ANGLO AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM MEDIA AND VISUAL ARTS

DEFINING "VIETNAMESE-NESS": A CROSS-GENERATIONAL DEBATE ON THE IDENTITY OF VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification thereof, or for any other university or institute of learning.

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are cited and included.

I also hereby acknowledge that my thesis will be made publicly available pursuant to Section 47b of Act No. 552/2005 Coll. and AAU's internal regulations.

Minh Chau Nguyen

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ABSTRACT

Defining "Vietnamese-ness": A Cross-generational Debate on the Identity of Vietnamese Immigrants in the Czech Republic

Minh Chau Nguyen

There are more than 60,000 Vietnamese-Czechs living the Czech Republic (CR) as of 2018, making it the third largest minority in the country. The first generation of Vietnamese came to the CR as early as the 1950s on a labor exchange program between Vietnam and Czechoslovakia. They remained in the country after the program ended, opened businesses and started families. The second generation of Vietnamese, the so-called "banana children," were born and raised in the CR. They look Vietnamese (yellow on the outside), but they act like Czechs (white on the inside), hence the label. The first-generation Vietnamese parents often fear and criticize their children's loss of their roots. This thesis investigates how the Vietnamese immigrants understand the concept of "root," and why is it important for them to preserve their roots. It explores the differences between the first- and second-generation Vietnamese immigrants and ways in which they embrace, or avoid, their Vietnamese heritage.

DISCLAIMER

The Vietnamese tend to have the same last names, making it difficult to distinguish them from each other. The article calls the subjects by their first names, similar to how it is done in Vietnam.

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"Twenty Lunar New Years abroad: Just another day

Shovel snow over our heads

Why do we keep seeking something faraway?

Having neither rice cakes nor Mother this Tet."

Le Quang Dai, Prague, Feb. 5, 2019

In daily conversations, 47-year-old Le Quang Dai likes quoting Vietnamese legends and ancient idioms. His friends say he is quite a poet. They enjoy reading his poems on Facebook and relate to his experience. Dai wrote the poem above on the first day of the Year of the Pig 2019 according to the lunar calendar. Living away from his home country, unable to take days off work to celebrate Tet, the biggest Vietnamese national holiday of the year, Dai can only express his homesickness through poetry. He misses Vietnam every day. It is surreal for him to think that twenty years ago, the CR was the "Promised Land," an alternative to his miserable reality in Vietnam.

"My generation came to the Czech Republic only because of money" Dai says. "If they say they want to learn new things and expand their minds, they are lying."

When Dai uses the term "my generation," he refers to the wave of Vietnamese who emigrated to the CR during the 1990s. Back then, Vietnam was still struggling economically despite the its Economic Reforms 13 years prior. Dai, at the time, was a young military general, based in Hue city, where one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War was fought. He yearned for a better life.

The Vietnamese had arrived in Czechoslovakia as early as the 1950s, but the '90s were what historian and ethnologist Stanislav Brouček calls "the time of freedom" for the Vietnamese. The end of the twentieth century saw flocks of them migrate to the CR dreaming of riches thanks to the country's lax immigration laws and newly open economy.

During the 1950s, most of the Vietnamese immigrants were war orphans and students with government stipends. After the Vietnam War, at the beginning of the '80s, the Vietnamese and Czechoslovak governments agreed on a labor exchange program. After the agreement expired in 1990, twenty thousand Vietnamese residents remained in the country, continued working and started families. The 1989 "Velvet Revolution" in the CR was the turning point for the country and the immigrants living there. Taking advantage of legal loopholes after the regime change and economic reforms, many immigrants, including the Vietnamese, participated in illegal transportation of goods and people through the CR. Dai was part of this wave of immigrants.

According to Stanislav Brouček's study published in "The Visible and Invisible Vietnamese in the Czech Republic," the Vietnamese immigrants not only moved to the CR for financial gains but also for the sake of their families. The Vietnamese often migrate as a "family strategy" for greater prosperity, better education, higher living standard and ultimately, a better life for the future generation. To achieve this goal, the Vietnamese found different ways to emigrate to the CR, both legally and illegally. Brouček writes in detail about the journey shared by many Vietnamese immigrants, including Dai via agencies (qua dịch vụ). During the 1990s, numerous Vietnamese employment agencies emerged and offered services to assist their fellow citizens to

relocate to the CR. The agencies claimed to be the bridge between the Czech society and the Vietnamese immigrants, providing information and guidance. Their services would help the Vietnamese find suitable employment and accommodation, teach them Czech, educate them in Czech laws, prepare them for visa application, and so on. The demand for these services grew, and so did greed.

The services became more and more expensive. People without qualifications were advised to borrow money for such services, in hope of repaying the debt after a few years working in the CR. After that, they were told, they could start sending money home to support their families.

Brouček explains that the agencies' sole concern was money. The agency workers only focused on how to relocate their clients to the CR. How the immigrants would survive and make a living to repay their massive debt back home was not the agencies' concern. In 2008, the global financial crisis hit the Czech Republic, and hundreds of factory workers were laid off within a week. The first to go were foreigners, including the Vietnamese. They faced a dilemma: they could not stay in the CR because they did not have a job to extend their visas; but they could not go back to Vietnam either, because they were in huge debt. With no employment agency there to help them, many became illegal immigrants. Some involved themselves in illegal activities to make a living. Some even attempted suicide.

"After the workers arrived here, they became modern slaves" said Marcel Winter, Chairman of the Czech-Vietnamese Society in an interview with *Podnikatel* in 2009. "If between January 1, 2007 and February 2008 our embassy in Hanoi issued 9994 business

visas to unqualified Vietnamese people who have no command of Czech and only 2,500 work visas to qualified Vietnamese people, it proves that there is something wrong here."

Dai also came to the CR with the help of an agency. The agency got him a tourist visa to fly to Slovakia, from there he traveled to the CR, and legalized his stay by marrying a Czech woman. The whole "package" cost him $7000 plus another $1000 "gift" for the bride's family. "We had a real wedding," Dai says. "We went to the town hall, to church and celebrated with people. We just don't live together. But the marriage was real."

Dai was a classic case of human smuggling at the time. Studies have shown that Vietnamese immigrants were often flown to Russia, Hungary and Slovakia, then crossed the border illegally to the CR in trucks. The price that Dai paid the smugglers was average. In some cases, it could be as high as $12,000 if the person lacked knowledge or experience in the "business." Dai borrowed the money from a relative who lived in the border city of Cheb. He and his Czech wife remained married for the next ten years. During this time, Dai had another unregistered wedding with a Vietnamese woman. "I didn't want to divorce [the Czech woman]," Dai says. "They would take away my green card. It's more beneficial to be a local's son-in-law than a divorced man."

For Dai and many other Vietnamese immigrants, leaving Vietnam for the CR was a gamble, but also one that they could cheat. Finding loopholes in the Czech immigration regulations and breaking the laws had become part of their survival instinct.

Dai was extremely lucky to have arrived before the economic crisis in 2008; he managed to pay off his debt within a few years. But many were not so fortunate, as in the case of the factory workers mentioned above, proving that the illegal journey to the CR

was a gamble that could cost some players their lives. Even though life in the CR is not the dream that Dai envisioned, he does not regret his decision to leave Vietnam. He is accustomed to the lifestyle here yet cannot let go of his roots. The struggle to integrate into the Czech society without losing one's cultural heritage is common among 60,000 Vietnamese immigrants in the CR and they approach the matter in their own ways as we shall see in the next chapters.

"Missing Thieu and friends,

The well, the sugar-apple tree, grandmother

Those days are long gone...gone

But how can I forget

These memories I carry with me forever."

Le Quang Dai, Prague, May 7, 2017

1.2 The Non-stop Mini-markets

There is at least one grocery store (potraviny) on every street in Prague, and its owner is most likely Vietnamese. It is estimated that one in three mini-markets in the CR is run by the Vietnamese, adding up to the total number of around 3,000 *potraviny* across the country. The Vietnamese are famous for working from early morning to late evening without holidays. They spare little time for their children and leave them in the care of nannies and schools.

The "Association of groceries in the Czech Republic" (Hiệp Hội Potraviny Cz) is the name of the biggest Facebook group used by the Vietnamese community. The Vietnamese joke that the second Czech word they learn after "*Ahoj*" (Hello) is "*Potraviny*," which they call "*pốt"* for short. But running a 24/7 business is no joke. It may look simple, but it requires hard work. In many cases, the job can be toxic to one's health and relationships.

"It's exhausting to run a *pốt,*" says 60-year-old Nguyen Khanh-Hoa, who once owned a *potraviny* before retiring. "You wake up at three or four in the morning to fetch fresh greens from the wholesalers. Deliver them to your store. Arrange the goods. Put price tags on them. Clean the place [....] Our store close early, usually around 21:00, but many other shops open overnight."

