Chapter 3
'Becoming adult by remaining a minor': Reconfigurations of Adulthood and Wellbeing by young Vietnamese migrants in the UK

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Introduction

In 1975 images of the Vietnamese 'boat people' captured the attention of Western media. The fall of Saigon and the withdrawal of US troops prompted the exodus of thousands of refugees from Vietnam to countries all over the world. The 'boat people' formed the first wave of refugees who were initially ethnic Vietnamese from South Vietnam facing persecution due to their involvement in the former capitalist regime. The majority of these refugees fled to countries with previous colonial links to Vietnam such as the USA and France (and later Australia and Canada). Those coming to the UK however represented quite a unique and specific case in the global spread of Vietnamese refugees. They were in fact ethnic-Chinese from North Vietnam (62%) who fled the ethnic cleansing that took place after the Chinese invasion of North Vietnam in 1979 (Dalglish 1989). Fleeing in large boats of up to 1,000, these refugees were hosted in 'holding' camps in Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian countries before coming to the West (Hitchcox 1990, Dalglish 1989). A steady flow of Vietnamese refugees continued to arrive in the UK and other Western countries until the early 1980s. Despite this, the Vietnamese community in the UK today still remains a numerically small, culturally and politically invisible minority (Barber 2014, 2015) with a population of 60,635 (ONS 2011).

While earlier waves of Vietnamese refugees to the UK were welcomed with a great deal of sympathy for their political plight (Dalglish 1989), contemporary Vietnamese migration to the UK has been associated with 'illegal economic migration' and marred by association with particular labour market sectors in the shadow economy such as cannabis farming, money laundering through nail shops and people smuggling and trafficking (see Silverstone and Savage 2010). Anecdotal evidence suggests that these migrants are coming from the poor rural parts of central Vietnam where poverty is a key push factor (Silverstone and Savage 2010, UKHTC 2010, Beadle and Davidson 2019). This newer migration has been overwhelmingly composed of young people and children (CEOP 2011, SOCA 2013, US State Report 2015). While young unaccompanied migration to the UK has registered an important concern among immigration and welfare agencies, a deeper understanding of some of the cultural narratives shaping why and how this is happening is needed to uncover some of the push and pull factors relevant to young Vietnamese unaccompanied migrants.

This chapter explores cultural conceptions of 'Migration', 'Becoming Adult', 'Wellbeing' and 'Futures' among young Vietnamese migrants while subject to immigration control in the UK. It investigates the norms and ideas represented in the Vietnamese cultural media, to establish the potential impact these have on young people's migratory decisions. Through a focus on online media and particularly the role of social media, this chapter argues that the internet is becoming an important agent in shaping and forming views about migration, how to succeed as a minor once in the UK and when to 'return' home. It is argued that while young Vietnamese migrants are represented in the cultural media as 'child slaves' and victims forced to work in cannabis farms, research materials show that cannabis farming is often seen

as a common route into 'employment' by young people themselves and as a route to becoming adult and for developing agency. A brief discussion of cultural conceptions and definitions of adulthood and an overview of the socio-political context of cultural media in Vietnam is given, followed by a discussion of the methodology before moving to a discussion of the main findings.

Vietnamese conceptions of adulthood

Migration is often tied into the transition to adulthood for Vietnamese youth through a process of life events and the taking on of certain financial responsibilities. Adulthood is also often signalled through economic success. Statistics from the National Child Labour Survey 2012 suggest that some 1.75 million children in Vietnam are classified as 'child labourers', accounting for 9.6% of the national child population and 62% of children engaged in economic activities (ILO 2014 p.2). Nearly 85% of these children live in rural areas and 60% belong to the 15-17 age group (ibid). Economic and financial constraints also influence the transition into adulthood through important life events, such as marriage. Ethnic minorities in remote areas of Vietnam still practice underage marriage so the husband's family gains a labourer and the wife's family has one less 'mouth' to feed (Jones et al, 2014). Young people, who, according to different definitions, can be grouped in either 'child', 'youth' or 'adult' categories (or arguably all three), are actively encouraged to migrate. Migration itself is considered such an important life event that, in a sense, young people are being urged to 'leave' their childhood and transition into adulthood. This non-Western attitude towards childhood and adulthood clearly features in a range of Vietnamese cultural media. Contrary to Western approaches to child protection and children's rights, in which economic activities tend to be separated from childhood, Vietnamese practices value and honour the economic contributions made by children. For the purposes of this article, when we talk about adulthood we will be referring both to the UK/international legal definition as well as common Vietnamese constructs of adulthood which emerge through cultural media.

