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**The Formation of Ethnic Representations: The Vietnamese
in Poland**

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Summary

This paper deals with perception and representations of a very new immigrant group in Poland, that is the Vietnamese. The research aims at identifying the main representations of the Vietnamese existing both in popular knowledge and in the mass media and examining the relationship between them. The paper argues that Vietnamese immigrants are unexpectedly well perceived by Poles, which is rather surprising taking into consideration the low familiarity with, and dissimilarity of this ethnic group, the economic crisis, the hostile attitudes towards immigrants in general and towards different groups of immigrants, and a negative portrayal of the Vietnamese and their country in the Polish mass media. The divergence between media and popular representations mainly result from a lack of long-term, deeply ingrained negative representations from the past, the richness and complexity of emerging images and the appreciation of what the Vietnamese offer in the impoverished Polish society. A significant role of economic interests in ethnic perception and representation can be seen as another confirmation of importance of economic factors in contemporary Poland.

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Preface

This paper is a part of a larger research project connected with my PhD at the University of Warsaw, and a fruit of my three-month fellowship at Sussex Centre for Migration Research that allowed me to conceptualise the research problem, and develop the research framework and appropriate instruments for proper fieldwork. This paper presents my research on the representations on immigrants in the Polish press conducted during my stay in England as well as results of previous research projects (my own and other authors) on this topic.

Poland has recently become a country which has begun to attract immigrants, and my project deals with one of the consequences of the emergence of immigrants in Poland, namely the formation of ethnic representations and changes in those that already exist. In present paper I have chosen to deal with the Vietnamese as an example of a new immigrant group since they are one of the most visible, "exotic" and thriving foreign groups in the Polish society. The research aims to identify the main representations of the Vietnamese among both "ordinary" people and in the Polish mass-media, and examine the relationship between them. In brief, the research shows that Vietnamese in Poland, who run businesses selling cheap textiles in stalls on open markets or in tiny shops and, to a smaller degree, operating Asian fast-food restaurants, are an example of a well organised, flexible and thriving community that has achieved economic success. They are also quite well perceived by Poles. I hope my research will contribute to progress in our understanding of the structure and content of ethnic representations.

I would like to thank the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (SCMR) and the Centre for Culture Development and Environment (CDE) who hosted me as a Marie Curie Fellow and allowed me to realise this project. I am grateful to Professor Ralph Grillo who was my mentor and tutor, and Doctor Richard Black for his organisational assistance and opportunities he has given me. I owe special thanks to Professor Russell King for his attention and support, and to my irreplaceable friend Clare Waddington.

1. The economic, political and social context

From the late 1980s, Poland, which had been regarded as a country of emigrants for over a century, began to attract immigrants from less economically developed regions of the world, notably southern and eastern post-communist European countries, Asia and Africa. Although by comparison with Britain, France or Germany the numbers may be perceived as small – for example in 1999 the stocks of foreign citizens having “permanent residence” or “fixed-time residence” in Poland was about 43,000 out of a total population of some forty million – they are not insignificant. Moreover the majority of foreigners in Poland usually do not appear in official statistics since they are circulatory migrants coming officially as tourists or illegally entering the country. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs estimated, for instance, in 1999, that there were between 150,000 to 200,000 migrants working illegally (Lentowicz, 1999). A large number of such migrants regard Poland as a transit country and intend to head further in to Western Europe.

Poland is becoming a country of immigration in a specific economic, political and social context, different to that which characterised immigration to western countries in the past. Aiming to become a member of the European Union (EU), Poland is expected to guard the eastern frontier of “Fortress Europe”, and co-operate with the EU to restrict immigration into the continent, particularly Western Europe. Although restrictions on the number of visas and permissions for work for foreigners from economically less developed countries imposed by the Polish state have led to a decrease in controlled migration, at the same time they have caused an increase in the number of clandestine immigrants and illegal workers. Additionally, immigration policy in Poland is not yet adequately elaborated and still lacks some important regulations.

Secondly, migrants coming to Europe nowadays have different socio-demographic characteristics. In general they are better educated and better off than previous newcomers, and there has been a growth in the number of women among migrants as well as in the number of people coming from urban areas. Thirdly, there is the fact that in general in Eastern Europe there are no second or third generation immigrants, especially in the case of groups of Asian or African origin. Therefore ethnic networks, immigrant communities and ethnic institutions are usually not yet well developed in post-communist countries. There is also little

assistance and support for migrants from state organisations and NGOs.

In contrast to the long history of large-scale immigration to Western countries, a recent influx of culturally different migrants to Poland is also a very new phenomenon for homogenous post-war Polish society. The economic advantages of cheap goods and services offered by migrants coupled with a fascination with such novelty clashes with political discourse, nationalist sentiment and fears of outsiders.

2. General attitudes towards immigrants in contemporary Poland

The few foreigners who came to Poland between 1950-1980 were mainly perceived as exotic and temporary guests who should be treated according to “traditional Polish hospitality” (Lodzinski, 2000). Although communist doctrine stressed an idea of internationalism, at the same time in reality a strong vision of one homogenous culture and nation was reinforced and forced resettlements of people belonging to different ethnic groups took place in Poland in order to impose their assimilation.

Research carried by Aleksandra Jasinska-Kania (1996) has confirmed that since the Second World War the attitudes of Poles towards other nations and ethnically different groups has been mainly dependent on the level of modernity and prosperity of the migrant’s nation of origin, the cultural and political similarity to Polish society, previous conflicts and alliances between that national group and Poles, and the presence and the image of the national group in the Polish mass media. Therefore in the 1970s those nations positively received by the Poles popular were: Vietnamese, Russians, and Bulgarians. Conversely, twenty years on popular hostility is felt towards the latter two, whilst Americans and Western European nations are now the most admired.

Due to strict restrictions in international movements as well as the political and economic characteristics of communist Poland, the number of foreigners was small and the issue of immigration was latent. The political and economic transition in 1989 profoundly changed this. Borders in recently communist Europe were opened and Poles could now easily go abroad. However Poland also had to get accustomed to the role of host society.

