

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Acculturation of Young Vietnamese Women in Poland

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The article focuses on the adaptation and acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants in the Polish society. Specifically, it concentrates on the situation of young Vietnamese women. It is based on analysis of 22 regular interviews and supplementary informal conversations with young Vietnamese immigrants in Warsaw conducted between 2007 and 2012. The author stresses the psychological problems and internal conflicts brought about by the process of adapting to Polish ways of living and thinking. The researched group was composed of 1.5 and second generation of Vietnamese who either were born in Poland, or grew up here from an early age. The situation of these young people, in particular of young women, grows on profound differences between expectations addressed to them in the Vietnamese society from which they come from, and the Polish culture in which they chose to or must live. Many Vietnamese norms are deeply inculcated and internalised – for instance those connected with having children, especially sons or those connected with the higher position of the older generation. At the same time, young Vietnamese immigrants find various Polish normative solutions much more attractive and favourable, for instance giving more freedom to girls by Polish parents, equal relations between men and women (especially between spouses and between parents and children).

Keywords: Vietnamese migrants; young women migrants; acculturation; cultural change

The Vietnamese in Poland

The Vietnamese community is the largest immigrant group in Poland among the diaspora coming from non-European countries. However, there are serious difficulties in determining the group's numbers: at present, estimates oscillate around 30 000, in comparison with estimations of 35 000 around a decade ago (Halik, Nowicka 2002; Halik 2006; Lesińska 2014). The problem is that there are no official statistics on the number of illegal immigrants entering Poland. Figures in the 2011 census speak of about 4 000 people declaring themselves to be of Vietnamese nationality, including 3 000 declaring only Vietnamese and 1 000 people who declared themselves to have both Vietnamese and Polish nationality, with Vietnamese as the first (no one declared Vietnamese as a second nationality). Neither the Ministry of the Interior nor Polish Vietnamese associations accept these results, and both are more than sceptical about the accuracy of these numbers. The problem comes from the fact that Vietnamese people avoid the census researchers and see them as representing the Polish authorities. Some do so because of their illegal status, and others because of their

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illegal activities (Iglicka, Gmaj 2010). It should be emphasised that Vietnamese migrants in Poland are not political refugees; their migration is voluntary and is based on the hope of increasing their social status through the emigration.

Two waves can be distinguished in the Vietnamese migration to Poland, which differ in many social aspects. The Vietnamese called the 'first wave' came to Poland from the early 1950s onwards (Halik, Kosowicz, Marek 2009) as students of an international exchange programme, a system of aid for poorer socialist countries. Some of them – against the will of the communist authorities of their country – decided not to return to Vietnam. In 1986, this group founded the Vietnamese Socio-Cultural Association in Poland and started the publication of the periodical called *Van Viet*. The Vietnamese from this first wave are now middle-aged or elderly people, sometimes married to Polish spouses, usually with their own adult children. All of them are well educated, with fluency in Polish language and an excellent grasp of Polish history, and are immersed in Polish social life.

The 'second wave' consists of those economic migrants who came to Poland after the 1990s and were mainly engaged in trade and small catering. Those of the second wave – economic migration – can be characterised by low levels of interest in the Polish culture and integration with Polish society, although they are very well adapted in a practical sense, acting smoothly in doing their businesses. Rarely are they able to speak Polish fluently, so their knowledge of Polish social life is rather limited (Halik, Nowicka 2002; Grabowska 2010; Piłat 2012). This second wave of Vietnamese immigrants largely used earlier networks of family relations with the first-wave Vietnamese, who already had a stable position in Polish society. It is important to note that legal status, not always regulated in the case of Vietnamese migrants, at first influences the economic and professional adaptation of immigrants of the second/economic wave (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008; Wysińska 2012; Stefańska, Szulecka 2013).

