

**State-diaspora relations in illiberal contexts:
the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia**

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the reasons, modalities, and consequences of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. The case of the Vietnamese in Cambodia is of particular interest because, unlike most existing studies on state-diaspora relations, it examines a group which stands between two illiberal countries and, partly as a consequence of this, does not represent a significant threat and/or resource to either the host-state or the homeland. Furthermore, despite having lived in the host-state for generations, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been unable to access Cambodian citizenship and hold virtually no documents from Vietnam: they are *de facto* stateless.

This thesis seeks to answer two, interrelated questions: how do the Cambodian state and the Vietnamese state perceive of and engage with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia? What are the implications of their engagement on this diaspora's enjoyment of citizenship? To answer these questions, the research uses documentary sources from the two governments and eighty-three in-depth interviews with Vietnamese villagers, members of the Association of Khmer-Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia (AKVVC), representatives of the Cambodian government, experts, and representatives of civil society organisations. Departing from existing perspectives on state-diaspora relations, the thesis argues that the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have viewed the diaspora as "inconvenient subjects" and engaged, respectively, in the *bounded exclusion* and the *bounded inclusion* of the group. Rather than taking full responsibility of the diaspora, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments have shared the custody of the Vietnamese, alternating care and control and co-governing it through the work of the AKVVC. This deliberately ambiguous strategy has resulted in the Vietnamese' *de facto* enjoyment of some citizens' rights in Cambodia and Vietnam; yet, it has also (re)produced a multi-level liminal space in which the Vietnamese are more easily governable.

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Author's Declaration

I, Lucrezia Canzutti, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“All compatriots – this is the last opportunity, if we don’t rescue our nation, four or five years more is too late, Cambodia will be full of Vietnamese, we will become slaves of Vietnam”

(Former opposition leader Sam Rainsy as cited in the Phnom Penh Post, 2013)

“Every family in this village has lived in Cambodia for three generations. Yet, we are still considered immigrants”

(Vietnamese villager I08, personal communication, 10 March 2016)

“You say they are stateless? They are not stateless. Their “state-ness” is in consideration by the two governments”

(Advisor to the Cambodian Ministry of Interior, personal communication, 11 July 2016)

1.1 The Research Puzzle

On the 13th of December 2017, *The Phnom Penh Post* published an article titled: “Ethnic Vietnamese in Phnom Penh resigned to document purge”. The news story detailed the Cambodian government’s confiscation of Cambodian documents from members of the Vietnamese diaspora who had obtained them “irregularly”. The move, which enacted a sub-decree introduced earlier in the year, was estimated to affect 70,000 Vietnamese throughout the Kingdom - a significant portion of what has been considered to be Cambodia’s largest minority (The Phnom Penh Post, 2017a). What reporters did not mention is that, albeit in a less systematic and official way, the revocation and the invalidation of documents held by the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been taking place for decades and have not been limited to irregular documentation.

Despite having lived in Cambodia for decades, often generations, the Vietnamese diaspora has in fact been unable to access Cambodian citizenship. Instead, they have been relegated to temporary legal status which, combined with Khmer people’s deep-rooted anti-Vietnamese sentiment, has caused them to live at the margins of the host-society. The majority of Vietnamese diasporans have lived separate from Khmer communities; most of them have resided in Vietnamese land or floating villages, working as fishermen and earning an average of two to six US dollars per day. In addition to being “perpetually temporary” (Ehrentraut, 2011) and marginalised in the host-state, these Vietnamese have never been citizens of Vietnam. Most of them have spent their whole lives in Cambodia (with the exception of the Khmer Rouge period)

and have held no Vietnamese documents to prove their origins. As Nguyen and Sperfeldt (2012) first noted, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been *de facto* stateless.

Nguyen and Sperfeldt are among the few scholars who have investigated the situation of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. Existing studies have examined their history of violence and repression (Jordens, 1996; Goshal, 1995); the roots of the Khmer population's anti-Vietnamese sentiment and the discriminatory practices of the Cambodian government and people (Huges, 2002; Ehrentraut, 2011); and the diaspora's legal status according to Cambodian, Vietnamese, and international laws (Nguyen and Sperfeldt, 2012). However, studies on the group have overlooked the Vietnamese state's role as a homeland to these Vietnamese, instead focusing on the Cambodian state's failure to protect them and integrate them. News articles and reports concerning the population, too, have tended to depict the Vietnamese government as a passive witness of the Cambodian government's actions.

Contrasting with existing accounts, my own experience in Vietnamese villages in Cambodia revealed a tangible presence of the Vietnamese state in diaspora communities. Such presence was made conspicuous by the work of the Association of Khmer-Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia (AKVVC), commonly known as the Vietnamese Association. "The Vietnamese Association is under the Vietnamese Embassy; it's Vietnam", I was told by a member of the AKVVC in Village Two (I13, personal communication, 30 April 2016). As I visited more communities and spoke with more people, I appreciated how extensive and relevant the Vietnamese Association was. I learnt about its work, its aims, and its connections with the Vietnamese government. What I could not understand, however, was *why* the Vietnamese government had an interest in these Vietnamese communities.

This empirical puzzle prompted me to look for an alternative angle from which to analyse the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia: that of the triadic nexus between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the diaspora (rather than the Cambodian state and the diaspora alone). This led me to the two research questions that guide my thesis:

1. *How do the Cambodian state and the Vietnamese state perceive of and engage with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia?*

2. *What are the implications of their engagement on this diaspora's enjoyment of citizenship (in both states)?*

In addition to shedding new light on the empirical case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, these questions add to the limited literature on state-diaspora relations in illiberal contexts – where both the homeland and the host-state are illiberal countries.

The situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia has in fact been markedly different from that of diasporas in liberal host-states (e.g. the Vietnamese in Europe or the United States). When we think of “diasporas”, we usually think of remittances and economic growth (Smart and Hsu, 2004); “human capital upgrade” (Bauböck, 2003); war and conflict (Adamson, 2013); and influential lobbies (Waterbury, 2014; Itzigsohn, 2000). For policymakers and academics alike, the term has described valuable or dangerous populations who have played an increasingly significant role in both domestic and international politics. The burgeoning literature on state-diaspora relations is a reflection of this: recently scholars have been more and more interested in how homelands, which are usually developing states, engage “their” populations abroad; and how host-states, which usually hold an economic or political advantage, react to such engagement (Délano and Mylonas, 2017). The implications of this engagement on diasporas have also been explored, with particular attention to policies such as extra-territorial rights and dual citizenship or nationality, which have become increasingly common across the world (Waterbury, 2009; 2010)

The case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia breaks away from these stereotypes, for it speaks of a population which has been excluded from the host-state and is unlikely to attract the interest of the homeland; and whose homeland and host-state are both illiberal regimes (with the former being more developed and influential than the latter). Such premises unsettle the familiar dynamics of homeland, host-state, and diaspora relations, and pose the basis for the argument and contributions of my thesis, which I summarise in section 1.3. First, I however present a more detailed background of the three main actors of my research: the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the Vietnamese diaspora.

