constantly “beleaguered” by the Polish community. Young Vietnamese people live at the crossroads of two cultures which profoundly differ from each other. They are beleaguered by two languages, two normative systems, and two models of thinking about family and society.<sup>33</sup>

The “atypical” young Vietnamese overtly resent characteristics attributed to “typical” Vietnamese people.

“A skinny man, very polite, always elegantly dressed [...] he lacks assertiveness.”<sup>34</sup>

[The] young Vietnamese do not meet the criteria characteristic of “post-modern figures”. The freedom of choosing one’s place in the social system within which they function, i.e. in the Polish society, is limited. And this is not due to economic factors pushing them to the margin of the consumer reality, which Bauman would agree to consider.<sup>35</sup>

The majority of students surveyed are people in a good and very good financial situation. The factor that cannot be eliminated and which limits the freedom of Vietnamese students in choosing their place in the reality of the immigrant community is, in their opinion, “a social stigma” attached to their physical distinctness in the immigrant society.<sup>36</sup>

The reflective nature of the identity of Vietnamese students studying in Poland is striking. Having been brought up in two cultures simultaneously, they cannot confine to a mechanistic, “obvious” relation towards none of them. They must define their position and make choices in situations in which it is impossible to be culturally

<sup>31</sup> G. Szymańska (2006), *Tożsamość etniczna...*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>33</sup> P. Majkut, *Strategie adaptacyjne wietnamskich licealistów w Warszawie*, in: E. Nowicka (ed.) (2011), *Blaski i cienie imigracji. Problemy cudzoziemców w Polsce*, Warszawa, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> G. Szymańska (2006), *Tożsamość etniczna...*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*

both a Vietnamese and a Pole. Those positions differ much from each other despite the fact that the social situation of individuals does not differ much. Grażyna Szymańska-Matusiewicz has identified several types of identity choices which manifest themselves in different configurations of attitudes towards Vietnamese and Polish cultures. The emerging picture of the attitude towards different elements of the Vietnamese culture is not uniform. One of the interviewees has said that

he will try to instil into his children the Vietnamese respect for elders and associated customs e.g. eating meals together. At the same time, he is put off by the way in which, in his opinion, the Polish youth spends its free time. That is why he says that he will not allow his children, especially daughters, to go to discos. He justifies that declaration by saying “the Polish youth scares me.”

The interviewee is willing to accept a number of important elements in his own life. We may presume that the affirmation of the above described rigorous upbringing system, despite his negative personal experience reported in his other comments, is a reaction to the “situation of uncertainty and confusion” which he experiences now.<sup>37</sup> While describing such an identity choice, Szymańska-Matusiewicz argues that a Vietnamese while

construing their identity between the world of strict and, to an extent, oppressive parents and the community of the Polish youth described as self-promoting or spoiled, is inclined to choose the rigorous normative system which gives that person a sense of stability and security.

In her interpretation of such an identity choice, Szymańska-Matusiewicz refers to the concept of authoritarian personality. Authoritarian attitudes are typical in particular of those persons who, during their socialisation, experienced hierarchical systems and rigorous upbringing. Those elements, in fact, are present in the Vietnamese culture and, according to scholars studying that cultural area, have their roots in the Confucian tradition. Thus the bi-cultural nature of the interviewees’ situation, their confusion and normative uncertainty may all contribute to their high level of fear. That fear is the foundation of authoritarianism of highly educated people and results in them looking for support in a culture providing rigorous and clear norms of conduct like the traditional Vietnamese culture. To the above interpretation one may add the search for one’s embedding in a community. That may but does not have to be related to the authoritarian attitude in a situation where one’s own identity, which is culturally close to the Polish identity, diverges from an asymmetrical description of a Vietnamese in invariably unambiguous categories of physical differences. In that situation, it is impossible to overcome barriers to any identity change. It is worth noting that choices between being a Pole and being a Vietnamese and all constructs

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<sup>37</sup> G. Szymańska-Matusiewicz, *Tożsamość narodowa w calokształcie tożsamości jednostki. Portrety czterech studentów wietnamskich wychowanych w Polsce*, in: E. Nowicka-Rusek (ed.) (2011), *Blaski i cienie migracji...*

combining the two are manifested in family relations. One can be fully or partially accepted or rejected.