In Poland, a country that 'sends' its citizens abroad rather than 'receiving' foreigners, the considerable immigrant group constituted by the Vietnamese has attracted the attention of scholars of various disciplines. There has been a recent interest in stereotypes of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland (Nowicka 2006), their ways of adaptation to the Polish social environment, and the diversity of identity strategies in different groups of the Vietnamese diaspora (Winiarska 2011; Szymańska 2006; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2011, 2013), as well as the functioning of Polish–Vietnamese marriages (Halik 2004; Winiarska 2011). This article focuses on Vietnamese adaptation and acculturation in Polish society, concentrating on the situation of young Vietnamese women, their opinions on relations inside the family, between children and parents, between spouses, and generally between men and women. It is important to take into account traditional Vietnamese gender roles, intergenerational contract/relations, and the institution of the family, marriage or the notion of filial piety as contrasting in many respects to the Polish aspects of social life (Halik, Nowicka, Połec 2006). Family structure is treated by Vietnamese people living both in Vietnam and in Poland as a crucial, absolutely stable institution, not affected by foreign influences, and the 'core' social element in Vietnamese culture (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2013; Grabowska 2005; Smolicz 1987). I focus on these particular aspects of differences between Vietnamese and Polish social life. Moreover, the research of Ewa Grabowska (2005) and Grażyna Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2013) indicates that Vietnamese immigrants in Poland as parents are more restrictive and more traditional than the same generation of parents living in Vietnam; this makes the situation of young Vietnamese women born or brought up in Polish reality especially difficult.

Vietnamese immigrants enter Polish society through the process of group adaptation, to a great extent closed in their own ethnic environment. Their social contacts with Poles are usually superficial, and cultural relations with Poland are usually limited. However, there are also some Vietnamese immigrants who have a very deep connection with the Polish culture and whose close contact extends to marrying Poles.

Internal division is also an *emic* category incumbent in Poland, as the first wave Vietnamese ‘ex-student’ group are also consciously distinct from the later wave (economic) – and they stress and affirm their specificity. They associate with similar migrants – their Vietnamese friends are mainly people who studied in Poland, and contacts with Vietnamese people who arrived later are seldom, and most often for economic reasons. We find this image in some interviewees’ declarations. They talk about economic migrants from Vietnam using the word ‘they’. As a 40-year-old man, twice married in Poland, belonging to the ‘first wave’ said, *They are a completely different line because they mainly come here to trade and set up restaurants, and I wanted to do something rather different, so we do not get along. Sometimes I buy something from them, sometimes I eat with them, and at the end there is no contact* (Winiarska 2011: 82). It is rare to hear about their dealings with the newcomers, exchange of services and mutual aid with them.

Some aspects of the differences between these two groups are demonstrated by the following statement from a young Vietnamese woman, the daughter of a ‘first-wave migrant’:

In my generation all Vietnamese studied very hard and we are now studying abroad or at a very prestigious university, but now it's a new generation of students who are very mediocre. So a lot has changed, they don't study too much. Previously it was a generation whose parents came for colleges, for example, my dad. Then for me the emphasis was on the study, and as it is now, most Vietnamese people come simply from Vietnam just to earn money...¹

Topic of the study and theoretical underpinning

The theoretical inspiration for this article comes from Malewska-Peyre’s observation analysing the process of changes in migrants’ values and behaviours affected by prolonged living in a foreign cultural environment (Boski, Jarymowicz, Malewska-Peyre 1992: 10). This article raises questions about the state of adaptation and acculturation in Polish society, as well as the type and model of identity and internal psychological conflicts among the young generation of Vietnamese female immigrants living in Warsaw and the city suburbs.

The concept of acculturation applied in this article is in accordance with the anthropological tradition (Redfield, Linton, Herskovits 1936; Spicer 1961) accepting the majority of contemporary psychological uses of the concept (Berry 2003, 2006). Acculturation is defined here not as every cultural and social change resulting from cultural contact, but only those changes that occur (1) during the life of an individual or a generation and (2) concerning crucial elements of the value system, affecting the rules and norms of interpersonal relations, which (3) may occur as the result of prolonged (not incidental) cultural contact. My concept of acculturation refers to both individual attitudes and values and to the changing social context (Fischer, Moradi 2001; Matsudaira 2006).