1.2 Setting the scene: the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the Vietnamese diaspora

As mentioned above, what sets my research apart from the majority of existing studies are the illiberal context in which engagement takes place and the marginalised position of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. In this section, I elaborate on these two factors: I start by discussing the political contexts of Cambodia and Vietnam and why they represent two instances of illiberal regimes.¹ I then consider the (past and present) position of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia vis-à-vis the two states.

(i) *Failed democratisation: the Cambodian state between 1993 and 2018*

Political crises between the 1970s and the 1990s have transformed several authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships into democracies, engendering what Huntington (1991) termed the “Third Wave of Democratization”. Largely as a result of this trend, democratic countries across the world increased from forty-four in 1973 to eighty-six in 2000-2001 (Nguyen, 2016). Yet, two decades after Fukuyama (1989) heralded the “end of history” and celebrated the triumph of liberal democracy, authoritarianism proved resilient in numerous states and returned (in part or in full) in many post-transitional states (Nguyen, 2016). Among these was Cambodia.

Post-UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) Cambodia has often been described as a hybrid regime (e.g. Norén-Nilsson, 2016; Levitsky and Way, 2002), that is a regime that combines elements of democracy and authoritarianism (Goode, 2010). Since the UN left in 1993 Cambodia has in fact failed to complete its transition to democracy, alternating periods of democratic progress and recession while prolonging Prime Minister Hun Sen’s grip on power (Un, 2009). In 2017, Cambodia’s democratic prospects were further debunked by a series of repressive actions aimed at neutralising critics and opponents of the Hun Sen regime. Among the most recent of these was the shutting down of the independent newspaper *The Cambodia Daily*, which was forced to close in September 2017 over allegations that it owed the government USD 6.3 million in unpaid tax bills (The Cambodia Daily, 2017).²

¹ “Illiberal regimes” is a wide category which includes all kinds of semi-illiberal states.

² On the 4th of September 2017, *The Cambodia Daily* published its last edition titled “Descent into outright dictatorship”. In May 2018 the *Phnom Penh Post*, another independent newspaper, was similarly accused of having an outstanding unpaid tax bill and was consequently sold to Malaysian businessman Sivakumar Ganapthy. The new owner, who fired several employees and prevented them from publishing the details

In the same period, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were closed or threatened with closure, while former opposition leaders Kem Sokha and Sam Rainsy remained, respectively, in prison (on charges of treason) and exile (Human Rights Watch, 2018). A year of increased repression culminated in the dissolution, on the 16th November 2017, of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) by Cambodia’s Supreme Court, whose lead judge was a known member of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP)’s permanent committee (The Phnom Penh Post, 2017b).³

In addition to portending the end of Cambodia’s “flickering democratic system” (Human Rights Watch, 2018), the dissolution of the CNRP pointed to a longstanding feature of Hun Sen government: the absence of judicial independence. In 2007, the AHRC (Asian Human Rights Commission), an NGO which promoted human rights in Asia, reported that ninety-nine per cent of Cambodia’s judges were members of the CCP, making the prospect of an independent court system nearly utopic (AHRC, 2007). In 2014, the government passed three laws which further undermined the impartiality of Cambodian judges and courts: the *Law on Organization and Functioning of the Supreme Council of Magistracy*; the *Statute of Judges and Prosecutors*; and the *Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Courts*. The laws were criticised, respectively, for a) providing “excessive power to the Minister of Justice to control and lead the decision-making process of the Supreme Council of the Magistracy”; b) empowering the justice minister to “advance and promote judges and prosecutors as well as placing judges and prosecutors under the central administration of the ministry”; and c) empowering “the justice minister to govern, control, and manage the budgets of all tribunals” (Radio Free Asia, 2014).

Coupled with the government’s shift to more oppressive means to control over civil society and opposition, the state of the judiciary triggers questions on whether Cambodia has been transitioning from a “shaky” hybrid regime to a fully authoritarian one, where

of the sale, was also the director of a public relations firm allegedly linked to the Cambodian government (BBC, 2018).

³ The fifty-five parliamentary seats that the CNRP had won in the 2013 elections were reallocated among smaller parties. The Khmer Economic Development party was given one seat; the Cambodian Nationality Party was given two; the League for Democracy Party, six. By contrast, the royalist FUNCINPEC party was given forty-one seats despite only winning a 3% of the vote in the 2013 elections. FUNCINPEC, whose long-term leader has been Prince Norodom Ranariddh, has been considered largely irrelevant in today’s political scene, and has already announced that it prefers to be considered a “minority” rather than an “opposition” party (Asia Times, 2017).

“formal democratic institutions exist on paper but are reduced to façade in practice” (Levitsky and Way, 2002:7). The recent developments highlighted above suggest that such transition is not unlikely and that the Cambodian government’s previous and seemingly promising steps toward democracy (most noticeably the elections) may have been a mere “exercise in political theatre that the CPP use[d] to legitimise power” (McCargo, 2005:100).

Despite the promise of democracy, Cambodia has thus remained an illiberal regime.⁴ This has affected the Vietnamese diaspora’s opportunities to flourish in economic and, especially, political terms. As I explain in more detail in Chapter Seven, as non-citizens the Vietnamese in the Kingdom have had no platform to express their grievances and influence policy-making (Ehrentraut, 2013). The lack of Cambodian ID cards has also limited their access to jobs and their ability travel outside of their province of residence, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, arrest, and abuse (particularly by Cambodian authorities). Hence, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have faced even greater hurdles and human rights violations than Khmer citizens. Whilst their predicament has attracted the attention of the Vietnamese government, the Politburo has been significantly more concerned with wealthy Vietnamese diasporans living in developed host-states. Furthermore, the Vietnamese government has had a dire human rights’ record itself, especially with regard to ethnic minorities (Human Rights Watch, 2018b). As we will see in the next section, since the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* programme the Politburo has prioritised economic growth over citizen’s freedom and democratic rights, carrying out what scholars have described as liberalization without democratization (Li 2012).

(ii) *Vietnam after the Đổi Mới (1986 - 2018): economic renewal and resilient authoritarianism*

Vietnam under the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has been characterised as “a typical undemocratic one-party regime” and an example of “resilient authoritarianism” (Nguyen and Pham, 2016; Nguyen, 2016). Despite facing numerous challenges, the CPV has managed to lead the country for over thirty years, adapting to changing international and domestic contexts and overcoming periods of crisis by (re)gaining public trust and support, constraining domestic opposition, and reducing external pressures (Nguyen,

⁴ Further information on the features of the CPP’s rule can be found in Chapter Three.

2016).