In 1989, the transition to a democratic political system and free market economy was heralded with euphoria in Poland. At the same time there

was also a current of great excitement about the novelty of, and interest, in different cultures. Poles were quite willing to help victims of intolerance and economic refugee since the abuse of individual rights was in those days a sensitive issue. Pal Nyiri (1995:193) characterised the situation in Hungary in 1989 as follows:

"At the time, the foreigner settling in Hungary, if he had money, was seen as promoting the progress of the country, if he did not have money he was fuel for our national pride: 'there, for them, we are the West already'".

I argue that these words are also applicable to Poland. For these reasons it is not surprising that according to a European Values Study in 1990, Poland – the leader in political and economic transformation - was one of the most tolerant countries towards immigrants among post-communist states (Jasińska-Kania, 1999).

In the 1990s we observe an increase in contact between Poles and immigrants linked with the influx to Poland of different categories of immigrants: economic migrants, refugees, Westerners working for international corporations. Poles started to be aware of the presence of immigrants in their country. They had to form attitudes towards immigrants as well as take a position on "immigrant issues". Ethnic representations have been taking shape and changing under the influence of personal contacts. In the second half of the 1990s the previous positive curiosity has been replaced by distrust and anxiety. According to European Values Studies, in 1999, by comparison with 1990, ethnic intolerance has strongly escalated in Poland (Grzymala-Kazłowska, in progress). A similar (but weaker) tendency, is also observed in many other European countries. By the end of the 1990s the Poles were less willing to admit foreigners to their country and help those who managed to come there. Poles started to reject ethnically different groups more openly and insist on assimilation of immigrants in contrast to the former acceptance of their native culture. Apparently immigrants are no longer treated as welcome guests who could maintain their cultural habits, but have come to be seen as rivals and potential long-term habitants who should adjust to, and respect, the norms and values of those who "generously" host them.

According to a social survey undertaken in 1999 by CBOS [Centre for Public Opinion Research], the evaluation of the presence of immigrants in Poland is mainly determined by the perception of its economic consequences for Poles. Similarly to Hungary, in Poland immigrants have been increasingly perceived as rivals in the job market

(Csepeli and Sik, 1995). Especially now, when 17-18% of the Polish population capable of working is unemployed, there is a serious threat that frustrated people can blame immigrants for the deterioration of economic conditions and come out against foreigners. Hostility towards immigrants is deepened by an opinion that immigrants may become rivals for social welfare. But immigrants in Poland are not perceived in a solely negative way. Rather they are seen in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand they are perceived as threats - competitors on the job market, rivals for social welfare, criminals (CBOS,1999). On the other hand it is equally often noticed that immigrants are irreplaceable suppliers of cheap services and goods to impoverished Poles.

News on immigration, that was absent from the mass media before 1989, has become present on the public agenda. The media have focused generally on negative news, such as the growing influx of illegal arrivals, the delinquent behaviour of immigrants, their participation in a shadow economy. Results of the analysis of the Polish press conducted in 1996 by Maciej Mrozowski showed that immigrants were presented in a negative light. Articles concerning immigrants were divided by the author into four main categories. The largest group consisted of articles regarding the influx of immigrants to Poland where foreigners were presented as people entering Poland illegally, remaining there beyond the permitted time and posing a threat to the country and society. A slightly smaller group comprised articles reporting the criminal behaviour of immigrants in Poland. The third group of texts focused on the economic activities of immigrants, especially their role in a shadow sector. Only a very small number of articles discussed the daily lives of immigrants.

3. The Vietnamese in Poland

The Vietnamese are a new and "exotic" immigrant group who can be described as thriving and successful. Their influx to Poland can be linked to three phenomena. First, social networks existing between the Polish and Vietnamese societies developed as a result of student exchange programs that allowed thousands of the Vietnamese to study in communist Poland. For example, at its peak in 1972 over 800 Vietnamese students entered Polish universities. Secondly, the Vietnamese perestroika "do moi" that took place in 1986 and had a great impact on the economic activity of the Vietnamese and their entrepreneurship. Thirdly, the opening of the Polish and other Easter European borders at the beginning of the 1990s coincided with the emergence of economic

opportunities connected with the transition period in that part of Europe.

At the end of the 1980s Vietnamese students and former students who had not returned to Vietnam started to establish and run small businesses in Poland. At the beginning of the 1990s they were joined by other Vietnamese, for instance ex-students who had gone back to Vietnam after finishing their studies, and who in the 1990s returned to Poland. At the same time, students' families, friends, and neighbours arrived in Central Europe. Additionally, Poland attracted Vietnamese guest-workers unwelcome in Germany, former Vietnamese students from other post-communist countries regarded as not as well developed economically as Poland, and the Vietnamese who moved from the Czech Republic after the introduction of unfavourable regulations.

Although over the course of time the Vietnamese coming to Poland have been less selective in terms of their education level and socio-economic position, even the last wave of the Vietnamese can be characterised as quite well educated and well off, and tending to come from urban areas. Though males probably predominate, there are, for example, a significant number of women among open market traders - roughly one in three or one in four.

There is a strict hierarchy among the Vietnamese in Poland. The position of individuals depends mainly on their education and societal status in Vietnam, legal status in Poland, the level of cultural adaptation (knowledge of the Polish language and culture), the level of integration with Polish society, and socio-economic status in Poland. Region of origin also plays an important role among the Vietnamese. Those living in Poland come from different provinces of the northern part of Vietnam: Ha Noi, Thanh Hoa and Nghe Tinh (to the south of Hanoi), Son La (to the west of the capital), Lang Son (to the east), Hai Duong, Nam Dinh (very close to Hanoi on the south-east), Ha Tay (next to Ha Noi on the south) and Ha Bac. People from one province stick together. Each province has its own soccer team.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Vietnamese in Poland due to their high spatial mobility and their status. Many migrants come to Poland as "tourists", but remain there and work illegally. According to representatives of the Polish government the number of Vietnamese immigrants is estimated to be a maximum of 50,000, whereas the leaders of the community claim that in Poland there are no more than 20,000 – 30,000 Vietnamese. Although numbers might be not very high, the Vietnamese are a very visible immigrant

group whose members are often encountered in the streets, especially in big cities. The Vietnamese in Poland concentrate in the capital and, to a smaller degree, in the other largest Polish cities. When in 2001 we asked a representative sample of inhabitants of Warsaw what was in their opinion the most numerous immigrant group in the capital, 63% of them mentioned migrants from Asia (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2002). Among those respondents 27% gave a general answer "Asians", 26% said "Vietnamese", and the rest mentioned "Chinese" (4%) or "Koreans" (4%). Research with a representative sample of Poles done in 2000 by Teresa Halik and Ewa Nowicka (in progress) showed that almost half of the population (49%) had personal contacts with the Vietnamese, of which 9% had frequent contacts with the immigrants. In big cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, 60%, and in middle-size cities 71% of Poles have met Vietnamese in person at least once. One fifth of people living in the largest cities often have contact with Vietnamese migrants.

