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**Review of Teresa Halik's book *Migrancka społeczność  
Wietnamczyków w Polsce w świetle polityki państwa i  
ocen społecznych (The Migrant Community of the  
Vietnamese in Poland in the Light of State Policy and  
Social Assessment)***

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*Migrancka społeczność Wietnamczyków w Polsce w świetle polityki państwa i ocen społecznych (The Migrant Community of the Vietnamese in Poland in the Light of State Policy and Social Assessment)*, by Teresa Halik, is the newest and biggest monograph on the Vietnamese Community currently living in Poland.

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The book is a summary of almost ten years of the author's work, comprising a range of studies conducted within different groups of the Vietnamese migrants and persons involved in contacts with these groups – Polish spouses, teachers, co-workers or social “neighbours” of the Vietnamese, such as actual neighbours or stallholders doing business at the same marketplace. The research was conducted with various techniques and research methods – structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and all-country opinion polls.<sup>1</sup> The collected material is supplemented with information gathered by the author during her unofficial contacts with the Vietnamese and the analysis of legal regulations and official statistics received by the Central Statistical Office (GUS), Headquarters of the Border Guards and Ministry of Interior and Administration. An important element of the book is the account of the Polish state policy towards immigrants and the development of official relations between Poland and Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the studies, conducted together with Professor Ewa Nowicka, resulted in the publication of two books: T. Halik, E. Nowicka, (2002) *Wietnamczycy w Polsce. Integracja czy izolacja [Vietnamese in Poland: integration or isolation?]*, Warsaw, Prolog; T. Halik, E. Nowicka, W. Połec, (2006) *Dziecko wietnamskie w polskiej szkole. Zmiana kulturowa i strategie przekazu kultury rodzimej w zbiorowości Wietnamczyków w Polsce [Vietnamese child in a Polish school: Cultural change and strategies for conveying Vietnamese culture in the Vietnamese community in Poland]*, Warsaw, Instytut Orientalistyczny.

Although Poland had not been a popular destination of immigrants from Asia in the past, the country is currently one of the few European states in which the Vietnamese form one of the biggest and best organised migrant communities. In the author's opinion, the reasons for this phenomenon can be traced to the contemporary history of Polish and Vietnamese relations; in particular to those maintained during the communist rule in Poland. It was then that the governments of Poland and Vietnam concluded a number of agreements on cooperation, economic assistance, scientific and technical exchange, training of technical staff and education of graduate and doctoral students. Polish specialists went to work in Vietnam, while the first Vietnamese – in most instances graduate and doctoral students – started to arrive in Poland. In particular, many Vietnamese arrived during the Vietnam War, however this was not mass migration. The author says that the Vietnamese coming to Poland at that time were some of the first foreigners of a different cultural background. They were warmly welcomed, both by the country's authorities and the communities they would live in. The Vietnamese stereotype that arose was very positive: they were perceived as able, hardworking and polite people and patriots. Some of the immigrants settled down in Poland, others returned to Vietnam. After the fall of the communist regime in Poland, some of these Vietnamese returned to Poland.

In describing the first waves of Vietnamese immigration the author uses the category of *Welcomed Guests*, comparing them to the category of *Unwelcomed Guests*, i.e. the migrants who started arriving to Poland during the last decade of the twentieth century. The latter migration may be called a mass migration: according to the estimates. The current Vietnamese population in Poland totals 20,000-30,000, though some figures are higher. In contrast to the former migrations, the current migration is mainly of an economic nature and is – at least in some cases – illegal. The main body of the book is devoted to the current situation of migrants, although the author keeps referring to the former migrations – this should be the context of perceiving both the selection of Poland as a destination country and the way of organising immigrants' lives there. The newcomers function largely on the basis of the structures created by the migrants who already settled down in Poland.

In the book, the author does not create her own theories on migration or integration. Furthermore, she rarely refers to the existing, recognised theories. Although it has some interpretative elements, the monograph is primarily a very detailed, sometimes even photographic, description of the situation of the Vietnamese in Poland over the last few decades. Thanks to many years of her involvement in the matters of the Vietnamese Community, the author is able to show, step by step, the process of creating the first Vietnamese institutions, such as associations, clubs (women, seniors, athletes) or religious communities, present most common forms in which the immigrants spend their free time and analyse the extent of the Vietnamese's participation in the Polish culture. Also, the book contains a chapter on the consequences of the Vietnamese

presence in Poland, with particular emphasis on the subject of mixed marriages and the participation of Vietnamese children in the Polish education system. In the section of the book concerning vocational activity, particularly related to trade and catering services, one can find a description of the so-called *Stadion Dziesięciolecia*, the biggest marketplace in Central and Eastern Europe, where immigrants from different countries conduct their trade, commonly known as the *Fair Europe* or the *Russian Market*. Another titbit, and for the ones interested in the subject, a valuable source of information, is the Schedule of the Official Polish and Vietnamese Contacts 1950-2005, presented in the annex to the book.

The author rarely refers to the controversies and gossip that surround the Vietnamese presence in Poland, such as crime, mafia connections, human trafficking, illegal stay, “marriages on paper” or activities of the Vietnamese intelligence in Poland. Some of these issues do appear in the book, but the author fails to get a closer look at them and give the reader any details, basing her findings on quotations and not trying to ultimately assess their reliability. Although the author notices that the very positive stereotype of the Vietnamese, shaped a few dozen years ago, changes towards a less favourable one, she disagrees with the “opinion and examination” of the state authorities that the Vietnamese, as an immigrant group, generally arouse social dislike and are seen as crime-makers.<sup>2</sup> Also, she is optimistic as to the future of the Vietnamese in Poland. However, Poles, when asked about the possibility of accepting the Vietnamese, often point to “racial” differences and cultural barriers as the factors that can hinder or, according to some, even render impossible their integration into the Polish society. Concluding, the author states that the Vietnamese are not only a stable element of the Polish ethnic landscape but that they also present one of the major and better organized communities aimed at staying in Poland.

T. Halik (2006). *The Migrant Community of the Vietnamese in Poland in the Light of State Policy and Social Evaluate*. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the report *Społeczność wietnamska w Polsce. Migracyjna polityka Wietnamu* (The Vietnamese Community in Poland. Vietnam’s Migration Policy) published by the Migration Analysis Division of the Migration Policy Department of the Polish Ministry of Interior and Administration, a separate chapter was dedicated to the discussion of the abuses of the means of residence legalisation among the Vietnamese living in Poland. The report was published in June 2007.