

**Perceptions on collective national identities: Reflections on the Unity  
of Vietnam in 2016**

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## *Abstract*

The past of Vietnam is full of conflict and colonialism. Before the reunification that took place in 1975-1976 the country was divided in two parts. The reunification meant a drastic change especially to the South that had been for long time under the influence of France and then the United States. Having the turbulent history of the country in the background, this thesis attempts to develop an understanding on the current state of unity of the society through analytical lens of collective national identity. This lens is used for analysis of eleven interviews of young Vietnamese adults in the city of Da Nang. There are six main claims made regarding the unity of the society in Vietnam. First claim is that the Communist Party of Vietnam appears to have a strong authority over the definition of Vietnamese national identity. Second claim is that there are great differences in the internalizations of Vietnamese national identity between people. Thirdly, the claim is that collective goals of territorial preservation and economic growth are two significant unifying factors in the society of Vietnam. Fourthly, another important unifying factor in the Vietnamese national identity is them being proud of their past. Fifthly, there appears to be slow transformation happening in the society of Vietnam. Finally, differences in Southern and Northern Vietnamese national identities seem to exist to some extent but that does not bear any significance in the context of unity in Vietnam. There are other elements that make greater divisions in the society.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The past of Vietnam is of conflict and colonialism, the country has undergone multiple wars and foreign invasions. Before the last reunification that took place in 1975-1976 the country was divided in two parts, to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and to the Republic of Vietnam in the south. The reunification meant a drastic change especially to the South that had been for long time under the influence of France and then the United States and which now became part of the communist Vietnam. Having these turbulent historical events in the background, this thesis attempts to develop an understanding on the current state of unity of the Vietnamese society through analytical lens of collective national identity. This lens is used for analysis of generated data that has been produced from eleven interviews of young Vietnamese adults perceptions on their national identity in the city of Da Nang. In the conclusion, there are six main claims regarding the unity of the society in Vietnam.

First claim is that the Communist Party of Vietnam appears to have a strong authority over the definition of Vietnamese national identity. Second claim is that there are great differences in the internalizations of Vietnamese national identity between people. Thirdly, the claim is that collective goals of territorial preservation and economic growth are two significant unifying factors in the society of Vietnam. Fourthly, another important unifying factor in the Vietnamese national identity is them being proud of their past. Fifthly, there appears to be slow transformation happening in the society of Vietnam. Finally, differences in Southern and Northern Vietnamese national identities seem to exist to some extent but that does not bear any significance in the context of unity in Vietnam. There are other elements that make greater divisions in the society.

## A RESEARCH OUTLINE

**How do content and contestation derived from Vietnamese young adult perceptions on Vietnamese national identities reflect the state of unity in the society in 2016?**

This research aims to explore the state of the unity of the country in 2016 through Vietnamese people's perception on their collective national identities. In other words, the research looks at the content and contestation in the narratives on Vietnamese national identity. One point of interest is in

the way people still might show categorisation in Northern and Southern people in their narrative.

However, the incoherencies in collective identities do not necessarily need to be only about the past division of the country and the reunification that followed. In the course of the past four decades the importance of the war and the past in general has been fading. The country has opened up to the outside world in the aftermath of *Doi Moi*, the economic reform introduced in the midst of severe economic hardship in the middle of 80s. Vietnam has become part of globalised world and its economic growth has been amongst the fastest since 1990 (World Bank 2016). Still, the Communist Party of Vietnam has kept its grip on the governance of the country. This kind of special blend of ideology has brought up new nuances in the structures of the Vietnamese society.

This thesis has two main objectives. Firstly, it attempts to test the definitions on collective national identities that are being discussed in the second chapter on the theoretical framework. The nature of the concept is such that the literature is full of debates on its content and applicability. The stance in this debate taken in this thesis is somewhat contra-essentialist, where social world is “imagined” and socially constructed. In order to be able to make the empirical analysis, some categorizations have been used. This means that the research is in the middle of the epistemological debate.

Secondly, the objective of this paper is to provide interpretation on a social phenomena in Vietnam in 2016. Through analytical lens of collective national identity, the structures of Vietnamese nation and its unity are being evaluated. There is literature on Vietnamese nationalism and Vietnamese national identity, but a constructivist approach that has been taken in this thesis is something new that this research aims to produce. Perhaps national identity as such is not something that we should be looking at. In case of Vietnam it would be natural to look at categorization to Northern and Southern identities, but perhaps we should not even focus on the possibility of multiple national identities. The result of this research shows that simple categorizations to Southern and Northern Vietnamese sub-national identities is not enough if we want to look at significant factors on the unity of the society.

The analytical frame of this research is perception on collective national identity. This research attempts to analyse the unity of the society of Vietnam through perceptions on collective national identity. The components of the collective national identity that can be empirically researched are content and contestation . By content in this thesis I mean norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models, which is something that has been drawn from the definition of Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott (2006:696). Norms are the kind of formal and informal

rules that define membership in the group, in this case they are the rules that define membership in Vietnamese collective national identity. Social purposes are the collective goals that the members of the collective identity share. By this I mean the collective goals that Vietnamese share. Relational comparisons refer to the process of differentiating the collective identity from others, in other words it means the process of drawing borders. In this research the interest is in both intra-national and inter-national comparisons. Finally, cognitive models refer to worldviews and interests that are shaped by collective identity. In a way by cognitive model is like an analytical lens people use to make sense not only of political and social world, but of themselves.

By contestation I mean the social process of determining the content of a collective identity within the group. However, instead of only looking at the actual contestation process within the in-group, the agencies behind the contestation processes have been discussed. In these two ways contestation has been an important analytical concept in order to draw conclusions on possible incoherencies in the Vietnamese national identities.

Finally, as a last note of this part of the thesis I need to mention that since this research is based on subjective perceptions, the ideas of the norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models, are subjective experiences of the people who have been interviewed. However gained data has been used to describe “intersubjective” collective identities, to give collective meanings to Vietnamese national identities. I agree with the argument of Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott that it is the practices of individuals that are the most simple to analyse with the methods of social science. ( 2006:701). However, this research does not aim to produce accurate and detailed definitions of Vietnamese national identities. Rather, it attempts to present some of the coherences and incoherencies of the collective identities, which then can lead to a discussion on the unity of Vietnamese society.

The matters of content and contestation of Vietnamese national identity have been analysed by using interviews of young Vietnamese adults. In order to gain relevant data through the interviews, the concept of collective national identity has been broken into its components which then have been used to form sub-questions. These sub-questions have been utilized to formulate set of interview questions. The first question is on the first component of the content of collective identity, constitutive norms: What kind of formal and informal rules regarding to collective national identity do young Vietnamese adults unintentionally or intentionally describe? How does the outcome reflect the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? To answer this question I have formulated questions on the requirements the Vietnamese people experience in the context of being



Vietnamese. These requirements include required behaviour, for example patriotic practices, and expected characteristics.

Second sub-question refers to the second component of the content of collective identity. It is about social purposes, or collective goals: What kind of collective goals regarding to being Vietnamese do young Vietnamese adults unintentionally or intentionally describe? How do these goals reflect the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? To answer this question I have constructed questions on collective goals and future. What do the participants feel that are the goals that Vietnamese are aiming for. I also asked about the opinions of the participants on the origin of these goals, whether they thought that certain social purposes were collective in sense that they were goals of the public, or whether they were more the goals of the government.

The third sub-question refers to the third element of the content of collective identity: In what ways do young Vietnamese adults unintentionally or intentionally describe relational comparisons between in-group and out-group in the context of collective national identity? How does it reflect the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? To answer this question I have formulated questions on Vietnam's relations with other countries, especially China and the US. I have also asked about their feelings towards these countries and their population.

The fourth sub-question is related to cognitive models in the context of collective identity: What kind of worldviews and interests shaped by collective national identity do young Vietnamese adults unintentionally or intentionally describe? How does that reflect the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? In order to answer this question I have made interview questions on nationalism. I have also asked the interviewees to describe Vietnamese.

Fifth and the last sub-question that is directly related to the analytical frame of collective identity as defined in the theoretical part of this thesis is contestation: In what ways do young Vietnamese adults describe unintentionally or intentionally the process of contestation in the context of collective national identity? How does that reflect the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? To answer this question I have asked the participants to talk about identity construction.

Then there are two questions that needs to be asked even if they are not part of the analytical frame. Firstly: How strongly does the interviewed identify with the collective national identity they have described? This is not a sub-question per se, but it is an important question to ask nevertheless. I have asked the interviewees about their attachment to Vietnamese national identity. Also, I have

asked if they feel like they fit in the group they have described.

Secondly, I think it is important to ask: In what ways can unity of society in Vietnam be reflected? This is a difficult question which could have multiple ways to find an answer. Through analytical frame of collective national identity this research attempts to find out whether there is sense of one national identity in Vietnam, or perhaps multiple national identities, or maybe the perceptions on national identities are too fluid and fragmented. Also, in the analysis part of this thesis I will aim to discuss whether the results to the question of collective national identity/identities in Vietnam manage to tell anything significant about the unity of the society.

## **B RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is a qualitative research. In a lot of countries “national identity” may not be a sensitive topic for a research. However, in Vietnam it proved sometimes to be a sensitive, deeply rooted and complex topic. Numerous people were interested in the possibility to reflect their perceptions on their national identities through participating in the research. Nonetheless there were also people who either did not want to take part in the formal interview after having told their opinions in informal conversation and people who did not seem to be able to think and speak freely when being interviewed. In my opinion this is already an indication that qualitative type of research would work better than a quantitative approach, if the goal is to obtain as much sensitive information and subtle nuances in the narratives as possible. Also, quantitative research would have required more essentialist approach to the topic and again the complex and fine details of the narratives would have been lost. For the same reason I chose to use interviews as main source of data collection. According to Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott “interviews have the obvious advantage of allowing researchers to ask specific questions about identity. These techniques allow interested researchers to directly address questions of content and contestation.” (2006:703)

That way I could produce generated data which was then analysed in this thesis. According to Ritchie and Lewis “if people are unlikely to be willing to talk frankly about something, or if it is so bound up with social rules and expectations that they cannot be expected to give a truthful account, then naturally occurring data will be more useful” (2013:57). However in this research the aim has not been to find the “truth”, since the concept of truth is outside of the scope of the chosen epistemological approach. Also, self-categorization has been considered as the most basic element

of collective identity (Ashmore et al. 2004:84). Obtaining generated data by interviews works well for gaining narratives of self-categorization.

There were 11 interviews conducted in total. Acquiring larger amounts of interview data could have been possible if there were resources and time for that, but due to the nature of the research this was not necessary. I have asked the interviewees describe Vietnamese national identities. Even if the sample would have been significant, the lists of characteristics obtained would not have been able to give a description of Vietnamese national identity/identities. Robert Jervis argues that identities are “stereotypes in being over-generalizations” (2010:23). We can analyse the characteristics but we cannot state what national identity is or is not. The aim of this thesis is not to define different collective national identities in Vietnam, which would have required a lot wider data base, but to explore a corner of the current state of narrative on Vietnamese national identities and then analyse its significance. The small number of interviews already revealed variety of narratives on Vietnamese national identities, which could be used in the analysis on coherences and incoherencies of the collective identities in Vietnam.

The interviews were conducted during May and June 2016 in Da Nang, Vietnam. The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth. The target group of these interviews were Vietnamese young adults that have got good or excellent command of English. The language requirement was necessary since I do not speak Vietnamese and did not want to use translator due to the nature of the research. The age range of the interviewed people varies between 23 and 31 years old. There were 7 females and 4 males in the sample.

A little bit other primary data has been used, such as several Facebook posts, but the main source of analysis are the interviews. Other data is used to support the analysis of the interviews. If the focus of the research was different, there would have been certainly a lot of government produced data on Vietnamese identity and nationalism available. However, this is not the main interest of this research and only some such data has been used again to support the analysis of the data generated by the interviews.

In order to conduct this research I moved to Da Nang, the third largest and fastest growing town in Vietnam which is located in the northern part of former South Vietnam. I lived in Da Nang for two and half months in which time I established contacts with young Vietnamese adults. I had interesting conversations with some older citizens as well, but it became soon clear that they did not want to be interviewed. They did not specify the reasons why they refused the interview. I have to clarify that I only asked four middle aged or above Vietnamese to participate in the research, so I

cannot make generalization that people above certain age in Vietnam do not want to be interviewed about their perceptions on Vietnamese identity. One person of younger age also refused to take part when asked.

