Vietnam:
One-Party State and the Mimicry of Civil Society

John Kleinen

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Are the issues of civil society, "good governance", and the role of NGOs in Vietnam part of a discursive discourse that is linked to a growing development industry in which development studies and economics dominate? Kleinen questions these issues based upon longitudinal research in Vietnam since the early 1990s. In this study, an effort is made to explain the concrete interactions between authorities of the Vietnamese one-party state and its citizens by introducing an attitude of participants to conceal their real intentions with the intent to disguise their actions in order to obtain benefits for their own. Using the concept of mimicry the author tries to grasp what it means to live in a society where political and economic life is dominated by elite groups and were social change is coming from different directions.

Two case studies are presented here: one in which local stakeholders of home stay tourism achieve their goals to develop an acceptable form of co-habitation with ethnic minorities without questioning the state. Another case study focuses upon the rapid urbanization of the periphery of Hanoi where land grabbing and private economic gains of outsiders are at loggerheads with local experiences and perceptions of state-village relationships. The question remains what it means for Vietnam's modernization and the prospects of a civil society.

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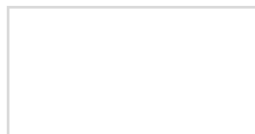
IRASEC

INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE SUR L'ASIE DU SUD-EST CONTEMPORAINE
RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIA

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by

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The Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (USR 3142 – UMIFRE 22 CNRS-MAEDI) has since 2001 focused its activities on the political, economic, social and environmental evolutions of the eleven countries of the region (Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam). Based in Bangkok, the Institute promotes transdisciplinary and regional approaches.

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Table of contents

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

References

Introduction

Profound changes of Vietnamese society in the first decade of the 21st century have given rise to new interest groups testing their ability to advance their concerns in the political sphere. Old Stalinist modes of political representation are being challenged by the emergence of vocal rights and justice movements. Around the year 2000, Vietnam was seen as a "normal" country being part of a globalization process that had set in during the late 1990s. By emphasizing the contrast with old image of a country devastated by war, Vietnam gradually became a success story of the international donor community. The political infrastructure remained largely intact with the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) at the helm of the one-party state.[1]

Unlike in China where the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution had uprooted the Communist Party, Vietnam's revolutionaries, who were young men during the wars of the 1950s-70s, were still around in the late 1990s - in government, business, academia, and elsewhere. Continuing social links between these "war heroes" may make the leadership more sensitive to ordinary people's concerns. With the recent death of Vo Nguyen Giap (1911 – 2013)[2], this generation finally disappeared. Their influence on daily politics after the reunification of the country in 1976 ended in 2006 with the 10th Party Congress when a new more technocratic and pragmatic leadership replaced the old guard.[3]

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[1] In 2001 the French scientific journal, *Raisons politiques: études de pensée politique*, numéro spécial sur "Ce qui reste du communisme", No 3, August 2001, pp. 37-64, published a critical article by this author about the workings of the Vietnamese one-party state entitled "La comédie de l'État-parti. Le Viêt Nam depuis la réunification". Mimicry was translated into *comédie (simulation d'un sentiment, apparence trompeuse)*, but a better term might be *mimique* or even *mimétisme*. See also Brocheux (2004) for his comments.

[2] Except for Vietnamese expressions and concepts, no diacritic marks are used for names and places in this text.

[3] For this text, I was not able to bring sufficiently in the work by Nguyen Thi Lien-Hang (2012), but reading it confirmed my ideas about the nature of the national security state shaped by Le Duan.

The sudden protests from the heartland of the revolution, the province of Thai Binh, in the late 1990s served as a wake-up call to the political leadership of the country, who tried to reconnect with the masses with a number of grassroots democracy decrees and reforms of the mass organizations (see Kleinen 1999: v-vi). The one party-state was seriously challenged, but not in the way as in China where rising tensions among segments of the population had caused China's Tiananmen Square protests and were dealt with a violent crackdown. In Vietnam, beheading of protest movements took place by using force in the form of prosecutions, evictions of protesters, and violence against protesters and journalists.[4] But the confrontation also led to a new stage.

Since then Vietnam's political development has entered an extraordinary, if undefined and not yet formally recognized phase. Coercion and repression remain menacing, though not dominant, features of daily social life. Politics in Vietnam has been changed in a way that echoes the discursive space of post-globalization: Internet and mobile devices served as a forum for dissent and contentious politics, which are more difficult to deal with than in the past when physical abuse in the form of harassment, arrest, and imprisonment were the hallmarks of the state's repressive capacities. What is left of the State is, according to Gainsbourough (2010: 182),

> "little more than a desperate group of actors with a weak notion of 'the public good', using uncertainty, not impartial rules, as the basis of order."

When common interests are threatened, these actors are able to react, defending a state of affairs that is characterized by corruption, state business interests, local politics, and applications of force rooted in culture and ideology.

In this contribution, the relevance of anthropological approaches to development processes will be combined with the study of civil society since the 1990s taking this concept as a point of departure (Olivier de Sardan 1995). The principal objective is to explore the inherent difficulties of translating international development-related notions of "good governance" and "civil society" into the historical Vietnamese context of building a state-socialist society and economy. I will start with the question about the path that Vietnam took in the '70s and '80s, how it diverged, and why. This question is a necessary

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[4] Army journal *Quân Đội Nhân Dân* (19-12-1997).

preparation for a larger question about the kind of development that took place after the socialist experiments ended in Vietnam, and the role national decision-making agencies played in the divergence.

State socialist attempts to modernize economy and society can also be regarded as a form of ideological mobilization: at the start, the architects of liberated Vietnam used a modern ideology as Marxism to mobilize labor and capital in a given historical context in order to modernize their societies, and as soon as the leaders had achieved their aims, "socialism" became in their view synonymous with modernity.

I will argue that it is unclear yet whether a pseudo reform or a real political liberalization with a civil society is emerging in Vietnam. The last combination has not yet been achieved, but within the state the shaping of a kind of civil society is underway giving individuals a certain margin to escape from a tolerant authoritarianism. The CPV is still dominating the national theatre of politics, but the general audience is receptive to playing the game and learning the discourse and the techniques to adapt. More importantly than the view from the top, the events at Vietnam's grass roots are relevant to study. For this reason, chapters 2 and 3 take a different angle of approach from the perspective used in the introductory chapter 1. After a discussion of what the concept of "civil society" means for contemporary Vietnam, we present two case studies in which the workings of grass root activities are presented and analyzed. In chapter 2, we show the results of an-depth research by the Dutch researcher Pim Verweij among local NGOs in a specific region where tourist activities take place and where aspects of civil society surface in public and private domains in terms of brokerage between clients and customers. Chapter 3 shows a classic example of what Ben Kerkvliet once coined as a dialogical interpretation of state and party relations regarding land issues as a result of rapid urbanization and modernization that takes place in Vietnam at the moment. Here we focus upon a long-term research undertaken by foreign and Vietnamese researchers in an area near Hanoi.[5]

Chapter 1

The political system:
state-party relations reconsidered

After reunification in 1976 the Vietnamese Politburo decided to extend the "DRV model"[6] to the South, i.e., a Stalinist version of a planned economy with emphasis on rapid industrialization with State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), collectivization of agriculture, and strong capital accumulation. The Mekong delta was collectivized and rice trade came under state control. Between 1977 and 1979 the Second Five Year Plan failed as a result of the "spontaneous" breakdown of the socialist economy in which SOEs started to scout for supplies elsewhere. This was also a consequence of the halt of Chinese and Western aid when Vietnam invaded Cambodia at the end of 1978. As a result the crisis of the central state-management system of land and the ad-hoc de-collectivization in the Mekong delta forced Hanoi to accept a kind of "market" in order to resume production. Around 1980, the Mekong delta was freed from the Northern imposition of collectivization when farmers refused to join the cooperatives and cadres met considerable resistance in factories and production collectives. China's ill-organized invasion of Vietnam in February 1979 to punish its disloyal political "vassal" for the occupation of Cambodia, led to a crisis of food production and a scarcity of consumer goods. An intense political debate followed resulting in partial reforms: output contracts in agriculture, and a "three plan" system in SOE's (which meant that they could build up capital from various sources and that the management was steered by political

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[6] The "DRV model" is discussed in Fforde and de Vilder (1996: 3-4), as a neo-Stalinist application under Vietnamese conditions and opposed to the later "transitional model."

influence). Agriculture was comparatively unproductive, the (small) industry was inefficient, and the war-torn infrastructure was badly lacking. The poverty rate in Vietnam reached nearly 70% (Fforde and the Vylder 1996: chapter 4, 128-137).

The early 1980s saw an increased marketization of the economy with ups and downs but with a conservative reform policy. The death in 1986 of Le Duan, the Vietnamese Brezhnev, who was responsible for this conservative economic policy, enabled the protagonists of the "partial reforms" to pursue their "economic renovation" course. The slogan "*đổi mới hay là chết*" (renovate or die) closed the 6th Party Congress at the end of 1986 with a warning but also with a promise. The period of the 1980s ended with the liberalization of SOEs (for the time being in terms of equitization) and cooperatives from central level influence (see also Sjöholm 2006). The opening-up of domestic trade between provinces and the acceptance of foreign investment, however, did not abolish central planning as the "core" of the system. "Market-oriented" reforms imitated Central European attempts, and resulted in a partial de-Stalinization of everyday life under Party leader Nguyen Van Linh. A watershed occurred in 1989 when Soviet aid collapsed and domestic markets opened up for goods from other countries like Japan and ASEAN countries. Though most price controls were removed, controls on land, labor, and capital remained tight, at least in the northern and southern-central parts of the country under state control. The re-mergence of private trade gave the country an appearance of "normality" by the standards of its neighbors in Southeast Asia.

In 1990-91, the Vietnamese economy recovered, leading the IMF and World Bank to salute Vietnam as an example of effective top-down reform utilizing IMF methods. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequences for the European Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union made the CPV reluctant to accept political reforms, but encouraged Western official development assistance (ODA) and direct investment (FDI) from foreign business. The rapid economic growth of 1993 to 1995 gave the impression that Vietnam was a "coming tiger": Vietnam experienced accelerated growth of exports, transformation of middle-class lifestyles, and commoditization of land. The "post-boom" (an expression used by Fforde 1996) of 1996 expressed by rural unrest as a result of farmers' protest in Thai Binh against corrupt local officials, enabled the countryside to (re)establish rural cooperatives of "a new type" which enhanced grassroots democracy in rural communes. The Asian crisis of 1997 had minor consequences for Vietnam, possibly due to its partial interface with the world market. Vietnam's positive GDP growth was maintained, but "the socialist

oriented market economy" reformed only very gradually. The 1999 Enterprise Law marked an acceptance of the emerging private sector, but was in fact a joint venture between SOE managers and private businessmen. Rapid economic growth continued after 2000 without major political changes. The membership of WTO in 2007 confirmed the acceptance of Vietnam in the global economy, its own form of capitalism supported by groups who have markets in land, labor, and capital.

Keen observers like Adam Fforde (2011), Martin Gainsborough (2009), and Alexander Vuving (2001; 2010) noticed a weakness of state performance in several key sectors like the economy, but also in education and health services. When foreign donors filled the void by delivering key social services, the call for "civil society" became bigger and made Vietnam a "country in transition" while a domestic civil society is still lacking (Salemink 2006: 104-105). Thus it is relevant to ask what the role of donor support has meant for the liberalization of the economy, which in Vietnam did not lead to political glasnost.

State power in contemporary Vietnam originates from the transformation of the mono-organizational state in Vietnam during the transition to a market economy (Fforde and De Vylder 1988; 1996; Turley and Selden 1993; Beresford 1988). The mechanisms behind these economic developments, i.e., the political system, or more accurately the agents of political change like the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and its relationship with the state is fundamental to study the changes of the last ten to twenty years (Fforde and de Vylder 1996: 81 -82). Economists disagree not only about the timing and nature of the renovation policy, but also about the intriguing question of whether it was engineered or just happened as a reaction to inside and outside factors, which could be controlled by the leadership of the one-party state. State-formation and by implication the political changes underway in Vietnam are, in spite of the pretensions of a planned economy, intrinsically blind and unplanned processes, which are difficult to steer or to direct from above.

The collectivization of the Vietnamese countryside did not force the majority of the peasants into strange environments, but changed agrarian life by creating socialism. A centrally planned economy was organized between 1958 and 1975 in the northern half of the country, and was expanded to the southern part. The policy turn in the mid-eighties was not the start, but the end of a development that was under way since 1975. In the words of Ben Kerkvliet (2005:1), "Put simply, decollectivization started locally, in the villages, and was largely initiated by villagers; national policy followed."

The final end of agricultural collectivization in 1988, when a Party decree ended the powers of the co-operatives, resulted in a household-based economy, which would be difficult to reverse.

The Party apparatus through which real power was decreasingly channeled is until today still more concerned with upholding its personnel to monopolize power than with ideological matters. Abrami et al. (2008) point in this regard to a number of dimensions like (1) the size of the winning coalition within the regime, which has influenced (2) degrees of constraint on executive decision making, and (3) the competitiveness of party elections (2008: 15-16).

At the same time the CPV is seeking a way to cope with a fast-changing society. The Party faces an uphill struggle to shape the direction of political change while struggling for physical survival in a global environment in which Party politics has come increasingly under attack. Shifts in the composition of the political elite and the major groups or factions contesting political power need to be taken into consideration.

The reform process that took place between the early 1980s and 1990s was crucial for examining the interplay between the single party-state and the society as a whole in contemporary Vietnam. A most intriguing question still is whether a civil society in Vietnam is emerging outside or inside the one-party state. The question is especially intriguing because Vietnam and China seem to refute Western wishful thinking that a steady rise of a middle class will lead to political pluralism that preserves governmental virtue and guarantees a fine distinction between state and society. Empirical evidence reveals no place for such a development where the expanding new rich class is closely linked with the one-party state (see also Robinson and Goodman 1996).

What interests us here, however, is how "state socialism", or "market-Leninism" as it often colloquially called, in any form either in Vietnam or in China, has led to diminishing participation of the people, and to weak performance of the economy (London 2009). State-driven development conceived as "governmentality" and discursive power does not automatically lead to greater freedom but can readily contribute to inequality and oppression. A key-concept in these discussions is the term "civil society" that has been debated since the late 1980s and which is part of an ongoing intellectual discourse in political and other social science disciplines as well as among policy-makers and practitioners

(for the latest contribution see Waibel et al. 2014). In this discussion I take Goran Hyden's characterization that "civil society is both a means and an end" and that "different regimes create different conditions for the role that civil society plays" as a working definition and a mental compass to guide the reader through the body of literature that has appeared since the late 1980s (1997: 27). Definitions are manifold and often poly- or multivocal, vacillating between "Gramscian" and "liberal" interpretations (Gray 1999; see also Nørlund 2006).

The Dutch scholar Glasius (2010) has summarized this long discourse by discerning five nodes of intersections each taken from different philosophers and political thinkers: civil society as seen from the perspective of social capital (inspired by Alexis de Tocqueville and Robert Putnam); as a public affairs arena in which citizens are active; as a form of collective action to avoid violence (inspired by Mahatma Gandhi); as the public sphere where political debate takes place (from Jűrgen Habermas); and the idea that civil society is a form of counter-hegemony, "formulating and disseminating ideologies that challenges the powerful and champion the marginalized, through cultural institutions such as the media, churches, associations or trade unions" (based upon Antonio Gramsci's idea of counter-hegemony) (see also Hann and Dunn 1996 and Fowler and Biekart 2011 (page 7 for an extended quote from Glasius).[7] Which of these apply to the Vietnamese case is still a matter of debate. All kinds of forms of citizenship under state-socialism are mirrored in the way the CPV imposes its rule on society, which guarantees the political supremacy of the Party and paves the way for markets and individuals, but also risks inequality (London 2013: 1-24). Thus it is important to consider what "civil society" means in the context of Vietnam; Lee Hock Guan (2001) posed this question in one of the first contributions to this subject. Hannah (2004) has convincingly argued that the Western conceptualization dating back to Ferguson and Hegel, passing through Gramsci, is useful from a philosophical point of view, but is not always functional in the Vietnamese context (see, e.g., Bach Tan Sinh 2014 in Waibel et al. 2014: 39-57).

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[7] For each, an argumentation can be upheld. Civil society as social capital is a network society *avant la lettre*. Well known is the approach by Habermas which sees civil society as synonymous with the public sphere and fostering public debate. Most authors opt for the Gramscian civil society as counter-hegemony, which might be the least applicable conception in the case of Vietnam and China.

The political system

Studying the behavior of organizations like the Communist Party is not an easy task because access to the inner workings of the CPV is strictly limited. One feels sometimes like one of the blind Confucian scholars who try to describe an elephant by only touching its outside shapes and guessing the content and the form of the object. A modern approach is to treat the internal workings of the single-party state as a black box, the workings of which can be decoded by taking a closer look at how elite formal institutions actually operate (see Abrami 2008; Koh 2008). Koh uses the term "palace politics" (*cung đình chính trị*) by referring to the opaque connections, "wires", within a political black box (Abrami et al. 2008), which sometimes are not all connected with each other, while others are linked in a direct way.[8] The study of the black box usually takes place after a crash, but sometimes one can get an impression of its workings during political crises when Party members fall out or internal dissidents allow rare internal insights.[9]

Often the observer does not understand what he sees at first sight, but feels that what is real is cloaked in a fog. In telling the story of collectivized agriculture in northern Vietnam, Ben Kerkvliet (2005) lends a clear voice to those villagers who effected change at a very early moment, when the state was still in favor of a political model that was regarded as superior to similar agrarian policies elsewhere. Kerkvliet renovates his former middle-range theory of everyday politics to what he calls "mobilizational corporatism", a concept that echoes Daniel Chirot's "socialist corporatism" but with the great difference of placing the peasantry at the center of Vietnamese politics. Activities that did not conform to the behavior required by authorities might carry considerable political weight. The outcome is a revised picture of Vietnam's political system and the interactions between state and society. The power of everyday politics is not unique to Vietnam, Kerkvliet asserts. Agricultural institutions that want to be durable must satisfy four conditions: commitment to participate by free will, trust, effective monitoring of members' activities, "and transparency in how the organization is governed and authority exercised" (Kerkvliet 2005: 15-16). None of these were met.

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[8] Personal communication by David Koh in 2012.

[9] As is the case with the recent book of "citizen-journalist" and army veteran Huy Đức, *Bên Thắng Cuộc* [*The Winning Side*], Osinbook (2012).

Ken MacLean (2014) adds to this discussion another element that is known among anthropologists as "mimicry" and which I already try to discuss in Kleinen 2001. For now, it is relevant to know that MacLean confirms the cunning attitude of peasants during the collectivization periods to imitate socialist working ethics and procedures by playing out the forms or models to the utmost, suggesting that their behavior was a sign of selfless and therefore socialist action rather than self-interest.