My theoretical inspiration is provided by studies which show how the age of entering into contact with a foreign culture, the possibility of secondary socialisation, and the intensity of contact are crucial factors of profound acculturation changes in an individual way of thinking and behaving (Matsudaira 2006). I am also applying a two-dimensional concept of cultural identity and competence of migrants (Sam 2000; Berry 2003; Phinney, Devich-Navarro 1997). The individual preferences, reflexivity and psychological functioning in both cultures are factors which I find very important in the process of adaptation and acculturation (Matsudaira 2006). Though in general terms I accept John Berry’s concept of acculturation, I do not agree with his theory, which neglects two different aspects, namely the conscious (reflective) and mechanical (not reflective) level of the process: ethnic identity on one hand, and cultural competence on the other, which do not need to agree in their tendency. A person may accept his/her Vietnamese ethnicity without any doubt but may reject particular elements of Vietnamese tradition. This is the case that I will elaborate in detail.

Methodology and the studied group

My research includes those young Vietnamese women who were either born in Poland or grew up here from an early age. It therefore excludes short-term migrants. The researched group consists of those young women who had the opportunity to participate in two different social orders: Vietnamese family and Polish schools. They have sometimes attended primary school, and sometimes high school and/or university.

The research method is purely qualitative, with 26 interviews collected between 2006 and 2012. The interviewees were Vietnamese women between 18 and 33 years of age, working or studying, four of them married (one to a Polish husband) and two with children. All interviews were conducted in Polish and all interviewees had a very good command of the Polish language. The young women interviewed talked voluntarily, so the interviews were long (between 45 and 90 minutes); all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted sometimes at the home of the interviewee, and more often in a coffee shop, school building or the place the interviewee worked. Interviewers were either one of my students (Aleksandra Winiarska, Grażyna Szymańska, Anna Małachowska) or myself. The three young interviewers were generally of the same age as the interviewees, which favoured the informal character of the conversation. I was also a participant observer during various formal and informal contacts with Vietnamese migrants.

It should be noted that the young people researched here are in a particularly difficult situation, being under the psychological pressure of coming from both groups (the migratory one and the receiving society) and from both cultures – Vietnamese and Polish. The serious differences separating the two cultures make the situation even more complicated. The title of the article indicates the difficult psychological and identity crisis faced by this group.

The situation of these young people, in particular young women, develops into profound differences between the expectations addressed to them in Vietnamese society from which they come and from the Polish culture in which they chose to or must live. On the one hand, they find the strength of family roles, family ties and family expectations, communality, hierarchy and obligations. On the other, they feel a sense of inability to complete the ‘fusion’ in Polish society because of the obvious physical differences, perceived by Poles as well as by the Vietnamese people themselves as noticeable and substantial. I will attempt to show differences that can be observed in the process of adaptation and acculturation to Polish culture between (1) young people, which are the second generation – children of Vietnamese immigrants of the ‘first wave’ and those of the ‘second wave,’ and (2) young men and young women in both waves.

Previous anthropological studies (e.g. P. Radin, H. Spicer, R. Linton, N. Lourie) indicate that Native Americans exhibit gender differences in the forms and intensity of adaptation and acculturation to new Euro-American models of life. The process is much more difficult, including a higher proportion of pathological phenomena and dramatic psychological difficulties among males than females. Women ‘cope with’ acculturation to Euro-American patterns much more easily, partly because of the rise rather than the decrease in their status. This also preserves the possibility of the maintenance of their traditional roles as a concurrent technical facilitator in everyday life, as a result of the contact with a higher level of civilisation. Where a clash of civilisations takes place, men usually suffer more because of being cut off from the social gender roles that gave them the social status enabling them to demonstrate their manhood.

I am well aware of the limitations of vast comparisons, stemming from the diversity of cultural contact between Vietnamese migrants’ culture and the Polish culture described by anthropologists. I discuss the above-mentioned observations only as an inspiration to analyse the differences in response to contact with the European culture in young Vietnamese men and women. One such situation is marriage with Poles, which requires a change in the basic native principle values and behavioural patterns.

In this article, I focus on that particular category of young people who are born and raised in Poland. In general, they spent all their lives, or at least most of the period of early socialisation and schooling, in Poland. The children of the second wave usually spent their early childhood in Vietnam.

