"SHE GAVE US FAMILY LIFE": VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND THEIR CZECH NANNIES REDEFINING RELATEDNESS[1]

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Abstract: ***Vietnamese families in the Czech Republic often recruit Czech women to look after their children. Put in the context of the dominant scholarship, this is quite a unique case of care work in which the employers are immigrants, while the employees are women of the host country. At the same time, it is an exceptional child care solution in the context of the Czech Republic, where only 1–2% of the population seek individual private child care. Drawing upon qualitative research conducted with Czech nannies, Vietnamese mothers, and their children, the article interprets the experience of Vietnamese immigrants with paid child care as an outcome of the post-migratory redefinition of family relations. In so doing, the paper demonstrates how family ties and child care arrangements are negotiated vis-à-vis the new life in the host country, where the different "normal caring biographies" are supported by the common-sense understanding of what care and/or mothering should be, by social policies, and by everyday practice. I argue that recruitment of the nannies is an essential part of these negotiations. I respond to the following questions: What is the role of delegated child care in post-migratory family arrangements? What are the motivations for and consequences of recruiting Czech nannies in the context of Vietnamese immigrants' family lives? In my paper I put forward the thesis that the post-migratory challenges of family life lead to the recruitment of nannies, which further challenges the family lives of both nannies and immigrants. The article focuses both on the negotiations which result in hiring the nanny and the negotiations originating in the recruitment of Czech nannies.***

Keywords: ***nanny; family ties; Vietnamese immigrants; Czech Republic***

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"It is these creative possibilities that lend kinship its very great symbolic force – a power that is all the more salient because it emanates from the emotional and practical circumstances of people's everyday lives – from the things they hold most dear, and with which they are, in every sense, most familiar."

Janet Carsten (2004: 153)

Introduction

Ms. Pham[2] is a 25-year-old woman with a Vietnamese passport who has one three-year-old child. She came to the Czech Republic eight years ago and now works in the immigrant economy as an entrepreneur. She started working ten hours per day when her daughter was eight months old. Because of her incorporation into the labour market she had to look for another woman to care for her child. Ms. Brhlíková is a 55 year-old Czech woman. She has adult children of her own with whom she spent twelve years on parental leave. Now she is a pensioner informally working for Ms. Pham. These two women are part of a *common* model of delegated child care which can be found in the Czech Republic (and is *unique* vis-à-vis the international division of reproductive labour) – a model where immigrant families hire national women to look after their children. These two women are both part of the global division of reproductive labour, but their situation differs from that of Filipina domestic workers in the USA, Polish domestic workers in Germany, or Czech au pairs in the UK. The Czech nannies are called "grandmothers" or "aunts" by the Vietnamese children and their parents, and this name is indicative of the nature of the relationship which will be addressed in this article.

During the past three decades, research interest in care/domestic workers has been increasing. Since in the 1970s in the United States "the earning power of most men has declined" (Ehrenreich – Hochschild 2003: 3) and fewer households have been able to rely solely on a male breadwinner. In fact we have been dealing with a so-called worldwide gender revolution. Delegated care work is an important factor that made this revolution possible. At the same time, delegated child care has become one of the most prominent issues in feminist research (Parreñas 2001, Anderson 2000, Momsen 1999, Lutz 2008, 2011, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Macdonald 2010). In examining the new international division of reproductive labour, scholars have focused on migrant women working in

2 All names were changed.

domestic services in Western countries. They have demonstrated the inequalities between Western working mothers and migrant mother workers based on race/ethnicity, class, and citizenship. In addition, they have elaborated the framework in which domestic work should be understood. This framework relied on the dichotomy between national women (white, middle class, educated) who hire the migrant women (of colour, working class, uneducated). However, what happens when the logic between hiring and being hired is reversed? What if the migrant woman (Vietnamese) hires national woman (Czech) to care for her child?

Vietnamese immigration to the Czech Republic (and to the former Czechoslovakia) has a long history dating back to the state-socialist era, and more than 20 years after the fall of communism the number of newcomers from Vietnam continues to increase (with a small decrease caused by the economic crisis). Today, Vietnamese immigrants are the third largest group in the Czech Republic (altogether 60 000 persons, ČSÚ 2009). At the same time, they are also one of the most intensively-researched groups (Nekorjak – Hofírek 2009, Kocourek 2008, Brouček 2003, Gabal 2007, etc., for Slovakia see Williams – Baláž 2005, 2007). Generally, scholars have focused on the economic motives of migration, inclusion/exclusion in the labour market, ethnic niches and immigrant economies. They have demonstrated that Vietnamese immigrants are very often stall keepers working on their own as entrepreneurs, whose work life outweighs their private life; while they worked eight hours a day in Vietnam, in the Czech Republic some of them spend at least 11 hours at work, including weekends and most national holidays. Incorporation into the public sphere of work is imperative for both men and women, young and old, parents and childless persons. Private family life is minimized, and Vietnamese parents must hire Czech nannies to be with their children while they work, whether to care for them if they are a few months old or to do homework with them when they are older.