Before "the War against America", or the "American War" as the Vietnamese called the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese one-party state hoped to gain from collective farming the necessary means to feed an under-nourished population, but also to mobilize enough soldiers to wage the struggle for reunification of a divided country. This led to all kind of problems like red tape, misbehavior and miscommunication of officials who did not understand local peasants lives and clear cases of corruption based upon political favoritism (for a review see Kerkvliet 2014b). Instead of voting with their feet, the Vietnamese peasants of the Red River Delta undermined this strategy by their everyday political behavior, possible by using mimic strategies as MacLean suggested (2014). Sometimes with the help of local elites, peasants frustrated their leadership's aim to pursue collectivization at any cost and refused to follow the stages of their Chinese neighbors during the late 1950s and in the 1960s and 1970s. Kerkvliet is relatively mild on the process of land reform, which he nevertheless called "divisive and violent", a qualification that reflects the findings of a number of in-depth histories of the period (see Kleinen 1999: 94-137). The same elite that had started the system terminated it, not for ideological reasons, but in deference to harsh realities on the ground. The end was not a "Big Bang" like in the Soviet-Union or in Eastern Bloc countries with resulting in detrimental circumstances. The undermining of collectivization preceded the economic renovation politics of the late 1980s. Party policies had become hopelessly compromised and were ultimately destroyed largely by the activities of villagers. De-collectivization began locally among villagers themselves; national policy merely followed, sometimes reluctantly.

The state and its supporting political elites often based their power on local or family relations, these being still the dominant forces in Vietnamese politics, and assembled them within the CPV. Yet, the internal transformation of the society that is underway is confronted with an international environment. Higher incomes, changing cultural practices, and the rapid growth of the private

sector took place within a changing international context in which the effects of globalization and the shifting economic power balances were, and remain, important factors. Vietnam is still feeling the political and economic heat from China at its borders and realizes that politically and economically China erodes US hegemony.

The government

State and government, maybe better termed as a "polity", are thoroughly intertwined. The Communist Party of Vietnam delivers the president and the prime minister, who together with the general secretary form a troika that is almost always listed together in Vietnamese media as "the leadership". Unlike in China, the Vietnamese premier has the same authority as the general secretary of the Party. This was a result of an internal political struggle at the end of the 1980s, which emerged among those who preferred state sector domination of the economy, with reformers and the military. It led to Article 4 in the 1992 Constitution that preserved the role of the CPV as "the leading force in the State and society." In 2001, the constitution was amended without altering Article 4 and in 2005 a Civil Code was issued to protect the interests of individual citizens.[10] In 2013, when a more seriously revised version of the 2001 Constitution had to pass the National Assembly for ratification, an attempt to discuss the modifications for a wider audience developed into fierce criticism by bloggers and members of the intelligentsia. A proposal to remove Article 4, that would have contested the CPV as the sole political force and allowed a free press and elections, was rejected. An important change, however, was the omission of the sentence that the state sector "*plays the leading*" role in the national economy, a reference to the rampant corruption in SOEs.[11]

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[10] Civil code (No. 33/2005/QH11), Unofficial Translation, (http://mirrors.creativecommons.org/international/vn/civil-code-2005-(English).pdf), (http://www.lexadin.nl/wlg/legis/nofr/oeur/lxwevie.htm).

[11] "Constitution Revision In Vietnam: Legitimacy of Communist Party's Leadership Questioned", *Tây Sơn News Wire*, 4 March 2013, (http://eyedrd.org/2013/03/constitution-revision-in-vietnam-legitimacy-of-communist-partys-leadership-questioned.html). See also "Critics pile on Vietnam government in rare debate", *huffingtonpost.com*, 1 March 2013, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20130301/as-vietnam-dissidents/). For an overview of the discussion around the Constitution see (Bui 2014).

As a principle, the general secretary of the CPV has the power over the Party, but he has no legislative or executive roles in the government apparatus. The further division of labor among the three members of the troika has consequences for the organization of the government, the army and the Party. Abrami et al. (2008: 12) use the term "diffused troika" to point out that, unlike in China, the CPV cadre promotion system is weaker in government decision-making. The fact that Vietnam has no Standing Committee as the head of the Politburo and the Central Committee is also important (see Koh 2008). This leads, however, to stronger patron-client relationships, ensuring each member of the troika a loyal following.

The new government of today presents a new face and brings the theatre of politics in full swing: the language fits with both donor rhetoric of "(good) governance" (but where is the political power in reality?) and official teaching about the nature of the Vietnamese state (Fforde 2008: 6; Will 2007). The restructuring of the state and Party organs in January 2007 led to a reduction of the number of line ministries from 26 to 22. The number of Central Committee commissions was reduced from eleven to six (Thayer 2008a). The ruling elites are divided in the way they look at the world around them: those who support the integration through the WTO into the West (the "jump into the ocean") and those who resist it (Vuving 2008).

The Central Committee's proposal that the Party, army, police, and mass organizations divest themselves of commercial enterprises, which would be handed over to the state and sold to private investors, struck a sensitive nerve, especially among Vietnam's People's Army.[12] All this was an important step in a process that since the difficult eighties has been labeled as a "chaotic overlap" between CPV and government, but since the Party chooses the top government leaders, policy-making means "issuing documents for the government" (*chính sách*) and it is the Party that "decides" or "lays down the line" (*chủ trương, đường lối*). Important government decisions are always subject to Party approval. Line ministries like Finance or Defense are not headed by important politicians but by senior Party members whose power is sanctioned

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[12] The Vietnam People's Army, for example, currently runs 140 enterprises and hold shares in another twenty companies. These enterprises are engaged in an incredibly diverse range of economic activities from coffee production, coal mining, garment manufacture, stock broking, and telecommunications to health services. In 2006, army-run enterprises earned US $ 2 billion in revenue or 3% of Vietnam's gross domestic product (Thayer 2008).

by the CPV. This leads to questions: what kind of state Vietnam is and what the key institutions are that determine this state; how do these institutions work; and how are they dealing and interacting with each other? Briefly: where does power reside, and how it is created, distributed, exercised and transformed? This question led Vuving (2008; 2011) to conceptualize politics in Vietnam as a game between four key players: regime conservatives, modernizers, rent-seekers, and a group that is pro-China (Vuving 2010: 367). These players are active inside and outside the CPV and the government and are represented at every echelon of policymaking" (Vuving 2010: 368). It is what Gainsborough describes as a "deceptively complex" situation in which he discerns a "persistent blurring of the relationship between public and private" that leads to "uncertainty as a principle of rule" (Gainsborough 2010: 182).

The party

The fact that the CPV with its 3.2 million members rules over 90 million Vietnamese and, since 1986, officially applies a policy of economic renovation (*đổi mới*), does not mean that it fits easily into the image of a monolithically party. Janos Kornai's well-known claim in his classic about the communist one-party state is that the destruction of the one-party system is a necessary condition for the complete abolition of central planning. Until now, however, this seems to have been rendered false or at least contradicted by the reform processes in China and Vietnam. On the other hand, a fast-developing economy and society do not easily match with control mechanisms and constraints of a classical Leninist model. The continuation, however, of a "syncretic policy of economic pluralism plus Party dictatorship" as an observer of Deng's China has put it, could possibly go on for a long time before a radical political reform occurs (Ding 1994: 39). The term "market-Leninism" used by various authors (Kristof et al.: 1994; Thayer 1997; London 2003; 2004; 2009) could also cover this definition.[13] It means that the CPV applies a pragmatic approach of promoting relatively free-market activities, but prefers autocratic one-party rule (see London 2009; 2011).

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[13] A capitalist system overseen by a nominally ruling communist party. In the three decades since Deng Xiaoping launched market-oriented reform and began opening China to the world, the country's economy has averaged about 10% per year. This spectacular performance has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and led some to argue that China's "market Leninism" has defied the theory that societies democratize as they get richer (*Financial Times*, Oct 2013).

Observers of the Party culture in Vietnam differ in their appraisals as to whether this pragmatic approach established by the late Ho Chi Minh has largely avoided the existence of ideological factions or "wings" with a political line of their own. Disagreement over policy during wartime and later over the course to take after the country had been reunited, gave rise to a whole series of studies in which this "factional power approach" was emphasized (Honey 1960; 1962; Fall 1960; Chen 1969; Pike 1969; Thai 1985). The most sophisticated version of this approach tends to treat the internal workings within the Politburo as essentially driven by contests between several factions or power blocks, headed by politicians who struggle for personal power (Thai 1985: 63-96; Bui 1995: 100-111).

Others have emphasized a so-called "collegial" or "collective" approach, which tends to find compromises as much as possible, as a specific feature for the Vietnamese decision-making process (Huynh 1985; Elliott 1975; 1976; Porter 1993; Beresford 1988). Apart from cultural reasons - an inclination for compromise seeking in a Vietnamese, i.e., Asian context - for such an appraisal of the political process by which the CPV operates, several authors point to the history of the CPV (its peculiar tradition and the influence of Ho Chi Minh) or to the difficult position into which the CPV was thrown during the war, scrambling for support from its communist allies who were themselves in conflict with each other.[14] In most cases the two just-mentioned visions of Vietnam's political culture compete for authority. Both approaches target only small parts of the higher Party echelons and the appraisals support what is generally called "Badinhnology" comparable with the "the Kremlinological approach" of observers of the former Soviet Union. It is the art of analyzing from a distance the decisions taken within a closed political system and disregarding the interaction between the power elite on the one hand and mass political action and legitimization on the other. The "factional approach" is largely based on a pessimistic or a diluted Machiavellian worldview, regarding politicians only as vying for personal power, while the "collegial" or "collective" approach gives too much credit to a seeming continuation of leadership goals and to a supposedly long-term cohesiveness of the Party elite. Furthermore, the "factional approach" is unsuited to the analysis of reform because it represents the view from above and is personality oriented, while the "collective" approach holds mainly explanatory power for the war period.[15]

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[14] For a comprehensive overview see Vasavakul (1995) and London (2014).

[15] Vasavakul (1997b) describes this approach as assuming "a monolithic character of the leadership fostered through similar class background and shared revolutionary experiences and goals, while recognizing Party leaders' differences over means to achieve common goals" (1997b: 83).

A third and probably more realistic interpretation of Vietnamese leadership politics has been proposed by scholars who have studied the composition and the political behavior of the Central Committee (CC) over a long period of time (Thayer 1988a and 1988b; Vasavakul 1997b; Vuving 2001; Gainsborough 2010; Fforde 2010; London 2014). In line with the existing mechanism of elections within the Party apparatus, it is assumed that leadership positions are based on institutional or geographical power bases, like a ministry or a province. This "sector representation" approach implies that "interest group" politics is at work in Vietnam and that Central Committee members represent "sectorised" or regionally based constituencies rather than being straw men filling out a top leader's "faction" (Thayer 1988b: 179). According to this approach, sector-aligned interests overshadow political alignments in terms of being either reform-minded or more conservative. The "sector approach" furthermore also takes into consideration the generational succession among the CPV's top leadership, whose older members were influenced by the core values of Confucianism as was their much-acclaimed leader, Ho Chi Minh (see Marr 1995; Duiker 2000). The question remains whether or not these core values are still transmitted from one generation into the next. Older generations share with the loyal opposition their criticism of corruption and their concern for declining "social values" under the influence of the encroaching market economy. Since 1986, this criticism has been heard at each Party Congress, and was in 2006 the hot issue at the Tenth National Party Congress when the PMU-18 corruption scandal was discussed, named after a project management unit within the Ministry of Transport.[16]

The 2007 elections (May 20th) for the National Assembly and the Central Committee's decision of Cabinet reshuffles showed that the most important basis of power in Vietnam, then and now, rests with the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and not the organs of the state. This "institutional readjustment" could have been a sign of initial change that not the Party but the State is accountable for its own decisions. Loosing the reins would challenge "the essence of Party power in a totalitarian state" (Vuving 2008:378 - 379). This comes close to what Kerkvliet (Luong 2003) called the "dominating state" interpretation of the political system in which the Communist Party is the most powerful and pervasive institution (see also Womack 1987).

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[16] For a brief overview of the PMU affair in English, see the article on the BBC News website, (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4874600.stm), accessed May 2, 2013. For an overview of the political contents of Party Congresses since 1986, see Martin Gainsborough (2007).

Collective leadership in the former Council of Ministers, argues Thayer (2008), has "given way to increased individual ministerial responsibility in the Cabinet. But Vietnam has still to untangle the chaotic overlap of party and state institutions. Prime Minister Dung has been given increased authority to select his leadership team, but as the 2008 Cabinet selections indicate, his authority is subject to restraint by vested interests within Vietnam's one-party state and the innate conservatism of the party's senior leadership" (Thayer 2008; see also Vuving 2008).

From this follows the conclusion that Vietnam is a country where one party, the CPV, not only claims to have a monopoly on the way power is exercised but also determines the production and distribution of ideology.[17] Gainsborough (2005: 37) stated that "The very notion of an oppositional sphere, or a domain outside of the state, remains anathema – an affront even.... [It] does not fit with the philosophical underpinnings in which the Communist Party of Vietnam is rooted and still draws."

But how important is ideology in a changing domestic and international environment? It is very difficult to see how the one-party state continuously adjusts to economic reforms without playing a key role to support and take the profits from them. Rent seeking, which is mainly organized by state agencies, is a serious problem throughout Vietnam.[18] If the state is so prominent in the country's economy, how can state power also be so weak in Vietnam to the point that local autonomy seems to take the upper hand? The answer to this question starts with the recognition that the state did not cede the center, but has shifted to other opportunities that were absent before the economic reforms began in the early 1980s: investment in infrastructure, allocation of land and property, and joint ventures with foreigners. This move, rather than the measure of state firmness or weakness, explains the growing. When provoked, the state will react violently as was the case in China in 1989. But as long as the reform process is benefiting the state's assets, nothing like this will happen.

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[17] A recent example is this old-fashioned attempt to prove the vitality and modernity of Marxism as an ideology in an editorial in the Party paper *Nhân Dân* "The everlasting vitality of Marxism", consulted on 5 May 2013. (http://www.nhandan.com.vn/english/news/050508/editorial_e.htm).

[18] The term "rent-seeking" is coined by James Buchanan (1980) to describe state regulations to restrict "freedom of entry" into a market. Anne Krueger uses the term for planned economies in which managers have to do a lot of footwork to convince bureaucrats to assign subsidies and soft loans. The bureaucratic elite extracts privilege from this interaction. Fforde (2002) borrows the term from the economist Mushtaq Khan, who focuses upon the ways the state becomes a tool. By using the term "state rent-seeking", Fforde regards the state as a tool for transforming the economy, but he doubts the intentional, planned character of it. The institutionalization of rent seeking is, according to Fforde, the driving force behind the reforms.

Given the limited representation of the CPV among the population – its membership only comprises 3 to 4% of the population – and the past experiences of waging a war against a powerful enemy by balancing between two important allies, there is reason to believe in what Kerkvliet calls a "dialogical" rather than a "dominating" or "authoritarian" approach to state-society relations. This has enabled the proliferation of embryonic NGO and civil society institutions that are increasingly able to influence social, economic, and even political change. The people can thus, through various formal and informed channels, have a say in sharing Vietnam's future and in determining its unique and critical balance of tradition and modernity. What this means in daily life for the Vietnamese will be discussed in the following section.

"The people": society?

The political system in Vietnam is not only composed of state and Party but also of a political system in which the government is "of the people, for the people, and by the people." Who the people are is a matter of definition, but a third layer of Vietnam's political system, alongside the Party and the government, are the mass organizations and, for the past several years, to some extent special interest groups. It is generally called "the 'People': in the usage of leading Party newspaper (*Nhân Dân*), the People's Army (*Quân đội Nhân Dân*) and in legal references to the judiciary (e.g., the Supreme People's Court). The concept of "the people" as a category of fundamental political importance in a modern nation has been developed in Vietnam since the first decade of the 20th century, partly based on Sun Yet Sen's 1911 revolution in China: people's political, civic rights (*dân quyền*) democratic rights (*dân chủ xã hội chủ nghĩa*); economic rights or welfare rights (*dân sinh*) (see also Quang Huy 1997).

Mass organizations have mainly "an organizational monopoly" of their own, but they are under the close scrutiny of the CPV (see for a general description Kornai 1992: 39). Adopting the Maoist idea of a "mass line" program, a series of mass organizations have existed in Vietnam since 1954. The four main such organizations are the Fatherland Front (*Mặt trận Tổ quốc Việt Nam*) with 15 million members, the Women's Union

(*Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam*) with 12 million members, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (*Đoàn Thanh niên Cộng sản Hồ Chí Minh*) and its Pioneer sub-organization with 5 million members, which has a Pioneer sub-organization, and the Confederation of Trade Unions – in 1995 renamed the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor Unions (VGCLU or *Tông Liên Đoàn Lao Đông Việt Nam*) – with 4.2 million members. At times a former Collective Peasants' Union (8 million members) succeeded by a Peasants Union (*Hội Nông Dân Việt Nam*) function in this way in the countryside, although not very successfully. Kerkvliet (2001) considers the role of these organizations, which represent the support for the state and channel citizen's concerns and criticisms in an organized and "safe" way to the leaders of the Party and the state, as a form of "state corporatism" or as an institutionalized "mobilizational authoritarianism" (Turley 1993). Globalization currently has particularly strong and hard-to-manage effects upon labor intensive sectors such as clothing and footwear manufacturing. An emerging history of wildcat strikes shows that the official trade unions have proven entirely unable to support workers (Clarke 2006; Do 2009; Do et al. 2013). Outside the industrial sector, farmers increasingly have organized in various ways and for both economic and political ends since they found official structures unable to articulate their interests (see Fforde 2008). The Farmers' Union appears increasingly isolated, stuck in its Leninist role as transmission belt for official policies.

All these organizations play the dual role of implementing state and Party politics in their respective fields of responsibility and of being the "transmission belts" in the Leninist sense of the term between the Party and the masses (Chirot 1991). The same organizations urge local state officials to perform assigned roles, but personal and institutional links often overlap. While the Fatherland Front is still successful in performing its assigned role as a platform for social and religious affairs, the other organizations' power is declining in favor of a myriad of bodies representing special interests, like new associations, clubs, and non-governmental organizations.[19] In the first decade of the twenty-first century,

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[19] Sidel (1995) discusses the nature of nongovernmental organizations and provides a typology for such groups. The Women's Union declares itself an NGO, but is clearly acting, given its official role, as a quasi-NGO (QUANGO), being not independent from state or Party. At the same time, the Women's Union is showing more openness towards post-feminist viewpoints and tries to cope with gender equality perspectives; see Pistor and Le (2014: 93-112). The Labour Confederation, VGLU, however, is sometimes under pressure from workers; see (Do Quynh Chi 2008).

a number of voluntary organizations and non-governmental organizations have sprung up. These groups, however, differ from the above mentioned "transmission belts" in the sense that they are no longer outposts of the CPV in society, but voluntary organizations and non-governmental organizations. It is also doubtful whether this associational activity is a sign of enhancing civil society or just a byproduct of development, or an invention of tradition referring to an idealized past. Nevertheless, "social or civic organizations" (in Vietnamese labeled as "*tổ chức*" or "*hiệp hội*") have grown quickly in number in recent years to over 250 national and more than 2000 local organizations in 2005. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi alone, more than 300 "VNGO or issue-based organizations" have sprung up in recent years (see Gray 1999; Wischermann 2003; 2013; Nørlund 2006; Wells-Dang 2014).[20]

The policy of reform created not only the opportunities for the founding of civic groups, mainly issue-oriented organizations, but also a legal framework in which they can operate. The rate of their growth was partly determined by international donors. Their success also depends on the willingness of the donor community to support these organizations. Examples are research centers outside the leading scientific think tanks and education institutions like the Center for Vietnamese Studies (CVS) and various centers for research on natural resources and environmental studies, led by leading academics or (Party) members of the National Assembly, which act as clearing houses for academic researchers abroad and domestically.

