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**Review of Phuong Nguyen's diploma thesis *Ethnic Identity among Vietnamese Descendants in the Czech Republic: An Intersectional Analysis of the Lived Experiences* (2020), submitted to Department of Gender Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague.
Supervisor: Ivy Helman, PhD.**

For her diploma thesis Phuong Ngyuen chose the subject of the second and the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese ("Vietnamese Descendants", as she calls them) living in the Czech Republic and self-understanding of their intersectional identities that, as she correctly stated in her thesis, has been understudied. So far the most intriguing research in the field of Vietnamese-Czech(oslovak) studies, according to my knowledge, focused on the state-socialist history of labor migration from Vietnam to Czechoslovakia¹, while most of the research carried out in the Czech Republic has drawn on policy-oriented research and its integration aims. Therefore Phuong Nguyen's research effort has to be properly acknowledged.

I firstly review the theoretical background of the thesis, after that I discuss the research methodology and lastly I debate the research findings. In the conclusions I shortly comment on the language and referencing. Most importantly, the questions and comments that I expect the thesis' author to respond to during the defense are posed throughout this review.

In the first three chapters, the thesis' author lays out the theoretical background of her thesis and primarily covers the topics of the history of migration from Vietnam to the Czech Republic, the theories of identity formation and the intertwining of ethnic and gender identities. I believe the chapters could have been titled and organized differently, as one cannot distinguish clearly the part describing identity theories as conceptual framework (Chapter 2) and the one discussing issues of gender and ethnic identities as terminology and literature review (Chapter 3).

The three theoretical chapters are exhaustive. Phuong Nguyen makes great effort at connecting various theories, comparing them and identifying their contributions to the subject studied (especially on pp. 55 – 58). Specifically I would like to point out and appreciate author's effort at providing examples for a number of discussed phenomena (e.g. fn35, p. 23). At the same time there is a number of unnecessary footnotes explaining basic social-scientific concepts or concepts that was already given proper attention in the main text (e.g. fn29, p. 19; fn34, p. 22; fn52, p. 30; fn61, p. 34; fn66, p. 37; fn136 and fn137, p. 107). For a thesis written in a gender studies program it is a bit surprising to see a more thorough discussion of feminist input into understanding identities only at p. 37. When explaining gender as a constructed category (p. 38), Phuong Nguyen incorrectly refers to Butler's understanding of performativity, while her understanding of performativity here heavily relies on West and Zimmermann's understanding of the concept. (Similarly, on p. 43 she misinterprets Butler's use of "etc." for a description of various identity categories as Butler's solution to the issue of never-ending play of social identifications.) However, the most important concept drawn from feminist theorizing is intersectionality. The concept itself is thoroughly explained, primarily in the vein of Crenshaw's classic work. It is further complemented by perspective of transnational feminism.

¹ Alamgir, A. K. (2013). Race is elsewhere: state-socialist ideology and the racialisation of Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia. *Race & Class*, 54(4), 67-85. doi:10.1177/0306396813476171 and further articles by the same author.



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The methodology and research design – comprising of questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews – are thoroughly explained. I believe the research could do without the questionnaire survey entirely, and the data could have been collected through semi-structured interviews only. Firstly, the interview guide to a large extent mirrors questions in the questionnaire. Secondly, it is rather unclear how the sampling of questionnaire’s respondents was carried out and with what purpose the respondents were approached.² Thirdly, the questionnaire and interview data are treated as one data set. Even though the interviewed research subjects were recruited from the questionnaire respondents, the two groups of research subjects are clearly different and should not be treated as in any strong relation to each other. The ensuing analysis in the fifth and sixth chapter combines both quantitative and qualitative data, compares and contrasts them (see e.g. p. 90) and draws conclusions from both sets. This is a methodological and analytical error.