Poland and Vietnam: cultural differences

The cultural differences between Polish and Vietnamese society are perceived as significant by both sides. For some Vietnamese people, it seems impossible to overcome these differences. Poles do not like dealing with the Vietnamese lack of expressiveness, with no displays of affection, anger or hatred. These are unintelligible behaviours for Polish interlocutors. In business and, even more so, in close relations, the approach of not giving opinions is perceived as ‘secrecy’ and is perceived negatively. The Vietnamese, however, are surprised by Poles’ concern for privacy, which from their point of view makes the country sad.

In Vietnamese tradition, the family, lineage, local community or ethnic group a person belongs to define the individual’s identity. In the traditional family model, with its sources in Confucian philosophy, marriage was in fact a ritual way of paying tribute to ancestors, arranged for the family according to their wishes. Today it is said of this tradition that *[the] family was considered a superior value and its interests were considered as more important than those of the individual man and woman in marriage* (Halik 2004: 207).

The family in Vietnam is basically multigenerational, and the relationships between family members are based primarily on the patrilineal authority, i.e. the father being the head of the family and the oldest living man. Legally, the wife has a lower position than her husband or mother-in-law because of her age and/or her gender. Nowadays, this model is largely maintained in Vietnamese thinking, even among the emigrant population.

In Poland, the family has evolved towards a two-generation model, and one of partnership between the spouses, and to some extent, between parents and children. To be sure, these tendencies also influence Vietnamese immigrant families. In the Vietnamese family, from an early age, children are introduced to a hierarchical social system. They are taught to understand that social system is equal to generational hierarchy and not to human equality. Both were valid in the family and in the wider society. Young people are taught properly and rewarded for submissive behaviour to their parents and people of a perceived higher social status. They should not express their own opinion, nor show their assertiveness or independent thinking. From an early age, children are taught the appropriate Vietnamese etiquette, correct behaviour in relations with family members and submission to the hierarchical structure of family and society as a whole. This adherence to etiquette ensures the maintenance of the social, transcendent order and the harmony of the functioning community at all levels of society, including the family and gender relations. Traditionally in Vietnam, the multi-generational and extended family was part of the local community as an economic unit, i.e. working together for the entire community. However, this model changed, and was not accepted when the French colonial authorities introduced acceptance of immigration, which meant leaving one’s family and one’s home village and as a consequence leaving one’s local community (Halik 2006: 17).

The traditional model of the Vietnamese family and community life assumed the subordination of women’s fate exclusively to family goals (Ngo 2004). Despite the many changes in the value system of Vietnamese immigrants, this aspect of the female social role is reflected in various aspects of the thinking of today’s immigrants. Young Vietnamese female immigrants are much less concerned with the question of national self-identity (and the way it is defined) than are young men. The reason is the specificity of the Vietnamese tradition, in which women, in particular young and unmarried ones, are much more attached to the ‘space of family, home’ (Ngo 2004), resulting in a reduction of their contacts with the external and non-household world (Szymańska 2006). It is also indicative that among the 15 cases of Polish–Vietnamese married couples

in Aleksandra Winiarska's study, only four are mixtures of Vietnamese women with Polish husbands, while 11 are Polish wives with Vietnamese husbands (Winiarska 2011). The asymmetry of the surveyed families results from the difficulty in finding a marriage in which a Vietnamese woman married a Polish man. I explain this by the Vietnamese tradition, according to which men can easily afford to go beyond the ethnic group in their life plans, while women are more likely to be kept in the vicinity of their own ethnic community. Girls are given a lot less freedom in their social life in Vietnamese families, especially over their choice of spouse. They are treated with a much greater degree of control in their daily lives, and this is more visible after emigration in Poland.

The meaning of life is different for women of both waves of Vietnamese immigration. Those coming from the first wave are more 'Polonised' and have fewer traditional pressures. They are the daughters of former students. The older and younger members of the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants have ambitions similar to young Polish women's ambitions. Young Vietnamese girls educated in Poland have different aspirations in life from the role of women in Vietnam. One of these girls says of the bad influence of traditional patterns for young ambitious Vietnamese women:

I also know a Vietnamese girl who graduated and also studied abroad and came back here to Poland and married. Her husband has a business here and she followed him in his business. It is a pity because her mother spent a lot of money on her education abroad and she is doing business. So it makes no sense at all. I know I would not want to do the same.