Besides the demanding labor, another concern of Khanh-Hoa is the lack of time and attention she has for her 15-year-old daughter who was born in the CR and now goes to high school here. She says many Vietnamese shopkeepers sacrifice quality family time for financial gains and give their children little care and guidance which affects their personal development and self-image. There are second-generation Vietnamese who

answer “I am Czech” when somebody asks where they are from. They have no awareness of their origin she says in disappointment. They resent their parents and their roots. There are exceptions, of course. Eighteen-year-old Nguyen Linh-Chi, for example, is highly conscious of her bloodline and its significance.

It was already 10 p.m. and Linh-Chi’s parents had not come home from the shop yet. This was ten years ago but Linh-Chi remembers it well. She and her brother planned to stay up to wait for their parents but were falling asleep. “We tried our best to stay awake,” Linh-Chi says. “I tried to drink a lot of water and told my brother to slap me, but he had already fallen asleep. I continued to wait without him.” She was drifting into sleep when she heard the doors click.

“Hello! (Ahoj)” her parents said as they walked in. “Hello,” she replied. No one said anything further. The family was tired, so they simply said, “Good night (Dobrou noc)!” and went to bed.

“I really wished they had more time for me,” says Linh-Chi, fidgeting her fingers while looking away, but then laughs it off. She says she’s used to being on her own and taking care of herself. Her parents, similar to most first-generation Vietnamese, only need a limited Czech vocabulary to speak to the locals and sell them goods. Due to their busy work schedule, they spend little time expanding their Czech knowledge. Linh-Chi remembers writing sick leave letters for herself in elementary school. The teacher could easily see that she had faked her parents’ handwriting because the excuse sounded childish, though honest. Linh-Chi eventually learned how to write proper sick leave letters by imitating those of her classmates. She says all other second-generation

Vietnamese she knows shared the same experience. Their family situation pushed them to be independent and self-sufficient from an early age.

It would be unfair, however, to say that Linh-Chi's parents never spend time with her because they did during her first five years. This period, though brief, played an important role in shaping Linh-Chi's understanding and perception of her cultural identity. In the early 2000s, her parents sold clothes at the Prague Market (Pražská tržnice) in Praha 7. This place was Prague's central slaughterhouse before becoming a market. Today at the gate still stand two cow statues, earning the market its nickname "Cow Market" (Chợ Bò) by the Vietnamese. At the beginning of the twentieth-first century, there were up to 500 stalls run by the Vietnamese in "Cow Market." Hundreds of Europeans, especially the Czechs and the Danes, arrived at the market in buses every day to buy goods. Business went well so Linh-Chi's parents used to close their shop around 6 p.m. and their family had the whole evening together. Her mother brought textbooks from Vietnam and taught her to read and write in Vietnamese. "I used to hate my parents for making me stay up until 10 p.m. to learn Vietnamese," Linh-Chi says. "But now, I'm extremely grateful."

Born and raised in the Czech Republic, Linh-Chi has only visited her father's hometown in Vietnam three times but feels deeply connected to her cultural heritage. "I'm a hundred percent Vietnamese," she states. "Vietnamese is my mother tongue. There's no reason for me to identify as a Czech. I may have a Czech education, but that's just the environment I grew up in. My blood is Vietnamese."

However, Linh-Chi's strong sense of cultural identity is an aberration among the second-generation Vietnamese growing up in the Czech Republic. Most Vietnamese

parents are like hers: too busy to care for their children, let alone educate them in Vietnamese language and culture. Most children become the "Banana children" (Banánové děti) of the Vietnamese community. "Banana children" is what Asian immigrants around the world often called: yellow on the outside, white on the inside. A "banana child" may exhibit Asian features, but he or she acts and thinks like a white person. Although the term was first used as an insult to a person who had lost his or her roots, the majority of these young Vietnamese don't take offense. They have dispelled the negative connotation and reclaimed the term. To show pride in their identity, Viet Up, a non-profit organization for second-generation Vietnamese organize "Banana Festival" (Banán Fest) every year. Vietnamese and Czechs alike come to "Banana Festival" to learn more about each other's backgrounds and stories to find similarities and celebrate differences. In her paper "Spaces for Counter-Narratives: The Phenomenology of Reclamation," Professor Farah Godrej explains that reclaiming ownership of derogatory terms can be empowering, liberating and inspirational. We've seen this throughout history with terms such as "bitch," "queers," "niggers," and so on. "Linguistic reclamation is usually a tool for disarming the power of a dominant group to control one's own and others' views of oneself," Farah Godrej writes. In this case, reclaiming the term "banana children" helps cultivate a common identity and create solidarity among the second generation of Vietnamese in the CR. By organizing meaningful activities and events such as talk shows about careers with Vietnamese and Czech speakers, the group bridges the Vietnamese minority and the Czech society. Their goal is to slowly change the perception of others towards the "banana children" and bring a new positive meaning to the term.

However, some Vietnamese of the first generation still find it hard to hear "banana children." Dai, the lover of Vietnamese poetry, thinks it is unacceptable to become white on the inside and to forget one's roots. To Dai, even if the children speak Vietnamese but enjoy a Czech education, they will develop a Czech mentality. For a person to maintain and promote the traditions and values of any culture, Dai thinks, he or she must be fully immersed in that culture. If they grow up in the CR, they will never understand Vietnamese traditions or feel a sense of nationalism. He calls this losing one's roots (mất gốc). The Vietnamese dictionary writes: "*Mất gốc* means losing one's connection with his/her ancestors, origin and foundation. Example: *mất gốc* men depend on the United States for livelihood." As the dictionary example indicates, the term gained its popularity in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). North Vietnam would call South Vietnam "*mất gốc*" for supporting the United States invasion. Thirty years after the war, the term, once used for people who commit treason, is used to call those who have forgotten where they come from.

Dai becomes passionate when expressing his love for his homeland. He tells the old legend of the Vietnamese origin: A hundred people were born out of a giant egg, the product of the love between king Lac Long Quan and fairy Au Co. These people built a kingdom and expanded it into what is now Vietnam. "We are brothers and sisters born out of the same parents," he concludes. "We share. We unite. We defeat enemies. That's our root."

Dai sent his children back to Vietnam ten years ago, before they started elementary school. They have lived with his parents-in-law since. Dai says his children adapted quickly to their new life where they are loved and cared for by a tight kinship network

instead of being alone and bullied for looking different. Getting over the initial pain of family separation, Dai is proud to see his children grow up as "authentic Vietnamese" who not only speak Vietnamese and practice its tradition but are soaked in patriotism. "Authentic Vietnamese" always have their homeland in mind and do their best to contribute to its well-being and prosperity. Patriotism, Dai explains, is a spiritual connection between a person and his/her country which can only be felt when one is raised in it.

Linh-Chi's viewpoint is slightly different from Dai because she is a citizen of two countries who enjoys a liberal European education that does not encourage hypernationalism. Furthermore, she thinks one's identity depends on the person, not the environment. To reach this level of Vietnamese language competence and cultural understanding, Linh-Chi mostly learns on her own because her parents don't have time for her. The inclination to discover one's roots, she says, will come naturally as the person grows older as in her case. Linh-Chi listens to Vietnamese news daily and shares her opinions regarding social issues in Vietnam on Facebook. Born and raised in the CR but she thinks she cares and knows more about Vietnam than many "authentic Vietnamese" themselves. This is how she shows her love and respect for her origin.

Chapter 2: The Second-Generation Vietnamese-Czech

2.1 Czech Grandmothers

When Yen-Nhi Phamová was almost six-month-old, she was sent to a Czech nanny, or "*bà Tây*" (literal Vietnamese translation: Western grandmother). She would stay with the nanny from Monday to Friday and only go home to her Vietnamese parents on the weekend. This routine continued until Yen-Nhi was a few years old.

It is estimated that 80-95 percent of Vietnamese families hire Czech nannies for their children, while only one to two percent of the Czechs use private caregivers, according to an article "Paid Caregiving in the Gendered Life Course" by Adéla Souralová. Some Vietnamese children are sent for a few months, some years. Award-winning blogger Vietnamese-Czech, Do Thu Trang, explains the importance of these women in the personal development of the Vietnamese-Czech children in her blog "Our Czech grandmothers:"

> Our parents agreed with them on babysitting, tutoring, picking up after school or solving the necessary school affairs. They are often professional women, retired grandmothers, or housewives who have taken us Vietnamese in and raised us as their own children. Sometimes for a short period, sometimes for several years. Sometimes for a small financial reward, sometimes just for pleasure. They taught us Czech, cooked Czech food and explained to us the world around.

The care and guidance of the "Czech grandmothers" shape the childhood of most second-generation Vietnamese and develop their mindset. Yen-Nhi, now a 23-year-old business graduate, doesn't remember much about her Czech nanny but recalls leaving her. "I did

not know who my parents were," Yen-Nhi says. When she moved permanently back home to live with her parents, she only spoke Czech. "One day, they dropped by and introduced themselves to me. It was really strange. After, they declared their 'ownership' over me and took me home; they only spoke Vietnamese to me."