Methodology

The study took a qualitative approach to exploring samples of Vietnamese cultural media using both content and semiotic analyses. Based upon the assumptions and understandings of the situation of newer migrants in the UK, described above, this involved selecting material that would be both wide-ranging but also relevant to the target study group of young Vietnamese people subject to immigration control. The source material was selected on the basis that it was either: a) media that was known to be used by the target group of unaccompanied migrant children and young people; b) media in Vietnam which contained an emphasis on the themes of migration, youth and becoming adult; or c) media in the UK relating to the target group. Where possible the selection of material was made based upon popularity and circulation, for example the time slot in which a programme was shown or the likelihood that young people would consume the media, as well as the likely influence on broader society or the extent to which it was felt to reflect dominant cultural narratives in Vietnam. The research material was drawn from a range of sources including Vietnamese and UK national press (online news media), social media websites, contemporary Vietnamese novels and Vietnamese television shows. The cultural media was analysed first thematically, with the themes 'migration', 'adulthood', 'wellbeing' and 'futures' in mind. Summaries of relevant content (including cultural idioms and concepts) and extracts of the material were collected and then sorted into themes. The media was also analysed according to a semiotic

analysis where signs and symbols arising in the media relating to the core themes were explored.

A range of methodological challenges and limitations confronted the research into cultural media relating to undocumented young Vietnamese migrants. This firstly related to the accessing of material, notably, in relation to social media where undocumented young Vietnamese migrants' participation in and consumption of media is difficult to determine. Issues of anonymity and identifiability were another important ethical consideration in the research. Given the small number of Vietnamese websites based in the UK, the researchers were conscious of not drawing unwarranted attention to discussion pages containing sensitive and personal information, or compromising the anonymity of web users through the possibility of rendering them identifiable[i]. The sensitive and personal nature of issues discussed online and concerns over possible detection of migrants with illegal status and criminal activity required the authors to be cautious in naming and identifying certain sources in this article. Since the target research subjects are 'children', although admittedly people featured in our report were usually over 18, such concerns were of even greater importance. Research into migration and becoming adult through a content analysis of cyberspace such as online chat forum and social media websites also raised issues as to the verification of such posts and the identity of the users. The nature of these platforms allows users to have multiple identities and enables them to present themselves in different ways reducing our ability to verify the age of those who claim to be, under 18; and so part of our analysis is based on unverified information. This limitation applies to analysis on other claims/statements made through analysis of website discussions. The difficulty in identifying the real age of these 'children' is also faced by the authorities, and hence representations of child migrants in the press.

The research and analysis were also limited in scope as the authors were only able to capture the responses of Vietnamese migrants using public websites rather than through Facebook or other similar social media channels. Given the popularity of Facebook in Vietnam (VOV 2012), the exclusion of this social networking site may risk excluding the types of communication between the young Vietnamese and their fellow migrants and those in their homeland. Another methodological challenge that cross-national research such as this one faces relates to location. Specifically, being based in the UK, we do not have access to off-line materials such as printed newspapers and books and consequently our reliance on the internet inevitably makes the materials presented in this paper highly selective. The findings below therefore should only be taken as indicative rather than conclusive. Online research, which is essentially what this study has adopted as its main methodological strategy, also lacks personal interactions between the researchers and the research subjects. This may hinder the possibility of gaining a complete understanding of young Vietnamese migrants' experiences of transition into adulthood. These limitations aside, the material does provide rich insights into the ways in which cultural and social norms may shape young people's migratory decisions and outcomes.

Cultural conceptions of migration: successes and failures

In the 2012 primetime television series Hai Phia Chan Troi or *Two Horizons,* an emblematic scene plays out between two relatives who are discussing the advantages and disadvantages of sending their children abroad to Europe. One relative argues that life is hard and dangerous overseas while the other, drawing upon the common perception that the 'Viet Kieu' label is synonymous with fortunes and money insists: 'if going overseas was so bad, why would

people still pay so much to go?' (Two Horizons, Episode 7). These views reflect the two polarised cultural conceptions of migration in Vietnam relating broadly to issues of financial gain and improved status versus those of wellbeing and identity.