Some young women say openly: *Well, I rather recognise such a system, I was practically born in Poland, and so I definitely want to work and to be in a high professional position.* This woman remarks that her husband must accept her aspirations: *I do not want to be some kind of a stay-at-home housewife. At home, the division of work and responsibilities should be shared equally... I want to work in a bank, and not just be a stay-at-home. I don't want to be just a housewife.*

These sorts of declarations are present in interviews with the young generation coming from the 'first' wave as well as in interviews with the economic wave of Vietnamese immigration. However, young women belonging to the second wave of economic Vietnamese migration, employed in trade, are deeply rooted in traditional patterns of life.

From these interviews we can conclude that for young Vietnamese women from both waves of immigration, Polish reality concerning gender roles and internal family relations seems to be much more attractive than their native Vietnamese lifestyle. They frequently point to the positive aspects of the Polish tradition. At the same time, they also often openly criticise the Vietnamese approach to certain norms and rules deriving from the tradition derived largely from Confucianism and Buddhism.

The ideal young woman

It is worth mentioning that the young women researched were not explicitly evaluating the entire Polish culture and Vietnamese culture as a whole; they talked about both cultures selectively, focusing on the expectations of both cultural traditions addressed specifically to young women. They disagree with the belief about the roles of women, drawn from the tradition of Vietnam, and they also accept Polish demands in the area of the division of duties in family life. Knowing well the expectations of Vietnamese tradition directed to women (particularly to young women), they prefer to see their future lives in the categories and roles attributed to women by Poles. They stress the importance of personal development, life satisfaction and some shyly exhibited facets of hedonism. Although the young women interviewed stressed that remaining Vietnamese in

the young generation is important both for them and for their parents, they emphasised that observance of the Vietnamese tradition may coincide with their new aspirations. They feel they cannot properly face the expectations directed to them by their parents as young women. They demonstrate the feeling that their aspirations have changed since their migration in Poland compared to women who spent most of their lives in Vietnam.

This individualisation through the implementation of their own personal ambitions, passions, and purposes is contrary to the traditional Vietnamese perception of extended family, clan and lineage. These are the most important points of reference in the field of the traditional Vietnamese value system. This is expressed in young women's rebellion against the control of their family – and especially their parents – over their personal lives. The traditional ideal images of Vietnamese women are for them to be submissive, quiet, always smiling, not standing out, accommodating, passive, always agreeing with their husbands and ceasing to be attractive. Young Vietnamese women (the second generation of the second wave) pointed out various aspects of these attitude changes in the thinking of the younger generation of Vietnamese migrants: *Women are definitely more independent. Polish girls are certainly more independent. It may sound very negative, but the Vietnamese woman is seen more as the property of men.* She also indicates another difference between the Polish and Vietnamese way of life, important in her newly organised value system; this is the traditional ideal vision of a Vietnamese girl which is totally inadequate to the contemporary demands of modern civilisation: *In Poland, people are taught that everyone should be very, very self-confident, so women in Poland are more confident, they do what they want to do.*

During my visit to Vietnam 2010 I met women who studied very well, but in general they were not very confident. They were pretty, but were not taught to speak up, to express their views, to look someone directly in the eye. When they were looking for a job, they thought they would not get it. They had a very pessimistic opinion in every way. Although many of them were very smart, they were taught not to open their mouths to elderly people, etc. As a result of such belittling, it is always the woman who has to take care of the man, the man is always in first place, etc., and it is the man who selects his partner, whereas in Poland it is the opposite trend. Many women hit men. Another young woman says with irony:

A daughter should be lovely, sweet, nice (teasing), take care of everything... should know how to cook – it is very, very, very important, especially Vietnamese dishes. She takes care of her husband and the family. It's all just so the perfect housewife is the ideal type of girl. A guy... generally the ideal man should earn money and it's probably the only feature that a man must have, because the rest is just drink and play cards and they are rude.

This kind of criticism, attacking traditional gender roles, is common in the opinions expressed by my young Vietnamese interlocutors. The formerly obviously higher social position of men and lower position of woman is no longer accepted by all my interviewees. Some Vietnamese girls are beginning to behave in exactly the same way as young Polish women; this tendency is noticed and commented upon by Vietnamese female immigrants.

Return to Vietnam?

