

Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese: Minority Rights and Domestic Politics

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The study's main aim is to analyse the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Anti-Vietnamese sentiments have been regularly displayed by the Cambodian elite and in the policies of the Cambodian authorities, the roots and effects of these attitudes are explored. The anti-Vietnamese discourse in Cambodia shows that the perceptions of Vietnam as a state, influence the attitudes towards the Vietnamese minority. Discriminatory policies implemented by the Cambodian authorities and attacks instigated by such policies led to the virtual elimination of the Vietnamese minority in the 1970s, when some 420,000 Vietnamese were expelled or fled to Vietnam. In the 1980s ethnic Vietnamese returned to Cambodia while in the 1990s, politically motivated attacks on ethnic Vietnamese were carried out on a number of occasions. These attacks posed a real threat to the Vietnamese community at large.

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to examine inter-ethnic relations in Cambodia. This is done through a case study analysis focusing on the ethnic Vietnamese¹ in that country. During the 1990s, armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia² occurred on several occasions. Such attacks represent an extreme and obvious expression of anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Cambodian society. The study looks at anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia to identify its roots and its evolution, to what degree it is politicised, as well as its effects on the situation in Cambodia. Furthermore, because relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are highly relevant for the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, they will be subject to attention. The interrelationship between the ethnic Vietnamese situation in Cambodia — affected by government policies and various expressions

¹ The term “Ethnic Vietnamese” refers to the largest ethnic group in Vietnam, i.e., the “Kinh” and not ethnic minorities in that country. This definition is derived from Decision No. 121 — TCTK/PPCD on the “Nomenclature of Vietnamese ethnic groups” issued by the General Department of Statistics on 2 March 1979.

² The term Cambodia will be used throughout the study, unless there is a need to differentiate between different Cambodian governments or political parties.

of anti-Vietnamese sentiments, including armed attacks — and Cambodian-Vietnamese relations will be a key dimension, analysed in this study.

The focus is on the contemporary situation, i.e., developments and events following the creation of a coalition government in Cambodia following the United Nations' organised elections in May 2003. However, since the historical context is of great relevance for an understanding of the contemporary period, a background section on developments since Cambodia's independence from France in 1953 is included.

The empirical part of the study is structured chronologically while the analytical part of the study section serves two main purposes. First, to analyse the policies towards the Vietnamese minority in the context of the overall domestic developments as well as in the context of the relations with Vietnam. Second, to assess the impact of the anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Cambodia and the challenges posed for minority protection.

Vietnamese presence and Cambodian attitudes: 1953–1993³

After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953 the Cambodian authorities attempted to regulate the activities of immigrant communities in the country, among them the ethnic Vietnamese, through a process compelling many to seek naturalisation to Cambodian citizenship. Cambodia's relations with the two Vietnamese states became an issue of growing concern as the war in Vietnam escalated in the 1960s and by the end of the decade gave rise to anti-Vietnamese sentiments. The size of the Vietnamese community is difficult to ascertain due to different criteria used to classify ethnic groups, with official censuses using nationality as a basis for classification, e.g., 217,774 Vietnamese in 1962. The most reliable estimate puts the number of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia at some 450,000 out of a total population of about 7.3 million, by the end of the 1960s (Migozzi 1973:21 and 40–46).

Following a deepening political crisis Prince Norodom Sihanouk was removed as Head of State in March 1970 and the Khmer Republic was established. The beginning of the Khmer Republic was marked by open persecution of the ethnic Vietnamese. Attacks caused thousands of deaths among the ethnic Vietnamese (Chandler 1993:205; Chou 1992:34; Goldblum 1974:28–30 and 44–51; Pouvatchy 1976:340–342). In addition, some 250,000 Vietnamese fled to the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) (South), according to official Vietnamese statistics (Pouvatchy 1976:342–347).

³ For a more extensive empirical overview of the period 1953–1993 see Amer 1994c: 210–238. Unless otherwise stated information in this background section is derived from Amer 1994c.

After a long and bitter war, the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia (RGNUC), dominated by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), captured the capital Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 and defeated the Khmer Republic. The CPK gradually took full control of political power in the country. The country was renamed Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The fate of the ethnic Vietnamese was one of renewed exodus, as some 170,000 were expelled from Cambodia in 1975. The Vietnamese were estimated to be about 200,000 by the mid-1970s. However, between 1975 and 1978, only some 30,000 remained in the country and many of them died of starvation, diseases or by executions. This meant that the Vietnamese minority had all but completely disappeared from Cambodia.⁴ The CPK remained in power until it was overthrown by a military intervention launched by Vietnam on 25 December 1978.

Following the fall of Phnom Penh in early January 1979, a new Cambodian administration was established and later gave the country the name of People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The PRK/State of Cambodia (SOC) period lasted *de facto* until the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in March 1992. It faced armed opposition from three groups: the overthrown DK also known as Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), i.e., the Khmer Rouge), the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and the Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC). They formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) on 22 June 1982. The CGDK changed its name to National Government of Cambodia (NGC) in February 1990.

The new order installed in Cambodia came about with extensive Vietnamese assistance and people who had sought refuge in Vietnam in the 1975–1978 period returned to Cambodia. This process involved not only ethnic Khmers but also ethnic Vietnamese, leading to the re-emergence of a Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. The later caused international concern as they were seen as part of a process of “vietnamisation” of the country.⁵ Whether they were returnees who had been forced out of Cambodia during the 1970s or new migrants they were all perceived to be part of a larger Vietnamese scheme to gain influence and even to colonise Cambodia.