Bach-Yen, on the other hand, does not recall her daughter struggling to adjust to her "new" home. "Yen-Nhi was very intelligent," says Bach-Yen. "She looked up Vietnamese words in a dictionary and wrote them down. She even wrote poems in Vietnamese." Since she no longer employed a Czech nanny, Bach-Yen spent more time with Yen-Nhi, teaching her family values and traditions. Yen-Nhi now speaks fluent Vietnamese, Czech and English, so does her older brother, who moved from Vietnam to the CR to reunite with his family at the age of eight. Graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration from Anglo-American University in Prague, Yen-Nhi and her brother opened their own finance consulting company in the Vietnamese market SAPA. Their achievements have brought the parents great joy and pride. But what makes Bach-Yen most proud is her children's strong connection to their Vietnamese roots, especially in the case of Yen-Nhi. The time she invested in her daughter paid off.

According to Adéla Souralová in her extensive studies on the subject, Vietnamese immigrants hire Czech nannies for their children for several reasons. The first is obvious: the parents are busy. Not only do they have to work hard to settle the loans that enabled them to relocate to the CR in the first place, but in many cases, they also have to send money back to Vietnam to support their extended families. Second, Vietnamese parents want to bring a grandmother figure into their family, simulate a normal lifestyle of a Vietnamese household and help their children learn the Czech language as quickly as

possible. First-generation Vietnamese are well aware of their biggest shortcoming: the language barrier, so they make sure their children speak fluent Czech. Linguistic competence is key to social acceptance and integration. Furthermore, first-generation Vietnamese hire others to take care of their babies because they are used to the dual-earner household model where both partners work to provide for the family. Souralová explains that in Vietnam, wages are low, maternity leave is only a few months and there is a wide range of nursery schools as well as complex kinship networks to help take care of babies as early as a few months old. Women staying home for too long after birth to look after their children can be judged as lazy, incapable or dependent on her husband's money for survival. Vietnamese women are, therefore, not used to the housewife life.

On April 3, 2019, a Vietnamese mother of two complained on Facebook community group of the Vietnamese non-profit Lam Cha Me CZ (Parenting in the CR) that staying home for three years taking care of the children has made her suffer financially and psychologically. For fear of the stigma towards "bad mothers," the woman shared her story under the fake Facebook account "Thy Thang," asking other Vietnamese mothers for help. She explains that her husband is the sole breadwinner of the family, earning 30,000 Czech crowns each month, a third of which is used to cover the living expense of two adults and two children: a new-born and a two-year-old. But since she gave birth to the second child, the family had struggled to keep everything under budget, causing the couple to argue regularly. The post received more than 250 comments from other Vietnamese women, most were sympathetic and supportive. Many women took the opportunity to share their own stories of financial struggle and depression after giving birth. Most people advised "Thy Thang" to go work for a Vietnamese restaurant or nail

salon to earn extra cash, so that she can afford a Czech nanny for her children. Others recommended that she take advantage of her maternal leave to babysit children for other mothers for money. “Women have to be financially independent, so no one can look down on us,” a woman commented. “Thy Thang’s” story shows that young Vietnamese women prefer working to babysitting, so they allocate the latter to old Czech women.

Souralová describes the job of a Czech nanny in her studies as time-consuming, demanding, paid and fulfilling. The last characteristic is most important: These nannies choose to look after children because it brings them joy. Through her interviews, Souralová finds that the nannies often have to look after the child all day or all week for a monthly salary of 6,000 to 10,000 CZK (230-380 EUR) which translates to less than 20 CZK per hour. But most Czech “grandmothers” don’t care about the payment. If the women are retired, they have the social benefits covering their basic expenses; their main concern is the loneliness, the passivity and the meaningless life of old age. Caring for a child regardless of its ethnicity brings them a sense of fulfillment.

Thanks to the Czech “grandmothers”, the Vietnamese children grow up, speak Czech and understand the culture of their host country, which helps them integrate better when attending Czech schools. The impact of the Czech environment on the second-generation Vietnamese can be seen in a survey done in 2017 by Alex Tran from Charles University with 120 Vietnamese-Czechs from 15 to 25 years of age. The survey shows that 86 percent of the participants have had a Czech nanny look after them. Although 84 percent say they are fluent in both Vietnamese and Czech, 70 percent speak only Czech on a daily basis because their Czech is better than their Vietnamese, and half of the participants cannot write Vietnamese at all. Most of them have more Czech friends than

Vietnamese ones. Sixty-seven percent identify with the Czech culture and have conflicts with their parents because their differences in cultural and social values. Nevertheless, the survey also indicates that the Vietnamese-Czechs identify more with their cultural heritage as they grow older; 62 percent say they identify with the Czech culture in childhood, but only 53 percent do now in adulthood.

Hoang Minh Tuan, for example, considers Czech his first language, but as he has grown older, he has come to appreciate his origin and developed an urge to learn Vietnamese. He now tells his Vietnamese Czech friends to call him by his Vietnamese name Tuan, instead of his Czech name Martin. He says his father picked "Martin" because it was a popular name during the 90s and easy to pronounce. Growing up in Cheb, a town that is only five kilometers away from the Czech-German border where ten percent of the population is Vietnamese, Tuan had many friends who are also second-generation Vietnamese. They would hang out in the park after school, using pieces of wood as swords or guns to play pretend while screaming at each other in Czech. He only speaks broken Vietnamese at home, having simple conversations with his parents who have gotten used to his strong Czech accent and loanwords. After graduating from University of Economics in Prague with a degree in Economics and Management and working for IBM as its external supplier, Tuan sets himself a goal to improve his Vietnamese.

"My vision is to secure my family," says Tuan with a big smile. His eyes wide open, brimming with confidence. "I want to make them financially secured by introducing them the concept of passive income so that even if they stop working, they will still have money. I want to learn Vietnamese as a mission, a higher purpose. If I speak Vietnamese

more fluently, I will teach them things I know: success theories, sales skills, negotiation, my knowledge from books and classes. They are over 50. They haven't had the opportunities that I have to learn about these things. They have done the same thing for 30 years. It's my duty to teach them and make their lives better."

Although Tuan thinks his parents are not the best investors, they are his inspirations for hard-working entrepreneurs, which is how they earn the respect of the local Czechs in Cheb. "They work 365 days a year," Tuan says, switches from speaking English to Vietnamese and imitate his parents' words. "Mưa, bão, tuyết rơi, chẳng sao hết! (Rain, Storm, Snow: No problem!)"

Martin is grateful for his parents sacrifice that enabled him to attend a top university and work for a top global IT company, which is why he plans to travel to Vietnam next month to rediscover his cultural roots, so that he can connect with his parents on a deeper level in the future. There many other second-generation Vietnamese similar to Martin with rusty Vietnamese and vague understanding of its culture, but they know their origin. At one point in their life, when they are mature and ready, they naturally feel the need to reconnect.

2.2 Labels at School

"Ha...T..h..an..h.…," the teacher squinted her eyes to look at the letters, struggling to pronounce her new student's name. Eventually, giving up, Ha Thanh's kindergarten teacher gave her a new name for convenience: "Hasika." The name "Hasika" does not have any meaning, while "Ha Thanh" means "green river" in Vietnamese.

"At that time, I didn't speak any Czech," said Ha Thanh Špetlíková in an interview with *Lidovky* in 2010. "I saw that the teacher wrote "Hasika" next to my name. I didn't understand what it meant. In primary school, Hasiku sounds like Jessicu so I answer to both names."

Having a name in the local language is the first step for any immigrant to integrate into the society of the host country, especially when it helps him/her find jobs or places to stay. A research by Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education shows that Vietnamese immigrants must apply for twice as many apartment advertisements as Czech people in order to be invited for a view. Czech job seekers are also 180 percent more likely than Asian immigrants to earn an interview when applying for jobs. A similar experiment done in the United States in 2016 shows that second-generation Irish, German and Polish immigrants with "very ethnic names" earn $50 to $100 less per year than those with "very American names." "If you want your child to be more sociable, confident and able to avoid unnecessary troubles, you can choose a Western name for him or her," says Vuong Thuy-An a Vietnamese mother of two living in Prague, President of the non-profit Lam Cha Me CZ (Parenting in the CR).

On Easter 2019, Thuy-An organized a trip for several Vietnamese mothers and their children to Budapest. Coming along with the group is a Chinese boy whose name hardly

anyone could pronounce or remember. “People mispronounced [the boy’s] name into funny sounds,” An says. “He didn’t enjoy it and was unhappy whenever his name is called. Sometimes he sighed in reaction to hearing it, but never dared saying anything. Every time this happened, I only wished his parents had given him a Western name to make it easier for others to call him.”

Thuy-An herself knows the struggle of naming children in a multicultural environment. Her husband is Chinese. Their nine-year-old son Filip has a beautiful Chinese name 吴蒙捷 (Wu Mengjie), given to him by his grandfather, which means health and strength. Only one problem: the middle name 蒙 (Meng) is translated into “buttocks” (Môngin Vietnamese. Thuy-An, therefore, for convenience, gave her son a Czech name “Filip,” a name Czech, Vietnamese and Chinese people can all pronounce.

