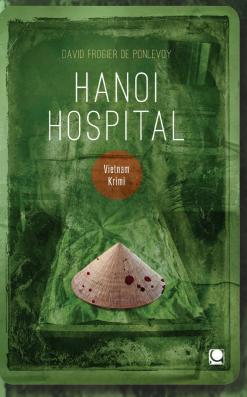
## **Book review** Hanoi Hospital

Britta Schmitz



have to admit: I am a fan of crime fiction. There is nothing better for a long train or plane ride than a gripping thriller. A lot of my first impressions of Sweden came from the novels written by Mankell and Co. It was only when I moved to Sweden that I realized that mine and grumpy, old Wallander's Scania were maybe not exactly the same. So, I was all the more eager to read "Hanoi Hospital" by David Frogier de Ponlevoy when I got my hands on it. After all, I have lived in Vietnam for a while. Would I be able to recognize the Hanoi I experienced while living there myself? Would the author succeed in explaining daily life in Vietnam to his Western readers and at the same time manage to captivate them with a thought through arc of suspense?

To begin with, this book wants to be a lot of things: It wants to be a classical whodunit, a coming-of-age story, a city novel and a report casting light on Vietnam's social problems in the age of economic transformation.

The story takes us to Hanoi, where some mysterious fatalities occur. Patients die while they are treated in public hospitals or they just disappear. A young girl hits a corpse and soon she and her cousin are hot on the trail of villains in lab coats, discovering

criminal schemes in Vietnam's medical system.

First of all, Frogier de Ponlevoy knows his stuff; he is – as far as a Westerner can be - an insider of the Vietnamese culture. He used to Anne, half Vietnamese - half German live in Vietnam from 2006-2014 and and stuck in an identity crisis, Tuan apparently did not spend those years the migrant worker, who had to bury in an "expat-bubble", secluded from his dream of a better life in the capital the life of the ordinary people. His and finally the doctor, highly educated knowledge about the country and its but without moral conscience. customs as well as social and family Vietnam's ever growing expat circles structures seems to be really extensive. are portrayed in Jonathan Axen, a

So extensive that some passages of the novel might get tiring - especially when he indulges in describing seemingly endless lists of food or le his characters quote from Vietnam' ancient national epos "The Tale of Kieu".

But with this story he takes us deep inside the contemporary Vietnamese society and shows it to us from many angles; describing the events from five different perspectives. That is to say, the book does not have only one protagonist. Each chapter is dedicated to one of the four main characters representing different members of today's Vietnamese society. There is Linh, the shy "All-Vietnamese girl";

German expat-manager, who is drunk with success in business and thinking of himself as a one-off womanizer. While it is an excellent idea to tell the story from different perspectives, this concept does not give enough room for deeper insights into the character's developments. Some of the protagonists appear rather woodcut-like or extremely exaggerated. The motives of the doctor for example can't be described by anything else than megalomania. Linh's development from being a conformist, the economic actors and moral values shy translator to becoming a brave and highly-engaged journalist seems a bit over-the-top. And it stays unclear, why exactly the girls are getting so engaged r, Jonathan at, who seems Axen, the arrogan in an especially might be more be portrayed ggerated way, listic than one would like to think. affairs manager for a big pharma firm available in a German language edition.

Britta Schmitz [schmitzbritta@gmx.de] travels a lot and has always a crime novel in her luggage. But she also knows Asia quite well with a Master in Modern China Studies and more than 10 years of living, studying and working in China and Vietnam.

Asia is full of this kind of expats, living pretentiously, loud and ostentatious. However, in "Hanoi Hospital" it is not just the "ugly foreigners" committing crimes against the poor Vietnamese people, Westerners and Vietnamese are hand in hand involved in criminal machinations.

- is more relevant than ever, not only in how medical advancement, profit for novel I was convinced that thing like the falsified pharmaceutical stud could not be happening that e But it seems that here, too, the aut

The topic of the plot – crime and ethical violations in the medical sector

onfirmed, that sadly enough a lot isuse and manipulations are possib n the initial phases of pharma studie even in countries like Vietnam wher the legislation itself is quite strict.

"Hanoi Hospital" is an entertain read while at the same time it is packed with insights and facts about Vietnam The story has its weaknesses a thriller and Linh is for sure not th new Lisbeth Salander, but it captivates Vietnam. It leaves the reader wondering with its vivid descriptions of life Hanoi. I definitely recommend the book for everyone planning to travel to Vietnam or for those who just came back and want to keep that special Vietnam-feeling just a bit longe

## **Bibliographic details**

But it seems that here, too, the author Frogier de Ponlevoy, David (2015): Hanoi did an excellent research job. A friend Hospital. Conbook, Meerbusch, ISBN: be more of mine, who is global regulatory 978-3-943176-91-9; until now only