Across the Vietnamese media these two broad tendencies are represented on the one hand, in positive coverage of 'successful' migration. Stories showcasing 'hyper-success' (in terms of both financial and social esteem markers) of the overseas Vietnamese or 'Viet Kieu'[ii] and their contributions towards Vietnamese society are frequently invoked in the Vietnamese press (Tin Moi 2015, VTV1 and VTVN4). Return migration of the *Viet Kieu* to Vietnam has been changing views on migration. In 1994 an increasing relaxation of visa restrictions saw a softening of attitudes in Vietnam towards the Viet Kieu alongside a growing recognition of the range of economic and social contributions they made to the homeland (Pham 2010, Chan and Tran 2011, Chan 2013). Positive narratives of successful migration have been developed in a Vietnamese equivalent of the Mills and Boon style novels (part of a surge of novels and short stories dealing with romantic love in contemporary settings since the mid-1980s, (Phan and Pham 2003)). The novels have generated a sub-genre of fiction which represents an overly idealistic view of migration through prioritising the movement of already privileged individuals. For example, in the novels 'Beloved Oxford' (2011) by Duong Thuy and 'London is Far Away' (2013) by Le Thu Huyen, migration is depicted as a worthy pursuit that is undertaken by brave, hardworking and middle-class students with bright futures. In this portrayal, migration is represented as a 'rite-of-passage' (as discussed by Monsutti 2007 and Hagan 2008). Image of the UK portrayed in these novels are stereotypical, which in turn reinforces popular notions in Vietnam that the UK (and Europe more broadly) is a luxurious, exotic and 'heavenly place'. Such celebratory stories generally present migration as an easy process and thus reinforce and oversimplify the connections between migration and success.

Such narratives further reflect broader societal trends where popular culture in post-doi moi Vietnam has increasingly featured a celebration of economic success and material wellbeing, driven by a rising consumerism among the younger generations[1]. Although economic growth in Vietnam has engendered a degree of social progress and higher standards of living among certain sections of the population, it has also been criticised for engendering rampant consumerism, the rise of 'money worship' and a lifestyle driven solely by self-interest and practical considerations (Dang and Pham 2003; 200).This is in part thought to be shaping the cultural conceptions of migration and young people's migratory decisions by emphasising particular push and pull factors. However misleading such media is about the process and outcomes of migration, it nonetheless can have a powerful influence on young people. Yet while there is the emergence of the 'cult of celebrity' and a general appetite in Vietnam for the consumption of migration success stories, in more recent years a more critical stance in Vietnamese society has developed, one which provides a counter-narrative and which depicts the various struggles and hardship of a different group of migrants.

There has hence been a rise in more negative portrayals of the 'gritty' realities of migration, particularly those related to irregular economic migration and trafficking (Viet Press 2015, Nguoi Lao Dong 2015, Tuoi Tre 2015). In Viet Press (2015), for example, article headlines such as; *100 illegal Vietnamese migrants in the UK are to be deported* and *Hundreds of Vietnamese migrants have come to the UK illegally or overstayed their visa* have begun to emerge. These articles provide factual information about changes in UK policy and

government declarations of applying tougher rules on immigration including the deportation hundreds of people belonging to the category of 'illegal'. However, indications across other parts of the cultural media suggest that such stories tend to be overlooked by those Vietnamese who wish to migrate as they are seen as being outweighed by the promise of better financial gain.

An increase in more realistic accounts of migration is also found in Vietnamese fictional media. The television series, Two Horizons (2012) (based on the novel Blood of Snow, 2006) and the adapted novel Quyen (2007) to the film Farewell Berlin (2015), offer a contrast to the overly simplistic representations of migration found in the news media discussed above. Such a wide range of conflicting representations make it hard for young people to reconcile decisions about whether to migrate or not. Young people frequently become the target of cultural pressures to migrate while at the same time being caught between social and economic imperatives to find a better life. Any nuanced treatment of both the possibilities and challenges of migration is more difficult to find.