Psychologist Erik Erikson, known for his theory of identity crisis, says people develop their sense of “self” around the age of puberty. During this period, we ask ourselves questions such as “who am I,” “what is my purpose,” “who do I want to become,” and so on. For children of immigrants, this is extra challenging because they are under the influence of two or more cultures. Sometimes, in order to cope with the identity crisis, they deny one of the two identities.

“I’m more Dužan than Duc,” says the Vietnamese-Czech movie director Dužan Duong (Vietnamese name: Duong Viet Duc) in an interview with Czech Radio in 2016. “But at home, when I’m with my parents, I’m still Duc. And I will always be Duc at home.”

Dužan doesn’t speak Vietnamese. In 2014, he made a short docu-fiction film named “Mat Goc” (Rootless) based on his personal experience with identity crisis. The movie

features him and his brother visiting Vietnam for the first time, overwhelmed by the culture shock. While the Vietnamese culture shocked Dužan, the Czech culture shocked Thu Vu when she first set foot in the CR at the age of six. Hiding behind her big leather purse, Thu sobs as she recalls her early experiences in the Czech Republic. It's been years, but the painful memories still haunt her.

"At the time, I couldn't get used to my new life in the Czech Republic," Thu says. "Meanwhile, my friends in Vietnam had already forgotten me. I didn't know who I was, or where I belonged."

When Thu went to school, her classmates mocked her for her Asian appearance and accent. After the initial struggle with the language, she slowly became fluent in Czech, and her academic performance spiked. But that only made her situation worse. Thu became a subject of envy. "Some girls provoked me to fight them after school," she says. "They spread terrible rumors about me. The situation got out of hand, and the police arrived at school to question me. I didn't want to go to school anymore."

Thu was not the only Vietnamese student to suffer from bullying. In the research done by Alex Tran on 120 second-generation Vietnamese, 58 percent of the participants have reportedly experienced racist and/or xenophobic assaults during their time in the CR, 86 percent of which were verbal. These attacks harm their self-esteem and pride, make them question their identity and sometimes, leave deep scars in their hearts.

Ondra Nguyen was another victim of bullying. After two older students beat him up for no apparent reason, his sister came to talk to the teacher. Ondra did not want people to know about the incident, but the injuries were hard to hide. He was ashamed.

“I used to hate being Vietnamese.” says Ondra, now a student at University of Economics in Prague. “When I was young, maybe 12. Something like that. It’s very difficult being Vietnamese in the Czech Republic during those times. I think it wasn’t just my problem, but of many Vietnamese. I heard it from some Vietnamese they hated being Vietnamese in the CR when they were younger.”

In her book “Green Passport Goes Around the World,” (Hộ Chiếu Xanh Đi Quanh Thế Giới), Ho Thu Huong describes in detail how she was verbally and physically assaulted by Czech people during her teenage years in the small city of Havířov. One time in primary school, Huong and her classmate Veronika went for a walk and passed a playground where four boys, the same age as them, were playing. Veronika knew the boys, so she dropped by to say hi. But before she started her greetings, Huong already heard what she had expected. “I heard ‘China! China!’” Huong writes in her book. “I wanted to walk as fast as I could from those children. But they wouldn’t let us be. They followed us like a tail. As we sat on a swing, the smallest boy hit me in the head with a long stick. Other boys threw rocks at me. I ran home, slammed the door and cried.”

Huong did not let the racist slurs or violent attacks bring her down. She turned them into motivation instead. “It is always a big challenge to be an immigrant,” Huong writes. “Until the world tears down all prejudice, immigrants everywhere have to fight for themselves.” Since then, she studied hard to prove her abilities, won numerous academic competitions and gained opportunities to travel abroad for study and work. Now 31, Huong has traveled to 25 countries and is fluent in five languages. In 2016, she co-authored with two other Vietnamese to write “Green Passport Goes Around the World” and told their stories of living, working and traveling around the world. The book made it

to the top 20 most valuable books in Vietnam in the same year. The labels people put on Huong no longer bother her, she says in her book, because she knows who she is. She is a global citizen. She does not belong to a single nation but the world.

Ondra also found a way to fight for himself and regain confidence. After the assault, he started learning martial arts. A few years later, on his way out of the supermarket Kaufland, Ondra heard a drunkard said something racist about him. “I waited outside for the man to finish his shopping, and then I just beat him up,” Ondra says. “I was stupid. I was young. I wanted to show off to people that I’m Vietnamese but I’m confident.”

Fortunately, Ondra does not fight on the streets anymore. Now he practices boxing and dancing with a personal trainer. “I work out because it’s a lifestyle,” Ondra says. “I’m glad the two guys beat me up that day. That’s how it all started. Everything. My behaviors. My attitudes to life. Who I am today. I’m very proud of it.”

No one can avoid being labeled. In his book about stereotypes and prejudice, Charles Stangor, professor of psychology at the University of Maryland, asserts that since prehistoric times, for our own safety and livelihood, humans have learned to judge quickly and put people in boxes of friends and enemies. But social categorization and stereotyping have pros and cons. Social boxes exaggerate the similarities among people in the same social group as well as the differences between social groups. Insults and violence between social groups often deepen the divide and contribute to the stereotypes. Derogatory labels affect people’ sense of identity. As we have seen, second-generation Vietnamese have various ways to deal with their labels. Some deny the labels. Some reclaim. Others turn them into fuel for success. No one can avoid being labeled, but everyone can choose how to deal with it.

2.3 "Model Citizen" Expectations

"Vietnamese fellow citizens are a model and inspiration for us in many ways," said the Czech President Miloš Zeman in an interview with Vietnamese magazine Huong Sen in 2018. What impressed the president most was the integration of the second-generation Vietnamese who "speak Czech better than their Czech peers."

"Young Vietnamese today become successful entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers or economists in the Czech Republic," President Zeman continued. "I would like to use the talent and potential of the second-generation of Vietnamese to deepen relations between the Czech Republic and Vietnam. With the knowledge of Asian mentality and languages: Czech, Vietnamese, English and often other world languages, young Vietnamese have become sought-after by companies in the Czech Republic whose export strategies count on penetration into Asian markets."

For Asian immigrants, being called "model" citizens of the host country can create pressure as well as honor. In her book, "The Success Frame and Achievement Paradox: The Costs and Consequences for Asian Americans," Min Zhou, professor of sociology and Asian American Studies at the University of California, describes how Asian American parents in the United States (US) invest all the family's resources in their children and push them to perform at the highest level in class and in life at all times.

> "doing well in school" means: getting straight A's, graduating as valedictorian or salutatorian, getting into one of the top UC (University of California) schools or an Ivy, and pursuing some type of graduate education in order [to] work in one of the "four professions": doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, or engineer.

Similar to Asian parents in the US, the Vietnamese parents of the CR also encourage their children to study and work hard in defense to racism and xenophobia. Researchers found that the Vietnamese Czechs score an average of 1.3 in primary schools and 1.7 in secondary schools (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 is highest). Their academic success is believed to earn the respect of the locals. But great expectation means great pressure. In the Bulletin of the World Health Organization 2006, Harpham and Tran reported that a fifth of young Vietnamese people suffer from depression and anxiety under educational stress. The stress also leads to family conflicts, substance abuse, and violence.

The pressure is likely a result of traditional Confucian teachings in Vietnamese culture, according to Kristýna Koplová in her bachelor thesis "Second-generation Vietnamese in the Czech Republic" published in 2013. In Vietnam, Confucianism is considered a religion and a way of life. It teaches people to respect the social hierarchy and obey their parents, follow the orders of the authorities and conform to the majority. Parents plan their children's career path in childhood, and ask for recommendations from other Vietnamese parents. A number of families to send their children to grammar schools (gymnázium) rather than secondary school (střední škola) because the former is believed to provide better preparation for entering university. Many second-generation Vietnamese follow their parents' advice and pursue a business degree at the University of Economics in Prague because bankers, entrepreneurs and accountants are believed to earn well. Kristýna says the Vietnamese believe education means social mobility. Czech education, on the other hand, encourages critical thinking and independence. Schools provide people the necessary knowledge that enables them to make wise life decisions. People should have the freedom to choose their fields of study, universities and careers.

In her bachelor thesis, Radka Štorkánová interviews five Vietnamese and analyzes their identity issues from a narrative approach. The interviews show one common dilemma that second-generation Vietnamese face: parents' expectation versus personal freedom, specifically in the choice of study and employment. Vietnamese Czechs, as a result, often find themselves in a middle of "clash of civilization" where they have to decide to listen to their parents' orders or follow their dreams.

Dužan Duong's father never knew he went to film school (then dropped out of it). Dužan did not think his father would understand, so for a long time, he kept his filmmaking passion a secret. Not until his docu-fiction "Mat Goc" (Rootless) was released in 2014 and became a phenomenon in the Vietnamese community did the father slowly understand what his son did outside of their family's groceries store. Showing support for his son's career, Dužan's father agreed to play in his son's next movie called "Bo Hai" (Father Hai, 2017) as himself and the lead character.