Smaller groups like Towards Ethnic Women (TEW) and the Rural Development Services Centre (RDSC) act as rural support NGOs and implement projects in the credit sector. The Marine Centre for Development (MCD) is another example (see Brown 2013)[21]. All organizations are steered by people who once were part of "the state

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[20] They are generally described as falling under the slogan "wealthy people, strong State, just/equal society, democratic and civilized society" (*dân giàu, nước mạnh, xã hội công bằng, dân chủ và văn minh*), see (Nørlund et al. 2006).

[21] MCD changed its name into Center of Marinelife Conservation and Communication Development (sic).

system or apparatus" (*Bộ máy nhà nước*), generally as an employee of a ministry or a university. Directors or chairpersons of these organizations are in most cases members of "revolutionary families" (*gia đình cách mạng*) or at least from "intelligentsia families" (*gia đình trí thức*) who have supported the revolution.[22] Self-help groups in the countryside and networks of research organizations (NROs) like GenComNet, a government gender and development network, also belong to this expanding area of a civil society, which has official and unofficial aspects. The best example is Bloc 8406, named after its founding date, 8 April 2006, which emerged with a "manifesto on freedom and democracy" and backed by middle-class academics and leading Party dissidents like Hoang Minh Chinh (1922 –2008).[23] When the group moved into the formation of two new parties and asked for the boycott of the national elections, state and Party apparatus moved in quickly and sentenced 26 members to long-term punishments for violating paragraph 88 of the Criminal Code. The agony of the outlawed United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBVN), a southern-based organization of Mahayana Buddhists, dating back from the Vietnam War, has not yet ended. Less visibly, attempts to propose a Law on Associations in order to create an official space for "loyal" civil society organizations were postponed in 2007. The Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) still acts as an umbrella to ensure that NGOs are "embedded" NGOs, i.e., their members are not critical towards the CPV.

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[22] Intelligentsia families, often recruited by Viet Minh cadres, recall their shared experiences of war, revolution, and national reconstruction in the years during and since the 1946-54 anti-French resistance war (Nguyen Bac 2004). For an anthropological study, see (Bayley 2007).

[23] Minh was a high level Party member who held political tenure in the 1960s before he became an opponent of the war efforts in the south and outspoken critic of the CPV. He was jailed twice for a period of 11 years and was under house arrest until 1990. It was renewed in 1995 until his death.

Changing state, party and society relations

Alternative political movements, of whatever composition or structure, are still out of the question in Vietnam, but the reform process has, more than ever, propelled centrifugal forces to the foreground in the form of sector lobbies, regional pressure groups, and factions within the Party (Kornai 1992: 422). It is here that "sector-politics" develop not only at the apex of the political system, but also all the way down shaping at the same time the reform process in Vietnam. The 1992 Constitution laid the groundwork for a reform of the administrative part of the state and the government (Vasavakul 1997a; 1997b). Criticism of rampant corruption, which has been reported by the Vietnamese press since the mid-1980s, has forced Party leaders to pay at least lip service to measures to curb the practices of individuals in positions of authority (see Kerkvliet 1997: 47-81).

In spite of the new openness *(cởi mở)* and the renovation of the economic policy *(đổi mới)* which this constitution reflects, it still contains a number of "taboo issues vis-à-vis the official ideology" (for a general treatment, see Kornai 1992: 409-418). The Communist Party is still the competent leading force in society (Article 4) and this dogma is until now upheld. The CPV still decides who will be appointed to the helm of the five leading permanent state organs, but the National Assembly has some room of maneuver, at least in discussing the appointments to be made (Articles 84, 135, 139). Though the Constitution grants more autonomy to the prime minister and his cabinet, there is still no clear separation between legislative, executive, and judicial powers, although the number of laws issued by the National Assembly is increasing. The important Civil Code, composed of 834 articles, was approved in late 1995 (again in 2001) and became effective a year later, granting citizens for the first time a tool with which to protect themselves against state harassment (Tønneson 1997). Complaints about police abuse can be filed, but protection against "administrative detainment", the common pretext to arrest dissidents, is not guaranteed.[24] As said, an attempt in 2013 to revise the Constitution more thoroughly was met by resistance of the leadership, but as Jonathan D.

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[24] See (http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/02/01/vietna17954.htm) for a 2008 list of political prisoners in Vietnam.

London put it, "The party leadership has lost control over the discussion. Like it or not, there is in Vietnam a debate on the constitution, with even longtime Party members are weighing. Bottling it up at this point will be no easy task."[25]

The establishment of administrative courts, seemingly independent from the rest of the judiciary, is equally seen as an important step in the direction of a more independent government section within the party-state. In spite of ambiguous references to a demand for a "state of law" (*Rechtstaat*), the actual situation is known as "government by decree" or "state rule by law" (*Nhà nước pháp quyền*). Article 4 of the Constitution implies that Party decrees are carried out and enforced by Party chapters at every level. "State rule by law" is rooted in a legalist manifestation of Confucian tradition, which states that the good of society outweighs the good of the individual and social configurations like the family, the village community, or even a business enterprise (Marr 1995). Marxist notions of how the state should be ruled blend into this tradition in the sense that the Party claims to know what constitutes the "good of society."[26] Scant empirical research points to a mixed bag of borrowed elements from Western countries and possibly China and Japan (see Gillespie 1997: 375).

The last, but not unimportant, sacred principle is the control over the armed forces as a means for outside intervention and suppression of unrest at home. The CPV and not the National Assembly has power over the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and its several branches (including the security apparatus), which also means that the Assembly is denied vital information about the PAVN's functioning. Together with the position of the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Organ of Control, the armed forces are subordinate to the power of the Party. Also the National Assembly is restricted in its control of the government and in developing an independent policy apart from the CPV. The media and the mass organizations are supposed to "join hands with the state" and "supervise the activities of state agencies."[27] The security apparatus watches economic trends very closely, concerned about the effects of economic slowdown.

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[25] Jonathan London quoted by AP Press, March 2013, (http://bigstory.ap.org/article/critics-pile-vietnam-government-rare-debate).

[26] An example was the SRV Party Central Committee Political Report to the Eight National Party Congress. Full text in *Quân đội nhân dân*, 30 June 1996. Translated in FBIS-EAS-96-134. See also Kerkvliet (1997: 47-79). Gillespie refers to "the nebulous 'will of the state' before individual rights" (1997: 388).

[27] See chapter 10 of the CC 1996 Political Report.

The reform of the administrative apparatus in the ongoing reform process is a matter of debate (Vasavakul: 2014). Since 1995, Party debates have focused on the reform of certain state institutions, administrative procedures, and the creation of a civil service that which is less bound by Party loyalty. Already in 1996, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's Party Central Committee warned against "officialdom, corruption, and law violation" and argued for the installment of "a system on recruitment, training, functions and selection of civil servants" but at the same time it made little differentiation between cadres and state personnel (SRV Political Report 1996).[28] As Vasavakul (1998) rightly points out: "All these measures were advocated by state architects and technocrats and were seen as a major move to attack the vested interests of a group of state officials in the decentralized economic system, while strengthening the grip of the central government through the decentralization of the state apparatus" (1998:74). In other words, Vietnam's political process is based upon Party Congresses where every five years access to patronage and political protection is circulated via changes to the Politburo and Central Committee (see Gainsborough 2007).

Society and culture: civil society?

The discussion about civil society in Vietnam is based upon two premises. The first is how to define civil society and what it means empirically in the context of a country that is adopting market economic principles while maintaining the socio-political configurations deeply rooted in a form of Confucian communism. In Vietnamese, the term civil society creates confusion: *xã hội công dân*, literally meaning "society of the citizens", and *xã hội dân sự*, "people's society", are not mentioned in language encyclopedias before the 1990s (Bui Phung 1977; Dang Chan Lieu et al. 1993) or in pre-1975 dictionaries popular in the Republic of Vietnam (Việt Nam Cộng hòa). The Vietnamese translation of the *Dictionary of Sociology* (2002) by Gunter Endruweit and Gisela Trommsdorff (1989) includes "Society" at large, but omits the term "social contract" wherever authors like Hobbes, Rousseau, and Ferguson are mentioned. There is no mention of the term "civil society" (*Zivilgeselschaft*),[29] nor the name of Gramsci.

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[28] Political report to the Eighth National Party Congress, held in June 1996.

[29] Sources: "Zivilgesellschaft", *wikipedia.org*, (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zivilgeselschaft).

A second premise is that the different elements of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the overarching legal framework in which they operate are not always compatible with the first premise. A "civil society gaze" leading to label all associational activity as political might hinder what we see as an exponent of civil society activity (see Feuer et al. in Waibel 2014). From these premises two conclusions can follow: the engagement of international donors with civil society are different; and the consequences of an approach and strategy for engagement with civil society in Vietnam are uncertain.

In urban areas, widespread indicators of tensions associated with "civil society" are demands for democratization from within the Party, the emergence of unofficial newspapers and other information media, and student and youth activism. Protests by Catholics about a disputed Church property in 2008, student protests about the South China Sea Islands, and the still-unsettled "Bauxite-affair" show an increasing willingness from the side of the authorities to negotiate, possible due to the unexpected and rapid use of Internet and mobile phones.[30] Handling of corruption cases like PMU 18 in 2006 followed a different scenario by exposing the responsible ministers to the public as long as there is no serious challenge to the CPV. The affair involved 200 officials who had embezzled ODA funds to pay bribes, cover gambling debts, and procure luxury vehicles and prostitutes (Thayer 2008).[31]

As said, the broad-based political organization of CPV combined with the tradition of a one-party state until recently limited the growth of a civil society. Whether this civil society is part of the one-party state is still a matter of debate and of perspective. The political discourse of the CPV was not supportive of organizational expression of collective identity and interest outside the framework of the Party. Though Vietnam in the past had a rich associational life (which is partly idealized by Vietnamese authors like Bach Tan Sinh and Phuong Le Trong 2014) civil society as understood in mainstream development practice has remained underdeveloped. Mass organizations are still the largest and most dominant of social groupings. They often occupy the space that CSOs used to occupy in other countries and political contexts. In chapters 2 and 3, I will consider two case studies based upon fieldwork in 2013 and 2014 that show these tendencies (Kleinen and Verweij 2014, Kleinen 2014).

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[30] See for the spectacular rise of Internet access in Vietnam the site *www.tiasangvietnam.org*, consulted in February 2015.

[31] See for the latest corruption report, (Davidsen et al. 2008).

However, in the last ten to fifteen years, the political and economic context in which Vietnam operates has been rapidly changing and is characterized by a globalizing marketization of the economy. As we have seen, the growth of social groupings outside the Party is increasing. The increased use of Internet and mobile hard-and software has led to a diminishing state domination of development activity and to an acceptance of the contribution of other development actors. From this, it follows that Vietnam can be characterized by a limited but increasing tolerance of autonomous civil activity, while the issue of "civil society" remains politically sensitive.

There are two broad trends that one notices over the decade since 2000. Firstly, there has been the growth of international, local, and quasi-autonomous-non-government organizations for promoting development (NGO's and QUANGO's), which were essentially different from the front-organizations that emerged as a product of the retrenchment process during the late 1980s. Secondly, there has been an upsurge of all kinds of associations – voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental, community based, grassroots, and cooperative. These associations, partly a legacy of the past, fulfill a variety of roles ranging from organizing activities at the local level, to income generation, to disseminating knowledge. These new (and sometimes old) forms, together with the mass organizations, provide material assistance to the poor but do not engage in public debates about policy. By accepting that local NGOs are merging with community-based organizations, the CPV allows an interplay between government and social groupings, shifting from total state domination of development activity to an acceptance of the contribution that other players may bring (Sabharwal and Than 2005). A number of decrees since 1998 show this tendency to enhance a well-guided socio-economic development strategy to enable the poorest segments of Vietnamese society to participate.[32]

The term "civil society" defined be it somewhat in problematic terms, as "the broad range of organized groupings that occupy the public space between the state and the individual citizen" is often translated in a Vietnamese context as "consisting of a range of organizations, which when organized along a spectrum consist of Community Organizations (CBOs) at one end of the spectrum and research based organizations and (International)(Vietnamese) NGOs at the other end"

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[32] See Decree on Grassroots Democracy in 1998 (see Decree No.29/1998, 11 May 1998, amended in 2003). Further, the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2000-2010) and the draft Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010), (http://www.ngocentre.org/vn/node/99).

according to two researchers from the Global Policy Form, using the CIVICUS definition by Nørlund et al. (2006). In Vietnamese eyes, various organizations, like mass organizations, new cooperatives, social and charity funds and local NGOs, "act" in the field of local development. Public media and the private sector do not have this agency and are seldom regarded as the domain in which "civil society" plays a role. Mark Sidel (1995: 293-94) classified these groups into nine categories, explicitly rejecting the term NGO as a collective term. Carlyle Thayer (1994: 54) did the same (using the same number of categories) for Vietnamese associations, while the sociologists Jörg Wischermann and Nguyen Quang Vinh (2003) used more general terms in four categories (mass, professional, business, and issue-oriented). The roles of coordinator, implementer, intermediary, and networker are ascribed to these "actors", while they see themselves as natural partner, supervisor in the field, innovator, and advocate (Jörg Wischermann and Nguyen Quang Vinh 2003: 13). Last but not least, the Thai scholar Vasavakul (2003: 186) referred to five categories (political-professional, mass, popular, non-state research institutes and centers, and non-governmental organizations. If we confine our description to the five "factors" we mentioned above, we get the following picture (Bich 2014: 39-57).[33]

Mass organizations like the Vietnamese Fatherland Front (VFF) are reorienting their role and position. Under the main umbrellas of the VFF there are 30 member organizations of which the Vietnam Women's Union is the largest. Over the past few decades they have proved to be effective in reaching services down to wards in cities and communes outside cities. While the mass organizations are an important vehicle for improving access to services, specifically across the poorest provinces, they are not effective in promoting accountability for local government actions. Mass organizations are largely funded by the Party or the state, and closely integrated with both, though increasingly they are collaborating with INGOs to implement development programs (see Pistor and Le 2014: 93-113 in Waibel et al. 2014). According to Bich (2014: 45) "they are well placed to influence the government process, and ... policy-makers." A second group is a great number of popular and professional associations ranging from "umbrellas" such as the Association of Writers, to the Vietnam Gardening Association, based upon a traditional approach to family food production as a means of integrated farming known as the VAC-system combining an orchard *(vườn)*, a fishpond (*ao*) and an animal shed (*chuồng*) for

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[33] Mainly taken from Bach Tan Sinh, *Bringing past models into the present: Identifying civil society in contemporary Vietnam.* In Waibel et al. (2014: 39-57).

pigs (Bich 2014: 47-48). Charities and funds are the third group, which has been in operation since 1999. They bring services mainly to the urban poor. Sometimes organized by individuals and largely supported by domestic donations, they will continue to play a role in enhancing access to housing and child protection for the urban poor. A fourth group is composed of research and training centers based upon professional expertise from the initiators. They are mainly active in the major cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. These are mostly organized under umbrella organizations like VUSTA, which was established in the early 1980s even before the *đổi mới* policies were officially initiated (Bich 2014: 49-50) as we already noted. A fifth group is community-based organizations (CBOs), among which the agricultural extension groups are the best-known. The majority of these organizations operates in the countryside and can be seen in a certain way as a spin-off effect of the new Cooperatives, which were formally established in 1996 by law and reconfirmed in 2007.[34] They provided the opportunity for a new generation of local leaders to seize economic opportunities by organizing farmers to produce and market their goods collectively. At the village level farmers have opted for leadership that is not directly linked to, though not necessarily exclusive of, Party membership. As the CIVICUS study has made clear:

> "At the higher end of the civil society spectrum INGOs occupy the space that NGOs tend to occupy in other developing countries in other parts of Asia. … More recently there has been a trend amongst some of the more progressive INGOs to operate through local Vietnamese NGOs (VNGOs). … In the long run, as capacities of local NGOs develop they will need to redefine their role vis-a-vis the emerging development context of Vietnam" (Sabharwal Gita and Tran Thi Thien Huong, 2005: section 14).

In July 2005 already roughly 140,000 CBOs and 3,000 cooperatives had been registered, with most of them operating in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, construction, sanitation, and health care, as well as about 200 charities and 1,000 local NGOs. In 2007, the government counted 530 NGOs with 150 representative offices. If we replace the term "non-governmental" with "social", all the Party and state-run mass organizations are included and the members would number around 60 million (out of a population of 90 million) (Nguyen, 2007).

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[34] Law No. 35/CTN of 20 March 1996; Decree no. 151/2007/ND-CP of 10 October 2007.

VUSTA recorded in 2011 over 600 members, of which 240 were registered as local NGOs. Most of these organizations are connected to the Vietnamese system and thus are not true NGOs in the western sense of the term. They are extensions, if not agents, of the state. How local NGOs work in Northern Vietnam's main tourist area is presented in the following case study based upon the research by the Dutch researcher Pim Verweij in 2013.

Chapter 2

NGOs in Northern Vietnam: between public and private domains[35]

Local NGOs working among minorities in mountainous regions, sometimes with an ecological agenda, are often regarded as outposts of an enlarging civil society network. They operate under permits granted by the central government and stay scrupulously clear of opposition politics. As we said already, Vietnam's NGOs are not fighting for more democracy or any other cause that makes them vulnerable. They often operate in a legal limbo due to the still-pending Law on Associations, which is still a Decree.[36] Salemink (2006) concluded, "Outside the discursive context of human rights and democratization, civil society discourse in Vietnam is usually equated with development (and also environmental) NGOs, both local and international, and with the development concepts and practices that they introduce" (Salemink 2006: 122). Salemink treated a case study of a Dutch NGO consortium (SNV) with provincial authorities in central Vietnam, which was plagued by conflicts from the start, and eventually ended in

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[36] See. e.g. The Decree on the Organization, Operation and Management of Associations (*Quy định về tổ chức, hoạt động và quản lý hội*), Decree No. 45/2010/ND-CP of 21 April 2010.

"misunderstanding, mistranslations, contestations and the ultimately unsuccessful search for common discursive ground" (2006: 122). The project was "unsuccessful by most standards" (ibid.: 122). For a similar critique of NGO activities in Vietnam, see (Fforde et al. 2005).[37]

The position of Vietnam's minorities resembles that of minorities in the former Soviet Union and China: a dominant ethnicity has taken charge of the communist state while assigning indigenous groups to the social, economic, and symbolic peripheries of the nation-state with the result of minorities occupying lower social levels and experiencing marginalization of many kinds (Salemink 2003; Michaud 2013). In Vietnam, the northern upland periphery is the home of 28 or more official indigenous minority ethnicities (*các dân tộc thiểu số*, literally translated as "minority nationalities"), many being politically fragmented with lineage-based forms of social organization. Many live in farming households scattered over tough terrain and try to maintain sustainable livelihoods at a minimal level, often in harsh conditions. These resilient farmers make use of their finely tuned indigenous knowledge (*metis*) of food systems while coping with or trying to resist powerful state interventions to incorporate them in one single nation-state. State-led research among minorities is still subject to ideological agendas in spite of attempts to use more universal scientific standards. Vietnamese researchers are inclined to restrict their gaze to politically correct topics like material culture, ethnomusicology, artistic performances, and modernization of the local economy (Sowerwine 2004).