Another identity model identified by Szymańska-Matusiewicz is the “Vietnamese cosmopolitanism”. It is a model referring to postmodern individualism. At its core is the rejection of the rigorous and hierarchical system of family relations based on limiting children’s freedom by their parents. That is clearly an identity model of choice, i.e. one which is construed and not given or instituted. Politeness and respect for tradition approved of by the above quoted interviewee of Szymańska-Matusiewicz are in her interpretation not related to the acceptance of family hierarchy. To a person who has that type or kind of identity, the national/ethnic identity is not central to the comprehensive identity of an individual, giving way to identity components related to education and professional work, social position and individual interests. That individual identity model is close to Bauman’s model of “a tourist” who takes advantage of his or her borderland (crossroad) migrant status. An individual (a young Vietnamese person in that case) keeps building his or her identity in opposition to elements of the Vietnamese tradition and the critically assessed characteristics of the Polish and, more broadly, Western society.

The third type of the identity model or construct is “an individualistic intellectual”. In that construct the attitude towards the Polish and Vietnamese cultures is also conditioned by attitudes to concepts of family relations. An individualistic intellectual adheres to a external position to both cultural worlds which he or she explores. The result is a balanced and critical approach to both cultures.

“Polish people think that once they are eighteen, their parents have truly nothing to say. Whereas we, or at least I, I prefer to speak for myself rather than in general, I have a feeling that sometimes they do have some wisdom and it is worth listening to what they have to say.”<sup>38</sup> I would interpret the above respondent’s comment as an expression of his intellectual distancing and not of being torn as Szymańska does: “I have friends but I do not know if they fully understand me. I have a family but I also do know if they fully understand me.”

That young male interviewee is in somewhat isolated from the Vietnamese culture. He, alone, without his mother’s help is not able to understand Vietnamese poetry so his Vietnamese language skills are limited and this cuts him off from the “typical Vietnamese culture” which is the “core” culture<sup>39</sup>. This individualised intellectual or intellectual individual accepts, to an extent, the Polish perspective while building his national/ethnic identity, a component of which is his fascination with Eastern philosophies. In addition, he compares his own plans for the future with plans of many “other Poles”, as he puts it. In fact, that last phrase undermines the full “Vietnamese” identity of the interviewee.

<sup>38</sup> G. Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2011), *Tożsamość narodowa...*

<sup>39</sup> E. Nowicka, *Polskość niejedno ma imię. Polacy za wschodnią granicą państwa polskiego*. in: M. Głowacka-Grajper, R. Wyszynski (eds) (2011), *Polska inteligencja na Wschodzie*, Warszawa, pp. 34-54.

In all cases identified, the impact of the Vietnamese culture has been exerted by the family home of the interviewees, friends of their parents and of their own friends, the entirety of the Vietnamese community in Poland, both institutionalised and not, and by Vietnam's culture in its original form during visits in Vietnam. The interviewees have had contacts with the Polish culture both at school and in every-day life. Their chosen identity configurations vary, which can be attributed to more individual psychological factors.

According to already quoted Teresa Halik, despite the variety of identity strategies, their first choice is to define themselves as Vietnamese people, totally disregarding the option that they could be recognised as Poles. Such a qualification is automatic also in the case of researchers. The selection of respondents for all types of surveys among Vietnamese people in Poland conducted by me and my colleagues and doctoral students was based on criteria which we found obvious, i.e. related not to the conventional but substantial criteria, to use Stanisław Ossowski's terminology<sup>40</sup>. That level of obviousness is at "the bottom" of both scholars' and respondents' reasoning.