In the movie, Hai runs a groceries store. His son Viet-Anh, Dužan's brother, helps Hai run errands around the store whenever he can, even though he prefers doing other activities. Viet-Anh has many Czech friends with whom he practices hip hop dancing after class, but he keeps it a secret from Hai. All of this is based on the true-life story of Dužan. By showing the Czech audience the conflict between the father and the son, the film director provided an insight into the life of a Vietnamese immigrant family behind the mini-markets.

The generational gap between Dužan and his father is also an acculturation one which often takes place in immigrant families where different generations are immersed in different cultures. The same acculturation gap is observed by researchers Joyce Ho and

Dina Birman in Vietnamese immigrant families in the United States. Thanks to their linguistic competence and education, the second-generation are usually more integrated into the host society than the first-, but they are still children with limited knowledge and experience. Poor family communication prevents them from asking their parents for help and guidance. Quite the opposite, they are expected to provide assistance to their parents because they know the local language. This role reversal leads the children to lose respect and feel embarrassed for their parents. Meanwhile, they lack role models which leads to identity crisis. This is especially tough during their teenage years as they try to gain independence from their Vietnamese parents while striving to fit in with their Czech peers.

"As a teenager, I saw how my friends were able to hang out much later than me," says Lam Nguyen, a student at Anglo-American University's School of Humanities. "When my parents gave me the reason that it's culturally unacceptable for us to do the same thing, I couldn't understand it at all. My mom told me that's not what Vietnamese girls do. I have no power of negotiation in my family. When I snap at them, they come back and say that I'm too 'westernized.'"

The difference between Lam's mindset and her parents shows their acculturation gap. Štorkánová explains in her study on second-generation Vietnamese that family conversation is often kept simple and brief due to the lack of time, the language barrier between parents and children and their hierarchical relationships determined by Confucianism. This lack of communication between Vietnamese parents and their children leads to misunderstandings that heighten the differences in thinking and lifestyles. Meanwhile, many second-generation Vietnamese are discriminated against and

humiliated because of their ethnic or economic background, making them ashamed of their family and heritage. The shame causes them to further distance themselves from their parents.

"When I was small, I heard that all Vietnamese are shopkeepers," says Vu Ha-Thu in the documentary film "Banánové děti" (Banana Kids) directed by Martin Ryšavý in 2009. Ha-Thu was born in Vietnam but came to the CR at the age of ten. "It hurt me a lot. It was such a livelihood, but I think that we could have a totally different occupation as the next generation"

Many Vietnamese Czechs such as Ha Thu feel the stigma towards *potraviny*. Some Czechs feel alarmed by the number of *potraviny* owned by Vietnamese people and the pace at which they are spreading around the CR. Their fear is bolstered by possibly biased news on Czech media about illegal Vietnamese immigrants, tax evaders and criminals. For example, in 2018, a headline runs on *iDnes*, a private news outlet owned by Andej Babiš the Czech Prime Minister (PM), "No receipts. A fifth of Vietnamese mini-markets violate EET laws". However, the article says that while 19 percent of the Vietnamese mini-markets violate the law, 13 percent of Czech ones do the same. It is clear that not only the Vietnamese are guilty, but it can be convenient for media to redirect the focus of any criminal issues to the immigrants for its self-interest. Because of this unfair reporting and lack of representation of Vietnamese Czechs on Czech media, there is a stigma towards Vietnamese in mini-markets. In research entitled "Immigrant Parental Expectations and Investment into Education of Children," none of the 54 Vietnamese parents want their children to follow their footsteps and work in retail,

general services or the catering industry. But some Vietnamese Czechs have a different viewpoint regarding the profession.

"[At the beginning] I would tell people that it's my parents' shop, not mine," recalls 30-year-old second-generation Vietnamese Luu Anh-Nhat when she bought the store from her mother and started running it on her own. "But then I realized, actually I'm doing a lot more than the average employee. I should be proud that I'm owning my own business. I manage it well, so I have time to manage my other projects."

Anh-Nhat thinks the stigma towards Vietnamese running mini-markets also comes from the self-inflicted narrative of the "banana children" which pushes them to be different from and better than their parents in order to prove their worthiness to the locals. The title "model citizen" has become another label forced on the Vietnamese immigrants and whenever one of them does not live up to the stereotypical standard, he/she is a disappointment. Anh-Nhat is glad that her generation are trying our different professional fields and showing the Czech locals that they are not all the same. But she also hopes the society will soon progress to the next stage of acceptance where people are no longer judged by their job titles but their humanity.

2.4 Discussions about Love and Marriage

"If your child dates a white guy, you [as a Vietnamese parent] know the society is gonna say something, so you put that pressure of the society on your child" says Anh-Nhat, the previously mentioned Vietnamese Czech with her own *potraviny*. "My friend has just started dating an American guy. She knows if [her parents] know, she'll be screamed at home. So sometimes if [the relationship] is not serious, [the second-generation Vietnamese] just don't tell their parents. They know they are gonna be judged."

Štorkánová's narrative research has shown that relationship issues are among the most common disputes between first- and second- generation Vietnamese, especially regarding their choice of partners. When a Vietnamese marry someone, he/she is married to the other's family. It is, therefore, vital that one's parents approve of his/her partner. An ideal couple should come from the same class, same city or at least region/country, share the same cultural, religious, educational and economic background and match each other's zodiac signs, according to studies done on religions in South Vietnam by the US Department of the Navy in 1967.

For example, Yen Nhi, the previously mentioned girl who was sent to Czech nannies when she was six-month-old, was not allowed to have a boyfriend until her twenty-second birthday. In the traditional Vietnamese culture, a woman's value depends on her virginity. Therefore, it is not encouraged for a Vietnamese girl to have relationships when she is still in school. After leaving school, she has around five years to find a partner and start a family before she becomes a "leftover woman" (gái ế): old and unwanted. Dating often begins after two families have approved of the couple's relationship and concludes

in a marriage. That is why many first-generation Vietnamese show concern over who their children are seeing. A Vietnamese woman marrying a Westerner used to be seen as shameful and unpatriotic as described in the classic novel "The Industry of Marrying Europeans" written by famous Vietnamese writer Vu Trong Phung under the French colonial rule. *Tuoi Tre News* reported that between 2008 and 2010 there are 300,000 marriages between Vietnamese women and foreigners for economic reasons. These women marry foreigners for their husbands' citizenships, so they can stay in their husband's country, work and send money home. They prepare themselves for a modern and comfortable life, but not for the cultural shock or the language barrier. The brokers do not bother themselves with educating their women, either. Their job is to find a man who needs a wife and a woman who needs money and unite them under one roof. Unsurprisingly, international marriages between people who have little understanding of each other's culture and can barely communicate have many problems.

"Many of those with foreign husbands have low educational levels, so they usually have to depend on their husband," said Dang The Hung, deputy chairman of the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs in the same article, published in 2013. "Some of them have been mistreated by their husbands or their husbands' families. [...] Besides, many marriages were conducted like 'commercial exchanges' between foreigners and poor women who wanted to marry foreigners for financial purposes."

What the deputy chairman says is true, but contributes to the narrative that only unattractive poor uneducated Vietnamese women marry foreigners. The stigma grows as the media covers cases of domestic violence, cultural conflicts and divorces between the above-mentioned Vietnamese wives and their foreign husbands.

When asked if she would mind her daughter dating a Westerner, Bach-Yen struggles to give a yes or no answer. “I know my children listen to me,” she says. “To be honest, every Vietnamese is afraid of losing his root (mất gốc). When they say they let their children decide for themselves, they are defending themselves. I teach my children that good trees produce good fruits. Look at the parents to choose your life partner. I don’t care what nationality that person is, where he or she comes from, Hanoi or Nam Dinh (cities in Vietnam) because you know I am from Hanoi. To me, it doesn’t matter.”

Anh-Nhat says this is a classic Vietnamese parents’ answer. Vietnamese parents say they are open-minded and support mixed marriages in general. However, if the mixed marriage takes place in their family, they have a hard time accepting it. According to the Czech Statistical Office in 2015, only 3 percent of Vietnamese households were mixed.

“They think if you marry a non-Vietnamese, your children would lose even more cultural identity,” Anh-Nhat explains. “In Cheb, many Vietnamese men married Czech women and most of them got divorced. The parents are afraid that if we marry non-Vietnamese people, we’ll also get divorced.”

This concern shows the stigma in the Vietnamese community against divorce, especially divorced women. In Vietnamese, the saying goes “women are better than each other thanks to their husbands” (đàn bà hơn nhau ở tấm chồng). Forty percent out of 1,400 people aged 18 across the country said divorce was “wrong” in a study by the Hanoi-based Mekong Development Research Institute published in January 2019. The study also shows that less educated people are less open-minded about divorces. Despite the hype around rising number of divorces in Vietnamese media, the divorce rate in Vietnam is still among the lowest in the world, according to research by University of

California at Irvine sociologists Cheng-Tong Lir Wang and Evan Schofer. In a country with a population of 87 million, there were 88,591 divorces or a divorce rate of 1.7 percent compared to the worldwide average of 5.5. Due to mostly financial and social pressure, many Vietnamese couples would rather remain in unhappy marriages than get divorced.