The Vietnamese have the most developed ethnic institutions among ethnic groups in Poland, and the heart of the Vietnamese community in Poland is the "*Stadion Dziesięciolecia*"¹. The Vietnamese play a significant role in Polish markets, especially in Warsaw and other large cities. The research "Warsaw Area Studies" shows that on the main market in Warsaw alone ("*Stadion Dziesięciolecia*"), and its immediate surroundings, there are at least 1,200 Vietnamese stalls (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2002). The Vietnamese are also present in the other major open markets in Warsaw as well as in other Polish cities. In addition, according to leaders of that community, there are between 300-400 Vietnamese fast food restaurants in the capital and 30-40 big restaurants. The number of large restaurants in the whole country may reach 100, not to mention hundreds of snack bars.

¹ This open market is owned by a private company and located very close to the city centre on the right bank of the Vistula river. The open market was started in 1989 and from its beginning has been an important place of exchange between Polish traders and migrants from the former Soviet Union. Although, following the best trading year in the history of the market in 1997, business declined due to economic problems in Russia and in Poland, and because of restrictions on the admittance of migrant traders, there are now 5,000 companies operating on the market and more than 20,000 workers are employed there. The majority of traders sell clothing, shoes and cosmetics, both wholesale and retail. Apart from Poles and the Vietnamese, we can also find Russians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Romanians and Africans traders. The market is open seven days a week from 6.00 a.m. till 14.00 (see Damis official Web Site, <http://www.jarmark.damis.pl>.)

Besides being a place of work, the "*Stadion Dzieściolecia*" open market plays a crucial role for Vietnamese migrants in Poland. There are dozens of Vietnamese coffee shops, and at least a few shops with Vietnamese food, medicines, and newspapers (published both in Vietnam and in Poland). Here, Vietnamese services, such as hair-dressing and video rentals, are on offer. The stadium integrates the Vietnamese migrants who organise themselves as a quasi-community. They exchange information, plan a common market strategy, organise social and cultural events, raise funds. The Vietnamese in Poland can be characterised in many respects as a self-contained ethnic group with a high level of co-operation and self-organisation. All members are obliged to act in a co-operative way and to accept the existing hierarchy. The majority of conflicts are re-solved within the group.

One reason for such a high degree of self-organization seems to be the fact that the Vietnamese are very concerned about their image in Poland and they are active in the creation of positive representation. The leaders of the community are willing to meet Polish journalists, politicians, and researchers, and present the advantages of a Vietnamese presence in Poland (such as the creation of new jobs for Poles, the enrichment of Polish culture, supplying Poles with inexpensive products and services, charity activities raising aid for Poles who need help - flood victims, orphans), and deny any negative media information.

The role of the Vietnamese associations in organising Vietnamese migrants and creating their positive image in Poland is similar to that played by the strong and resilient ethnic associations in Hungary that integrate and organise Chinese migrants (Nyiri, 1997). Membership of the "Socio-Cultural Association of Vietnamese in Poland", includes the socio-cultural (and often financial) elite of the Vietnamese consisting of 200-300 ex-students and their families. These people have been living in Poland for the longest time. Usually they have Polish citizenship or at least permission for settlement. They know the Polish language and culture and are well integrated with Polish society. Many of them are married to Polish wives. Members of that association act as leaders for the whole "community". Some of them occupy key positions in a second organisation, "Solidarity and Friendship", which seeks to gather, organise and control all the Vietnamese migrants in Poland.

Having presented some data on the nature and organisation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, I now turn to some more general theoretical considerations concerning ethnic representations

before examining how Vietnamese are represented in the Polish press.

4. Comments on theoretical and methodological approach

In my research I am trying to go beyond the rather reductionist conception of ethnic stereotypes predominant in the literature on the perception of ethnic groups. In my view ethnic representations should be seen as a complex and multidimensional sets of various, sometimes contradictory beliefs, which are socially constructed and depend upon broader cultural, social, political and economic contexts. The most useful method for my research seemed to be content analysis. My research is first of all qualitative study by means of interpretive analysis. Therefore, the most important aspect of my research is the analysis of meaning conducted on the basis of key categories and significant analytical dimensions.

Particularly valuable to the study of social representations is also discourse analysis, which

"aims to show how the cognitive, social, historical, cultural or political context of language use and communication impinge on the contents, meanings, structures or strategies of text or dialogue, and vice versa, how discourse itself is an integrated part of and contributes to the structure of these contexts" (van Dijk, 1991:45).

It draws our attention to dependence of images on broader socio-cultural context. Using Michel Foucault's words (1977), we can say that ethnic representations – their content and structure – are subordinated by a particular, characteristic for a given historical time, discourse practice. Ethnic representations not only reflect but also reproduce the system of social meaning.

The confrontation with new culturally distinct, immigrant groups leads a native population to the formation of some new ethnic representations and attitudes towards the group and to changes in already existing images. A group often constructs representations of "others" using own self-definition as a point of departure. In that way representations of "others" may be to some extent reverse representations of producers either actual or desired and therefore they are usually negative. The images of "others" may reflect the values and symbols of the greatest importance for a society (Bokszanski, 1995). Encountering a new group a society can also use the same system of categories and mental patterns as it used in the past. From this perspective there can be some

similarities and continuities between representations of various ethnic groups existing in one society.