The ethnic Vietnamese settling down in Cambodia became one of the major issues in the discourse of the Cambodian groups opposed to the

⁴ In 1978 Vietnam requested assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to cope with 341,400 refugees who had arrived from Cambodia since 1975. Among these refugees there were 170,300 ethnic Vietnamese. The figures over the number of refugees in Vietnam in 1978 is taken from *The Boat People*: 1979:98.

⁵ For details pertaining to the alleged “Vietnamisation” of Cambodia during the

PRK/SOC and to the Vietnamese influence in the country. The Ambassador to the United Nations of DK⁶ gave estimates of the number of Vietnamese settlers in 1979, 300,000, and in 1981, 500,000 (*UNGA* A/34/PV.62:1204; A/36/PV.36:722). In 1984 the President of the CGDK, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, put the number at 600,000 (*UNGA* A/39/PV.40:par. 4–5). In 1986 he claimed that 700,000 Vietnamese had settled in Cambodia (*UNGA* A/41/PV.42:par. 46). In 1988, Son Sann, Prime Minister within the CGDK claimed that the number was between 800,000 and one million (*UNGA* A/43/PV.42:par. 17). In 1989, he claimed that there were one million Vietnamese settlers in Cambodia (*UNGA* A/44/PV.56:par. 16–17).

The official policies of the PRK towards “Vietnamese residents” were outlined in a publication of September 1983 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Policy* 1983). The PRK estimated that by mid-1983 there were about 56,000 “Vietnamese residents” in Cambodia and they had returned after the PRK had authorised them to do so (*Policy* 1983:7). The official policy of the PRK towards the Vietnamese sought to regulate the Vietnamese migration to Cambodia but not to prevent it.

There is a considerable discrepancy between the PRK's claim of 56,000 ethnic Vietnamese in 1983 and the CGDK's claim of 600,000 settlers in 1984. It can be noted that in 1984 Cambodia's total population was estimated at about 7.2million (Vickery 1986:2–3), i.e., about the same level at the end of the 1960s. The scholarly literature does not produce any clear assessment of the figures or of the actual size of the Vietnamese community in Cambodia. Some researchers have simply quoted the CGDK claims or sought to justify these claims (Martin 1984:180–184; Pouvatchy 1986a:3–4; *The Vietnamisation* 1984:11–16). Other researchers have made more modest estimates than the CGDK but higher than the PRK figure of 1983. According to such estimates the number of settlers would have been in the range of 300,000 to 450,000, i.e., below or at about the same size as before the two exodus of the 1970s (Chandler 1993:233 and 267 footnote 11; Chou 1992:40; Hiebert 1984:2–5; Vickery 1986:2–3 and 165–167).

Following a peace process in the late 1980s and early 1990s that led to the signing of the Paris Agreements on Cambodia in October 1991, a peacekeeping operation was carried out by the United Nations in Cambodia from March 1992, i.e., when the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) was formally established, to September 1993 when

PRK/SOC period see for example: Martin 1984:177–191; Martin 1989:206–227; Pouvatchy 1986; *The Vietnamisation* 1984.

⁶ The overthrown government in Cambodia, i.e. DK, was allowed to continue to represent Cambodia in the General Assembly from 1979 and throughout the 1980s. For details see: Amer 1994a:89–108.

UNTAC's mandate expired with the adoption of a new Cambodian constitution by the Constituent Assembly.⁷ In the context of this study events taking place up to the end of June 1993 will be included in this section.

The peacekeeping period was marked by repeated attacks against the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Former parties to the CGDK/NGC attempted to limit the number of ethnic Vietnamese who could take part in the planned general elections this was most evident in the discussion prior to the adoption of the Electoral Law in 1992. Armed attacks leading to deaths among the ethnic Vietnamese occurred in April, May, July, October, November, and December 1992. After a period with no reported attacks in January and February 1993, there was a sharp increase in the number of attacks in March following an announcement by UNTAC, on 1 March that it had discovered three Vietnamese men who had served with the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and whom UNTAC therefore regarded as "foreign forces". UNTAC requested Vietnam to take the three persons back as Vietnamese "nationals". The increase in attacks in March forced some 20,000 ethnic Vietnamese to seek refuge in Vietnam. Armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese continued in April and in May. Even after the elections in late May, attacks were reported in June.⁸

Following the elections in late May, the four parties represented in the Constituent Assembly established an Interim Joint Administration (Provisional National Government of Cambodia (PNGC)) to govern the country until a new Constitution was adopted and the Constituent Assembly transformed itself into a legislative assembly (*UNSC S/26090:2*). On 1 July the Constituent Assembly gave a vote of confidence to the PNGC.

Attacks and talks since 1993

Continued attacks mid-1993 and 1994

The political developments did not put a halt to attacks against ethnic Vietnamese as they continued in July 1993. The Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh sent a note to the SNC, to UNTAC and to the Foreign Ministry of PNGC. According to the note twenty ethnic Vietnamese had been killed in attacks carried out by the PDK on 6, 8 and 10 July (*BBC/FE/1744:A2/4*). On 1 August, a representative of Vietnam's Ministry

⁷ For an overview and assessment of the United Nations' peacekeeping operation and the post-electoral evolution up to the withdrawal of UNTAC see: Amer 1993:211–231; Amer 1995.