The CPV has ruled the North of Vietnam since the 1940s and the whole of Vietnam since 1975 (London, 2009). In its first two decades in power, the Party fought numerous wars, including the struggle against French Colonialism, Japanese fascism, and the US-backed Republic of Vietnam (RVN). At the time, Ho Chi Minh's charismatic leadership and the promise of a Soviet-inspired socialist society and economy ensured the government's legitimacy (Bui, 2017). Such legitimacy however came into question in the mid-1980s, when the Vietnamese government found itself in the middle of a comprehensive social crisis which critically eroded public trust in the ruling party (Nguyen, 2016). The state-socialist economic institutions installed by the CPV in fact failed to guarantee the survival of an increasingly impoverished population. What is more, citizens' impoverishment as a result of decades of conflict stood in stark contrast with the wealth of their representing elite, whose privileged position was built around corruption and nepotism (Nguyen, 2016). The alarming performance and decadence of the communist regime sparked civic protests across the country, threatening the CPV's legitimacy and survival (Luong, 2003; Nguyen, 2016). Thus, in the mid-1980s the CPV found itself at a critical crossroad, having to choose between "death or reform" in order to maintain power. It chose "reform" (Nguyen, 2016).

At its 6th National Congress in December 1986, the CPV decided to shift away from the central planning model of socialism and embrace a "market-oriented social economy under state guidance" – the so-called *Đổi Mới* (literally "renovation"; "reconstruction") (Beresford, 2008). *Đổi Mới* reforms had a major impact on the Vietnamese economy: within a decade (prior to the 1998 financial crisis), Vietnam went from being an under-developed country to an emerging economic "dragon" (Dollar and Litvack, 1998); its poverty rate dropped and in 2016 it joined the ranks of lower middle-income countries (Nguyen, 2016). As it opened up economically, Vietnam also introduced political reforms (ostensibly) aimed at democratising the state, such as changes to electoral rules and efforts to increase government accountability and reduce corruption (Hai and Minh, 2016; Nguyen, 2016).

In 1998, for instance, the CPV adopted the so-called "grassroot democracy" programme in order to improve governance at the local level through enhanced transparency (Thayer,

2010).⁵ Introduced in response to peasant protests in Thái Bình, the “grassroot democracy” programme has been often dismissed as “window-dressing” by its critics. Nevertheless, according to Nguyen (2016:41), the programme has proved to be a “mutually empowering mechanism for the party and the peasants”, for it mitigated peasants’ dissatisfaction while strengthening the legitimacy of the CPV. In addition to domestic changes, Vietnam has also opened up internationally, bolstering its relations with other countries (including historical enemies such as France and the United States) and actively participating in international institutions (Thayer, 2015). Overall, the party has thus displayed a degree of political flexibility and successfully adjusted to the spin-offs of economic liberalisation (Hai and Minh, 2016; Nguyen, 2016).

Yet, as Nguyen noted (2016), it has done so while preventing the formation of a domestic opposition and limiting public outcries that could jeopardise its authority. Vietnam has turned into a more open, but still authoritarian, country. Even the state’s linkages with the West have had the effect of reducing external pressure and reinforcing, rather than challenging, the legitimacy of the CPV and its regime. Hence, the very changes (at the domestic and international level) that are normally thought to pave the way for democracy have contributed to strengthening the CPV’s grip on power (Nguyen, 2016). In the meantime, basic rights such as freedom of speech, opinion, association, and press have remained restricted and critics of the regime have continued to face harassment, imprisonment, and assault (Human Rights Watch, 2018b). Freedom of religion has also been denied, with ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. the Hmong; the Montagnards) suffering persecution and abuse at the hands of the government (ARC, 2017).

The Vietnamese government’s primary preoccupation with economic growth over rights has been further reflected by its stance towards the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. As I explain in Chapter Five, whilst the Politburo has reached out to *wealthy* overseas Vietnamese who could contribute to the development of the state, the diaspora in Cambodia has long stopped being of interest to the Vietnamese government. I elaborate on this in the next section, where I introduce the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom and its (past and present) position vis-à-vis the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam.

⁵ The “Grassroot democracy” decree aimed to introduce new mechanisms for citizens’ voices to be heard by allowing them to access information on government decisions which affected them, discuss and participate in the formulation of specific policies, take part to local development initiatives, and supervise (some) government activities (McElwee, 2006).

(iii) *The Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia*



Fig. 1: Vietnamese Floating Village in Cambodia

Ethnic Vietnamese have been one of the largest minorities in Cambodia. Reliable data on the size of the group are difficult to source. International observers have estimated that approximately 400,000 - 500,000 Vietnamese lived in Cambodia at the time of this research, accounting for 5% of the country's population (Schliesinger, 2015). This number included both "newcomers" and long-term settlers. "Newcomers" are recent migrants who have moved to Cambodia for a short period of time, often (illegally) employed by Vietnamese construction and carpentry businesses (RFA, 2015). Long-term settlers are members of the Vietnamese diaspora who have spent all or most of their life in Cambodia. The latter group, on which my research focuses, can be further divided into two sub-categories: those who moved to Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge, many of whom were encouraged to do so by the French protectorate;⁶ and those who arrived during the 1980s migration wave (Gottesman, 2004).

All but four of my respondents declared to be descendants of the first sub-group: they were born in Cambodia and, whilst they did not know exactly when their family had arrived, they stated that their parents and grandparents had also been born there. The only protracted period of time they had spent outside the Kingdom was during the turbulent years of the Lon Nol regime (1970-1975) and the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979),

⁶ I elaborate on this in Chapter Three.

when (albeit at different times) all of my interviewees escaped or were forced to leave Cambodia and seek refuge in Vietnam. Most of my respondents spent five to ten years in Vietnam. They returned to Cambodia in the 1980s moved by pragmatic and sentimental reasons. On the one hand, not many people had profitable jobs in Vietnam and Cambodia's watercourses were richer in fish than their Vietnamese counterparts. On the other, Vietnamese families had lost several members in the pogroms and felt compelled to return to Cambodia in order to take care of their ancestors' graves or make offerings to what some referred to as their ancestors' "lost souls". At the time, Vietnamese refugees were also formally encouraged to return to the Kingdom by the Vietnam-led People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime (Willmott, 2011). As I explain in more detail in Chapter Three, this prompted the re-emergence of a Vietnamese minority in the Kingdom. Such minority, however, was not made solely of pre-Khmer Rouge diasporans who had returned to their homes.