This article addresses a lacuna in local research on Vietnamese immigrants in the labour market and in international research that focuses exclusively on migrant domestic/care workers. It brings together these two frameworks and discusses the delegated child care in post-migratory family settlement. Several studies have documented how migratory experience affects family constellations, including gender and generational relations in the host country (Kibria 1993, Foner 1997, Song 1999, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Nazli Kibria, in her study on Vietnamese immigrants in the USA, shows how immigrants live their family lives under the new structural conditions and how their responses to these conditions are affected by the "cultural baggage, or experience and understanding about the

world, that they bring with them to the new society" (Kibria 1993: 22). Ideas about child care and gendered/generational division of reproductive labour are inherent part of this cultural baggage. These ideas may conflict with the gendered normative expectations about child care and family arrangements in the host country, or they may be unrealizable because of the profound changes in family structure. Nancy Foner (1997: 969) describes how "the absence of immigrants' close kin in the new setting creates the need to improvise new arrangements, a reason why 'fictive kin' are common in immigrant communities and why men sometimes find themselves filling in as helpmates to their wives in child care and other household tasks." As I will argue further, the Czech nannies in Vietnamese families are perfect example of such "improvisation of new arrangements".

Inherent in such improvisation is the kinning process accomplished by care giving. The modern anthropological theory of kinship emphasizes the formative role of care in the maintenance and reproduction of kinship/family ties: in defining what a family is, who is included in it, and who is not. Ever since the 1970's, when the definition of kinship was unbiologicized (Schneider 1984), scholarship on the issue has shown that ideas about the family are formed not on the basis of what is given, but what is done. It was especially the contribution of the anthropologists of adoption which illuminated the process of *becoming* relatives. Above all, I am inspired by Signe Howell (2003) who has developed the concept of kinning to describe the way an adopted child is becoming part of adopting parents' kin. More accurately, based on empirical material obtained from a study of transnational adoption in Norway, she defines kinning as "the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom" (Howell 2003: 465). In her view, the kinship is "something that is necessarily achieved in and through relationships with others" (*ibid*: 468).[3] In her article she discusses the practices which lead to both the incorporation of adopted children as the adoptive parents' kin, and their transformation into parents.

Drawing upon existing analytical frameworks, the article addresses the following questions: What is the role of delegated child care in post-migratory family arrangements? What are the consequences of recruiting Czech nannies for the

3 Howell rejects the notion of "fictive" or "artificial" kinship because they seem to privilege biology. Her main conclusion is that the case of adoption – when addressed by the concept of kinning – demonstrate the negation of "the separation between the social and the biological that is encountered elsewhere in society" (*ibid:* 468).

cared-for children's family life and for the Czech nannies' lives? In the following text I put forward the thesis that the post-migratory stresses on family lives lead to the recruitment of nannies, which in turn brings further challenges to the family lives of both nannies and immigrants. I focus on the way that the families in my study find themselves in a double process of negotiations over family ties – first after coming to a new country and unpacking the cultural baggage, and second when a nanny is hired to perform the very intimate task of child care. My analysis starts with the challenges to family ties that are experienced in the post-migratory family settlement. Hiring a nanny plays an important role in post-migratory family re-definition. An important part of this re-definition that will be focused on here is the process of knitting the kinship ties between the child and the nanny. I will address caring – both in the sense of *care for* ("the varied activities of providing for the needs or well-being of another person") and care about ("thought and feeling, including awareness and attentiveness, concern about and feelings of responsibility for meeting another's needs") as acknowledged by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2000: 86–87) – as one of the crucial practice of kinning and as a bonding activity which leads to the constitution of strong kinship ties between the carer and the cared-for. The article aims to contribute to feminist discussions on gender and family relationships after migration, as well as delegated child care, and generally the role of care in the establishment of kinship ties.

Study design

The data for this paper was collected from spring 2010 to autumn 2012 as a part of my broader research on Vietnamese families, children and their nannies. I conducted in-depth interviews with diverse individuals involved in the practice of caregiving in some of the largest Czech cities (Brno, Prague, Opava, Zlín), as well as in the Czech-German and Czech-Austrian border regions, where the concentration of Vietnamese population is traditionally greater. Altogether I conducted more than fifty in-depth interviews with nannies (15), mothers (15), children (20, age of 16–25), and their friends and relatives (7). In her prominent article about the "nanny question in feminism" Joan Tronto emphasizes three differing perspectives through which we can approach the nanny question: the perspectives of the families (mothers), the children, and the nannies (Tronto 2002). My methodological strategy was to cover all three of these perspectives in order to capture the complexity of the entire relationship, as well as the contradictions contained within it.