Nevertheless, I decided to focus on the younger generations who seemed to be more open to discuss about their perceptions. I used non-probability snowball sampling to choose the interviewees. Often at least two or three of the interviewed knew each other and that is how I was introduced to them. Three times it was the owner of a homestay or hostel who was a link to the interviewees.

After having established contacts with people I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviewees were free to talk about anything they liked, but I asked them about attributes, attitudes and attachment in the context of collective national identities. I also asked their opinions on identity construction and their view on government's involvement. In the beginning of each interview I highlighted that the information I would gain by the interviews would be treated with confidentiality and would only be used for the thesis. It was also stated that the interviewee could decide not to answer a question/questions if they either did not know what to say or found the question uncomfortable. There were several occasions where interviewees did not reply certain questions. I did not ask them to clarify the reasons behind that. In few occasions I could see that the interviewee struggled to comprehend the questions. That was perhaps because of their insufficient level of English or their unfamiliarity to answer abstract questions. The questions were also somewhat unclear. The latter may relate to my limited capability to formulate questions but it is also an issue that is linked to the fundamental debate between positivist and interpretative epistemological stances which I will discuss further in the theoretical framework part of this thesis.

I both recorded the interviews and took notes in order to preserve as much information as possible for the analysis. None of the interviewees refused to be recorded when they were being asked permission for the recording. I used topic guide to give some structure to the interview, which also made the handling and coding of the data easier. Space for further discussion was also left, which in most of the 11 cases resulted in similar type of talk which was not directly related to the question, but nevertheless was very interesting result. This I will discuss in some detail later on in the end of the analysis part of this thesis.

There were few challenges doing this research. Most obvious one is a practical one. Since I do not speak Vietnamese I could only talk to small portion of the population. In general in Da Nang it is still relatively rare for people to be able to speak fluent English. The situation is changing and new English schools are constantly opening around the city. Several of them are for children that have

disadvantaged backgrounds and are based on voluntary work of the teachers but majority of them are businesses and aimed for the wealthy.

The people that were interviewed for the research are all from middle class background and have got higher education. They had good jobs or were well supported financially by their parents. All of them are also from Kinh ethnic group which is the largest group of the 54 groups in Vietnam, accounting for around 86% of the population of the country (IWGIA 2016). Including only Kinh people in the sample was not intentional, but since they are the majority, better educated and wealthier than the ethnic minorities (Oxfam Policy Brief 2013:9), it was quite likely only have them as interviewees. Nevertheless, this is an important point which I had to take in account. Instead of speaking about Vietnamese national identities I could be talking about Kinh national identities. However, due to the epistemological stance of this thesis, emphasizing ethnic groups would not be purposive. Therefore I have only acknowledged the information but have not refined the frame.

Another point that I had to take in account when collecting data is whether matching interviewer and participant characteristics was possible, as that may have impact on the results (Ritchie et al. 2013:65). In the case of educational and social backgrounds, the participants and I would more or less match. However, I am aware that the fact that I am from a Western country might have an impact on the results of the interviews too. The people that I interviewed may have felt that they could talk more freely to a person who is not a member of their community. My opinion is that this was actually the case. For example all of the interviewees spoke about their stance on their government without me asking about it, even if few of them were careful with their words and other few did not have anything negative to say about their government. Some of them were talking about how people in the communities do not talk about this kind of topics, which in my mind supports the idea that they felt more free with an outsider.

Also, by deciding to base my research on Vietnamese national identity on interviews of Vietnamese I am assuming that people are able to describe something that they are part of. Something that I had to bear in mind during my interviewing process and when analysing the data is that certain aspects of Vietnamese identity might be internalized by an interviewee in a way that makes it hard for them to even recognize that they are acting upon certain norms coming from “Vietnamese identity”. Norms may affect behaviour in different ways, they can make choices biased, reduce choices or make actions unconscious when the norms have been internalized. (Abdelal et al. 2006:697)

In similar way person's description of their perception of collective Vietnamese identity is impacted by the identity itself. That is why it was very important to try to gain some level of understanding of

the bigger picture. For example it was important to ask the interviewees about their background in the beginning of each interview. The ethnicity, gender, education, occupation and age of the participants were being asked. Also there were questions about the family background of the interviewees, especially about the social status of the family and about their links to the communist party. Everyone was from middle class or upper middle class. Only 1 out of the 11 interviewees did not have any one in the family as a member of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The rest informed that either their parent(s) or grandparent(s) were party member. Interestingly only one of the respondents was interested in becoming a member themselves. They told that membership was not appealing for them since having a good life in Vietnam did not require being CPV member any more. In their eyes there were a lot of other routes to success, such as working in the private sector. 6 of the participants were working in an occupation that was directly or indirectly linked to tourism.

In addition the interviewees were asked to tell whether they had studied or lived abroad, 4 of the 11 had studied abroad and one was going to study abroad. 2 of them had ambitions to possibly move abroad in the future. Finally, they were being asked to tell which part of Vietnam their family came from. 5 of the participants had their family roots in the North, 1 of them had their mother's side from the South and father's side from the North, 4 of them was from Da Nang/Central region and 1 of them was from the South. This shows how Da Nang has become a place that attracts people from different locations in Vietnam.

## **C CHAPTER OUTLINE**

In the first chapter I will define the analytical frame of this thesis which is based on the concept of collective national identity. In the beginning of this chapter the reason of choosing collective identity is explained. The claim is made that this concept has its advantages when one wants to understand the state of unity in a society. Also, the reason of choosing collective identity instead of using another related concept of social identity is described. The next and relatively large part of this chapter takes part in the epistemological debate on the nature of the concept, which is also very prominent in the literature. This is important especially because the outcome or stance on this debate defines also the conceptualization process of collective identity. The conclusion is that in this thesis the stance is interpretative perspective on subjective social world.

The next part in this chapter is where the collective identity has been broken down to its components, which then later are used as analytical lenses for answering the research question.

Collective identity has two variables, content and contestation. These are then defined. Content of collective identity is divided in four different forms: constitutive norms, social purposes, cognitive models and relational comparisons. These are briefly discussed. After the conceptualization of the content of collective identity, there is definition of contestation.

Third part of this chapter on theoretical framework introduces the concept of national identity. After all this research is not about any collective identity, but collective national identity. The nature and definition of national identity are being discussed. After that there is brief introduction to the related concepts that are relevant for this thesis. I discuss what is meant by nation, nationalism and national unity. This is the end of the theoretical part of this thesis.

Second chapter begins with brief overlook at the literature on Vietnamese identity. The base on this are academic articles and books written on the topic. They will bring up some themes that are later echoed in the analysis of the interview data. This will serve as background to the main part of this thesis which is the analysis of the Vietnamese national identity.

The second part of the second chapter of this thesis is where the lens of collective national identity is being used in order to understand the current state of unity in Vietnam. This is done by analysing of eleven interviews of young Vietnamese adults who were located in Da Nang in May 2016. Few other sources are used for this analysis, the most important being several Facebook posts by a Vietnamese activist. The chapter is divided in three parts.

The first of these parts is again divided in four parts. In these four parts the four components of collective identity are used in order to find out different aspects of Vietnamese national identity. The interview data is being analysed through constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models. The second part is analysis of contestation. In the last part there will be discussion whether we should talk about one or multiple national identities when we take into account the historical context of South and North Vietnam. In that part also other possible ways to divide collective identities are discussed.

Finally, there is a chapter where all the different parts are drawn together for conclusions. This is where the state of unity of the Vietnamese society is being discussed.

## 2 COLLECTIVE NATIONAL IDENTITY AS ANALYTICAL FRAME

### A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

This research is essentially focused on exploring the unity of a society. This happens in the context where a country has been previously divided in two parts. Reunification has however taken place relatively long time ago. Nevertheless, one interest of this research is to find out whether the differences in the possible separate national identities have persisted and whether present day differences have any significance to people's lives now and in the future. This however only one focus point of this research since fragmentation or disunity of society may take place for other than historical reasons. One way to analyse the state of unity of a society is to look at collective identities and the way people identify themselves within certain groups.

Instead of the concept collective identity I could use the concept of social identity. However social identity is often associated with Social Identity Theory. This theory is interested in explaining the construction of social movement. Therefore collective action would gain emphasis on this thesis, which is not however the intention. Possibility for social movements is something that this analysis does not try to explain. Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe write in their article on collective identity: "collective identity often implies some sense of political consciousness and collective action." But the difference to SIT is that they see these features as "possible rather than essential elements of collective identity" (Ashmore et al. 2004:81). That is why the concept of collective identity has been used. Nevertheless, I will take the in-group out-group relations, which is the core element of SIT, into account when I discuss the content of the collective identity in the analysis part of this research.

There are multiple definitions for the concepts of collective identity in the literature (Ashmore et al. 2004:80; Abdelal et al. 2006:695; Brewer 2001:115; Peters 2002:9) which causes challenges for its conceptualization also for this thesis. According to Marilyn B. Brewer the problem is that the concept is embedded in different theoretical structures and literatures that do not have much mutual influence (Brewer 2001:115). Behind this are the different disciplinary origins that then are reflected in the conceptualization (Brewer 2001:116).

I begin to disentangle the concept by a seemingly simple definition provided by Ashmore, Deaux



and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) that still includes one fundamental question that needs clarification. They write that “collective identification is first and foremost a statement about categorical membership. A collective identity is one that is shared with a group of others who have (or are believed to have) some characteristic(s) in common.” (2004:81) The challenging nature of the concept is present in the second part of the definition: whether the group members *have* or *are believed to have* same characteristics. This refers to epistemological debate, to the question of nature of knowledge. Brubaker and Cooper write about the same question that the sameness between group or category members may be understood *objectively* or *subjectively* (2000:7). From these definitions I concentrate on the common characteristics that the group members, *believe* to have, characteristics that they subjectively perceive having. This is instead of taking positivist approach that for example Emile Durkheim represents by acknowledging identity as a social fact. There are several reasons for my choice.

The choice to focus on the subjectivity of collective identity reflects my epistemological stance on the debate between positivist and interpretive approaches to the concept of collective identity. The interest of this research is interpretation of fluid social structures of a society as “identity is a social construct that is constituted within the realm of ongoing social interaction.” (Pozarlik 2013:80) Stuart Hall describes identity as “something formed through unconscious processes over time, rather than being innate in consciousness at birth” (1996:608).

Brubaker and Cooper write that identity is implicated in everyday “identity talk” by people to “make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others”, as well as in “identity politics” where it is used by political elites to “persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in a certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) “identical” with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines.” (2000:4-5)

According to Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov subjectivist approach defines for example nationhood “not in terms of objective commonalities but in terms of participants' beliefs, perceptions, understandings, and identifications”. (2004:31) This is the kind of constructivist stance that is being applied in this research. Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov use concept of cognitive perspective to describe a way to avoid objectivist groupism while still keeping groups as object and field of study.

When looking from this kind of perspective it is natural not to claim that something “is” but rather is “believed to be”. In the case of collective national identity the distinction is perhaps easier to

make than if the interest of this research was in other type of collective identity. For example collective identity based on “ascribed characteristics” such as gender or ethnicity may seem less “imagined” than national identity. However, this does not mean that collective national identity would be less real or that it would not bear importance.

Identification with a collective identity implies a belief in categorical membership, but also connotes “a set of cognitive beliefs associated with that category, such as stereotypic traits thought to be shared by category members or ideological positions that define the group's goals.” (Ashmore et al. 2004:82) It includes “value and emotional significance” (Tajfel 1981:255 in Ashmore et al.2004:82) which tells about the commitment people feel towards the group and other members of the group and about the value people give to the membership and about how the value given by other members is perceived. Finally collective identification reflects in the way people behave. (Ashmore et al. 2004:82) In this research the focus is on national identity, but as Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe mention in their article, an identity does “not exist in isolation from” other identities. (2004:84) Similarly according to Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott “processes of social contestation” do not “occur in vacuum” but that other actors can influence their direction or even their outcomes. (2006:700) Also, concept of identity is “context-dependent and dynamic” (De Cillia et al. 1999:3).