Lenny Bich Ngoc Pham, whose boyfriend is Czech, says her parents have the same fear. Their biggest concern is the opinion other Vietnamese will have about their daughter being with a Westerner. "[My parents]' mentality is that 'our daughter isn't that bad-looking, her study is also not that terrible, why can't she find a decent Vietnamese man with a nice background?'" Lennay says, recalling various occasions when the family argue over her relationship. "[Czech and Vietnamese] cultures are very different from each other. Family gatherings are very common in the Vietnamese culture. If two families have a meal together but cannot understand each other's stories or jokes, it will be very uncomfortable. So, there won't be any family reunion."

"When it comes to relationships, you can feel their expectations," says Thang Do, a 27-year-old front-end developer whose family constantly pressure him to settle down. "Not only your parents but your aunts and uncles want you to date a Vietnamese girl."

Although Thang's family never explicitly forbids him from having Western partners, they repeatedly stress the benefits of endogamy (the practice of marrying within one's social group) while making examples of failed marriages between Vietnamese and Czechs. Vietnamese wives are preferred over Western ones because the former are considered more helpful, obedient, kind and caring, while the latter are often deemed too liberal for long-term commitment.

Thang himself is naturally drawn to other second-generation Vietnamese with whom he shares the same experience and the same languages. Gwendolyn Seidman, professor of psychology and chair of the psychology department at Albright College, says this is normal. We are more likely to be attracted to people whose features or characteristics we find familiar or similar to our own. Similarly, Lenny sees herself as an independent woman with strong opinions who would fit better with a Czech partner. "I asked my parents if they cared more about their daughter's happiness or other people's opinions," says Lenny, saying that her mother now approves of her partner only on the condition that the man loves and cares about Lenny, but her father never wants to meet him. "They don't want to have mixed grandchildren who cannot speak Vietnamese. That is the same as losing your descendants to another culture (*mất gốc*)."

Lenny's last point echoes the wish of Le Quang Dai, the Vietnamese poet, to have "authentic Vietnamese" children and not "*mất gốc*." This "*mất gốc*" fear is prevalent among the Vietnamese immigrants and deeply rooted in their subconsciousness. Thousands of years of invasion, colonization and war have planted a seed of doubt in the Vietnamese mind, causing them to fear foreigners. Patriotism in Vietnam, heightened during wartime and in recent years in response to globalization, also draws a clear distinction between "our people" (người mình) and "their people" (người họ) in terms of values, traditions and religions. The term "*mất gốc,*" once used for national traitors, is now used to criticize anyone who does not fit the idea of a "true" Vietnamese. While first-generation Vietnamese say they are open-minded about mixed marriages, they still hold certain negative prejudices that will take time to change. The second-generation

with a liberal Czech mindset, however, are likely to follow their hearts despite their parents' comments.

Chapter 3: More Than Just Race

3.1 Ambitions, Careers and Success

"A state within a state," "the biggest national ghetto," and "Little Hanoi" are some among many names Czech media have given SAPA, the Vietnamese wholesale market in Libuš near the outskirts of Prague. Some labels are less culturally sensitive than others, but all stereotypes have some truth in them.

The 350,000 square meter market is owned exclusively by a few powerful reputable Vietnamese businessmen. SAPA belongs to the Vietnamese for the Vietnamese. It provides a number of services such as banking, translation, insurance, tourism, dentistry to Vietnamese immigrants to make their lives easier in the CR and to speed up the integration process. Paradoxically, the more services SAPA offers to the Vietnamese immigrants, the more it isolates these people from the rest of the Czech society. Realizing their own shortcomings and limitations, the first-generation Vietnamese encourage their Czech-born children to step out of the "comfort market zone" and try out other professions.

Wishing to show different faces of the second-generation Vietnamese in the CR, Viet Up started a project called "Humans of Bananas" on their Facebook page, interviewing Vietnamese Czechs from a variety of industries. A prominent example is Jackie Tran, owner of Cafefin situated at Jiřího z Poděbrad square, one of the most sought-out cafes in the city. His parents, who run the famous Vietnamese bistro chain "Pho Vietnam Tuan & Lan," had already opened three restaurants in Prague when Jackie opened his cafe. He oversees the visual design of all branches. Cafefin's interior design

combines modern architecture with traditional Vietnamese furniture from the 80s. Jackie takes pride in his craft, whether it's photography, graphic design, programming or making coffee. The cafe's Instagram account @cafefinvpraze has 21,700 followers with each photo attracts around 1,000 likes. His products translate his appreciation of his cultural heritage.

Another Vietnamese cafe in Prague with a similar design concept is AntHill situated near Namesti Miru owned by six Vietnamese-Czechs with a goal to create a safe space for second-generation Vietnamese to relax and escape the world of pressure and expectations from the previous generation. Almost every day, cultural or social events take place at AntHill.

Other "banana children" take advantage of their education, experience and language skills to help integrate other Vietnamese to the Czech society. Tran Van Sang, founder of integration center Sangu.eu, teaches his fellow Vietnamese the Czech language, and educates them about Czech laws, policies, culture and history. Now, he is running for a seat in the European parliament.

Having been in the CR since he was ten years old, like many of his "banana" generation, Sang was the family's translator, accompanying his father to governmental offices to do paperwork. After graduating from college, Sang worked for over five organizations in Prague focusing on translation, interpretation and consultancy, during which time he saw a number of problems his countrymen encounter during their arrival in the CR, such as the language barrier, a lack of knowledge of basic immigration laws, and unreliable sources of information. He started his project "Sangu.eu" in 2015 to provide

solutions to these issues. Since then, he has become a bridge between the Czechs and the Vietnamese.

Campaigning his way into the European Parliament, Sangu wrote a long post in the Facebook community group "Potraviny Union" which has 43,000 members, all Vietnamese. He began with his father's story of coming to the CR in 1969 on a labor exchange program, leaving behind everything in hope of building a better future for his children. He compares this with the current situation where hundreds of thousands of Czechs are leaving their country for better paid jobs elsewhere in the world, indicating that the next generation of Vietnamese Czechs might not stay with their parents but travel abroad for better opportunities just as their parents once did.

"We, Czech and Vietnamese alike, all care about the future of the CR," Sang writes. The post gained 1,500 likes and hundreds of comments in a few hours. "The EU parliament is the basis of the EU; therefore, having a representative in the EU parliament will be an advantage for the [Vietnamese] community as well as the CR. [...] In this race, you don't need to support me financially, but I would love some spiritual support from the community!"

Support he received. Only a few days after Sangu's announcement to lobby into the European parliament, 500 Vietnamese stores across the CR have volunteered to put up banners advocating for him.

While Sang use his platform to share positive sides of the Vietnamese community to the Czech society, some Vietnamese Czechs use their platform to discuss the "dark side" of the Vietnamese culture. Ha Thanh Špetlíkova, a Vietnamese-Czech actress and entrepreneur, has always been the "black sheep" of her generation. When most were

attending grammar school following their parents' wishes, Ha Thanh was the one who signed up for fashion design at Secondary School of Applied Arts. Her parents hoped for a long time that after secondary school, she would choose a more serious major. But she continued to go against the current and pursued stage design at DAMU, a decision that attracted considerable criticism at the time.

"It is a shame that our [Vietnamese] community is still very small; we all have common friends, so people develop a bourgeois mindset," said Ha Thanh in an interview with iDnes in 2018. "It's a world in which everyone compares and competes in hypocritical issues like what kind of car you use, or which brand your clothes are from."

The noise died down in 2012 once Ha Thanh earned a small role as a nurse in the TV series on TV Nova "Surgery Clinic in the Rose Garden" only to gain momentum again when "Miss Hanoi," the drama in which she plays the lead character, was released six years later.

When the trailer of "Miss Hanoi" with Vietnamese subtitles was released on Facebook in 2018, it attracted thousands of views within hours. It was the first time a Vietnamese woman played a main character in a Czech movie. Ha Thanh herself took part in editing the script, providing the director Zdenek Viktora with insights into life of the Vietnamese minority in the CR: racial tension, financial struggle, generational conflicts, social hierarchy, corruption, criminal networks, etc. Movie screenings with Vietnamese subtitles exclusively for Vietnamese audiences were organized in Prague, Brno and Ostrava, making this the first time Vietnamese people could go to the theater in the CR and watch movies in their mother tongue. The support was overwhelming. People

celebrated as they saw their representation on screen, especially that of a strong courageous female role model.

"This movie reflects reality," said Trinh Tan, President of the Vietnamese Union in Ostrava Northern Moravia, at the movie screening at Luna Cinema in Ostrava on Sept. 23, 2018. "In many cases, [Vietnamese] parents are often worried for their children, but the children grow up building their own career. This is a classic example. [The lead character] changed her private life to enter a different profession, not doing business [like her parents], but integrating into the Czech society to be a police officer. This is a tough job, but she has fought for justice and righteousness!"

"I hope that over time, there will be more Vietnamese actors," Ha Thanh says. "Most importantly, I hope they don't have to always play the role of marijuana growers or shopkeepers."