In the 1980s, Cambodia witnessed a new wave of migration of both "old" and "new" Vietnamese. The "new" immigrants were brought into the Kingdom by the regime and hired in factories, warehouses, and infrastructure projects – a policy which angered the Khmer public due to the perceived favouritism that the Vietnam-dominated PRK granted the Vietnamese (Gottesman, 2004). The regime's policies also fuelled suspicions regarding Vietnam's long-term plan to swallow Cambodia and rumours concerning Vietnamese authorities' control of the ethnic Vietnamese in the Kingdom. According to Gottesman (2004), such rumours were not unfounded. The Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh in fact

“considered itself the representative of all Vietnamese residents living in Cambodia, overseeing a network of representatives of various ethnic Vietnamese communities. Vietnamese advisors [...] assumed leadership roles within the ethnic Vietnamese community, ‘explaining, leading, and educating the Vietnamese people in all places where there are Vietnamese people living and working’” (Gottesman, 2004: 166).⁷

Vietnamese officials also attempted to organise the Vietnamese minority in revolutionary units (or *snoul*) aimed at leading “the movement of the Vietnamese people”, and encouraged Vietnamese civilians to live in “Vietnamese Solidarity Villages” which served to “consolidate the Vietnamese residents in order to teach the

⁷ This description bears some resemblance with my own account of the AKVKC in Chapter Six. Gottesman (2004) also wrote about the Vietnamese Association, the formation of which he dated back to the PRK period.

policies of the Cambodian revolution and the Vietnamese revolution, mutual assistance, ceaseless solidarity, etc.” (Gottesman, 2004:165, 166). Finally, Vietnamese authorities checked the political backgrounds of Vietnamese village leaders and schoolteachers, and Vietnamese residents were expected to look out for and report any “bad elements” (i.e. counter-revolutionaries) in their communities.⁸

The extent to which the Vietnamese in Cambodia collaborated with Vietnamese authorities is unclear. As the Vietnamese who arrived in the 1980s migration wave merged with pre-Khmer Rouge communities, it is also difficult to determine exactly who supported the Vietnamese regime and whether they did so because of a shared ideology or the sense of security that came with the Vietnamese occupation (Gottesman, 2004).⁹ What is certain is that, at the time, the members of the Vietnamese diaspora represented an important political resource and a potential political threat to the regime, as represented by the Vietnamese government’s efforts to harness them and identify “bad elements” within the group.

Until recently, the support of the Vietnamese in Cambodia has also been instrumental to Cambodia’s ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) – the natural successor of the PRK. The CPP has long been accused of recruiting Vietnamese from within and outside Cambodia to cast illegal votes in its favour during the Cambodian general elections (LICADHO, 2013). Whilst the recruitment of Vietnamese from Vietnam has never been proven, several of my Vietnamese respondents confirmed that they had been able to vote in the elections despite not holding Cambodian ID cards. As I explain in Chapter Five, such strategy has however sparked the outrage of the Cambodian public and hindered the popularity of the ruling party. Aptly emphasised by the opposition, the issue of “Vietnamese votes” has even brought into question the validity of the CPP’s marginal win in the 2013 elections (The Economist, 2013), thereby exposing the shortcomings of using the Vietnamese as a means to skew the elections in favour of the CPP. Thus, in the recent political climate the ruling party has realised that the benefits associated with the diaspora have been counterweighed by its costs.

⁸ These included defectors from the Vietnamese army and counter-revolutionaries who attempted to flee Vietnam and crossed into Cambodia to make their way overseas (Gottesman, 2004).

⁹ As Gottesman (2004) noted, some Vietnamese are likely to have left their ancestral homeland because they experienced difficulties in making a living in newly communist South Vietnam.

A similar argument can be made in relation to the Vietnamese government. As the regime's expansionist ambitions faded in favour of economic growth, so did the perceived value of the diaspora in Cambodia. In addition to losing its significance from a (geo)political point of view, the diaspora has contributed no capital or skills to the homeland. Furthermore, although they could represent a threat to the homeland and/or the host-state (e.g. through protests and other forms of political action), such threat has been latent and successfully kept under control by the two governments.¹⁰ Combined with the regime type of the two states, this poses the background to the main arguments of my thesis, which I summarise in the paragraphs below.

1.3 The argument of the thesis

As I stated earlier in the chapter, my thesis is guided by two research questions:

1. *How do the Cambodian state and the Vietnamese state perceive of and engage with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia?*
2. *What are the implications of their engagement on this diaspora's enjoyment of citizenship?*

In response to these questions, I put forward the following arguments. Building upon the above account of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, in Chapter Five I argue that Cambodia and Vietnam have viewed these Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects and have refrained from fully including them due to political and economic costs that this would entail. Influenced by domestic politics and bilateral relations, the Cambodian government has engaged in what I term the *bounded exclusion* of the diaspora, allowing the Vietnamese to live within the territory of the state while keeping them outside the imagined community of the Cambodian nation. Conversely, the Vietnamese government has engaged in what I term the *bounded inclusion* of the group: motivated by the recent mass return of thousands of Vietnamese from Cambodia, the Politburo has embraced the Vietnamese as part of the nation, but tried to limit their presence inside the territory of the state. Neither Cambodia nor Vietnam have taken full responsibility of the Vietnamese diaspora. Nonetheless, in Chapter Six I argue that the two states have shared the custody of the group through the work of the AKVKC, which has ties with both governments and has acted as a "middle man" between the three actors.

¹⁰ This has been possible through the shared custody of the diaspora, the effects of which I discuss in Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis.

The work of the AKVVC relates to the research question on how the Cambodian and the Vietnamese governments have been engaging the Vietnamese diaspora. I argue that through the activities of the AKVVC, the two states have been able to alternate the care and control of the Vietnamese. The Cambodian government, for instance, has allowed the diaspora to obtain temporary legal status and reside and build Vietnamese schools within its territory. Yet, by controlling the information that has reached the population and suppressing protests, it has kept Vietnamese communities under control and delayed their access to citizenship. Vietnam, on the other hand, has provided donations and allowed irregular border-crossings into its territory. However, by holding the diaspora's documents at the border it has ensured that visitors returned to Cambodia instead of settling into Vietnam. Through the shared custody of the Vietnamese, the two governments have been able to fulfil (most of) the diaspora's basic needs while preventing it from becoming problematic.

The dynamic described above suggests that, unlike the majority of diaspora groups analysed in existing literature, the Vietnamese in Cambodia may not have the potential to benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state. This is the main point that I investigate in Chapter Seven, where I seek to answer my second research question concerning the implications of diaspora engagement. In mainstream accounts of state-diaspora relations, diasporas typically enjoy *formal* and/or (some aspects of) *substantive* citizenship in both states (Brubaker, 2010). By contrast, I argue that the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' balancing of care and control has perpetuated the legal and social insecurity of the Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, the line between care and control has often been blurred, for even the governments' concessions have come with limitations. The possibility to live on Cambodian land and watercourses, for instance, has come with a higher incidence of forced relocations. Access to (temporary) legal status has gone hand in hand with the postponement of Cambodian citizenship; and access to education in both countries has been limited by the documentation that the pupils hold. These and other examples show how the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese has contributed to the insecurity of the diaspora and trapped them in a multi-level liminal space where they are easily governable. In co- "managing" the Vietnamese diaspora (Vietnamese MOFA, 2009), Cambodia and Vietnam have thus (re)produced the very space that makes such management possible.