## **B CONTENT AND CONTESTATION**

Collective identity can be defined as a social category that has two variables, content and contestation. Content outlines the meaning of a collective identity and contestation describes the level of agreement over the content of the collective identity by the group members. (Abdelal et al. 2006:696) Content of a collective identity may consist constitutive norms, social purposes, cognitive models and relational comparisons. (Abdelal et al. 2006:696)

The authors of “Identity as a Variable” (2006) describe **norms** as “formal and informal rules that define group membership”. These constitutive norms identify the appropriate way of behaviour for the particular identity. Also they result others to recognize a member of a particular collective identity. They do not determine the preferences of a group but draw the boundaries. The authors continue about the ways processes of internalization and habituation may be manifested:

First, norms may bias choice, meaning that certain behaviours are consciously ruled out or

discounted as inappropriate for one's identity. The commonly used phrase, “logic of appropriateness” might best describe this level of internalization. Second, norms may reduce the level of consciousness in choice. Semi-conscious choice would mean options are barely considered, or only fleetingly considered, and are dismissed out of hand. “Common sensible” choice might capture this form of internalization. Third, norms may be so deeply internalized that they are acted upon completely unconsciously, out of habit. (Abdelal et al. 2006:697)

**Social purposes** refer to the collective goals of a group. They are the possible purposive content of collective identity. Drawing from Goldstein and Keohane the authors of “Identity as a Variable” argue that “[t]his purposive content is analytically similar to the common sense notion that what groups want depends on who they think they are. Thus, identities can lead actors to endow practices with group purposes and to interpret the world through lenses defined in part by those purposes.” (Abdelal et al. 2006:689) Social purposes is the content of collective identity that makes it easier to determine the goals and preferences of a group. Like norms, social purposes may also give requirements to the group members, but in a different form. “[C]onstitutive norms impose an obligation to engage in practices that reconstitute the group, while social purposes create obligations to engage in practices that make the group's achievement of a set of goals more likely.” (Abdelal et al. 2006: 698)

**Relational comparisons** refer to drawing the borders of a group by comparing it to other identity groups, to defining it by what it is not. Political philosopher Seyla Benhabib writes that “since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference.” (Benhabib 1996:3 in De Cillia et al. 1999:2) This shows in behavioural dispositions towards the “others” in readiness to exclude them from the in-group. (De Cillia et al. 1999:153) In Social Identity Theory (SIT) formulated by Tajfel and Turner in the late 70s in-group – out-group relation plays significant part. “SIT assumes that we show all kinds of “group” behaviour, such as solidarity, within our groups and discrimination against out-groups as a part of social identity processes, with the aim to achieve positive self-esteem and self-enhancement.” (Trepte 2006:256) SIT is indeed interesting way to look at collective identities and their role in social movements. However, in this research SIT and collective action are left on the side note, as something that can take place in a society where there are coherent collective identities.

**Cognitive models** concern worldviews and interests that are shaped by certain collective identity. They are not only wider views of world, but include understandings of other, group and self. They are kind of “framework that allows members of a group to make sense of social, political, and economic conditions.” They are also the part of collective identity that shows the epistemology and

ontology of the group. (Abdelal et al. 2006:696) Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov describe this in their definition on “cognitive perspectives”: “They are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one's problems and predicaments, identifying one's interests, and orienting one's actions. They are ways of recognizing, identifying, and classifying other people, of constructing sameness and difference, and of “coding” and making sense of their actions. They are templates for representing and organizing social knowledge, frames for articulating social comparisons and explanations, and filters that shape what is noticed or unnoticed, relevant or irrelevant, remembered or forgotten.” (2004:47)

Since the content of a certain collective identity is never predetermined or fixed, we need a concept to describe the process where the content is constructed. This is called **contestation**. Sometimes the members of a group agree over specific content in greater degree, in other matters in lesser degree. According to Abdelal et al. “contestation can be thought of as a matter of degree – the content of collective identities can be more or less contested”. (2006:700) Contestation over the content of certain collective identity shows especially how identities have got fluid and contextual nature. (Abdelal et al. 2006:697) It can be either explicit, which means intentional process, or implicit, which refers to unintentional process of contestation. Intentional process according to Abdelal et al. means “explicit debates about the meaning of an identity”. By unintentional process the authors mean everyday contestation of identity “which takes place among members of a group without their consciously seeking to revise or remake the meaning of their identity.” (Abdelal 2006:701) This process happens within the group of a collective identity, but it is not detached from context. (Abdelal 2006:700) However, in order to use the concept for empirical research, the focus have to be in the in-group.

Abdelal et al. state that “where there is little contestation, one might conclude that part of identity content is taken for granted or considered “natural” (2006:701). High degree of contestation may have few different meanings depending on the interpretation. One way is to conclude that the content of the collective identity is incoherent. On the other hand, one can argue that the collective identity does not exist, since the content is fluid and is not widely shared and agreed upon. In the latter case there would be two options. Firstly, the relevance of the concept of collective identity could be questioned. Alternatively, one could argue that instead of that one specific collective identity there are multiple collective identities.

## C NATIONAL IDENTITY

The focus of this thesis is in the collective identification with national identity. Peters writes about collective national identity that it “consists of those elements of collective identity which are present or circulate among members of a state-bounded society, a society which is politically organized by a territorial state. ‘National identity’ in this sense should be regarded as a special part of the public culture of a modern statebounded society.” (2002:12) By public culture he means cultural symbols and meanings that are accessible to and known by larger public. Statebound societies are those with compelling institutional or organizational structure. According to De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak national identity can be:

a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons; (b) as well as of similar behavioural dispositions; (c) all of which are internalized through 'national' socialization.

National identification does not require people to possess any certain characteristics. The characteristics of collective national identity are not something we can see, they are “imagined”. As the title of this research suggest, I assume that there is not just one national identity but different national identities. Wodak writes that “different identities are discursively constructed according to audience, setting, topic and substantive content.” (Wodak 2009:4) The meaning of national identity can be formulated or influenced by political authorities (Abdelal et al. 2006:700; Wodak 2009:4), media or “everyday discourse” of public (Wodak 2009:4). Grzegorz Pozarlik quotes Tomasz Leszniewski (2008) to describe the formation of identity: “[T]he source of identity is placed in the interactive area shared with others” (2013:79).

Even if the concept of national identity has been used in this research as analytical category, it does not mean that “national identity” is treated as real existing category. According to Brubaker and Cooper the analysis should be in the “identity talk” and “identity politics” as “real and important phenomena” (2000:5). Using their words, the interest of analysts should be to explain the “processes and mechanisms” through which concepts such as ethnic group or identity “can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality. (2000:5) Therefore this research does not attempt to make claims of what is Vietnamese national identity, but it aims to explain the ways people perceive national identity. That is one way to look at the processes and mechanisms.

Balancing between essentialism and subjectivism is challenging. Gleason criticizes academics of “loose and irresponsible usage” of the concept identity and argues that the research on identity is

“little more than portentous incoherence” which should not be “intimidated into regarding it as more than that” (1983:931). Over three decades later the criticism of Gleason seems too strong. However it is perhaps a good reminder of the need to use the concept of collective national identity in a way that leads to some new insights instead of getting lost in its fluid, fragmented and undefined nature.

How can one conduct empirical research on something as ambiguous, “imagined” and fluid as collective identity? Following an implication by Robert Cox authors of the article “identity as a variable” state that “even if one assumes the social world is a constructed one, there may be periods and places where intersubjective understandings of these social facts are stable enough they can be treated as if fixed and can be analyzed with social scientific methods.” (Abdelal et al. 2006:700)

## Nation

When talking about national identity we need to be clear about the related concepts. What do we mean by nation? Peters writes about state-bounded society. Similarly Hobsbawm regards nation as “a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state', and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it.” (2012:9-10) He continues that he agrees with Gellner about emphasizing “the element of artifact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations.” (2012:10)

Already Ernest Renan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century discredits the theory that ethnicity, language or religion would be a basis for the unification of people into a social entity. He states for example that “race” is something that is “made and unmade” and that “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle”. People play an active role on the construction of a nation, and “forgetting”, which according to Renan “is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.” (1882)

Based on these assertions we can argue that nation is a social entity in a territorial state, which simultaneously is an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983:15) where people are “convinced that they belong to a unique national community” (De Cillian et al. 1999:154) and they are “united by a sense of mutual belonging rather than by any possibility of knowing more than a fraction of those who claim to be members of the same nation.” (Smith and Jackson 1999:368). “People are not only citizens by law, they also participate in forming the idea of the nation as it is represented in their national culture” (De Cillian et al. 1999:155)

Peters is against the concept of nation or other communities being mere “images or imaginations” and argues that they have “other constitutive structures, apart from collective self-images” (2002:13). I do not see contradiction in the claim that nation is both imagined, meaning socially constructed and maintained, and real, that it has those constitutive structures. If we argue that nation has elements of social construction, national identity plays significant role in the preservation of the nation. As Hobsbawm states: “Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round.” (2012:10)

## Nationalism

From the concept of nation we move to a concept of nationalism. By nationalism we often understand either the loyalty members of a nation may feel towards their nation, which also could be described with terms patriotism or national pride. On the other hand nationalism may refer to the actions that people may take when they are seeking for self-determination, construction of a nation. When describing nationalism in this way, the social entity of nation starts to look more positivist. That is not however the perspective of this thesis, neither does it follow the epistemological and ontological stances that have been adopted in the previous discussion on the theoretical framework. Hence, if nations are imagined in one hand and constitutive structures on the other, nationalism needs alternative ways of definition.

Hayes argues that “[M]odern nationalism signifies a more or less purposeful effort to revive primitive tribalism on an enlarged and more artificial scale.” (1968:12) According to Breuille one approach to nationalism has been that it is a “modern, irrational doctrine which could acquire sufficient power so as actually to generate nationalist sentiments and even nation-states.” (Breuille 2008:xx) These definitions give different, perhaps more negative sounding meaning to nationalism and go in line with Hobsbawm's idea on nationalism feeding nations.

## National Unity

When studying national identity the interest is in the elements that reflect intra-national similarities. However the assumption of national unity may be questionable. How homogeneous are nations?

According to Wodak this question needs to be taken in account more. She writes that in the field of Cultural Studies national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity are primarily emphasized and intra-national differences ignored (2009:4). It is for an advantage of a country to maintain an image of national uniformity, however one should be critical towards existence of such unity. Rosalie Tung (2008) mentions example of culturally diverse nation Canada. She argues that there could be more similarities between Anglophones and Americans than between Anglophones and Francophones (2008:42).

Intra-national differences can be more significant than cross-national differences. Naylor states that “[p]ortrayal of all members of a national or nation-state cultural group as sharing the same set of beliefs and practices is a faulty one” (1996:79). Also in more constructivist sense there is “*no such thing as the one and only national identity* in an essentializing sense, but rather that different identities are discursively constructed according to context” (De Cillian et al. 1999:154) This supports the claim of nations as “imagined communities”. The question of national uniformity is another reason why the focus of this research is in the incoherencies in national identities.



### 3 VIETNAMESE NATIONAL IDENTITY

#### A Literature on National Identity in Vietnam

In the first part of this chapter I will briefly discuss Vietnamese national identity as it has been previously presented in the literature. In her article “South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969” (2006) Nu-Anh Tran analyses Vietnamese responses to a letter which was written by an US navy serviceman James R. Kipp in 1966. The letter was published first in English Saigon Daily News on April 4th and then two weeks later in Vietnamese Newspaper *Chính Luận* as translated version. According to Tran the content of the letter was highly critical towards Vietnamese people and presented them as idle, incompetent and stupid who “prostitute their wives and daughters to Americans”. (Tran 2006:169) Tran discusses the letter, its responses and other literature on Vietnamese identity from the same era.

This article is a useful starting point when I start to untangle perceptions on Vietnamese identities. For discussing the history of national identity in the South Vietnam Tran provides an interesting argument of how Frances Fitzgerald in her book “Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam” manages to capture a fact that Southern Vietnamese elite had accepted American assistance as something that had to coexist with “assertions of autonomous identity” (2006:171). According to the analysis Tran provides of the 60s literature on the Vietnamese identity, South Vietnamese at that time experienced “generalized threat” to their identity and “loss of control over their own destiny” (2006:171). Also, Tran mentions a study of South Vietnamese literature by Võ Phiến where the author argues that popularization of American products had made the Vietnamese to feel anxious about losing their national identity (2006:171). These kind of worries were not present in the conversations I had with people during my stay in Da Nang, even though Vietnam has since the economic reform encountered more and more Western influence in the form of economic cooperation and cultural westernisation.