The *families* I met during the research varied widely, both in their experience of immigration, as well as (to a lesser extent) their current situation (employment and type of residence). The parents arrived between the 1980s (the era of socialist cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Vietnam; see below) and 2005. The status of the parents depends on when they arrived: most of them permanent residence; temporary residence is an exception. None of my informants (or their parents) had Czech citizenship, the reason being that they did not want it, and assumed they would return to Vietnam after the children are grown and are financially secure. In selecting *children* interviewees I took into account two criteria. First was their age, which I limited to 16–25 years in view of the data collection method – in-depth interviews – and the nature of the research, as I was interested in capturing the *long-term* aspect of the entire relationship. The interviews focused on recollections of childhood and a description of their current relationship to the nanny. In doing this I am not working with "children" as an age category, but as a role in the relationship mother-nanny-child. A second criterion was place of birth. My goal was to carry out interviews with children who were born in the Czech Republic (first-generation nationals; a total of 10 of my subjects), as well as with children who came with or to their parents to the CR at the age of 6 or before (when mandatory schooling begins; altogether 10 of my subjects). All of the *nannies* I interviewed shared one basic characteristic: they were dependent on the welfare state. The majority (nine) of the nannies were retirees receiving pension, two were on disability, two more were unemployed, and one was on maternity leave. These characteristics are key to understanding the entire relationship between the Vietnamese families and the Czech nannies.

I used the snowball technique to recruit my informants. All of the interviews were recorded with the agreement of my informants, and transcribed. All names used in this text are changed in order to preserve anonymity. When recruiting the informants, it was necessary to rely on gatekeepers willing not only to recommend me the family/nanny, but also recommend me *to* the family/nanny. This recommendation was very helpful in overcoming the a priori mistrust of my informants. This mistrust originates not only in the fact that care is considered a private matter hidden from the eyes of public (and from researchers), but also in the basic nature of the care arrangement – the fact that caring is accomplished on the irregular labour market. This was the first but not last obstacle I had to deal with when contacting my informants. In searching for Vietnamese parents who pay Czech nannies, I encountered the problem of their intensive labour market

participation. Paradoxically, without doing any interviews I stumbled across one of the main features of their life, and the very reason why they hire Czech nannies. A third obstacle also tells a lot about Vietnamese immigrants' lives: the language barrier. Since I do not speak Vietnamese, I wanted to conduct all the interviews in Czech. However, even though some parents would be willing to talk with me, their poor knowledge of the Czech language (and my zero knowledge of Vietnamese language) made it impossible. Therefore some of the interviews with parents were conducted with an interpreter, and hence were affected by what Bogusia Temple and Rosalind Edwards (2002) call the so-called triple subjectivity; the interaction between three actors: subject, interpreter, and researcher. Paradoxically, all these obstacles in a sense served me as research data that rounded out the information found during the conducted interviews.

My research focused only on Vietnamese families who hire Czech nannies, not on all Vietnamese families. The study thus reveals the patterns of family life in *this* type of family, where the parents are first-generation immigrants, and children are second-generation. My analysis consequently focuses only on care arrangements related to paid child care. During my research, I also interviewed people – children and parents – who had never personally had a nanny. There were various reasons for that: the family could afford to rely on one salary and the mother could remain on maternity and parental leave; the families came to the Czech Republic when the children were older and started attending elementary school; or they simply did not want to have a nanny because for them having a Czech nanny was a threat to their "Vietnameseness".[4] However, these informants and their stories are not included in this article. My sample therefore has the limitations which have an impact on the results of the analysis. This article focuses on a particular group of Vietnamese immigrants that employs a specific model of child care, and this must be kept in mind when reading the research findings presented in the following text.

4 One informant told me: "I didn't want my sister to have a Czech nanny because I do not want her to forget about her roots as most of Vietnamese children who live here do."

Family life contestations and constellations: becoming a family with Czech nanny

The historical specificity of Vietnamese immigration to Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic has shaped the character of the Vietnamese diaspora in CEE (see e. g. Williams – Baláž 2005). Two features of Vietnamese diaspora in the Czech Republic are crucial for this paper. First is the demographic structure of the Vietnamese population. Compared to other groups of immigrants, the demographic structure of Vietnamese immigration is progressive, with a high percentage of women and children. According to the Czech Statistical Office, in 2005 21 % of the Vietnamese population were children 0–14 years old (in the Czech population 15 %). 78 % of population are of productive age (age of 15–64), and only 1 % were people older than 65 years old. Second, the employment structure of the Vietnamese population is characterized by high occupational concentration. As Williams and Baláž (2005) have noted, the greater part of Vietnamese immigrants are entrepreneurs in wholesaling and retailing, i.e. owners of small shops and/or open-air markets. Self-employment is thus the crucial aspect of their work life in the Czech Republic. In 2009 around 88 000 (63 000 men and 25 000 women) foreigners in the Czech Republic held a valid trade licence, of which 36 000 were Vietnamese (25 000 men and 11 000 women). The roots of such occupational concentration can be found in the early 1990s, when obtaining a business license was a way to formalize and legalize residence for immigrants who had come under the former agreements (Brouček 2003, Nekorjak – Hofírek 2009).