As a result of these changes, most young Vietnamese women raised in Poland cannot accept or even imagine returning to Vietnam for good: *My parents really, really want me to go back. And I rather do not fit entirely into the environment of Vietnam, to the culture there.* The interviewee assumes that the customs in Vietnam cannot possibly change: *Because for me, but after all, a woman there should be more the traditional woman, such as a housewife. And I will never get used to it [this kind of life]. Besides, I don't want to get used to it.*

Finally, the interviewed woman refers to the economic argument: *And still further wages in Vietnam are five times lower than in Poland. Though the standard of living there is also different. Above all, you pay less. However, there is the difference.* The interviewee has some future plans – Poland, however, is not the ultimate choice: *I would like to, in the future, live somewhere near Asia or Singapore or Australia to be able to visit my parents from time to time.* The attitude of young Vietnamese women living in Poland towards both Vietnam and Vietnamese tradition is complex. Whereas they criticise, reject and accept the traditional standards imposed on women and men, at the same time they express their devotion to family, even in relation to future plans for further migration. Another Vietnamese woman adopts a similar position: *Family is important – respect for the other person.* Immediately after these words, the interviewee speaks about totally different values:

Such a development is important – not to stay all the time in the same place and accept everything... to make progress, to get an education, to explore the world, to see how other people live, what they dream about, because this is very interesting. Also to help others as much as possible.

At the same time, she added some caution:

Of course we should do so not at the cost of losing ourselves, acting within reason. We should stay in one place like everybody, like other people, just listen to what goes around and not... You just have to be open and to be so active in life to have some contacts in this life.

A long-term migrant examines the situation of the Vietnamese in Poland, referring to her own experience:

The influences that you have from childhood are a very powerful factor, it is the subconscious that you can't manage to ignore, but I think it is worth doing it. Because people have such a possibility – they are not an animal that lives instinctively, only one is aware of it and should exercise one's choice to enjoy this life as much as possible, to get something from this life, because time goes by so fast. Already I have lived here for 20 years and I feel like it was yesterday. I regret what I haven't done, not what I have done.

A substantial compromise permeates the reflections of those who have lived in Poland as immigrants for many years. Their experience gives them a strong basis for estimating the particular choices immigrants have to face in their lives.

Family and having children as crucial value

Young Vietnamese people watch young Poles having fun and want to do the same. And yet they rule out returning – at some point in their lives – to Vietnam. At the same time, young Vietnamese women consistently accept the traditional value of the family – it is valid to increase the size of the family. Having children is undoubtedly important for the Vietnamese immigrants, and every woman chooses to give birth as soon as possible. All women emphasise that they want to have children, and among the interviewees, none of the young women had the slightest doubt about that:

Vietnamese girls want to have children, for them it is a kind of gift. Very few women of my age do not have children [in Vietnam]. They all wish to have two, three children. Some also decide too late on the second child and they have a problem, but they try it just because they earn money for it. If there are no

children, what is it all for, you know? You can travel, but these children are really a gift, I think too that if I had the right conditions I would want to have children. You pass your genes on, the children inherit, there is more fun, there is more fun in the family. If someone is older... is already in old age their grandchildren will come and they will give fun at home, if only for that reason.

Children are followers of the family, of the lineage, and they have the duty to take care of their aged parents. This is just the fulfilment of obligations, recorded in the Confucian tradition. The young immigrants say that the *Vietnamese family tradition is particularly simply to have children, it is a kind of gift. This is a gift and we believe that if a young couple has a child it means that it is a gift from the heavens. When a woman cannot give birth, this means that something has happened, some sort of punishment to the couple.* It is very desirable to have children. And there are few people who decide not to have children, who do not want to have them. In practice, however, the number of children (one or two) is adapted to the conditions of life in the diaspora. The value of having descendants remains important, despite the critical attitude towards many of the traditional values. The traditional gender hierarchy is preserved in many forms. It is taken for granted that it is good to have at least one son, who will continue the family tree. Therefore, the parents of two and three girls often seek to have more children: *I would like to have two or three. With the first child I would firmly and decisively want it to be a boy, then it's neutral.* When asked why, the interlocutor replies: *Because as I have been with the Vietnamese tradition then it should be a boy. And on the other hand, in my college group all the other students are boys, because I'm the only girl in the group so I could easily see that all the guys who have an older sister are less masculine. I noticed that the first boy is a nice case.* This request is repeated in interviews: *I'd love to have a boy, then a girl, because I always wanted to have a brother. I would love to have two children.*