According to Tran “Understanding Vietnam” by Neil Jamieson and the study of Võ Phiến “do not provide evidence of an explicit relationship between Vietnamese engagements with Americans and the discourse they produced on their own identity” even though they “recognize that the American presence significantly shaped discursive Vietnamese considerations of their own identity” (2006:172). Tran attempts in her article is to show how the American presence had strong impact on the construction of “political and cultural identity” in the South Vietnam. The context of American

invasion that is present in Tran's article is a good example of identity construction through relational comparisons which is one of the four elements used in this thesis describing collective identity.

## **B Perceptions on Vietnamese National Identity**

In this chapter I will analyse the data that has been generated through interviews by using the analytical lens of collective national identity. The chapter has been divided in three parts. In the first part I will discuss the content of Vietnamese national identity as it has been described intentionally or unintentionally in the interviews by the 11 young Vietnamese adults in Da Nang in May-June 2016. This part is in five sections. Firstly there are the four elements of content as presented in the framework: constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models. The interview data is being analysed by using each of these concepts as analytical tools. After that part I will discuss contestation processes of Vietnamese national identity by using the concept as analytical lens. Finally, in the last part I will discuss the question of one or multiple national identities discussing the level of differentiation between Southern and Northern Vietnamese national identities.

### **Content**

The perspective of this research is that content of collective national identity is not defined and predetermined, but ever changing. This does not however mean that the fluid nature of collective national identity would make it less useful as an analytical frame. Even subjective narratives of national identity reveal something about the nation. In this thesis the focus is to interpret how the perceptions on Vietnamese identities reflect the state of unity in the society. Therefore it is of interest to have a look at the different elements of national identity and identification.

### ***Constitutive Norms***

In this part I want to analyse the kind of formal and informal rules regarding to collective national identity that the young Vietnamese adults intentionally or unintentionally described during the interviews. Vietnam is a communist country ruled by single party where the grip of the governance

of the state is still firmly in the hands of the party. Because of the power it holds to rule over the nation it has also been quite strongly regarded as a source of the norms that define Vietnamese national identity. Brook and Schmid argue on the success of a nation: "[t]he triumph of the nation has been to confirm its power to organize the world, to confine social collectivities within its boundaries, and to block awareness that things were not always what they now seem." (2000:1) This seems to fit well in the context of Vietnam and Vietnamese nationalism. One of the interview participants especially showed frustration towards the current situation as he experiences it. He said that he is "kind of mad": "If I have voice I would talk about it but I don't. My voice does not have any power. Actually the whole of us we don't have voice. The government wants to stop it, they just wants us to stop talking." (2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016). Linh tells that there have been a lot of protests in Vietnam recently which the government has tried to stop. "The government wants us to have a certain behaviour. It does not scare me but it influences my thinking. A lot of my friends or my friends' family, they try to have a second nationality. I think they don't feel secure in Vietnam." She then tells that the main reason for feeling insecure is the threat of China. (4<sup>th</sup> June 2016)

Few other interviewees showed frustration towards the current system where the normative content of Vietnamese identity seems to derive mainly from one source of authority. This is not however the only perception. Thi argues that the government cannot do much about national identity "because the identity of Vietnamese people come from the people...come from the history, it is not come from the control of the government." So she does not think that the government can do much in terms of constructing national identity. This was an opinion that was not really supported by other participants. Based on these few narratives, the presumption that the Vietnamese government has a big role on construction of informal and formal rules that define the Vietnamese national identity seem justified. What kind of norms do the participants experience in their lives?

When I asked the interviewees about the requirements that they experience in their lives, there are few themes that were brought up. One of them is patriotism. Thi (Da Nang, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016) mentions that "the government sort of still expects that all Vietnamese, or the majority of Vietnamese, [are] patriotic...and have the same, like similar thinkings about the history...Every party, every country, have their own political strategy...in order to maintain that they...want their people to be consistent in terms of identity...especially when compared to other countries." However, she does not think that the government is the only source of promotion of patriotism, even if it has a critical role in it: "For outsiders it looks like it is only the government where this comes, but is also come from all the Vietnamese."

Ai told that party membership is something that government would like people to be interested in (19<sup>th</sup> May 2016). However, the reality according to Cam is that there are "not many people who have a mindset of being a member of one party any more". The reason behind that in her opinion is that "there are a lot of private sectors involved in this economy". This is something I came across with in discussions with people in Vietnam in general. They told me that in the past it was important to have good connections and a family that had been on the right side during the war. This for example impacted people's chances on getting better jobs or higher education. However according to these people this does not bear importance any more, as the country has opened the markets after the *Doi Moi* economic reforms, and private entrepreneurship is allowed. Mai explained the current situation in Vietnam for me: "Actually in Vietnam right now we really have equal education for all, and even if someone is qualified enough for the job, they also could take it, but for sure, really competitive. The only thing [where being on the wrong side during the war still matters] is the promotion in working as a government officer, and also they couldn't become a member of the Communist Party." Therefore it appears that the appeal of party membership has faded, even though it is perhaps still something that the CPV promotes.

Bao stated that she does not care about governments attempts to promote patriotism and that she is not interested in it, which tells that she however feels that this is something that the government does (18<sup>th</sup> May 2016). Ai does not feel the same way, she says that she does not notice promotion of patriotism in her own life. (19<sup>th</sup> May 2016) Cam describes how Vietnamese for example "raise the flag...when Obama comes we have to raise the flag...to raise the awareness of being...Vietnamese" (27<sup>th</sup> May 2016). Hoa also mentions the use of flag. She says that there is a "communist flag next to the national flag in every hall and communal settings, pictures of Ho Chi Minh in every classroom from kindergarten to university". She also finds that the role that national celebrations such as "Veteran's Day, the People's Army day, National Day, Independence Day and so on" have is great on promoting patriotism. She also acknowledges that the government's means to affect people work in some ways in her, even though she is conscious of the purpose : "It was a very romantic kinda thing when you walk down the street with red flag on both sides...of course this is patriotism working at its core but it does indeed cultivate a sense of pride".

The other participants of the interviews felt quite strongly that there are nationalistic social norms. They did not really talk whether they comply with the norms or not, but eight out of the eleven interviewees were somewhat critical towards them. Hoa argues that "the government encourages a very nationalistic identity building since young through education and propaganda. This basically consists of being proud of your identity as Vietnamese, emphasizing the harmony between the 54

different ethnic groups and other kind of diversity in the country, being grateful for the peace established in the country thanks to the Communist Party." According to her this "involves knowing the Vietnamese history inside out despite the fact that some are vague and fictional" and "narratives of the war has too much victimization and propaganda without really teaching history and political thoughts."

Dinh supports the argument that the government expects certain behaviour of the people. He says that the government "want[s] people to respect the authority" and that the "government is still looking for bad behaviour." (17<sup>th</sup> May 2016) This suggests that he does not feel the freedom to do as he likes, but feels controlled or restricted in some ways. However, some of the interviewees told me that things are changing. Even Dinh mentions later that the government has "realised that no one authority can control people's thinking" (2016). Also, most of the interviewed expressed to be well aware of the intentions behind the norms and rules. Hoa said that "the party required great trust from the population due to the uncanny fact that it is not democratic...They try to promote some sort of "grass root democracy" but transparency remains vague." Despite of the pessimistic stance on the system, she acknowledges that there advantages of one being loyalty to the government: "Being loyal to the party is of course one key thing to advance in corporate life especially in public sector, and even some of the private sector...and through such favouritism the party legitimacy is perpetuated." (18<sup>th</sup> May 2016) Here she seems to touch upon one of the issues that was brought up several times during different interviews: corruption and how it does not disappear even though the national and regional governments tell that they are fighting against it.

Three of the eleven interviewees were not sceptical towards nationalist norms they experience coming from the government, even though all of them at least partly acknowledged that there are such norms. They considered it good for the stability of the nation to have rules that guide the behaviour of people. Cadeo was slightly taken aback when I asked his opinion and experience on required behaviour. "I think that's question you have to ask the people in the North Korea. Because you know people in my country they [are] living the life they love...very freedom. They don't have to live their life the way government wants to." He continued that the government "don't have to try to do something...try to convince us live that not like...but you know sometimes they give some rules and we have to follow them." This shows that he has internalized the obligations at quite deep level.

Abdelal et al. argue that the "degree to which such practices are habituated or internalized is an empirical question." (2006:697) It seems that only three of the interviewees had internalized the

constitutive practices which were discussed about during the interviews. Cadeo acknowledged rules that needs to be followed, but simultaneously thought that asking about rules was not appropriate when we were talking about Vietnam. Therefore it may be correct to argue that his choices are biased by the norms so that they are acted upon totally unconsciously. Thi and Cam are more conscious of the nationalist purposes of the norms, but think they are appropriate. Their choices are biased. The rest eight interviewees appeared to be somewhat by-stander-like. The level of internationalization of the norms was not deep and they were conscious about that. However, I do not know if they acted upon the practises out of self interest.

To conclude the section about constitutive norms I will make few remarks on the content of Vietnamese national identity based on the interviews. Firstly, for these participants the CPV emerges as a strong authority that sets norms that defines people's behaviour. These norms take often nationalist forms. Most of the interviewees had not internalized these norms to significant extent, whereas few others appeared to have internalized them to quite deep level where they had become either semi-conscious or totally unconscious part of their identity. Quite a few of the interview participants were sceptical towards the norms and rules as government's attempts to secure its self preservation. Therefore their behaviour may not be influenced a great deal by their national identity in this sense. However it is not possible to make generalizations based on these interviews about the state of unity in Vietnamese society. The only notion that I can make in that is that there appears to be incoherencies in the levels of internalization of norms between people. This may affect the behaviour of the population differently. Other people may be more aware of the intentions of the government to promote nationalism, others less so. However, I cannot make conclusions on the behaviour of people. Even if some people think that some norms are irrelevant for them personally, they might still follow the obligations for example for the sake of their own self-interest.

### *Social Purposes*

As the second part of the analysis on the content of Vietnamese national identity I will discuss the social purposes or collective goals of Vietnamese as described by the eleven interviewees. One purposive goal that appeared in the discussions with the participants was preservation of territory. One illustrative example of this was mentioned in several interviews. It is related to an ongoing territorial dispute between China and Vietnam on the East Sea: Thi tells that there are documentary films and exhibitions of maps that have purpose to show people how Spratly Islands belong to

Vietnamese, not Chinese. This heated territorial debate is something I have also come across in social media. Lịch sử Việt Nam qua ảnh, "Vietnam's history through photos"-group has posted a picture of "Hoàng triều trực tỉnh địa dư toàn đồ" map that is featured in the airport of Tuy Hòa. This Chinese map from 1904 is being said to justify Vietnamese territorial claims over the islands since the Spratly islands are not marked in the map as part of China. (Lịch sử Việt Nam qua ảnh, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016). Cadeo is very sceptical against the intentions of China: "China tries to have war in the east sea so...they just want to make something against us". Mai (29<sup>th</sup> May 2016) told that she is worried for the future of Vietnam since Vietnam is located near China. She continued: "They also want to control our country, we are first destination for them. [Chinese] also sell bad things to my country, there is often poison [in the Chinese products], but [Vietnam has] no money to buy from other countries." There the territorial worries had also taken other forms of fear. Cam argued: "China is a very tricky country. They never forget their intention to take Vietnam to become part of China. That is their desire for thousands of years. In the one thousand years there has been many times that Vietnam has won against China...until now. As a big country they have that desire in their mind. I don't think they will never forget." Also Bao is concerned about possible conflict with China. Based on the interviews I argue that "threat of China" is one of the most unifying factor that came up in the interviews. No one was really against this claim but everyone showed some level of fear towards China. Therefore it seems that collective goal of preservation of territory is a strong factor to bring the people together and to stand behind the nation. This is something that the government of Vietnam may also use. In addition of territorial preservation, there was another very strongly collective goal present in the interviews: economic growth.

