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**Transnational Aspects of Identity:  
The Vietnamese of the 1.5 and Second  
Generations in Prague**

*Master's thesis*

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague on 27 April 2024

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## **Bibliographic note**

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## **Abstract**

Amidst the backdrop of transnationalism and cultural pluralism, the constructs of identity and belonging of immigrant youth and children of immigrants have evolved, reflecting a shift towards bifocality and hybridity. Based on twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study explored the variations in identity negotiation of the second generation and the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese descent in Prague. The findings reveal that the interlocutors constructed their own idea of two poles of Czechness and Vietnamese-ness and positioned themselves within these polarities. Specifically, the second-generation participants were most inclined to identify as Czech, followed by the Czech-oriented 1.5-generation interviewees, while the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5-generation respondents identified as Vietnamese. The results show that the feeling of home of the migrant children and the children of migrants is determined by citizenship, age, upbringing environment, the role of Czech nannies, language, exposure to the ethnic community, understanding of Vietnamese heritage and participation in cultural organisations or pan-ethnic networks. Considering the variations between and within generations, the research also features the significance of the life course perspective in the study of identity development, emphasising the dynamic interplay of individual, interpersonal, and structural factors over time. It suggests that subsequent generations will have more variations of identity and ethnic boundaries will further erode. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of immigrant experiences and cultural dynamics, which can help develop programs aimed at fostering diasporic people's inclusivity and social cohesion within host societies.

## **Keywords**

Identity, second generation, 1.5 generation, transnationalism, Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, life course

## **Title**

Transnational Aspects of Identity: The Vietnamese of the 1.5 and Second Generations in Prague

## **Abstrakt**

Na pozadí transnacionalismu a kulturního pluralismu se vyvinuly konstrukty identity a sounáležitosti mládeže a dětí přistěhovalců, které odrážejí posun k bifokalitě a hybriditě. Na základě dvanácti hloubkových polostrukturovaných rozhovorů studie zkoumala rozdíly ve vnímání identity u druhé generace a 1,5 generace vietnamského původu v Praze. Zjištěná data ukazují, že účastníci rozhovoru si vytvořili vlastní představu o dvou pólech češství a vietnamství a jejich vlastnmu umístění mezi nimi. Druhá generace respondentů se nejvíce přiklání k identifikaci jako Češi, následovaná česky orientovanými respondenty 1,5 generace, zatímco vietnamsky orientovaní respondenti 1,5 generace se identifikovali jako Vietnamci. Výsledky ukazují, že pocit domova mládeže a dětí migrantů je dán občanstvím, věkem, výchovným prostředím, rolí českých chův, jazykem, vystavením etnické komunity, chápáním vietnamského dědictví a účastí v kulturních organizacích nebo účastí v pan-etnických sítích. S ohledem na rozdíly mezi generacemi a v rámci jednotlivých generací výzkum také poukazuje na význam perspektivy životního běhu při studiu vývoje identity, přičemž zdůrazňuje dynamickou souhru individuálních, interpersonálních a strukturálních faktorů v čase. Naznačuje, že následující generace budou mít více variací identity a etnické hranice budou dále erodovat. Závěry této studie přispívají k lepšímu porozumění zkušenostem přistěhovalců a kulturní dynamice, což může pomoci vyvinout programy zaměřené na podporu inkluзивity a sociální soudržnosti diasporických lidí v hostitelských společnostech.

## **Klíčová slova**

Identita, druhá generace, 1,5 generace, transnacionalismus, Vietnamci v České republice, životní běh

## **Název práce**

Transnacionální aspekty identity: Vietnamci 1,5 a druhé generace v Praze

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## **Institute of Sociological Studies**

### **Master's thesis proposal**

#### **Guideline:**

Based on empirical research supported by existing knowledge derived from the literature, the features and social integration of the Vietnamese young generation in Prague will be described and interpreted. One of the basic issues will be enculturation and integration processes. What society are they integrating into? To the Vietnamese community? Are there overlaps of integration into Czech society or rather into a transnational society, which is strongly represented in Prague? Particular attention will be devoted to how the 1.5 and second generations of young Vietnamese contribute to people's cultural repertoires and the values of the country of origin that they bring along. This thesis mainly employs qualitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The interpretation will serve not only contemporary research of predominantly Czech academia that has studied Vietnamese in Prague for several years but also comparative literature from other European Cities and Vietnam.

#### **Topic of work**

##### **A. Introduction:**

The Vietnamese is the third-largest immigrant community in the Czech Republic. Despite its initial isolation from the autochthonous society, there has been a change in recent years as the result of the integration of younger generations, i.e. the 1.5 and second generations. In this sense, the 1.5 generation is defined as individuals immigrating to the Czech land before and during their early teens; and the second generation as those born in the Czech Republic.

The young Vietnamese in the Czech land are in a transition period. Opposed to the first generation, these young generations are exposed more to local life, such as attending public schools or language centres. Thus, they blend much better into Czech society and promisingly imply a better integrating Vietnamese community in the future. However, due to the clash of Vietnamese and Czech values, they seem to experience identity problems and are exposed to great cultural conflict (Hřebíčková, 2020; Svobodová and Janská, 2016). In other words, they confront the dilemma between traditional values, e.g., the roles of family inspired by their

parents, and the new behaviours, values, and lifestyles that are practised by the majority of inhabitants in Czech society. Additionally, in Prague, there are many social patterns possible to follow or blend with traditional Vietnamese norms and customs, as well as ways to develop specific transnational patterns of communication.

The aims of this study are to (i) discover the features and social integration of the Vietnamese young generation in Prague and (ii) understand how they identify themselves in the transnational community.

The main part of this paper will be developed as follows:

First and foremost, an overview of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic will be provided. In this section, the thesis will present briefly the Vietnamese diaspora in Europe and the Czech land, the Vietnamese as a Czech national minority, geographic and social background and traits of the Vietnamese migrants to the Czech Republic.

Followed will be the empirical part. Firstly, research on the features of the Vietnamese young generation and an evaluation of their social integration process will be conducted. This assessment will cover the aspects of language, religion, media habits, involvement in social activities, and adaptation to the local system. Subsequently, an exploration of their identity formation will be carried out by analysing generational solidarity and conflicts between the first and younger generations; the later generation's attempts to bridge two cultures despite struggles with cultural differences, language barriers, and social isolation; how they position themselves in Prague, Czechia or international society and orient their lives and careers.

## **B. Literature review**

As for theoretical framework, the project will discuss how integration and identity are captured in the theories and concepts of transnationalism, diasporas and assimilation. Though there are some arguments that transnationalism is 'from above', most scholars have agreed that transnationalism is 'from below', involving individuals, local and grassroots activity (Tedeschi et al., 2020). According to Vertovec (2009), transnationalism concerns 'the sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders', which affect people's sense of attachment and belonging. With regard to the concept of diasporas, Cohen (2001) demonstrates that in a global age, 'diasporas are in a continuous state of formation and reformation'. He argues that diasporic people refer to their country of

origin as descent- the law of blood, with fondness and longing; and the host countries as destinations of opportunities, and together with globalisation, migrants become adaptive, “deterritorialized, multilingual and capable of bridging the gap between global and local tendencies”. Similarly, assimilation theories are also often addressed when it comes to the discussion of the integration of immigrant groups. According to Simons (1901), the prolonged contact between the members of two races engendered assimilation unconsciously. All of the theories and concepts mentioned above serve as a firm basis for the development of this project.

Undoubtedly, the young generation of migration groups is of high interest among scholars (Attias-Donfut et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2008; Foner, 2011; Moskal, 2015; Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Rosenthal, 1996; Souralová, 2020). However, research on the integration of Vietnamese youth in Czechia is mainly limited to educational aspects; also, not much has been done on their identity formation. From the published work, it is commonly concluded that the younger generation is better integrated compared to the older one (Brouček, 2005; Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Hřebíčková, 2020). In terms of identity, conclusions are slightly diverse. However, the two most observed outcomes are either the Vietnamese considered themselves as banana children, i.e. those that think, behave, consider themselves as Czech; or somewhere in between, i.e., considering themselves Czech when it comes to education, lifestyle, but being proud of Vietnamese history or traditional values (Hřebíčková, 2020; Svobodová and Janská, 2016).

### **Assumed research methods**

The research will be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the introductory part, this paper will study literature and do a statistical analysis of available secondary data sets from public institutions, namely the Czech Statistical Office, the Labor Office of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In the empirical part, ethnographic methods will be used, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. By this means, research participants can discuss their personal experiences and insights. The interview includes a wide range of questions about self-assessment, aspirations, life and career trajectories and strategies. 30 interviews are expected to be carried out. Interviewees are (i) 1.5G individuals and (ii) second-generation individuals and possibly first-generation parents (to better visualise the

conflicts between the generations). Respondents must have permanent residence or Czech citizenship, be 15 years of age and above, be of Vietnamese origin or identify Vietnamese as one of their identities. The call/selection for interviews can be done personally or assisted by Vietnamese and Czech organisations and educational institutions in Prague.

### **Ethical context of the considered project**

The names of the interviewees will be changed in order to secure their identities. This will help them be more open and sincere in their answers.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Identify as a transracial person- a Czech trapped inside an Asian body”*

*- a young Vietnamese Czech’s personal statement on Instagram*

In the heart of Europe, a vibrant community thrives. Strolling throughout Prague’s streets, you might notice numerous ‘potraviny’, restaurants and beauty salons run by the Vietnamese. Especially if you get a chance to go to Sapa- Little Hanoi on the outskirts of Prague, you are brought into the world of the Vietnamese community right here in this Central European country. The Vietnamese community stands out in the ethnic landscape of the Czech Republic for its people bring with them a highly distinctive culture and an Asian appearance that makes them easily distinguishable.

The said diaspora dates back to the late 20th century, primarily as a result of the political and economic ties between the two countries during the Cold War era. Initially arriving as guest workers, many Vietnamese individuals settled in large cities and the border areas, establishing businesses and communities that have since become integral components of the country's social fabric. Over time, subsequent generations have been born and raised in the Czech Republic, forming a unique demographic with distinct experiences. The young generation of Vietnamese individuals represents a compelling intersection of cultures, bridging the heritage of their parents' homeland with the realities of their lives in a new country. Many of them consider themselves as ‘banana children’, i.e., have a Vietnamese look but think, behave, and consider themselves as Czech. Their stories, aspirations and struggles reflect the complexities of navigating multiple cultural landscapes while seeking to forge a sense of belonging in a transnational world.

Undoubtedly, the young generation of migration groups is of high interest among scholars (Attias-Donfut and Cook, 2017; Choi et al., 2008; Foner and Dreby, 2011; Moskal, 2015; Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Rosenthal et al., 1996). It is commonly concluded that the younger generation is better integrated and has fewer traditional values compared to the older one. During their adolescence, one of the main challenges is the search for identity. It is an interdisciplinary construct that includes several dimensions (Ashmore et al., 2004; Christou, 2002; Romero and Roberts, 2003). Many factors have been said to impact the behaviour and identity formation of the immigrant children and the children of migrants, namely age, gender, educational levels, and other demographics (Crul and Schneider, 2010), migrant

background and parents' culture (Kibria, 2002; Min, 2002; Svobodová and Janská, 2016), the measurable activities in which they are involved and transnational ties (Cham, 2015). Further pointed out by Kim (2010), identity development tends to be experience-oriented. Rather than an attachment based on the colour of their skin and common ancestry, the second generation feels a connection to those who have had similar challenges and upbringing as members of a visible minority. With a more systematic approach, Min (2002) stated that ethnic identity can be viewed from three different angles: primordial, structural, and social construction. The primordial perspective highlights physical, linguistic, religious, cultural, and historical similarities; the structural perspective considers places of settlement, socio-economy, and racial discrimination experience; and the social construction perspective examines ethnicity as a socially formed view in social interactions. Furthermore, some researchers emphasise the strong impact of parents on their second-generation children's identity process because it is not only a matter of ethnic or cultural identity but also a family matter (Sabatier, 2008). According to Chueng and Nguyen (2001), migrant parents are divided into three self-explained types: traditional, bicultural and integrated. However, most of them belong to the last type, while their children advocate the behaviour, values, and lifestyles of the majority culture. This can create serious tension and conflicts in the family and impact how second-generation adolescents think and behave.

Existing literature has also investigated the Vietnamese diaspora in the Czech lands (Brouček, 2003; Freidingerová, 2014; Hřebíčková, 2020; Kocourek, 2006; Martínková, 2008; Souralová, 2020; Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Szyszlak, 2016). However, among those studies, only a few are devoted to comparing the second and 1.5 generations. In this sense, the second generation is defined as individuals born in the host country or moving there before age 4 and the 1.5 generation as those immigrating before age 13 (Kang, 2004; Zhou, 1997). However, these studies are mainly limited to integration and educational aspects, and not much has been done on identity formation. Besides, most research was conducted with quantitative methodology, which is not ideal for the study of such a complicated and interdisciplinary topic. Last but not least, there is limited research done by Vietnamese scholars, which may not provide adequate insights about the migrants of Vietnamese origin.

## **Purpose of the study**

Through exploring their unique experiences, challenges, strategies for navigating multiple cultural contexts, and cultural meanings, this study aims to compare the transnational identity dynamics of the second and the 1.5 generations of Vietnamese descendants in the Czech context. The researcher argues that identity formation should not only be generalised by grand theories but also consider the dynamic interplay of individual, interpersonal, and structural factors over time. Therefore, the researcher suggests combining the approach of ethnic identity formation and the life course perspective in the study of this topic.

By means of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study aspires to provide a more nuanced understanding of identity development among immigrant children and the children of migrants, which is crucial not only for academic inquiry but also for fostering inclusivity and social cohesion within the host society. Furthermore, culturally, the Vietnamese are known to be closed, keeping their personal issues from new contacts, especially foreigners. With her Vietnamese origin, language capabilities and thorough knowledge of Vietnamese culture, the researcher hopes to uncover some hidden aspects that foreign scholars might not yet explore. The results hope to contribute to contemporary research of predominantly Czech academia that has studied the Vietnamese in the Czech Republic for several years, as well as comparative literature from other countries and Vietnam.

Attempting to address the issues of transnational identity in its entirety or of the young generation of Vietnamese descent is beyond the scope of this analysis. Instead, inspired by earlier studies and theories in the field, this master's thesis presents original field research in the city of Prague, Czech Republic. In Prague's unique metropolitan setting, Vietnamese immigrants have developed suitable models for adjusting to the country's urban environment. The city offers many social patterns possible to follow or blend with traditional Vietnamese norms and customs, as well as ways to develop specific transnational patterns of communication.