Those who have lived in Poland for many years and came here to study as very young people can be described in the categories of a layered identity.<sup>41</sup>

Vietnam is my homeland but I do not live there anymore, so Vietnam issues are foreign to me. You understand, when one does not live in the society there, their problems do not concern me. But, on the other hand, I live in Poland and everyone asks me: What is new over there in your country? What is the news in your Vietnam? Thus here, I am not a Pole in that sense, am I?<sup>42</sup>

### The acculturation process of young men and women

It is not without a reason that all persons portrayed by Szymańska-Matusiewicz as people who particularly clearly present they approach to Vietnamese and Polish cultures are men.<sup>43</sup> When analysing the ways of construing or conceptualising one's own national identity in the Vietnamese community, one can notice that this issue is more rarely and less analysed and disputed by Vietnamese women than by men. The reasons for that situation can be found in the specificity of the Vietnamese culture, in which women, and in particular young and single women, are to a much greater extent tied to "their family home space"<sup>44</sup> which limits their contacts with peers and with the community external to their homes in general.<sup>45</sup> It is striking that only four

<sup>40</sup> S. Ossowski (1939), *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> E. Nowicka, *Obcy wśród nas. Afrykanie w Polsce*, in: M. Bucholc, S. Mandes, T. Szawiel, J. Wawrzyniak (eds), *Polska po 20 latach wolności*, Warszawa, pp. 422-439.

<sup>42</sup> A. Winiarska (2011), *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> G. Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2011), *Tożsamość narodowa...*

<sup>44</sup> Ngo Thi Thanh Binh, *The Four Confucian Feminine Virtues*, in: L. Drummond, H. Rydstrom (eds) (2004), *Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam*, Singapur.

<sup>45</sup> G. Szymańska (2006), *Tożsamość etniczna...*

of fifteen Polish-Vietnamese married couples studied by Aleksandra Winiarska were those of a Vietnamese woman and a Polish man, while the other 11 were those of Vietnamese men and Polish women.<sup>46</sup> The lack of symmetry in the sample of the families studied resulted from difficulties in finding couples in which the wife was a Vietnamese woman married to her Polish husband. The number of men among Vietnamese students has been higher than that of women. However, it is also easier for a man than a woman to go beyond their ethnic group while planning their life, and women tend to be more “protected” by the close-knit ethnic community ties. In addition, as observations suggest, girls in Vietnamese families are given much less freedom in their social life and their every-day life is more controlled. In one of the couples studied, the Vietnamese woman was met by her now Polish husband in Vietnam. Her wedding to her Polish husband was preceded by difficult efforts to obtain the consent of her family and the wedding ceremony was agreed to be accompanied by all traditional Vietnamese rituals.<sup>47</sup> In general, it is noticeable that Vietnamese traditions are present in Polish-Vietnamese homes where the wife is a Vietnamese. Maintaining customs and passing on traditions are mainly the woman’s tasks. Vietnamese husbands, even if they attach importance to Vietnamese customs, remain passive and do not take any actions in that regard, thus one may suppose that they do feel a need to act in that respect. Some Polish wives of Vietnamese men conclude that it is their task to sustain Vietnamese values of their husbands, although for Polish wives Vietnamese customs have usually only an aesthetic value.

The situation of female and male immigrants from the labour immigration wave is different. For a working Vietnamese woman, it is difficult to meet all requirements of her traditional culture. Raising children and doing housework are still considered to be the exclusive domain of women and thus a female Vietnamese immigrant finds it problematic to balance her traditional duties with her job. The situation of immigrant single women, in particular single mothers, is even more complicated. If they do not have anyone close in Poland, finding a job is much more difficult. A young Vietnamese woman says openly:

There are less Vietnamese women in Poland because boys more often decide to emigrate and improve their status. It is also easier for them. Women are, for sure, physically weaker. But I can tell you that many such single women come here; they come alone and are later joined by their children. Men immigrate more often. There is also a discussion at home: who will take better care of children and who knows more about earning money. It is a calculation.

Working in retail, which makes one leave home early in the morning or even in the middle of the night, makes it difficult to reconcile family roles with professional responsibilities. Vietnamese women speak about it too.

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<sup>46</sup> A. Winiarska (2011), *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem.*

In my opinion, being a working mother highly disturbs family life. I have heard that when the market at the stadium was opened, women usually had to leave home at 3 or 4 in the morning and their children were left at home for the whole day. And later such parents feel guilty and that is why they give a lot of money to their children.