Vietnamese immigrants are thus an example of the typical demanders of paid child care: the dual-earner couples. However, it would be misleading to see the creation of dual-earner household as just one of the achievements of migration. In what follows I will demonstrate that the patterns of work life play a crucial role in defining and learning the care ideologies in the country of origin, and that they gain a new importance in the host country.

First step: bringing the cultural baggage

> *"Generally, the Vietnamese are taught that people of productive age must work, and being on maternity leave is not work. Everybody must work, parents, grandparents, and older children and kids have all done it since childhood."* (Ms. Veselá, born Nguyen, interpreter between the Czech and Vietnamese languages and mother seeking paid child care)

I have already noted that all of my parent-interviewees were first generation immigrants, and that half of my children-interviewees were born in Vietnam, half in the Czech Republic. In other words, all of my parent-interviewees were brought up in Vietnam, and some of them had experience with early child care there. At the same time, all of my informants are part of what Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) called a transnational social field. Watching Vietnamese television, calling and chatting with friends and relatives who stayed in Vietnam, remittances sent to the homeland, and home visits and idea of return, all shape their transnational lives. Vietnamese parents consequently have more frames of reference at their disposal (Khayati 2008), and these frames equip them with multiple sources of ideas about what the family is and how care is performed. That is to say, child care is ideologically organized around the model from Vietnam, but it is geographically bounded by the Czech Republic where the care is performed. Therefore, understanding the care arrangements in the host country begins with understanding of the child care ideologies in Vietnam, which are a significant part of the cultural baggage that the Vietnamese immigrants bring from the country of origin.

When talking about the differences between Vietnam and the Czech Republic regarding child care and state support, my informants brought up two issues. These issues shape the child care ideologies that (future) parents pack up and take along with them as an important frame of reference for their future decisions. First was the issue of the "normal caring biographies", above all the question of when the mother returns to labour market. In Vietnam, the total time for paid maternal leave varies from four months (for normal types of employment), through five months (for types of employment involving dangerous environments or difficult shifts, etc. such as policewomen or soldiers) to six months (when a woman is disabled). Women are paid 100 % of their salary during these four months; thereafter employees can request unpaid maternal leave (Nguyen 2012: 7). As my interviewees state, only rich families can afford unpaid maternal leave because two salaries are a necessity, especially in poorer regions.

Second, maternal leave arrangements create the demand for both formal and informal child care facilities. Formal child care is provided in public and private schools and centres – nursery schools (for children aged 3 months – 3 years), kindergarten (3–5 years) and pre-primary schools (5–6 years). Nevertheless, despite this net of institutions, most families with children under 3 rely on informal child care (Nguyen 2012). My question of how the Vietnamese parents would have managed child care if they had stayed in Vietnam was answered by almost all interviewees to the effect that the mother returning to the workplace would be either replaced by the grandmother or by institutional care, or in richer families by private nannies or maids. Grandmothers, therefore, play an important role in nuclear-family life, and in the harmonization of work and family life. This importance was articulated in many interviews – both as memories (how it was when we were in Vietnam) and as imagination (how it would be if we were there or how our relatives do it). For instance Nguyet, a twenty-year-old university student, came to the Czech Republic when she was 4 years old. Before they moved to the Czech Republic, Nguyet's mother went to work immediately after a four-month maternity leave. Four-month-old Nguyet was taken care of by her grandmother, her mother's mother.

To sum up, my informants (as well as parents/employers of my informants) left their country of origin with a set of ideas and experiences of how the child care should be and is performed. But what happens to these ideas when they cross borders and start unpacking their cultural baggage?

Second step: unpacking the cultural baggage with Czech nannies

> *"We are foreigners here and it will be difficult for them [children] to prove they are not worse than others. We want them to have better life than we currently have."* (Ms. Ho, mother of two children)

I was often told by my parent informants that there is only one *real* reason why they recruit nannies: parents have to work. With one salary they cannot survive in the host country, and the woman must return to work (either help her husband in his shop or take care of her own) as soon as possible. On the other hand, the nanny informants shared with me their own opinion about this issue, stating that the mother *could* have stayed at home longer (the father's breadwinning activity covers all family expenses) but *did not want* to. Mothers were often criticized by the nannies, who applied what Uttal and Tuominen (1999)

call "moral hierarchies" – the nannies' judgement about the appropriateness and correctness of their employers' mothering strategies. The sources of these tensions and contradictory points of view on the part of mothers and nannies can be found in the radically different strategies for reconciliation of work and family life. It is the Vietnamese parents who balance between these two strategies, trying to "do their best"; it means accommodating their cultural baggage to the new living conditions in a host country.