## **Research questions**

At the core of the research are three guiding questions. In particular:

*Firstly*, how do the processes of identity negotiation vary between the second generation and the 1.5 generation, and what factors influence their sense of self?

*Secondly*, do life and career trajectories differ between the two generations?

*Lastly*, how does the life course perspective contribute to the study of identity development of immigrant children and the children of migrants?

## **Structure of the thesis**

The project consists of seven chapters. This *introductory chapter* has outlined the context, purpose, scope, strengths and contribution of this research, as well as the research questions.

In *Chapter 2*, key concepts will be introduced and existing literature reviewed. It will review the theoretical frameworks that inform this study, followed by studies on the young generations of Vietnamese descent around the world and particularly in the Czech lands.

*Chapter 3* will provide an overview of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic, including a brief history and information about the said diaspora, followed by a brief introduction to Vietnamese culture.

*Chapter 4* will explain the research design and describe the research approach. It will provide details about the participant recruitment, interview process, sample characteristics, and a summary of the interviewees, after which the data analysis techniques will be described. This chapter will also include ethical considerations.

*Chapter 5* will analyse the data, starting by telling two of the respondents' life stories. It will then present the results of all interviews, which will be organised thematically based on key themes and patterns identified in the data.

*Chapter 6* will interpret the results and relate them to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. In particular, it will discuss similarities and differences between second-generation and 1.5-generation immigrants in their processes of transnational identity formation and explore the implications of the findings for theories.

Lastly, the *conclusion chapter* will summarise the study's key findings. Implications of the research will be discussed in terms of its significance for the field of identity development in the transnational context. An overview of the research's limitations and potential future research directions will also be provided.

## **Chapter 2: Key Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks**

This chapter serves as a foundation of theory on which the study will be built and reviews empirical research. It starts by introducing key concepts related to the research topic, including migration, transnationalism, diaspora, identity, and ethnicity. Then, it reviews theoretical frameworks on identity formation, followed by existing literature about the young generations of Vietnamese descent around the world and particularly in the Czech lands.

### **1. Key concepts**

#### **Migration and Transnationalism**

As a key manifestation of globalisation, international human mobility has become an inexorable phenomenon. It helps reduce wage differentials and equalise inequality (United Nations, 2020), solve labour shortages and improve labour quality (IOM, 2014), and contribute to cultural diversity (Damelang and Haas, 2012). Migration studies are an interdisciplinary puzzle that “need a simultaneously top-down as well as bottom-up approach, and it needs history to temper the overwhelming topicality of the present” (Favell, 2007, p. 260). Thus, it is widely argued that migration theories are hardly compatible but complementary to each other (Massey, 1999; Bakewell, 2010). Generally, the motivation to migrate is well explained by the push and pull mechanism with a focus on socio-economic factors. According to Lee (1966), the decision to migrate is influenced by the pull factors of the destination countries, push factors of the origin countries, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. At the macro level, especially economic migration is frequently illustrated by the neoclassical theory (Hicks, 1932), i.e. equalising wage inequality and living conditions on the global scale; world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974), i.e. the capitalist investment into peripheral regions as the catalyst for transnational movement; and dual labour market theory (Doeringer and Michael, 1971), i.e. an insatiable demand for foreign labour. At the micro level, migration is an individual decision aiming to maximise the pay for the corresponding human capital investment. Meanwhile, at the meso level, migration decisions are rather collective decisions, e.g., families, not only to maximise expected income but also to minimise risks and constraints of market failures, as explained by the new economics of labour migration (Stark and Bloom, 1985).

The fluid movement of people, ideas, cultures, and resources across national borders has brought challenges to the study of contemporary migration. Due to the complexities of the interconnected world, migrants' experience has long been defined as being connected to more than one place at once— in other words, “being neither here nor there”. According to Schiller et al. (1992:1), immigrants “build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement”. The transnational activities that they were involved in affect their sense of belonging, loyalty, and attachment. Opposed to the conventional ideas of migration, which emphasise the process of assimilation into the host destination, transnationalism acknowledges the simultaneous engagement with multiple cultural, social, and economic spheres. Transnationalism is further enhanced due to the virtual transnational contact via the internet as well as the global contacts created in a single locality through trade, profession, or interest relation (Uherek, 2017). As put by Vertovec (2009:3), transnationalism “describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity”. Further elaborated by Bourne (1916), this movement creates a cosmopolitan society- a fabric of cultures. Concerning “the sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 3), transnationalism covers the aspects of global communication and transportation, diaspora communities, cultural hybridity, multiple belongings, and identity negotiation. Therefore, transnationalism perspectives on migration are increasingly relevant and provide an analytic research lens through which to view the effects of international migration and understand immigrants and minority populations.

## **Diaspora**

Diaspora is what Tölölyan (1991:5) has called “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment”. It is broadly defined as a community of immigrants living away from their country of origin yet still maintaining links with their homelands, including established expat communities, temporarily overseas stationed migrant workers, expatriates with the citizenship of the host country, dual nationals, and second- and third-generation migrants (IOM, 2008). Types of diasporas are usually classified by the reason for leaving the homeland, namely victim, imperialism, labour, and trade. Victim diasporas result from the

expulsion of a group from a region due to conflict, persecution, or other traumatic events. Jewish, African and Armenian diasporas conform to attributes of this category. Imperial diasporas are caused by political expansion, such as the Indian diasporas in Britain. Apart from arising from a traumatic or involuntary dispersal, expansion from a homeland could be the result of business activities or a global pursuit for work. The Lebanese and Chinese diasporas are examples of trading diaspora, and the indentured Indians and Japanese diasporas of labour diaspora. Cohen (1997) suggests another type, namely cultural diaspora, in the case of the migrants of African descent from the Caribbean. It derives from the fact that the majority of this group are active intellectuals and writers in the public sphere, and they are “positioned somewhere between nations-states and ‘travelling cultures’ in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state in a physical sense, but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside the nation-state’s space/time zone” (Cohen, 1997, p. 135-136). Instead of being viewed as a discrete entity, a diaspora is made up of several opposing convergences of people, ideologies, and even cultural orientations (Quayson and Daswani, 2013).

According to Cohen (1997), diasporas have several of the following features: forced dispersal, usually traumatically; pursuit of employment, trade or colonial goals; collective memory and myth about the homeland; an idealisation of the ancestral home; a quest for return; a strong ethnic group consciousness; difficulties in integration with the host societies; a sense of solidarity with fellow ethnic members abroad; the potential for a unique and fulfilling life in tolerant host nations. He argues that diasporas are in a continuous state of formation and reformation, and they refer to their country of origin as descent- the law of blood, with fondness and longing; and the host countries as destinations of opportunities. Further pointed out by Tsuda (2013), the circulations between the host nation and their homeland may create different attachments to the idea of a nation, as diaspora was continually constructed and reconstructed by a range of social and moral relationships (see also Brah, 1996).

Together with globalisation, diasporic people become adaptive, “deterritorialized, multilingual and capable of bridging the gap between global and local tendencies” (Cohen, 1997, p. 176). They often have strong ties to their homelands but also create new structures, thus connecting their new and original home and creating an interaction system that occurs "here and there" at once (Evergeti, 2006; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Vertovec, 2009). Identities are deterritorialised, constructed and deconstructed by both the elements of agency and structure (Hall, 1994; Seyhan, 2012), which is what Said (1979:18) calls “a generalized condition of homelessness”. The apparent deterritorialisation of identity has changed the

concept of 'native land' and given way to bifocality, hybridity or 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). In his work, Anderson (1983) describes an 'imagined community', where a nation is viewed as a socially constructed community that is imagined with a memory of place by those who identify as belonging to a particular group.

### **Identity and Ethnicity**

*Identity* encompasses the qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, affiliations, and expressions that characterise a person or a group (Franco-Zamudio and Dorton, 2014; Herman, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2011). Essentially, identity is perceptions of sameness and difference that define who you are (individually or collectively) and how you are perceived by other individuals or groups (Baumeister, 1986; Butler, 1990; Reicher, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2011; Verkuyten, 2004). As a result, identity acts as a "self-regulatory social-psychological structure" that guides behaviour and fosters internal harmony (Schwartz et al., 2006, p. 6). Three levels at which identity can be defined are personal, relational, and collective (Schwartz et al., 2011; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001). *Personal identity* is strongly associated with self-image, self-esteem and self-evaluation (Sedikides and Gregg, 2008), goals, values, and beliefs (Marcia, 1966), religious and spiritual beliefs (MacDonald, 2000), desired and feared possible future selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). *Relational identity* refers to one's roles in relation to other people within interpersonal space (Bamberg, 2004; Kerpelman et al., 1997), within families (Grotevant et al., 2000; Manzi et al., 2006) or a larger system like the workplace (Thatcher and Zhu, 2006). *Collective identity* is a shared sense of belonging to a group and is strongly linked to role behaviour or the collection of group memberships that define them (Burke, 2020), such as ethnicity (Taylor, 1997), nationality (Schildkraut, 2007), religion (Cohen et al., 2005), and gender (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). Identity, therefore, offers a way of thinking about how social and psychological facets of the 'self' come together to form a self-concept (Woodward, 2002).

Approaches to understanding *ethnicity* have dichotomised between primordialism and constructivism. Under the influence of primordialism, some authors claim that ethnicity is a subjective identity associated with a perception of shared origin, kinship, biological heritage, and a sense of solidarity, which results from common nationality, history, cultural origins and possibly religion (Bulmer, 1996; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Weber, 1968). Consequently, the term 'ethnicity' in a way overlaps with the concepts of race and national identity (Banton,

1998, 2014; Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Ratcliffe, 1994). However, constructivist perspectives that developed after the 1960s increasingly view ethnic groups as social constructs whose identity is determined by societal norms. Especially in the literature on migration, ethnicity is not a congenital, rigid notion; it, in fact, varies throughout one's life based on time and space, as well as the people that he/she is surrounded with (Ibrahim and Heuer, 2016). With an increasing flow of migration and the growth of diasporas, the majority of societies around the world have become ethnically and culturally plural (Ibrahim and Heuer, 2016; Verkuyten, 2004). Some authors further present unconventional alternative ways to look at ethnicity without invoking the imagery of bounded and fixed groups. Brubaker (2002) highlights that individuals engage in ethnic practices and claims-making across diverse social contexts, blurring boundaries between ethnic groups and allowing for fluidity and hybridity in ethnic identities.

## **2. Theoretical frameworks**

A number of researchers have explored the aspects of identity formation, such as Erikson's (1968) theory of identity versus role confusion, Marcia's (1980) identity status theory, and Arnett's (2000) theory of Identity Formation in Emerging Adulthood. However, the elements of ethnicity and transnationalism have been overlooked by said scholars (Phinney and Alipuria, 1990). With the aim of providing a profound background for exploring identity in the context of transnationalism, the study combines the approach of ethnic identity formation with the life course perspective.

### **Ethnic identity formation**

Ethnic identity explored by social science disciplines focuses on the group level. Sociological and social anthropological work has shown that identity is a complicated process – it is socially co-constructed, sometimes contradictory and constantly evolving (Khor, 2020). Thus, literature in these domains is usually reserved when it comes to concepts and models to explain ethnic identity variation. Rather, anthropologists have been studying the hybridity of identities - the idea of moving between various identities. The notion of rigid group boundaries and stable, inner identity has given way to the understanding that identities are plagued by contradiction, fluidity, and contestation (Griffiths, 2015).

On the other hand, within psychology, ethnic identity usually focuses on the individual and interpersonal processes. Several social, developmental and cross-cultural psychologists have proposed conceptual models as lenses or orientations through which to view the development of racial and ethnic identity. In general, all researchers agree that identity is achieved through a dynamic and complicated process of exploration and experimentation, especially during adolescence- a critical stage in life when one acknowledges significant changes and gains more exceptional cognitive abilities (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1989)

Based on interviews with US-born adolescents of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White origins, psychologist Phinney (1989) proposes a three-stage model of ethnic identity formation, which includes (i) *unexamined ethnic identity*, (ii) *ethnic identity search/moratorium*, and (iii) *ethnic identity achievement*. In the first stage, minority members show no interest in ethnicity (no commitment and no exploration) and accept the majority culture's values, even negative views of their own group, without questioning (commitment without exploration). The second stage is the period of exploration, where the individuals encounter "a shocking personal or social event that temporarily dislodges the person from his old world view, making the person receptive to a new interpretation of his identity", as put by Phinney (1989:37). Finally, the ideal outcome of one's identity is achieved, characterised by acceptance, internalisation and a clear sense of one's ethnicity. Here, the subjects learn to live with the cultural distinctions between their ethnic group and the dominant culture.

Focusing on the unique aspects of identity development of biracial individuals in the United States, Poston (1990) suggested that initially, during childhood, one's sense of self is unrelated to ethnic grouping. Later on, individuals feel under pressure to select one racial or ethnic group identity over another and their decisions are impacted by the group's status, parental influence, cultural awareness, and appearance. However, they then feel guilty and uncertain for favouring one identity and begin to investigate the potential of the other one. This leads to respect for other identities and exploration of heritages, hence the integration and valuing of multiple racial identities. Correspondingly, the 5 identity statuses identified by Poston are (i) *personal identity*, (ii) *choice of group categorisation*, (iii) *enmeshment/denial*, (iv) *appreciation*, and (v) *integration*.

With a focus on Asians, Kim (2001) develops the Asian American identity development model. She identifies a continuum of 5 stages that leads Asian Americans to form a positive racial identity, namely (i) *ethnic awareness*, (ii) *white identification*, (iii) *awakening to social-*

*political consciousness*, (iv) *redirection*, and (v) *incorporation*. The first stage starts in early childhood, where the family acts as the major ethnic group model, and the minority subjects' attitude about ethnicity depends on how much ethnic expression there is in the household. Later on, school settings and classmates become important channels for spreading and legitimising racial prejudice, which begins to have a detrimental effect on their identity and self-esteem. As a result, they tend to identify with white society and leave their Asian background behind. In the third stage, individuals start to take on a new outlook, typically accompanied by heightened political consciousness and an understanding of oppression and oppressed groups, and most likely no longer desire to identify with white society. The redirection stage is characterised by a renewed sense of pride and commitment to Asian culture and background, followed by a realisation that white privilege and oppression are to blame for Asian communities' difficult experiences. Eventually, in the pinnacle of identity evolution, the minority subjects respect other racial and cultural groups as well as positively identify as Asian Americans and no longer have associations with or against white culture.