⁸ For details on the attacks on the Vietnamese during the peacekeeping period see Amer, 1994c:222–228.

of Foreign Affairs called on the Cambodian authorities and on international organisations to take “practical measures” to assist ethnic Vietnamese who had sought refuge in the border areas between Cambodia and Vietnam to escape from the “Khmer Rouge’s terrorism and killings”. Vietnam wanted the PNGC to “receive them and create favourable conditions” so as to allow them to return to normal life within Cambodia (*UNSC S/26360:2; BBC/FE/1759/A2/3*). On 12 August, Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a communiqué concerning another armed attack against ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, which killed six persons on 10 August. Vietnam accused the PDK of carrying out the attack and strongly condemned the killings (*BBC/FE/1767:A1/3*).

During the withdrawal process of UNTAC from August to December 1993, the new Constitution of Cambodia was adopted. A closer look at the Constitution shows that it does not contain any provisions providing human rights protection nor any duties and privileges of foreign nationals living in Cambodia. The constitution deals with the rights and duties of “Cambodian citizens” without making any reference to the ethnicity of such citizens.⁹ Thus, the constitution in itself does not exclude any ethnic group from being Cambodian citizens. However, in late September 1993 it was reported that during debates in the National Assembly relating to who should be regarded as “Cambodian”, members of the Assembly broadened the definition to include ethnic Chams and ethnic Chinese but excluded the ethnic Vietnamese. Thus, the status and the rights of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia continued to be a controversial issue (Amer 1994b:18–19; Murdoch 1993:11).

From September 1993 to March 1994 no armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese warranted an official Vietnamese protest. Then, on 9 April, thirteen ethnic Vietnamese were killed and twenty-seven wounded in Kandal province, prompting the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to condemn the killings and to urge King Sihanouk and the Royal National Government of Cambodia (RNGC)¹⁰ to take “prompt and effective measures” to ensure the safety of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia (*BBC/FE/1962:B/16; BBC/FE/1969:B/7; BBC/FE/1970:B/2*).

The period without lethal attacks on ethnic Vietnamese saw several high level meetings between Cambodian and Vietnamese leaders. The ethnic

⁹ For the full text of the “Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia” see: *BBC/FE/1822:S1/1–9*.

¹⁰ King Norodom Sihanouk was brought back on the throne through the provisions of the new Cambodian constitution which was adopted on 21 September 1993 (*UNSC S/26529:1–2*). The RNGC was made up of the same four parties as the PNGC and was officially brought into office by a vote in the National Assembly on October 29 (*New Parliament* 1993:15).

Vietnamese in Cambodia was one of the topics discussed at these high level meetings, another issue was the border disputes (*BBC/FE/1777:A1/2*; *BBC/FE/1779:B/1-2*; *BBC/FE/1781:B/5*; *BBC/FE/1939:B/10-11*; *BBC/FE/1962:B/16*). In April 1994 a “Cambodian-Vietnamese joint communiqué” was issued at the end of the Vietnamese Prime Minister’s visit to Cambodia. The communiqué stated that a working group would be established to “discuss and solve the issue of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia based on the respect for Cambodia’s law and international law and customs”. It also stated that the ethnic Vietnamese would be treated as other “foreign nationals” (*BBC/FE/1963:B/1-3*).

In May 1994 King Sihanouk claimed that Vietnam had been “nibbling away” Cambodian territory by moving border demarcation marks. This highlighted that tension still persisted between the two relating to the land border. Vietnam’s response was to deny the accusations and to state its readiness to resolve the border problems by peaceful means through negotiations. Following King Sihanouk’s accusations, anti-Vietnamese protests were reported to have taken place in Phnom Penh.¹¹

During the rest of 1994 the relations between the two governments focused on the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, first, in relation to attacks on ethnic Vietnamese with Vietnam protesting against killings of ethnic Vietnamese, and, second, in connection with the Immigration Law adopted by the Cambodian National Assembly on 26 August.¹² The passing of the law raised Vietnamese fears that it would be used against the ethnic Vietnamese.¹³

A closer look at the attacks displays that the first attack took place on 15 May in Kompong Chhnang Province where two ethnic Vietnamese fishermen were killed (*BBC/FE/2009:B/6*; *FBIS-EAS-94-104:74*). The second attack occurred in the same province on 3 July when all five members of a family were killed (*BBC/FE 2048:B/6*; *FBIS-EAS-94-135:54*; *FBIS-EAS-94-136:51*). A third attack occurred on 15 July when a passenger bus was stopped in Pursat Province and an ethnic Vietnamese was dragged

¹¹ King Sihanouk’s accusations were put forward in an interview with Nayan Chanda of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in May 1994 (*The Centre* 1994:20). For Vietnam’s position and the anti-Vietnamese manifestations see *Hanoi denies* 1994:7; *Vietnam ready* 1994; *Vietnam denies* 1994.

¹² The law was passed by a majority of 97 votes in favour to one against (*BBC/FE/2086:B/2*; *FBIS-EAS-94-168:77*). For the full text of the law see *Law on Immigration*: 113–129.