On the one hand, social representations are subordinated to the broader social-cultural context and political and economic situation, but on the other hand they may vary in some respects depending on social groups. Although my research presented in this paper focuses on the press representations of the Vietnamese, I situate the results of my study in the context of results of public opinion polls and other research on the images of immigrants in popular knowledge. I compare similarities and differences between press and popular representations. I am trying to find out what is relationship between those two kinds of representations and why discrepancies exist between them.

These discrepancies may be attributed to differences between popular representations shaped by popular discourse practice and existing among mass, and elite representations present for example in the press. Elites have the power to produce powerful representations of others which influence public discourse. In contrast, popular representations are more private and incoherent, since they are influenced by various impacts: popular knowledge, public discourse and individual experiences. Although classical discourse analysis represented by Teun van Dijk (1993) stresses that popular ethnic representations are first of all shaped by elite discourse, we should not forget that the discourse of the press is also much influenced by the expectations of a mass audience. Therefore, in my opinion press discourse must be seen as a product of negotiations between the aim of the elites, on the one hand, which is to take care of own interests by the favourable definition of situation and reproduction of the existing social order and, on the other, with the expectations of a mass audience. Nowadays distinction between elites and masses is being challenged. It is said that groups used to regard as elites such as governments or artists are under the strong pressure of public opinion. The power of the mass-media is reduced by existence of plural and visions and contradictory arguments.

5. The portrayal of Vietnam and the Vietnamese in the Polish press in the 1990s

Part of my research is concerned with representations of the Vietnamese and Vietnam in the Polish press. Data are derived from three newspapers: "*Gazeta Wyborcza*", "*Rzeczpospolita*" and "*Zycie*". I have chosen two one-year periods for content

analysis: 1993 and 2001, the first and the last accessible. Because of the volume of material, I decided to look into four one-month-periods within each selected year (articles published in February, May, August, November). In total my sample consists of almost 300 articles.

Although the papers might reveal some characteristics typical of public discourse practice in general, it is to be expected that there will be differences in particular titles depending on producers and expected audience. Therefore it is significant to mention that all three papers occupy the top end of the Polish press; they are broadsheets. "*Rzeczpospolita*", a conservative newspaper, is especially highly regarded among Polish papers and is read by the narrow but influential elite: intelligentsia, professionals and general managers. "*Gazeta Wyborcza*" and "*Zycie*" were created after the transition from Communist rule. "*Gazeta Wyborcza*", the first Polish "free" newspaper, has the biggest circulation of all Polish papers and a slight left-wing tendency.. "*Zycie*" can be described as a title with right and Catholic opinions.

The quality of the papers might suggest that they would avoid imposing negative stereotypes on particular ethnic groups and that their the news-reporting would be more sensitive, or "politically correct". However it appears that the negative stereotyping that does occur is done in an indirect way. In tabloids immigrants are portrayed in a more directly negative way, since such newspapers focus on sensational events, pathological behaviour and "bad news". In contrast, there was no crime column in "*Rzeczpospolita*" and "*Zycie*", and crime reporting was much reduced in "*Gazeta Wyborcza*".

In "*Gazeta Wyborcza*" and especially in "*Rzeczpospolita*", Vietnam and the Vietnamese are presented in a variety of different and broad contexts: political, historical, cultural and economic. One of manifestations of this is that there are, for example, more articles on Vietnam than on the Vietnamese in "*Rzeczpospolita*", although a comparison of articles published in 2001 and in 1993 reveals that the proportion is changing. All of the newspapers give voice to government officials and experts at times which means that, to a great extent, they do reflect official (state) and political discourse on immigrants.

It is also significant that in 2001, there were only seven articles published in "*Zycie*" mentioning Vietnam or the Vietnamese, and even these references were rather insignificant Vietnam is usually mentioned as an example in the context of discussions of American foreign policy. This signifies

that in this paper the issue of immigration is somewhat neglected and disregarded. Additionally, "Zycie" was not yet published in 1993. Therefore the analysis almost solely refers to "Rzeczpospolita" and "Gazeta Wyborcza".

Prior to 1989, Vietnam, the country, most often appeared in the context of the Vietnamese war. The communist mass media showed Vietnam as a brotherly and friendly communist state needing Polish support (Halik, 2000). The Vietnamese were depicted as victims of an "American war" that drove them into misery and poverty, and as a nation which was bravely fighting for freedom as Poles did twenty years before during the Second World War.

Since 1989 the Vietnamese war is still present in press discourse but in a completely different context. My analysis of press articles revealed that Polish television shows many old American films concerning the Vietnamese war, or portraying it in the background, in a very specific way. The Vietnamese war is also mentioned in biographies of important American politicians published in the Polish press. The moral legitimacy of the American intervention in Vietnam is still discussed, but in the context of current international conflicts and military interventions. Usually the Vietnamese war is shown in the Polish papers as a fight for a just cause, but an American failure with tragic consequences. Many articles are devoted to those consequences as well as to difficult past and present American-Vietnamese relations. There is however a shift from political to economic aspects, as we can see in the following quotation. (The quotations from the press, and the titles of articles have been translated, into English by the author of the present paper.)

The highest level American delegation since the end of the war in 1975 began talks with representatives of the Vietnamese government in Hanoi. A goal of the three day mission is to check possibilities of economic development in Vietnam and execution of reforms in order to prepare ground for massive come back of American companies to Vietnam.⁽²⁾

Few texts deal with the colonial and postcolonial French-Vietnamese relationship.

Sometimes Vietnam is shown in the context of uneasy international relations in the south-east Asian region. It is presented as a country that does not play a leading role in the region but has

² "Rzeczpospolita", 1993.10.07, "Information" [Informacje], Piotr Rudzki, Tadeusz Templewicz, "Gazeta Ekonomia"

superpower ambitions and a strong impact on the situation in neighbouring Cambodia and Laos. The following quotation illustrates this:

Representatives of the opposition from Laos accompanying the general have said "Rzeczpospolita" that Vietnam is trying to hide its military presence [in Laos]. In peace periods [Vietnamese] soldiers guard strategic structures, work as traffic, energy and telecommunication service. Now there are fifty thousand Vietnamese soldiers on military service in Laos. After 1975 huge numbers of Vietnamese started to settle in Laos. Under the pretence of friendly relations, expressed in the 1977 treaty, Vietnamese brought all government institutions under their control. Public administration at different levels employs about eight thousand Vietnamese experts.⁽³⁾

At the beginning of the 1990s Vietnam was still depicted as a poor and backward country that needed to be supported. Examples of such an image are found in the two citations below. One comes from a brief mention about assistance offered to Vietnam by the World Development Bank in order to help the country improve its infrastructure and develop educational and economic institutions. The other reports some information concerning the arrival of modern telecommunications technology to Vietnam.