A female interviewee whose father came to Poland as a scholarship student blames working parents for not having time for their children. It happens also that Vietnamese parents send their children to Polish families in the countryside to be raised there for some time. Only the richest hire a Polish nanny or, more rarely, a Ukrainian one. The priority, i.e. earning money during their stay in Poland, often creates extreme conditions for bringing up children, including infants, who are neglected and treated as an obstacle to family happiness rather than its source. Polish babysitters hired by Vietnamese parents speak about it with disapproval. A young woman justifies that situation as follows:

That is such a hard-working nation that they will always find a job. Even when their journey is one month long and exhausting and they cross the green border illegally, they are at work on the following day and there is really no difference whether it is a man or a woman. Besides, some of them have come here to improve their life, so it would be silly that they come and do nothing.

Young Vietnamese women studying in Poland have other life aspirations that the role traditionally ascribed to a woman in Vietnam:

I also know a Vietnamese woman who graduated from a university and studied also abroad but returned to Poland and got married. Her husband works in retail and she joined him at work. It is a pity because her mother spent a lot of money on those studies abroad and now she works in retail. It does not make much sense. I would not like it.

Also mothers, who work in shopping centres, do not want their daughters to do what they do.

My parents always tell me that they work so hard for my life to be easier. So that I would not have to work in retail as they do because it is hard work. That is why they always tell me to study because then, they think, I will have a good job.

The collective entity of strictly economic immigrants from the 1990s and the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. is not interested in the Polish culture. They are oriented towards maintaining their Vietnamese traditions and ties with Vietnam. The situation of women born to Vietnamese people who came to Poland as students (the first wave) is totally different from the situation of women of the second wave of (economic) immigration. That applies also to young men but the role of a woman is more threatened with change as regards the Vietnamese tradition. The earlier immigrants – the less traditional and more acculturated ones – are mainly those who married Polish women and largely resigned from passing their Vietnamese culture to their children.

In the case of Vietnamese people who have lived in Poland for a longer time, the traditional and rigid division between the private sphere (home) and the exter-

nal public sphere blurs. In result, the clear division between female and male roles breaks down. However, while women do enter the sphere once reserved for men, men take on female roles in domestic life much more rarely. Thus the workload and responsibilities of Vietnamese women at home do not change even though they perform other roles too.

Requirements of Vietnamese and Polish cultures affect young Vietnamese women simultaneously, and that refers to both women raised in Poland, i.e. daughters of former Vietnamese students who settled in Poland, and women who have lived in Poland for some time and came to Poland with their parents with the economic immigration wave. A Vietnamese woman summarised her situation in the following way:

“It is an adaptation to a given culture, to a place where one lives. And thus people try to somehow combine those cultures: the Vietnamese and the Polish one.” Some young women say openly: “Well, and I accept this system. I am almost as if I was born in Poland so I definitely want to work and earn a senior position, so I would like him to accept that.” “I do not want to be some stay-at-home housewife. There should be an equal division of tasks at home. I want to work at a bank and not to take care of the house only.”

### **Attractiveness of Polish culture**

To young Vietnamese women, Polish reality appears to be much more attractive than their native Vietnamese one. In the interviews, they frequently spoke about positive aspects of the Polish culture while criticising the Vietnamese approach to certain issues that results from the tradition largely rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism. The women surveyed did not pass overall judgements on the Polish or Vietnamese culture. Instead, they spoke about some expectations about them in both cultural traditions. They did not consent to the established roles of women in the Vietnamese tradition and accepted Polish standards of task division between the sexes. Being well aware of expectations about the Vietnamese woman, they preferred to perceive themselves in the categories and roles which Poles assign to women, highlighting the value of individual development, life satisfaction and some timid hedonism. Although the female respondents underlined that for them and their parents maintaining their Vietnamese identity was important, they did not agree with the expectations which they as women were to meet. They had a feeling that their aspirations changed if compared to women who spent most of their life in Vietnam. Their individualisation through the pursuit of one's own personal ambitions, passions and goals contradicts the collectivist perception of family and kinship as the major point of reference when it comes to values and assessments. A manifestation of the above is them rebelling against the control of those young women's life by the family and by parents in particulars. The ideal of a Vietnamese woman who is submissive, calm, quiet, always smiling, modest, compliant, passive, and who always agrees with her husband, is no longer attractive. A young Vietnamese female respondent pointed to various aspects of attitude transformations:

Polish women are certainly more independent. Vietnamese women, to accentuate the pitfall, are actually perceived as a property of men. In Poland, people are taught to be very self-confident, so women in Poland are more self-confident and usually do what they want to do. When I was in Vietnam, there were women who were good students but in general had little self-confidence. They were pretty but they were never taught to speak out aloud, express their opinions, look into other people's eyes, and so on. That did not change when they looked for a job. They did not believe that they could find it and, in general, they are very pessimistic in every respect. Despite the fact that many women are very intelligent. But they were taught not to answer back to their senior, and so on. The reason for such a belittling of women is that a woman must always take care of the man, and his needs always come before hers and that it is a man who chooses his female partners. And in Poland, the tendency is opposite. Many women pick up men.

According to the Vietnamese, some young Vietnamese women start to behave in the same way as Polish women do.

Because of such acculturative changes, the majority of young Vietnamese women raised in Poland cannot envisage them returning to Vietnam for good. "My parents want me very much to return. And I do not really fit into the Vietnamese society and its culture there." The respondent presumes that, in Vietnam, old habits are impossible to break: "Because as I see it, a woman in Vietnam should be more the traditional woman, a housewife. And I will never get used to that. Besides, I would not like to get used to it. I told my parents that, at most, I can ...". That pause at the end of the comment indicates some concession to Vietnamese habits, but it remains unarticulated. In the end, the woman invokes an economic argument: "In addition, earnings in Vietnam are five times lower than in Poland. The standard of living is also different. Everything costs less. There is a difference." The respondent has some plans for the future and Poland is not her ultimate choice: "In the future, I would like to live in some place close to Asia, in Singapore or Australia, so that I can visit my parents from time to time". This is an example of a peculiar combination of values which is relatively common among young Vietnamese women living in Poland. They reject, if only in part, Vietnamese cultural norms concerning women and men; they accept the cultural distinctness of Vietnam; and they are attached to their families even if they emigrate (that refers not only to Poland). A similar opinion was expressed by another Vietnamese woman:

"Family is important, it is about respect for another person. But not staying in one place and approving of everything means a growth ... To develop, to educate oneself, to see the world and how other people live and what their dreams are, that is very interesting. Also to help others as much as one can". She cautiously adds: "Of course not at any cost, not to lose oneself. All within reason. But not to stay in one place and be part of a 'grey mass' as other people do. Not to listen only to what they say next door and not to... One simply has to be open and to be active in life to feel it." The long time immigrant analyses the situation of Vietnamese people in Poland drawing on her own experience: "the childhood conditioning is very strong and so subconscious that one cannot overcome it but I think it is worth the effort. Because people can do that. They are not animals living by their instincts. People are self-aware and should make their choices in order to experience and enjoy life as much as possible because time passes so quickly. I have lived here for 20 years already I feel as if I arrived only yesterday. People [more] regret what they have not done than what they did."

The Vietnamese youth observe young Polish people having fun and want to do the same. However, they almost never totally exclude them going back to Vietnam at some point in life.

### Children as a value

Having children is undoubtedly important to Vietnamese families and women decide to have a child as soon as possible. All women emphasise that they would like to have children and none of the young women interviewed had any doubts about that.

Vietnamese women want to have children because for them a child is a gift. So they give birth to children. There are very few women in my age who do not have children. All of them have two or three kids. Some decide to have the second child too late and there are problems but they keep trying because that is the purpose behind earning money. If you do not have children, then what all of this is for... It is true, you can travel, but children are a real gift and I believe so myself. If I had right conditions, I would want to have kids too. You pass on your genes, your children inherit them, and there is more fun and joy in the family. When you are older, your grandchildren will come to visit you and there will be joy at home. So if only for that reason, it is worth it.

Children are the continuators of the family and they are obliged to take care of old parents. It is the fulfilment of the obligation which has its roots in the Confucian tradition. Young immigrants spoke about it too.

Vietnamese families, especially those with a tradition, simply must have children, and those children are considered a gift. They are a gift and everybody believes that if a young couple has children then it is a gift from heaven. And if a woman is not able to give birth to a child, it means that something happened and the couple is punished for it. So it is very desirable to have children. And few people decide not to have children, that they do not want to have children. It seems to me that there are less such women than, for example, in Poland.