### **Life-course perspective**

As Kim (2001) notes, attitudes and identities can develop based on the degree of ethnic expression in the family and community. Therefore, the context of one's life plays an important role in forming his/her racial and ethnic identity. Undoubtedly, it differs throughout communities and between individuals as a result of their disparate personal and historical experiences (Persons, 2017).

The framework of the life course is useful in the studies of migration and integration. It studies life trajectories across life stages and highlights the importance of socially constructed meanings applied to life events, transitions, the development of individuals and relationships over time. Among the five heuristic principles of this theoretical perspective (Elder et al., 2003), four of them could shed light on migrants' experience and identity formation, namely (i) agency, (ii) time and place, (iii) timing and (iv) linked life.

According to the principle of *agency*, "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (Elder et al., 2003, p. 11). Instead of acting passively according to social influence and structural constraints, people make choices and compromises. In the context of Vietnamese migration to the Czech lands, the old cohort's mobility decision may stem from

economic hardships, and their isolation might be rooted in the distrust in the majority of society's institutions. In contrast, the young generation may have different life trajectories and strives for integration, not only into the host country but also internationally, for better educational and occupational attainment.

The principle of *time and place* says that “the life course of individuals is embedded and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime” (Elder et al., 2003, p. 12). Regarding generational differences, this principle is very well explained by the concept of ‘civic stratification’. Civic stratification is the inequality which “crosscuts ethnic, geographical or socio-economic inequality” and is “reinforced by the political and legal difficulties” in the new country (Attias-Donfut and Cook, 2017, p. 120-126). Different generations of migrants can have different positions in civic stratification. For instance, the first generation of Vietnamese migrants, who are ‘absolute outlanders’, would have the least socio-economic benefits. Meanwhile, the younger generation, who are born in or come to the new land during their adolescence, speak the language and attend the social system, would have a higher position in civic stratification.

The principle of *timing* explains that the same event affects individuals in different ways. As stated by George (2009:166), “events, experiences, and contexts affect individuals differently depending on their timing in the life course”. Migration is a significant life-changing event that causes major shifts in life trajectory and produces serious and long-lasting effects. The event taking place at different points of the life course brings about different opportunities for transnational involvement, as “age underlies the organization of family, educational, work, and leisure institutions and organizations” (Settersten, 2003, p. 81). Also, integration is a process over time, where an individual has to take time to learn a new language, get used to new customs and find new relationships. The older generation experiences the absolute change in the living environment at a later age, when they are already attached to their cultures and values of origin countries and may have completed family formation. Thus, they face the challenges of re-establishing family patterns and roles in a new sociocultural environment and with language barriers. Meanwhile, the younger generation grows most, if not all, of their life in the host society and feels closer to the majority. Therefore, the experience with and response to the hosting society differs in important ways across immigrant generations (Kulu and González-ferrer, 2014).

According to the principle of linked lives, lives are “lived interdependently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (Elder, 2003, p. 13). As a family project, all migrant family generations are linked by “a complex set of gifts, debts and reciprocity” (Attias-Donfut and Cook, 2017, p. 120). In Vietnamese culture, help to parents, financial support and other kinds of help are part of the gift contract. Every member is connected by, for example, family hardship, family nurturance and economic factors. Therefore, link lives are to support relationships and control individual behaviour, and relationships among migrant members include compromise, controversy, and sometimes conflicts. This is a complex process of re-negotiation.

### **3. The young generations of Vietnamese descent**

Many studies have been devoted to the young generation of Vietnamese descent around the world. They are perceived as high achievers academically and professionally, with high levels of education and a high percentage of white-collar employees (Barber, 2021; Bösch and Su, 2020). Most studies illustrate the young generations with a lack of Vietnamese linguistics skills and access to ethnic networks, limited knowledge about Vietnam and a low level of attachment to the country of their ancestors (Barber, 2022; Blanc, 2004; Dang and Harima, 2020; Pokojaska, 2017; Pyke and Dang, 2003; Sims, 2007). Studying the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia, Nguyen and Bowles (2008) reveal that despite the younger generation having Vietnamese linguistics fluency and attachment to Vietnamese culture, values and extended family, they still do not feel particularly attached to the country, especially to its communist government. The reason derives from their parents’ negative stories due to experience of war, trauma and forced migration (Ben-Moshe and Pyke, 2012; Nguyen and Bowles, 2008), which hinders them from developing a favourable sense of Vietnamese identity (Baldassar et al., 2017). Some scholars also delve into the negative impacts of cultural, linguistic and intergenerational conflicts on adolescents’ self-identification, self-esteem and mental health (Lam, 2005; Orth et al., 2014; Smokowski et al., 2014; Tran, 2021; Ying and Han, 2007), which can potentially cause behavioural problems (Choi et al., 2008) and create family tensions (Ho and Birman, 2010)

Besides, it is commonly concluded that the Vietnamese second generation has a hybrid, bicultural identity, but individual experiences vary considerably (Barber, 2022; Dang and Harima, 2020; Kibria, 2022; Nguyen and Bowles, 2008; Pędziwiatr and Brzozowski 2015;

Pokojska, 2017; Tran and Bifuh-Ambe, 2021). Some scholars also discover the gender aspect, arguing that Vietnamese females' identities tend to lean more towards the mainstream society due to the high expectations addressed to them in Vietnamese culture and the freedom and equality in the host country (Nowicka, 2015; Rosenthal et al., 1996). Apart from Vietnamese language proficiency and access to ethnic networks, factors that contribute to their sense of belonging include multi-household upbringing (Nguyen and Bowles, 2008); neighbourhood, i.e. concentrated or sparsely populated Vietnamese areas (Barber, 2022); and generational differences (Barber, 2022; Rosenthal et al., 1996; Schmidt, 1995; Trueba et al., 1993). Many individuals also form a sense of belonging with 'like-minded' Vietnamese with similar backgrounds, goals and aims, family-oriented and education-oriented (Barber, 2022). Studies from Australia, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom seem to advocate pan-ethnic youth programmes and bespoke networks in the international diaspora as a means to cultivate ethnic ties and facilitate ethnic identity development (Barber, 2022; Huynh, 2022; Nguyen and Bowles, 2008; Tran, 2021). A similar conclusion, however, is not made for the Vietnamese young generation in France. Blanc (2004) pointed out that second generation born in France have little connection with Vietnam and largely blended into French society despite the serving of cultural organisations and institutions.

In the context of the Czech Republic, there is excessive literature investing in the topic (Brouček, 2003; Freidingerová, 2014; Hřebíčková, 2020; Kocourek, 2006; Martínková, 2008; Suralová, 2020; Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Szyszlak, 2016). In general, the younger generations successfully adapt to the host country via inclusive exposure to local life, the Czech education system and Czech nannies' door (Svobodová and Janská, 2016; Martínková, 2008). They are born or may have grown up in the host society, and most of them have Czech citizenship and treat the Czech Republic as their homeland (Szyszlak, 2016). Their attendance in the education system is supported by the Czech government, for instance, free school fees. Thanks to the preschool facilities, which provide language capacity and involvement with Czech classmates, the young generation masters the Czech language and basic social and cultural skills. In addition, Vietnamese parents make much effort to support children in education as they believe it is one of the most valuable investments for a better position in society (Szyszlak, 2016), even if it significantly affects the structure of their expenses (Uherek, 2003). Thus, they hire Czech nannies so that their children can learn the language and adapt better to the host nation. In fact, this motivation of parents also aligns with their children's drive to outperform their antecedents and gain access to a greater range of

professions, even the most prominent ones, through education. As a cultural heritage, Vietnamese pupils have high respect for teachers and education, and thus are viewed favourably as ambitious and successful. Consequently, the younger generation is the symbol of the integration of the Vietnamese community and is seen as the bridge between the two societies. However, as they are educated according to the Czech educational system and taken care of by Czech nannies, most of the younger generation lack knowledge about Vietnam's history and find it difficult to communicate in Vietnamese (Martínková, 2008). Therefore, though they do not have problems in the aspects of jobs, education, housing, health or migration policies like the first generation, they do struggle with integrating into Vietnamese society in the Czech Republic.

Due to the intergenerational gap and tensions, Vietnamese children in the Czech lands face cultural dualism (Martínková, 2008). In the family circle, they speak Vietnamese and try to conform to their parents' cultural activities and requirements in order to avoid conflicts. However, at school and among friends, they speak Czech, behave and do activities identical to those of their Czech peers. Even among siblings, they prefer to communicate in the Czech language because they are more familiar with Czech culture and find this language easier. Most of them at least once ask themselves 'Am I Vietnamese or Czech?'. According to Hřebíčková (2020), the second generation is less oriented towards Vietnamese culture; however, both generations are more towards Czech culture and with the same degree of orientation. In another study, Svobodová and Janská (2016) concluded that the young generations do not feel like choosing a fixed identity. Instead, they consider themselves Czech when it comes to education and lifestyle, but are proud of Vietnam's history, traditional values and cultural heritage.

## **Chapter 3: The Vietnamese Community in the Czech Republic**

This chapter provides the historical context of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Czech lands. By looking into the early migration, the journey to attain its national minority status, the community characteristics, as well as the Vietnamese culture, we endeavour to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics that contribute to the Vietnamese descendants' experience in the Czech Republic. Due to the limitation of the thesis, this part will remain as a summary.

### **1. A brief history**

The first wave of Vietnamese migrants to Czechoslovakia took place in the early 1950s thanks to intergovernmental agreements between the two socialist countries. Selected young Vietnamese, either excellent students or children affected by the war, came to the Central European country for training, apprenticeship and study. In the 1980s, the second wave of migration took place as a result of several bilateral agreements on scientific and technical cooperation created between 1974 and 1980. The agreements were based on ideas of “socialist internationalism” and were continued due to a labour shortage. The immigrants were those interested in studying at universities and internships in companies; however, the majority of them were labourers- in particular, apprentices, trainees and employees in textile, engineering, and paper industries. The culmination occurred between 1980 and 1983, when the number of admitted Vietnamese people rose to nearly 30,000 (Brouček, 2005). In the 1980s, some Vietnamese started to engage in trading in Czechoslovakia (Martínková and Pechová, 2011)

After the fall of communism in 1989, most of the political and economic agreements between the two nations were cut off. The said Vietnamese got to choose either to go back to Vietnam with some financial support or apply for a residence permit in Czechia. Those who were able to adapt to the new conditions decided to stay in the country and started business. In this so-called ‘Age of Freedom’, the once state-controlled and temporary migration had given way to spontaneous migration, motivated primarily by economic factors (Krebs and Pechová, 2008; Nguyen, 2020). These economic migrants come to the Czech lands with the purpose of maintaining their families at a good level, protecting their children financially, and taking care of their parents in their home country (Szyszlak, 2016). Throughout the 1990s, the most widespread forms of economic activity for the Vietnamese in Czechia were retail businesses,

restaurants, and beauty salons. Later on, Vietnamese people also immigrated to the Czech lands for family reunification and education. Based on the 2022 national census, 65,763 Vietnamese were reported to reside in the country legally.<sup>1</sup> The community has grown and become the third-largest national minority in Czechia.

## 2. The community dynamics

Since the early 2000s, the Association of Vietnamese in the Czech Republic had sought recognition as a national minority. Despite many fruitless efforts, ultimately, in 2013, the Vietnamese were officially recognised as a national minority, marked by the presence of their representative in the Czech Government Council for National Minorities. As a result, Vietnamese has been recognised as a minority language and used in public settings, courts, and on radio and television.<sup>2</sup> For the Vietnamese, this means protection and cultivation of their language and culture, opportunities to defend their rights and fulfil their duties, better access to subsidy programs as well as information on their obligations towards Czechia, increased interest of the local government in cooperation with the Vietnamese, and a chance to be part of politics (Szyszlak, 2016). Indeed, the change in its foreign status facilitates the prospect of the real integration of the Vietnamese into the host society. Their increasingly better knowledge of the society mechanism and utilisation of their status attainment have been indicated by a growing number of Vietnamese shops and restaurants in shopping centres, real estate purchases, and a large number of Vietnamese associations- both commercial and non-profit, with a local or national reach. There is also a growing number of Vietnamese people in the Czech labour market as well as in Czech films, theatre and other media and arts sectors.

A particular environment in terms of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic is the market. It is not only a workplace but also the soul of the community- i.e., administrative, cultural and media centres. Sapa- Little Hanoi is a classic example. Here, all kinds of business entities and non-profit organisations are established in order to help its people, such as, inter alia, restaurants, beauty salons, the Vietnamese-owned supermarket *Tamda*, Vietnamese film rentals, Vietnamese publication purchases, advertisements, public relations, travel agencies, nursery schools, event venues, pagodas, medical services, and services related to solving problems with adaptation and functioning in the Czech Republic (Freidingerová, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cizinci.cz](http://www.cizinci.cz)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2013). Retrieved from: [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/czech-republic-vietnamese-and-belarusians-recognized-ethnic-minorities\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/czech-republic-vietnamese-and-belarusians-recognized-ethnic-minorities_en)

Further, it serves educational purposes and other community events in the form of courses for Czech language and university entrance exams, camps for children or youth, sports tournaments, weddings, concerts, award ceremonies, conventions and congresses (Kocourek, 2006). In general, the Vietnamese market has its specific laws, regulations and relations, implying the self-sufficiency of the community as a whole.

However, the Vietnamese minority is not homogeneous, for there is internal diversity and hierarchy within the group. Pointed out by Freidingerová (2014), its internal diversity was distinguished by family and family relations; region of origin in Vietnam; economic status and education; the social, economic and political context of arrival in the Czech lands, i.e. migration cohort; belonging to the immigrant generation, i.e., first, 1.5 or second generations. Furthermore, the hierarchy of the Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic is divided into three categories: old settlers, independent traders and the lowest class (Martínková and Pechová, 2011; Huwelmeier, 2015). Old settlers are in the highest position, becoming leaders in business and social life in the Vietnamese community and earning the most respect. The middle class is made up of tradespeople, who often serve as a basis for other Vietnamese family members and whose children study and integrate into Czech society. On the other hand, the lowest of the hierarchy includes the newly arrived or "weakly rooted", who usually are students, factory workers, or staff at restaurants, grocery shops, and beauty studios. Such stratifications reflect differences in integration level into the Czech society, identity and belonging, as well as one's attitude towards the country of origin, culture and tradition.