The World Bank announced its first loan to Vietnam in fifteen years, 228 million dollars. It was granted for the improvement of primary education (70 million) and a road network (158 million).⁽⁴⁾

In the capital of Vietnam there was an opening of the first 100 telephone booths for calls made with a special magnetic card loaded with a given number of impulses.⁽⁵⁾

On the other hand, even in 1993 there were some texts presenting Vietnam as a dynamically developing country with a large potential (for example possessing oil) that is willing to reform its economy and open the market for international investors. Even in 1993 it was stressed that the largest international companies were interested in Vietnam and did their best to invest in that coun-

³ "Rzeczpospolita", 2001.02.19, "Cicha wojna w kraju tysiąca słoni" [Quiet war in the country of thousand elephants], Stanisław Grzymalski

⁴ "Rzeczpospolita", 1993.10.28, "Pozyczka Banku Światowego dla Wietnamu" [Loan of World Bank for Vietnam], Piotr Rudzki, Gazeta Ekonomia

⁵ "Rzeczpospolita", 1993. 12.29, "Informacje" [Information], Piotr Rudzki/ Gazeta Ekonomia

try. "Rzeczpospolita" quite often reported on actual and potential foreign investments in Vietnam in the following way:

Philip Morris is peeking at Vietnam. American ford-tobacco giant Philip Morris started to investigate possibilities in Vietnam for starting production of milk products (butter, yogurts, cheeses) and Marlboro cigarettes.⁽⁶⁾

Adidas prefers Vietnam to Slovenia. German producer of sport shoes, Adidas, has announced that at the end of January the production will be moved from the ZAD factory in Partizanske in Western Slovenia to Vietnam.⁽⁷⁾

In 2001, Vietnam was almost exclusively shown as a dynamically expanding and significant actor in the global economy. The Asian country is presented as the leading exporter of rice and coffee. Moreover it is shown as a selfish country which does not want to co-operate with other producers but floods the world market with huge amounts of cheap and bad quality coffee:

There were many proposals on how to restrict the supply of coffee. There were attempts to reduce exports, destroy a part of the harvest or promote drinking coffee. It came to nothing, because producers of coffee as a general rule are poor countries. The limitation of production by one country presented too great a temptation for the rest, who started to export to the nth degree. An increase in production by Vietnam, who at the beginning supplied poor quality coffee in huge amounts, had a disastrous influence on the market had. This export began two years ago and clearly deteriorated the market. Now Vietnamese coffee is better quality but still is too much.⁽⁸⁾

Growers should limit themselves to one harvest a year instead of the current three, uproot plantations and care only about weeds will not outgrow shrubs. Vietnamese stop growing coffee but too little. In India growers switch to vanilla, pepper and flowers. But the majority of them still harvest grains, because a lower income is better than nothing. So far actions of ACPC have shown that it is difficult for producers to agree on one decisive plan in order to defend prices. There is no solidarity among

⁶ "Rzeczpospolita", 1993.12.21, "Informacje" [Information], Dorota Margas, Gazeta Ekonomia

⁷ "Rzeczpospolita", 1993.12.03, "Informacje" [Information], Gazeta-Ekonomia

⁸ "Rzeczpospolita", 2001.05.05, "Ceny kawy spadają" [The prices of coffee are lower and lower], Danuta Walewska, Gazeta Ekonomia

countries, but a struggle for export and market share. Brazil and Vietnam excel in it.⁽⁹⁾

Vietnam is also often portrayed as having a cruel communist regime that abuses civil rights by keeping writers and monks in prisons, pacifying demonstrations and severely punishing for political insubordination or economic offences and represses religious and ethnic minorities.

According to Amnesty International in Vietnamese prisons are kept 54 political prisoners. American Department of the State in a report in January 1998 writes about more than 200. Vietnamese refugees claim that there are 1000.⁽¹⁰⁾

The population of Vietnam is presented, on the one hand, as vulnerable victims that have to leave the country in order to save lives but, on the other hand, as people who can violently protest and be cruel and inhuman as bureaucrats and soldiers:

The journal 'Nhan Dan' writes laconically, that there is 'certain social unrest'. Hanoi is pacifying the region with the aid of police and army. In clashes several protesters were injured. In a few places highlanders took hostages. They cut off the hand of one hostage, a policeman accused of bribery. Another – a manager of co-operative – was tied to a pillar and flogged. The man will survive but his condition is serious.⁽¹¹⁾

Another, albeit relatively rare, image of Vietnam in the Polish press depicts the country as a fabulous tourist destination with its exotic culture and beautiful landscapes that offers a great adventure both for ordinary people and inspiration for artists - painters, photographers and film directors.

In competition there are reports about problems of our present time; complicated human lives, dramas, happiness are shown and politics, religion, arts are discussed...Jan Jakub Kolski in his document "Cambogia, Vietnam" shows everyday life and exoticism of Indochina.⁽¹²⁾

Press articles, television documents and artistic films incorporate comparisons in which similarities

⁹ "Rzeczpospolita", 2001.08.03, "Jak ratować ceny" [How to keep prices], Piotr Rudzki.

¹⁰ "Rzeczpospolita", 1998.08.29, "Dysydenci maja wyjsc na wolnosc" [Dissidents are expected to be free], Tomasz Mioduszewski, Gazeta Prawo

¹¹ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.02.10-11, "Niespokojne pola kawowe" [Anxious coffee fields]

¹² "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.11.21 „Pokaz filmowy" [Film show]

between Europeans and Asians are played down and differences emphasised. Such articles show Vietnamese culture as mysterious and strange, and full of incomprehensible, irrational customs and traditions.