Ha Thanh has almost always been given roles designed specifically for Asian actresses such as the quiet shy nurse in the TV series "Surgery Clinic in the Rose Garden" (2012) or a no-name receptionist at a casino in Poupata (2011). Her interviews also revolve around her ethnicity to such a degree that in an interview with *iDnes* in 2018 about her movie "Miss Hanoi," Ha Thanh had to stop the journalist from asking further about her Vietnamese background to ask if they were going to talk about the movie.

Luu Anh Nhat, member of the non-profit Viet Up, expresses the same frustration. She thinks there is still a long way to go until the Vietnamese Czechs are recognized for their talents and abilities and not just their exoticness. Anh-Nhat mentions the case of Do Thu Trang, who was listed in "Forbes 30 under 30" in 2017 for her blog *Asijat.ka* which discusses both Vietnamese and Czech cultures from a viewpoint of a person who grew up

both worlds. Trang's achievement was a great opportunity for the Czech population to learn more about the young generation of Vietnamese in the CR. In her interviews, Trang shares her take on Vietnamese culture, religion, lifestyle, language, but Anh-Nhat thinks that journalists treat Trang unfairly by focusing solely on her race. Anh-Nhat's argument is based on the fact that Trang has a diverse career in public relations, copy writing and IT besides writing blogs about the Vietnam. She used to be a Happy Manager at IBM, one of the world's top IT company. Now she works in the Communication Department of Spaceti, the world's number one property technology start-up. "It's so boring, and she has so much more to offer than 'I'm Vietnamese.'" Anh-Nhat exclaims. "She's actually very talented and well-grounded and has great wisdom for her age. They should have asked her about that!"

Trang, on the other hand, is not offended when asked about her cultural background because it is the center of her successful blog. "I think [my ethnicity] is part of me," says Trang, who was born in Vietnam but moved to the CR at the age of five. "I will never ever consider it as an offence. But I will really appreciate next time that the interviews would ask me questions about being a young person and finding some work-life balance, because it's not always about success, it's also about how to balance and integrate work into life, and I think being the Happiness Manager at IBM gave me an overview, so I think I have a few things to share with the young generation, so when being asked about my career, I quite enjoy."

While Trang takes pride in her cultural heritage and builds her career on it, some second-generation Vietnamese would like to be defined solely based on their merits. Many follow their parents' path and expand it. Others travel back to Vietnam to discover

their roots and find ways to contribute. Living in two cultures has made them flexible, adaptive and open-minded. Whatever they do, most of them show high level of integration and confidence.

3.2 Global Citizens

"If the Czech idiom 'You live a new life for every new language you speak' (Kolik jazyků znáš, tolikrát jsi člověkem) is true then I'm five different people," writes Ho Thu Huong in the book she co-authored with Nguyen Phan Linh and Pham Anh Duc "Green Passport Goes Around the World." "I have had the privilege to live in a multicultural environment since childhood, so I'm used to switching languages as well as my way of thinking and communicating when talking to somebody.

Huong calls herself a global citizen for several reasons. Born in Vietnam but growing up in the CR, Huong has lived in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Mexico City (Mexico), Vancouver (Canada) and now Boston (USA). She is fluent in five languages: Vietnamese, Czech, English, Spanish and French. Spending her childhood in Havířov, a small town in the North East of the CR with a population of 80,000, Huong dreamt of traveling abroad to melting pots such as London, New York or Sydney. Her dream pushed her to learn about other cultures and participate in various competitions that would allow her to visit other cities. Looking back, Huong realizes how her proactiveness has earned her opportunities to travel the world.

"Growing up in the CR, I live in two worlds simultaneously. When I'm at home, I speak Vietnamese with my family, eat traditional meals; when I'm at school, I speak Czech, eat Czech lunch, treat people more equally because in Czech, the second person pronouns do not change based on age or status as in Vietnamese. [...] Thanks to my interaction with different cultures, I can compare them to each other and choose the best out of each for myself."

Huong's story has inspired many other Vietnamese to step out of their comfort zones, find different ways to experience new things and learn more about the world. The concept of being a global citizen also resonates with modern mothers.

"I teach my children a global mentality," says Vuong Thuy-An, the Vietnamese mother whose son Filip Wu was introduced in chapter two. "First, I don't want them to be influenced by [nationalist ideologies]. Second, I teach them humanism rather than following any religious beliefs."

Unlike patriotic veteran Dai whose only wish is his children be "authentic Vietnamese," Thuy-An does not want to preach to her children "blind patriotism," which she experienced first-hand when marrying her Chinese husband nearly ten years ago.

"Many [Vietnamese] just hate Chinese people for no reasons," says Thuy-An. "When I did a Facebook livestream discussing Chinese traditions during Lunar New Year, there were some mean comments such as, 'do you even know how Vietnamese celebrate Lunar New Year? Why don't you talk about it instead of Chinese New Year? So much free time, huh? You China kiss-ass!'"

Eighty-four percent of the Vietnamese population hold unfavorable views of China, according to Global Attitudes Survey by Pew Research Center in spring 2014, due to their dreadful history of on-and-off conflicts and most recently, the South China Sea disputes. Vietnamese media, under the influence of the Communist Party, managed to channel anti-China sentiments into pro-government nationalism. After all, the Communist Party needs nationalism for its existence. Nationalism fueled the Vietnamese to fight for their independence against the Chinese, the French and the Japanese for centuries, said Vietnamese cultural researcher Nguyen Viet Chuc in an interview with

Voice of Vietnam in 2019. Nationalism also drove them to defeat the Americans and unite the country under one rule. Both Chuc and Dai think a Vietnamese identity is defined by their love of nation.

Thuy-An also see toxic nationalism in her Chinese mother-in-law who despises the Japanese to the point she feels delighted hearing about natural disasters killing people in Japan. “The hatred has permeated deeply into their consciousness,” she says as she curls her legs up to fit into her kitchen chair. Thuy-An does not want her children to see borders when they look at another human being. People should be treated equally regardless of their race, nationality, and gender. She teaches this to her children by talking to them for hours about her own experience. For instance, one day, her son Filip came home crying because another student said to him, “you Chinese go back to your country!” Seeing his tears, Thuy-An was happy. She told him that she, too, was insulted many times for her height and skin color. She asked him how he felt when he heard the insults and explained to him that if he does not enjoy being insulted for his skin color and nationality, he should never do the same to anyone. She thinks the experience, though painful, has taught her son a good lesson about human decency and respect.

Thuy-An’s approach to child-rearing is more open-minded because of her personality and background. She is confident and sociable. Unlike the majority of the Vietnamese community, Thuy-An did not come to the CR to make a living, but to study at Faculty of Technology of Tomas Bata University in Zlín when she was 19. At the time, she already spoke Czech, Chinese and English besides her mother tongue. She chose to study in the CR because of she could afford it (free tuition) and she wanted to see the world. Back when she was still in Vietnam, Thuy-An had already made friends with

random foreigners on the streets of Hanoi, asked them about their cultures and brought them home to introduce them to hers. Her knowledge and experience have contributed to her worldview and set her apart from her fellow immigrants.

Thuy-An's neighbor and best friend nicknamed Trang Soukupová is also raising her children to be global citizens. Trang is a divorced single mother with two daughters aged two and four, each of whom has a different father, but both fathers are Czech.

Twenty-eight-year-old Trang calls herself a "modern woman"; she single-handedly takes care of two little girls while balancing a few jobs and non-profit projects. Since their divorce three years ago, Trang and her ex-husband, who is 28 years older than her, are still on good terms. He loves the children, even though the second one is not his. However, because of his busy work schedule, he can only drop by a few times to put the children to sleep and take them to school the next morning.

The price of being a "modern woman" is not cheap. For her lifestyle and marriage decisions, Trang has received a great deal of criticism from close family members and random Vietnamese alike. She just ignores it. "Why do I need to react to people who don't want to understand me and want to harm me?" she says. "Whoever understands me will sympathize with my problems. In the end, who else can live your life for you?"

As the Vice-President of Lam Cha Me CZ, Trang supports President Thuy-An in organizing extra-curricular classes, field trips and cultural events for Vietnamese families in the CR so her daughters are well exposed to both Vietnamese and Czech cultures. They both speak fluent both languages fluently, thanks to their mother speaking to them in Vietnamese while the father speaks Czech.

“My greatest success is having two nice daughters, doing what I enjoy, and surrounding myself with friends who give me energy and inspiration to live,” writes Trang on her Facebook wall. “One of the most significant impacts comes from An. Simply put, I would like to quote ‘It doesn’t matter how long we live, it’s how we live that counts.’”

The quote is from Thuy-An’s fiction “Hanh” which touches upon many serious topics from child molestation, domestic violence, to mental illnesses and restrictive traditional gender roles. Thuy-An even spends time discussing some of these issues with her children and encourages other parents to do the same. She does this by giving simple examples and asking for their opinions, or by explaining and encouraging them to think critically. Empathy is key to being a global citizen, but to be a successful one, a person needs to master his or her language skill. That’s why from the day Filip was born, his mother has spoken to him in all four languages that she knows: Vietnamese, English, Czech and Chinese. “I don’t know which language he will adapt to first,” says Thuy-An, pointing at the flower vase on the kitchen table. “For example, I will teach him this is flower, hua, hoa and květina.”