Adulthood and becoming adult in the UK asylum system

Issues of biological age

In the Vietnamese cultural media, relatively young family members are documented as more likely to migrate, while migration of older family members is often represented as undesirable or inappropriate given the cultural and social draw to the homeland (seen in Two Horizons, Beloved Oxford, London is Far Away). On the receiving end of this migration, British press coverage of Vietnamese migrants has frequently focused upon stories of children who are trafficked into Britain for the purposes of cannabis farming. These children and young people are frequently reported as being taken into the care of local authorities as unaccompanied children and then frequently go missing from care soon after. Typical headlines in the national press regarding this phenomenon include; 'Why are so many of the UK's missing teenagers Vietnamese?' (BBC 17th June 2013) and 'Vietnam's lost children in labyrinth of slave labour' (BBC 27 August 2013). In these stories, and notably in the story of Hien, featured in The Guardian (24 May 2015), childhood seems to end soon after entry to the UK where they are subject to domestic slavery and bonded labour. In the short film 'The Trip' (2013), Hung, a 16 year-old boy is portrayed as reaching adulthood through the key life events of being trafficked and enslaved in a cannabis farm. Hung begins his journey to adulthood when he takes on responsibility for becoming the breadwinner for his family by travelling to the UK in order to rescue his parents from destitution. Hung 'becomes adult' on this difficult journey, learning the hard way through his enslavement on a UK cannabis farm.

Vietnamese children culturally are said to reach adulthood on turning 16 years of age (CEOP 2013). However, among the Vietnamese in the UK, notions of childhood, youth and adulthood are often juxtaposed with each other due to the specific context within which young people find themselves. In the UK, the Vietnamese notions of adulthood have to be adjusted to suit the purposes of the UK legal and cultural frameworks. The biological age of the Vietnamese migrants is arguably difficult to read in the UK by UK officials and many Vietnamese are able to claim they are younger than they are for the purposes of navigating punitive aspects of the immigration and asylum system. This is a process that has been observed across a number of different groups where migration control authorities often have difficulties verifying claims made by so-called under-aged or minor migrants (see Dorling 2013, Crawley 2007).

Online discussions hosted on one of the UK Vietnamese websites also testify the importance of biological age as a concern for young Vietnamese migrants, especially those trying to become adult through navigating the asylum and care systems in the UK. Age is important as it relates to the notion of becoming adult and marks the milestones to responsibility in the UK context. Notably, the biological age categories between childhood and adulthood are manipulated by young Vietnamese migrants as a survival strategy and becoming adult in the UK context (although they have already become adult under Vietnamese cultural constructs) is seen as an undesirable legal transition due to the responsibilities and lack of rights and welfare entitlements that this entails (Coram Children's Legal Centre 2012). In the chat discussions, one contributor explains how s/he has claimed to be 16 in order to be allowed to stay in supported accommodation for asylum-seeking children and is now very nervous about having to defend this fabricated story to renew their visa. Responses to this post from fellow Vietnamese youth reveal this to be a common experience and many contributors share stories of their own attempts to manipulate age references in order to secure continued support as a minor. For example, one contributor explains how after being arrested they gave the authorities their real age, 17, and as a minor they were placed in the care of a family, but now they have been 'kicked out' of their temporary guardian's home because the Home Office is challenging their claimed age of 17. Such examples reveal how the process of becoming adult in the UK, in terms of securing a future and opportunities to follow a 'normal' life, is hampered by technicalities surrounding legal status and process that in effect prevent the transition to adulthood.

Issues of gender

Processes of becoming adult are also shaped by gender. The transition to parenthood emerges as a particularly important concern for young women. In one example, a young woman who is seeking asylum and is barely an adult herself (by UK legal terms) describes how on reaching the age of 18 and having had a baby, she no longer has access to social housing, has lost her school place and has had her application for asylum rejected but is fearful of returning to Vietnam. What is revealing in the responses by other contributors in the chat forum is that responsibility and blame are apportioned directly to the young woman. The comments suggest a presumption that through becoming a parent, she is now an adult and no longer a vulnerable victim of the system. One rather stark comment suggests she must find a way to live and work in the UK illegally because it will be virtually impossible to return to Vietnam where it would be even more difficult to support herself. Presumably, the shame associated with being forcibly returned to Vietnam and/or returning as a young single mother outweighs the potential penalties of the British legal system. By contrast for young men, the shame of returning home before having become adult, (here read having become a 'breadwinner') is presented in discussions as relating to not being able to support a family, with an emphasis upon returning as a provider. Women, on the other hand appear more easily tarnished by having entered into the wrong relationships, having lost Vietnamese language or having become a single parent.