In contrast to the few texts devoted to Asian crafts, religion and martial arts, a large number of articles deals with Vietnamese, or more generally Asian, cuisine. Asian cuisine is characterised as extraordinary - rich and tasty but suspect and odd for Europeans. The quotation below comes from an interview with the owner of a trendy Oriental shop:

It all began with a journey to the East. They have developed a taste for Hindu, Chinese, Indonesian cuisines. They began to bring mementoes from journeys and eventually they opened a well-known shop in Warsaw, "Eight treasures"...The majority of goods come from India and Singapore, some from Vietnam, and a saleswoman is a real Vietnamese – a close friend of the owner...Eastern combination of spices and ingredients sometimes seems odd to Europeans, for example a combination of chilli, honey, ginger and nuts. It is difficult to define the taste of Hindi products...For Hindi dishes real Hindi rice is needed. Unfortunately, rice in shops [in Poland] does not meet the quality requirements.⁽¹³⁾

After showing how Vietnam is presented in the Polish press, in the following paragraphs I will focus on the representations of Vietnamese immigrants. Vietnamese migrants in Poland are mainly presented in the context of a massive influx to Poland. According to the Polish press, in addition to a large numbers of Vietnamese migrant workers, Poland is flooded by cheap Asian products. An example of such an image is found in the following quotation:

Stadion Dziesięciolecia has responded to the deterioration in the economic situation by lower prices and larger quantities of bogus products, which are mainly sold by Russians and Vietnamese flooding the market with huge amounts of cheap clothing.⁽¹⁴⁾

The media suggest that Asian goods are an economic threat to Polish traders and the Polish economy. Not only is the large quantity of im-

ported goods and services provided by the Vietnamese stressed, but the poor quality of the goods is also emphasised. For example, it is often suggested that food offered in Vietnamese fast-food restaurants does not meet hygienic standards and may be even harmful for customers since it may contain stale, poor quality products and ingredients considered inedible in our culture, such as pigeon meat. The quotation below illustrates how Vietnamese rice is presented as a product of low quality that can even be a danger to health.

Just beyond the Polish border Trade Inspection is waiting for rice – they check importers, wholesalers, retailers. They checked everything. The inspection had reservations about the quality of ¾ of the checked consignments ... What does disqualify rice? Damage caused by pests, humidity, fungi, changed colour showing overheating or going bad (for example, yellow, amber, light red), foreign grains, husks, stones, sand and weed seeds, chemical contaminants, pieces of metal, glass. The evaluated rice came mainly from Vietnam and also from India, Thailand, Guyana, Australia and US...Comparing grains with the norm, inspectors found... grains mixed with living and dead pests.⁽¹⁵⁾

Vietnamese immigrants are also frequently connected with various economic offences such as smuggling, producing and selling false products, bribing officials, avoiding paying taxes and using telephones without paying bills.

Half of the computer programs used last year in companies [in Asia] were illegal. A pirate world record belongs to Vietnam, where illegal copies constitute 97% of computer software in companies.⁽¹⁶⁾

Twenty cases of fictitious Vietnamese-Polish marriages disclosed police in Lodz.⁽¹⁷⁾

The Regional Court in Warsaw considered yesterday a civil case which Polish Telecommunications (TP) brought against the owners of flats, where telephones were used by a group of the Vietnamese for free calls at a loss to TP. It referred to a famous of a few years ago case, where a large telephone exchange was discovered in the centre of Warsaw

¹³ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 1993.05.07, „Slodki smak 'Osmiu skarbow'" [Sweet taste of 'Eight treasures'], Leszek Talko, Gazeta Stołeczna

¹⁴ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.11.12, "Da sie wyzyc" [It is possible to survive], Katarzyna Hubicz, Gazeta Stołeczna

¹⁵ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.02.24, "Palczki bija na alarm" [Chopsticks are raising the alarm], Magda Kłodecka, Supermarket

¹⁶ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.05.29, "Piraci maja sie dobrze" [Pirates are well], Komputer

¹⁷ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 1999.23.10., "Polsko-wietnamska fikcja malzenska" [Polish-Vietnamese marriage fiction]

and its constructors – two Vietnamese - were caught.⁽¹⁸⁾

The Polish media often focus on the illegal presence of the Vietnamese in Poland. There is an image of a dynamic, illegal influx of Vietnamese to Poland. Many articles concern attempts by the Vietnamese to cross the Polish borders illegally:

Across our Eastern border leads also a route for illegal migration from Asia and Africa. Last year 700 people were caught, that is six times as many as two years ago. The majority of them are citizens of Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, who have to go across Poland to get into Germany.⁽¹⁹⁾

Dozens of Chinese and Vietnamese were trying to sail on a pontoon over the River Bug close to Hrubieszow. Twenty of those who managed to get to the Polish side – 12 men and 8 women – were caught by border guards. ⁽²⁰⁾

The Vietnamese are also frequently shown in a context of serious crime. Examples of kidnapping, ransoms, murders attributed to the Vietnamese stand out in crime columns. The Vietnamese are regarded as immigrants who form dangerous, cruel and well organised ethnic gangs.

Often discussed is the presence of the Vietnamese immigrants on the Polish market. The Vietnamese are presented as very go-ahead entrepreneurs and dangerous rivals for the Polish traders who steal jobs and force out Polish traders and producers. Hostility towards Vietnamese immigrants is fuelled by such texts as the one below which suggests that the Vietnamese drive Polish traders and producers into bankruptcy. The following citation comes from an interview with the owner of a small suitcase factory, who employs 60 people and is shown as a benefactor for a peripheral local community. He complains about foreign competition in those words:

Two Polish factories went broke at the beginning of the 1990s. Our competitors are Germany, China, Vietnam and Taiwan. In Poland probably nobody new will appear in this trade.⁽²¹⁾

¹⁸ "Rzeczpospolita", 1999.06.16, "Darmowe rozmowy" [Free calls], Marek Domagalski, Gazeta Prawo

¹⁹ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 1993.02.23, "Kanałem przez Okecie" [By channel across Okecie]

²⁰ "Rzeczpospolita", 1999.03.30, "Chinczycy na Bugu" [Chinese in Bug], Zbigniew Lentowicz

²¹ "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.05.28, Teraz walizka [Now a suitcase], Gazeta Zachodnia

That representation is reinforced by the frequent picture of the expansion of Vietnam on the global market, such as continuously repeated remarks, in "Rzeczpospolita" in 2001, about "a flood of cheap and poor quality" Vietnamese coffee on the world market.