¹³ For Vietnam’s reaction to the immigration law see *BBC/FE/2085:B/2-3*; *BBC/FE/2088:B/1*; *FBIS-EAS-94-167:86*; *FBIS-EAS-94-169:95*; *FBIS-EAS-94-17156-57*; *FBIS-EAS-94-174:84-85*; *FBIS-EAS-94-191:82-83*.

away and shot dead (*FBIS-EAS-94-142:97-98*; *FBIS-EAS-94-144:99*). A fourth attack took place on 26 July when a train was attacked in Kampot Province and three ethnic Vietnamese were killed (*BBC/FE/2062:B/2*; *BBC/FE/2065:B/6*; *BBC/FE/2066:B/3*; *FBIS-EAS-94-147:100*; *FBIS-EAS-94-149:70*). Yet another attack occurred on 5 September in Kandal Province, the grenade attack killed four Vietnamese and two Khmers (*BBC/FE/2097:B/4*; *BBC/FE/2099:B/3-4*; *BBC/FE/2100:B/3-4*; *FBIS-EAS-94-173:87-88*; *FBIS-EAS 94-174:84-85*). The next lethal attack occurred on 20 October when ten ethnic Vietnamese were killed and two wounded in Kompong Chhnang Province (*BBC/FE/2135:B/7*; *BBC/FE/2136:B/2*; *BBC/FE/2138:B/2*). The last attack with deadly outcome in 1994 took place on 7 December when two Vietnamese fishermen were killed and two wounded in Kandal Province (*BBC/FE/2176:B/3*; *BBC/FE/2177:B/2*).

Decrease in attacks amid bilateral talks — January 1995–April 1996

The visit by Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh to Vietnam in January 1995 gave the two countries an opportunity to discuss the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese at the highest political level. It was agreed to hold a meeting of experts to discuss the issue. Cambodia pledged that the Immigration Law would not be aimed at "confining or deporting en masse Vietnamese nationals". Cambodia also stated that it would "try to do everything", in conformity with Cambodian regulations and "within its capacity", to ensure the safety of the "Vietnamese nationals" in Cambodia (*BBC/FE/2204:B/2-3*; *BBC/FE/2205:B/1-3*).

The first meeting of the expert-level working groups on the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia was held in Phnom Penh on March 29–30. The two sides had "frank, friendly discussions" and they achieved "some results" (*BBC/FE/2269:B/4*). The second meeting was held in Hanoi on 28–29 July and an agreement was reached on measures to "settle the number of Vietnamese refugees" in Chrey Thom in Kandal Province. It was also decided to continue the discussions on other issues (*BBC/FE/2371:B/1*). Then on 28 October, Cambodia announced that ethnic Vietnamese "staying temporarily" at Chrey Thom were being sent back to "their" provinces (*BBC/FE/2447:B/4*; *FBIS-EAS-95-209:38*).

In August 1995 Vietnam's President Le Duc Anh made an official visit to Cambodia and in December 1995 King Sihanouk visited Vietnam. Both sides stressed the commitment to co-operation and friendly bilateral relations (*BBC/FE/2377:B/3*, *BBC/FE/2378:B/2-3*; *BBC/FE/2487:B/7*; *BBC/FE/2490:B/5*).

During the period January to July 1996 the border disputes dominated relations between the two countries. Cambodia's First Prime Minister Ranariddh took the lead by claiming that Vietnamese farmers backed by troops had encroached on Cambodian territory in some of the border

provinces.¹⁴ Vietnam denied the accusations and in early April, Vietnam's Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet made an official visit to Cambodia to discuss the border issue and other matters. The press communiqué noted problems concerning "Vietnamese residents" in Cambodia and it was agreed that the expert groups would hold their third meeting in Phnom Penh "as soon as possible" (*BBC/FE/2584:B/2*).

Renewed attacks amid continued bilateral dialogue on the ethnic Vietnamese: May 1996–March 2000

In May 1996, attacks on ethnic Vietnamese re-occurred and Vietnam protested at the killing of fourteen ethnic Vietnamese in Pursat Province (*BBC/FE/2619:B/3*; *BBC/FE/2622:B/4*). In early August, Vietnam announced that fifty "Vietnamese nationals" living in Cambodia had returned to Vietnam following the "massacre" of twenty-five Vietnamese by the PDK (*BBC/FE/2683:B/1*). In late October, the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh sent a note to Cambodia's Foreign Ministry protesting against the killing of two "Vietnamese nationals" on 10 October in the province of Kompong Chhnang (*BBC/FE/2760:B/2*).

During the last five months of 1996 and into 1997, relations between the two countries improved through mutual visits. In November 1996 it was reported that Cambodia had taken steps to issue temporary residence permits to ethnic Vietnamese who had entered the country before 1993 (*BBC/FE/2771:B/1–2*).¹⁵ During this period the most important visit was carried out in late February 1997 by Vietnam's Foreign Minister Mr. Nguyen Manh Cam. It was agreed that talks aimed at finding "appropriate measures" to solve issues relating to the "Vietnamese nationals" in Cambodia would continue (*BBC/FE/2856:B/2*; *BBC/FE/2857:B/1*).¹⁶

The situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia remained problematic and in late May 1997 the Vietnamese Embassy in Cambodia officially protested to the Cambodian authorities. Four attacks had taken place, the first on April 22 in which three Vietnamese were killed and six wounded. The second and third took place on April 27 in Ratanakiri Province and involved attacks against ethnic Vietnamese fishermen. In total nine people were killed and ten wounded. The fourth attack also took place in Ratanakiri Province in May when twelve Vietnamese were killed and sixteen wounded (*BBC/FE/2926:B/3*; *BBC/FE/2927:B/4*). Further,

¹⁴ For details see: Amer 1997:80–91.

¹⁵ This information was carried in a report published by the Cambodian newspaper *Reaksmei Kampuchea* on 15 November 1996.