1.4 The significance of the thesis

My empirical findings lead to four main contributions. The first one is a more nuanced understanding of the term “diaspora”. As I explain in more depth in Chapter Two, partly due to its prevalent focus on diasporas in liberal and economically developed countries, existing studies have tended to understand diasporas as homogeneous groups which represent a threat and/or a resource to their homeland and their host-state. Although in the past the Vietnamese in Cambodia may have reflected this imagery, as stated above in recent years they have lost much of their political value while contributing no capital or skills to the two states. Rather than being a threat or a resource, the Vietnamese have been seen as inconvenient subjects by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. This view stands in sharp contrast with that of wealthy and skilled diasporas living (mostly) in Western countries, including overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều*) in Europe and the US. The disparities between these subgroups within the Vietnamese diaspora points to the need, highlighted by Tsourapas’ (2015) and Délano and Mylonas’ (2017), to avoid generalisations and recognise the heterogeneity of diaspora populations. Such heterogeneity is matched by the differential treatment of these sub-groups by both their host-states and, partly as a consequence, by their homeland.

This links to the second contribution of my thesis: the importance of the role of the host-state in shaping diasporas and diaspora engagement. The aforementioned differences between diaspora sub-groups are in fact partially dictated by the states they live in. Diasporas’ ability to become a threat and/or a resource and, accordingly, the ways homelands view and engage them, are contingent upon their access to civil, political, and economic rights in the host-state. In liberal host-states, long-term settlement has usually led to citizenship status, which in turn has translated into citizenship rights.¹¹ However, in Cambodia, like in many illiberal countries, citizenship status has not necessarily implied citizenship rights; and long-term settlement has not always resulted into citizenship status. The latter point has often been linked to the enduring relevance of ethno-national belonging as *a sine qua non* of citizenship, which is one of the main reasons Vietnamese diasporans have been unable to become Cambodian citizens. This has affected their ability to thrive politically and economically. Another important factor to take into account is the host-state’s relationship with the homeland. As a matter of

¹¹ With this, I do not mean to suggest that liberal countries have no stateless populations. Cases such as the stateless Roma in Europe demonstrate that, although less common, exceptions do exist.

fact, the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia cannot be analysed independently from the “special relationship” between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam (Heder, 2018). These considerations point to the need to “bring the host-state back” into the study of diasporas and account for how its regime type, domestic politics, and relationship with the homeland contribute to shaping diaspora groups.

The third contribution of my thesis partly stems from the above points and is concerned with the modalities of diaspora engagement. Several studies have explored diaspora engagement in the form of homelands’ strategies to “tap”, “embrace” and “govern” their populations abroad (Gamlén, 2014). Engagement has been generally depicted as a two-way relationship involving the diaspora and the homeland, but not the host-state. A few exceptions to this have been works considering homelands and host-states’ collaboration on security issues, such as France and Tunisia’s joint effort to control “Islamist expansion” (Brand, 2006). Yet, even these have described a type of collaboration that is very different in its form and aims from the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. The shared custody of the diaspora in fact involves the states’ alternation of care and control through the *co-governing* of the diaspora by the two states. As such, it represents a novel form of engagement featuring a greater level of coordination between the homeland and the host-state.

My next point is more of a reiteration than it is a contribution. Like many studies on Southeast Asia, my thesis exposes the enduring relevance of symbolic and physical boundaries in the region, which I highlight through the concepts of *bounded exclusion* and *inclusion* of the Vietnamese. Symbolic boundaries have underpinned the acceptance (or lack thereof) of the diaspora in the Cambodian and Vietnamese nations. In Cambodia, the Khmer public’s long-standing anti-Vietnamese sentiment has reflected the manipulation and crystallisation of ethno-national feelings into “walls in the head” (Sutherland, 2018:36) which have placed the Vietnamese permanently outside the “imagined community” of the Cambodian nation (Anderson, 1983). By contrast, in Vietnam those same symbolic boundaries have had the opposite effect of including the diaspora into “the great family of the Vietnamese nation” (Vietnam Diplomatic Handbook, 2010:82). Physical boundaries, and more specifically the Cambodia-Vietnam border, have also been crucial in determining the position of these Vietnamese between the two states. In Cambodia, for instance, the permeable, fluid and disputed nature of the border has facilitated the (re)production of the aforementioned anti-

Vietnamese sentiment, which has largely motivated the Cambodian government's decision not to grant citizenship to the Vietnamese. In Vietnam, the permeable border between Cambodia and Vietnam has exacerbated the Vietnamese government's fear of uncontrolled "return" migration of the group and informed its efforts to limit it. Both symbolic and physical boundaries have thus played an important role in shaping the position of the Vietnamese diaspora between Cambodia and Vietnam.

Finally, the last contribution of my thesis links to my second point and concerns the meaning of "citizenship" in illiberal contexts. In Chapter Seven, I seek to find out whether the Vietnamese diaspora has benefitted from its dual ties with Cambodia and Vietnam by investigating its access to *formal* and *substantive* citizenship in the two states (Brubaker, 2010). I understand *formal citizenship* as incorporating legal citizenship status, and *substantive citizenship* as involving a combination of the civic republican and liberal views of citizenship as political participation and rights (Bosniak, 2000). In applying these concepts to the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, I unveil the limitations of these notions in describing illiberal contexts. In illiberal states, *formal* and *substantive* citizenship (and, thus, "citizenship" in general) are indeed characterised by a degree of flexibility - with the enjoyment of status, rights, and political activity being contingent, intermittent, and reversible. My research points to the need to account for these alternative forms of citizenship by considering the meaning and content of citizenship beyond liberal normativity.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

In the final section of this introductory chapter, I provide an outline of my thesis. In the following chapter (Chapter Two), I present a critical overview of the existing literature that informs my investigation and identify the debates that my research adds to. The chapter consists of three main sections. In the first one, I define the concepts which underpin my theoretical and empirical formulations. In the second section, I review existing studies concerning state-diaspora relations: I start by analysing the term "diaspora" and then explore how diasporas are viewed and engaged by their homelands and their host-states. Finally, I highlight the main limitations of the literature, which inform many of the contributions highlighted above and are (at least partly) determined by a tendency to focus on diasporas living in economically developed and liberal countries.