The model of dual-earner household created in Vietnam is maintained in the host country as well; however, working life goes through both qualitative and quantitative changes. The qualitative changes in work biographies occur when immigrants shift from their previous professions (whether skilled or unskilled) and become entrepreneurs concentrated in the immigrant economy. In addition, the new occupational position requires quantitative changes in work life and leads to its intensification at the expense of private life. The interviewees experience what Wall and José (2004) called pressures *to* work – as the migration project aims at maximizing the income – and pressures *from* work such as atypical or long hours, along with the pressure not to miss work. Because they had struggled to come to a new country and build their position in a very competitive segment of economy, women were aware of the fragility of their job positions. Six months after giving birth to her daughter, Ms. Pham faced the dilemma whether to hire a shop assistant or a nanny. Her husband had found a place for a new shop where Ms. Pham could sell clothes, and she had to make a very quick decision. So she decided to hire a nanny for her seven-month-old daughter.

In the Czech Republic, only 1–2 % of families choose individual private paid care (Hašková 2008); the model of delegated child care, therefore, is not very common. This may be partly caused by the reintroduction of the traditional familization regime in state family policies (Sirovátka – Saxonberg 2006, Lister et al 2007). Sirovátka and Saxonberg (2006: 186) analyze three key areas that "influence the ability for women and men to balance work and family: child care leave schemes, access to day care, and labour market policies". The first and the second of these are crucial for my interviewees. In the Czech Republic, as well as in other CEE countries, there are two kinds of paid family leave. The first is maternity leave, the benefits of which have not changed during transformation; they are now available for 28 weeks, with a replacement rate of 69 % in the Czech Republic (Sirovátka – Saxonberg 2006). Parental leave is available for a longer period of up to four years, and it is up to the parents (most often the mother) to choose its length and hence the height of the replacement rate, as the amount

of money offered for four years is 220 000 CZK (around 8800 Euro). This means that a parent can draw money from 19 months (at almost 12 000 CZK/480 Euro a month) up to 45 months (at around 5100 CZK/204 Euro). The mothers I interviewed regard parental leave as "too long", and for them inappropriate – both in terms of the big "ideological" discrepancy between the models in Vietnam and the Czech Republic, and in regard to the financial cost of such a long break in their work life. Simply put, even though they agreed that they would *surely* like to stay home with the children longer, a period of four years (the maximum of parental leave) meant for them an unimaginable gap in their working lives.

The explicit re-familization policy, which "promotes separate gender roles for men and women, since few men will be willing to utilize their right to parental leave under these conditions" (*ibid:* 189) is further reflected in the reduction of state aid of nursery schools for children 0–3 years of age. This reduction was accompanied by an attack on the mythologies of collective day care for children under 3. Nursery schools were declared to be a "communist invention" (Hašková – Dudová 2010), and collective care for 0–3 aged children in general was claimed "unhealthy" and/or "unnecessary" (see also Hašková – Saxonberg 2012). The lack of nursery schools is not the only factor that shapes Vietnamese parents' child care decisions. Even in districts where the child care facilities are available, the lack of flexibility creates an important barrier. Generally nursery schools are open till 5 pm, which is not sufficient for the parents who work till 8 or 9 pm. Even if they managed to place the children in nursery school, parents would need a person who would pick them up and stay with them till they come from work. It seems, then, that the current day care arrangements are not convenient for Vietnamese working parents.

State support for a work-family balance which is often policy used in Vietnam, is thus unavailable in the context of the Czech Republic and its family policy. And so is the final option that can be turned to in Vietnam: support of kin, notably grandmothers. I have already noted that the percentage of the immigrant population over age of 65 is only 1 %. It means that only a few families (in whole my sample only 1 family) have their grandparents here. Moreover, if the grandparents are here they are also economically active, so that few of them can take care of their grandchildren. The absence of a network of relatives is mentioned in every interview with parents, and it is spoken of in terms of a lack of economic and emotional support, including the child care.

So far the discussion has focused on the demand for paid child care on the part of Vietnamese immigrants. Now it is important to look into how this demand and the needs of Vietnamese families are met in a particular type of

Czech women. In doing so we must start with a basic description of the relationship, which is that the nanny in the Vietnamese family *supplements* the mother and *supplants* the grandmother (Nelson 1990). This fundamental logic implies the *potential* for further development of kinship ties. This potential, however, is not fulfilled in all families, and not all families or nannies want it to be fulfilled. What are the factors that influence the further direction of the relationship between nanny and family? The first and fundamental pre-condition is the age of the nanny; meaning that the nanny must be a generation older then the child's mother. Second is the age of child at the time the caregiving relationship starts. In July 2011 I visited Ms. Dudková and her partner. At the beginning of the interview I asked all my informants to tell me something about themselves. Ms. Dudková started talking about her job, her hobbies; then she came to the topic of the family:

> *"I have two children. One of them is already 46 years old and the younger is 36 years old. And I had three granddaughters – one is at university, Jana is in seventh grade and Lucka in fourth. But my biggest darling is my little Thuy, the biggest darling. I love all of them but I have had her since she was seven weeks old."*

For Ms. Dudková, Thuy's age at the beginning of caring not only played a fundamental role in establishing the ties between her and the girl, and serves as the significant marker of the differences between her children's children and cared children. However, as became apparent during the interview, besides the age of Thuy, it was day-to-day contact with her and lack of contact with her own children's children that shapes her perception of the relationship with Vietnamese girl. This leads us to a third factor, the nanny's caregiving biography: her relationship with her children and grandchildren, her experience with paid child care, and the meaning of child care in her life. Depicting their daily routine, she talked about the many small things she likes about having the responsibility for a little girl. For instance, every day when Ms. Brhlíková comes to the apartment where Than and her parent live, the little girl greets her and waits for some candies which her nanny brings every day. The nanny describes the scene:

> *"She comes and calls 'granny, granny'. And I cannot help myself, I would give her anything. Well and I have this complex that I do not have my own grandchildren so that I have to come here to snuggle. She is our baby."*

Like Ms. Brhlíková, many women decide to become nannies because they long to be needed, they experienced the absence of grandmothering. Ms. Brhlíková was not mothering any longer nor grandmothering; Ms. Dudková's grandchildren were grown up and did not need her care; while other women were not in regular contact with their grandchildren. Simply put, for various reasons in their caring biographies, there was an empty place that could be filled by a Vietnamese child.

Third step: from nanny to granny

> *"And then he once told me: 'Granny, I know you are not my own granny, but aren't we happy we met?' He completely destroyed me by saying this."* (Ms. Havranová, nanny of a Vietnamese boy)

In this section, I describe the last step in establishing kinship ties. If the first step concerned the pre-migration roots of the child care and the family constellation, and second explained post-migratory child care and family challenges, the third step looks at the re-negotiation of family ties through child care arrangements. Here I address the process of kinning by dealing with those aspects of the nanny-child relationship that both nannies and children in my sample cited as tie-establishing, and where they discussed the roles that are played on the basis of the kin idiom. Despite the diversity of both the children's and nannies' experiences, their accounts of what lies beyond the formation of ties were surprisingly very similar among my interviewees. The nannies and children enumerated many aspects of everyday life, and all of them had a common denominator: intensive physical contact and shared memories. In the following, I will elaborate three kinds of activities which were significant for the children's understanding of the role of granny in their lives and *vice versa*. I classify these into three groups, as such classification is useful for illustrating the distinct ontological nature of these activities in the context of family life and the parent-nanny sharing of child care.

The first set of activities can be labelled as the **"parent-responsibility substitute activities"**. These are activities that a nanny performs because she is the nanny. The nannies in my sample as well as nannies of my children-informants were recruited for very distinct tasks which are done within very distinct timetables for children of very specific ages. Regarding the last factor, on one end of the age continuum are children who started being cared for by nanny when they were a few months old, and on the other children who had her first nanny when they started attending elementary school. Timetables of care, consequently,

varied between 24 hours per day, 7 days a week (when they lived with nannies and their parents came to see them typically for Sunday lunch), through 12 hours per day, 6 days a week, down to 4 hours per day, 5 days a week (in the case of school children who spend time with nannies between the end of school and the end of parents' working hours). It is obvious that these responsibilities vary over the course of time. Sometimes it is the nanny who, literally, teaches the child to go to potty in early childhood, as well as to count and write in early school years. On the other hand, there were nannies whose only responsibility was to get child ready for school (only three in my sample, including one in the sample of nannies); the majority of nannies had almost all the responsibilities related to child care delegated to them. Nurturing, cultural and social capital transmission, decision-making about daily issues, doctors' visits, parent-teacher meetings – all these could be found on the list of nannies' everyday tasks.

From this logic of relationship, it is already apparent that there is a huge quantitative and above all qualitative discrepancy between the time that children spend with their nannies and with their parents. As Minh (a seventeen-year-old boy) concluded, "I spent time for learning with granny and time for sleeping with mum". Mia was the youngest of my interviewees: when we met in 2010, she was sixteen years old. When talking about her grandma, I asked her whether she could imagine her life without her grandma, and what would be different. Without any hesitation she told me: "I think I would have been most of the time alone; the parents had to be at work. And if I was not with granny, I would be simply alone." The intensity of the physical contact between child and nanny and the lack of time spent with parents meant the women went from being mere nannies to becoming the primary care-givers. "My granny taught me everything," was very often echoed in interviews with children who recalled their early childhood. The influence of parents is temporarily overshadowed, and the nanny becomes a solid point in the life of child, the person who is always there for a child to listen, help, and give advice, and with whom a relationship filled with intimacy, trust, and emotion is spontaneously created.