¹⁶ The PDK strongly criticised the visit by the Vietnamese Foreign Minister (*BBC/FE/2856:B/3*).

evidence of anti-Vietnamese feelings was a bomb attack against the memorial monument for “Vietnamese Volunteer Soldiers” in Sihanoukville. This prompted a condemnation from the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry in early June (*BBC/FE/2934:B/4*). In response King Sihanouk and First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh made statements in support of good relations with Vietnam (*BBC/FE/2942:B/3*; *BBC/FE/2946:B/3–4*).¹⁷

The demise of Prince Norodom Ranariddh in July 1997 and the election of Ung Huot to the post of First Prime Minister in 1997 did lead to a period of improved bilateral relations. During the second half of 1997 and the first quarter of 1998 there was no Vietnamese reaction to attacks on ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.

In April the PDK claimed that it had killed 45 and wounded “many” ethnic Vietnamese in Kompong Chhnang Province (*BBC/FE/3207:B/1–2*). Vietnamese reacted negatively to the attacks (*BBC/FE/3208:B/3*; *BBC/FE/3212:B/4–5*; *BBC/FE/3213:B/2*). Further evidence of the precarious situation was in the form of anti-Vietnamese statements made by the opposition during the election campaign ahead of the general elections held on 26 July 1998.¹⁸ The political tensions between the leading Cambodian parties following the elections and the difficult process in forming a coalition government was marked by anti-Vietnamese actions. First, there was an attack on the “Vietnam-Cambodian Friendship Monument” in Phnom Penh in late August which prompted a protest by the Vietnamese Embassy (*BBC/FE/3320:B/6*). Second, in two incidents on 3 and 4 September three ethnic Vietnamese were killed, five wounded and ten abducted in Phnom Penh. In a first reaction the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the “barbarous act of national hatred” and urged the Cambodian authorities to act (*BBC/FE/3326:B/10*). In a second reaction the Ministry urged King Sihanouk to “prevent the recurrence of such racial crimes”. It also welcomed a 5 September statement by the Cambodian government urging Cambodians to “exercise immediate and strong actions to stop” such acts. Furthermore, the statement called on the Cambodian authorities to “ensure the safety of life and property for the ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia” (*BBC/FE/3327:B/8*). The Vietnamese reactions continued on 16 September when the out-going Ambassador to Cambodia Tran Huy Chuong criticised the “opposition parties” for having “incited racial discrimination in Cambodia”. On 29 September he made yet another statement saying that if the Cambodian government had not put a “timely end to the demonstration that openly vandalized the Vietnam friendship

¹⁷ Both statements reported by Vietnamese sources, i.e., *Voice of Vietnam* and *Vietnamese News Agency VNA*, respectively.

¹⁸ For anti-Vietnamese statements by Prince Ranariddh during the election campaign see *BBC/FE/3251:B/6*, *BBC/FE/3282:B/6–7*.

monument in August, the relationship would have suffered because of extremists and their policy of racial discrimination" (*BBC/FE/3336:B/4; BBC/FE/3348:B/8*).

The formation of a new coalition in Cambodia on 25 November ushered in a more politically stable period witnessing a decline in actions against ethnic Vietnamese. It is also noteworthy that in Prime Minister Hun Sen's presentation to the Cambodian National Assembly, of the *platform* of the new coalition government on 30 November 1998, it was stated that the Government "absolutely prevents racial discrimination, which is an activity violating laws and against human rights" (*BBC/FE/3403:B/1-2*).

The period from December 1998 to July 1999 saw several high-level meetings and the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese was addressed during these meetings. In mid-December Prime Minister Hun Sen visited Vietnam. During these talks both sides expressed "hope for an early settlement of outstanding issues" in bilateral relations "including" the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia (*BBC/FE/3411:S1/5-6*). In late May, Prince Norodom Ranariddh the Chairman on the Cambodian National Assembly visited Vietnam and held talks with Vietnamese leaders. In the joint press communiqué the Vietnamese side expressed thanks to the Cambodian government and people for "creating favourable conditions for Vietnamese nationals to live and work normally as other foreign residents in Cambodia" (*BBC/FE/3551:B/5-6*). On 9 and 10 June the Secretary-General of the VCP, Le Kha Pieu, visited Cambodia. In the joint declaration, Section 10 was devoted to the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and reads as follows:

The Vietnamese general secretary expressed his gratitude to the King, the state, and the people of Cambodia for their care, assistance, and equal treatment towards the Vietnamese residents in Cambodia, in the same way as all other foreign residents, thus ensuring their legitimate rights and normal life.¹⁹

Following the visit, Vietnam's Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam elaborated in more detail, on the issue of ethnic Vietnamese. First, the status of the

¹⁹ *BBC/FE/3559:B/1-2*. See also *Vietnam-Cambodia 1* 1999:17. The text reproduced by *Nhan Dan* was different and reads as follows:

"H.E. the General Secretary expressed his sincere gratitude to His Majesty the King, the State and the people in Cambodia for their kind attention, protection and equal treatment rendered to the Vietnamese residents, like all other foreign residents in Cambodia, ensuring their legitimate interests, their normal life and work, for them to contribute to building a peaceful and prosperous Kingdom of Cambodia and the relations of traditional friendship between Vietnam and Cambodia." (*Vietnam-Cambodia 2* 1999)

Vietnamese “nationals” living in Cambodia was “high on the agenda” during the talks. Second, he identified those who “maltreated” Vietnamese “nationals” as “some politicians” and “pure or fanatic Khmer Rouge”. These same persons were accused of having “tried to undermine” the good relations between Cambodia and Vietnam. Third, while in Cambodia, the Secretary-General of the CPV met with Vietnamese “residents” in the country and he “reminded them to observe Cambodian laws and order”. Finally, Vietnam “requested” the Cambodian government and people to “facilitate overseas Vietnamese to have a normal life so that their lives are ensured” (*BBC/FE/3565:B/6–7*).