In Chapter Three, I return to the case study of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia and present its historical and (geo)political background. In the first half of the chapter, I trace the evolution of Khmer ethno-nationalism from pre-colonial Cambodia to 2018 and explain how different elites have harnessed and fuelled Khmer people's anti-Vietnamese sentiment to their political advantage. In the second half of the chapter, I focus on Cambodia's domestic politics and the Cambodian government's relationship with the Vietnamese regime. I pay particular attention to the "special relationship" (Heder, 2018) between the two neighbours and the extent to which it has been affected by the Cambodian government's recent cosying up to China. This context sets the scene for the main arguments that I present in Chapters Five and Six.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the methodology of my research and the challenges that I encountered during my fieldwork. I start by justifying my methodological approach. Next, I consider the selection of field sites and my relationship with translators and gatekeepers. I then discuss the process of collecting data, especially my interviews with members of the diaspora and the elite. Throughout the chapter, I reflect on how the interlocking of positionality and an illiberal research context has facilitated and/or constrained my fieldwork. In the last section, I highlight the limitations of my research and the ways in which factors such as the timing and location(s) of my fieldwork may have affected the data that I collected.

Chapter Five is the first of three empirical chapters. Here, I analyse the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' stance towards the Vietnamese diaspora. I argue that both states have viewed the group as inconvenient subjects rather than a threat and/or a resource, and have engaged in the *bounded exclusion/inclusion* of the Vietnamese. In the first section, I clarify what I mean by "bounded" exclusion and inclusion. I then examine the domestic and international factors that have informed the position of the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. I demonstrate that, due to economic and political considerations, neither Cambodia nor Vietnam have taken full responsibility of the diaspora. In the last section of the chapter, I explore how this has affected Vietnamese people's experience and discourses of "home".

Whilst neither Cambodia nor Vietnam have taken full responsibility of the Vietnamese, the two states have shared the custody of the diaspora. This is the main focus of Chapter Six, in which I explore the modalities of the two states' engagement with the Vietnamese.

The governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have collaborated in what they have described as the “management” of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia (MoFA, 2009). They have done so mainly through the AKVVC, which has embodied and enacted the decisions of both. In Chapter Six, I delve into the workings of the AKVVC: first, I detail the structure and growth of the Association and its official linkages with both the Cambodian Ministry of Interior and the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I then discuss the roles of the AKVVC, which have developed around its three main aims of: a) promoting legal life and the respect of Cambodian law among Vietnamese communities; b) improving education levels; and c) distributing charitable donations from Vietnam. Within and beyond these areas, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to alternate the care and control of the Vietnamese. In the final section of Chapter Six, I investigate how this ambivalent stance by the two states has been understood and represented by the Vietnamese diaspora itself.

Having explored the reasons and modalities of Cambodia and Vietnam’s engagement with the diaspora, in Chapter Seven I analyse the implications of such engagement on the Vietnamese’ access to *formal* and *substantive* citizenship in both states (Brubaker, 2010). Here, I build upon Brubaker’s formulation and understand the two terms as involving Linda Bosniak’s (2000) dimensions of status, rights, and political activity. Investigating the Vietnamese’ access (or lack thereof) to each one of these dimensions allows me to contrast their position to that of diasporas living in developed and liberal countries and demonstrate how Cambodia and Vietnam’s shared custody of the Vietnamese has been perpetuating the legal and socio-political insecurity of the group. At the same time, it encourages me to reflect on the limits of the concepts of *formal* and *substantive* citizenship when applied to illiberal states.

Overall, my thesis sheds some light on the underexplored sub-field of state-diaspora relations in illiberal contexts. In Chapter Eight, I review the main findings of my research and place them in the larger context of diaspora studies. In the first section of the chapter, I summarise the main arguments of my thesis. In the second section, I discuss the wider relevance of my work. I then conclude by outlining possible avenues for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

The literature on State-Diaspora relations

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a critical overview of the existing literature on state-diaspora relations and identify the debates that my thesis contributes to. The chapter is made up of three main sections. In the first section, I clarify the central concepts of my thesis: the notions of “state”, “nation”, and “nation-state”. These terms are of particular importance in that they form the backbone of my theoretical and empirical analyses. Furthermore, the conceptual diatribes that characterise them make it paramount to specify what each one of them means in the context of my thesis.

In the second section of this chapter, I move on to review the existing literature on state-diaspora relations. I start with a discussion of the term “diaspora” and explore how the concept has evolved over time while contrasting it with the more recent notion of “transnational community”. I then focus on how diasporas are viewed and engaged by their homelands and host-states. I argue that states usually view diasporas as a threat, a resource, or a combination of both. The states’ view(s) inform the policies that they employ to engage diasporas - or, as Brubaker (2010) calls them, the *internal* and *external politics of belonging*. Recent studies on diaspora engagement have focused mostly on the policies of the homeland. The reason for this is that host-states are assumed to have integrated or assimilated diasporas in the early stages of their (or their ancestors’) migration. Homelands, on the other hand, have only recently realised the potential of “their” populations abroad and devised a panoply of engagement strategies aimed at harnessing the resources that they represent. These have taken a variety of forms, ranging from dual citizenship to symbolic inclusion, and have been at the centre of the burgeoning literature on state-diaspora relations that I review in this chapter.

Whilst rich in accounts on the reasons, modalities, and consequences of diaspora engagement, such literature suffers from a number of limitations. I discuss these limitations in the third section of the chapter. Here, I use the case study of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia to shed light onto three shortcomings of existing studies: a) the portrayal of diasporas as single, homogenous groups that fit the categories of threat and/or resource; b) the scarce attention paid to the role of host-states and host-

state/homeland relations in the construction of such groups; and c) the tendency to assume that diasporas can benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state. Overall, I argue that the diaspora literature is predominantly representative of diasporic groups who live in economically developed and liberal countries, where they can access the political, economic, and social rights that come with citizenship of the host-state. As such, the literature tends to focus on one half of the picture on state-diaspora relations. The case of the Vietnamese in Cambodia offers a glimpse into the other half: that of diasporas living in less developed and illiberal states.

2.1 State, nation, nation-state

As mentioned in the Introduction, I open this chapter with an overview of the core concepts of my thesis. As is the case of most scholars working on diasporas, my empirical and theoretical formulations develop around the two concepts of “nation” and “state” - and the position that diasporas occupy in relation to them. These concepts are intertwined, ambiguous, and essentially contested. Yet, in order to understand the discussions to come, it is important to define them and analyse their presumed congruency, which is represented by the popular notion of “nation-state”.