Intensive contact between nanny and child also leads to a transformation in the perceptions of grandmotherhood on the part of nannies who had already experienced "grandmothering" with their children's children. Ms. Dudková contrasted the experiences in terms of intensity of contact, stating that "while their children wanted to be with their children when they came home, Thuy [the Vietnamese girl] was with us all time – days, nights, when she was ill, always". As Ms. Orlová, the nanny of two Vietnamese children (14 years old girl and

12 years old boy), reflects on her experience with caring for their Vietnamese grandchildren:

> *"I would say that I feel more like a granny with them because I could not be with my own grandchildren when they were small (...) I was not here the whole day, I was working in the city and they were here. When I came home from work, I went to them, of course, but I was not in daylong touch."*

Ms. Orlová's account suggests that while for their children's children they are so called "Sunday/holiday grannies", for Vietnamese children, they are "full-time grannies". The process establishing kinship ties dialectical, and enrols all actors in the process of re-thinking their understanding of what kinship is. As has become evident, the cornerstone on which these ties are built is everyday physical contact and the performance of the little daily interactions within the space of intimacy, mutual responsibility, and reciprocity where the codex of the family relationship is the main rule.

"Family ritual activities" is the second umbrella category in which I placed the activities which my informants saw as separate from everyday life, and which had special meaning for them and for their family. Generally, there are two kinds of activities which I have labelled as "ritual". First are what I call "liminal moments" in the life of a cared-for child in which the nanny participates: events such as enrolment in kindergarten/primary school, or the first day at school. For instance, Hanh and Bui recalled their first day at school, where they went with mother, father, and nanny. Hanh related how nice it was to be on such an important day with both her parents and her nanny. Bui added that her parents wanted her nanny to go with them not only because they were afraid that they would not understand the teacher, but also as a gesture signifying their gratitude and the confirmation of the importance of her role in the family. This logic also works in the opposite direction – that is, the child (and her/his family) is present at the important, liminal moments of nanny's life. For example, Michal told me that when the partner of his nanny, Ms. Orlová, passed away and they went to his funeral, they stood together with Ms. Orlová's family and received condolences together.

Secondly, there are festive days in the course of the year or in one's life, such as Christmas and birthday celebrations, or school performances for parents and relatives. These are perfect examples of the "family building" activities that strengthen the sense of familial belonging and emotional ties.

Bui (a twenty-years-old girl) who lived in a border area densely inhabited by Vietnamese immigrants, told me it was common for school performances to be attended by three people for each Vietnamese child: mother, father, and nanny. She also remembers that while the parents alternated in the audience (one year there was the father, another year mother), her nanny was there *every time*. During the interviews, the presence of the nanny at these events was mentioned as an important characteristic of an event itself. For instance, Mia told me that she cannot imagine spending Christmas without her nanny:

> MIA: *We are always with them on Christmas and have carp and potato salad [a typical Czech Christmas meal].*
> ADÉLA: *So right on Christmas Eve?*
> MIA: *Yes.*
> ADÉLA: *So there are many of you there…*
> MIA: *Grandmother, our family, this is five people, and then her daughter with husband and two kids. Ten people together. Besides they take the dogs…*
> ADÉLA: *It must be awesome, with a big tree. And so it is since childhood?*
> MIA: *Since childhood, we spent Christmas there with my granny. To be honest, I cannot imagine the Christmas atmosphere at home because in Vietnam Christmas is not celebrated much, so…*

Only a few children in my sample (used to) spend Christmas with their nannies, however, all of them exchanged gifts with them. Gift-giving (not only for Christmas or birthday but also small gifts like candies, ice-cream, or toys from nannies or special Vietnamese food for nannies during the year) played an essential role in dealing with the contradictory status of child care which is paid[5] but at the same time generates such strong ties. All of my children-interviewees strongly emphasised that "nanny does not do it for money", while nannies accentuated that "you cannot do it for the money" referring to both to the size of salary and to the emotional requirements of the "job". Consequently, in the interviews gift-giving was mentioned by all interested actors (and especially by the nannies and children) as a proof that the relationship between them is more than just utilitarian and based upon the market rules of employment. It has a symbolic

5 In 2012, the average salary in the Czech Republic was little bit more than 24 000 CZK (960 Euro). Minimum wage during the same period was 8 000 CZK (320 Euro) per month. The average wage of the nannies in my sample was 7000 CZK (280 Euro), while the most frequent amount was 6000 CZK (240 Euro) per month.

power to transcend the employer-employee relationship and highlight the altruism and emotionality (when Ms. Brhlíková gives little Than candies, while commenting "I would give her anything", see above) between nanny and child/family.