In practice, however, the number of children (two or three) depends on the living conditions of immigrants.

The hierarchy of the sexes is important in this context too. It is still important that one of the children is a boy who will be the continuator of the family. That is why parents of two and three girls often want to have more children:

"I would like to have two or three children. But I would definitely want my first child to be a boy. If I have one, the sex of the next one does not matter." When asked: "Why?", the female respondent says that: "Because that is the Vietnamese tradition which I have inherited, that there should be a boy. On the other hand, there are only boys at the university and I am the only girl in the group. And I have noticed that all men who have an older sister are less masculine. I have seen it that if a boy is first, it's great." The same wish is repeatedly mentioned in other interviews: "I would like to have a boy, and then a girl, because I have always wanted to have an older brother. And I would like to have two children". In addition, young Vietnamese women pay attention to preferences of their husbands: "It is very important for a father to have a son."

There are sayings in Vietnam: “A daughter is worth less than 2 hens” and “Ten daughters mean less than one son”.<sup>48</sup> Boys are treated as parents’ old-age insurance. Traditionally, it is the son’s duty to stay in the family house and take care of his father and mother, while daughters leave home when they get married. Although today daughters help their parents in the same way as sons do, Vietnamese people still do not consider the two sexes equal, which is related to their patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal system.

In Vietnamese families living in Poland, no person is indicated to be the head of the family, thus living abroad contributes to the emergence of a new model. However, it is meaningful that in interviews with young women, it was never mentioned that a woman was the head of a family despite emphasising the egalitarian model of family relations. A working female immigrant breaks with the Vietnamese tradition usually for economic reasons and she continues to work during pregnancy until the time of delivery. It is also rare for a woman to give up her job once she gives birth to a child. She returns to work as quickly as possible, while the infant is taken care of either by grandparents who also live in Poland or by a hired babysitter. It also happens that she takes her children with her to work. One of the young women from the second generation of immigrants commented on that as follows:

Vietnamese children. Vietnamese children... Now, in the new generation, Vietnamese children are very spoiled. Because parents, in particular in Poland, work at the market at the stadium or in some other place, and they have no time at all to take care of their children. That is why parents usually give their children a lot of money and they buy what they want.

Gradually, young Vietnamese women raised in Poland start thinking differently about having children and that includes having children not necessarily shortly after the wedding. Women want to provide their children with better living but also to enjoy their own life. Vietnamese immigrants of the first wave have followed the traditional family model and try to impose it on their children. The situation among the second-wave immigrants is different. However, all parents still believe that they have the right to participate in decisions about their children’s marriage and that refers not only to daughters. Young women are not able to ignore the will of their parents although they often rebel against it secretly.

I got married at the age of 23. My parents knew that I had been dating my present husband for some time and insisted on us getting married, saying that it was the right time. It is an element of the Vietnam culture that a woman should get married to have children. My parents wanted to have grandchildren very much.

In the past, matchmaking was common practice in Vietnam. I have observed the same phenomena also in the Vietnamese community in Poland. Such activities, however, are carefully camouflaged and kept secret from Poles and even in the Vietnamese community.

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<sup>48</sup> Xuan Phuong, Danièle Mazingarbe (2001) *Ao dai: du couvent des Oiseaux a la jungle du Viet-Minh*, Paris [Polish translation: *Niepokorna córka*, Warszawa 2003].

It is also symptomatic that young female interviewees are reluctant to marry Vietnamese men:

“I would prefer to marry a Polish man. Vietnamese men are rude. At first they are so loveable but after they get married, they will cheat, lie and do nothing”. Another comment is very similar: “A daughter should be gentle, loving, kind (mocking tone), and take care of everyone. She should know how to cook, in particular Vietnamese dishes. That is extremely important. She should also take care of her husband and family and, in general, be a perfect housewife. That is the ideal girl. And a man... in general, a perfect man should earn money and that is the only thing which is required of him because otherwise they only drink, play cards and are rude.” Being aware of and rejecting the following is also common: “Vietnamese people always believe that if you are a Vietnamese woman you must marry a Vietnamese man and vice versa. They say that later, cultural differences matter and [other] marriages are unhappy and can fall apart. My parents always tell me to marry a Vietnamese man and not a Pole, but I do not think so.” As one Vietnamese woman wrote on her blog: “In paradise, your wife is a Vietnamese woman. In hell, your husband is a Vietnamese man”<sup>49</sup>.