Yet becoming a parent is also discussed on the chat forums as a potential strategy employed by migrants (especially the females) to remain in the UK. For example, in one post a female contributor asks 'How can I avoid deportation?' prompting a response which reads 'Get pregnant quick', as this is perceived as a way to complicate the deportation process and get special dispensation. Under section 60 of the Immigration Act 2016, a pregnant woman would be exempted from being taken into a detention centre (prior to deportation) because

they are deemed particularly vulnerable to harm in detention. To avoid the deportation of both mother and child after the birth, another strategy that is often exploited is paying someone with British citizenship to be the child's father. This way the child can be registered as a British national and the mother can apply to be his/her guardian/carer and thus gains the right to stay. Forum users raised concerns that this strategy might fail if the Home Office request a DNA test to prove the father-child relationship. This subsequently leads to an alternative approach, known among the migrant community as the marriage route. The unmarried mother can pay a British citizen (often another migrant who has acquired settlement status) to marry her and she can apply to be his dependent spouse. The broader practice of marriage-migration is a common route for Vietnamese women to other Asian countries (see Belanger and Wang 2012, Belanger et al 2013), but the specific strategies discussed above appear distinctive to the UK context.

The role of gender in migration experiences is also perceptible through experiences of gendered violence and gendered position in the labour market. Women are more vulnerable to being raped, as depicted by Quyen in the novel of the same title, or Hanh in 'Hai Phia Chan Troi'. This shows an additional risk for women during the migratory journey. Gender differences are also seen in the different 'trades' that Vietnamese people occupy in the UK. For example, women have notoriously worked in (and been smuggled into) nail shops (and in some cases, brothels) while men work in the cannabis trade. In both cases, the effects of noxious chemicals and long working hours are equally damaging, but nail shops are seen as a relatively safe environment, hence more suitable for the so called 'weaker sex'. On the other hand, cannabis farms where isolation, gang violence and poor living conditions are prevalent, are considered a dangerous environment, requiring a certain degree of perceived tough 'manliness' to cope with.

For young Vietnamese migrants, becoming adult in the UK arguably relates to the acquisition of certain skills and the ability to be savvy in navigating the UK legal and welfare systems in ways which enable them to make a successful economic life in the UK. In the examples above, there is a clear indication of a commonly shared problem of the meanings and understandings associated with age and a range of strategies that Vietnamese young people must be aware of in order to navigate categories of childhood and adulthood in the UK. While the category of adulthood in the UK system may be punitive to illegal Vietnamese migrants in the UK, it has no bearing upon their own cultural definitions of adulthood which is a status that many of these young people have reached through the process and journey of their migration.

Wellbeing: shame, honour and 'saving face'.

The notion of 'saving face' is an important cultural construct in Vietnamese society and is of central relevance in the stories of migrants. Seen as the 'golden egg' for the future, younger family members are actively encouraged to migrate; often to increase the socio-economic prosperity of the family and sometimes to distance themselves from perceived 'demise' in Vietnam, and as a rite-of-passage (Two Horizons, Beloved Oxford). In order to secure better futures, protagonists across a range of the fictional and non-fictional media have to sacrifice the wellbeing of their families at home in Vietnam in the short-to-medium term to develop a 'project-of-the-self' as a breadwinner (Chase 2013). The expectation of 'successful migration' is therefore high. Those who did not live up to the images of success face shame and stigma in their community in the home country. Not only is this notion of shame brought upon the migrants themselves but it also affects their family members. For instance, in the

television series, Two Horizons (2012), having borrowed money with exorbitant interests from illegal lenders (thus incurring a huge debt), Mich's wife could not send money back to support the family and instead lost touch completely. His family now have to deal with financial hardship, emotional turmoil and an uncertain future. She is thought by the villagers to have abandoned her husband and two sons to marry someone else overseas. Mich is perceived of as foolish to have let his wife migrate. Believing that his daughter-in-law has dishonoured the family, Mich's father disassociates himself from the social stigma of 'unsuccessful migration' by disowning his son. Mich is then left to live with the consequences of both poverty and shame.

The theme of 'saving face' is also seen in the various strategies engaged in by the characters who must fabricate stories about the realities of their situation in the countries in which they are residing to their family members in Vietnam order to save face personally. This strategy allows a superficial preservation of wellbeing both for them as individuals and for their families, enabling them to save face in their local community in Vietnam (for an exploration of 'saving face' among East Asian diaspora communities in America, see Chung 2016). The significance of being able to 'save face' can also be linked to ideas about the future and return. Notably, the shame of losing face often seems to prevent people from returning to Vietnam - a recurrent theme across the fictional media but also a key concern for young people posting on websites. One illustrative example is that of a male forum user who, after 10 years in the UK, has suffered many health problems due to the harsh living conditions. His idea of returning home is dismissed both by himself for fear of becoming a burden for the family and being seen as a failure, he concludes; 'I feel like a failure because I have no money to bring home. Maybe I should just stay here and die.' This fear of being seen as a 'failed' migrant is a common feature in forum discussions. The notion of 'losing face' and 'saving face' is recurring in another discussion in which a female participant is advised not to go back to Vietnam because she now has a fatherless child. Having a child without being married, in some cases, can lead to the mother being disowned by her family because this is considered a dishonour and causes them to 'lose face' with their neighbours and the local community. By not returning, these migrants 'save face' for their families. Here it can be seen that the strategy used to navigate the migration system (e.g. becoming a parent) can cost the young people their connection with their family. Yet this is a price many accept to pay.