#### **4. The culture of Vietnam**

The culture of Vietnam shares many similarities with the common characteristics of Southeast Asian and East Asian cultures, but also has unique characteristics. It is a mix of Confucian and Buddhist ideology as well as wet rice civilisation (Le, 2021). To elaborate, the cornerstone of Vietnamese is an emphasis on reverence for lineage, filial piety, hierarchy and patriarchy (Confucianism), humanity, peace and harmony (Buddhism), as well as community and autonomy (wet rice civilisation).

Confucian elements are deeply ingrained in Vietnamese culture, including filial piety, family-centredness, patriarchy and hierarchy. Among all, filial piety is the core value, i.e., honour, love and respect for one's parents, elders, and ancestors (Kohn, 2004), fostering a sense of duty and obligation towards family. Acts of filial piety include ancestor veneration and

respect for elders. Like other Southeast and East Asian cultures, Vietnamese culture emphasises parents' merit of giving birth and sacrificing their own needs, time, energy and money for their children to have a better future (Chao, 1995; Du and Li, 2023; Kim and Wong, 2002). Therefore, children are expected to care for their parents in their old age. Most, if not all, Vietnamese practise ancestor worship and maintain an ancestral altar at their residence to stay connected to their departed ancestors. Ritual worshipping takes place in the family of the eldest son, usually in the presence of the whole lineage. Vietnam's culture also heavily focuses on the ideology of family collectivism, in which all economic activities are cooperative (Kibria, 2002). Moreover, as opposed to Western culture, which advocates individualism, kinship plays a crucial role in Vietnam. The concept of family is understood as a blood relation, involving immediate family members as well as distant relatives, creating a strong support system throughout one's life (Tran, 2005). Therefore, the Vietnamese always cherish family values and prioritise family gatherings and celebrations. Important events, such as Giỗ<sup>3</sup> or Tết<sup>4</sup>, are occasions for family members and relatives to gather, bringing an air of excitement, renewal, and intimate conversations. Besides, the care about family also goes along with social and economic obligations (Ngo, 2006). Kin have the responsibility to support one another materially, intellectually, mentally, and politically (Tran, 2005).

Furthermore, Vietnamese culture follows a strict hierarchy and discipline. In the family setting, children are expected to obey their parents as a means of showing good manners and filial piety, hence the custom of one-way communication. Respect for elders is not limited to family context but refers to anyone higher in the social order and age, such as teachers. Such obedience naturally results in a restriction on personal development and personal opinions. Communication in Vietnamese also follows the principle of top-down and emphasises vocative, attitudes, and gestures (Nguyen, 1993). Unlike in English, where there are mainly 2 pronouns "you" and "I", in Vietnamese, how a person is addressed depends on all factors of age, gender, role, context or communication purpose. When vocative is misused, it indicates chaotic filial behaviour.

Patriarchy is another significant traditional value. It is clearly manifested in the Vietnamese proverb that says "nhất nam viết hữu, thập nữ viết vô", which means having one son means

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<sup>3</sup> An annual death anniversary held in order to remind the descendants of the deceased.

<sup>4</sup> Also known as Lunar New Year, it is the most significant and widely celebrated festival in Vietnamese traditions. During *Tết*, families exchange wishes and lucky money in red envelopes, prepare traditional meals, visit relatives, display colourful decorations, vibrant parades, lion dances, and fireworks, showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage, customs and rituals.

having one child, but having 10 girls means having none. Men are considered the mainstay, whilst their counterparts are of lower position and are imposed with strict requirements, such as “*công dung ngôn hạnh*”<sup>5</sup>- the four basic standards for women. That said, Vietnamese wives are in charge of money management and backstage family functioning (Le, 2021).

The idea of an extended family is reflected in the Vietnamese notion of ‘*đồng bào*’ (compatriots), which emphasises solidarity, dependence, shared responsibility, and a high value on looking out for one another. The cherished tradition of communal dining is the most manifest embodiment of family and community bonds. Dishes are placed at the centre for everyone to share, upholding the spirit of solidarity, mutual reciprocity, and collectivity over individualism. Vietnamese people also value harmony, joy, affection, and relationships, and try to avoid conflicts, quarrels, and personal criticism. As a result, they are less likely to open up and communicate directly as in the West, hence the lack of assertiveness and frankness.

Despite a high communal spirit, the Vietnamese culture also comprises the element of autonomy (Le, 2021; Tran, 2005; Tran, 2016). The coexistence of these two contradictory aspects derives from the wet rice civilisation. On one hand, autonomy manifests in the people’s timidity and cautiousness. In particular, Vietnamese people open up within the family but stay reserved and careful elsewhere. For them, personal as well as family reputation and dignity need to be carefully safeguarded because “bad news has wings” and “the apple never falls far from the tree”. Consequently, there are stricter stereotypes against some family members, especially women and children. On the other hand, autonomy is also exhibited in the people’s spirit of hard work, independence and self-sufficiency. This comes from the fact that, traditionally in Vietnam, each family is viewed as a self-reliant agricultural production unit, which enables its members to meet their living needs (Le, 2021). The harmonious combination of the two opposing characteristics, i.e., community and autonomy, contributes to the flexible behaviour of the Vietnamese people.

Under the influence of the Internet and international exchange, traditional society has undergone certain changes and disturbances. Nevertheless, the core values of Vietnamese culture are still preserved in the modern family.

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<sup>5</sup> “*công*” means to be good at housework and taking care of family; “*dung*” means to have formal beauty and appearance; “*ngôn*” is to have courteous speech with a well-mannered gesture; “*hạnh*” refers to morality, kindness, faithfulness and devotion.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to provide a nuanced exploration of the identities of the young generations of the Vietnamese in Prague. As we cannot predict the responses that would allow for constructing a questionnaire, a qualitative rather than quantitative method is selected. In this way, we can obtain detailed information that can be highly diversified between interviewees. The study collects information from an emic perspective, i.e., from an insider perspective to understand why people think and act in particular ways, and interprets the result from an etic perspective, i.e., from a social scientific perspective to form a complete picture of the phenomenon. For the reasons mentioned above, the study will apply the method of in-depth semi-structured interviews.

This chapter details the methodology adopted in this research. It will describe the research design and provide a summary of the interviewees, after which data analysis techniques will be described. This chapter will also include ethical considerations.

### **1. In-depth semi-structured interview**

In qualitative research, the interview is a common method to collect data. The social actors' experience, understanding, and worldview can be obtained via their stories, accounts, and explanations (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). The content of the stories and how they are narrated is formed by the social actors' inner state development through social events which have impacted, shaped and even changed them, thus giving access to individual and social processes as well as interactions (Guhlich, 2017). Additionally, the interviewer has the opportunity to observe the interviewee's non-verbal expressions, and both parties get to clarify information directly (Darlington and Scott 2002). An in-depth interview allows the interviewer to investigate an issue thoroughly and even explore additional points. The interview might be time-consuming and unsuitable for a large sample, yet the collected data provide a large amount of valuable and hidden information. In other words, it centres on quality over quantity.

There are three types of qualitative interviews, namely structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. As suggested by the names, the structured interviews are fixed and rigid regarding the number of questions and their order. They are similar to verbal questionnaires and are utilised to collect data that is easy to categorise and quantify.

Meanwhile, unstructured interviews are flexible and spontaneous, where questions are produced based on the interviewees' preceding answers. They are usually used when little is known about the topic and can be a useful exploratory research tool. The semi-structured, on the other hand, is a mix of the two aforementioned types, i.e., it is based on a guide to maintain the track but still allows researchers to add and modify their interview questions adaptably. This helps researchers gather reliable data while also gaining a deep understanding of the respondent's feelings and beliefs on specific topics.

The in-depth semi-structured interview method allows the acquisition of meaningful insights while ensuring the focus of the study. We will be drawing a sample and asking open-ended questions that can be refined further during the interviews. In this way, it ensures that participants can discuss their personal experiences, understandings, and insights from their own perspectives.

## **Interview setting**

### *Respondent recruitment*

My own knowledge of Vietnamese culture informed my decision to recruit participants mainly via personal networks, where they knew me in person or were introduced to me by their trusted friends. It comes from the fact that Vietnamese people generally are closed and do not like to share about their personal lives, especially family-related issues. As a matter of fact, some potential interviewees refused to have an interview with me because they did not want to talk about their personal life, even though they were connected with me by their close friends. This will be discussed further in the result section, as part of the analysis of field notes. Apart from that, there were two participants that I approached personally and randomly in a public setting. I also wanted to mention that I used to work part-time at a Vietnamese restaurant in Prague in the summer of 2023. The short employment here helped me immensely with the recruitment process. Here, I got the chance to establish contact with some of the interviewees, both of the second and the 1.5 generations.

I have chosen some criteria for selecting respondents, including (i) having permanent residence or Czech citizenship, (ii) being 15 years of age and above, (iii) being of Vietnamese origin or identifying Vietnamese as one of their identities, and (iv) residing in Prague. I also ensure gender balance in the subgroups. A total of twelve interviews were conducted, seven

of which were with the second generation and five with the 1.5 generation. Data was collected from July 2023 to January 2024. All except one interview were carried out face-to-face. The other was conducted online via MS Teams.

### *Process*

During the first contact, I introduced myself and the purpose of my study, and provided them with all necessary information about the interview procedure and ethical issues (see *Consent Form* in Appendix 1). I also expressed my wish to record the interviews to facilitate the narration quality and the ease of interview transcription afterwards. However, I underlined that tape recording was not compulsory and that I could take notes instead- whichever way they felt most comfortable. Respondents were then given the choice of place and time for the interviews. Interviews took place in varying settings: cafes, restaurants, or interviewees' homes, which shaped our interaction and the narration in different ways.

Before the interview started, I once again explained the purpose and structure of the study, as well as the necessary information. Respondents were informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. Again, I asked for their permission to record the interviews. During the interview, I let the participants freely express themselves and only intervened when they misunderstood the questions, spent too much time on a question, felt uncomfortable or did not know what to say next. Depending on the case, I explained or rephrased the questions, summarised their main ideas so we could move forward to the following questions, or tried to ease the situation with a comment. Importantly, in uncomfortable or difficult situations, I reminded them of their right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at their will. The interview includes a wide range of questions about socio-demographic information, self-identity, parent-child relationship, social and personal relationships, and life and career trajectories (see *Interview Guide* in Appendix 2). I took ethnographical notes during the whole process, i.e., at the initial contact, during and after the interviews. The notes included my description of the first meeting, the interview atmosphere, and my observation of the participant's behaviour, language, non-verbal expression, and interactions with me and other social actors (if any).

Each interview lasted 40 to 90 minutes, with a median length of 1 hour. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese or English, depending on participants' choices. To protect the participants' privacy, their names were anonymised. Some respondents preferred to be

addressed by their Czech names; therefore, the substitute names were given according to their reported names.

### *Socio-demographic information*

There were six males and six females. The mean age was 24.8 years (range: 17-31), and 27 for males (range: 20-31) and 22.7 for females (range: 17-28). The highest education was a Master's degree for the second generation and Secondary school for the 1.5 generation. Out of eleven interviewees, two were living with their parents. The majority of the respondents moved out when they finished secondary school. All second-generation participants and Mai and Tobi (who were of the 1.5 generation) reported holding dual citizenship (Czech and Vietnamese). Other 1.5-generation interviewees reported to have only Vietnamese citizenship.

**Table 1.** *Participants' socio-demographic information*

	Name	Gender	Age	Highest education <sup>6</sup>	Profession
Gen2	Lien	F	28	Master's degree	HR manager
	Trang	F	27	Bachelor's degree	Programmer
	Huyen	F	22	Secondary school (3)	On maternal leave (previously: Saleswomen)
	Lam	M	30	Secondary school (3)	Programmer
	David	M	28	Bachelor's degree	Technician, photo/videographer
	Andrew	M	24	Elementary school	Self-employed
	Hung	M	29	Master's degree	IT specialist
Gen1.5	Anna	F	17	Elementary school	Vocational school student
	Mai	F	24	Secondary school (3)	Back office staff
	Nhi	F	18	Elementary school	Vocational school student
	Tobi	M	20	Secondary school (3)	University student
	Thanh	M	31	Secondary school (1)	Chief

<sup>6</sup> Note: Elementary school consists of nine grades; Secondary school includes mainly 3 types: Vocational school, Lyceum (Professional school), and Grammar school (with *Maturita* examination), which are coded in numbers 1, 2, 3, respectively.

## 2. Summary of interviewees

*Lien*, my first interviewee, was one of the two participants that I approached personally in the restaurant, where she was a frequent customer. Due to her limited Vietnamese capacity, we mainly communicated in English and Czech. One day, during my shift, I finally introduced myself and my project, and expressed my interest in interviewing her. Lien was willing and happy to help, and we scheduled an interview a few days later. Due to her tight schedule as an HR manager, we decided to have a virtual interview via the MS Team platform. Lien was the only respondent who was born and raised in Prague.

I got to know *Trang* in 2019 when she came to Vietnam for an internship in Hanoi. When I came to Prague for my studies in 2021, we reconnected. She introduced me to her second-generation friends, invited me to her events for Vietnamese youth, took me to Sapa- Little Hanoi, and broadened my knowledge about the Vietnamese community. Trang worked as a front-end engineer at a Czech company.

*Lam* was introduced to me by an acquaintance of mine in Vietnam. He was born in Vietnam and went to Czechia at age four. He moved to Prague alone for secondary school, and a few years later, the whole family reunited in the capital. Lam used to study at Czech Technical University and spent an Erasmus semester in Germany. However, he quit in the last year of university, believing he could still get a good job without the degree. He then co-founded a start-up with a Vietnamese Czech friend. Even though it did not function anymore, the company attracted great attention while it lasted. Since then, he had worked as a programmer at a Czech company. It was Lam who suggested I interview his sister, Huyen. By then, Huyen had just given birth, so I was invited to their parents' flat, where she was residing. I conducted the interviews separately to avoid biased answers.

*Huyen* came to Prague with her family at 10. Like her brother, she quit university. Before going on maternity leave, she worked at a big Western clothes company. Huyen had always considered herself Czech, as she rarely interacted with the Vietnamese community. However, the acquaintance and tying the knot with her current Vietnamese husband drastically changed her life and perspective. Conversing with her and observing her talking with her newborn baby in Vietnamese, I could hardly believe this girl was not familiar with the language previously.