In July the same year, Chea Sim, the Chairman of the Cambodian Senate, visited Vietnam to promote ties between the Senate and the Vietnamese National Assembly. He also met with Vietnam's President who expressed the hope that the “Vietnamese nationals living in Cambodia would be assisted to stabilize their daily life.” (*BBC/FE/3594:B5–6*). In the press release it was stated that:

“The Vietnamese side expressed . . . its profound and sincere thanks to the King and Queen Sihanouk, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Government and the people of Cambodia for . . . the creation of favourable conditions for the Vietnamese nationals to live and work normally and be treated equally as other foreigners in Cambodia on the basis of respect for and observance of Cambodia's current laws.” (*Press Release* 1999)

In February 2000, Nong Duc Manh, Chairman of Vietnam's National Assembly, visited Cambodia and during his talks with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, the latter, “reportedly” promised to “ensure” a stable life for “Vietnamese nationals” in Cambodia. He also said that Cambodia “will never treat” the Vietnamese like they were “during the Lon Nol and Khmer Rouge regimes” (*National Assembly* 2000; *Les dirigeants* 2000).

Despite these high-level meetings and their preoccupation with the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, attacks against the Vietnamese were again reported in February and March 1999. According to a Cambodian newspaper report, four grenade-attacks against Vietnamese took place between 12 February and 3 March in a slum area of Tonle Bassac in the vicinity of Phnom Penh (*BBC/FE/3485:B/1–2*).²⁰ According to a Vietnamese report — referring to the Cambodian police — at least seven grenade attacks had taken place in Phnom Penh “most of them targeting the ethnic Vietnamese community”. Furthermore, the Cambodian police had arrested four men in connection with the attacks. Finally, it was noted that

²⁰ The information is from the Cambodian newspaper *Reaksmei Kampuchea* on 16 March 1999.

opposition parties in Cambodia had called for an “end to such attacks” against the ethnic Vietnamese (*BBC/FE/3492:B/1*).²¹

In early 2000 there were renewed displays of anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia with three demonstrations carried out by Cambodian students in January 2000. Two demonstrations were carried out against the border agreements between Cambodia and Vietnam signed in the 1980s while the third demonstration outside the Vietnamese embassy, demanded that the Embassy “repatriate Vietnamese nationals” from Cambodia.²² Later in March, monks, nuns and students staged demonstrations in front of Chak Angre Leu Pagoda and in front of the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh urging the Cambodian government to “expel Vietnamese” living in the area of the pagoda. In response to the March demonstrations, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry officially voiced its “deep concern about the situation of the Vietnamese now living in Cambodia”. It was also stated that “Vietnam expects the royal government and the grassroots administration of Cambodia to take appropriate measures to help overseas Vietnamese in Cambodia stabilize their life”. In this context it can be noted that the spokeswoman also said that the problem had been basically settled (*Viet Nam hopes* 2000; *Les Activités* 2000).

Cessation of attacks in the 2000s

After these incidents there has been a decline in the attacks on the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. In fact there have been no publicised reactions by Vietnam regarding the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia except for a fire that destroyed houses and which affected the Vietnamese in the Cambodian capital in late 2001 (Answers by MOFA, 2001). Reports from high-level meetings between Cambodia and Vietnam have not made any references to the ethnic Vietnamese issue since early 2000. This can be contrasted by the publicity given to the border issues between the two countries.²³ In addition the parliamentary elections of July 2003 were not

²¹ Report carried by the *Voice of Vietnam* on 23 March 1999. The Daily newspaper of the CPV *Nhan Dan* reported that a karaoke shop owned by a Vietnamese living in the Cambodian capital was subject to a grenade attack. The report stated that it “is believed that the attack might be the idea of the opposition in Cambodia to create disorder and bolster the anti-Vietnamese movement in the country” (*Vietnamese Owned* 1999).

²² *BBC/FE/3734:B/1*; *BBC/FE/3738:B/1*; *BBC/FE/3739:B/1*. The first and the third report was carried by the Cambodian News paper *Moneakseka Khmer* on 4 January and 14 January, respectively. The second report was carried by *Radio Australia*.

²³ This can be seen in the reports and comments carried on the web site of Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mofa.gov.vn>).

marked by the same level of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric as the earlier elections as there was no upsurge in anti-Vietnamese activities in the country. This seems to have prevailed in the aftermath of the elections despite the deep differences amongst the main Cambodian political parties prior to the agreement of a new coalition government between the CPP and FUNCINPEC in June and July 2004. However, this does not imply that prejudices against the ethnic Vietnamese have disappeared in Cambodian society or that all members of the Vietnamese community perceive that discrimination against them has ceased.²⁴

Attitudes and policies towards the ethnic Vietnamese

The situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia cannot be studied in a distinctly domestic context. Consequently, the observations made in the following analysis will attempt to grasp the interaction between the domestic and the international context in order to show the complexity which shapes Cambodia's attitudes and policies towards the ethnic Vietnamese.