Young Vietnamese girls pay attention to the man's preferences: *For a father, it is very important to have a son.* As the Vietnamese proverb says, *A daughter is worth less than two hens, or Ten daughters does not mean as much as one son* (Phuong, Mazingarbe 2003). Boys are considered as part of retirement benefits for old parents – a sort of social security for their old age. Traditionally, it is the responsibility of a boy to remain at home and take care of his parents. The daughter, on the contrary, leaves the parental home upon marriage. Although today daughters, like sons, in fact help their elderly parents, the patrilineal continuation goes through males. The position of the genders is not equal; it is the feeling of the unequal value of genders among the Vietnamese immigrants that is associated with the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal social structure. However, young Vietnamese women, when asked openly about their opinions on gender equality in the family living in Poland, do not take either side regarding the head of the family. Yet it is significant that in the answers of the young women it never occurred to them to say that the woman is the head of the family, although invariably my interviewees emphasised the egalitarian model of coexistence in married couples.

Immigrant living conditions are an absolutely conducive factor in the formation of a new pattern. Young female immigrants usually break the Vietnamese tradition and work during pregnancy until the end for purely economic reasons. They rarely give up their job after childbirth, and return to work as soon as possible. The baby is in the care either of grandparents, who are also in Poland, or of a hired babysitter. Parents sometimes arrive in Poland especially to take care of their grandchild. A young mother might even take her child to the work place. The interviewees pointed to the consequences of this situation: *Now, in this new generation, Vietnamese children are very, very spoiled. Because, in Poland, especially because parents work, at the market or wherever, they do not even have time to take care of them and usually give them a lot of money and buy what they want,* says a young woman from the second generation of the first wave of Vietnamese immigration, criticising customs among economic immigrants. It sometimes happens that Vietnamese par-

ents give their children for some time to Polish families in the village for child rearing. Only the wealthiest Vietnamese mothers employ a Polish (or, more rarely, Ukrainian) babysitter at home. The priority and main goal is to earn money in Poland. This situation creates extreme conditions for raising children, including infants, who are neglected and treated as an obstacle rather than a source of happiness. These are the observations of Polish and Ukrainian nannies hired by Vietnamese parents who talk with a frown.

Marriage and having children

Among the young Vietnamese women brought up in Poland, there are new ways of thinking about having children – this does not necessarily happen immediately after the wedding. Vietnamese girls want to give a better life to their future children and at the same time ensure that they have pleasure and fun in their youth. The first wave of Vietnamese immigrants kept the pattern of traditional family and tried to impose it upon their children. The situation is different among immigrants of the second wave. These women are much more engaged in their jobs, and cannot face all the demands of the traditional Vietnamese family model.

All parents, however, still claim a major share in the decisions of their children, not only daughters, to marry. Most often, young women are not able to ignore the will of their parents, but rebel against this internally:

I got married when I was 23 years old. My parents knew that I had been dating my current husband for some time, and put pressure on us that we should marry, that this was the time. It has already been adopted as the culture of Vietnam that a woman should be married to have children. My parents really wanted to have grandchildren.

In the past, matchmaking of young people was common in Vietnam. I have also encountered this phenomenon among the Vietnamese in Poland, although such arrangements are strongly camouflaged and hidden from the Polish, and even Vietnamese community.

The choice of the nationality of the boy who may be a proper candidate as husband is another question, often being a source of intergenerational conflict. We also meet with the conscious rejection of the opinion:

The Vietnamese always feel that if you are a Vietnamese girl then you need to marry a Vietnamese man and vice versa. Because they say that with cultural differences, such marriages are not successful, they may break up. My parents would always tell me to marry a Vietnamese man, not a Pole, but I don't think so.