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[37] Fforde, Adam, John Kleinen, and Joerg Wischermann 2005, "Comments: Understanding pro-poor political change: the policy process – VIETNAM" by ODI for DFID, 2004 (prepared on request from certain donors), mimeo 2005.

Hmong child playing with camera of tourist
(© Pim Verweij 2013)

The following case study is about homestay tourism and its impacts on local villagers. It presents a critical review of pro-poor tourism programs implemented in Sapa, the northwestern former hill station and home to many ethnic groups. Pim Verweij (MA), who did his research in 2013, carried out the fieldwork. In this report, the term "we" is used to refer to the researcher and also to this author, who supervised the study partly in the framework of research on civil society. For obvious reasons, the case study in this context is adapted for a wider audience and fits in with the topic of civil society issues in Vietnam today. Special attention is paid to the VNGOs involved in homestay *tourism*.

As Gita Sabharwal and Than Thi Thien Huong already made clear in a pre-study on civil society in Vietnam:

> "At the higher end of the civil society spectrum INGOs occupy the space that NGOs tend to occupy in other developing countries in other parts of Asia. … They are largely engaged in implementing development programmes at the level of the commune/district and piloting innovative development interventions for poverty reduction. More recently there has been a trend amongst some of the more progressive INGOs to operate through local Vietnamese NGOs (VNGOs). This has allowed them to strengthen the VNGO capacity … while increasing their outreach. Some have successfully engaged in the policy making process of the state while others have been engaging in issue based advocacy. In the long run, as capacities of local NGOs develop they will need to redefine their role vis-a-vis the emerging development context of Vietnam" (Sabharwal and Than, 2005).

What implicitly is assumed here and taken for granted for the CIVICUS researchers is that "civil society" and "good governance" issues are part of the "development" programs. A closer look at "homestay tourism" leads to a different interpretation, especially in mountainous areas like Sapa where more villagers decided to transform their houses into homestays for foreign and local tourists, supported by a number of NGOs who consider "homestay tourism" as an important "pro-poor" tool to let the less fortunate benefit from tourism in this area.

The role of local and international NGOs can be linked only indirectly to promoting civil society issues due to their integrated development projects in Vietnam. SRV is a good example, having a long track record in Vietnam since the 1990s. Its ups and downs are well-known, illustrating how difficult it is to "broker between … diverging interests and interpretations" of their development projects (Salemink 2006:122). The Sapa case at least proves that "socialization" is possible without questioning the larger political context, let alone the leadership of the CPV. What is more important, the Sapa-project is not meant to be presented as a "success story" for tourist development projects like the ones analyzed by Christian Culas et al, in Tam Dao in Vinh Phuc Province, where four tourism projects in four villages were executed (Culas and Nguyen 2010). More important, however, was that, the researchers found a number of tensions between local government bodies and local villagers in Tam Dao, which go to the heart of the Vietnamese perception of "grassroots democracy" as embodied in the law of 1988.

Today, there are up to 36 homestays operative in the village where the research was carried out. The original inhabitants of the village own the majority of homestays. Over the last few years more and more outsiders, Vietnamese from Hanoi and even foreigners, have come to the village to open businesses. Some outsiders rent a house from a villager and open their own "homestay"; others have opened new souvenir shops or bars. Because of all these fast developments, increasing disparities in income levels are pushing villagers apart. This causes social problems like jealousy, disputes, or even aggression among villagers. Villagers are not prepared for the growing competition from newcomers who explore new opportunities to open businesses. An expert of the Academy of Responsible Tourism (ART) in Hanoi, however, maintained that it is a good sign that newcomers come to the village to introduce "new products, new services and new skills to the local people". According to him: "the local people will better understand how they have to set up their house to look more professional, to pick up the tourists."[38] However, it can be argued that there is still a long way to go before villagers are able to fully understand how to compete with these newcomers. "Homestay trainings" provided by NGOs do not respond enough to this situation. Most of these trainings are largely focused on household and cooking skills, not on other skills such as how to manage competition or how to improve services for their visitors.

Here we deal extensively with what are called "High Impact Tourism Trainings" (HITT) or "community based tourism programs", which are encompassed as part of the EU-funded[39] "pro-poor tourism" strategies implemented by a number of VNGOs and INGOs, such as the Hanoi Institute of Tourism Development, the SNV, and the Academy of Responsible Tourism (ART) in Hanoi. The original research question was, "How do local villagers in Ta Van village experience the pro-poor tourism strategies implemented by (V)(I)NGOs, and in particular the HITT homestay trainings?" Besides the focus on the HITT homestay training programs, the research also put the question

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[38] Interview at ART Hanoi, 26th of March 2013.

[39] In April 2012, HITT Vietnam signed a letter of agreement with the European Union and Vietnam Government funded by the Environmentally & Socially Responsible Tourism Capacity Development Programme (ESRT). The partnership ensures a close working relationship to develop training materials for homestays, provide trainers to deliver HITT training, and potentially support SNV's local partner in Vietnam, REACH, to establish training facilities in remote areas of Vietnam. Source: "HITT Vietnam inks agreement with EU, ESRT", *snv.org*, 18 April 2012, (http://www.snvworld.org/en/countries/vietnam/news/hitt-vietnam-inks-agreement-with-eu-esrt).

why some homestay families are very successful in doing their business, while their neighbors or other villagers stay far behind, even despite the fact that they share the same backgrounds and received the same training. Is there a direct relation with possible shortcomings of pro-poor tourism strategies? Or do we need to search for the answer in the commitment of the villager himself?

Defining poverty

Defining "poverty" is a long and storied issue, and the lack of careful definitions is a weakness in the application of pro-poor tourism (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010: 12). Most of the leading literature about pro-poor tourism does not address the issue directly but rather implicitly (ibid 2010: 12). "Alternatively, studies focus on specific groups of people who may act as proxies for the poor (for instance 'rural residents' or 'crafters')" (ibid.). Mitchell and Ashley use "a dynamic and self-categorizing definition of 'poverty'." For example they ask hotel managers what proportion of their staff are from a poor background, as a way of "estimating the role of tourism in lifting hotel employees out of poverty over time" (ibid.).

In most of their reports, the SNV describes its target group as follows:

"While the Vietnam economy has been growing strongly, unemployment is high particularly in rural and remote areas and amongst ethnic communities. These are considered potential workers in the HITT Vietnam programme" (ibid.: 4).

"The HITT programme focuses on expanding access training for disadvantaged target groups, including women, youth, unskilled, semi-skilled, and potential workers, and aims to facilitate direct links with the tourism industry to maximize their opportunities to employment and income. In the case of Vietnam, there is also a focus on targeting ethnic communities because of the strong links between ethnicity and poverty, which is a key government priority" (ibid.).

How to define "poverty" in this context is not specified. For NGOs implementing the pro-poor tourism trainings, all residents in Ta Van village are considered "poor" (since every homestay owner receives training, no matter what their income is). *The Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey 2010* (General Statistics Office of Vietnam), measured differences in poverty between households with the help of so-called "poverty lines of the Government". "Based on the new poverty line (equal to VND 653,000/person/month or $2.25/person/day, PPP 2005) and updated monitoring system, the national poverty rate in 2010 is 20.7% vs. an official poverty rate of 14.2% in 2010 using official MOLISA (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs) urban and rural poverty lines of VND 500,000/person/month and VND 400,000/person/month, respectively".[40] When using this standard, villagers in Ta Van with a monthly income below this "poverty line" can be considered poor. These "poverty lines of the (Vietnamese) Government" are in fact below the poverty line used by the United Nations Development Programme, as part of the Millennium Development Goals: namely 1.25 US $ per day, which is around 1 million VND (36 euro per month).[41]

In 2012, Ta Van village had 125 households deemed to be "wealthy", 133 households deemed to be between "wealthy" and "poor", meaning they had just enough money to buy food for themselves, and over 400 households considered "poor" by local standards, meaning they are short of food for at least two months or more annually. "Poor" households are issued poverty cards and are economically supported by the government.[42]

Many of these households had possessions such as a motorbike, a television, or a refrigerator, and also are the operators of homestays. While they did not receive any financial support from pro-poor supporting NGOs, they do receive frequent training. Homestay training was only given to households that could afford to transform their houses into homestays. In order to undertake such renovation, households need a certain amount of capital to being with. This was, in fact, one important critique of pro-poor tourism, also stated by David Harrison (2008).

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[40] (http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/01/24/poverty-reduction-in-vietnam-remarkable-progress-emerging-challenges), accessed 17 October 2014.

[41] (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2010/chapter2.pdf).

[42] Source: report by the Ta Van Commune Committee, Sa Pa District, Lao Cai Province, 2012.

Pro-poor growth

Another definition, common in literature about pro-poor tourism, is "pro-poor growth". According to Mitchell and Ashley (2010: 10) this is a contested term. According to the World Bank definition, growth is pro-poor as long as the poor benefit (ibid.: 11), but by this definition "almost all economic growth is pro-poor – even if the main beneficiaries of growth are the non-poor and growth is associated with rising inequality" (ibid.). To make the matter more complicated, another approach favors "a restrictive definition of pro-poor growth, where it is *pro-poor* if it reduces inequality, and here, all commercial growth is excluded" (ibid.: 10). According to this approach, the poor should proportionally benefit more than others so that inequality is reduced along with poverty. "In other words, tourism in only pro-poor if it reduces inequality as well as directing resources to poor people" (ibid.: 11). According to the authors, there are a few examples of "supply chains into the tourism value chain" that meet the restrictive definition of pro-poor tourism, but they are few and far between (ibid.). On more difficulty with pro-poor growth is how to measure it. "Some refer to it as growth that results in significant poverty reduction, thereby benefiting the poor and improving their access to opportunities (e.g. World Bank, 2000; OECD, 2001). But it is not clear how significant a reduction in poverty must be and how progress in achieving pro-poor growth is to be monitored." (Pernia, 2003: 2). Homestay operators occasionally benefit so much from tourism that they cannot be considered poor anymore. But because villagers' incomes were not transparent, this was hard to monitor for supporting NGOs.

Did the pro-poor growth in the case of homestay tourism in Ta Van village meet the restrictive definition? How was inequality reduced, and did the "poor" villagers benefit significantly more than the middle class Vietnamese who work in the same tourist industry? During our fieldwork, we noticed greater inequality between villagers emerged as a result of the so-called "pro-poor growth": "Pro-poor growth is primarily about the distribution of growth *between, not within*, lower and upper income groups. Pro-poor growth merely requires that the proportional income growth of the poor exceed the overall average income growth" (Pernia, 2003: 2).

Defining tourism and community-based tourism

Many young Western tourists and just a handful of domestic Kinh (Vietnamese) tourists visit the homestays in Sapa. Even the domestic tourists are easy to recognize, since they behave and look very different from the local villagers. Official definitions of "tourist" date back to the late 1930s and were extended in the 1960s (World Tourism Organization, 1995: iii; Leiper, 1979: 393). From a recent World Bank definition of tourism, tourist are "people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one year for leisure, business, and other purposes not related to an activity remunerated from the place visited" (World Bank, 2009: 393). But the definition is "quite tricky to apply in practice in a developing country" (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010: 8). For example a lot of domestic tourism in developing countries is often overlooked and ignored in statistics (ibid.).

If the definition of "tourist" is already difficult, terms like "tourism sector" or the "tourism industry" are also complicated (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010: 8). " This is partly because tourism is an economic activity which is a composite of services and goods surrounded by rather unclear boundaries. Activity in the sector is usually estimated simply by summing the economic sub-sectors of hotels, restaurants and transportation. But of course many tourists do more than eat, sleep and travel and this 'other' spending is not attributed to the tourist sector" (ibid.: 8-9).

According to Mitchell and Ashley, "spending on these kind of 'non-tourist' activities are falling outside the 'International Standard Industrial Classifications (ISIC) categories that constitute tourism" (ibid. 8). Another often-used expression in the literature is "community-based homestay tourism" (CBT). "Community-based homestay tourism is a form of tourism that is closely related to nature, culture and local custom and is intended to attract a certain segment of the tourist market that desires authentic experiences" (Jamal et al., 2011: 5). "Community based tourism (CBT) is a community development tool that strengthens the ability of rural communities to manage tourism resources while ensuring the local community's participation. CBT can help the local community to generate income, diversify the local economy, preserve culture, conserve the environment and provide educational opportunities." [43]

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[43] (http://www.apec.org/Press/Features/2010/0401_Local_Development_Through_Sustainable_ Tourism.aspx).

Worldwide, tourists in 2010 spent more than US $ 681 billion in developing countries (WTTC, 2011), five times the US $ 129 billion budget for development aid worldwide (OECD, 2011) (Hummel et al., 2012). But the main question is whether the poor actually benefit from tourism? Some argue that the great majority of the potential benefits "leak" back to the countries of origin through "the activities of international tour operators, foreign-owned hotels and the high import propensity of tourism in developing countries" (Mitchell 2012: 458). In addition, tourism is often seen as "seasonal, low-paying and exploitative" (ibid.).

In order to improve the situation for poor people in such a way that they can benefit from tourism, a small group of researchers at the Millennium Development Summit, held in September 2000 at the United Nations headquarters in New York City,[44] coined the term "pro-poor tourism" (PPT). The first intention of the idea behind pro-poor tourism was to explore how tourism could contribute to poverty reduction (Ashley and Goodwin, 2007; Mitchell, 2012: 458)."Pro-poor tourism draws from the concept of pro-poor growth. This emerged as a counter to the belief that the benefits of development would inevitably 'trickle down' to poor households" (Mitchell, 2012: 460). In other words, pro-poor tourism is defined as "tourism that generates net benefits for the poor" (Ashley et al., 2001: 2).

Benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental, or cultural. The definition does not clarify the relative distribution of the benefits of tourism. "Therefore, as long as poor people reap net benefits, tourism can be classified as 'pro-poor' (even if richer people benefit more than poorer people)" (ibid.) (Harrison, 2008: 854). According to Harrison, the focus on tourism as an "alleviator of poverty" is not new: Specifically pro-poor tourism approaches, promoted by the UK by a small group of researchers and consultants since the end of the 1990s, to some extent by others elsewhere … seem to have led to a popular, simple, sharper and more appealing moral focus on the links poorer residents in destinations have with tourism enterprises" (Harrison, 2008: 855).

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[44] (http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/).

Value chain analysis

According to Ashley et al. pro-poor tourism cannot succeed without the successful development of the entire tourism destination in question. "Pro-poor tourism is not a specific product or sector of tourism, but an approach to the industry. It involves a range of stakeholders operating at different levels, from micro to macro. *Stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, as well as the poor themselves who act as both producers and decision makers*" (Ashley et al. 2001: 145; italics added). They distinguish three linkages between "the tourist sector" and ''the poor households" (ibid.: 462). The first includes direct flows between the tourist sector and the low-income groups in the local economy. The second link includes indirect flows, where tourist expenses stimulate other activities, outside the tourist sector, for example, hotel construction wages and supplies, food, and beverages (ibid.). The third pathway includes the dynamic effects (both positive and negative) of tourist activity on the local economy. In particular the direct and indirect inflows from the tourist sector to the poor households *inside* the tourists' destination are relevant. To map these inflows, researchers work with the "value chain analysis". Value chains can be considered as a way of understanding the interaction of people and firms with markets – whether domestic or global" (Ashley et al, 2001). In value chains, primary actors perform a selection of (primary) functions. These functions, or activities, are required to bring a tourist to a destination and provide all the necessary services (accommodation, catering, retail, excursions, etc.) (Overseas Development Institute 2009: 1).

Value chain analysis provides a better understanding how poor people can engage with domestic and regional economic activities. Secondly, value chain analysis has "economic viability and sustainability" at its core because of its focus on markets and commercial viability (as well as development concerns) instead of an exclusive focus on the producers of goods or services. And, thirdly, value chains are a strong "qualitative diagnostic tool" capable of identifying critical issues for specific target groups (Mitchell, 2012: 467-468).

According to Mitchell & Ashley, pro-poor assessment has recently moved to "mapping entire tourism economy or value chain. A value chain covers all elements of providing goods and services to tourists, from supply of inputs to final consumption of goods and services, and includes analysis of the support institution and governance issues within which these stakeholders operate" (Ashley, 2006; Mitchell & Faal, 2007; Mitchell and Le Chi, 2007; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010: 16). For a complete explanation of this value chain approach in homestay tourism in Ta Van, we refer the interested reader to Verweij (2013: 26-33).

When analyzing the value chain about direct and indirect flows related to homestay tourism, it becomes clear that a tourist indirectly supports a wide range of stakeholders within the chain. When a tourist books a homestay tour at a travel agent in Hanoi, he or she pays US $140-160 (107-122 euros) for a basic tour, including transportation, a return ticket for the overnight train (approx. 45 euros), one night in a homestay and all meals.[45] After the tourist has paid the agent in Hanoi, the money trickles down the value chain. Although it is hard to prove how much money the tour operators retain for their own profit, it is estimated that the homestay operators in Ta Van make 30,000 VND (1.08 euro) per tourist per night. That means that less than 1.5% of the total travel sum is reaching the homestay families. After the tour company, the local tour guides are second in earnings; their salary is paid from the tourist fees. In fact, the homestay operator and the tour guide (if they are not Kinh) are the only actors within the chain belonging to local minority groups and can be labeled "pro-poor actors". All the other main actors in the chain belong to the Kinh majority or are foreigners. One other group of pro-poor actors in the chain are the handicraft sellers, but they are paid cash by tourists who visit the villages; the money is not trickling down from the travel sum paid in advanced by the tourists.

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[45] (http://hanoiarthotel.com/sapa-tours/sapa-bac-ha-market-3-nights-2-days.html), (http://halongsapatours.com/tours/cat/21-sapa-tours.html).

Pro-poor tourism strategies in practice: success or failure?

The SNV is one of the first international non-government organizations in Vietnam to set up projects in order to reduce poverty in the country. From 1995 onwards, SNV has been active in Vietnam with various activities, not only in tourism, but also agriculture, sanitation, and hygiene and renewable energy.[46] However, in Sapa, the main focus has been on sustainable tourism projects within the framework of pro-poor tourism. Over the years, these pro-poor tourism projects gradually transformed into the so-called "HITT training projects". At the same time, more international as well as local partners became involved, and the projects have been co-financed by the European Union.[47] The HITT trainings aimed "to make an increasing contribution towards sustainable pro-poor growth of the informal tourism sector" (SNV 2012: 36).

Conclusions

"Many academics continue to doubt tourism's role as a development tool, with their views often coloured by their commitment to a range of theoretical (and fashionably changing) perspectives, including modernisation and dependency theory, liberalism, statism and globalization. ... It is in this context, at the end of the 1990s, that the movement for 'pro-poor tourism' emerged" (Harrison, 2008: 853).

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[46] (http://www.hitt-initiative.org/countries/vietnam/partners/).

[47] *Partners in HITT initiative*: the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), the departments of Culture, Sport and Tourism in Lao Cai, Quang Nam and Ha Giang Provinces, REACH, Hue Tourism College, Sapa Tourist Information Centre, and the Academy for Responsible Tourism. Source: (http://www.hitt-initiative.org/countries/vietnam/steering-committee/).