Economic growth is a topic that seems to bring together both the nationalist social purposes and the collective goals of the public. Nine out of the eleven interviewees mentioned money, rising salaries and economy as most important elements for future of Vietnam. Some of the participants did not personally consider economic gains as most important collective goals, but they believed that other Vietnamese care about money and that especially the government cares about economic growth. Bao told that "money is a collective goal that is constructed from top down". Based on the other testimonials it however seems that the collective goal of economic gains is widely shared and does not have to originate from the government:

Dinh tells that "economic growth is a big one [collective goal]", Hoa mentions "economic development" as the collective goal of Vietnamese and Cadeo says that "Vietnamese people want most in the future...to change the salary". Canh thinks that there would be other more important collective goals for Vietnamese, but "people only care about money". Cam thinks that economic

growth is most important: "In the region, South East Asia, we should be very strong in economy first. We have to be good member of the ASEAN and have to also help other countries do well, like Laos and Cambodia. The [communist] party will have to improve and be more selective on what investors are let in, which would protect the country better." It appears that economic growth is important for the public widely in the country, at least in the Southern parts. When I was discussing with different people in Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh city, they often mentioned economic matters.

Third collective goal that was mentioned is preservation of Vietnamese culture. Ai mentions that there are festivals organised for the purpose of keeping the Vietnamese culture and identity alive. Cam's opinion is that these days people like special days because having a day off instead of any other reason, and that it is mainly the older people who "are interested in the parades". There were few differing opinions amongst the interviewees on the matter, for example Cadeo told that he loves taking part in the national holidays celebrations. He also had enjoyed the communist youth clubs. In his opinion most people want to take part in those clubs where they learn to do volunteer work and help poor people. Dinh thinks that the youth clubs were important in the past but that they do not matter anymore, Bao tells that pre-youth and youth unions are collective communist activities which she did not enjoy taking part. Nonetheless, according to her "there is strong peer pressure to take part, only few people don't do it". This is an example of how the group influences individual behaviour. Are these obligations enough for the preservation of the national identity? Thi sums up the feelings that were also brought up by other participants: the country lives too much in the past glory, that all the different national days also represent, which might not be enough anymore.

I have a little bit feeling that the government still too much on what we have done in the past. The victories that we had in the past. At the time every single Vietnamese are so proud what the government has managed to get. The current government is still a little bit live too much in that. And believe that the people are still very proud of that... things has changed and the country has opened and... so the government need to be realistic about the current situation. Yes, we are proud of the past... but what the current government can do for the people... You maybe use some money of your parents but if your parents pass away and they have no more to give you, then you have to earn money by yourself and if you not, you will become poor so you cannot just live because your parents have done good thing.

By this Thi means that there should be other things to be collectively proud of instead of always drawing from the past. She also suggests that the legitimacy of the government has traditionally come from the great war victories. That is something that people still are proud of, but it is not any more the same people in the government that protected Vietnamese against foreign forces all the decades ago. Therefore the government has to have something new to provide for the people in



order to keep its legitimacy. Linh's argument goes in the same line as Thi's. She tells that at the moment Vietnam is changing from the post-war term to something new. She thinks that the new is better. (4<sup>th</sup> June 2016) On the other hand quite a few of the interviewees give the impression of being frustrated at the Vietnamese way of looking the world only through history. For example Hoa says that Vietnamese "shouldn't talk about the past, contemporary things are more important." Nevertheless, "thousand years of history" is something that I came across few times both during the interviews and in the literature review on Vietnamese nationalism. Thi, Ai, Cadeo and Cam mentioned the "thousand years of history" or "thousand years of culture" during the interview. I would argue that history is strongly the lens that the participants used for looking at themselves as Vietnamese, even if they in the same time criticize Vietnamese for looking back too much. Peters argues that "[m]emories of past historical achievements may also be a source of collective pride and confidence" (2002:14) which appears to be very much true in case of Vietnam. What would happen to the Vietnamese national identity if history was not given so much role in defining it?

Bao's opinion on the future of Vietnamese identity and culture is that it will prevail. However An is more pessimistic. He thinks that Vietnamese only care about survival and money and that they do not care about culture. He says that "the whole country will lose its identity" and that "the history will lose its importance". However, he looks at the situation through the context of globalization and thinks that actually every country will lose their identities, not just Vietnam. (17<sup>th</sup> May 2016) Overall, it appears that most of the participants do not think that preservation of Vietnamese culture and identity by national celebrations is particularly important part of people's lives any more. At least not in a conscious level.

Nationalist collective goals are mentioned by Linh, who thinks that "a lot on the news and TV is propaganda", she thinks that these practices are for the stability of the country. Vietnamese activist Phuong Mai Nguyen, who currently resides in the Netherlands, writes about one type of nationalist propaganda on her status update on Facebook: "One of the poorest provinces in Vietnam has approved a 65 million-dollar- project on building a statue complex of Ho Chi Minh. The personality cult around him has been maintained for 45 years after his death, linking a censored and idolized version of his life with the image of the current ruling Communist party. Is it unfair to be made God-like for political purposes?" (4<sup>th</sup> august 2015) Hoa's argument is that the goal of the government or CPV, which two she does not think need distinction, is solely to preserve the legitimacy of the party. In her opinion one way to do that is through nationalistic propaganda, "which is exactly what they are doing".

Canh argues that "it is important for the government [to influence the way we see our national identity] but in the same time they don't care about anything. They have to know what we think and how we are, but they don't care." (2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016). By that he means that he acknowledges the importance of congruence between nation and national identity. However, for him there is incoherence between the collective Vietnamese identity and the governance of the nation. In other words he thinks that the people and the government do not necessarily want same things.

What would be the collective goals of the people that are perhaps not yet in the interest of the government? I cannot answer the question other than presenting the issues that the eleven participants brought up. Generalization would need a larger sample. Nevertheless, the themes that were mentioned in the interviews were environment, equality and social justice and freedom. All of those themes were elements that the several participants hoped would be collective goals in the future. Ai hopes that "social aspects and environment will be taken better care of". Dinh would like people to be "more responsible for each other and for the environment". Mai says that "most people want to have freedom, free speech for example." Bao thinks that "nature and social aspects are new trend", she is not however certain whether those things will play big role in the future. Dinh is pessimistic and argues that "economy has been growing, but the environment and equality have crashed." In these narratives I see reflection on themes that are emerging in global level.

Analysis on social purposes brought up few important notions. Firstly, it appears that a lot of current collective goals are obligations that come from the government of Vietnam. They are nationalist in nature and aim for preservation of the current system. Many people seem to be scared of China, at least that was quite homogeneous answer that I got from the interviews, which is something that the government can use to gain support. Threat of China also unifies the population. There were only one other collective goal mentioned that was equally well internalized with the goal of territorial preservation against threat of China. This other collective goal that appears to be internalized by especially wide audience is goal of economic growth. Opinions on other matters are more heterogeneous. For example some of the participants enjoyed nationalist celebrations or participating the youth clubs, others did not. Therefore I argue that amongst this group of interviewees it appears that a lot of the collective goals related to Vietnamese national identity may be less "collective". Another notion in this part is that quite widely the interviewees agree on the argument that the CPV gets more say about definition of collective goals than the public or the media. This follows the similar argument on the construction or influence in the definition of constitutive norms which was discussed in the previous part of this analysis. However, it was brought up multiple times during the interviews that things may be changing.

## *Relational Comparisons*

In this part I will analyse the relational comparisons between Vietnamese national identity and the others, that were brought up in the interviews. Mostly this border drawing between “us” and “others” in the responses of the interviewees was regarding Chinese and China. Therefore I will start by discussing the relational comparisons between Vietnamese and Chinese.

China brings up strong feelings amongst the interview participants. Vietnam has common history and border with China. There are Vietnamese that are ethnic Chinese. China is also seen as a threat, as discussed in the previous part. Cadeo tells that Vietnam "used to be the tribe of the China's culture" and therefore Vietnamese culture have "some similarities with China's culture, even the alphabet." However he then continues that Vietnam has a lot of its own culture and own history. He finishes by saying that "Chinese are not respectful" whereas for example "Russians are more respectful". Cam also thinks that Chinese people are not very respectful in some public places. She also told that Vietnamese are separate from the Chinese because of their own "ego and pride". As mentioned previously, Mai thinks that Chinese products are bad and often poisonous. I think that these examples are good illustrations on how the in-group tries to define itself from the out-group, in this case China. The two countries share a lot of commonalities, therefore the differences may have to be somewhat "artificial" such as the notions that Chinese are not respectful.

Hoa has a different approach and tells that Vietnam used to have "some sort of communist comradeship"-narrative with China. However, according to her this has been marred by the maritime dispute, which has led to the anti-China sentiments. She also mentions something that no one else does: Vietnam's economic dependency on China. An article in Ho Chi Minh city based Thanh Nien News has an illustrative headline: "Vietnam increasingly dependent of China, despite rhetoric". (Than Nien News 2014) The public discourse may be anti-China, but in the reality there is cooperation and even dependency which requires Vietnam to keep the relations adequate to its neighbour. Also, it is more of interest of Vietnam than China to maintain relations: Womack argues that relationship between China and Vietnam has a-symmetric structure that is created by the “disparity of capacities”. This is why Vietnam reacts strongly towards everything that comes from China whereas China does not need to take Vietnam into account, if it acts alone. (2006:1)

Around half of the interviewees think that Vietnamese have got better characters than the Chinese.

However the same kind of superior attitudes do not exist when we talk about the US. Actually it is very interesting how the US is quite highly regarded amongst the participants despite the conflictuous past. Hoa finds the relations between Vietnam and the US ironic: "While war crimes of Americans are taught in the book and showed on the TV these days still, Vietnam does not seem to resist the wave of Americanization very well." Canh tells that people think positively about the visit of president Barack Obama that took place in the end of May. Dinh mentions that the US attention on Vietnam is good as long as "they are careful in the ways they impact". The reason for his positive attitude is that the US "can give power to Vietnam" against China. Cadeo also agrees that good relations between Vietnam and the US are important. There is no need to draw lines between the US and Vietnam as currently the US is not an enemy. It does not share borders with Vietnam either. China however may be an actual threat to the sovereignty of Vietnam, in addition of which the narrative of threat can be used by the CPV to advance their own goals. The interviewees had differing opinions on this, nevertheless the narrative of China being "real threat" had more support.

When talking about comparisons to others, history is often brought up. The past days appear glorious in the responses of the participants when I asked them about things that make them proud of being Vietnamese. Cadeo told me about supremacy of Vietnam:

When we have problem and we are going to extinction...we have like power that can destroy everything. You know Mongol, they used to destroy China culture, they tried to attack Europe, but when they come to my country they have been defeat by our people. We have been through so many way, we fight so many enemy because in the war so many people are not lazy anymore, they just want to protect their country. They are very smart. They have way to fight any enemy, any problem. But when the country is peaceful they become lazy. They don't want to face any problem, they just want to hide it...they just want to live their own life... and they don't want to change anything.

In this sense the uniqueness of Vietnamese national identity is the great ability of Vietnam to defeat enemies. This is something that separates Vietnam from many other nations, in Cadeo's point of view. It is also perhaps the best example of how the Vietnamese national identity is defined by the in-group - out-group comparisons. Thi follows this sentiment with her opinion: "We are quite a unique country, in terms of being the only country, the weak country, the small country in the world...the small country that have fought and won over China and America and the French, in order to gain our independence... we are the only country that have managed to do that." According to Bao the government of Vietnam presents the country as better than Laos or Cambodia because Vietnam has the eldest culture. The Vietnamese national identity leans heavily on the past. The historic victories are something that the people appear to be the most proud of. It is the historic events that make most of the interview participants to feel nationalist sentiments.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis are especially that the relational comparisons are currently made between China and Vietnam. Chinese appear to have worse characters and they are not trustable in the way they make their products. Most of the participants mainly talked about the negatives of their big neighbour. The positives or the realities of economic dependency were only mentioned by one interviewee. This is a good example of how an in-group has to maintain a good self image to keep the members of the group together, which can be done for example by unfair comparison to the out-group. Vietnam is a weaker and less powerful nation than China, but in the narratives of Vietnamese national identity the picture is different.