*David* was the second person I approached at the restaurant I worked over the summer. He moved to Prague at 19 years old to attend university and earned a bachelor's degree in media.

He had a passion for music and photography; therefore, apart from his day job as a technician at a camera rental company, he worked part-time as a photo/videographer at concerts. David did not associate himself with the Vietnamese people because of the differences in mentality, personality and hobbies. We had the interview at a Czech pub.

I established contact with *Andrew* via a Vietnamese friend. Andrew was born in the northwest of Czechia and moved to Prague with his family at 12 years old. Unlike the other second-generation participants, Andrew did not finish secondary school. After one year of working in customer service, he figured out it was not a fit and decided to try his hands at designing bags. Like David, Andrew did not resonate with Vietnamese culture. Of all the participants, Andrew spoke the most broken Vietnamese. We interviewed at a café in the centre of Prague.

A university friend connected me with two other interviewees- her boyfriend's flatmate, Hung, and her boyfriend's cousin, Tobi. I was invited to their flat to conduct both interviews. *Hung* was born in Vietnam and moved to Prague at age two. He held a master's degree and worked as an IT specialist at a Czech company. On the other hand, *Tobi* had just come to Prague for his university, majoring in IT. He was born in Vietnam and came to Czechia at eight years old.

Another Vietnamese friend introduced me to *Anna*, who came to Prague from Vietnam at age eight. At the time of the interview, she was a secondary school student, yet was considering quitting in order to work full-time. After school, she devoted her time to her part-time job at a nail studio. We conducted the interview over lunch at a restaurant before she headed for work.

I had the interview with *Mai*, thanks to a Vietnamese classmate. Mai went to South Moravia from Vietnam at ten and moved to Prague a few years later. She was employed at a Vietnamese Czech company as a back-office staff. The interview with Mai was carried out differently- in a group setting. Four of us, including Mai, her second-generation friend, my friend, and me, had a girls' hangout, and the interview took place throughout the evening. Though it failed to be a one-on-one intensive and private interview, I got to observe her interactions with her second-generation friend, as well as with my friend and me. Notably, Mai was the only participant who felt uncomfortable with tape recording and asked me to take notes instead.

*Nhi* was my colleague at the restaurant. However, we did not spend much time at work together because I was about to leave when she got in. She came to Prague from Vietnam at eleven and was studying in a vocational school, majoring in Restaurant and Catering Services.

She wanted to have a part-time job in restaurants and pubs to sharpen her skills and earn pocket money. The interview was done in a café in Vynohrady, and at the time, we were no longer colleagues.

Similarly, I got to know *Thanh* from the restaurant, where he worked as a chef. Thanh came to Czechia at twelve years old and completed a vocational school in Manufacturing. At 23, he moved to Prague and started his career as a chef in Vietnamese restaurants. We interviewed at a café in an early morning before his shift.

### **3. Data analysis**

The interviews were recorded (or noted) and transcribed using Microsoft Word's *Transcribe* and the AI tool *Cockatoo*. The transcription was then revised manually. For interviews conducted in Vietnamese, they were translated with the help of Google Translator and then reviewed carefully. With my initial background in interpreting and translation, I guaranteed the precision, clarity, and nuance of the translation.

Five main themes were identified: *language, self-identity, parent-child relationship, social and personal relationships, and life and career trajectories*. Before coding, I listened to the recordings as well as re-read individual interviews and ethnographical notes several times to identify the inner sequential structure of the interviews. Information was reduced and coded based on the recurrent themes. All notes and new findings were also included for each interview. I used a colour-coded matrix in Excel to assemble information, presenting results in a clear form.

The analysis process identified patterns and regularities in both second- and 1.5-generation groups. It also looked into between-group as well as within-group similarities and differences.

### **4. Ethical considerations**

Confidentiality/Privacy: Participants' names were anonymised, and personal details were kept confidential. No one else except my supervisor could access the tape recordings and ethnographical notes.

Consent: During the initial contact and before the interviews, participants were informed of the purposes, format and process of the study, as well as their right to ask questions, refuse to answer any questions and stop the interview at any time. My wish to record the interview was expressed from the first contact, and permission was asked again before the start of the interviews. It was made clear that participation was voluntary, and interviewees could withdraw their consent at any time. They were also assured that whatever they shared with me would be kept confidential, would not be judged, and would not affect our existing relationships.

Negative effects: The study was designed to prevent any disturbance that might occur during and after the interviews. If there was any distress, the interview could be rescheduled or stopped immediately.

## Chapter 5: Results

This chapter will commence by presenting my field notes during the recruitment and interview processes. Then, it will present the story of two participants in the sample as examples of a second- and a 1.5-generation Vietnamese in the Czech lands. Next, similarities and differences between the generations will be presented and organised based on key themes and patterns.

### 1. Interview Setting

Of all the youngsters I have encountered in Prague, the majority of them were of the second generation. Furthermore, while the second generation belonged to diverse age groups, the 1.5 generation was either 15-18 years old or 30 and above. Consequently, it seems that the population size and age distribution of the two generations were not homogeneous.

During the recruitment process, I had distinct experiences with the two generations. All of the second-generation participants willingly agreed to do the interview at the first contact, and some even proposed to introduce more interviewees to me. There was one person of the second generation who I got to meet once 2 years ago. Knowing that he worked for a Vietnam youth organisation in Prague, I reached out via Instagram asking for his help to find participants of the 1.5 generation. He was very interested in the topic and even volunteered to do the interview. In my best experience, being open-minded and willing to share is how I describe the second generation. In contrast, I had certain struggles recruiting the 1.5-generation interviewees, which also resulted in the slightly imbalanced size of subsamples. None of the 1.5-generation participants were recruited outside my social network or not via mutual friends. Many potential participants took much time to make up their minds. Some of them even asked me to send the interview questions in advance but then decided not to proceed due to their hesitation to discuss personal topics. Some at first agreed to do the interview but made excuses at my follow-ups or even remained unanswered. This suggested that their initial agreement to interview was due to politeness.

During the interviews, the second-generation participants and part of the 1.5-generation respondents were open to discussing sensitive matters such as their parents' divorces or the heated relationship with their parents. On the contrary, some 1.5-generation participants, when asked about their relationship with their parents, just replied shortly 'Yeah, we are

good' and did not elaborate on any related questions, clearly showing disinterest in responding to the topic.

Based on their behaviour, perspective, openness to share, as well as their closeness with the Vietnamese community, the 1.5-generation interlocutors seemed to be divided into two distinct subgroups: one was similar to their second-generation counterparts, and the other was those with more Vietnamese traits. One of the possible reasons for such division is the environment they lived in when coming to Czechia. Many of them were surrounded by Czech people because there were few Vietnamese in their regions, thus they resonated more with the local people.

The analysis of the conducted interviews will be presented in the following sections.

## **2. The story of Trang: I don't want to put a label on my identity**

I got to know Trang during her internship in Hanoi. At work, Trang was known for being an enthusiastic, goal-oriented, and capable person. Not until I came to Prague for my studies did I get to know her personally. The more time I spent with her, the more I admired this young girl and became interested in the second generation in the Czech lands. A special thing about Trang is that she is great at organising events, especially those for the Vietnamese young generation and foreigners. I had been to one of her events, where she made Vietnamese food by herself and had great presentations about Vietnamese culture. When I asked for her help with the interview, she was really happy and willing. We had an in-depth 1.5-hour talk at a cosy café in the centre of Prague. The interview took place only one month before Trang and her husband-to-be went to Vietnam to celebrate their wedding and open a new chapter of life.

Like many other Vietnamese kids, due to her parents' hard work, she was taken care of by a Czech nanny since 1-year-old, whom she referred to as 'a mother figure'. The family was based in Domažlice; however, her dad had always wanted her to study in a bigger city, so she was sent to a Czech family in Plzen for elementary school. On weekdays, she lived with the Czech family, and on the weekends with her Czech 'mother figure'. She only went home to sleep on weekend nights. For that reason, the family bond was never too strong.

*When I was little, I looked at them (parents) more like an aunt and an uncle, not my proper parents. Because most of the time I would be spending time with my Czech nanny... She even had a cottage, so we went there with her. We did a lot of*

*field trips around the Czech Republic; she really treated us as her kids... She was such a mother figure to me, I wanted to go there even during the weekends. My parents had to pay her extra so that I could be there on the weekends.*

Having spent 12 years with Czech people, Trang had always felt so Czech. However, there were two turning points in her life where she experienced identity crises.

The first event was when her family reunited in Plzen. For her dad was very active in the Vietnamese community, Trang had to help him prepare traditional events for the community. When asked about how she felt when exposed to Vietnamese culture and helping her dad with such events, she said:

*At first, I was not interested, I was forced, not feeling comfortable, feeling a lot of pressure, and not liking it. But then I realised I enjoyed it. I made more Vietnamese friends there, with whom I was really close.*

The second, and also the biggest shift took place in 2013 when she attended *Trại hè Xuyên Việt*<sup>7</sup>. Here, she got to travel throughout Vietnam with other young Vietnamese of different international backgrounds and meet her husband-to-be, who was also Vietnamese Czech. The more time she spent with those ‘new Vietnamese friends’, the more things she realised they had in common, and the more she leaned towards the Vietnamese side. On that trip, she got to know the organiser of *Trại hè về nguồn*<sup>8</sup> Well-known for her event-organising skills, Trang was offered the opportunity to help with the 2015 event. Little did Trang expect that this event would drastically change her life and perspective. There, she was moved by the kids’ sharing, which reminded her of her childhood and struggles.

*Something was unlocked in me. A lot of kids shared their struggles and stories, and I think that something inside me really just moved. It changed my life in a way that I was there once because I spent most of my life- 12 years, with Czech people, suddenly, I had to adapt to this Vietnamese culture. I was so lost. I couldn't communicate with my parents.*

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<sup>7</sup> an annual cultural exchange program between Vietnamese youth living abroad and in Vietnam

<sup>8</sup> a week-long event organised by Buddhist Association and Vietnamese people’s associations in Europe. It aims to help the Vietnamese youth preserve Vietnamese culture and languages, as well as appreciate parents’ meritorious deeds

She then realised that after the one-week event, most of the kids had to be back to helping out at Večerka. They would still not have much of a free life, struggling and feeling lost. Therefore, Trang and her friends were inspired to establish a Vietnamese café to give the Vietnamese kids a platform, a safe space to talk things through and make new friends.

*A lot of kids came there without friends, very introverted, with sad eyes. Then I've seen them happy and having friends they can rely on, like those they made at Trại hè về nguồn... That's why I started to organise this because I wanted to create a platform for kids to get out of the system. I feel very grateful and blessed to have this opportunity to help people. I feel that it does have a big impact.*

Such a complete shift from 12 years of living with Czech people to a totally different world with the Vietnamese community caused her identity crises during her teenage years. However, observing that it was the case for all immigrant kids, she chose not to put a label on her identity.

*I feel that you can't put labels on these things, as in what is a Vietnamese, what is it to be Czech? I know for sure I have sort of belonging to the Czech Republic, but I also feel certain belonging to Vietnam, but I wouldn't consider either... Everyone is unique and I can use this duality for my own benefit, I can take the best of both worlds and not dwell on who I am and define myself.*

I then asked about her bond with Vietnam. Unlike other interviewees in my sample, Trang had visited Vietnam quite often- every 2 years since she was 12. However, as a kid, Trang didn't have much interest in the country, as it was all about playing with grandparents. But *Trại hè về nguồn* had changed her viewpoint about Vietnam completely. She was blown away by nature and fell in love with the country. She even made two similar trips to Vietnam with family and friends. For her, it was really easy and cheap to travel, and with the same budget, she could have a much more comfortable life in Vietnam. Besides, knowing some Vietnamese language, she was driven to learn more about the country. After the third trip, she decided to try living in Hanoi by applying for an internship. However, life in Hanoi did not meet her expectations as it was so traditional, as opposed to her open-mindedness. Trang later tried living in Ho Chi Minh City for a month and she found that the lifestyle there fit her much better. That was why her husband-to-be and she decided to move to the city for 2 years.

This decision was also a factor behind why she changed her career trajectory. After university, as a law graduate, she had an office job in a public institution. But her partner's

and her intention to move to Vietnam urged her to find a remote job so she could work for companies in Europe while living in Vietnam. Therefore, she decided to attend a coding school, and now she is a front-end engineer.

### **3. The story of Thanh: I am Vietnamese**

During my part-time job at the restaurant, I made acquaintances with Thanh, who worked as a chef. He was born in northern Vietnam and came to a small town in central Czechia at twelve, when he was a sixth-grader in Vietnam.

Like most of his 1.5 generation peers, when arriving in Czechia, Thanh did not speak its language at all and had to attend class at two lower levels (grade four). Everything was different from what he had known for twelve years: the people, the language, the culture. In the beginning, he was very reserved and insecure because he did not understand what others said and his pronunciation was bad. Luckily, he overcame the struggle gradually with the help of his classmates and teacher. Interestingly, for Thanh, language was not a barrier to integration. He got along well with his classmates and they used body language to deliver the conversation when there were language difficulties. Thanh reminisced good memories from childhood when his friends enthusiastically accompanied him home and passed by every afternoon to ask him out with the group. After one year, Thanh mastered the language quickly and blended well with the once strange society. Notably, his family was one of the rare Vietnamese households in the neighbourhood, thus, he was surrounded mainly by Czech people. Therefore, he considered himself '*one of them*' and had not thought much about his identity.

At twenty-three, Thanh moved to Prague and started his career as a chef in Vietnamese restaurants. Since then, he no longer had a connection with his Czech friends and was immensely embedded in the Vietnamese community in Prague. In particular, he spoke primarily Vietnamese, made friends and found jobs only within the community. Such a sudden change of environment impacted him greatly and also helped reflect on the values of both countries. He claimed that living with Vietnamese people for a long time impacted his mindset and personality- i.e., he became more careful with his way of talking, behaviour and dressing in order to stay harmonised with others. Though not aligned with some Vietnamese traits, such as patriarchy and strictness towards children, he strongly advocated the loving and sentimental nature of Vietnamese people. He also stressed the importance of family and

taking care of parents in their old age. Furthermore, he expressed a preference to have a Vietnamese partner, regardless of the generation she belongs to, for cultural compatibility and better communication with his family. When asked about his self-identity, Thanh said without hesitation *‘I am Vietnamese, one hundred percent’*.

Thanh visited Vietnam every two or three years and still maintained his bonds with the country; however, he had yet to have the intention to come back to his home country. He confessed that the idea had crossed his mind several times, but in the end, he still preferred working and establishing his future family in the Czech lands.