It is symptomatic that in interviews with young women there are reluctant opinions towards marriage to Vietnamese men: *I'd rather like a Pole. Vietnamese men are rude. Only at first are they loving, and after marriage they betray, deceive and do nothing.* On the 'Miss Sajgon' blog one can read a Vietnamese girl saying that: *In paradise, your wife is Vietnamese. In hell, your husband is Vietnamese.*²

Family hierarchy

Hierarchy based on age and gender dominates the Vietnamese families still living in Poland. During my interviews, Vietnamese women analysed and talked about the phenomenon with emotion. Parent–child relationships are based on submission to older people, who should always be given respect and obedience, and these relations do not change with age. They persist between mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, aunt and niece, etc., and even between older and younger siblings (Szymańska 2006). Even the language always reflects signs of hierarchy occurring in the behaviour:

In my opinion, in a typical Vietnamese family it is different from in a Polish family. For example, children have to listen, yes, to listen to their parents, and discussing with them is impossible, because they think that it is talking back, for example, in my case it is difficult to talk or discuss things with my parents. This is because they believe they are always right, because they have life experience. They believe that they and not their children can always be right. And sometimes the opposite is true.

Mothers usually only teach their daughters, give them tips, and rarely talk to them about their problems, and their relationship is rather formal. Young women talk about these relations from a comparative perspective, with the benefit of their observation in the Polish environment:

I recently had a conversation with my Polish friends and I found that in Poland people often talk, the mother often talks to her daughter about matters of the heart, general matters, etc. And in Vietnam there is such a hierarchy that generally parents speak only with children about school, etc., but never about feelings. It was very strange to my friends that my parents do not know about them or about the fact that I have a Polish boyfriend; I generally don't talk about such things. When I present him to them, it will be to tell them that he is probably my future husband.

The interviewee makes the following general remark: *In Asia, the intensity of interaction between the child and the parents is much lower than in Poland.* Sometimes, the parents have little contact with their children because of their hard work in the trade. The everyday living conditions result in the bad marks that children get in school. Children are involved in helping their parents, and school plays a secondary role that should be interpreted in terms of the immigration situation. Yet this development occurs only in the case of economic migration. In this way, the traditional normative order is destroyed by specific economic circumstances and not as the result of a real acculturation process. Despite this process, education remains highly valued:

From time to time my parents and we [children] watch TV together and that is all because I also have a lot of reading. During the school year, I often return home very late and there are days when we don't see each other, because I come back and they're already asleep. And usually we meet only to eat supper and perhaps watch TV.

Also, it is often difficult for children to adjust to total dependence on and control on the part of their parents while living in Poland and having contact with their schoolmates. Submissiveness is no longer so acceptable: *Since I came to Poland I can never agree with my parents so easily. Already eight years!* In Vietnamese families, children are strictly controlled, though boys are given much more freedom than girls. Vietnamese parents care about the reputation of their daughters. They cannot go out alone or with an unknown company, they need to tell their parents where, for how long, with whom they want to go out. A young Vietnamese girl

says with irony: *It would be best not to go out anywhere. I can go out sometimes but it is like that: 'OK, you may go', but it is said grudgingly.* None of my informants doubted the need to give reverence to parents, even though they expect more tolerance from them.

Conclusions

Young Vietnamese women living in Poland as immigrants who were here from their childhood face permanent pressure from two groups and the norms of two value systems: the Vietnamese one represented by the family (and particularly by parents) and the Polish one, represented by the Polish environment (school-mates, friends, teachers, anonymous people in the street and in various Polish institutions). They always have to decide, choose, and find a proper, or at least a less conflicting way of behaviour, all the time thinking about the demands of the mother, father, grandparents, aunts or even simply elder persons in Vietnamese immigrant groups. Many Vietnamese norms are deeply inculcated and internalised – for instance those connected with having children, especially sons, or those norms referring to the higher position of the older generation. At the same time, they find various Polish normative solutions much more attractive and favourable for them, for instance Polish parents giving more freedom to girls, equal relations between men and women, especially between spouses and between parents and children. Such a life leads to numerous dilemmas and psychological problems, together with permanent stress. It should be noted that every young Vietnamese long-distance migrant is conscious of the fact that every choice he/she makes is against somebody and against one's value system. His or her choice is between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Notes

¹ I use some extracts from interviews conducted in the course of my research seminar at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw.

² <http://saigon.blox.pl/html> (accessed: 12 June 2013).

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