Hmong clothing and tourist poster
(© Pim Verweij 2013)

First, proponents of pro-poor tourism are not "anti-capitalist". "Rather, strategies derived from a pro-poor tourism perspective are formulated to incorporate the poor into capitalist markets by increasing benefits, available to them" (Harrison, 2008: 855). In Vietnam, villagers are indeed incorporated into "capitalist markets", largely in a manner of "increasing competition". Most villagers working with homestay tourism are not trained to cope with these forms of competition, in particular competing with outsiders, Kinh or foreign, who open businesses in their villages. This causes unrest and conflicts in the villages, especially when the apparent success of homestay tourism attracts new people from outside the village who possess more capital and knowledge than

the villagers. It is clear that the network of Kinh-owned homestays in Ta Van and other villages extends beyond the village. This is in stark contrast with the Hmong or Giáy homestay operators, who state that they find it difficult to approach new agents.

A commonly used definition of homestay tourism by Thai author Boonratana (2010: 288) indicates that "homestay tourism" is a good way for both host and visitors to benefit from the interactions and exchanges. "The host is likely to gain awareness and understanding of their visitors and their diverse cultures, and possibly acquire some foreign language skills. The visitors are very likely to gain awareness and understanding of local culture, traditions, and simple rural lifestyles." This in itself is true, also for the village where I conducted my fieldwork. And when at the same time the local villager is in a position to make his living out of the exploitation of his home, there seems to be no cloud in the sky.

However, the organization behind homestay tourism is complex. There is much more to it than one might expect at first glance. For instance, it is usually not the villager who spontaneously offers to allow a casual passerby to stay at his home for the night. Nor does the tourist just present himself at a random village house in some small idyllic village in the mountains, even though appealing tourist advertisements might create that illusion. Instead, there is a large systematic tourist industry behind homestay tourism, fuelled by well-intentioned, subsidized pro-poor tourism strategies.

These strategies are implemented by (I)(V)NGOs in Vietnam, but also "in an almost identical fashion in other countries, such as Southern Africa, Uganda, The Gambia, Nepal, the Caribbean, and the Czech Republic" (Harrison, 2008: 854). The responsible NGOs that implement these pro-poor tourism strategies have the best intentions, but as shown in this thesis, it is not always evident that the "poor" villagers benefit from these strategies. First of all, when a village is designated to receive pro-poor support, in this case in the form of homestay training, only a small group of villagers can actually take part in it. Only those who own a house suitable for hosting 10 to 15 tourists at the same time are eligible to take part in the trainings. In the case of Ta Van, these are the households that are already the most "wealthy" of all people in the village. Because the Hmong

minority group owns smaller houses, only two Hmong households have succeeded in opening homestays so far, even though the Hmong are by far the largest minority group in the village: 68% of all villagers in Ta Van. And indeed, this is one of the critiques mentioned by Ashley and Harrison, that pro-poor tourism is not an appropriate tool for reaching the poorest – those with "fewest assets and skills who are least able to engage in the commercial economy" (Ashley and Harrison, 2008: 857).

Second, the research shows the effects for villagers being incorporated into capitalist markets. This is initially introduced by NGOs under the guise of "increasing benefits, by making the capitalist market available to the poor" (Harrison, 2008: 855). However, together with the capitalist market, *capitalist competition* is also welcomed into the village. In the last few years, more than six Kinh and foreigners started new homestay businesses in the village and last year the first foreign-owned bar was opened. The biggest problem is that the local villager is not trained how to deal with such competition from outside. An extensive training is been given to homestay operators, where all kinds of practical and communication skills are taught: from housekeeping and cookery skills to basic marketing knowledge. One of the most important skills in a fast-changing environment, however, is missing: namely a course in how to deal with competition. According to experts we have interviewed, *outsiders* bring "new products, new services and new skills"[48] to the locals, and locals can learn how to shape their homes more professionally. Whether tourists require a more professional looking homestay seems to be questionable. Research elsewhere has shown that tourists go to developing countries to have an "authentic" experience (Urry, 1999). Tourists who come all the way down to the rural villages to stay in a "traditional" homestay seek something "real" and traditional, which is promised them by the tour company, instead of luxury or a fancy-looking house. But at the same time, new elements could be added to the so-called *HITT homestay training*, such as how to provide more cultural activities, traditional games, farming activities, and more variety in food, drinks, and snacks for the tourists. By adding such elements, the homestay operators have more tools to compete with Kinh or foreign newcomers.

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[48] Quoted expert at ART Hanoi, 26th of March 2013 (see also footnote 34).

Third, only a small selection of the initial homestay owners seem able to cope with the increasing competition and are able to accommodate tourists nearly every day. These particular homestays are the two Hmong-owned places, the Kinh and foreign-owned homestays and perhaps one or two Giáy homestays. Most of the other 30 homestays are having trouble getting enough tourists, which provokes jealousy and conflicts between the operators. The Hmong homestays often have full houses because the Hmong tour guides, who favor their own family or minority group, mostly visit them. The Kinh and foreign homestays have enough visitors because they have built up a useful network with tour companies in Sapa or Hanoi. All of the other operating homestays do not have enough knowledge or recourses to attract more visitors. An additional disadvantage is that many of them have made investments to make their homestay more attractive by building toilets, hot showers, gas stoves, ADSL-internet, etcetera. For these investments, some of them took a loan from the bank and with the current decline in visitors have no money to pay off their debts. On top of that comes that most villagers never learned how to keep records or how to keep savings. An additional factor that worsened the financial situation for many homestay operators is the opening of the foreign-owned bar in 2012. Besides their income per tourist of 30,000 VND [1.08 euro], the villagers saw their income on drinks in the homestay go down to virtually nothing.

The fourth important issue is the dominance of tour companies and tour guides in this respect. As shown, the tour companies chose one village, Ta Van, among all other villages as the main "homestay hub" because of its ideal location and its five-hour walking distance from neighboring town, Sapa. In that sense, homestay operators are lucky to own a house in this village. So far, NGOs attempts to include other villages in the "homestay tourism trail" have failed, because the villages are not located at the right spot. However, Kinh-owned tour companies are not very concerned with the welfare of the "poor" villagers. For the operators in Ta Van, there is always the risk that tour companies shift their focus to another village, especially when the "authentic" atmosphere in the village changes due to influences of commercialization of the homestay tourism industry in Ta Van. There is a chance that if Ta Van continues developing like it is now, with newly constructed roads to the village, the opening of big restaurants, modern houses and bars, that the resulting change in atmosphere will make the village less attractive to tourists seeking an authentic, traditional experience. Furthermore, homestay operators depend to a very high extent on the willingness of tour guides to bring tourists to their homestay. Some

"controversial" tour guides are aware of their power and exploit the homestay operators by claiming (a part) of the fee or tips from the tourists, which were intended for the homestay family. This places the operators in an even more subordinate position.

However, the findings show that good guidance and training for both the homestay operators and the tour guides is essential to lead tourism in Ta Van in the right direction. Apparently, when a pro-poor tourism strategy is implemented at a certain location, it does not continue as a self-sustaining process. Better guidance and management seem to be required. Pro-poor strategies, and specifically the HITT trainings, should be more adapted to the local situation. In the present situation, trainings seem too systematic and too standardized to be usefully implemented in any developing village in Vietnam or in other countries around the world. Moreover, in this case, the homestay operators should be given more tools to cope with competition and to protect themselves against the overruling tour operators and controversial tour guides. In this regard, operators should be assisted by a neutral community management board that monitors minimum visitor rates and manages incoming streams of tourists to the village. Hopefully such measures can solve some of the problems taking place in Ta Van today and prevent arguments and conflicts.

Postcript

Recently, isolated incidents of uprisings by ethnic minorities have been reported in Lao Cai Province. In December 2013, a video was published on the Internet, where around 30 members of the Hmong community lie entangled on the street, seemingly unconscious.[49] Apparently these were Hmong "demonstrators", who were on their way to take a woman from their community to the nearest hospital. It was said that a local official beat a woman. On the way to the hospital, a police crackdown took place, whereby the local authorities tried to prevent the demonstrators entering town. According to unverified comments on the video, the demonstrators were brutally stopped by officials who sprayed a substance over the demonstrators to disturb their senses. After

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[49] See (http://www.nguoi-viet.com/ and https://www.youtube.com). *Nguoi Viet* is a Vietnamese-language daily newspaper in the United States.

the officials had left the scene, a passer-by filmed the demonstrators lying on the street. "Some of them had difficulties breathing, others had bleeding noses" according to the voice over of the video clip. Although contradictory reports remain on what exactly happened that day, collisions between Hmong and government authorities certainly do occur.

Often Hmong feel suppressed and intimidated by Vietnamese authorities. The authorities in turn look down on the ethnic groups and consider them ignorant and illiterate. Newly introduced government policies often cause anger and frustration among the ethnic groups. Recently, a new legislative rule was introduced, which determines that all tour guides in Vietnam need a Tour Guide License granted by the VNAT (Vietnam National Tourism Administration). Guides who do not master both English and Vietnamese language skills can no longer obtain a license for guiding tourists. This is a big loss for ethnic tour guides who often only speak their local dialect, apart from some broken English, but because they are expert in their own habitat have been successfully guiding tourists for many years. Due to the new policy many of them are now forced to cede their indispensable jobs to educated Kinh Vietnamese who come from Hanoi or other parts of the country seeking work. "The penalty on guiding without a license is 10 million Vietnamese Dong (365 Euro), an enormous amount of money," according to Mao, one of the tour guides in Sapa.

Another setback for ethnic minorities living in the northern mountains of Vietnam is that it has become virtually impossible to cross the border to China. The Vietnamese government considers most ethnic groups in Northern Vietnam as descendants from Chinese ethnic groups. Since the recent outbreak of the South China Sea dispute between China and Vietnam, Vietnamese border patrols no longer allow ethnic people to cross the border to China. This is a big deterioration in freedom of movement for the ethnic people, since they regularly cross the border for trade or transnational family relationships. This leads to frustration and resentment among the ethnic groups. "Last month, one of my deceased aunts had wanted to be burried in China, but they [border patrol] didn't allow us to respect her last will. This is a big problem for our family." says Lang, a local Hmong living in Ta Van village.

Chapter 3

Constructing civil society?
A tale of two villages

Introduction [50]

The increasing social differentiation within Vietnamese society in terms of economic inequality and an increasing gap between rich and poor is combined with political change to create a range of antagonisms familiar from the histories of other communist countries. The last ten years, a number of factors have added to this rapid social differentiation, which has consequences for the relationships between the state organs and society at large. As examples of Kerkvliet's "dialogical interpretation" of state and party relations, I will cite three cases in three different arenas in which struggles take place. Foreign and Vietnamese researchers also have analyzed the constrained "social interaction between authorities and people", as they call it (Culas and Suu 2010).

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[50] This research is part of a larger research project "*Land Fever*" and "*Bankrupt*": *Urbanization and Sustainable Development in Peri-Urban Communities in Vietnam's Northern Delta* that parallel with the IRASEC book project was undertaken by Vietnamese researchers and in which I also participated. The project received a specific grant from the Swedish International Foundation for Science (IFS) and was undertaken during the period 2012-2014 (see Nguyen 2014). The conclusions made in chapter 3 are mine and do not necessarily reflect the ones taken by the main researcher.

Public displays of criticism or disagreement with the ruling Communist Party are rare, but over the past decade, peasant farmers and religious believers have challenged the government over land use and collective propriety.[51] Crowds waiting to deliver petitions or demanding to speak to responsible officials are a common sight in major cities like Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi (see e.g. Kervliet 2014a). Most of the protesters are landless farmers from Ha Tay, Hai Phong, Dong Nai, Tien Giang, or Bac Lieu. The term "protest" is inappropriate because the government offices often have formal desks staffed by officials who are part of the so-called government inspectorates (*Thanh tra Chính phủ*).[52] Most complaints are about land issues (a smaller number are about housing). In 2007, official reports mentioned about 20,000 official complaints per year about land, among which 70% had to do with compensation, 10% denunciations of violations of the land law, 9% with land access conflicts, 7% demands for the return of land, and the remainder "miscellaneous" (Fforde 2008; De Wit 2013).[53]

After land reform in 1954, the state created three kinds of property rights with three different types of owner: 1) ownership rights, held by the "the whole people", 2) rights of control, held by the one-party state, and 3) rights of use, allocated to individuals or households or organizations for a specific time period. Private ownership of land is in contradiction with Item I, Article 5 of the Law on Land 1993/5, which articulates that every piece of land is in the possession of the entire nation, with the State being a representative for the public ownership. Based on the need of social groups and individuals, the State considers granting them stable and long-term land use rights (*quyền sử dụng*), not ownership rights *(quyền sở hữu)*.

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[51] Kerkvliet (2014) describes in ethnographic detail the protests and land issues of 2007 when a nation wide protest movement covered the main cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. A year earlier the well known Ecopark protest in Van Giang district took place in the province of Hung Yen near Hanoi. The protests continued until 2012, without solution for the protesters. The pattern is similar of what our research revealed in the outskirts of Hanoi between 2010 en 2014.

[52] This inter-ministerial body settles complaints and denunciations; exerts inspection of administrations and insitutions, settles complaints and denunciations and is responsible for combating corruption. Currently, the Government Inspector General is Huynh Phong Tranh, a southerner.

[53] Kerkvliet (2041a: 20) calculated that between 2008 and 2011 1,6 million complaints representing "a few million of people" in written form as petitions or in any other form as accusations were formulated, out of which 70% concerned land issues. From these 1,6 complaints, 42% was resolved.

It is what Katherine Verdery used to label "fuzzy" property forms, a situation similar to what has happened in Eastern Europe after communism. Verdery points out that the implementation of these rights reveals a quite tricky web of meanings and ambiguous practice (2004: 53-55; see Kerkvliet 2006 for a short history). Different articles in the Law on Land, however, stipulate that the State does not accept any claim for land that has been given to other users during the implementation of land policies of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1954-1975), the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (1975-1976), and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976-present). In other words, collective property rights granted in the past, before the new Law on Land was promulgated, during the transition from the previous regimes towards the temporary ones are no longer recognized. The National Assembly approved a resolution on November 26, 2003 regulating that the State does not re-consider policies and the implementation of policies promulgated before July 1, 1991 regarding land management. It is even more difficult to assert rights that originated before the respective revolutionary governments took power.

In 2008, hundreds of Catholic followers gathered at a land lot in central Hanoi, near St. Joseph's Cathedral. The building was part of the Apostolic Vicariate, which was represented in Hanoi during the French period (*Tòa Khâm sứ Hà Nội*). After 1954 the land and building came under state management. The premises were used for various purposes ranging from a local office to a youth dance hall under the supervision of Hanoi's Youth Liga. Around Christmas 2008, Catholic believers started to organize prayer sessions in front of the lot and the building, presided over by priests from the adjacent headquarters of the diocese.[54] After they had placed a statue of the Virgin Mary, the place was sealed off by the local authorities, which created a stand-off between the city authorities and the church leaders.[55] The protesting stopped after the Hanoi authorities, on behalf of the Vietnamese government, said they would return the former nunciature to the Archdiocese of Hanoi. In August 2008 the conflict escalated and the People's Committee of Hanoi took the decision to convert the building and its surroundings into a garden with a public library. At the same

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[54] For an official reaction to the land claims by Catholics, see a Vietnam News Agency interview with Duong Ngoc Tan, head of the Catholics Department under the Government Committee for Religious Affairs (http://english.vietnamnet.vn/social/2008/01/765720).

[55] A "protest" prayer blocks Hanoi traffic, *Asia News*, 1 November 2008.

time, Catholics in Ho Chi Minh City met in prayer vigils at the Redemptorist convent to ask the government to return 15 acres of land, seized for commercial purposes, to the Church. Parishioners elsewhere in Hanoi like the ones from Thai Ha Parish in the urban district Dong Da appropriated another piece of land to build chapels and erect grottos.[56]

Another example how the CPV is handling user and propriety rights is demonstrated during my own fieldwork in the northern coastal zone of Vietnam. Coastal areas, including territorial waters, have been treated as a collectively regulated resource. After 1986 the opening up of the coast (or maybe one can say the closing down of the state domain) led to social conflicts, over utilization of the coastal resources and environmental degradation (for details see Kleinen 2007). Vietnam's economic renovation policies since the mid-1980s have not only created conflicts about land, but have also affected coastal areas and waters that until now were regarded as common property without open access managed by the state.

At first glance the limited access rights for fishermen to their fishing grounds, the diminishing catch per unit effort resulting in a decline of beach landings, the developing shrimp cultivation, and a presumed "open access" to the sea is exploited by "free riders" who create a social dilemma about the question of who "owns" the common property of the (shallow) sea. Free rider behavior results mainly not from a lack of respect for common property, but as a result of opening up market activities in a formerly collectivized economy. The district and village authorities represent the state. On the one hand they try to prevent privatization of the common pool resource, but on the other hand they eagerly show a "private" interest of their own. State appropriation of "common pool" resources contributes to unsustainable utilization or conversion to other uses. In China, where a similar situation exists, collective ownership has not been abandoned as a result of the post-Mao rural reforms in the early 1980s, but has resulted in conflicts over the management of collective property (Zhang 2002, 3–21). Party channels intermix with government channels, which makes it very difficult for ordinary citizens to disentangle the two. NGOs are

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[56] See among others (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ5myc6Y2yw), consulted on 20 December 2014.

active in this area, like Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Communication Development (MCD), with which I worked for a while.[57]

These organizations act strictly within the boundaries of the laws on associations and follow the Party line on "socialization". "Renovation" means liberalization of market forces and privatization of natural resources. The government apparatus at the village and district level has not changed dramatically. The absence of clearly defined individual rights has led to encroachment on the beaches and mudflats by individual entrepreneurs and collectors. People's Committees are still the most important representations of state power, but their local autonomy has sometimes been increased with negative consequences. "New winds of change" have forced local authorities to yield to privatization, but will this also benefit the poor sections of the population? The question remains whether or not the activities of the different actors will also lead to better control of the natural resources and, with it, better control of negative ecological consequences, which have not yet been taken into account.

In the following example I will portray a similar portrait in a recent urbanization process at the southwest side of Hanoi where land conflicts are erupting, accompanied by local organizations acting as counselors to the victims of the forced urbanization, not as opponents of the authorities.

Vietnam's vibrant capital Hanoi is a fast-growing city that, since the 1990s, has experienced a continuous rush of building programs and people who are engaged in a frantic scramble for land that is the target for building activities. It was, after the war ended in 1975, still possible for a visitor to leave the city for the relative calm of the countryside within an hour; today large urban and peri-urban infrastructures are laid out in every direction. The village where I lived in 1992 was, under certain conditions, accessible by motorbike within less than an hour; the trip took the traveler into the province of Ha Tay and led along road number 6 and down a short cut along the dike of the Day River to Lang To (Kleinen 1999). Today, one can take a local taxi that brings the visitor to the same place within 30 minutes. During the trip, the passengers not only speed along broad traffic lanes that are crowded with all kind of transport vehicles

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[57] See Paula Brown 2013, (http://mcdvietnam.org/category/media/news-and-events/).

including the still omnipresent motorcycles, but also see high-rise buildings and blocks of apartments and compartment houses. Street sides are no longer the location of frantic building activities; also the green rice fields of the past have become landscapes where rapid urbanization has thoroughly changed the area's in-between status as part countryside and part city.

Encroaching cityscapes of Greater Hanoi
(© John Kleinen 2014)

Villages in the Red River Delta, in the past, exhibited a number of characteristics that were quite unique among communities in the rest of Southeast Asia in that they combined locality and community traits in a rather unique way. Michael Adas's view (1988) that (northern) Vietnamese villages had a much longer tradition of social cohesiveness compared to neighboring political realms within one of the strongest pre-colonial states of Southeast Asia does not preclude the state's successful capacity for control and command

of resources at the local level. In spite of the dramatic changes of colonial intervention, wars, and the transformation to a form of communist modernity, these villages still bear signs of long and arduous processes of "recycling traditions", to paraphrase Helen Siu's concept of the way politics and culture are intertwined with each other (1989).