Armed attacks on ethnic Vietnamese have often been attributed to the PDK, who, until the group's gradual fragmentation and eventual demise in the late 1990s, articulated the most extreme form of anti-Vietnamese propaganda. Some political parties also expressed anti-Vietnamese sentiments during the electoral campaigns in 1993, 1998, and 2003, e.g., FUNCINPEC in all three elections and Sam Rainsy Party in the later two, and this contributed to further fuelling such opinions among the population in general. The controversy regarding the status and rights of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodian society today can basically be attributed to anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodian politicians. These are in no way new features in Cambodian domestic politics. Since independence in 1953 the policies towards the ethnic Vietnamese have been more (Khmer Republic and DK 1970–1978) or less (the Sihanouk years 1953–1970) discriminatory. Only the PRK/SOC period was characterised by non-discriminatory policies.

The extreme policies implemented during the Khmer Republic and the DK years led to massacres of ethnic Vietnamese and the exodus of some 420,000 people to Vietnam, in what was a de facto elimination of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Seen in the perspective of the dramatic effects of anti-Vietnamese policies in the 1970s, the repeated armed attacks on ethnic Vietnamese during the 1990s in most cases attributed to

²⁴ The perceptions of some Ethnic Vietnamese and the sense of being discriminated were highlighted in article from 2002 (Myers, 2002).

the PDK presented a real threat to the Vietnamese community at large. This does not imply that all ethnic Vietnamese have been directly targeted in one or more attacks, but with the number of ethnic Vietnamese casualties in their hundreds and with attacks taking place in both rural and urban areas the threat was real. Furthermore, there is no indication that a differentiation was made between newly arrived Vietnamese and those who have lived in the country for a longer time.²⁵

The anti-Vietnamese stand displayed by generations of Cambodian politicians seems to transcend ideological differences since royalists, conservatives, liberals and communists either have been or are currently displaying anti-Vietnamese sentiments.²⁶

A disturbing pattern of behaviour has emerged within Cambodian society. Cambodian authorities officially display their discontent of relations with Vietnam while at the same time demonstrations and attacks on ethnic Vietnamese manifest popular anti-Vietnamese sentiments.. There also seems to have been a connection between the occurrence of anti-Vietnamese actions and political tension between Cambodian political parties in the run-up and in the aftermath of general elections as exemplified in both 1993 and 1998. On a more positive note the developments after the 2003 elections were not characterised by such an increase in anti-Vietnamese feelings being directed at the ethnic Vietnamese.

Furthermore, ethnic Vietnamese have routinely been accused of refusing to integrate into Cambodian society. Traditionally there has been more Sino-Khmer than Viet-Khmer intermarriages (Migozzi 1973:40–46). From the Cambodian viewpoint this is evidence that the Vietnamese refuse to fully integrate into Cambodian society. However, in view of the widespread anti-Vietnamese feelings in Cambodia, the Khmers may be reluctant to marry ethnic Vietnamese, which in turn reinforces the non-integration of the Vietnamese.

²⁵ Didier Bertrand has made an attempt to divide the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia into different categories and one of the major criteria he uses is the length of stay in Cambodia. He argues that the majority (“la plupart”) of the Vietnamese born in Cambodia claim to be “Vietnamese of Cambodia” (“Vietnamiens du Cambodge”) and that they perceive themselves as belonging to the Khmer people. This category of Vietnamese seems to be those who were living in Cambodia prior to 1970 and who have since then returned as well as their decedents. Bertrand observes that following their forced exodus they returned to Cambodia as soon as it was possible. He also argues that they do not have family links in Vietnam (Bertrand 1998:30–32).

²⁶ Didier Bertrand makes a similar observation relating to the use of anti-Vietnamese rethoric for political purposes by Cambodian politicians throughout the political spectrum, i.e., “royalistes, républicains et les Khmers Rouge” (Bertrand 1998:39).

An additional source of negative sentiment against the ethnic Vietnamese is the migration of the Vietnamese to Cambodia during periods of strong foreign influence, e.g., during the PRK/SOC years with extensive Vietnamese influence. Even during the peacekeeping period, migration to Cambodia took place. This contributes to reinforce the perception of alien Vietnamese 'running' the country and equating the Vietnamese community with foreign interests. The link between foreign influence and Vietnamese migration has not passed unnoticed by those opposing the presence of the ethnic Vietnamese and it has provided an additional tool to be used in the anti-Vietnamese propaganda.

Anti-Vietnamese sentiments are widespread among members of the Cambodian elite as expressed in the political debate and media. It seems that such sentiments are not limited to this social stratum, as evidenced by the attacks on ethnic Vietnamese by ordinary people in many parts of the country in 1970. However, anti-Vietnamese statements made by the Cambodian authorities and politicians should not be seen as responding to pressure from below, since the events in 1970 were instigated by the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of the authorities.

Several studies suggest that anti-Vietnamese sentiments have traditionally been stronger in urban than in rural areas (Chou 1992:34–39; Comte 1976: 69 footnote 49; Goldblum 1974: 30–34). It is of course difficult to make such generalisations but the findings should be taken seriously. One explanation of the differences along the urban and rural divide could be that the propagation of anti-Vietnamese opinions was more thorough in urban areas. It can be argued that as the spread of information becomes more sophisticated and reaches out to an increasing number of Cambodians, there is a risk that the anti-Vietnamese propaganda will reinforce prejudices against the ethnic Vietnamese nation-wide.

Relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are of great relevance for the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Strained bilateral relations can, as exemplified by recent history, have very negative repercussions on the ethnic Vietnamese. Even during periods with fairly good relations and when efforts are being made to resolve outstanding issues of dispute, inflammatory statements from high-ranking Cambodians can spark anti-Vietnamese manifestations from the public. This is exemplified by King Sihanouk's accusations against Vietnam in 1994 and the ensuing anti-Vietnamese demonstration in Phnom Penh that followed thereafter. Also, during the first half of 1996, there was an increase in the number of attacks against ethnic Vietnamese, following the accusations made by Prince Ranariddh against Vietnam. It can therefore be argued that for the well being of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, relations between the two countries have to be very tolerant and good. The bilateral relations have yet to reach that stage but regular efforts at governmental and parliamentary levels have led to generally cordial bilateral relations although the disputed

border issue between the two countries remains a challenge. The political situation following the general elections in Cambodia in 2003 does not seem to have had any major impact on bilateral relations.

The issue of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia has been on the agenda at high-level meetings between the two countries. Vietnam wants to ensure that the Vietnamese are not being discriminated against in Cambodia and assurances to that effect have been forthcoming from the Cambodian side. To give the ethnic Vietnamese full security and protection would be impossible, as the Cambodian authorities cannot fully guarantee the safety of the population at large. With a mutual understanding pertaining to the non-discrimination of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, it should at least be possible for the two countries to co-operate in preventing illegal migration across the border.

Interestingly enough, in the talks between Vietnam and Cambodia in the post-UNTAC period, both sides agreed that ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia should be regarded as Vietnamese citizens. For example, Vietnam referred to the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia as “Vietnamese citizens”, “Vietnamese nationals”, “Vietnamese residents”, and “Overseas Vietnamese”; all four terms refer to them as citizens of Vietnam. This bilateral understanding does not fully address all aspects of the issue. First, political parties opposing the PRK/SOC alleged that a large number of ethnic Vietnamese had been given Cambodian identification papers and were thus naturalised Cambodians. The present understanding between the two governments suggests that this process has been reversed so as to regard those persons as Vietnamese citizens again. Or could it be that the CGDK/NGC accusations were unfounded or that the naturalisation process involved only a negligible number of persons? Second, an undisclosed but considerable number of the ethnic Vietnamese who lived in Cambodia in the pre-1970s were Cambodian citizens. The present agreement between the two countries presumes that none or only a small number of them have returned to Cambodia. If, on the other hand, a large number of them have returned, the two countries will have to resolve the issue of how to handle their status and their Cambodian citizenship.

Hence the point in context is based on the notion that ethnic Vietnamese who can legitimately claim to be Cambodian citizens should be recognised as such. It should not be understood as claiming that only ethnic Vietnamese from the pre-1970s can legitimately claim to be Cambodian citizens.

Concluding Remarks

The direct threat against the ethnic Vietnamese that was evident in the 1990s seems to have diminished since 2000. This may be attributed to the policies of the Cambodian coalition government set up after the 1998 elec-

tions with its stated resolve to combat racial discrimination in Cambodian society. This displayed a more active approach by the Cambodian government to protect ethnic minorities and since the ethnic Vietnamese have been the target of many attacks it will benefit the most. These policies have had positive repercussions on the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. It may well have contributed to the reduction and de facto halt in the upsurges in popular resentment against the ethnic Vietnamese. The stated position against racial discrimination can be seen an endorsement by the Cambodian government of the notion that all minorities are part of Cambodian society. However, it was not sufficient that the Cambodian coalition government stood up against racial discrimination; it was also important that the opposition parties refrain from anti-Vietnamese rhetoric. There are indications that the 2003 election campaign was less 'anti-Vietnamese'. In fact, Sam Rainsy the leader of the Sam Rainsy Party (the main opposition party), has forcefully rejected accusations that he is anti-Vietnamese.²⁷ It is also essential that when criticising Vietnam both the government and opposition do not link the Vietnamese minority to the Vietnamese state in particular when relations are tense between the two countries.

In view of Cambodia's overall development needs, all quarters of the population must be mobilised in a co-ordinated effort. Anti-Vietnamese rhetoric would have the opposite effect by pitting Khmers against ethnic Vietnamese, thus dividing Cambodian society. The Cambodian elite can play a crucial role by promoting inter-ethnic harmony and condemning racial discrimination. The trend from the late 1990s — as expressed in the stances taken by Cambodian governments, the opposition's reaction to the grenade attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in early 1999, as well as in Sam Rainsy's public denial that he is anti-Vietnamese — indicates that the political elite in Cambodia has gradually withdrawn support for attacks on ethnic Vietnamese. This is an important development and raises hopes for enhanced inter-ethnic harmony in Cambodia and for a more secure environment for the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodian society. The challenge will be to reinforce such policies and attitudes and to implement them in practice to the extent that discrimination against the ethnic Vietnamese is no longer politically tolerated and its incidence considerably reduced in Cambodian society. The progress made will be put to further tests in times of domestic political competition and tension, such as in the

²⁷ Details on the statements of Sam Rainsy in response reports that he is anti-Vietnamese can be found on the web site of the Sam Rainsy Party (<http://www.sam-rainsyparty.org>). For an interesting analysis of the policies of the Sam Rainsy Party during the 1990s see Hughes, 2001:45–71.

run-up to future elections or in the event of renewed tension in relations between Cambodia and Vietnam.

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