Identity and Belonging: accommodation without assimilation?

A sense of identity and belonging features strongly in representations of subjective wellbeing among Vietnamese migrants outside of their homeland. In the social media, symbolic references are made to the lack of wellbeing experienced by migrants in the UK Vietnamese websites. Most notably, the term 'nguoi rom' (scarecrow or strawman) is widely used to refer to illegal migrants, especially those who watch over cannabis crops. 'Rom' (i.e. straw), together with 'rac' (rubbish) form a compound word 'rom rac', which means trash or worthless things. This highlights the feeling of powerlessness and inferiority among the migrants. The frequent appearance of adjectives such as 'sad', 'miserable', 'desperate' in the website users' nicknames signify their general emotional and psychological states and migration status/experience. In particular, one regular contributor takes the name of a hero in 'Thien Long Bat Bo' (a Jin Yong's martial arts genre novel), who is the leader of a beggar gang. This choice of name may have a subtle reference to the proverb "tha phuong cau thuc", which translates into English as "leaving one's hometown to beg for food". Given the fact that these migrants have also left their hometown to find work ('work' is sometimes referred to as 'finding food' in street slangs used by poor/working class people in Vietnam), this particular name may be seen as a way of expressing the migrant's feeling of vulnerability[iii].

Maintaining a Vietnamese identity is linked to a sense of belonging and aspirations to return to Vietnam. This is illustrated in the Vietnamese websites by one of the contributors who fears if he stays too long overseas and does not return to Vietnam this might jeopardise a sense of belonging. He writes to another web user "Are you certain that after many years of trying to stabilise your income, you would still be 'Vietnamese' and look towards your country". A concern with roots is reflected in broader cultural narratives in online newspaper coverage of Vietnamese migrants where those who are deemed the most successful are ones who are portrayed as having held on to their Vietnamese 'roots' by either returning to Vietnam, investing in Vietnam financially or retaining their mother tongue and culture (e.g. All Vietnam 2015). Fears over children forgetting their mother tongue, and thus their "roots" are also featured in Quyen (2007) and Beloved Oxford (2011). The expression of sentiments of longing for and belonging to the homeland among the overseas Vietnamese in cultural media has been encouraged and warmly received among the national Vietnamese who have historically had an uneasy political relationship with the Viet Kieu, pre-1990s (Pham 2010). This was illustrated through the positive reception in Vietnam of the Viet Kieu song 'Bonjour Vietnam' released in 2006. The song includes the chorus: "One day I'll touch your soil. One day I'll finally know my soul. One day I'll come to you. To say hello… Vietnam.", words which demonstrate and celebrate a nostalgia for the homeland.

This theme of maintaining a Vietnamese identity is developed in Beloved Oxford (2011) in which a cautionary tale is presented by two older migrants who explain how they 'endlessly ponder that we are fallen leaves from the people of our roots', acknowledging the danger of losing touch with Vietnam and their cultural roots which may lead them not being able to 'belong anywhere'. This relates to an old Vietnamese saying: 'La rung ve coi', meaning the leaves fall down near the roots of the tree. When Vietnamese people become old, they often want to return to their fatherland to live the remainder of their lives and pass away. The notion of ancestral lands and the importance of being buried in the family 'plot' is also recurrent in other novels and is explored in relation to the death of the character Hung in the novel Quyen (2006). A similar discussion is found in the Kenh14 online discussions (see below) where the contributors contemplate the merits of being able to feel a sense of 'meaning in one's life' which relates to the notion of needing to be able to 'look ones ancestors in the eye and smile and say I haven't disappointed them'. This is symbolic of wider Vietnamese cultural constructions around ancestral roots and the importance of the role of ancestors in judging the acts of the living as a determinant of both individual and collective wellbeing. Such issues may relate to and explain some of the reasons for why cultural hybridity does not seem to be taking place among newly arrived young Vietnamese migrants and a perceived lack of willingness to integrate may reflect a desire not to stay in the UK long term.