Another strong narrative in this part is the one of Vietnamese superiority in times of war. It is the narrative of resilience: Vietnamese cannot be defeated. This is an important part of Vietnamese national identity. Interestingly enough there were no relational comparisons made to the US except briefly in the context of war victory. Instead the country was quite highly regarded and the participants did not show any signs of Vietnamese superiority over the Americans.

The relational comparisons that were mentioned in this part gave once again a strong nationalist undertone to the discussion, which is obviously natural in this case when we are talking about national identity. However, the question could be whether the content of Vietnamese identity is formulated like this because of the self-interest of the group as a whole, or is it influenced by the interests of the authorities. Nevertheless, this form of national identity appears to be perhaps better internalized than the previously discussed "norms" and "social purposes".

### *Cognitive Models*

In this last part that describes the content of Vietnamese national identity I will analyse cognitive models as they come across in the descriptions of the interview participants. These cognitive perspectives define the way people see and understand the world. Firstly I will interpret the attributes that the interviewees linked to Vietnamese and discuss what it tells about world views or interests of the participants. Finally, I will analyse the way the participants talked about "change", as this theme seems to be interrupting the internalization of the cognitive models of Vietnamese national identities.

When I asked the participants to describe the way they see Vietnamese, there were a long list of

characteristics that could be categorized as positive: Dinh tells that Vietnamese people are family oriented and traditional, which is also what Cam mentions. Dinh continues that they are also flexible and adjust in situations, which is something Thi states as well. According to An Vietnamese are hard-working and love money. Cadeo thinks that Vietnamese are smart and willing to help people. Mai mentions friendliness and warmth. Hoa tells that Vietnamese are hard-working, sincere, warm and innocent. Linh thinks that Vietnamese are very hard-working, friendly and that they have got quick wit. The frequency of the characteristic of "hard working Vietnamese" suggests that the cognitive perspective of Vietnamese includes values of money and development. Most participants told that these are important things and that the country needs economic growth before other values can be applied. Not everyone agreed that money was their own lens to see the world, but they suggested that Vietnamese in general appreciate money more than anything else. When considering the conditions after the war in the seventies and eighties, when the country suffered from the war damages and was isolated from the global arena, and when the private entrepreneurship had been denied, the level of poverty had been enormous. There are still people living in extreme poverty especially in the highlands, and the average salary for the whole country in 2015 was still only around 186€ a month (Trading Economics 2015). At the moment the economy is growing at fast pace. Therefore it is not a surprise that the cognitive models of Vietnamese consist money as an important value.

It seems that the economic values have resulted in some more negative characteristics in the Vietnamese national identity: An thinks that Vietnamese know how to use people and take benefit from others. Other negative characteristics are also listed. Canh told that Vietnamese are mean to each other and that they do not care about other people but are selfish. He continues that Vietnamese only care for their own benefit. According to him they are lazy and always find a way to make things quickly regardless of quality. Only money matters. Bao thinks as well that people pay attention to themselves and do not have compassion for others that much. She does not think that this conscious.

Ai is not able to tell attributes for Vietnamese as a group. In her opinion there is no general definition for Vietnamese, but that some generalizations can be made based on generations. She divides Vietnamese in three groups: Open-minded young; traditional but quite open-minded middle aged; and conservative, strict and traditional old generations. Hoa also makes the divide between older and younger generations. She thinks that older people are more ideological whereas younger are less so and also more a-political. Ai however thinks that young people have "we should do more"-attitude and that they are interested in politics. My argument is that this tells how it is hard to

define and generalize, but also Vietnamese national appears to be fragmented.

In Bao's opinion Vietnamese are naïve, positive and hard working. By naïve she meant that people do not talk about politics much and tend to listen to the government without thinking for themselves. She finds this both good and bad. On one hand it is easier not to know. That way there is less struggle. Especially she thinks that not knowing is good for the people who live hard life and who have to struggle already for their everyday life. She says that "it is easier for them to bear when they do not have to think that things could be better." What Bao said in my opinion reflects also a kind of reformation in the society. Bao could not decide what to think about the situation in Vietnam. On one hand she was conscious of the problems she thinks there are in the country, but in the same time she did not know how to think of them. There seem to be a contradiction in her cognitive models. Based on this it seems that the traditional Vietnamese way would be not to bother oneself by thinking and knowing. For some reason Bao only has internalized this model of "not thinking and therefore not realising there is a problem" at semi-conscious level.

When I asked the interview participants whether they feel like they fit in the description they gave me about Vietnamese national identity, there were three kinds of answers. Four of the participants felt quite strong attachment to the identity that they had described. Hoa has studied abroad, which she thinks has helped her to have different perspective, but she said that she is still Vietnamese. Thi and Cam only answered the question by simple "yes". Cadeo has a negative image of Vietnamese characteristics but he tells that he fits in his own definition. Mai told that she thinks Vietnamese national identity describes her quite well.

Then there were two participants who were not certain about fitting in completely in the Vietnamese national identity. Canh said that he thinks he fits the description. Linh thinks that she partly fits in: "I am still a little bit outsider in the society, different. I think in the society there are a lot of different types of people. Majority of the people have been influenced by the society. But minority of the people have not [been] influenced by the society, but they think what they want for themselves." By saying that Linh suggests that Vietnamese national identity does not fully define her thinking or actions, but that she is conscious of what being Vietnamese is and is able to make her choices despite them perhaps not being in line with the in-group.

Five of the interviewees told that they do not think Vietnamese national identity describes them. Bao tells that she has worked for the government, a job she got because of her aunt working for the party, but that she had felt like she did not belong there. Dinh tells that he does not really feel like

Vietnamese national identity is his identity. He thinks that the reason for that is the fact that he had gone to study abroad and had then become more open minded. Ai tells that her lifestyle is different to the lifestyle of majority, and therefore she thinks that Vietnamese national identity is not in line with her personal identity. An simply answered "no". These self reflections show well how the cognitive perspectives that the participants have internalized are incoherent. It is extremely significant that almost half of the interviewees did not identify themselves with Vietnamese national identity at all. Based on these responses it seems that the cognitive models of the interview participants are greatly influenced by other identities. However, it does not mean that the Vietnamese national identity would not also shape their thinking. This shows in the next example, where I discuss one theme that was constantly brought up by almost all of the interviewees.

A theme that was often brought up during the interviews, even though there were no questions about it, is change. Eight out of the eleven participants had something to say about "change", about changing the way things are handled in Vietnam. This also means that there is change in the cognitive perspectives. Five of the interviewees appear to be more conservative: Linh, Cam, Mai, Cadeo and Thi. Thi even told me that her friends tell her that she is too patriotic. Other interviewees appear as less traditional. I have divided the opinions on change in three groups: passive change, restricted change and active change.

First group consists the opinions of participants who speak for slow change. The participants thought that change in the society is needed, but that people have got time to wait for it to happen. They do not see themselves taking an active role in making the change to happen. For instance Ai told that "the government's policy needs to be changed, but change takes time." She thinks that most people in Vietnam are aware of this, but that they are patient and do not want to change anything radically. In her opinion Vietnam is on the way to times when people have more say about things. She thinks that Da Nang is a special place in Vietnam where change is already more visible than elsewhere in Vietnam. She continued that Da Nang's example has not always pleased the government so it has tried to slow down the progress. Dinh also thinks that the system has to change, "otherwise there are more difficult times ahead". He also follows Ai's opinion that the change has to happen slowly, because quick change is "traumatizing". He describes himself as a patient man, but is not sure whether his fellow citizens are patient.

Linh is also patient. She tells that she has been working a lot in the government projects and feels that she has an insight to the matter. "There are big amount of Vietnamese who lose their hope about government... They have a bitter voice. But in big picture it is not easy to change, [however] I see



change. In ten to fifteen years [the country] will be different. People are talking a lot about this on Facebook. Not publicly a lot. They are worried about their safety. There are a lot of individuals who are angry and talk, it is fine. But if you are a group or organisation, that is a different story." She does not believe in quick change and tells that a revolution is not happening. According to her small cultural changes have already happened and Vietnamese have become more westernized and Americanized. In her mind people can quite freely talk about their opinions as long as they are not organised. People are scared to talk controversial matters in public. When looking at this group through the concept of cognitive models it seems that there has been a change in the cognitive perspectives of these participants. The way they look at their society has changed and it does not go in line with the cognitive model of Vietnamese national identity. However, they are not separate from the Vietnamese national identity, in which "change" is perhaps unfamiliar concept. Therefore there is a contradiction. There is incoherencies in the different cognitive perspectives of Vietnamese national identity.

Second group consists of opinions of those participants who advocate change at some lesser level where the current communist system would prevail. Thi argues that the society is conservative but that it is changing now. She thinks that political participation needs improvement and "people need to have more education about how to participate in political issues", but that the "one party system can work". She was the only one who was quite vocal about advantages of having a single party system instead of having multiple parties. She tells that "the changes need to happen within the party, otherwise stability is threatened and there could be civil problems and even civil war." She thinks that multiple parties would cause problems, such as more conflict and war: "it is a trade-off...maybe you have more choice...but it [leads to] more conflicts, more unstable and more civil problems that may affect the citizens. I don't want any war happening in any sort of form so I think the one party still works." Her cognitive perspective is perhaps more in line with the traditional cognitive model of Vietnamese national identity.

Mai has similar kind of thinking. She told that most people in Vietnam want to have freedom, for example free speech. She also thinks that in the future there will be more freedom. However, in order to gain more freedom the single party system can prevail. It does not prevent from people getting more voice: "many people want to change my politics to have different thing. I support my party and also want to change day by day". For making the change to happen she thinks that there needs to be pressure on the government. Mai is speaking for the slow change, because it is "not easy to change so fast". She does not understand people who want to westernize Vietnam: "people see only the good or the bad in other countries. Every party, every politics have good and bad." She

thinks that there is possibility for conflict in Vietnam between people who want change quickly and those who are more traditional. She would like people to understand that the grass is not always greener on the other side. Cadeo talks about the advantages of maintaining the current government too. He is optimistic and thinks that the government will try to change and fix all the problems and "control the country in the way that future is better". He tells that he trusts the government, but adds that he is not sure whether "so many people trust the government". He has noticed that some people want to change the government but thinks that it is just a few people, "about one per cent" of the Vietnamese. The way he estimates the scope of opposition suggests that he is not particularly concerned of possible clash between the conservative and reformative sides.

Third group is the participants who want change more actively. Canh is one of them. He thinks that young people are they key to change and he wants fellow young adults to work harder. But even if he is the most vocal advocate of change, even he thinks that the change will happen naturally. In his opinion the change will happen when the younger generation will take over the government: "We are waiting until it is our time and then we can change the things we are suffering from now. It is a natural process, nothing has to be done now. The change will happen when the older generations step down and it is our time to take over the government." An is very pessimistic about the current system. He told that "one thing is very clear, the government and the people who work for the government are taking use of it. When you work for the government you have more power than others. People would pay a lot to be member of parliament. I find the government in Vietnam powerful so everyone wants to work for the government." He does not approve the system and thinks that change will have to happen.

Two interviewees did not speak anything about change. In case of Hoa this is interesting as she is sceptical towards the government throughout the interview. She for example says about the elections: "I mean, they are not more than names in a bingo when you randomly cross some and then whoever has more random votes wins." However, she does not talk anything about change. Neither does Cam. She is loyal to the one party even though she for example mentions that the government is watching and controlling media. She understands that it is not possible to control all people so there is opposition: "not many people have a mindset of being a member of one party any more...there are so many people... out there and you cannot make them been follow you totally. Some people are fighting this people party, like free party... like they don't follow any party." Yet, she does not advocate change. It is difficult to draw any conclusions how cognitive models of Vietnamese national identity have influenced their thinking.