The topic of multiculturalism in Poland is not often debated in these elitist newspapers. Texts rarely show immigrants as new neighbours, hosts or even compatriots. Even if articles deal with an everyday life of the Vietnamese in Poland, the papers present the same few migrants who emphasised their distinctiveness from the majority of Vietnamese migrants. The heroes of the Polish press belong to the socio-cultural, often also the economic, elite of the Vietnamese in Poland. They are well educated (usually they graduated from Polish universities), successful in their occupation, and well integrated in Polish society. These Vietnamese know Polish culture and language, and have Polish wives or husbands and friends. They are ideal and model immigrants showing in an indirect way that Polish society can host and accept only somebody who socially and culturally integrates with it.

A Vietnamese Hien Nguyen Chi received in the Torunian town hall a certificate conferring Polish citizenship. Our new fellow countryman came to Poland 14 years ago as a young man to study at Politechnika Gdańska. He graduated in the Mechanical Department, majoring in engineering of machines and equipment for the chemical and food industries. He still spends a lot of time at the coast, because he works in Gdynia. The company he works for has little to do with his education, since he deals with the import of oriental goods. His wife, Ewa, is from Torun. They met in Gdansk during his studies...They have two children: a girl and a boy...He speaks Polish fairly well. ⁽²²⁾

The majority of Vietnamese workers, however, are presented as people who have low competence in the Polish language and culture and do not try to integrate in Poland. The migrants are presented as people who stick close together in their own ethnic group and are only interested in earning money from Polish customers. They are shown as hard-working, shrewd and effective traders and entrepreneurs.

²² "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2001.11.13, "Nowy Polak" [A new Pole], Gazeta w Toruniu

6. The popular representation of the Vietnamese in Poland

In spite of quite a negative representation of Vietnam and the Vietnamese immigrants in the Polish press, the Vietnamese in general are surprisingly well perceived by Poles. Regardless of the generally negative view of immigrants and an increase in ethnic intolerance in Poland the popular representations of the Vietnamese are predominantly positive.

Although there is little familiarity with the Vietnamese in Poland, and little similarity between Polish and Vietnamese cultures, the Asian group is far better perceived than more similar and familiar migrants from the former Soviet Union, or foreigners from southern post-communistic European countries. In the 1990s Gypsies, Romanians, Ukrainians and Russians were the people most disliked by Poles (Jasinska-Kania, 1996). In 1998, CBOS included in their research a question about attitudes towards the Vietnamese for the first time. In 1999, the response to the same question in this research showed that negative feelings towards the Vietnamese were only a little stronger than positive ones. Nonetheless the Vietnamese were much better perceived than members of other nations living in Poland and coming from economically less developed countries. In 2000, positive feelings towards the Vietnamese have dominated over negatives ones.

The results of research done by Teresa Halik and Ewa Nowicka (in progress) show that over a half of Poles (51%) have a neutral attitude towards the arrival of Vietnamese to Poland. Although almost one third of Poles do not want Vietnamese to come to Poland, those people from mid and large size cities, which we can assume to have more contact with immigrants, are more enthusiastic about the presence of the Vietnamese in Poland than an average Pole (17% and 12% respectively, in contrast with 10% in the population as a whole). Though a substantial number of respondents in Halik and Nowicka's survey (35%) did not answer the question about the Vietnamese, 11% characterised them in very general terms, saying for example that there are different people among Vietnamese or that they are as "normal" as Poles are. This might mean either that people did not possess enough knowledge to formulate an opinion or that they have too many inconsistent pieces of information and images to answer the question. The second option is supported by multiplicity and diversity in the characteristics mentioned by respondents. In both cases it shows that there is no one distinct and predominant representation in common knowledge. It can be said that the representation of the

Vietnamese is still under the process of construction and consists of many different dimensions.

My own research and analysis of data gathered by Teresa Halik and Ewa Nowicka (in progress) disclose that among people there are various, inconsistent and undeveloped images – associations concentrated around many different dimensions. My own research project began in June 2001 when I asked 75 sixteen-year-old schoolboys and girls to describe a typical member of four different immigrant groups living in Poland: Armenians, Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Romanian Gypsies. Then, in September 2001 at the Institute for Social Science I began to coordinate a project on immigrants in Warsaw coming from less developed countries, especially the Vietnamese. As a part of this research, we conducted a survey among a representative sample of adults living in Warsaw on their perception of the Vietnamese.

Although the Vietnamese war does not play a key role in the representations of the Vietnamese in Poland, it is present in the image of the Vietnamese in two, to a certain degree, contradictory ways. First, there still survive, although they are not so powerful, remnants of the representation created by the Polish communist mass media in the past. Apparently retained from that era is an image of the Vietnamese as a brave and valiant people. The beginning of the representation of the Vietnamese as persistent, heroic and unfortunate can be also traced to that portrayal. In the 1990s an image of the unfortunate Vietnamese was reinforced by pictures of boat people desperately attempting to get out of communist Vietnam. The stereotype of Vietnamese as cruel and ruthless is little present in popular representations in spite of frequent information from crime columns on the recent Vietnamese immigrants in Poland.

The emergence of the Vietnamese migrants in Poland in the 1990s leads to the deep deconstruction of previous images and the appearance of new representations. Many images have been formed or modified on the basis of daily contacts. The Vietnamese have become first and foremost linked with their main economic activities in Poland, namely with trade on open markets (selling inexpensive goods) and running ethnic fast food restaurants. Though many Poles have reservations about the quality of goods and services supplied by the Vietnamese, reservations apparently reinforced by the press, in general they appreciate the existence of those inexpensive offers.

Numerous characteristics present in association with the Vietnamese do not relate to the Vietnamese as an ethnic group but apply to the Vietnamese as traders. Those characteristics concentrate around attitudes towards customers and the issue of honesty. In the first respect Vietnamese in general are perceived predominantly as polite, attentive or even a little servile towards customers. On the other hand Vietnamese traders are characterised as pushy and noisy in ways which seem to be related to the image of the Vietnamese as go-ahead and enterprising. In general the Vietnamese are seen as a resourceful immigrant group characterised by a high level of ethnic cooperation, whose members have a gift for trade and are successful in running small businesses in Poland.