In 2013 and 2014, I engaged in a project with Vietnamese researchers to explore the reactions and responses of sub- or peri-urban village communities towards the rapid urbanization of the northern delta of Vietnam. Our goal was to investigate problems of farmers during this process with attention to their professions, livelihoods, and lifestyles. Changes in land use, economic structure, and employment status, and the deterioration of the local ecosystem, were part of the investigation.

At a more individual level, we were interested in the ways household residents have prepared for these changes and how well they have coped. We also asked about their feelings and responses to the changes. An important factor was whether or not residents's current coping mechanisms led to practices they had experienced in the past, or did return migration to the rural areas bridge the gap between those who had coped with the rapid economic and social change and those who were left behind (see Rigg 2013). The research also examined the question of sustainable livelihood transformation and social problems among peasants in these communities who lost their agriculture land to urban expansion and sold part of their residential land to pay debts or build their houses. It was hypothesized the people in the village communities were forced to adapt to the pressure of population and land resources; the aim was to understand villagers' thoughts, experiences, and deepest aspirations about current life and their future as well as how they are prepared to respond to great changes in land, occupation, and lifestyle.

Our initial research touched marginally upon the relationship between the fast-changing urban environment and the role of civil society. As I have argued from the start, Vietnam diverges from other countries in Southeast Asia in the way civil society today is emerging based upon the historical relationship between the state and the people in Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2003; Koh 2006).

Civil society, as it exists in Vietnam, takes place within and outside the state, often more within the context of activities of members of the CPV or

the mass organizations that maintain close ties to the state. Since *đổi mới*, the mass organizations especially received increased independence over their management and finance, and more forms of "civil society" or grass-root level organizations were allowed to be established and to operate. In the second decade the relative depoliticizing of the mass organizations have gained greater authority to undertake numerous public affairs activities, and additional forms of civil society organization (see Harms 2013: 55-69 and Nguyen 2013: 87-103). Parenteau and Nguyen (2010) report at length the role and the function of depoliticing of mass organizations to solve matters for local citizens and stakeholders.

Before the impact of the process of industrialization and urbanization on rural areas, a number of general studies about the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural sector were conducted (Dang Kim Son 2008, Le Du Phong 2007); other studies have focused upon particular areas or regions. We mention here the contributions of Nguyen Ngoc Thanh et al. (2009) about Vinh Phuc in the periphery of Hanoi, and Nguyen Duy Thang (2004) and Tran Duc Vien (2005) about a number of suburban areas around the capital. What these studies had in common was the rapid loss of agricultural land by small landowners. An anthropological or sociological view was expressed by Vu Hong Phong (2006), Ngo Vuong Anh (1998), Tran Hong Yen (2009), and Nguyen Van Suu (2004; 2007; 2008; 2010). In general, most of the authors stress that farmers in peri-urban villages face difficulties to switch from agriculture to non-agriculture as a result of low education and lack of capital. What most of these studies until now did not reveal is a number of coping mechanisms that people develop when they are faced with this new pattern (for a general overview see Labbé and Musil 2014). Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh considers a positive case of conflict resolution in a village in the Red River Delta (Nguyen 2010).

The urbanization rate is estimated for the same period in terms of conversion of about 11,000 hectares of mainly annual cropland into industrial and urban land, encompassing nearly 2,000 projects. It was feared that an estimated 150,000 farmers will lose their habitual work. In practice, from 2000 to 2004, Hanoi has converted 5,496 hectares of land for 957 projects, and this has

had critical consequences for the lives and livelihoods of 138,291 households, among them 41,000 classified as agricultural households.[58]

Land appropriation for industrial zone building dates back to the 1990s in Vietnam and has reached by 2005 hundreds of industrial zones all over the country. The last ten years this number has doubled resulting in another 200 industrial zones, which use nation-wide nearly 30,000 hectares of land, along with hundreds of small-medium industrial zones in 47 provinces and cities nation-wide. According to the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development, the appropriation of such agricultural land in Vietnam between 2001 to 2005 affected 950,000 agricultural laborers in particular and around 2.5 million rural people in general.[59] By early 2008, Vietnam marked the 20 year anniversary of it Foreign Investment Law (1987-2007) with a celebration of the outcome of 9,500 investment projects from 82 countries and territories with a total sum of US$98 billion investment capital.

A tale of two villages-Lang To and Lang Lua

In 2008 Hanoi's administrative boundary expanded from four urban districts and five rural districts to the whole of Hà Tây Province, the district of Mê Linh of Vĩnh Phúc Province and four communes of Hòa Bình Province. Hanoi's total area increased to 334,470 hectares, divided into 29 subdivisions, with the new population being 6,232,940. The Hanoi Capital Region (*Vùng Thủ đô Hà Nội*), a metropolitan area covering Hanoi and six surrounding provinces, now under planning, will have an area of 13,436 km^2 with 15 million inhabitants by 2020, making it the second-largest city of Vietnam.

In 2008, the southern Saigon Giaphong newspaper described the area southwest of Hanoi as the "most wanted" due to its infrastructure and scheduled urban development projects. Already two important highways have been built: the nearly eight-kilometer Le Van Luong-Road (700 billion VND)

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[58] Hồng Minh (2005). For a general picture see de Wit (2011; 2012; and 2013); Labbé and Musil (2014).

[59] Data taken from official government magazine *Nong thon ngày nay* [countryside today], 25 July 2007; also quoted in Nguyen Van Suu, 2007; see also Nghiem Lien Huong (2007).

parallel with the RN-6 until the River Day to mark Hanoi's millennium event in 2010, and the Le Trong Tan road that forms with other roads a so-called belt around Hanoi. Le Trong Tan intersects with the Le Van Luong at the villages we studied (Lang Lua, which belongs to Lang Duong, Lang To, and Yen Nghia). The roads are six lanes wide, with a grass median, and sidewalks on either side of the lanes. High-rising buildings have started to appear. Smaller roads lead to gated communities fronted by huge gates. Land prices for these plots skyrocketed from 7-8 million VND (US $438- 500) to 12-15 million VND (US $751- 938) per square meter.[60]

Like many villages in the Red River Delta, Lang To and Lang Lua belong to larger administrative structures, better known as "commune" (*xã*) where nowadays the official administration is located and where a Peoples Committee and a Peoples Council together represent the one-party state. Communes often encompass several natural villages, which have official status in the administration. For the inhabitants of a natural village, in Vietnamese called *thôn* or *làng*, the term "*làng*" is used with the connotation of being "at home" or "native village" (*quê hương* in Vietnamese). "*Thôn*" is the administrative term.

The natural village of Lang Lua is in the Vietnamese press nowadays known as the "Peach Tree Village", encompassing 100 hectares, named after its cultivation of peach trees, which are fashionable during the Tet season. In (pre-)colonial times the place was one of the seven villages that belonged to a sub-district or canton (*tong*), which had other natural villages around them. Unlike adjacent Lang To, six of these villages were (and still are to a limited extent) known for the production of natural silk, giving to the central town Ha Dong the generic name of "Ha Dong silk".

Both villages are affected by the rapid urbanization and expansion of Hanoi towards the former province of Ha Tay. Lang To got modern housing in its backyard, on the land that belonged to its neighboring village Yen Nghia. Lang Lua became the site of a land rush organized, in the words of locals, by "speculators and investors from Hanoi." They bought hundreds of square meters of land at VND1.5 - 2 million (US $94 – 125) each and soon they started

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[60] At the same time a decree was issued to regulate the operation: Decree 84/ND-CP-2007 (article 34) stipulates land use right certificates and gives guidance on land recovery; on exercise of land use rights; on order and procedures for compensation, assistance, and resettlement when the state recovers land; and on resolution of complaints about land.

to sell them for VND2.5- 3 million (US $156-188) per square meter.[61] The two major roads that crossed Lang Lua caused a quick transformation of the rural landscape, a change that is now also visible around Lang To.

In the following paragraphs we will describe this transformation process, with attention to the reactions of the inhabitants to cope with the new situation. In this context we will ask for attention on how citizens were caught in property disputes that originated from state modernization projects (see e.g. Gillespie 2011; 2013 and 2014). The gray area between "state" and "society" will be mapped out with special attention for the roles state agencies and individuals played. We will start with a short analysis of the events in Lang To, which is an example of the way mass organizations and Party members take responsibility and create a civil buffer against the encroachment of the state. Lang Lua is a more complicated story.

Lang To village

An example of an apparently smoothly adaptation to rapid industrialization and urbanization is the village of Lang To, where I did fieldwork in 1992 and where I have returned on a regular basis since then (Kleinen 1999). The natural village (*làng*) belongs, along with two other villages, to the larger La commune (*xã*). The population of the village today numbers over 600 households or 2,300 inhabitants, and has a total agricultural area over 65 hectares (655,200 m^2), of which more than 36 hectares (367,200 m^2) is rice fields (*đất đồng*) and the rest (280,000 m^2) is riverside land (*đất bãi*). The area for housing and gardens is about 20 hectares. As in the past, the village's main economic activity is agriculture, giving employment to 58% of the inhabitants; other economic activities include livestock raising, construction work, petty trade, and services (there are about 30 small shops in the villages, while others have found employment in the nearby town of Ha Dong and the city of Hanoi). The former Cooperative has given

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[61] The news website paper *Báo Mới*, government owned but often critical in reporting, referred to a similar development in 2004 in the area of My Dinh, Nhan Chinh, and Nam Trung Yen, where the roads started and New Urban Zones were created; prices of newly constructed town houses started at around VND1-1.2 billion (US $62,558 - $75,070) and were sold for at least VND3.5-4 billion (US $218,955 - 250,235). In 2011 and 2012 prices even rose to 40 million per square meter, as villagers told us (http://www.baomoi.com).

work to at least ten owners of tractors for transportation and construction, while four households engage in the taxi business. About 12% of the labor force is employed in the local administration including the schools and the police services (local cadres).

Although the VAC system was quite popular in the past (every household had a pig pen next to its garden), nowadays small industry seems to be rampant. At least six pig-raising households keep over one hundred animals each. Apiculture is also fashionable. While the rice fields have, for many years, constituted about half of the acreage, more and more households experiment with other crops like grapefruit (*bưởi*), which they even sell under a special label. This gives them quite high income (ranging from 10 million to 50 or 80 million VND per year). In addition to the two rice crops per year, villagers grow a winter crop on ten hectares (mostly tomatoes and cash crops). The riverside land area was, ten years ago, used for cash crops like sugar cane, maize, sweet potato, and cassava, but today apples are more profitable, yielding an estimated income between 5 to 6 million VND per *sào* (360 m^2). Measuring and comparing income as an index for inequality is a tricky business in development economics (see Fforde 2013). Village statisticians use Vietnamese definitions of what they label as "poor" and demonstrate that between 2011 and 2013 the number of poor households fell from 23 to 13. Our survey asked households to give a self-assessment, which resulted in a division of 18.6% of households labeling themselves as "rich", 76.5% as "middle", and 4.9% as "poor".

Social structure

The village administrative unit includes a village head and three hamlet heads. There is also a Party cell and an Agricultural Cooperative (new style) (*Hợp tác xã Nông nghiệp*). Local public life is divided into two categories of social organizations: social-political and sheer social organizations.[62]

The former category is composed of well-known mass organizations like the Fatherland Front and its satellites like the Women's Union. The latter category is

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[62] The term "natural village" refers historically to the original physical and geographical cluster of inhabitants, but administratively many of these villages are part of a large entity, called commune. Locals refer to *làng*, or *thôn*, sometimes *xóm*, with the last two better understood as hamlet or subhamlet. *Làng* is close to "home village". See for the different stages Kleinen (1997 and 1999).

a colorful collection of voluntary organizations whose members share a common past like the Club of Former Soldiers (*Câu lạc bộ Cựu quân nhân*), or have shared free time interests, like the Folk Singing and Instrumental Performing Club (*Câu lạc bộ đàn và hát dân ca*) and a Chess Club *(Câu lạc bộ cờ tướng)*. Ritual and social life is organized along voluntary groups that study and perform rituals in the local communal house, like the Committee for Rituals (*Ban Khánh Tiết*), or are bound by a common cause or age, like the Buddhist Elderly Association for Women (*Hội già vãi*) and other various associations based upon age (*Hội đồng niên*), or military class *(Hội đồng ngũ)*. There is even a sports club called the Club for Vitality (*Câu lạc bộ Dưỡng sinh*).

Some clubs and social organizations were formed recently, like the Club of Former Soldiers (*Câu lạc bộ Cựu quân nhân*) inaugurated in 2006. The Veterans Association is losing members in a natural way because of their age, but those who fought in the border war with China (1979) and the campaign in Cambodia (end of 1978) will join.

It is noticeable that in Lang To there are quite a lot of Age Associations (groups of people who take their birth year as a generational cultural experience). Any association depends on people to organize it. The members are mostly men. Their activities are holding meetings and social gatherings twice a year. During the village festival, they prepare offerings for the Communal House (*dinh*). Their aim is to promote sentiment (*tình cảm*), a key concept in Vietnamese culture. For some, attending this group helps them getting support to find jobs.

The Fatherland Front is an important link of the local political system; it is a center of unity among the people and a bridge between the Party and the people. The committee in the village consists of fifteen members: one chairman, one vice chairman, and members in each hamlet. Every six months they hold meetings to evaluate the work of the committee. The Front holds an annual Meeting of People's Representatives at the end of the year. They cooperate with other political social organizations to synchronize their activities in the village.

The Women's Union numbers 230 members from three branches in each hamlet of the village. The main purpose of the Women's Union is to propagandize the policies of Party and State to its members, to encourage women to participate in local activities, help each other develop their household

economies, and implement family planning. The Union Committee cooperates with the Social Policy Bank (*Ngân hàng chính sách xã hội Việt Nam*) to borrow capital for its members.

The Youth Union (*Đoàn Thanh niên*) is a resource branch of the Party cell. The Committee consists of seven members: a secretary, a vice secretary, and other members. They organize social activities for the young people in the village, like football, table tennis, and badminton. Each year summer activities are organized for children, as well as music performances and soccer competitions to celebrate annual occasions like National Day (2 September), Children's Day (1 June), and Youth Union Day (26 March).

The Lang To branch of the Veteran Association includes 46 members. Five people are on the executive committee. Their main activities are contextualized by the memories of the past when the national war for independence and liberalization was fought. Meetings on the VN People's Army Day (22 December) are held to coordinate mutual aid funds for members in dire situations to improve their lives and to visit members on special occasions like sickness and funerals.

The Farmers Association numbers 190 members, organized into smaller committees. Besides presenting the policies of the State and Party, they also mobilize farmers to receive new technology for improving cultivation and animal husbandry to improve economic effectiveness and people's lives in general, and cooperating with the Social Policy Bank to lend production capital to Farmers Association members; from 2011 to 2013, 90 members were able to borrow a total of 700 million VND.

The Elderly Association has 200 members, of whom fifteen are on the board. It has several clubs like the sports or fitness club, chess club, and badminton club to help old people in many ways. Annually, they organize visiting tours for members. They also cooperate with local government to organize a ritual during Tet holiday for celebrating long life and birthdays of people reaching 70, 80, 90 and 100 years of age. Their main activities are visiting ill members and attending its members' funerals. This association has a fund of 50 million VND.

In the 2020 master plan of La commune, most of the commune's agricultural land is envisioned as falling under various projects. The commune is assigned as a strategic part of a project called "Flood Area from the West

Lake" (*dự án Hồ tiêu úng phía Tây Hà Nội*), that started in 1995, carried out by the Hanoi Drainage Company (*Công ty thoát nước Hà Nội*) of the Department of Agriculture of Hanoi. Around 2005, the pumping system of the canalized Nhue River (also called the Van Khe Canal) that passes along the village was renovated, including a sluice that links this river to the Day River.[63] The Nhue is part of an irrigation, drainage, and sewage system, connected with the city of Hanoi and serving surrounding districts with wastewater for irrigation.[64] Since the late 1930s a dam further away from the village has affected this river, which has lost its function as a safety valve for the Red River. The riverbed is used as a suitable area for the growing of cash crops. Plans to reopen the Day have existed since the mid-seventies, but until now no essential change has occurred. How the flood area is shaped is still unclear, but a hamlet, Xom Chua, is the possible site of future flood control installations for Hanoi. Therefore half of the households of this hamlet will be relocated in the area of rice field (in front of the Lang To pagoda). These and other plans are part of a general vision for the future, called the "Master Plan of Hanoi by 2030 and a vision to 2050," announced in 2010, which also concerns the southwest development of the city.[65] Construction of housing for low-income people is carried out by the Vietnam Corporation for Construction (*Tập đoàn Xây dựng Việt Nam*).

Last year, the People's Committee of La commune decided to merge different pieces of riverside land (*đất bãi*) of each household into one large parcel. Each inhabitant in Lang To was allocated 144 m² in 1993; on average each household has about 2 *sào* but divided among about two to three pieces to make sure that all households received equal amounts of the three different quality land areas, such as land at various heights within the river bed/stream area of the former Day River. The land is suitable for cash crops. The more distant from the river, the more fertile the land. The commune has now merged all the land

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[63] (http://www.baomoi.com/Tag/Sông-Nhuệ.epi).

[64] (http://www.baomoi.com/Khoi-cong-xay-dung-3-tram-bom-thoat-nuoc-phia-Tay-thanh-pho/148/9863552.epi). The plan is part of a Belgian ODA loan to Vietnam of 9.8 million euros.

[65] Hanoi's area was 920.97 km²; after expansion with nine surrounding provinces it will become 3,349 km². The population grew from an estimated 3.4 million people in the late nineties to 7.1 million people in 2012, and is expected to grow to nearly 10 million after expansion. Hanoi is one of the 30 biggest cities in the world with an urbanization rate of 65 to 68%. A master plan was designed in 1997 by Rem Koolhaas's OMA office. Since then a number of planning teams have modified the plan from 2010 on: Perkins Eastman (US), Posco E&C (Korea), Jina Architects (Korea), and VNCC (Vietnam). See promotion film (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOGz6aiZN0I).Currently (2014) the enlarged plan is, pending an approval of the Prime Minister, being reformulated by a French group.

together, dividing it into different large surfaces. Villagers held meetings and they divided the parcel at random by using a ballot system with tickets. The commune made the decision, but the village head and the village Cooperative (new style) organized it. This is the policy "*Dồn điền đổi thửa*" (literally: "the plot is transferred into a plantation"), a form of land consolidation that also means that no compensation is required. By doing this, each household now has a plot of about two *sào* (one *sào* is equivalent to 360 m²) to cultivate. People feel happy about this decision as they have something like a garden for the long term. Even if the city takes away their rice fields in the near future, they still have some land to live on. Instead of compensation in terms of better rice fields or job opportunities, villagers opted for keeping alluvial land to grow cash crops.