Third were what I call **"exclusive (Czech) granny activities"**, meaning the set of activities in the children narratives coded as the activities they can only do with their Czech grannies. In other words, unlike the first group where the activities are done by the nanny *instead of* the parents, and second unit where they are performed *with* parents, the children marked some activities as "granny only" and hence done *without* parents. There are two sources of this "exclusivity", the first springing from the nanny's ethnic background (exclusive *Czech* granny activities), and second being activities that are "normally done" in the Czech Republic with grannies (and which because of the physical distance the children cannot do with the mother's mother or father's mother; that is, exclusively *granny* activities). The first example provides children with what we can call "window to the majority" (drawing upon Rollins' "window to exotica"; Rollins 1985). The nanny as a mediator of the "Czech culture" offers and teaches children the Czech habits and traditions (they mentioned above all Advent, Easter, but also events like pig-slaughtering). The children in my sample put a huge accent on this role of nanny, as their direct and personal contact with the Czech environment was interpreted as one of the most important aspects of their childhood which allowed them to "learn to adapt". Many of them concluded that they would surely *know* about Czech culture and traditions from school and from friends, but thanks to their nannies they could *live* these traditions.

A typical example of the latter type here is holiday at granny's, which has a special status in the children's narratives. Tuyet explained that when she was little, parents let her go to her nanny for holiday as a reward for doing well at school. She, as well as other children, reported how the granny always gave them a lot of food for them to bring home ("she packed the a lot of food, as the grannies do it"), how she prepared meals they love especially for them, etc. Many children spent holiday at nanny's together with nanny's grandchildren and other members of her family, with whom the ties of friendship were knitted. The children connected holidays with many summer activities that came into their mind when the word "granny" was said. For instance, Mia reported:

> *"The granny has a garden and with beds so we watered it. They had strawberries and raspberries, currants, tomatoes. So we made fruit syrup each summer. Or the granny made cakes so we helped her."*

Besides the list of particular activities the children were ready to enumerate, there was also another – seemingly even more important – aspect in the nanny-child relationship: the symbolic need to have a granny. As Minh put it: "It is, you know, that you just can say 'I have a granny', just the word."

Concluding remarks

"Migration uproots, and replanting takes time," wrote Charles Tilly and C. Harold Brown in 1967 (Tilly – Brown 1967: 139). After coming to the Czech Republic and starting the families here, Vietnamese parents deal with how to replant their child care and family ideologies in the new context. While being part of a transnational social field enables them keeping in touch with mothering strategies in Vietnam (through their relatives or friends, by following the situation there, etc.), living in the Czech Republic throws them into a different setting where different *"normal" caring biographies* are supported. The changes in family structure after migration (uprooting from the extensive kinship networks that the care can be delegated to) lead families to find a "substitute" grandmother for their children, and to the development of kinship ties with her and her family.

I have argued that when recruiting a Czech nanny, the Vietnamese family simulates the familiar family/child care arrangements intimately known from Vietnam. Simply put, hiring a nanny *fulfils the ideal of relatives in family life*. I am brought to this conclusion by the following two findings: First, in regard to the "unpacking of cultural baggage" (i.e. ideas about the family and child care), we can observe how Vietnamese migrants in the CR "simply do what they would do at home in Vietnam". The formation of the dual-earner household is not caused by the migration project, nor is delegating child rearing to a third person – both of these customs are established long before migration. Finding a Czech nanny is thus a simulation of the existing family model, adapted to the post-migration reality. In other words, the game does not change (in both the pre-migration and post-migration context with these families, the mother and father both work, and the children are looked after by someone else). Under the new rules (life in the new country) only the players are changed (instead of a grandma, the nanny comes in). Secondly, the relationship that arises between the family (mainly the children) and the nanny is such that the nanny replaces the Vietnamese grandma not only in looking after the kids, but can become their "real grandmother".

Analysis of the interviews conducted with Czech nannies and the Vietnamese children they looked after indicates the decisive role of *care* in the formation of

kinship ties. Hence, I analysed caring as an essential part of the kinning process (Howell 2003), arguing that intensive daily caregiving lays the groundwork for the knitting of kinship relations between nannies (grandmothers) and children (grandchildren). For many children of Vietnamese parents, the Czech grandma has become the main anchor in the new society, the main caregiver and teacher, and simply the person who is called "grandma" with whom it is possible to experience "typical grandma things" that cannot be experienced with their birth grandparents due to the separation of distance. The testimonies of interviewees suggest that there is a thick line between a Czech grandmothers who daily care for and about the children, and Vietnamese grandmothers who have never cared for them, and their capacity to care about them was limited because of physical distance. Although the children admitted that their grandmothers in Vietnam surely love them and care about them at a distance (by being interested in their lives and supporting their success, etc.), it was their Czech grannies who have daily cared for them and with whom they have the shared memories: from small events such as preparing food, to special events like Christmas or school performances. In many cases, the shared memories counterweighted or even overrode the role of blood and common origin in their conception of kinship ties and belonging to a kinship trajectory.

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