This discussion on change is interesting when we look at it through the lens of cognitive models. What does it tell when the participants talk about need to change their country? Clearly, the traditional nationalist Vietnamese identity is not the only factor that defines the cognitive perspectives for the people who think that there has to be change. Ideally, the cognitive model of national identity would certainly aim for maintaining the status quo. That is why I argue that even the people who only want restricted change within the framework of communist one party system have got some outside influence in their cognitive perspectives. The outside influence in the cognitive models shows especially in the ways the participants tell about their identification with Vietnamese national identity. This is a good reminder of how cognitive models or construction of collective identity in general "never happens in vacuum". (Abdelal et al. 2006:700)

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that despite the great interest in talking about change or need of change, most participants advocated for slow or passive change. The sentiment of "change" was present in the narratives of most of the interviewees, but perhaps it is the cognitive models of Vietnamese national identity that still orientates their actions into "non-action". The interviewees were divided in their opinions on this matter and it seems that there is incoherencies in the internalization of cognitive perspectives of Vietnamese national identity

## Contestation

Contestation describes the social processes of construction of the collective identity content. In this chapter I will discuss these processes by analysing the interviews. I cannot describe the actual processes of contestation with the data that is available, as it is not sufficient for that purpose. However, I can make analysis of the agency behind contestation in Vietnam. In other words, I will attempt to gain understanding on who are the ones that define or influence the content of Vietnamese national identity.

Once it is accepted that there are multiple ways of 'narrating the nation', the question of cultural authority is engaged and oral historians, like other social scientists, are forced to acknowledge their role in the politics of representation: asking whose voices are heard and whose are silenced, whose memories are considered noteworthy and whose are marginalized. (Smith and Jackson 1999:368)

Collective identities are socially constructed and can be influenced or defined by media, authorities and public. Brown argues that "state elites claim that they themselves are the objects of patriotic loyalty, and it is they who articulate the true will of the collective nation" (2004: 53).

Indeed, in case of Vietnamese national identity, the role of the authority, CPV, appears to be stronger than the role of everyday discourse by public or role of media. The government can influence the content in several ways, both intentionally and unintentionally. Firstly, the government can influence in the ways nationalist ideas become part of the cognitive models of Vietnamese national identity. This can be done by promoting communist activities, national celebrations, national heroes and so on. Then, government may use these nationalist sentiments for its self preservation purposes. For example the government can influence the way people think of China and the Chinese threat. This is a topic over which there is perhaps less contestation than over some other content. It appears to be somewhat generally accepted and internalized by the members of the group that territorial preservation is a collective goal.

Secondly, the government can try to limit public discussion on matters that it thinks to be against its goals. Bao gives quite dramatic statement on the power of the government to control people. She tells that "somehow the government managed to destroy the free will of people to act and to speak." According to Cam free speech and media are being limited: "government are watching all of those in news, you know, take a control of newspaper, you know, multimedias". Her argument is supported by literature (Abuza 2000:3) and a report by Freedom House , "an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world" that gives Vietnam press freedom score 86 when 100 is the worst. (2015) Phuong Mai Nguyen has posted on her Facebook page on the same topic: "Many citizens in this country feel they are being censored and barred from transparency, freedom of speech and information." (31<sup>st</sup> May 2016)

If this would be the case, one could argue that identity definition in Vietnam is being led by the government and that contestation is therefore minimal. However, when I asked the interviewees about public's role on identity construction, most participants stated that identity is not only constructed by nationalism that originates from the government, but that it is simultaneously constructed by people. Also, that it is not only the government that defines and uses nationalism, but that it is in the interest of public as well. According to Ortmann it "is impossible to conceive of a civic national identity that is solely promoted by a ruling elite, but must instead be continually renegotiated between the government and the people" (2010:24). Ai thinks that public is getting more influence on the matter as people have more free space to raise their voices. She also mentions the role of family and the community, that has traditionally been significant in Vietnam. Not all matters concerning Vietnamese national identity are defined by the government, but they are constructed in the everyday discourse and everyday life in Vietnamese homes and communities. In addition of this, in the present day Vietnam there may be more space and means for identity

construction by the public.

As it was brought up in many instances during the interviews, things may be slowly changing in Vietnam. Thi points out that "the government need to change themselves...and to be aware of all the access of information that Vietnamese people have today...they just don't have one source of information. There are many different sources of information. The government have to be aware of that... they need to listen to the people more. It is not like many years ago any more. There are some action they need to take in order to make sure that the [voice of the people] is respected because otherwise...and when people get their information from the bad sources...or from the group of people that want to end the government for example...and they [the government] don't take any action...then may lead to conflict." Thi thought that nowadays people have better access to all kinds of information than before. She also thought that at the moment government of Vietnam does not take this seriously enough, which might lead to trouble later on, if the government does not act accordingly.

Vietnamese Nguyen Cong Khe, former editor in chief and founder of the news daily Thanh Nien, writes in the New York Times opinion pages: "The Vietnamese government must allow the media to operate freely. This is essential to the country's continued economic and political liberalization, and to the Communist Party's efforts to regain the support of the people, which it needs for the sake of its own survival." (New York 19<sup>th</sup> November 2014) Phuong Mai Nguyen has written a post on her Facebook page that supports the same idea. On this post the tone is different to the previous ones as she brings into attention the fact that in Vietnam, like everywhere else in the world, there are now new ways to take part in the narrative construction:

Vietnam is celebrating its 90th anniversary of the Journalist's day, officially the Revolutionary Journalist's day, amidst the allegedly brutal beating of a journalist who tried to film a questionable checkpoint set up by the police. He was shocked severely with police electric batons and gang beaten despite his effort to claim he was a journalist. The brutality only stopped when people on the street intervened. A video was made. And today, facebook is flooded with anger.

It's so obvious that social media has turned any active user into a journalist of some sort. Mainstream media feeds on random experience of random people, and a random individual now has the influential power of going viral that was once only reserved for a journalist. Very soon, journalist is no longer a profession as it used to be, but more of a life skill anyone should have, since anyone can now be a journalist with a smart phone and a facebook or twitter account.

Greetings to the world from a country that ranks 174/180 on the Press Freedom Index, but has millions of new-born journalists who would be unleashed. Revolutionary or not, these people have realized they have impact. I salute you, my country fellows, for wanting to be the people you deserve to be. (Nguyen, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016)

These few examples show how the construction of Vietnamese national identity has been traditionally influenced perhaps more by the CPV whereas the role of the media and the everyday

discourse has been limited or controlled. However, it seems that this may be slowly changing as people have got access to sources of information they did not previously have. Also there are more ways to spread opinions, for example through social media. There is another aspect to the discussion on agency in this context of contestation of Vietnamese national identity:

There is something important that Thi brought up during the interview: with this talk on Vietnamese national identity we have been actually talking about Kinh identity. She argues that "the identity of Vietnamese people can be identity of Kinh people". The ethnic minorities that are located especially in the central and northern highlands do not have equal rights and their voice is still often excluded. For example World Bank report states that inequality in Vietnam mainly exists in the context of ethnic identity (2012) and that those "inequalities in opportunities continue to repeat themselves across generations" (2012:147,165-168). This suggests that it is likely that Kinh identity will prevail to be "Vietnamese national identity". What it means is that the identity construction and contestation that is influenced by public includes 86 per cent of the population but excludes the rest. The rest fourteen per cent are "excluded from narrating the nation" (Smith and Jackson 1999:369). However, it is not only ethnicity that defines people's opportunities to have impact.

Inequality in the identity construction may be based also on the economic measures. For example, people who have more money have better access to education. Hoa Tran argues in her article that there is an 'identity crisis' in Vietnamese higher education. Based on communist approach, the universities are required to teach Marxist philosophy. However they are also obligated to follow western university models. Tran also points out that the education is no more for everybody since it is no longer responsibility of the state alone, but universities have been allowed to collect fees (Tran 1999) which means that the wealthier have an advantage. Social and political capital are important factors for one's ability to be successful in the Vietnamese society (Taylor 2004:33): Results of "inequality awareness" study (Oxfam, 2013) reveal that in Vietnam it is still important to have parents who have either strong connections or power. Having good connections to the government is especially a significant factor when measuring individual success (King et al. 2008:799-801). What I try to argue by presenting these notions on wealth, connections and success is that these factors influence people's role in the hierarchy of the society and this way also determine whether they have a chance to be heard or not. If a person does not have voice, it is hard for them to be part of the everyday discourse in the context of Vietnamese national identity. An email from a Vietnamese friend whose parents had left the country after the war supports this argument of how connections matter even in present day Vietnam:

My grandpas were officers in South Vietnam, so I will never be able to become politically active in Vietnam. Only my grandchildren can become member of the party. However, my cousins in North Vietnam are officials and higher members in the party in Vietnam at the moment. So, if they would introduce me to a partner who is member of the party, my children can already become politically active. It's quite complicated you see:) It's all about the connections. (Ha February 2016)

It is important to note that all of the interview participants in this research come from relatively wealthy backgrounds and have got good education. Therefore they do not represent an average Vietnamese. An argues that the most significant element of identity in Vietnam is based on how well off your family is: "wealthy people are more open and westernized. They are not 100 per cent traditional Vietnamese." This is an interesting notion. Firstly, the people who are wealthier and who have got better education are more likely to have more influence. They are more powerful at the process of identity construction and they are more conscious of the cognitive perspectives than their poor fellow citizens. Secondly, the poor majority are more likely to internalize the Vietnamese national identity at more deep level, where they act upon its norms completely unconsciously.

The sample of my research represents wealthier and better educated part of Vietnamese population. This sample appears to show significant incoherencies in the perceptions on Vietnamese national identity. There are two main conclusions that can be drawn from the interviews. Firstly, these people have internalized the Vietnamese national identity at differing levels: others are more nationalistic and others appear to be conscious of themselves, as if they would be looking at the Vietnamese national identity from outside. My second argument is that this indicates that there is disunity in the Vietnamese society.

Perhaps majority of the people in Vietnam still have traditional nationalistic cognitive perspectives through which they look at the world, but that is not the only truth. Amongst Vietnamese young adults there are people who are able to differentiate themselves from their collective national identity. This makes them also willing to take part in the contestation of the national identity at greater level. It also causes them to see the "flaws in the current system" which they think need fixing. However, future will tell what happens in Vietnam, since the pace of change is perhaps hindered by cautiousness towards quick change, which may be influenced by the cognitive models of Vietnamese national identity. Also, perceived collective threat of China and collective goal of economic growth are important factors that seem to unify the population.

To conclude this chapter on contestation I will make few remarks. Firstly, the government of Vietnam appears to have greater influence on identity construction and contestation than any other

entity. It has traditionally limited and controlled the role of media and the public. However, this is now perhaps changing when there are new means for accessing information and spreading it, and on the other hand there is also demand for change to some extent amongst the public. The role of public is not equal either. The ethnic minorities have minimal role. Also, there is inequality between the poor and the wealthy. Wealthier and better educated people have both better access to influencing identity construction and a way to “think out of the box”, to be more conscious of the cognitive models of Vietnamese national identity. This is perhaps influenced by westernization or globalization.

### **One or Multiple National Identities?**

So far the analysis of content and contestation of Vietnamese national identity has not taken into account the historical context of Vietnam. The country has undergone reunification four decades ago, but for long time before that the South and the North had been separate entities under different influences. Peter writes about this matter of national identities by pointing about "empirical possibility of 'multiple national identities'":

There are cases of state-bounded societies where we find several encompassing subgroups, some or all of which might have strong 'cultural' or 'ethnocultural' collective identities. They may nevertheless share elements of comprehensive national identity. Naturally, this comprehensive, common identity will be focused on political principles. But it need not be confined to political contents. There might very well be other things like shared historical memories, more general values, ideas about specific characteristics of the society and so on. (2002:18)

Is this something that shows in the present day Vietnam? Should we talk about Vietnamese national identity, or perhaps Vietnamese national identities? Do the possible differences in the Southern and Northern identities matter? These are the kinds of questions that will be answered in this part of the thesis.

Firstly I will discuss the challenges of doing this part of the research. When doing the interviews I have acted against the epistemological stance that I have defined in the theoretical framework. This I have done by directly asking the participants about Southern and Northern identities. Brubaker and Cooper warn analysts against “unintentionally reproducing or reinforcing” reification of categories by “uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis”(2000:5). By talking about Southern and Northern identities with the interviewees I have been reifying those categories. I may have strengthened categories that otherwise might not have had significance as



separate categories in the eyes of the interview participants. I could partly take this into account when I interviewed the people, by letting them speak first on their perceptions on different Vietnamese national identities and not insisting on one or two categories of sub-national identities.