This year, the commune will also sell by auction some rice field areas of Lang To and its neighbor Dong Nhan to raise money for the construction of roads, a school, clinics, and other buildings. In 2010, the commune decided to use 2.9 hectares of Lang To rice fields (in front of the village) to build a new Cultural House, a sport stadium, and a kindergarten for the village (this was a direct reaction to prepare for urbanization given that local cadres and people understand they will be urbanized soon so build their public works before losing their land). This means 43 households lost their agricultural land. However, they were compensated with so-called "service land" (*đất dịch vụ*), a new term for land compensation to replace the requested agricultural land with land where gardening or even construction can take place (according to government regulations). However, this policy was applied differently in each area. In some areas, farmers received money for each *sào* they ceded to the government together with 10% service land of the area they had lost. In other areas, people got only about 6%.

In Lang To, the local authorities were quite flexible on this. As the land was taken, the local government had no money because it planned to build a cultural centre and a sports field. People received 50 m² "service land" for each *sào* (50/360 m²). With this land, villagers could build houses, or sell it for other purposes. The land price was very high at that time, ranging from 14 million VND to 25 million VND / per square meter. Almost 30 households sold this land. With income from selling this land, they could build new houses. It seemed to be easier to accept lower compensation rates when the exchange turned out to be at benefits for the village as a whole like a better access to housing wards or

an improvement of infrastructure.[66] In 2011 alone, about 40 households in the village built new houses. With the rice field area over the river and the regional railway (*đường sắt nối vùng*) (which is near the Lang Duong New Urban Area) a new housing area for low income people was planned by the city, but the plan was postponed in the face of the economic crisis. The Vietnam Corporation of Construction was asked to be in charge under the condition that before any activity should take place, prospective owners already take apartments in option. City authorities wanted to avoid the problem of unoccupied new houses, a risk given the weak financial prospects. But people understand that in the near future, they will lose most of their rice fields.

Like in Lang Lua, City Belt No. 4 (*đường vành đai 4*) will be built in the near future and will cut the village into two, as the existing railway has done already. Some families will lose their residential land and a portion of agricultural land will also be lost for this project. People said that the extended Le Trong Tan road would also be built; the road will connect the hamlet of Dong Nam, which is part of Lang To, with Ha Dong Town. In short, so far, Lang To villagers have only contributed less than three hectares of the agricultural land for building public works. Several projects were proposed but, given the economic crisis, none have been implemented so there has been no encroachment yet.

Land sales

Between 2009 and 2011 the land fever around Hanoi in areas like Trung Van, Yen Nghia, and Lang Duong affected the village of Lang To directly when it turned out that the received compensation was invested in Lang To and its neigbouring hamlets. Real estate speculators from outside the village (*các nhà đầu tư bất động sản*) borrowed money from the bank to buy land and drive the land market to higher prices.[67] They aimed rice fields in order to

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[66] See also Nguyen Van Suu (2004: 291-2): some villagers accepted lower prices for their agricultural land, especially when the degree of unfairness was only minor. In other cases it may stir up discontent and lead to heated arguments between the parties or institutions involved (for different views and statistics, see de Wit 2013).

[67] There is even a digital magazine, *Tạp chí đầu tư bất động sản*, devoted to investment options; see (http://cafeland.vn/).

transform it into service land for housing or industrial projects or waited for expropriation to receive compensation.

People bought land for speculation to build country houses in the village and offered them to city dwellers, while Lang To families offered residential land for this purpose. Our survey revealed that 30% of all the households we interviewed, i.e., 102 households, had less than 150 m²; 29% occupied between 151 and 230 m², while 41% had more than 230 m². Some families sold their land to pay debts and many sold land to build new houses. Thirty households sold their service land, which they had bought using the compensation they had received. Fifty households sold portions of their residential land. People cut off between 50-100 m² from their residential land for sale. It became known that a few men gambled with the land so that in the end, they had to build houses on agricultural land.

In Lang Lua, those who had received compensation for their land, were able to build houses with two and even three floors. In Lang To only 57% of households were able to build new multi-floor houses, mostly due to the sale of service and residential land. People often spent between 500 million VND and 1 billion VND to build houses. Since 2000, an estimated number of 75 families have sold their rice field and riverside land, and even their residential plots, on the land market. The main purpose was to raise money to pay debts (sometimes as a result of gambling) or to get money for medical treatment, or to build houses. This is also the number of households in the village that have male members indebted as a result of gambling.

Villagers' point of view on urbanization

When asked how they perceive the rapid urbanization, one third of our respondents explained that they had experienced more difficulties since the city of Hanoi expanded; one-fifth asserted that they had better prospects; but nearly half regretted the development that had brought negative and positive results.

Those who have jobs outside agriculture stated that their lives had improved since they had left their former profession. A majority of the villagers, however, voiced their worries about the prospect of losing land in the near future, fearing

an unstable income outside their agrarian jobs. Selling vegetables or fruits still guarantees a stable income, they remarked. If the government allows them to transform the rice fields into land for cash crops or fruit gardens, they expect a higher income. Some even calculate that with the present compensation fees (about 360 million VND per *sào*), it is just worth two or three years' income of selling grapefruits and other fruits.

Since the district of Hoai Duc became again part of the greater city of Hanoi, most villagers say that the city has invested more in rural transportation and sanitation, but at an unequal and sometimes slow rate. They expect more fundamental changes in the future regarding their infrastructure.

Some people complain about the bad consequences of the rapid urbanization, such as more "social evils" and the presence of newcomers who were not part of the village or who were not related to the village in any way.

If villagers lose land, they need to be provided with jobs. Villagers do not want to lose land for new apartments, which would means that there would be no jobs for them. Some of them want to have universities and factories surrounding the village to bring jobs. In short, people think urbanization is basically good, to improve their infrastructure, but ideally people want to keep land to grow flowers and grapefruits for the city.

Role of social organizations

Lang To did not yet lose land until now for urbanization projects. Its social organizations were not involved in land issues (as compared to elsewhere). Their boards played and still play quite important roles in village affairs. Individual members were acting on their own. In the past, whenever a decision was made, like the construction of a village road, selling small pieces of village land to generate money to repair the pagoda or the village kindergarten, a special meeting was organized, literally called the Political-Military People's Meeting (*Hội nghị Quân-Dân-Chính đảng*), a term that dates back to the days after the August Revolution in 1945, referring to the unity between the army and the people (read the Communist Party).

Apartment buildings
(© John Kleinen 2013)

In Lang To, the absence of a military chapter brings the representatives from the Party and the mass organizations together. Meetings like this get the description, "emergency meetings". Whenever the village built, for instance, a road or an irrigation system, about ten non-Party members were involved to supervise the work. It was difficult for contractors to corrupt the contracts.

For example, the purchase of 40 m² land (in front of the village well) in 2012, was discussed in that kind of meeting and it was decided the price need to be in balance with the market price. Whenever the village repaired at high costs the Buddhist pagoda or the communal house, representatives of villagers could join in and make sure there was little corruption in the work.

About land encroachment, so far, many members of the Party, like the former chairwoman of the People's Committee, retired teachers, and even the village head, have always raised their voices in important meetings of the commune to insist that they do not want to lose land to private companies. Thus, they really want local government to sell land according to the regulations in the law and have the commune use the resulting revenue to invest in local infrastructure. About social organizations, they are really voluntary groups. They do not care much about political issues in the village. Their members care more about sentiment and social networks as social capital.

Lang Lua village

Lang Lua is a cluster of 20 hamlets (*xóm*) encompassed within two village entities – La Nội and Ỷ La – both dating back to the sixteenth century. Even though the two were split into councils and authorities, they shared a communal house, pagodas, village customary laws, and an annual festival. In their common activities, members of La Nội are often considered "elder brothers", seated on a higher rank and to be the first in full-filling obligations compared to the same age-members of Ỷ La village. The guardian of the communal house is for that reason usually an elderly of La Nội.

The area's tradition fame for production of silk is proudly expressed in the saying, "silk gauze from La [Lua], silk from Van [Phuc], and cloth from Canh [Vân]" (*The La, lụa Vạn, vải Canh*), three handicraft villages around Ha Dong. In the past, men took care of agriculture while women concentrated on weaving. After the August Revolution (1945), this traditional weaving disappeared. During the socialist period of subsidized economy (1954-1986), Lang Lua villagers developed woven products for export to Eastern Europe. After *đổi mới*, some families restored the practices of weaving and dying on a large scale. They bought machines and materials from

southern Vietnam and established workshops in the village. There are about twenty workshops in the village at the moment. The merger of Lang Duong commune with Ha Dong Town and the subsequent attachment to Hanoi made Duong Village a larger commune.

Located in the west of Hanoi, Ha Dong District saw urbanization take place very quickly: between 2005 and 2010, new roads and housing projects were implemented at high speed. Lang Lua is close to Provincial Road No. 70, which connects Ha Dong and Sơn Tây. It is over 1 km from from Láng-Hòa Lạc Highway (presently Thang Long Highway). Notably, Lê Trọng Tấn Road[68] was extended and widened in 2007. The road cuts the village into two. The Lê Văn Lương Road,[69] on tourist maps also known as To Huu Road, is named after national poet-laureate To Huu (1920–2002); the road runs from Cau Giay and Thanh Xuan Districts in Hanoi until it reaches the village of Yen Nghia, near the Day River. Le Van Luong road is considered a standard urban road, which will become the main road of Ha Dong district.

Construction of the roads did not lead to the usual "site clearance" (*giải toả*) that took place elsewhere, because the area was sparsely built, but instead affected mainly agricultural land holdings. In 2007, a small, unknown area of agricultural land was lost for the construction of another road that crossed Le Van Luong, the Le Trong Tan road. The State public works authorities offered at a low rate compensation for the land: 47 million VND per *sào* or about 13 million VND per square meter.[70] A very small number of residential plots were taken. On March 25, 2010, however, one major incident hit the international press, with video of protests posted on YouTube, when villagers of Lang Duong tried to stop the destruction of a cemetery on a projected land track for the road that cut Lang Lua into two. An excavator of a road construction company hit a protester severely who was trying to stop the work. Deadly accidents also happened when young children and workers became the victims of unsafe working environments and sloppy road building when sink holes collapsed after heavy raining.[71]

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[68] Named after the legendary commander Lê Trọng Tấn (1914- 1986) who held several senior positions of the army during his military career from 1945 to 1986. Tan was born in Hoài Đức.

[69] Named after the Party veteran Lê Văn Lương (1912-1995) who was on death row in Saigon Central Prison in 1933 (http://langxuancau.blogspot.nl/2011/08/le-van-luong.html).

[70] As Nguyen Van Suu (2009) points out, the Vietnamese state "only pays economic compensation for the use rights on agricultural land, which the state has allocated to the villagers for use for a certain period of time, alongside other materials that the holders of use rights have cultivated or constructed on their fields."

[71] See the series under the name "Coercive village land grab" (*cưỡng chế đất thôn*) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg1muHCLZmA).

Before and during the road construction, local developers approached village authorities to acquire land for building activities. They worked closely with the district officials from a specially created Management Board that resides in the town of Ha Dong (*Ban Quản lý dự án quận Hà Đông*).[72] As Nguyen van Suu has commented:

> "In this way, state authorities remain the institution that have a final decision on land seizure, including the location, area of land, level of compensation, etc., however, the seizure is only being conducted once the entrepreneur has achieved the agreement from the holder of land-use rights, i.e. the farmer. Despites these conflicts over appropriations of and compensation for land-use rights remain a burning question in Vietnam. In 2008, therefore, the Government employs a pilot way of land seizure: Establishing a Company of Land Seizure and Compensation in the hope to build a mediate institution between the holders of land use rights and other parties who want to use the land to smooth the expropriation of land" (2009: 112).

In the Lang Lua and Lang To area, among the firms and companies that were and still are active as project developers and construction builders are Nam Cường Corporation (*Tập đoàn Nam Cường*),[73] Ha Long Investment & Development Co. Ltd,[74] the Joint Stock Company An Hung,[75] and Vietnam International School.[76] It is interesting to note that Nam Cuong and Ha Long began their existence as state owned enterprises (SOEs) in completely different fields of business, like producing and delivering fertilizer, salt, and seafood in the coastal province of Nam Dinh, before they entered the real estate market in and around the capital Hanoi. In the area in which the roads are constructed at least 15 projects are executed or being prepared for building apartment housing, low cost housing, offices, and other facilities within the Green Belt developing that falls under the Hanoi master plan that dates back from 1997 and has since then been modified several times.

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[72] (http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hà_Đông), (http://clip.vn/watch/Khu-do-thi-moi-Duong-Noi, QgB).

[73] (http://www.namcuong.com.vn/web/eNews.asp?module=3&subid=26&cid=5&mid=7), (http://namcuong.com.vn/web/Projects.asp?module=4&cid=9&mid=3&subid=37).

[74] (http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=114604537).

[75] (http://www.anhung.com.vn/vn/Cong-ty-An-Hung.html).

[76] (http://www.isvietnam.org/About-Us).

The biggest project is Lang Duong New Urban Centre (KDTM or *Khu Đô thị mới Dương Nội*), which has an area of 197 hectares. It consists of a service complex, shopping centers, hotels, offices, high-ranking houses, and a hospital.[77] The main developer is the Nam Cuong group. A similar complex is the An Hung New Urban Center (*Khu đô thị mới An Hưng*) encompassing 30 hectares, north of Lang Lua and the intersection of the roads.[78] The Joint Venture An Hung is investing here together with the Indonesian firm Ciputra, which also invested in the Thang Long International City project near Noi Bai.[79]

In early 2008, rumor had it that most of the village land would be requested for the building roads and for housing projects. Meetings were held by the village authorities to announce the policy of Ha Dong Town, where the capital of Ha Tay Province was located at the time having not yet merged with Hanoi. People discussed a lot about the compensation policy (see, e.g., Kim 2011: 493) and the government gave back 10% service land plus 201,600 VND per square meter and financial compensation for crops that no longer could be earned.[80] Also some compensation was offered for job training services. Counted per *sào*, villagers received 86 million VND (more than 4,000 US $ in 2008) for compensation. Villagers started to compare with their neighboring village La Khê, where for the same project 97 million VND per *sào* was paid. La Khê was already a ward of Ha Dong Town while Lang Lua Village, being part of Lang Duong commune, was still a rural commune in the district of Hoai Duc. The land values of urban and rural areas were thus considered different.

In the eyes of the state authorities, location, area, and the level of compensation are considered from the idea that the farmers only have use rights, not property rights. Meanwhile, Lang Lua villagers demurred at this higher amount not only because their lands were just adjacent to each other, but also they pointed out that La Khe's rice land was less valuable than land for

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[77] (http://cafef.vn/du-an/dno/khu-do-thi-moi-duong-noi.chn), see also, (http://www.baomoi.com/Tag/Khu-đô-thị-mới-Dương-Nội.epi).

[78] (http://dothianhung.blogspot.nl/).

[79] (www.ciputrahanoi.com.vn).

[80] Compensation for Agricultural Land Use Rights in a village Phú Điền in 2007 (Nguyen 2008): a total of 171,000 VND per square meter could be acquired. 1) Agricultural land use rights: 108,000 VND per square meter; 2) Vegetables and other annual fruits on the land: 35,000 VND per square meter; 3) Support for job shifting 25,000 VND per square meter; 4) Rewards for quick conduct 3,000 VND per square meter.

the cash crops and trees that Lang Lua produced.[81] Another bone of contention was thus the fact that in Lang Lua 6.8% service land (*đất dịch vụ*) was offered as compensation instead of the 10% that was given elsewhere.[82] For unclear reasons, the road construction was accounted as urban infrastructure and its 3.8% was deducted from the promised 10%. Concrete offers to provide jobs as replacement for the loss of land remained vague. Beginning in March 2008, villagers gathered at various places in the village to discuss the matter, eventually deciding not to cede agricultural land to the project in return for compensation.

During the interviews with villagers in 2013, many respondents showed an ambivalent attitude towards the past. At least one-third of the population had already engaged in trade or other non-agricultural activities. From what we heard, it turned out that their interest in the compensation scheme was minimal, though some opted for compensation. However, they kept quiet when most of the villagers expressed their uneasiness about the compensation scheme. The result was that mainly those who had agricultural land contested the compensation program. For that reason they showed up in great numbers at the People's Committee to display their uneasiness with the local authorities.

Deliberations took place between the local authorities and a delegation of three villagers who were assigned as representatives of the villagers. The answer of local authorities did not satisfy villagers, so they kept returning to the offices repeatedly and accused them of getting money from the Nam Cường Company, the biggest real estate developer in the area. There was a widespread mistrust among the protesters about the involvement of local Party cadres in the affair. Rumors that better lands were promised, offers of goodies and money, and even outright bribes became the talk of the day. In fact, Nam Cuong and some other companies had supported the Women's Union and the Youth Union by donating amounts of 5 to 10 million VND to support for special occasions. Villagers criticized the leaders of these organizations for taking bribes. Villagers surrounded the office building in protest to question

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[81] *SGGP* Special Report Urbanization "Runs after" Peach Villages. Sunday, January 27, 2008, consulted on 15 April 2014, (http://www.saigon-gpdaily.com.vn/Special_report/2008/1/61262/).

[82] According to Nguyen Van Suu (2003), the compensation increases as farmers feel that prior to the negotiations they can show that cash crops and perennial trees are already planted. The expression is *ăn đền bù* (eat the compensation). Suu gives the example of villagers who doubled their compensation by changing from vegetables and other annual fruits like rice, *rau muống*, to annual crops such as willows (*liễu*) and guava (*ổi*).

and criticize local cadres. Except some key leaders who took care of the office everyday, most of the personnel of social organizations in the commune were unable to work for several months. The protests extended to the provincial capital Hadong and even to Hanoi. In the village, people were very interested in the details of the protests (even if they did not call it as such), and they were eager to join any meeting held by the hamlet. Whenever any social organization held a meeting to implement any activity at the request of higher-level authorities, villagers took over the meeting to focus upon the land compensation question. Local leading cadres tried to mediate between the farmers and the authorities. Cadres sometimes felt caught in the middle, realizing that they also had to communicate and facilitate the government's policies.

Except for the Youth Union, all the mass organizations' members were interested in the land issue. Among them, members of the Women's Union and the Farmer Association were the most active participants in the protests. These two organizations often raised the question of proper compensation price and job training for those who had lost. The protest was vast and widespread if one realizes that the majority of villagers depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Some Party members also sympathized with these people, but could not openly admit it. The majority tried to hold the lines by declaring that they were determined to keep the land. Some hamlets even issued a resolution that those who would not join the protest or receive the compensation, could no longer count upon support when their families encounter difficulties due to funerals.

After questioning local government, villagers went several times to Ha Dong Town and Hanoi to submit petitions, sometimes with hundreds of people. Normally, each family had to send one member to join. With the exception of families of cadres and Party members, most families joined the movement. Strangely, local newspapers did not report the issue, but outside the capital it was picked up by, among others, *Saigon Giaphong*. The Internet was widely used (see list of relevant *YouTube* reports in example footnotes 68 and 80). The protesters realized that success only was guaranteed when local cadres were on their side. Thus, their main aim was exerting pressure, not letting the cadres or anyone receive compensation. In fact, local cadres were caught in between. This created a deadlock that at persisted for at least a year. By the end of 2008, a

new chairman was sent to Lang Duong from Ha Dong Town to replace the old chairman who had died of cancer. Only then was there a change in the situation. Village cadres were the first to receive money; some of them dared to tell surrounding people about their decision, some did not. In 2009, some random villagers received money. This caused tension in some families because some wives did not want to receive money but their husbands, under certain pressure or due to others' advice, decided to get money behind the wives' backs. Or the father did not want to get money but his son went to get it.