More generally issues of social integration and Gibson's (1988) notion of 'accommodation without assimilation' characterises depictions of Vietnamese migrant communities in the West. The same process is frequently acknowledged in Two Horizons (2012) and Quyen (2006) where the Vietnamese are acknowledged as preferring to 'stick among their own kind' rather than mixing with local western communities (in Germany, Czech and the USA). In the novel Quyen, the Vietnamese refugee settlement in Goldberg is described:

> "[...] Goldberg was like a Vietnamese village in the middle of Germany. However, it was an isolated village. The villagers refused to integrate with those outside Goldberg. The local authorities and people were not happy with some behaviours of the refugees. They never recycled, were loud and inconsiderate, and respected no laws".

Such reticence to integrate seems to stem from a combination of experiences of discrimination and a lack of desire to integrate with the local population. Fears over becoming what is termed a *'yellow Westerner'* (physically Vietnamese but culturally western) are explored in Two Horizons when a character considers her granddaughter having moved abroad and no longer able to speak much Vietnamese. Not being able to speak the mother tongue is represented as a loss in Vietnamese identity. At the same time, experiences of racism are represented as having a negative impact upon the individual subjective experiences of wellbeing. The term 'yellow chink', which is imbued with Orientalist colonial overtones is used in Two Horizons to position the Vietnamese as unwelcome in the Czech Republic and is symbolic of broader racism towards the Vietnamese in Europe (see Barber 2015). An overriding form of racialisation of the Vietnamese in the UK is reinforced by UK press coverage representing the Vietnamese as almost exclusively illegal migrants working in cannabis farms or trafficked into the sex trade via nail salons (see Guardian 2013, 2015, The Telegraph 2013, 2015 The Daily Mail 2005, This is London 2011). Conversely, forms of ethnocentrism are also evident in Vietnamese cultural narratives towards other ethnic groups and represent a form of reverse-racism. In the UK Vietnamese web posts, an illustration of this is revealed through the issue of interracial relationships as exemplified between a Vietnamese girl and an Albanian man. A strong racial prejudice is evident in discussions about the problems with interracial relationships flagged by other Vietnamese who argue that Albanians are 'never to be trusted' are involved in 'criminal gangs' and are 'uneducated' and 'deceptive' people. A similar theme is also taken up in relation to stories of interracial relationships (Beloved Oxford) where western partners are deemed to be imbued with a host of immoral qualities and characteristics.

Future

Social media appears to be playing an increasingly influential role in shaping young people's migratory decisions. It is evident that prospective migrants rely upon the internet as a source through which to discuss and seek advice on their possible futures. In one example, an enquirer writing from Vietnam consults a UK Vietnamese website to ask for advice about sending his/her son to the UK (presumably through organised criminal networks) to study and to be fostered. The enquirer asks about the technicalities involved in sending unaccompanied minors abroad, admissions criteria and the cost of schooling. Subsequent discussions by fellow site users (who all appear to be based in the UK) are sceptical of this decision and challenge the enquirer's motivations for coming to the UK. Instead they recommend staying in Vietnam to get a University degree rather than migrating to the UK. Being confined to unskilled work in the form of working as a nail technician, or in a restaurant or as an au pair, is also seen as a less 'honourable' route. The discussion is very revealing in a number of ways about the perceptions held by prospective migrants and migrants about the future. Firstly, that a Vietnamese parent conceives of a better future for their child by sending them overseas as an undocumented minor as being preferable to them remaining in Vietnam indicates a certain desperation about their life-chances in Vietnam. Secondly, the willingness of this particular parent to send their son to an unknown country, to the care of unknown foster parents to presumably give the child a better future indicates a level of certainty that migration will be advantageous. A key point raised by other site users relates to the risk of such a strategy, the enquirer seems unaware of/ or unconcerned about the potential danger of trafficking a child abroad. An important myth may be identified here, that sending one's child to Europe will automatically mean they have a better future. The responses in the discussion by contributors, who are currently in the UK, raise the question as to whether living an 'ordinary life' in Vietnam is actually as bad as it is made out to be

especially by comparison to the relative options available in the UK. This view runs counter to the representations of successful migration found in the mainstream media earlier in this chapter.