*If I come back to Vietnam, what job will I do? Here, I have a job and a girlfriend.  
If it were not for that, maybe... But honestly, I don't know...*

#### **4. The generations: Similarities and Differences**

For simplification, from now on, the sample will be divided into three subgroups: second generation (Gen 2), Czech-oriented 1.5 generation (CZ-Gen 1.5) and Vietnamese-oriented 1.5 generation (VN-Gen 1.5).

##### **Upbringing**

Gen 2's first grasp of the world was from a Czech lens. They attended the Czech educational system and were taken care of by Czech nannies until the end of the primary stage of elementary school. Typically, they stayed with the nanny after school and only went home in the evening. Sometimes, they stayed even on the weekend if their parents were too busy.

*I lived there all the time, all weekdays. She took me to kindergarten, she cooked for me Western food. I drank milk, ate in the Czech way, went to bed according to Czech time, at 7-8 o'clock. I also watched Czech channels. I lived like a Czech.*

(Lam, 31)

They formed a strong bond with the nannies- some interviewees addressed them as Czech mom, foster mom, and ‘Czech family’. It is worth noting that all of our respondents had very few or no Vietnamese friends at school, and the only Vietnamese people they were exposed to were their parents with limited time. Thus, their lives were mostly surrounded by Czech

people. However, though exposed mostly to Czech culture during their childhood, they were still raised by their own family, and solely by their family during adolescence. Parents' culture and the way they were raised influenced their view of life and personalities.

In contrast to Gen 2, Gen 1.5 spent their early childhood in Vietnam and came to the Czech Republic at 8-12 years old. Back in Vietnam, they were taken care of by close relatives such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, with whom they all still had a certain bond. Like any other Vietnamese kids, they mastered the Vietnamese language and attended kindergarten and early primary school. When coming to Czechia, they attended elementary schools at 2 levels down to learn the language. Four out of five respondents were completely taken care of by their family, except for Tobi. His parents were busy, so they sent him to a Czech nanny for a few hours every day after school in the course of six years. For Tobi, the Czech nanny and schools taught and shaped him greatly.

## Language

All Gen 2 interviewees spoke at least 3 languages: Czech, English, and Vietnamese- listed according to their fluency. Czech was the language in which they could express themselves best, and their communication strategies depended on the common languages they shared with the other person. Czech was also used the most in their daily life, followed by English, which was normally used in the workplace if required or when with international friends. They only used Vietnamese with their parents, relatives, and anyone who did not know Czech or English. Noticeably, when talking with their sibling and Vietnamese Czech friends, most of the interviewees used a mix of Czech, English, and a sprinkle of Vietnamese.

*I really like certain words in Vietnamese, like 'chém gió'<sup>9</sup> or 'thương'<sup>10</sup>. Certain words in Vietnamese that I feel that no other language can express.*

(Trang, 27)

Most of the respondents spoke very slowly in Vietnamese, and their tones were not clear. When asked in which language they preferred to conduct the interview, four out of seven respondents chose English. Among the rest who chose Vietnamese, one later requested to

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<sup>9</sup> (slang) to brag; to lie to get pride and credit (word-by-word translation: to slash the wind)

<sup>10</sup> to love (romantically or non-romantically) or to feel pain and sorrow at the unfortunate situation. In either case, the word expresses genuine concern and care.

switch to English as she found it easier and faster to express herself. As expected, the more one identifies as Czech, the more inarticulate s/he is in Vietnamese.

Furthermore, when communicating with me in Vietnamese, some Gen 2 respondents were confused with the use of hierarchic pronouns. In contrast to English or Czech, Vietnamese has a wide range of pronouns that express degrees of family relationship or kinship. Speaking of social relationships, the use of the reference terms depends heavily on the age and attitude of the speaker toward the listener. For instance, after his Vietnamese friend explained to him what pronouns to use when communicating with me, and even though I purposely used certain terms of reference during the conversation, Andrew (M, 24) still mixed the use of the pronouns. This indicates their unfamiliarity with the language.

Language barriers can result in parent-child conflicts. Lien (F, 28) said that she could hold simple conversations in Vietnamese, but when arguments took place, it was excruciating as she could not express herself fully in the language. For Trang (F, 27), language barrier was the biggest problem with her mom.

*I feel that because I don't know Vietnamese that well, sometimes I sound harsh... So, say my mom complains about something. In Czech or English, I'll say 'But mom, even though it's hard, you have to bear with it, it's going to be fine'. But in Vietnamese, you translate 'bear with it' into 'Mẹ phải chịu thôi, nó sẽ ok'. It sounds super harsh, right? You can't translate this word by word. I think that the way we speak in Vietnamese is so different... I don't fully understand the customs of the language or the culture. And mom thinks it is inappropriate to talk to parents that way, that I am insolent.*

In contrast, Trang's relationship with her father was much better because he spoke English and Czech, so she could express better what she wanted.

The Gen 1.5 respondents, in general, on the other hand, could speak Vietnamese well with a clear Vietnamese accent. In fact, except for Tobi, all of them preferred to interview in Vietnamese. CZ-Gen 1.5, like Gen2, considered Czech as their primary language and preferred to communicate with me in English (or Vietnamese if their English was not as good). For instance, Mai and Tobi naturally spoke Czech with their friends and only used Vietnamese with family or those who did not speak any other language. In contrast, VN-Gen 1.5 spoke more fluently and expressed themselves better in Vietnamese, and only used English or Czech when necessary. For instance, Anna only used Czech at school or with her

siblings when they did not want their parents to understand; and Thanh only when communicating with his fiancé, who was of the second generation.

### **Identity - Czech or Vietnamese?**

Except for Trang, who did not want to put a label on her identity, all Gen 2 participants claimed that they were somewhere in between but more inclined toward Czech identity. The common strategy was ‘making the best of both worlds’. For Gen 1.5, those who claimed Vietnamese as their primary language identified themselves as Vietnamese, and those who could express themselves better in the Czech language shared similarities with Gen 2. Especially, those who expressed a hybrid identity reported holding dual citizenship, while Vietnamese self-identities reported only Vietnamese citizenship.

When asked about what was considered Czech and Vietnamese, respondents’ answers covered the aspects of mentality, gender roles, family and cultural values, and work ethics. It was worth noting that most respondents tended to talk about Europe or Western countries when referring to Czech values. Those who answered the interview in Vietnamese often used the word ‘tây’, translated into ‘Western/Westerners’ in English.

The common answers were that Czechs are open-minded, individualistic, more relaxed, and more equal between men and women; however, they are lonelier, not as sentimental and family-oriented. Further pointed out by David (M, 28), Czech mentality is in a ‘weird middle ground’, where they are more open-minded compared to Vietnamese people but less compared to Western philosophy or way of thinking. On the other hand, the Vietnamese were said to be family-oriented, hard-working, welcoming, generous, conservative, indirect, judgmental, less gender equal, and having high beauty standards for women. Some also commented that Czech people are atheists, have no marriage or kid pressure, are more transparent in finance, and are sometimes jealous; while the Vietnamese are more spiritual and prone to compare themselves to others (and their kids to others), gossip, have high expectations from parents, have strict social hierarchy rules, and have poor awareness of the environment and queuing. Anna (F, 17) added that in Vietnam, parents are more stringent and not communicative with their children. Regarding working culture, answers showed that in the Czech environment, there is almost no hierarchy of authority, everything is fully documented, they follow the rules and have a work-life balance. In this regard, Lam (M, 31) shared his experience of co-founding a startup with his friend, who is the son of his dad’s

friend. The project was short-lived due to conflicts in working style and the intervention of friendship, as put by Lam:

*Vietnamese people are compliant. As friends, we can't tell each other off. I didn't want to ruin my relationship with his family, so, of course, I couldn't scold him. In my current (Czech) company, if I don't do something well, I'll get told right away. I think that is what it must be in order to get work well done.*

Moreover, participants' answers to this question might be evoked from a special life event. For instance, Huyen (F, 22), who had just given birth, said that in the Czech Republic, childcare is more science-based. In particular, while in the West, people follow doctors' prescriptions, Vietnamese people prefer traditional methods, such as herbal baths.

VN-Gen 1.5, who identified themselves as Vietnamese, supported Czech open-mindedness, gender equality and ways of kid raising; and were against Vietnam's patriarchy, gossiping habit and parents' pressure on children. However, they resonated more with Vietnamese culture and values and blended better with the Vietnamese community.

So, what did Gen 2 and CZ-Gen 1.5 mean by somewhere in between? They tended to view themselves as Czech when it comes to lifestyle, mentality, perception of gender equality, and work ethics; and as Vietnamese in regard to family and cultural values. Supporting Czech open-mindedness, directness, individualism, and equality, they also praise Vietnamese generosity, family gatherings, and stronger bonds in family and among friends. As Trang (F, 27) put:

*There is lots of pressure of being there for the family but it's nice that you always have someone to lean on. A few years ago, I supported Czech family values. But now I do see that Czech people are very lonely. Now I actually enjoy visiting my grandparents because I do see a value in it. Sometimes, it's really harsh because you have to be responsible for other family members that you might not get along with, but I like the narrative that we're one big family and we'll fight it through. And family values really reflect culture. I think it's super nice to have Tết or Giỗ because they always bring the family back together. I like that everyone will always make time for it, even though we hate it. When you get old and reminisce about it, you will feel, oh, it's a very nice tradition to have.*

In contrast, David and Andrew (Gen 2) identified themselves as closer to Czech and strongly claimed not to resonate with Vietnamese values. Besides conservativeness, judgment, and gossip, which lead to many bad relations, they both pointed out that they did not see the logic in Vietnamese social hierarchy rules and patriarchy.

*I want to respect people because of who they are rather than based on their age, because age doesn't discriminate. You can be a d\*ck even if you're 70. It doesn't mean that you have to be respected.*

(David, 28)

*In Asian cultures, there's a hierarchy, you have to respect the elders and your parents, what they say is absolute and you cannot question or talk back. Or else, you're seen as rude, misbehaving, insolent, all this bad stuff. You cannot question them and they rule with an iron fist.*

(Andrew, 24)

All Gen 2 participants expressed that when they were small, they felt completely Czech. They started to wonder about their identity during puberty and early 20s. Several factors led to this so-called identity crisis, namely a shift from a Czech life to increasing contact with the Vietnamese community, and appreciation for parents' raising and sacrifice. All respondents were aware of the parents' sacrifice of their own social mobility and time with family, as well as their intense work life in a strange society as immigrants for their children's better future. In the case of David (M, 28), as a child, he loved Vietnam; however, during puberty, he started to adopt the Czech mentality and realised a lot of his opinions and views were different from Vietnamese people. Additionally, he claimed that his passion for photography and heavy music is considered uncommon by Vietnamese people. All together, it had pulled him back from a Vietnamese identity.

*I've always tended to be outside of the community because I listen to heavy music. My whole life revolves around hardcore, metalcore... And I take photos of bands so I get to travel with them, which I don't think that many Vietnamese people here do, or know that it's an option.*

However, there are two Gen 2 males in the sample who did not experience identity crises at all. Hung (M, 29) did not care how much of him was Czech and how much Vietnamese. Andrew (M, 24) claimed that he integrated very well into Czech society and never had to

think about his identity. *'I always taught myself I was something in between. It is what it is. I'm, like, a citizen of Earth (laugh)'*, said Andrew.

Opposed to Gen 2, all Gen 1.5 respondents claimed they had never had identity crises. Coming to the Czech Republic when they already had formed some ties with Vietnam, all respondents felt anxious, overwhelmed, and missed home at first. However, it did not take long for them to get used to the new environment. They either always identify themselves as Vietnamese as a result of instant exposure to the Vietnamese community (Thanh, Nhi and Anna) or 'make the best of both worlds' rather than struggling with where they belonged (Mai and Tobi).

As to religion, all of the interviewees were atheists, while their parents followed Confucianism. They did not do any traditional practices at home and only practised at parents' residences at request. Nevertheless, they respected the tradition and agreed that it should be maintained. When speaking about Vietnamese tradition, respondents mentioned mostly family gatherings, fun, and food. Some respondents admitted that they did not understand the meaning of the practices, and they just copied their parents and 'acted' worshipping. Hung (M, 29) and Tobi (M, 20) are the only sons in their families, which, according to Vietnamese culture, means they would have to be responsible for all Vietnamese traditional practices in the future. When asked about his opinion on this, Hung said *'In the future, I have to do it anyways Now my father takes care of that so I just follow. But cooking is a pain for me. I am thinking about ordering food, or maybe my future wife has to deal with it (laugh)'*. On a different note, Trang (F, 27), who had the most experience and understanding of Vietnam among all respondents, shared that previously when in Czechia, she felt *'very stupid'* when her dad asked her to pray in front of a photo in the living room; but at her visit to ancestors' graves in Vietnam, it suddenly hit differently, and she felt connected to them. This suggests the link between one's understanding of Vietnamese culture and their connection with the country.

### **Parent-child relationship**

The majority of respondents maintained a good relationship with their parents. However, three out of five Gen 1.5 participants seemed to avoid answering questions about family.

Despite the great diversity of these statements, with a few exceptions, they described their parents as open-minded, understanding, and supportive. Many interviewees did not spend much time with their parents during childhood, but they understood that their parents had to work to provide for the family. Regarding expectations from parents, the general answers from Gen 2 were degree attainment and a good career. For female participants, marriage and childbirth were also included. Their parents also expected them to have Vietnamese partners but would not forbid it otherwise. Out of seven Gen 2 respondents, three did not get along well with one of their parents. In the case of Trang (F, 27), she and her mother had opposite opinions and stances in life. As explained by Trang, her mom was very traditional, bringing with her an old image of Vietnam without understanding that Vietnam had changed so much. For her mother, girls should be gentle and feminine, focus on looks rather than intelligence because *'boys do not like smart girls'*, and the oldest has to take care of younger siblings. Meanwhile, Trang described herself as *'boyish'* as she preferred smoking and drinking. *'Why boys are okay? Why I am not OK?... I wasn't asking for it. I can't influence whether I am male or female, or the first, middle, or youngest child!'*, exclaimed Trang. The conflicts also stemmed from the nuance of speech.

*My mom always says 'you have to', 'you must', she nags a lot. While my dad says 'I wish', 'I hope'. The nuance mom uses makes my relationship with her much worse. And with dad, I would be like, okay, he wishes, and he can wish.*

On the other hand, David's (M, 28) problems with his mom were related more to career aspirations. He worked at a rental shop and, in his free time, was a photo/videographer touring around Europe with bands. This job meant a lot to him; however, his mom did not seem to understand.