#### FAMILY RELATIONS

The hierarchy based on age and sex criteria still prevails in Vietnamese families living in Poland. Vietnamese women reflect upon it and get emotional while talking about it. Relations between parents and children are based on subordination to older people. Older people are to be respected and obeyed, and this does not change with age. In relations between a mother and a daughter, a grandmother and a granddaughter, an aunt and a niece, and other related women, and even between older and young siblings<sup>50</sup>, no signs of hierarchy can be observed in phrases used.

In my opinion, in typical Vietnamese families the situation is different from the one in Polish families. For example, children must obey their parents and sometimes no discussion is possible because for parents it means talking back. In my case, for example, it is difficult to have any conversation or discussion with my parents. And this is so because they think that they are always right. Because they are experienced people; they have life experience. They think that they are always right and not their children, while sometimes the opposite is true.

A mother would usually instruct her daughter and give her guidelines only. A mother hardly talks with her daughter about her daughter's problems, and their relations are formal. Young women compare that with the situation in the Polish community:

“Recently I have talked with my friends and it seems to me that in Poland, people often talk with each other. In Poland, a mother often talks with her child about the child's romantic affairs and, generally, about any anything. In Vietnam, however, there is some hierarchy and, in general, parents talk with their children only about school, and the like. They never talk about feelings. Feelings are not a topic. It was very strange for my friends to learn that my parents do not know that

<sup>49</sup> Miss Saigon Blog, <http://saigon.blox.pl/2012/03/A-moze-Ho-Chi-Minh-tez-by-la-kobieta.html> [accessed: 12.06.2013].

<sup>50</sup> G. Szymańska (2006), *Tożsamość etniczna...*

I have friends or that I have a Polish boyfriend because the Vietnamese do not talk about things like that. If you introduce your boyfriend to your parents, it means that most probably he is your future husband. In Asia, a child and its parents interact much less with one another than in Poland.” Sometimes, because of their hard work in retail, parents have little contact with their children. “From time to time I watch TV with my parents and that is all. It is also because I have to study a lot. During the school year, I come back home very late and sometimes I even do not see my parents. I am back when they are already asleep and we do not see each other. And if we meet, it is usually at dinner in the evening and then if I watch TV, I watch it with them.”

Due to such relations between adults and children, their contacts are not always good. For Vietnamese children, who spend much time with their Polish peers, it is not always easy to accept complete subordination to and dependence on their parents at home. It is difficult to accept that they have no say. “Since I came to Poland 8 years ago, I have never been able to find a common ground with my parents. I mean talk with them openly.”

### **Men and women in and outside the family**

The traditional division of work between men and women changes if the only objective of an immigrant couple is to earn money when living in Poland. Also the choice of the future spouse is based on emotional criteria. Actually what matters is pragmatics. Vietnamese women admit that women in Europe are romantic in their spouse choices while women in Asia are more materialistic. An unemployed Vietnamese man does not have a chance to date a girl, not to mention marrying her.

Girls are taught to cook, sew and keep home clean. It is the daughter who performs the majority of simple domestic tasks at her family home. Young Vietnamese women see the difference between Poland and Vietnam:

When I came to Poland, I was a bit surprised that Polish children were not able to do that. But it was not that those were my duties at home but simply that girls were busy with some things and boys with different ones. That they would play with toy cars and so on.

Both little girls and young women are expected to smile, be happy and willing to help. Boys are more easily forgiven their misbehaviour which is explained with the fact that they are boys. They are allowed to be undisciplined and disobedient. A girl who forgets her good manners is made feel ashamed because she is not allowed to behave like that. A perfect woman is kind, happy, never gets angry, never raises her voice, is obedient, never confronts anyone her senior and agrees with them even if they are not right. She is unassuming, inconspicuous, and does not protest against what she does not like. Young Vietnamese women comment on that in following way:

A perfect son and daughter. Well, in Vietnam, surely there is the rule that one cannot answer back older people. So even if an older person is not right, you should not answer him or her back because that means that you are bad-mannered. Certainly, you should not, you cannot say anything rude to your parents.