Filip started talking around two and a half, but he was confused as to which language to use, so sometimes in a sentence, he would speak all four languages. According to Zuzana Terry in her research on bilingual families in the CR, this is called code-mixing, a common problem. Bilinguals or in Filip’s case, polyglots, become better at code-switching (changing languages) after getting enough practice. Nine-year-old Filip now speaks Vietnamese to his mother, Chinese to his father and grandparents, Czech at school and English in daily life. Regarding Chinese, Thuy-An makes sure that her son’s

linguistic level does not stop at speaking, so she makes him practice reading and writing Chinese character on the weekend. If she has time, she creates games for Filip to make learning more interesting. Besides learning languages, Filip also attends a number of extra-curricular activities such as football, swimming, and martial arts because his mother wants him to experience as much as he can during his childhood.

"He has to try something out to see if it fits him or not," says An, taking an example of Filip practicing piano for three years before telling her he wanted to quit. "I respect his decision. [...] I will only guide [the children] until a certain age. When they reach 18, I will kick them out of the house and go traveling. I will be their advisor, but they have to decide for themselves which major to study, who to marry, etc. because I have taught this to them since young age."

Thuy-An wants to provide her children all the resources they need in order to "fly" and explore the world without borders. All the language lessons, extra classes, sport events and long talks about social issues are meant to help them adapt more easily into any culture. She teaches them to keep in mind that their every move will contribute to the image of Asian people in the world; therefore, they have to live up to the expectation.

Nguyen Phan Linh, the other co-author of the book "Green Passport Goes Around the World" born in Vietnam, has lived five years in New Zealand, three years in the CR and is now in Singapore. Linh says he carries with him Vietnamese characteristics and values wherever he goes. "It can be said that I am a global citizen with a Vietnamese appearance," Linh writes. "A few friends of mine joke that I am a 'banana.' But at the end of the day, your identity is however you perceive it. You are who you think you are."

It is obvious that the rootlessness fear, though common, is not universal among all Vietnamese immigrants. Only people who believe in the concept of "root" fear losing it. For people who consider themselves global citizens, "root" is a social construct, not a fact because humans have migrated since ancient times and drawn borders as they went. People's perception of "root" also varies based on their educational, economic and professional background. Dai, for example, served in the army when he was in Vietnam. He was trained to fight for his country. That is his "root." Linh, on the other hand, has traveled to different countries and made friends with people from different people since young age. His "root" is in all the places he has lived. As the world experiences yet another resurgence of nationalism, we can all learn from Thuy-An's lesson to her son when he was bullied in school "do unto others as you would have done to you." If a person wants acceptance and respect from others, he/she has to show the samefirst. There might be less violence and hatred if people open their minds and forget the borders. Czechs, Slovaks, Vietnamese, or Chinese are not people from different nations. They are one people of the world.

Sources

1. Interviews

1.1. Do, Thang

1.1.1. Thang Do was born in 1992 in an immigrant shelter in the CR. He is front-end developer. His family prefer him having a Vietnamese girlfriend to a Czech one. Thang thinks he is naturally drawn to other second-generation Vietnamese because they share the same cultural background and language. The interview took place via call in English on April 1, 2019.

1.2. Hoang, Minh Tuan (Martin)

1.2.1. Hoang Minh Tuan (Martin) spent his childhood in the city of Cheb, CR. He is a graduate from University of Economics in Prague who is learning Vietnamese in order to teach his parents what he himself has learned in university. Specifically, he wants to introduce the concept of passive income to them. This is how Tuan shows his gratefulness for what his parents have done for him. The interview took place in Prague in English on Jan. 28, 2019.

1.3. Le, Quang Dai

1.3.1. Le Quang Dai is an owner of a groceries store in Prague. In 1999, he came to Slovakia on a tourist visa, then crossed the border to the Czech Republic and married a Czech woman to legalize his stay. The two never lived together. Dai divorced her in 2013. He had an unregistered wedding with a Vietnamese woman. Together they have two children. Dai's

children are now in Vietnam, living with their grandparents. The interview took place in Prague in Vietnamese on Dec. 27, 2018. Translation is mine.

1.4. Leová, Bach-Yen

1.4.1. Bach-Yen Leová came to the CR in 1992 to reunite with her husband who graduated from Czech Technical University in Prague with a degree in Manufacturing Engineering. When she left Vietnam, her two-year-old son was sent to his grandparents for care until he was eight and reunited with his family in the CR. Bach-Yen's daughter, Yen-Nhi Phamová, was born in 1996 in Prague. The interview took place via Facebook call in Vietnamese on April 13, 2019. Translation is mine.

1.5. Luu, Anh-Nhat

1.5.1. Luu Anh-Nhat and her family moved to Germany when she was two years old. After five years, they moved to the CR. Anh-Nhat is an entrepreneur and the project manager of the non-profit organization Viet Up. Her non profit helps integrate young people, who comes from Vietnam to the CR, into the Czech society. Their cultural event Banán Fest takes place every year in Prague. The goal is to great an opportunity for Czechs and Vietnamese to learn more about each other. Anh-Nhat also manages a mini-market which she bought from her mother after the mother fell ill. The interview took place in Prague in English on April 12, 2019.

1.6. Nguyen, Khanh-Hoa

1.6.1. Nguyen Khanh-Hoa was born in 1957. She moved from Vietnam to the

CR during the 90s. Her husband came to the CR in 1975. Her daughter was born in the CR in the early 2000s and now goes to high school in Prague. Khanh-Hoa ran a mini-market in Prague for a few years before retiring. The interview took place in Vietnamese in Prague Nov. 5, 2016. Translation is mine.

1.7. Nguyen, Linh-Chi.

1.7.1. Nguyen Linh-Chi was born in 2001 in the CR. Her parents used to sale clothes at the Prague Market in Prague 7. Now they manages a groceries store in Prague 10. Linh-Chi has taught herself Vietnamese and become very connected to her cultural heritage. She speaks fluent Czech, Vietnamese and English. The interview took place in Prague in Vietnamese on Jan. 5, 2019. Translation is mine.

1.8. Nguyen, Ondra

1.8.1. Ondra Nguyen is a student at University of Economics in Prague. He was born and raised in a small city Kopřivnice, near Ostrava. After getting beaten up by two older students because of his looks, Ondra learned martial arts and started fighting on the streets. Now he has stopped street fighting and took up boxing as a hobby. The interview took place in Prague in English on Feb. 17, 2019.

1.9. Pham, Bich Ngoc (Lenny)

1.9.1. Pham Bich Ngoc (Lenny) is a member of Association of Vietnamese Students in the CR. She was born in Vietnam and moved to the CR at the age of two. She grew up with Czech grandparents. Her boyfriend is Czech. Lenny and her parents used to have many arguments about her

relationship. The interview took place via Facebook Messenger in Vietnamese on April 9, 2019. Translation is mine.

1.10. Phamová, Yen-Nhi

1.10.1. Yen Nhi Phamová was born in 1996 in the CR. Her mother is Bach-Yen Leová. After graduating from Anglo-American University in Prague with a degree in Business Administration, Yen-Nhi Phamová joined her brother in his consulting company INNOFIN s.r.o. located in the Vietnamese market SAPA in Prague. Starting from when she was six-month-old until she was a few years old, Yen-Nhi was taken care of by several Czech nannies. She speaks Czech, Vietnamese and English. The interview took place via Skype call in English on Nov. 1, 2016.

1.11. Soukupová, Trang (real name: Thu Huong Soukupová)

1.11.1. Trang Soukupová (real name: Thu Huong Soukupová) is a single mother with two children. Trang was born in Hanoi and moved to the Czech Republic at the age of 12. She is a close friend of Vuong Thuy-An and helps her manage Lam Cha Me CZ. The interview took place via Facebook Messenger and email in Vietnamese on April 11, 2019. Translation is mine.

1.12. Trinh, Tan

1.12.1. Trinh Tan is the president of the Vietnamese Union in Ostrava Northern Moravia. The interview took place in Vietnamese at the movie screening of “Miss Hanoi” at Luna Cinema in Ostrava on Sept. 23, 2018. Translation is mine.

1.13. Vu, Thu

1.13.1. Thu Vu is a student from School of International Relations and Diplomacy at Anglo-American University. She moved from Vietnam to the Czech Republic at the age of six. When she went to school, she was made fun of by other classmates because of her different appearance and accent. The interview took place in Prague in Vietnamese on Nov. 5, 2016. Translation is mine.

1.14. Vuong, Thuy-An

1.14.1. Vuong Thuy-An is the president of Lam Cha Me CZ (Parenting in the Czech Republic) a non-profit organization. She came to the CR to study at Tomas Bata University in Zlin when she was 19 years old. She is married to a Chinese man and together they have two children. She speaks four languages and teaches her children to do the same thing. Thuy-An wants to raise them into global citizens. The interview took place in Prague in Vietnamese on Mar. 24, 2019. Translation is mine.

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