Although the views presented in the Vietnamese media are varied, the common projection is that the future for those who have left their homeland is rather uncertain and capricious. While for some, the future promises opportunities, for others, the future portends more gloomy possibilities. It is clear from the media that to strive for a better future, the migrants have to constantly negotiate, compromise or even sacrifice their personal values and/or wellbeing.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the ways in which migration has been represented in a range of Vietnamese cultural and social media as both a positive and negative phenomenon. Enduring popular representations found in the mainstream press and social media both over-glorifies and over-simplifies migration. This leaves other experiences of migration such as more negative experiences; 'sad realities' and misconceptions, to be detailed only in a few and more marginal cultural sources. The social and economic imperative to send young people abroad to achieve material success and contribute to the prosperity of their families and the nation as a whole is an important cultural narrative in Vietnam. Young people are more likely to be encouraged to migrate due to their lack of immediate responsibilities, their presumed ability to adapt and cope more easily with migration and due to the cultural association of migration as a rite-of-passage into adulthood. Here the role of young people as the 'golden egg' for the future is a key cultural construct. Yet, young people's constrained abilities and often thwarted attempts to control their futures, and successfully navigate immigration controls (as seen in 'The Trip') confronts them with moral, emotional and physical dilemmas and hardships which are too often overlooked. Notably, the divide between the sending family's expectations and concepts of migration, and that of young people's everyday experiences of migration, often remains too large to straddle and places pressures upon young people to seek success at all costs. This has a heavy impact upon their sense of emotional, social and psychological wellbeing in the UK.

Despite its contribution to the (mis)conceptions of migration, the internet and social media are major sources of information which shape young people's migratory decisions. It is not uncommon that Vietnamese migrants seek advice on complex life issues such as marriage, relationship or parenthood on these social platforms. In some cases, they are encouraged to look up the advantages and disadvantages of staying in the UK versus returning to Vietnam on Google. Notwithstanding the quality of the information provided on these sites, stories and experiences featured here may in turn influence the perceptions of national Vietnamese who aspire to go overseas. The fact that young people actively seek information on social networking sites perhaps demonstrates their personal agency in this process. Agency is most clearly demonstrated when young people have to navigate the legal systems in order to maintain their migration status. This may involve them having to uphold their vulnerability or dependency as a minor to maximise institutional support and protection. This strategic form of agency displays nuances in the transition process into adulthood. According to their social backgrounds and migration routes, young people may have different experiences of becoming adult. By exploring how young people cope with the subjective transition process (according to the cultural constructions of adulthood emerging from Vietnam) and at the same time maintain a strategic identity to navigate the migration system (e.g. claiming to be younger

than they really are), future research can gain a better understanding about the process of becoming adult in the migration context.

In the analysis of the cultural media, gender differences were also discernible in relation to becoming adult. In our analysis, the nature of the source material did not enable a more detailed or sustained analysis of gender and social class differences, for example to discern in a more systematic way the impact of intersecting social differences upon the different resources and trajectories taken up by young migrants. A more nuanced appreciation of social hierarchies would seek to take into account regional differences, ethnic difference, and particular family hierarchies relating to age, class and gender. However, given the limitations in the study relating to issues of access and anonymity it was not possible to go beyond the analysis provided in this chapter.

With the emergence, and growing acknowledgement, of alternative stories of migration entering in to the mainstream media (particularly with the adaptation of the novel Quyen into the big budget film 'Farewell Berlin Wall' in June 2015, and the airing of drama series such as Two Horizons on primetime television), it is likely that more realistic representations of migration experiences will reach Vietnamese audiences. Certainly, the phenomenon of trafficking is becoming increasingly well known in Vietnam with anti-trafficking billboards warning against the trafficking of children (Economist 2015). Given this, it might be useful to establish the extent to which young people are aware of contrasting stories of migration and whether this might be precipitating any change in social attitudes towards migration in Vietnam. Future research to this end could help deepen understandings about the lives of young migrants and their relationships with their communities back in Vietnam.

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[i] For ethical reasons the specific names of the website have not been mentioned in this article to avoid the risk of identifiability of contributors. There have also been concerns among website users that the Home Office might be observing the discussion pages for immigration reasons.
[ii] Viet Kieu is a common term referring to both Vietnamese abroad and those who have recently returned to Vietnam (after a long time living overseas).
[iii] For the purposes of anonymity and identifiability the authors do not use the actual usernames of the contributors but where possible we indicate what their nickname stood for.

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