"[M]ultiplicity of identity is a crucial issue for investigators of collective identification to address" also according to Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004:84). One cannot assume that "borders" of a certain collective identity can be defined. However, in order to get something out of the interviewees and in order to be able analyse the outcome, I asked whether the participants think that there are separate identities. When they talked about separate categories of north and south, I asked them then to describe the differences between these identities. My presumption was that the former division would be one significant reason for incoherencies in Vietnamese national identity. It however seems that this is not a justified claim based on the perceptions provided by the interview participants.

When I asked whether the participants thought that Vietnamese national identity consisted more than one category, all the eleven interviewees said that there are multiple categories. Seven of them pointed out the difference between the north and the south prior me asking about that specific difference. Cam for example stated that "the south and the north are different in personality" and Mai told that there are "different cultures in the north and the south" and An argued that there are still "much division between the north and the south". Next I will discuss the differences as described by the interview participants.

Ai tells that in the south people are more open minded and friendly. Dinh has got the same argument. He continues that "in the north people are very political and calculated, not very open minded." An also thinks that the Southern people are "more open and westernized" and "not 100 per cent traditional Vietnamese." This is interesting, as he is making relational comparisons between "the real Vietnamese" and the Southern Vietnamese. About the Northern Vietnamese An tells that they are more traditional. According to Cadeo there is also division between westernized Southern Vietnamese and traditional Northern Vietnamese: "people living in Hanoi they have a lot of tradition...they just want to maintain our culture. They don't want to make everything different, be more western. ...people living in Ho Chi Minh City are very like western... they just want to change everything." Unlike the others, Canh tells that Southern people are "really racist". His opinion is that they hate the people from the north. He thinks that young people would not care anymore about north and south, but they have become racist because their parents have taught them to think and behave in such way. He finishes by saying that the Northern people do not really care about other

people and that they just like to live their lives like they have always done. Cam thinks that the people in the south and the north have got different personalities. The people in the north according to her are quite conservative "as the communism was established there quite a long time ago", and the Southern people are "very open and friendly and smiley, and they behave from their heart." She has also heard people generalizing the Northern people by claiming that they are "messy and disrespectful", but she does not agree with that kind of talk. Nevertheless, for Cam there are "quite clearly separate identities".

Linh thinks that the Southern people, Saigon people as she calls them, are "very warm and welcoming". She also thinks that they do not care about saving money unlike the Northern people. They are "Western style". "Northern people... eat less, spend less to secure money. To buy a house, to have property. Northern people are more careful about that." She is from the north herself and argues that the society influences her more than it influences the people from the south.

Bao thinks that north is more homogeneous category and south more heterogeneous. In the south people are laid back, open minded and talkative according to her. In the north there is "the old Hanoian culture": people are more "elegant" and more traditional. Where does Da Nang stand in this? Bao thinks that the city is blend of Southern and Northern identities. Cadeo thinks that Da Nang is "half western and half Vietnamese".

In Thi's opinion in the past there had been a lot of differences between the north and the south, but that after unification there is not much difference. She thinks that climate had more to do with the construction of different identities, than colonisation. Hoa also thinks that the differences were more in the past. In her opinion young people do not mind the division any more. However she tells that her mother had told her not to date anyone from the north. She also makes distinctions in the mentalities of people from the north "communism oriented" and the south "more liberal and open to capitalism and Americanized". Nevertheless, she sees that fluidity in the identities is really high nowadays and that it is not easy to make clear distinctions to different categories. According to her the trend in the past has been that "the leader moves to north and money moves to south" and that nowadays the south is making money for the whole country, which gives them more voice and therefore power. Therefore according to her the country is more homogeneous.

The narratives of Southern and Northern people appear to be quite consistent. People from the south are considered westernized and open minded whereas the people from the north are thought to be traditional and more community and family oriented. Therefore one could argue that there are

multiple national identities in Vietnam. This is mainly based on the historical factors, but perhaps not only the colonisation era and what followed after, but also the times before that.

However, counter argument for Southern national identity and Northern national identity is that they do not seem to matter in present day Vietnam to any significant extent. Racism has been mentioned by one participant, but this seems to be the only implication that could have impact on people's lives. Ai tells that "there is no clash between the north and the south". Therefore, if this small group of young Vietnamese adults who live in the middle of the "south" and the "north" describe these people with different characteristics but do not put much everyday significance in the differences, perhaps we can argue that something else overrides the "multiple national identities" narrative.

Even if the divide between the north and the south is not relevant in the present day Vietnam in terms of separate categories of national identity, something important is however brought up. There is no borderline between the north and south as per se, but the different characteristics that are brought up in the descriptions touches upon another divide: the divide between more westernized and traditional people. It may often be that the people in the south are more westernized and the people in north are more conservative, but it is not limited to this. One could argue that the most significant factor that divides people is their social class or economic status. Therefore wealthier and better educated people everywhere in Vietnam may belong to the "southern middle class mentality", and it is not limited to geographical location. Perhaps the geographical origins have impact on the cognitive perspectives of people, so that there are different nuances between the people who are born in the south or in the north, but that does not determine their identities. In addition of this kind of differentiation, there were also another different category mentioned in the interviews.

As it has also been previously mentioned, some participants thought that the greatest difference between different identity categories were that between generations. Young people are more open to new things whereas older people are more conservative. This may be problematic in the society where family and community are been highly regarded. Traditionally young people have been expected to follow the instructions of the older, but according to few of the interviewees this is changing. However, it is still the norm for the extended family to live in the same house, therefore the change may take time.

To conclude the discussion on multiple national identities we can argue that there indeed seems to be perceptions on different sub-national identities between the Northern and Southern identities.

However, they do not seem to bear much significance in the context of unity of the society. There is no clash between people in the north and the south, even if there were few notions of "racist" southerners present in the interview narratives. Nevertheless, the descriptions that the interview participants gave of southern and northern people are significant. They touch upon different categorization. Divide along the line of wealth. Wealthier people were considered by some of the participants as "less Vietnamese" and more "westernized", which were also the characteristics given to the people from the South. The people from the North represent the idea of true, traditional Vietnamese. This seems to have significant impact on the cognitive models of people in Vietnam. It does not divide people geographically to different national identities, but it nevertheless divides the society by differentiation of cognitive perspectives. However, what this means for the future of Vietnam is not something that this analysis can answer.

## 4 CONCLUSION

After looking at Vietnamese national identity, as it has been narrated by eleven interview participants, from multiple different perspectives it is time to look back to the purpose of this research. How do content and contestation derived from Vietnamese young adults perceptions on Vietnamese national identities reflect the state of unity in the society in 2016? The concept of content was broken into four components which then all were used as analytical tools to untangle the perceptions on Vietnamese national identity. What were the main claims that were made? How do they answer the question on the state of unity in Vietnamese society in 2016?

First claim that was made is that the Communist Party of Vietnam appears to have a strong authority over the definition of Vietnamese national identity. This does not really tell much about the unity of the society, except that ideally the norms and cognitive models originating from national identity would support the status quo of the nation, especially in an authoritative country like Vietnam. Therefore this notion of the influence of CPV on Vietnamese national identity could support the claim that there is unity in the society. However, this kind of claim cannot be made without taking into account other factors. Especially the level of internalization of the national identity.

Second claim is that there are great differences in the internalizations of Vietnamese national identity. Already in the first part where the constitutive norms were discussed, the conclusion was that there appears to be incoherencies in the levels of internalization of norms and rules between people. Some people are more prone to act according to the norms and others are not. Some people act without being conscious about the reasons behind their actions, others are semi-conscious and act nevertheless, some may even be fully conscious and they may act or may not act accordingly. The impression that I got based on the interviews is that even if few of the participants were perhaps fully conscious of the norms and obligations, and even if they did not agree with them, they might still follow them because it benefits them. All this analysis on the level of internalization is important when linking it to the unity of the society. I cannot conclude anything about the scope of incoherencies in the general population in Vietnam in their internalization of Vietnamese identity, especially because my interview sample is not adequate sample of average Vietnamese, but based on the eleven interviews it seems that there the level of internalization is not always very deep. At the moment it still does not seem to have significant impact on the unity of the society in other ways than perhaps in the cognitive models of people. What I mean by this is that people do not seem to act much differently at least in the context of collective action or disunity of the society, but that

their worldviews may not be always fully coherent with the Vietnamese national identity. However, future will tell whether these cognitive models influenced by other identities and factors will become visibly significant in the state of unity of the society.

Thirdly, I argue that collective goals of territorial preservation and economic growth are significant unifying factors in the society. I discussed the matters where the collectiveness of Vietnamese national identity seem most present. Based on the interviews people seem unified in the matter of "threat of China". Often the participants had differing opinions on certain topics, but China was a topic that gathered quite homogenous reactions. When using the concept of contestation, one can argue that there was not much contestation over the topic of China. Another topic where there was not much contestation is the collective goal of economic growth. It was widely regarded as most important value for Vietnamese by the participants. Hence, the argument is that the matters that show the most unity in the society of Vietnam, based on these eleven interviews, are collective goals of territorial preservation and economic growth. They may be significant factors when estimating overall state of unity in the society. They are counterbalancing the other factors that perhaps show more disunity and incoherencies.

Fourthly, another factor that appears to unify the population of Vietnam is them being collectively proud of the past. "Thousand years of history" or "thousand years of culture" were themes that were often brought up by the participants. The interviewees seem to really believe that Vietnam cannot be defeated. This kind of strongly nationalist sentiment brings the nation together even now when talking about China for example. However, the participants showed also frustration towards the emphasizes of history. They thought that government was not doing well enough because it trusted that people will continue to be proud of their glorious past and grateful for the government in its part in preserving the nation. Nevertheless, I would argue that despite the frustrations, Vietnamese will keep their proud history and that it can still be used as unifying factor by the government. This however leads to the fifth claim:

There seems to be a slow transformation happening in the society of Vietnam. Most of the participants talked about change. They did not really define clearly what they meant by this change, but it was strongly present in their narratives. I made division of different types of change that the participants seemed to advocate: active, passive and restricted change. The people showed great interest in change and they told that it is inevitable and needed. They wanted more voice for people for example However they did not really give themselves agency in the process. Rather, they were waiting for the change to happen naturally. I consider this as the most interesting topic of the

interviews. Clearly, there is some kind of outside influence present in the cognitive models of the interview participants. However, currently it seems that the Vietnamese national identity still defines their actions into non-action. Nevertheless, this is an aspect that shows some level of disunity of the society. Future will tell whether the change will become more apparent, perhaps if and when people have more public space for the discourse of change.

Finally there is the question of multiple national identities. The presumption of this research was that there might be different national identities in the South and North Vietnam, due to the history, and that this might reflect in the state of unity of the society. Indeed, based on the interviews there seems to be differentiation in the ways people define the Northern and Southern Vietnamese. Southern were defined as more open minded and westernized whereas northern were defined traditional. It was even said that the Southern Vietnamese are less Vietnamese than the Northern Vietnamese. These are quite strong claims. Still, they do not seem to have any real impact in the society. The society does not appear to be geographically divided in sense that it would tell anything about unity of the society. The significant categorical division comes from elsewhere. It seems that there are perhaps "multiple national identities" in terms of social class. The wealthier represent the Southern mentality and are more Westernized whereas the less wealthy fall in the category of "real Vietnamese". I think that this is an important finding. In a way it perhaps links to the presumption that I had: that there would be significant divide between the Southern and Northern national identities because the South has been influenced by foreign powers and greater economic success. Indeed, foreign powers, or perhaps rather globalism in general, as well as economic factors appear to be a factor that divides the cognitions of Vietnamese national identity. It just does not happen along geographic lines.

What can hence be said about the state of unity in the society of Vietnam in 2016? The conclusion of this research is that there are factors that indicate disunity in the society, as well as elements that pull the society together. However, based on the interviews, it seems that at present day these factors are still subtle and are not likely to cause any major change in the country in the near future. Nevertheless, the research has shown that Vietnamese national identity does not have only one definition. The participants of the interview may be not representative of average Vietnamese, but they still are Vietnamese. Their narratives have showed different levels of internalization of the national identity and different cognitive models through which they look and interpret world. I cannot categorize these different elements and definitions of Vietnamese identity, which is not the purpose of this thesis either. However, the different examples show some of the different definitions there are to Vietnamese national identity. Therefore I think it is justified to talk about "national

identities" as more fluid concept. I would argue that balancing in the middle of epistemological debate is possible since this research has managed to produce some insights to the state of unity in Vietnam in 2016.



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