*The concept of the day job for Vietnamese people is being employed somewhere: restaurant, company, lawyer, doctor, whatever. She only knows that I work in some company with weird stuff she doesn't understand, and that I travel around. She said that as long as I'm happy, she's happy, but I felt that it's very hard for her to grasp... It was not like she was excited for me.*

Andrew (M, 24) had a strong opinion about his father's neglect. According to him, his parents' generation just cared about providing a better life and neglected their kids.

*They don't care about their kids' studies, hobbies, or what makes them happy. Instead, 'if you don't agree with me, you're insolent'. And, of course, the kids*

*became shy, not outspoken. They don't know how to socialise and lack a lot of skills that parents normally would teach, like communication and how to make friends. It's a very cold relationship...Every traditional Vietnamese parent expects you to do exceptionally because they're already different, you have to be better than them, the only path to success in life is to study and get good grades. That's what they kept telling you from a very young age. It also results in more stress towards the kids because if they don't perform well, they get yelled at and forced into more grammar school, more studying. They have less time for their hobbies and socialising. That's how I grew up...*

Anna (F, 17) was the only Gen 1.5 participant who had a cold parent-child relationship.

*I lived in Vietnam and came here later when I was already a grown-up, I don't have many ties with them. We exchange some sentences and that's it. I don't share with them about my life. I think my dad is very traditional, he is always imposing his ideas on me... It's hard to talk about some sensitive topics, which, for 'Tây', is normal to talk about. I'm open-minded, but my parents are not.*

In a different view, Hung (M, 29) commented that having different mindsets was more of a generational issue, not necessarily because of migration and the differences between the two cultures.

All respondents helped their parents with shops (if any) and Czech language-related work, such as document translation or doctor visits, from a young age. Many claimed that sometimes it bothered them because of the complexity of the special terms in the documents, and that they got dragged along with their parents. However, when they got older, they understood their parents' sacrifice for them to have a better life, and they considered this a small thing they could help.

### **Social circle and personal relationships**

Gen 2 and CZ-Gen 1.5 respondents tended to choose Czech or Vietnamese Czech friends and partners who are smart, honest, trustworthy, kind, and have the same hobbies and mentality. Specifically, about dating, while all females claimed that they were open to dating Czechs or other nationalities, only half of the males agreed on this, arguing that Vietnamese people are more sentimental and, thus, the bonds are stronger. However, all respondents shared a

common view that their partners have to be family-oriented and respect their family and tradition, showing a strong preference for Vietnamese family values.

Further shared by Trang, her current husband-to-be was the first Vietnamese Czech that she had ever dated. With him, communication was much better, as their most comfortable way to talk was by mixing the three languages- Czech, English, and Vietnamese. Also, even though her boyfriend felt very Czech, he had a certain understanding of Vietnamese culture. Thus, Trang did not have to explain everything, and hence, it became so much easier for her.

Conversely, VN-Gen 1.5 showed a stronger preference for partners of Vietnamese origin because of cultural compatibility and better communication with their parents. Due to their job characteristics, their social circle was also within the Vietnamese community, i.e., people of the first generation or the new waves, who came here for economic reasons. Thanh (M, 31) used to be surrounded and influenced by Czech people at a younger age. However, after coming to Prague and working in Vietnamese restaurants for 10 years, his friend circle now was only his Vietnamese colleagues. He shared that after living for a long time with the Vietnamese people, his personality and behaviour were affected, becoming more 'Vietnamese'.

In general, no respondent experienced extreme racism or bullying at school or in the workplace. Some reported racism in elementary school because of their look, such as 'Ching chong', callouts, and slanted eyes. However, it lasted short, mostly reduced in secondary school, and completely ended in universities. Therefore, in general, it did not affect them greatly.

*We are not 100% Vietnamese but we know we are still different from them (Czech people). We have to admit it since childhood. At work, sometimes people joke around; I make some jokes back, that's all. It depends on how you think and feel.*

(Hung, 29)

For Mai (F, 24), racism and bullying can happen anywhere, not necessarily because of race. Thanh (M, 31), in contrast, had a good experience at school. He was very sad and shy because he did not understand the language and made many mistakes. However, his teacher gave him extra assistance, and gradually, he got better. His classmates also helped whenever they could, and signed if they failed to understand each other, which still remained a core memory for him.

Racist jokes, however, did not leave a good taste in David's mouth as he was constantly reminded that he didn't fit or belong.

*I was very angry about that, then I learned to cope with it with humour. We used to joke a lot about Vietnamese with my friends. It's like a coping mechanism when you're a teenager. But as you grow older, you realise it's not cool. People should just respect you... Now it still happens. They don't mean it in a bad way. It's dark humour. It's plain stupid. Sometimes, it upsets me, but mainly I'm just tired of hearing that. It's not like I have complications because of that. I'm shown that I'm different, that's the problem.*

### **Vietnam – the bond and career trajectories**

Except for Trang, the respondents only visited Vietnam occasionally, on average once every 3-6 years. To most of Gen 2, the Czech Republic was their home, and Vietnam was their parent's home. For their whole families were in the Czech Republic, their visits to Vietnam were mainly for vacation or to visit other relatives. It showed that their bonds to Vietnam were not so strong.

*It is nice to see where you are from and how the rest of your family lives. But I barely know them, just knowing that they are my family. They all treat me well, respect me, they provide. They're very nice to me. But it still feels a little distant.*

(Andrew, 24)

However, Trang (F, 27) and Lam (M, 31), who advocated Vietnamese family and cultural values the most, seemed to have a stronger bond with their relatives in Vietnam.

*During my visit earlier this year, I started thinking that I should visit Vietnam more. My grandparents were quite sick and weak. I also see that even though I live here (in Czechia), when I come back, they still love me very much, so I shouldn't abandon such relationships. Otherwise, the family would be parted.*

(Lam, 31)

As to career trajectories, in the case of Gen 2, six out of seven respondents found jobs themselves and preferred to work for Czech or international companies. Huyen (F, 22) was the only one inspired to open her own business in the Vietnamese community. Further, none

of them found their ethnicity to be an advantage or disadvantage when applying for jobs in Czech workplaces. Among the seven interviewees, only Trang would like to try living in Vietnam, five would like to stay in Prague, and one preferred Western Europe because of the better quality of life and the stronger currency. The reasons for them not living in Vietnam were diverse, namely language barrier, different lifestyle, unhealthy environment, worse living conditions, and lack of job opportunities (in the case of David- who would like to work in the music industry).

Speaking of Gen 1.5 respondents, they still thought of Vietnam as their motherland. All of them still maintained good relationships with their previous caregivers; however, they did not stay in contact much. Yet, the vast majority also claimed that, for their whole family is in Czechia, their bonds with Vietnam were not strong anymore. Career-wise, of the four participants, Tobi (M, 20) was still a student, Mai (F, 24) had worked for both Czech and Vietnamese companies, Anna (F, 17), Nhi (F, 18) and Thanh (M, 31) found jobs and work in the Vietnamese community. Particularly, Anna worked part-time at a Vietnamese-owned studio and was thinking about quitting school to focus on her career, with a dream to open a studio in the future: *'I want to work because I feel like in life, I need money more. I don't feel excited going to school anyway.'* None of them planned to move somewhere else in the foreseeable future.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

This thesis project seeks to understand the determinants of one's sense of self and compare the identity negotiation processes, the life and career trajectories of the second and 1.5 Vietnamese generations in Prague. Furthermore, it explores how the life course perspective contributes to the study of identity development among immigrant children and the children of migrants within the context of transnationalism. This chapter will delve into the findings of the study and focus on addressing the three research questions that guided the research.

In general, the Vietnamese youth that I had encountered integrate well into the Czech society and are likely to differentiate themselves from the first generation and the new waves- mainly those who come to the Czech Republic for economic reasons. The feeling of home among generations differs radically. All second-generation and Czech-oriented 1.5-generation participants had a hybrid, bicultural identity but leaned more toward Czech culture and considered Czechia as their home country. In contrast, Vietnamese-oriented 1.5-generation respondents still thought of Vietnam as their motherland and did not totally support Czech values. Here, it supports Uherek's (2017) argument that the feeling of home is unnecessarily tied to the country of origin or the country of destination, especially when the origin and target countries alternatively become one another over generations. Rather, the interviewed individuals tended to form a sense of belonging to other 'like-minded' people with similar values, goals and aims (Barber, 2022; Kim, 2010). They constructed the idea of Czechness and Vietnamese-ness by their own experience as well as stereotypes about both countries and addressed themselves between these polarities. This, in fact, further advocates Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined communities' and further suggests Brubaker's (2002) idea of ethnicity without groups. The boundaries between ethnic groups are blurring over generations, and identities have become fluid and hybrid.

### **Identity development**

Many identity formation models are devoted to the topic of identity development (see the Literature review chapter), yet they do not fully capture all of the possibilities. Besides, not every individual will absolutely go through every stage in a framework or model- some people may skip phases and may return to different stages at different times in their lives.

This study divides identity development into three main stages: *childhood, adolescence and adulthood.*

#### *During childhood*

The environment that the children of migrants and the migrant children grow in *during childhood* lays the groundwork for self-label. The second-generation interlocutors had an immersive Czech experience when growing up, which made them part of the mainstream. Conversely, the 1.5-generation respondents had formed certain bonds with Vietnam and their relatives since childhood, and most of them were taken care of solely by their parents when coming to the Czech lands. Naturally, they were more inclined towards the Vietnamese identity. However, those who grew up in the regions where there were not many Vietnamese tended to become more ‘*Western*’. Besides, Czech nannies are found to lay the foundation for the migrant children’s identity. The nannies’ intensive daily caregiving, together with the frequent absence of parents, made the nannies a solid point in the participants’ lives and created a special kinship tie between them. Tobi (M, 24), for instance, was the only 1.5-generation respondent who was taken care of by a Czech nanny; as a result, he was the only one inclined towards the Czech identity the most, compared to the others in the subgroup.

#### *During adolescence*

The identity in childhood is not fixed but further goes through a dynamic and complicated process of exploration and experimentation. The second-generation respondents consistently maintained their ‘white identification’ until adolescence, when they started to have increased contact with their family or the Vietnamese community (often, it was when they started the second stage of elementary school and stopped seeing their nannies) and admired their parents’ sacrifice. In this stage, they tried to get back to their roots and attempted to understand their parents’ decisions and thought processes. However, having spent years with Czech people and being exposed to the ‘individualistic’ lifestyle on a daily basis, their effort to fit in the Vietnamese heritage- which is known for collectivism, conservativeness, hierarchy, and patriarchy, to name a few- was a process of rejection and negotiation. Few participants strongly disagreed with the Vietnamese values and mentality, yet they had never completely rejected the traditions passed on by their parents. Most interviewees eventually

valued different racial and cultural groups and chose to have a hybrid identity, which they can use and combine freely and selectively depending on the circumstances (Bauman, 2001; Dowling and McKinnon, 2014; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Min, 2002; Svobodová and Janská, 2016). The 1.5-generation participants, on the other hand, experienced little to no identity crisis. Those who integrated well into the Czech society selected and adopted the values of the host country, thus ‘making the best of both worlds’; meanwhile, identity negotiation almost did not happen to the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5 generation. Though supporting some Czech values and disagreeing with some Vietnamese ones, they resonated better with Vietnamese culture and chose to stay close to and rely on the community.

### *During adulthood*

One’s self-identification may change even more when he or she enters adulthood and takes on new responsibilities, such as workers, spouses, and parents (Feliciano and Rumbaut, 2018), and the identity outcomes are most salient and stabilised by middle adulthood (Noels, 2014). Huyen (F, 22), who had always had a ‘white identification’, had changed her perspectives drastically since getting married to her Vietnamese husband. She spoke Vietnamese fluently, made more Vietnamese friends, and was actually considering starting a business in the Vietnamese community. Her willingness to understand and cultivate the Vietnamese side symbolises a change in identity development during adulthood. In the same vein, Wagner (2014) claimed that the sense of belonging may be dependent on their age. For example, Lam (M, 31), in his 30s, started to have a bond with his relatives in Vietnam and would like to visit the country more often to maintain it. Therefore, this paper argues that while those who identified as Vietnamese will continue this identity, those who identified as Czech might not have reached their final identity yet, especially those who were still at a young age.

### **Determinants of sense of self**

Citizenship is found to impact one’s feelings of belonging. Holders of dual citizenship reported a hybrid identity, and respondents with only Vietnamese citizenship claimed to be Vietnamese. Besides, apart from childhood upbringing, the environment in later phases of life that one is surrounded with also seems to have an impact. In the case of Thanh (M, 31), when first coming to the Czech Republic, he was surrounded by Czech people, and thus became

more *'western'*. However, after working for Vietnamese restaurants for a decade, his social circle stayed only within the Vietnamese community and at the time of the interview, he identified as pure Vietnamese.

Language is found to be associated with one's self-identity. Those who identified as Czech could express themselves best in the Czech language, while those who were inclined toward Vietnamese identity used their mother tongue on a regular basis. This resonates with many sociolinguists' and social psychologists' findings that identities tend to correspond with language use and frequency (Fought, 2011; Gauthier et al., 1993; Montaruli et al., 2011; Yip and Fuligni, 2002). Language is the primary medium through which individuals express cultural values, beliefs, norms, and traditions, shaping how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them within society. Thus, apart from being a means of functional communication, it displays the speaker's cultural identity and cultural legacy (de Witte, 2020).

Besides, the findings suggest that one's understanding of Vietnamese heritage may correlate with his or her connection with the country. In this regard, the results support studies conducted in Australia, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom (Barber, 2022; Huynh, 2022; Nguyen and Bowles, 2008; Tran, 2021), which argue that youth programmes and pan-ethnic networks seem to play an important role. Among all second-generation respondents, Trang (F, 27) had actively taken part in Vietnamese cultural organisations, had the most experience and understanding of Vietnamese heritage, had visited Vietnam most regularly and even felt a spiritual connection with the land during her visits. Notably, she was the only one who critically looked at Vietnam beyond the stereotypes and made an attempt to live and learn more about her roots. Other second-generation respondents gained knowledge about Vietnam from parents or stereotypes about the Vietnamese community. Thus, their perceptions were biased, and they did not build a close bond with the country. For them, the Czech Republic was their home and Vietnam was their parents' homeland. The 1.5 generation, however, had a better understanding of and connection with Vietnamese culture compared to their counterparts. For them, Vietnam was still their motherland, and they maintained a good relationship with their previous carers.