I begin with a discussion of the state. The classical definition of the state was formulated by the German sociologist Max Weber. In his lecture on “*Politics as a Vocation*” (1918, no page), Weber described the state as “a human community that (successfully) proclaims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”. To Weber, violence could only be legitimately exercised by the state and the agencies to whom the state delegates such power. His definition has informed many of the current accounts of the state, which have embraced its key elements of violence and territoriality and complemented them with additional features. To Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009) a state is: a) a unified set of governing institutions that are formally connected to each other; b) controlling a particular territory and a distinct society; c) making and enforcing collectively binding decisions; d) having the monopoly of the legitimate use of force; e) claiming sovereignty (i.e. unrestrained power over all other social institutions); f) operating in a public realm, which is distinct from the private sphere of individuals and

organisations; and g) defining its “citizens” and controlling entry to and exit from its territory.¹²

The “state” (also referred to as “regime”) is distinct from “government”. The governing institutions of the state include the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, and other institutions such as the police and the military. The “government”, on the other hand, refers to the “government-of-the-day”: the “group of politicians who hold office as members of a majority party or military junta” (Ponton and Gill, 1993:47). These politicians are, of course, part of the executive of the state. Nonetheless, the latter is also made up of bureaucrats, who typically remain in office regardless of the political orientation of the government. As such, the executive is a bigger institution than just the government, and so is the state. Moreover, the state is typically of longer duration than the government, as states often persist while multiple governments succeed in office (Ponton and Gill, 1993).¹³

The second main concept of my thesis is the “nation”. The definition of “nation” presents greater controversies than that of the “state”. Such controversies have typically revolved around the *what* and *when* of a nation (Smith, 2002). The question of *what* the nation constitutes has been addressed in two main ways, with an emphasis on either objective or subjective factors. “Objective factors” include language, religion, customs, and institutions, as stressed by Stalin’s (1973) definition of a nation as “an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (as cited in Smith, 2010:11). “Subjective factors” refer to less tangible phenomena, such as attitudes, perceptions, and feelings. An example of a subjective definition of nation is Benedict Anderson’s renown description of “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1983:49).

¹² Of particular interest to the study of diasporas are the state’s alleged control of a particular territory and its ability to choose its own citizens. These two elements will feature prominently in the discussion on state-diaspora relations and engagement. They are also an important component of the notion of “nation-state”, which I analyse later in the text.

¹³ In illiberal countries like Cambodia and Vietnam, the lines between “government” and “state” are often blurred. This will become apparent in Chapter Three, where I introduce the historical and (geo) political background to this research.

These two perspectives on *what* a nation is are inextricably linked to questions of *when* a nation exists. The latter have been at the centre of the longstanding debate between primordialist, modernist, and ethno-symbolist approaches to the study of nations and nationalism. Whilst an in-depth analysis of these theoretical paradigms is beyond the scope of my thesis, I shall clarify the main point of contention between the three and where my work stands in relation to it. At the core of the theoretical dispute between scholars in the field is the claim that nations have developed from ancient *ethnie* (whether “real” or symbolic) *versus* the idea that they have emerged as a consequence of the last two centuries of modernisation and industrialisation (Sutherland, 2013). Ernest Gellner’s question “*Do nations have navels?*” captures the essence of the debate. Like Gellner himself, I believe that “nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men as an inherent... political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that is reality*” (Gellner, 1983:10). As Hobsbawm (1990) points out, the making of nations is characterised by an element of artefact, invention, and social engineering. Whilst the process may make reference to a pre-existing *ethnie*, this does not mean that nations originate from it. The process of making a nation is made possible by nationalism. Nations are the result of nationalism; not the other way around.

In producing the nation, nationalism can challenge or, more often, legitimise the state’s authority. As Sutherland (2012a:10) notes, the nation is “a way of justifying where borders are drawn and a means of contesting those borders. It serves both to underpin the legitimacy of modern states and the conflicting claims of sub-state nationalists”. It follows that nations do not need states, but states necessitate some form of national construct to legitimise their power. They obtain this through state-led nationalism – also known as nation-building (Sutherland, 2012a). Nationalism is thus the glue that holds nation and state together, building the foundations of the compound term “nation-state”. The latter is another central concept of my thesis: it epitomises the ubiquitous conflation of “nation” and “state”, which in turn implies the congruence of state territory, national territory, national culture, and citizenry (Brubaker, 2010).

The notion of “nation-state” has long dominated socio-scientific research. Its extensive use as a taken-for-granted unit of analysis has led scholars to describe social and historical processes “as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-

states” and assume that members of these states “share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs and institutions” (Glick Schiller, 2010:110,111). Such “hegemonic imaginary” of the nation-state (Mignolo, 2000 as cited in Sutherland, 2016:91) has been termed “methodological nationalism”. By naturalising the nation-state, methodological nationalism has crystallised a model of “container society” while depicting migration as an anomaly and a potential threat to it (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002).

Several scholars have highlighted the need to move beyond methodological nationalism (e.g. Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002; Beck and Sznaider, 2010; Amelina et al., 2012; Faist, 2012; Shahjahan and Kezar, 2013; Sutherland, 2016). Their aim has not been to deny the existence or downplay the importance of the nation-state: as will become clear in later chapters, the nation-state has continued to play a crucial role in shaping both states’ policies and people’s identities (Brubaker, 2010; Sutherland, 2016).¹⁴ Rather, these authors have challenged the use of the nation-state as the natural starting point of social and political analyses and substituted it with a more fluid view of the world as “an interconnected realm of cross-border relationships” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002:311). By doing so, they have advanced an understanding of power that is not confined to bounded sovereign blocs, but “enmeshed” in complex and overlapping networks that transcend Westphalian borders (Sutherland, 2016:94).¹⁵

Studies of transnational communities and migration have been the perfect arena for this. Whilst not immune to the traps of methodological nationalism, these fields have opened up new ways of thinking about power relations across borders¹⁶. These power relations have involved a variety of institutions such as financial conglomerates, religious

¹⁴ In particular, the nation-state model has continued to influence states’ *internal politics of belonging* – that is policies directed at populations who have durably settled in their territory (Brubaker, 2010:63,66). At the same time, states’ *external politics of belonging* targeting migrants and diasporas have reflected the changing nature of the nation-state ideal: whilst internal homogeneity appears to have remained a priority, its territorial character has progressively lost relevance. As Brubaker pointed out, the aforementioned congruencies “between the boundaries of the state and those of the nation, between polity and culture, between residence and citizenship, and between cultural nationality and legal citizenship—are not all of a piece”, as “the recent wave of external membership policies reflects a movement toward ways of interpreting these congruencies that are decidedly less territorial” (Brubaker, 2010:78).

¹⁵ Claire Sutherland used the notion of post-modern mandala to examine nodal points of power and “move beyond analyses premised on bounded communities” (Sutherland, 2016:102).

¹⁶ As Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) noted, studies of transnational communities often suffer from the same limitations as community studies (e.g. overstating the internal homogeneity and boundedness of communities; overlooking the significance of cross-community interactions; or ignoring cases where transnational communities have not formed or have ceased to be meaningful for individuals).

organisations, NGOs and, of course, states (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). The relationship between states and transnational communities offers several examples of transnational and overlapping exercises of power. These will be a feature of the next section, where I discuss the triadic nexus between homelands, host-states, and diasporas.