### **Control over children**

Children in Vietnam families are under strictly control although the attitude towards boys is much more liberal than towards girls. Vietnamese parents attach great importance to the reputation of their daughters. Daughters are not allowed to come back home late and they always must say where, with whom, and for how long they want to go. A young Vietnamese woman comments upon it ironically:

“It would be best if I did not leave house at all. I can go out, but I always hear: ‘OK, so go’, said with resentment. I can go out from time to time but I must say where, with whom, what for, for how long, and when I will be back.” Older girls cannot live without guardians. “We, Vietnamese women, we cannot live alone, without parents, like you do. It is unthinkable for my parents that I would live with a girl who is my friend. In our Vietnamese culture, the norm is that young women live with their parents. Only when they get married, they can leave their family home. And women who live with a boyfriend or other unrelated Vietnamese people do not have a good reputation.”

I personally know stories of young Vietnamese girls who lived with their peers. Many Vietnamese people, both older and younger ones, considered those girls to be undisciplined and lacking self-respect. I have also heard negative opinions about their parents who were blamed for not taking good care of their daughters.

For the older generation it unacceptable that a Vietnamese girl from a good family swears, drinks alcohol or smokes cigarettes. In Poland, only few Vietnamese women smoke because it is disapproved of. It is in the culture that those who smoke are... but of course some women smoke; some of those raised in Poland. I do not know, I think it is a matter of culture that men have always smoked and women have not.

Some young Vietnamese women admit that occasionally they have a drink, a beer or smoke a cigarette. They cannot imagine, however, that their parents would find out about it as, most probably, they would be forbidden to leave home ever. Young girls should be busy learning. Generally, young women raised in Poland much more often prefer the European life style which provides them with more opportunities than the Asian one. In contrast, the older female generation, who lived most of their life in Vietnam, remains faithful to Vietnamese traditions and customs.

### **The value of education**

Nowadays, for Vietnamese parents, education of their children is most important. That refers to boys but also to daughters. Vietnamese parents see the future of their children in professions other than their own, that is not in a warehouse, in retail or in a restaurant. Education of children is the top priority for the family.

Our duty is to be very good students and make our parents proud. In fact, there are not many Vietnamese people in Warsaw and everyone knows one another. So when children are good students, they make their parents so proud. Education was hugely emphasised and much pressure was put on me and my brother. And, generally, there was much emphasis on work and so on.

In Poland, however, there are also very poor immigrants. Difficulties which their children have at school are mostly due to their low fluency in the Polish language. In result, they are made to help their families at work and their education is of lesser importance. It is a side effect of the situation where for immigrants their immediate economic gain is the top priority. This disturbs the traditional normative order and it is not so much a consequence of acculturation but of a specific socio-economic situation. Nevertheless, education of children is important to those families too, though, in their situation, it is an objective more difficult to implement. Today, all Vietnamese parents want their daughters to be well-educated too but not necessarily that they pursue their professional career. What Vietnamese immigrants still consider most important are the family and children as well as the continuation of generations while maintaining, to every possible extent, the Vietnamese tradition.

#### ABSTRACT

*The article presents the specific identity situation and acculturation processes pertaining to the young generation of the Vietnamese living in Poland since childhood. On the one hand, they spent the period of their early socialisation in Poland, went to Polish schools and their most frequent daily contacts were with their Polish peers while, on the other hand, they remained in the circle of their Vietnamese families so the milieu of Vietnamese friends and acquaintances and especially of their parents puts them under the psychological pressure of both cultures. They cannot completely ignore the demands of their families to which they feel attached but often they more highly value Polish cultural models which appeal especially to young women more than the Vietnamese ones. Young Vietnamese women find Polish culture attractive as it raises the woman's status shortening the distance between her traditional social roles and male roles. Vietnamese men and women differ significantly in their reactions to contacts with Polish culture although both adhere to stable elements of the Vietnamese tradition: strong ties with the family, the desire to have children as the greatest value and attributing some greater value to the birth of a boy than a girl.*