Apart from the talent and strong motivation for work the Vietnamese prosperity is also attributed to their cunning and dishonesty. Now we can refer to a very useful paradigm of intergroup perception based on a combination of competence and morality components produced by Phalet and Poppe (1997). The first (competence) refers to the positive or negative adaptive value of traits for the self, the second (morality) refers to their value for others. The combination of the two allows the creation of a typology of stereotypes concerning different ethnic or national groups:

1. Moral and incompetent;
2. Immoral and incompetent;
3. Moral and competent;
4. Immoral and competent.

According to this typology, the Vietnamese in Poland are depicted as competent but rather immoral. There may be similarity between the images of the Vietnamese and Jews in Poland, as it has been suggested from discussions with Professor Grillo. In the case of both groups their competencies are perceived as high and they are positively evaluated, but their moral characteristics are seen in a negative way. Members of both groups are perceived as clever, talented and enterprising but canny and dishonest. Both ethnic groups are regarded by Poles as closed communities. There is an image that the Vietnamese form a closely-knit, hermetic, well organised group with a strong solidarity and cooperation between members against Poles.

Several diverse studies have shown that in the perception of Vietnamese the most prevalent are positive characteristics such as: "hard-working", "calm" and "kind". The most noticed dimension in

the image of the Vietnamese in Poland is their motivation for work. "Hard-working" is the most frequent characteristic, often accompanied by such traits as "diligent", "persistent" and "meticulous".

According to Teresa Halik (2000), in 1960s and 1970s among Polish teachers and tutors who dealt with Vietnamese students there already was prevalent an image of the Vietnamese as quiet, calm, diligent and honest. My research has shown that the contemporary Vietnamese immigrants are also regarded as kind, calm and well-mannered.

But popular representations of the Vietnamese also express the anxiety and the fear which accompanies contacts with "strangers". The Vietnamese are characterised as physically unclean which may reflect a popular belief in the inferiority of Asians. According to this belief, Vietnamese hygienic and civilisation standards are lower than Europeans. Representations also focus on differences in appearance between Poles and the Vietnamese. The Asians are characterised as being physically unattractive, having yellow or "dark" skin, slanting dark eyes, and black hair and perceived as weak (short with frail figures), but agile (fast and tough).

Associations with Vietnamese food are a good illustration of the dissonance involved in stereotypes: on the one hand, there is curiosity and a fascination with a distinct and different culture but, on the other, anxiety about the unknown. It is believed that that Vietnamese fast food restaurants offer unusual and tasty food, but food which is "polluted", prepared without meeting adequate hygienic standards and using ingredients forbidden in Polish culture, such as pigeon meat, dogs, cats. There is a hidden fear of unknown illnesses that can be caught from the Vietnamese.

Vietnamese migrants are also, to some degree, popularly represented and associated with illegal residence in Poland and illegal economic activities (smuggling goods, not paying taxes). In spite of a relatively frequent presence in crime columns in the Polish press, the Vietnamese migrants are not perceived as dangerous or as being able to physically harm the Polish. More visible is the threat of their competition on the market.

The Vietnamese and their culture intrigue Poles who perceive immigrants as mysterious and exotic. In popular perception there is a large cultural distance between the Vietnamese and Polish society which makes it impossible for both sides to communicate, understand each other and other norms, values and customs.

7. Conclusions

I would like to finish with some preliminary conclusions. My main point is that the Vietnamese as an immigrant group are unexpectedly well perceived in Poland. This is rather surprising taking into consideration the low familiarity and dissimilarity of this ethnic group, the economic crisis, the hostile attitudes towards immigrants in general, and quite a negative portrayal of the Vietnamese and their country in the Polish press. To be clear, I do not say that the perception of the Vietnamese is good, but it is significantly better than the perception of other migrants from developing countries and the image of the Vietnamese in the Polish press.

The divergence between media and popular representations seems to be an interesting problem for further study. It could be attributed to the fact that the newspapers studied are not very influential for the attitudes of the majority of Poles, and that could easily be explained by the relatively narrow range of their readership. But the image of the Vietnamese migrants is probably even worse in popular newspapers and on TV. It is possible that there is general disbelief in what the media say, a result of the control of the press in the communist past and the manipulation of public opinion by the communist rule. After 1989 a situation in the Polish mass media can be described as "chaos" of strongly articulated different, opposite, often contradictory views and arguments (Czyzewski, 1997). That reduces the influence of the mass media on the audience. It shows the limited influence of the media and its dependence on different social and political contexts.

However, I believe that the better perception of the Vietnamese in Poland than could be expected considering the relatively widespread intolerance towards migrants, and very negative representations of different immigrant groups, such as Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians, mainly results from a lack of long-term, deeply ingrained, negative representations from the past, the richness and complexity of the emerging images where various different representations exist in parallel, and what is the most important from the appreciation of the Vietnamese in an impoverished society. It seems to me that daily experience and awareness of economic interests for customers contribute a lot to that. The flexibility and adaptability of the Vietnamese activities in the Polish market have meant that during the current tough economic conditions they can meet customers' needs better than Polish traders, and have a better approach to clients than have Poles. It can mean that rational thinking in terms of po-

tential costs and benefits affect ethnic relations and representations of others.

For example, the perception of immigrants mainly in terms of economic advantages and disadvantages can be another confirmation of importance of economic factors in the life of Poles called by Janusz Czapiński (1996) as "the anchorage of the Polish soul". This can be an illustration of Bokszański's thesis (1995) that the images of "others" may reflect the values and symbols of the greatest significance for a society and be perceived as the important part of ethnic or national identity of a society that produces them.

The results show also how important is a broader economic and political context for the perception and representations of particular ethnic groups. It will be interesting to see how these images develop and transform in the changing social, political and economic contexts. Polish membership of the EU will undoubtedly have a large impact on the situation in Poland and provide a new framework for ethnic discourse. Any debate on immigration and ethnicity will intensify in public discourse. The question remains of how will these events influence popular representations of the Vietnamese in Poland.

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