By the end of 2009, there was an announcement that the government would only pay during one week, and if people did not show up, the money would be transferred to the State's treasury, where it eventually could be claimed. This was not exceptional, because the same strategy was used in other villages around Ha Dong (e.g., in Dong Mai commune). There were also allegations that anyone who accepted the compensation would receive the allocated service land at a good location and against a good price. All these made villagers join a crowd to demand the money from hamlet's head. It apparently worked because by 2010, only 300 households of Lang Duong had not yet received money. Among them, only 30 households came from Lang Lua, while the others were La Duong households. These people continue their protest.

At the moment (2013 - 2014) the problem is still not solved: 30 households of Lang Lua and over 100 households of La Duong continue to keep their land, still sending petitions to various government offices. They even put blogs on Internet.[83] The group from Lang Lua have reduced their protest demand to 10% service land (instead of the 6.2% that their fellow villagers accepted) while La Duong protesters do not want to lose their land at all.

After receiving money, each household in Lang Lua joined a ballot system to receive their allocated service land. Depending of the number of household members who got land after 1993, the amount of service land varied. In Lang Lua, each inhabitant received 264 m^2 of agricultural land in

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[83] See the blog *Phe Áo Đỏ Sư Tử Cái Hà Đông Tin tức và Chính trị*, consulted on 15 April, 2014. Local events are put on the Internet, e.g. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AeAAcwRYlY#t=11), consulted on 1 January, 2013.Farmers of Lang Duong (Ha Dong) defend their land unyielding against many attempts of armed forces to chase them away (*Nông Dân Dương Nội - Hà Đông giữ đất Dân Dương Nội kiên cường đẩy lui đợt phản công đa binh chủng*).

1993. With the policy of 6.5% of service land, each of them got about 17 m^2 of service land. Therefore, people must share with others in their families. Villagers had to find relatives and friends to share. If these people could not be found, the local government helped out. Service land was concentrated in three areas surrounding the village.

From 2010 to 2012, given the land fever, Lang Lua people could sell their service land ranging from 20 to 40 million VND per square meter. Half of all the households sold their service land and the majority used the money to build new houses. That is why the village looks really spacious now. People also spent the compensation money (87 million VND per *sào*) on the fees for building infrastructure for the new area of service land (2 million VND per square meter). Some families used their money to buy land in neighboring Lang To or more distant villages.

One-third of the Lang Lua households trade for a living. Many of them earned enough to buy land from their fellow villagers. Therefore, among a 50% of service-land receivers who sold land, three-fifths (or 60%) sold to fellow villagers and two-fifths (or 40%) sold to outsiders.

As Lang Lua villagers have less residential land (*đất ở*) than Lang To villagers, this land was rarely sold. Just about 50 households totally sold their 5% land (private land dating back from the collectivization period) or land too close to the residential area that was not taken by project developers. So far, Lang Lua people have experienced anxiety during 2008-2009, replaced by a feeling of "rocking the boat" (*con thuyền bồng bềnh*) when they received a large amount of money in 2010. Most people say today that they still have not recovered from the shock of receiving such large amounts of money.

What people still regret was that the compensation policy was not consistent, differing from locality to locality. Their protests were motivated by these differences. Secondly, the policy was not clear or thorough. The project took 90% of the people's land. Some people have not lost a single square meter of land, but they suffered from changes in the land situation in that the irrigation system was affected. Meanwhile, unlike others, they have no money from compensation to improve their lives.

Among those who continue to protest by not giving land and those who agreed to give land under certain circumstances but the project did not accept, there are two different points of view to discern. Some villagers say they will lose money because they might receive lower compensation in the future, given that the recent compensation policy of the government has changed. There will no longer be a service land policy, they fear. Other villagers believe that if the government will not or cannot take the land, it might let people to transform that land to become service land. This would mean people could build houses or do other things on that land after paying the State a certain amount of money in return. In 2002, the total agricultural land area of Lang Duong commune was 386 hectares. In 2011, only 24.54 hectares were left.

The conflict created a sense of uneasiness among the villagers. It split the village community into supporters and opponents of the government compensation policy. The latter group was surely a minority (estimated at 30 households out of 1,000 in Lang Lua) that kept protesting. In spite of threatening holdouts with social exclusion, most of the Lang Lua villagers accepted their right to protest, and social events like funerals and weddings were not influenced by the division among the villagers. On occasions of official celebrations, like Women's Day on 8 March, only supporters of the compensation scheme showed up, leaving the opponents with a feeling of frustration.

Apart from these personal consequences, Lang Lua and Lang To villagers have profited from the wave of protests against land compensation that took place in Vietnam the last decade. In some cases government officials tried to negotiate with local representatives and in other case disputes were settled. The National Assembly adapted the Law on Land in 2012 and the powerful Government Inspectorate reported that nearly 50% of all the complaints regarding land issues were justified or merited closer scrutiny.[84]

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[84] (http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-vn/61/43/trong-nuoc/hoan-thien-co-che-phoi-hop-giai-quyet-khieu-nai-to-cao/186900.html), accessed in January 2013; (see also Kerkvliet 2014: 37-39).

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Rapid and successful economic growth is not the sole prerogative of democratic governments, as the experiences of other less democratic governments in Asia (Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore under Lee Kwan Yu, and Indonesia under Suharto) have shown. Intellectuals within the Chinese and Vietnamese elite have not failed to notice this observation.[85] On the other hand, the Vietnamese political system, here defined in terms of state-society relations, can no longer be viewed as a monolithically one party-state in which a ruling elite tries to control all aspects of social life within the boundaries of the country. The term "mono-organizational socialism" used by one author (Thayer 1995) refers to "one-Party rule", but seems to be contested in the current post-renovation period in which central control is repeatedly challenged by local Party officials, who sometimes act like "independent kings". The economic central planning system that paved the road to rapid modernization and industrialization has been replaced by a market economy – "Vietnamese style". It is perhaps too early to determine where pseudo-reform ends and real reform, with real political liberalization, begins, but it is here that we have to look for changes in the power structure and the official ideology. Before we deal with that question, a short note on the influence of cyberspace and civil society must be made.

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[85] In China this position was called, during the late '80s, "the enlightened despotism plus market" model (Ding 1994). In Vietnam, regime intellectuals like the late Nguyen Khac Vien (at least until 1990) defended similar positions.

Cyberspace and civil society

In the last decade, Internet and mobile devices have introduced a discursive space that is resistant to comprehensive state interference and management (see Gray 2015). The Vietnamese "blogosphere" has become a particularly notable site of dissent and contentious politics. Over the last ten years, Internet activists have regularly experienced personal intimidation, arrest, imprisonment, and even physical abuse. Unlike in China, Internet censorship in Vietnam has shown that Hanoi's internal security agencies are swift in taking measures when bloggers criticize the state or its leaders. Censorship and repression are used at the very moment that authorities feel any form of social mobilization, regardless of content, is taking place. The number of bloggers persecuted by the Vietnamese authorities is growing and with human-rights activists their number is, relative to population size, bigger in Vietnam than in China. A number of government decrees make it difficult for bloggers and online social network citizens to share information and to provide news.[86] In 2013, Vietnam placed a dismal 172st place out of 179 on the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index (Ismail 2013). It remains to be seen whether the Internet-enabled changes in the political culture of Vietnam amount to more than a "net delusion", despite which life on the ground goes much unchanged (see Morozov 2012: 143-146).

Andrew Wells-Dang (2011; 2013) gives a number of examples how citizens can mobilize each other and the general public around a shared objective and then "work the system" to build support for their goal. The mobilization to forestall the danger that the beloved Reunification (formerly Lenin) Park in Hanoi would have to make room for a five-star hotel complex, and public advocacy by and behalf of people with physical disabilities, are among the few successful examples shown by Wells-Dang. These mobilizations achieved public policy goals without attracting reflexive, negative responses by organs of the party/state system. The activists were loosely organized and not seeking

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[86] Decree No.2/2011/ND-CP describes administrative penalties for press and publication articles; articles 79 and 88 of the Criminal Code target bloggers, blaming them for "crimes on infringing upon national security" (Ismail 2013:20).

official recognition. Many belonged to networks based on childhood and school friendships within the state and Party structure and with reporters and editors.

Wells-Dang argues convincingly that informal and virtual networks, rather than corporatist associations or autonomous non-profit organizations, are the true building blocks of civil society.

In at least two cases that he did not discuss, his analysis is relevant for understanding the workings of the networks of concerned citizens towards the powers that be: the so-called Vedan affair and the protests against bauxite mining in the Central Highlands. The Taiwanese producer of monosodium glutamate (MSG), Vedan, allowed the discharge of industrial waste into a river near Ho Chi Minh City. Measures from the city government to fine the manufacturer, who has been active in Vietnam since 1991, remained powerless, until in 2008 local newspapers revealed the miserable cause of several thousand fish-farming families whose livelihoods had been systematically destroyed. The result was an avalanche of judicial claims by lawyers who had taken up the cause and public support by consumers to organize a boycott of Vedan products. When the Ministry of Environment and even the prime minister showed more than a token interest, the Taiwanese company gave in for fear of a loss in court and promised farmers compensation at a level that was unique in Vietnam until that date (August 2010).

In the same period, a Chinese consortium that was allowed to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands, was besieged by an ad-hoc coalition of internal and external critics of the one-party state. On-line blogging became a useful instrument for a colorful range of people who felt concerned about the development in the central highlands. A monster-coalition consisting of concerned environmentalists, (former) soldiers, scholars, students, even important members of the CPV including Vo Nguyen Giap, and anti-regime dissidents used the digital platform to raise voices. In the end, the group was not able to stop the bauxite project due to the weakness of the coalition that expanded also into an anti-Chinese protest linked up with the situation in the South China Sea. Security agencies used this as an excuse to crack down on the protests.

Marston (2012: 190), who deals at great length with this case, admits that current research, including its own, "falls short of analyzing events following on the ground from the perspective of local voices. Much work is necessary to ensure that civil society debates address the 'view from the rice-roots' ", a clear reference to Wells-Dang work. In none of these case studies did Western model NGOs play a significant role. The space for a civil society coalition was created with the help of some elements of the regime. It started with a handful of individuals stepping up to a problem and providing consistent, responsible leadership.

Nowadays Party discipline and Leninist structures expressed by long-lasting personal relationship networks seem to have become less relevant for political dispute resolution. What Fforde (2007) calls "old wine in new bottles" is a silent consensus about the following aspects of the Vietnamese one-party state. The Party has embraced market-based strategies for capital and resource accumulation and at the same time has maintained its symbiosis with the Vietnamese state, partly based upon Leninist institutions. This means that the necessity for reform is less pressing for the country's political elite or at least for segments of that elite who regard the Vietnamese state as flexible, dynamic, and efficient in economic matters, while politically the state does not need fundamental reform (Fforde 2004; London 2009). On the other hand, the CPV also realizes that unreformed Leninist political institutions risk an evaporation of institutional authority (Fforde 2012). Reforms of the private sector are the result of the way the SOEs used their capital for outlets elsewhere. The Enterprise Law of 1999 enabled the joint collaboration of state managers with private businesspeople to become a group of Vietnamese capitalists. This is another turning point in the Vietnamese development.

An emerging civil society in Vietnam: what are the prospects?

Observers of Vietnam's political system are divided in their views as to whether the political reforms will lead to a genuine political liberalization or to a hybrid political system with strong authoritarian features. Some argue that the Vietnamese people are increasingly able to organize their daily lives without reference to the Party (Marr 1995; Kerkvliet 1997; 2001). Probably millions of Vietnamese do actually live in such a way, either as "free riders" or just practicing "*kính nhi viễn chi*" which means more or less "do what you like to do in your way, but do not bother me with it." But a "civil society" that is capable of reforming the incumbent system is something else. Others (on a more orthodox side) feel that the political legitimacy of the CPV has been lost since the reunification of the country in 1975-1976 and refer implicitly to a "golden socialist past" when large parts of the Vietnamese population supported the war efforts (Greenfield 1994; Kolko 1997).

Genuine political liberalization, according to Kornai, is only possible when the key feature of the old classical structure, the Communist Party's power, disappears: "So long as the Communist Party is in power, the system can only move from the classical system if the Party makes the alteration itself, or at least tolerates it" (1992: 566). Kornai asserts that a number of tendencies already mark the reform-prone process, which could possibly lead to genuine reform. He points to five trends whose depth and degree vary depending on specific historical situation. These five trends or tendencies are the revival of the private sector, the introduction of self-management in SOEs, the idea that socialism should be based on a market economy, a genuine price reform, and last but not least, the increase in sovereignty of individuals, groups, and organizations in several respects (Kornai 1992: 569). Others argue in reference to China that in the economic reforms the private sector was allowed to grow much faster than the state sector (Lardy 1991), while Chinese culture is not opposed to democracy and capitalism at all (Perry 1991). All these arguments apply more or less to Vietnam. Its colonial past with China and the West, its civil war, and its long conflict with the

United States are even stronger factors at work when a real (or realistic) choice has to be made between its own "socialist market model" and liberal capitalism. There are cultural and geographical factors at work, which will enable the Vietnamese state to change faster and more profoundly than China. Culturally, adaptation to other cultures like the ones of Southeast Asia and even the Western world has a longer history in Vietnam than in China. Vietnam's "politics of scale" and its geo-political position will influence its outward orientation more than China, an observation Woodside already made when discussing Sino-Vietnamese relations in the nineteenth century (1971).

In Kleinen (2001), I tried to explain the workings of the one-party state by introducing an attitude of the participants to conceal their real intentions with the intent to mislead and/or to disguise in order to obtain some benefits.[87] With the term mimicry[88] I pointed to political signals that function to deceive the receiver by preventing one from correctly identifying the mimic. Mimicry in this interpretation becomes a function of camouflage and it was this technique that the author experienced for so many years when living and working in Vietnam. It was a reflection about the way the Vietnamese Communist Party performed politically and economically since the end of the Vietnam War, in particular since the 1980s when a policy of renovation (the Vietnamese version of *perestroika*) was launched. The mimicry of the one-party state consisted of Leninist principles and managerial skills to organize the Vietnamese state. The velocity with which society and economy was changing was in contradiction with any control-mechanism that emanated from a classical Leninist model. In return, those who perform the mimicry devise their own strategies and start to mimic their rulers in the same way.

This type of mimicry is used by the prominent Africanist James G. Ferguson in an article called "Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the 'New World Society'" (2002: 551-569). Ferguson takes his inspiration from

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[87] Kleinen 2001 was an abridged version of an unpublished research paper in English with the ironical title "The Mimicry of the One-Party State: Vietnam since Reunification" (1975).

[88] Use of the word mimicry dates back to 1637. It is derived from the Greek term *mimetikos*, "imitative", in turn from *mimetos*, the verbal adjective of mimeisthai, "to imitate". Originally used to describe people, it was only applied to other forms of life after 1851 (see also Barret 1987).

Homi Bhaba[89] who regards mimicry as an ambiguous presence in the cultural politics of colonialism, and from Jean Rouch's remarkable film *Les Maîtres Foux*. In opposition to Homi Bhaba and Jean Rouch, Ferguson uses the term as a means to describe the aspirations of many Africans to share with the western world a form of modernity that enables them to have enough to eat, sufficient education, efficient health care, and, above all, democratic political institutions. "Wanting Europeans [to help us to become like you] ... is neither a mocking parody nor a pathetically colonized aping but a haunting claim for equal rights of membership in a spectacularly unequal global society" (2002: 565).

Ferguson's interpretation goes beyond the sheer camouflage aspect and is a serious challenge of "the discourse of development", but it does not exclude mimicry as an attempt to become part of a particular picture rather than an attempt to imitate a pre-existing image. That picture might have many dimensions and can be understood in various terms. Ferguson is a prominent critic of development operations in which "a knowledge/power regime of development" rules at the expense of the pretended local beneficiaries.[90]

Ken MacLean (2013) uses the term "mimicry" in a slightly different way. The years that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was developing, it presented a falsified world in which several actors try to optimize their strategies to profit from the advantages socialist state formation offered. In my view these acts of mimicry are also applicable here for understanding how "civil society" is reproduced in Vietnam in a way that "it fails to perfectly reproduce the original" (MacLean 2013: 74) (see also MacLean 2012). MacLean applies "mimicry" mainly to demonstrate that the mobilization of segments of the population to build a socialist society was met by strategies

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[89] Homi Bhabha adapted the term into colonial discourse theory to describe the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. The term "mimicry" has been crucial in Bhabha's work to describe this ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized to "mimic" the colonizer, the result is never a simple reproduction but a blurred copy of the original which becomes a threatening mockery of colonial dominance and reveals the limitation of the discourse itself.

[90] See also Ferguson's critical study of a CIDA/World Bank project in Lesotho (Ferguson 1994).

that de facto made the state illegible to itself (2013: 73-77). Centralized planning took place via an avalanche of paperwork that consisted of decrees, procedures, questionnaires, and all kind of audits. At the bottom of the (rural) society this paperwork met low-level officials and peasants who used their own strategies to solve their local problems. The result was a continuous wheeling and dealing between lower and higher echelons of bureaucratic rule that ended up in a compromising situation that was profitable for the lower cadres who were able to create a localized and imitation version of a socialist state. MacLean cites Vietnamese versions of claims that peasants made to gain benefits, awards, or promotions. His book deals mainly with the way collectivization ended in the 1970s and 1980s, but also deals with recent developments during which village communities set up new village conventions to govern their own affairs. The comparison with the way "civil society" is embraced by local NGOs is striking.

The topics of civil society, "good governance", and the role NGOs play in this regard have been chosen as a case to test the social reality of what happens "on the ground". Anthropologists were not always on speaking terms with the growing development industry in which development studies and economics dominated. It was our task in the first place to study "culture", "agency", or "developments from below" in emergent and hybrid terms. The application of the concept of "civil society" to Vietnam in scholarly literature is mostly not applied by anthropologists who research vivid grassroots social life, which is not always compatible with what in Western societies is seen as associational life.

On the other hand, political reforms are unacceptable because they threaten the omnipotence of the CPV and jeopardize it by bringing other versions of the truth to light. The Party determines what is truth, and that is in its own opinion not to be found in universal values (instruments of Western hostile forces to attack the Party) nor in democracy, human rights, or civil society, or even in the Vietnamese Constitution, which guarantees, inter-alia, freedom of expression and the independence of the judiciary. Its attempt to build a law-based state (*nhà nước pháp quyền*) deserves attention, but as long as government and party are closely intertwined such an effort is difficult to succeed.

The CPV, nobody or nothing else, determines the reform agenda. In the last two years criticism between the highest echelons was visible and reached the public. In ended in lip service to economic and social reform, while corruption excesses are tackled to bring more respect and credibility to the Party and grant more legitimacy to them. The people can cheer these operations, and may even point out cases of corruption, but they should not be actively involved in the fight, especially in an organized way that could threaten the CPV's control. That explains the intensification of repression and censorship. Victims are mostly activists, journalists, and lawyers who work for political reform. A favorite target is the widespread movement of pro-democracy activists, bloggers, journalists, and religious leaders who remind the Party that less corruption, more rule of law, and greater openness is also in their favor. Those who spread "rumors" – the Party determines what a rumor is – via Internet risk a number of years in prison. In the hunt for dissidents, state television plays prosecutor and judge. Arrested critics are forced into humiliating self-criticism on TV. Who holds the power in Vietnam, still has a monopoly on truth.

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