

sex
Centre for
ratio
Research

Summary

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

Table of contents

1. The economic, political and social context	5
2. General attitudes towards immigrants in contemporary Poland	5
3. The Vietnamese in Poland	6
4. Comments on theoretical and methodological	

Preface

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

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

I would like to thank the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (SCMR) and the Centre for Culture Development and Environment (CDE) who hosted me as a M5imPur

was also a current of great excitement about the novelty of, and interest, in different cultures. Poles were quite willing to help victims of intolerance and economic refugee since the abuse of

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

At the end of the 1980s Vietnamese students and former students who had not returned to Vietnam started to establish and run small businesses in Poland. At the beginning of the 1990s they were joined by other Vietnamese, for instance ex-students who had gone back to Vietnam after finishing their studies, and who in the 1990s returned to Poland. At the same time, students' families, friends, and neighbours arrived in Central Europe. Additionally, Poland on the other hand

tr	at	name	se	stu	ET	EM	C/P	AM	CID	1	9	739.1602	Tm
----	----	------	----	-----	----	----	-----	----	-----	---	---	----------	----

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

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

These discrepancies may be attributed to differences between popular representations shaped by popular discourse practice and existing among mass, and elite representations present for example in the press. Elites have the power to produce powerful representations of others which influence public discourse. In contrast, popular representations are more private and incoherent, since they m(rinflu-nce d b varyi86 Tm(popular)Tj0.000Tw 10.02 0 0 02 68n)Tj523 Tw 10.02 0 0 10.02 5

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

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

Since 1989 the Vietnamese war is still present in press discourse but in a completely different context. My analysis of press articles revealed that Polish television shows many old American films concerning the Vietnamese war, or portraying it in the background, in a very specific way. The Vietnamese war is also mentioned in biographies of important American politicians published in the Polish press. The moral legitimacy of the American intervention in Vietnam is still discussed, but in the context of current international conflicts and military interventions. Usually the Vietnamese war is shown in the Polish papers as a fight for a just cause, but an American failure with tragic

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

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

It all began with a journey to the East. They have developed a taste for Hindu, Chinese, Indonesian cuisines. They began to bring mementoes from journeys and eventually they opened a well-known shop in Warsaw, "Eight treasures"...The majority of goods come from India and Singapore, some from Vietnam, and a saleswoman is a real Vietnamese – a close friend of the owner...Eastern combination of spices and ingredients sometimes seems odd to Europeans, for example a combination of chilli, honey, ginger and nuts. It is difficult to define the taste of Hindi products...For Hindi dishes real Hindi rice is needed. Unfortunately, rice in shops

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. The popular representation of the Vietnamese in Poland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But popular representations of the Vietnamese also express the anxiety and the fear which accompanies contacts with "strangers". The Vietnamese are characterised as physically unclean which may reflect a popular

7. Conclusions

I would like to finish with some preliminary conclusions. My main point is that the Vietnamese as an immigrant group are unexpectedly well perceived in Poland. This is rather surprising taking into consideration the low familiarity and dissimilarity of this ethnic group, the economic crisis, the

Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (H.A.S)

Jasinska-Kania Aleksandra (1996). "Stereotypowe wyobrażenia Polaków o sobie i o innych narodach". *Ethnic Tolerance*

Czapinski Janusz (1996). „Uziemienie polskiej duszy” [The anchorage of the Polish soul] in M. Marody and E. Gucwa-Lesny „*Podstawy życia społecznego w Polsce*” [Bases of social life in Poland], ISS UW

Czyzewski Marek (et al.) (1997). „*Rytualny chaos*” [Ritual chaos], Aureus

Dijk, Teun, van (1991). „*Racism and the press*”, London: Routledge

Dijk, Teun, van (1993). „*Elite discourse and racism*”, Newbury CA: Sage

Foucault, Michel (1997). „*Archeologia wiedzy*” [The Archeology of knowledge], Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy

Grzymała-Kazłowska, Aleksandra (in progress). „Trzy wymiary tolerancji w Polsce i w Europie” [Three dimensions of tolerance in contemporary Poland and Europe] in A. Jasinska-Kania and M. Marody (eds.), „*Polacy wśród Europejczyków*” [Poles among Europeans], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Scholar

Grzymała-Kazłowska A, (2002), „Cudzoziemcy z krajów mniej rozwiniętych w Warszawie” [Foreigners from less developed countries in Warsaw] in A. Grzymała-Kazłowska (et al.), „*Wpływ migracji zagranicznych na sytuację na stołecznym rynku pracy*” [Impact of international migration on situation on the job market in Warsaw], Working Papers, seria Prace migracyjne, nr 44, ISS, UW

Halik, Teresa and Nowicka, Ewa (in progress). „*Integracja czy izolacja: Wietnamczycy w Polsce*” [Integration or Isolation: Vietnamese In Poland], research report

Halik, Teresa (2000). „Vietnamese in Poland”, in Hamilton, F.E.I. and Krystyna Iglicka eds *From Homogeneity to Multiculturalism: Minorities Old and New in Poland*, SSEES Occasional Papers No. 45, London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies

„Damis” (Official web-page of the company), <http://www.jarmark.damis.pl>

Jasinska-Kania, Aleksandra (1999) „The Impact of Education on Racism in Poland Compared with Other European Countries” Hagendoorn, Louk and Shervin Nekuee (eds) „*Education and Racism: a Cross National Survey of Positive Effects of Education on Ethnic Tolerance*”, Aldershot: Ashgate