Opposed to many studies, this research does not show enough evidence for the correlation between generational relationship and identity formation. Most of the participants maintained a positive relationship with their parents. For those who were not on good terms with their parents, conflicts stemmed from language use, different opinions in life, and parents' neglect

due to their ambition for work. However, these generational issues can happen anywhere, be it in a migrant family or a non-migrant one, not necessarily because of migration and the differences between the two cultures. It is also worth mentioning that though being individualistic, all interviewees maintain certain bonds with family and kin.

On another note, racial discrimination does not seem to impact identity formation, as most of the respondents agreed that it could happen anywhere and to anyone. Similarly, there is not enough proof for religion to be a determinant. Though showing respect for the ritual practices and the importance of maintaining them, all participants were atheists and did not actively practice or thoroughly understand their parents' religion.

### **Life and career trajectories**

In this regard, the study also finds differences between the generations. Aligned with most research (Barber, 2021; Bösch and Su, 2020), this study agrees that the second-generation participants were high achievers with careers in the white-collar section. Meanwhile, the 1.5 generation in the sample seemed to be inferior to their counterparts. Additionally, the second-generation participants tended to be inclined towards Czech society and the international world, and the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5 generation preferred to stay in the community, while the Czech-oriented ones were more adaptable to both spectrums. This applies to social circle, partner selection, as well as career trajectories. In particular, Czech-oriented identities were more open to date Czech or other nationals, cared about work-life balance, preferred to work for international companies and live in European countries. Except for Trang, none of them saw themselves living and working in Vietnam due to the language barrier, different lifestyles, unhealthy environment, worse living conditions, and lack of job opportunities. They were also very open-minded, socially liberal and active in communal work, as well as had high entrepreneurial, freelancing or investment spirits. On the other hand, those with a stronger attachment to Vietnam showed a stronger preference for partners of the same Vietnamese origin, socialising and looking for jobs within the community. Notably, they were more money-centric and wanted to go straight to work alongside their family. They brought with them the traits that are commonly used to describe the Vietnamese diaspora: being cautious, closed and conservative, and avoiding personal or sensitive matters to safeguard their own and their family's reputations. Similarly, no one in this subgroup would like to come back to Vietnam; however, their dependence on the Vietnamese community in the

Czech Republic was significant. Despite the given differences, all participants have one thing in common- a requirement for their partners to be family-oriented and respect their family and Vietnamese culture. This proves their fondness and priority for Vietnamese family values.

### **The perspective of life course**

There was an identity diversity between groups and even among participants of the same subgroups, which supports the life course theory that emphasises how development occurs within particular historical and social circumstances (Elder et al., 2003). Four of its principles are proven in this research to play an important role in shaping the interviewees' experience and identity, namely (i) *agency*, (ii) *time and place*, (iii) *timing* and (iv) *linked life*.

Consistent with previous research, this study indicates that individuals can exercise *agency* in making conscious choices about how to engage with their Vietnamese heritage, the host culture, and the broader globalised world. Given opportunities and structural constraints, they construct their identities and express themselves through choices related to language use, cultural practices, social networks, educational and career paths, transnational activities such as travel, study abroad, or involvement in ethnic organisations (Elder et al., 2003). Within each generation, its participants were exposed to more or less the same historical and social contexts, yet there were varieties of identities. In the second generation, while some decided to rediscover their Vietnamese heritage, compromise and build a hybrid identity, few others rejected the traditional values and attached themselves closer to the 'white identification'. Meanwhile, within the 1.5 generation, while some 'made the best of both worlds', others chose to stick with people also of Vietnamese origin.

The *time and place* of migration also shape the life course of individuals. As children of the first generation, the interlocutors did not go through the struggles that their parents, as 'absolute outlanders', had gone through. They spoke the local language and had all other necessities for integration into the host country, such as attending to the social systems. However, the two generations differed from each other in the civic stratification position. The second generation was born in the receiving country, held dual citizenship, and emerged better in the host society. Therefore, compared to their 1.5-generation counterparts, they had a higher position and more civic rights. Their position difference in the receiving society shaped particular opportunities and motives for integration (Schunck, 2011).

The *timing* of migration also influences the identity formation process of the 1.5 generation. They migrated during their adolescence, when they were experiencing physical, cognitive and psychological changes. The event of migration, therefore, influenced their social and psychological adjustment during young adulthood. Their identity varied more greatly depending on their bonds with the motherland and the degree of integration into the host country. For the second generation, integrating into the host country was not an issue because they had never moved from one country to another. However, their identity development was more salient compared to their 1.5-generation counterparts, which is better explained by the principle of linked lives.

By considering the *linked lives*, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex and dynamic processes of transnational identity formation. As a family project, all migrant generations are linked by ‘a complex set of gifts, debts and reciprocity’ (Attias-Donfut and Cook, 2017). In particular, the first generation- with great immigration hardship and at the expense of their own social mobility, time with family and work-life balance, provides social capital and invests in their children’s education with the hope of an easier life and successful future; in return, children have the moral obligation to succeed in the host country and possibly take care of the older family members in order to repay for the sacrifice. Hence, bonds of loyalty, obligation, and affection are what create strong attachments and settlements across the generations (Foner and Dreby, 2011). At a younger age, most participants felt bothered when helping their parents; however, when getting older, they started to appreciate their parents’ sacrifice and even attempted to rediscover their heritage. Moreover, lives are linked not only within the familial context but also social and cultural ones. Vietnamese culture emphasises solidarity, shared responsibility, and a high value on looking out for one another. Therefore, those with a strong attachment to Vietnam tended to restrict friendships, cohabitation and marriage to members of Vietnamese origin. This supports the life course theory, which indicates that individuals’ lives are linked to their significant others.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study highlights the transnational identities of the second generation and the 1.5 generation of people aged 18-31 of Vietnamese descent in Prague. In particular, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews, it explored the variations in identity negotiation within transnational contexts as well as the life and career trajectories of both generations. In doing so, the research also featured the significance of the life course perspective in the study of identity development, emphasising the dynamic interplay of individual, interpersonal, and structural factors over time.

Due to the distinction within the 1.5 generation, the sample was further divided into a total of 3 subgroups: second generation, Czech-oriented 1.5 generation and Vietnamese-oriented 1.5 generation. Given the topic of the conversation, the interlocutors constructed the idea of two poles of Czechness and Vietnamese-ness. They stylised themselves within these fictitious polarities and, in their answers, tried to characterise which one they were closer to. Specifically, the second-generation participants were most inclined to identify as Czech, followed by the Czech-oriented 1.5-generation interviewees, while the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5-generation respondents identified as Vietnamese. Given the dynamics of participants' identities between and within generations, the study argues that not every individual went through every stage in any of the discussed ethnic identity formation models, and they might revisit different stages at different times. To simplify, the identity development process is broken into three phases: *childhood*, *adolescence* and *adulthood*.

During *childhood*, study participants were completely under the influence of the environment they grew up in. In other words, those who had an immersive Czech experience would be part of the mainstream, and those who were exposed mainly to their ethnic community would incline more towards the Vietnamese side. While the identity of the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5-generation participants remained stable, those of the other two groups were more salient, especially the second generation with a dynamic and complicated process of identity exploration and experimentation *during adolescence*. For the second generation of my interlocutors, the so-called identity crises occurred when they started to have increased contact with their family and Vietnamese networks and developed an admiration for their parents' sacrifice. For the Czech-oriented 1.5-generation interviewees, despite the initial struggles, they soon integrated successfully into the Czech society and decided to 'make the best of both worlds'. However, the said process may continue into *adulthood* when they take

on new responsibilities. Thus, the paper argues that those who identified as Czech, especially those at a younger age, may not reach their final identity yet. Furthermore, it found that despite the varied identities, all respondents advocated Vietnamese family values and culture.

The study argues that the feeling of home of the migrant children and the children of migrants is unnecessarily tied to their origin, but rather other factors such as community affiliations and social interests. In line with the general assumptions, this research on Vietnamese descendants in Czechia confirms the importance of citizenship, upbringing environment, role of Czech nannies, language, exposure to the ethnic community, age and life stages. Further, it proposes the understanding of Vietnamese heritage and active participation in cultural organisations or pan-ethnic networks as determinants of one's self-identity. Conversely, the study did not find enough evidence for the relation between the sense of belonging and parent-child relationship, experience of racial discrimination, gender, religious and cultural practices.

This study also found distinctions among the generations in regard to life and career trajectories, covering the aspects of personalities, social circles, partner selection, and career aspirations. The second generation tended to be inclined towards Czech society and the international world, and the Vietnamese-oriented 1.5 generation preferred to stay in the ethnic community, while the Czech-oriented ones were more adaptable to both spectrums.

Last but not least, the study confirmed the contribution of the life course perspective in the study of transnational identity. The diversity between and within generations emphasises how development occurs within different historical and social circumstances. With the given opportunities and structural constraints, individuals can make conscious choices about how to engage with their Vietnamese heritage, the host culture, and the broader globalised world (the principle of *agency*). Moreover, their position in the receiving society (the principle of *time and place*), the age at which one migrates (the principle of *timing*), and linked lives in familial, social and cultural contexts (the principle of *linked lives*) shape particular opportunities and motives for integration, as well as identity navigation. Considering the transnational background and hybrid identity of the interviewed second and 1.5 generations, this study suggests that subsequent generations will have more variations of identity and the ethnic boundaries will further erode.

### **Contribution of the study**

This study fills a research gap regarding the identity development of Vietnamese descendants in the Czech Republic. It also contributes to contemporary research predominantly conducted by Czech scholars or Vietnamese researchers born or raised in the Czech Republic, as well as comparative literature from other countries and Vietnam. Originally from Vietnam, the researcher provides a deeper understanding of its culture and a different perspective on the topic. With the in-depth semi-structured interview approach, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of identity development among immigrant children and the children of migrants. Moreover, it confirms the combination of different identity formation models and the life course perspective in the study of this topic, emphasising the dynamic interplay of individual, interpersonal, and structural factors over time. The findings not only inform future studies on immigrant experiences and cultural dynamics but also help practitioners develop programs aimed at fostering inclusivity and social cohesion within host societies.

### **Limitations of the study**

While this work may contribute to the understanding of transnational identity among the young generation of migrants, the findings cannot be generalised to all young adults of Vietnamese descent. This is because of the small sample size and the slightly imbalanced size of subgroups resulting from the constraint of recruiting participants of the 1.5 generation. Another shortcoming of this research is the researcher's weak command of the Czech language, which may hinder her from extracting some valuable insights during the participation observation or during interviews with participants who expressed themselves the best in Czech.

### **Recommendations for future research**

This study has investigated the process of transnational identity development of the second and 1.5 generations of migrants. Future research should further look into the effects of varied identities on the resilience or erosion of ethnic boundaries in the subsequent generation. Also, it is recommended that the data be enriched by combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and respondents' parents should be included to provide different perspectives and a more comprehensive approach.

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## **List of appendices**

**Appendix 1:** Consent Form

**Appendix 2:** Interview Guide

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consent Form

Hi! I am Anh, a master's student of Sociology at Charles University. I am currently doing my master's research project entitled: *Transnational Aspects of Identity: The Vietnamese of the 1.5 and Second Generations in Prague*.

This project aims to explore the unique experiences, challenges, strategies for navigating multiple cultural contexts of the Vietnamese youngsters living in Prague, by means of in-depth interview. The findings will help foster inclusivity and social cohesion for minorities within host societies.

I would like to invite you to participate in this interview. Below is some information to help you somehow know what to expect.

- The interview is expected to last 40-60 minutes, and can be conducted either face-to-face or virtually (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout).
- The questions will cover the aspects of socio-demographic information, self-identity, parent-child relationship, social and personal relationships, and life and career trajectories.
- The interview serves research purposes only and participation is voluntary. You can withdraw the consent at any time.
- There are no foreseen risks over the course of your participation. However, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any point for any reason. Furthermore, you are free to ask questions at any time.
- It would be ideal if I can record the interview. Due to the length of the interview, audio recording helps me better transcribe the answers later and avoid missing information. However, if you prefer me to take notes, I can definitely do that.
- Your name will be anonymised and the interview will be kept confidential. No one except my supervisor and I can access the tape recordings and ethnographical notes.
- I assure you that what you share will not be judged or affect our existing relationships.

To continue, I kindly ask that you consent to participate in the interview.

Thank you.

Anh

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

### Socio-demographic information

1. How do you want to be called?
2. What gender were you assigned when born?
3. How old are you?
4. Where were you born?
5. When did you go to the Czech Republic/Prague?
6. What is your citizenship?
7. What is your highest educational level?
8. What is your current occupation?
9. What languages do you speak? *Please rank the languages regarding fluency.*

### Self-identity

1. Would you identify yourself close to Vietnamese or Czech?
2. In your opinion, what is considered 'Czech' and 'Vietnamese'?
3. Describe how you were raised. Did you have a Czech nanny?
4. Have you ever experienced identity crises? *Please elaborate.*
5. What influence do you think the Vietnamese community/culture has had in shaping your self-identity?
6. What are your parents' religions? Do you do any traditional practices at home? How do you feel about it?

### Parent-child relationship

1. Are you living with your parents? If not, when did you move out?
2. Please describe your relationship with your parents. Do you need to assist your parents with their business and bureaucracy-related work (e.g., translating and interpretation, paper work, residence permit)? How do you feel about it?
3. Are there any values or expectations set out by your parents that have impacted you? In which aspects do you and your parents have the same values and which conflict (education, career choice, marriage, cultural/family values)? How do you resolve it?

**Social and personal relationships**

1. Please tell me about your experiences in schools. How did it impact you?
2. Have you ever experienced racism?
3. Describe your friend circles. What activities do you usually do? What qualities make you more likely to befriend them and how have they impacted your identity/personalities?
4. What qualities of a partner that you are looking for? Does ethnicity matter?
5. What do you think about gender role and family values?

**Life and career trajectory**

1. Could you please describe your career path?
2. Are you more likely to search for work among your ethnic group?
3. Does any element of your ethnic background give you advantages or disadvantages when applying for jobs?
4. How often do you come back to Vietnam? Have you ever considered to live and work there? Why/Why not?
5. Speaking of career development, where would you like to study/work in the future? Why?

**Closing:** Is there anything else you you like to add or share?