In the discussion of the challenges encountered during the interview process (p. 70ff), Phuong Nguyen also very briefly mentions the active role of her partner who was instrumental in providing spot-on interpretation from Czech to English and vice versa. It would be good to reflect on his involvement in more detail and think about possible interference in interview data gained. Furthermore, the process of data analysis, that is, coding, is not clear enough (p. 67ff). The author states that her analytical theoretical framework was that of feminist intersectionality and transnational feminism (p. 65), while at the same time she states that she organized her data “around the keywords ethnic identity [sic]” (p. 67). I would like her to explain her analytical process in more detail at the defense.

In interpreting her findings about ethnic identity, Phuong Nguyen stresses the role of language spoken among young Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic (p. 80) as well as the strong involvement of parents in their children’s lives (p. 87). At the end of the 5th chapter (pp. 90 – 94), the author focuses on situational and contextual aspects of ethnic identity of her interviewees and interprets them while making use of the feminist concept of intersectionality. Her explanation of intersectional ethnic identities is brief. I would like her to elaborate on the intersectionality of ethnic identities of her research subjects in more detail at the defense, specifically on the question of how the processual, constantly changing, character of identities (p. 94) can be interpreted within the intersectionality framework.

For feminist scholars, research findings on gender and ethnic identity and their interpretation in the 6th chapter form the core of the diploma thesis. The chapter compares parents’ expectations with a more Westernized outlooks of their children, especially on issues such as career and family. Other issues, such as beauty standards, bullying and non-binary gender identification, come to the forefront, too. There is however, one presupposition that is strongly involved in data interpretation that I find problematic – the opposition of traditional Vietnamese culture to liberal, individualistic Czech culture and gender norms of both respective cultures. Author draws on the supposed traditionalism of Vietnamese (p. 101) from scholarly literature (primarily Kibria 1990, as well as Knodel et al. 2005, Vu 2019, Lieu 2000, Zhou and Bankston III 2001), which is summarized as

² The author states that “the selection of respondents followed neither random nor quota sampling” and that “the sample was diverse enough since respondents are various regions in the Czech Republic, and all genders were included in the sample” (p. 63).



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respect for parents, strong family ties, responsibility for one's children as well as parents, no sexual activity before marriage (enforced primarily on young women), and gendered division of breadwinner and primary carer roles. My question is: How is this traditionalism of Vietnamese first generation immigrants in the Czech Republic and/or the Vietnamese culture (both in Vietnam as well as in diaspora) as such constructed? In my (rather limited) understanding, gender order in Vietnam has undergone significant changes in the past 35 years, after the *doi moi* economic reforms and transition from central planning to market economy. The Communist and Confucian pre-1986 gender discourses focusing on social equality of women and men in public sphere gave way to retraditionalized gender discourses stressing the economic contribution of private households.³ Undoubtedly, these economic changes were later supported and/or halted by further developments. Still, the question is, where does the "traditionalism" of Vietnamese gender order and Vietnamese "culture" as such, come from. How has it been transmitted and redefined by the first generation Vietnamese migrants to Czech Republic? Does it play any role in negotiating ethnic and gender identities of the second and 1.5 generations?

The diploma thesis is written in an academic style. A few typos, unnecessary repetitions, or terminological mistakes do not significantly affect the readability of the text. The reference list is extensive, with minor mistakes (e.g. Formánková's and Lopatková's 2018 article was not published in English, as the title in References would suggest).

To conclude, the submitted diploma thesis meets the criteria for a successful thesis. I recommend grade "good" (3) and that the candidate proceeds to oral defense.

Lubica Kobová, PhD.

Prague, September 10, 2020

³ See Werner, J. S. (2009). *Gender, household and state in post-revolutionary Vietnam*. London: Routledge; Earl, C. (2014). *Vietnam's new middle classes : gender, career, city*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press; Scott, S., & Truong Thi Kim, C. (2007). Gender research in Vietnam: Traditional approaches and emerging trajectories. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30(3), 243-253. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2007.03.006>.