2.2 The literature on homelands, host-states, and diaspora relations

In this section, I review the existing literature on state-diaspora relations. I start with an analysis of the term “diaspora”, its evolution over time, and the features that set it apart from the wider category of “transnational community”. Such distinction is important because it helps us to trace the contours (and, thus, the limits) of the increasingly loose notion of “diaspora”. I then review the literature that explores the relationship between diasporas, host-states, and homelands, paying particular attention to how the two states view and engage diasporas. The ways host-states and homelands engage diasporas are known, respectively, as the *internal* and *external politics of belonging* (or membership) (Brubaker, 2010). The former apply to populations that have permanently settled in but are not citizens of a state; whereas the latter pertain to communities that have settled outside the territory and jurisdiction of a state but claim (or are claimed) to belong to “its” nation (Brubaker, 2010). As diasporas are multi-generational communities, most existing studies assume that they are already citizens of the host-state and focus exclusively on their relationship with the homeland. As I mentioned in the Introduction, this is not the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. In this section I therefore include the host-states’ perspective on established and incipient diasporas.

(i) Introducing Diasporas

Over the last two decades, the term “diaspora” has become a buzzword in both academic and public discourses. As cross-border movements surged as a result of globalisation, so did literature investigating the relationship between states and diasporic communities. Nonetheless, diasporas are not a new phenomenon. The concept of diaspora was originally used to describe the dispersion of Jewish, Greek, and Armenian peoples. Common to these archetypal diasporas was a “central historical experience of victimhood at the hands of a cruel oppressor” (Cohen, 2008:1). This experience of traumatic dispersal motivated Cohen’s portrayal of the group as “victim diasporas” who live in one or more foreign destinations and nurture a collective memory of the homeland (2008). Cohen extended the classical definition of diasporas to African and Irish

populations and, retrospectively and controversially, to the Palestinians. Archetypal diasporas continue to influence the contemporary study and understanding of the phenomenon. As Clifford noted: “we should be able to recognise the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora without making that history a definitive model” (1994: 306).

Clifford (1994) suggested that Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diasporas should be taken as non-normative starting points for an increasingly hybrid concept. In recent times, the term “diaspora” has in fact escaped its conceptual cage (Dufoix, 2008). According to Cohen (2008), this escape took place gradually. He identified four phases: the first one is represented by the aforementioned classical notion of diaspora. The second phase started in the 1980s, and marked the first stretch to the term, which came to encompass categories that were previously known by other names: “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*” (Safran, 1991:83). Arising as a reaction to the “second phase”, the third phase loosened the term even further. Inspired by postmodernist tenets, in the mid-1990s social constructionists expressed the need for a “diaspora” that could aptly represent the complexity and deterritorialisation of identities. The current, final phase, which began at the turn of the century, partly accommodated these requests. Yet, it also highlighted the danger of turning the diaspora into a “a promiscuously capacious category”, (Tölölyan, 1996:8).

Authors from Tölölyan to Brubaker warned against the universalisation of “diaspora” which, they said, risked losing its discriminating power and its ability to distinguish between phenomena (Brubaker, 1996). Thus, the last decade has been marked by a renewed effort to contain “diaspora” whilst adapting it to a changing (i.e. globalising) world. Crucial to this endeavour has been the conceptual distinction between “diaspora” and “transnationalism”. As a matter of fact, at the same time as “diaspora” was being adapted and revived, transnational approaches began to gain traction. As both terms refer to cross-border processes and social formations operating in the context of globalisation, they feature an inevitable degree of convergence and overlap. As Thomas Faist put it, “diaspora” and “transnationalism” are “awkward dance partners, which talk about similar categories of persons involving forms of forced and voluntary migrations” (Faist, 2010:9). In discussing the notion of “diaspora”, it is thus essential that I compare it and contrast it to that of “transnationalism”.

Several scholars have sought to devise a taxonomy of modern diasporas and match them or set them apart from transnational communities. Although no consensus has been reached, Thomas Faist and Rainer Bauböck's book *Diasporas and Transnationalism* (2010) made some important steps forward in both directions. Bringing together some of the most prominent names in the field, the volume unveiled the main differences and similarities of "diaspora" and "transnationalism". I now focus on the differences which, as Faist explained, are better understood as differences in emphasis as opposed to theory. The first observation to be made concerns the focus of diaspora and transnational approaches. Both diaspora and transnationalism are elastic terms which investigate enduring cross-border relations between dispersed people and their state of origin and destination. Yet, they place different emphasis on different actors. Diaspora studies often focus on the cultural distinctiveness of diasporas and their relationship with the homeland; or, in the case of postmodern approaches, on ties among diaspora members living in different regions of the world. Transnationalism, on the other hand, pays greater attention to transnational practices and the integration of (more recent) migrants in the country of destination (Bauböck and Faist, 2010).

According to Faist (2010), differences in emphasis between diaspora and transnationalism are apparent in three more areas: the scope of the groups they describe, the concepts of identity and mobility, and time. With regard to the first dimension, Faist argued that the notion of "diaspora" is narrower than that of "transnationalism". "Diaspora" refers to religious, ethnic and national communities, whereas "transnationalism" describes a wider panoply of social connections which include (but are not limited to) diasporas. It follows that "transnational communities encompass diasporas, but not all transnational communities are diasporas" (Faist, 2010:21). The second dimension develops around the concepts of identity and mobility. Albeit used in both diaspora and transnational approaches, the former are said to pay greater attention to matters of collective identity, whilst the latter focus on questions of cross-border mobility. The third and last dimension listed by Faist is time: "diaspora" often indicates multi-generational communities who have settled in the host-state and maintain (fully or partly) distinctive national, cultural, and/or religious identities. By contrast, transnational studies analyse recent migrant flows and seldom touch upon aspects of historical continuity (Faist, 2010).

The dimensions outlined so far allow us to discern between diaspora and transnationalism. Yet, the two concepts also share some similarities that go beyond the nature of the phenomena that they describe. Most noticeably, both diasporas and transnational societal structures are defined by states and cannot be conceived of independently from them (Faist, 2010; Cohen, 1996; Ragazzi, 2006). This will become apparent in the next sections of the chapter, where I return to focus exclusively on diasporas and how states view and engage them through the internal and external politics of belonging (Brubaker, 2010)

(ii) *Diasporas as threat or resource: The view from the states*

Relationships between homelands, host-states, and diasporas are based on how the three actors see each other. Diaspora engagement by the two states, in particular, stems from the popular and opposing views of diasporas as a threat or a resource. The perception of diasporas as threat is most commonly associated with the host-state. Loyalty to more than one state has historically been a cause of suspicion among host-states and host-societies. As Tom Smith pointed out, even in the United States, where a civic understanding of nationhood prevails, diasporas are seen as “open to divided loyalties and therefore less patriotic than ‘unhyphenated’ Americans” (Smith, 1994 as cited in Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004:9). In the current context of global terror, in particular, diasporas and their networks are often associated with illegal activities and the potential for terrorist acts (Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009). Furthermore, their relationship with the homeland is believed to have the potential to spark ethnic conflict. This scenario, widely discussed in Brubaker’s work on post-communist Europe, assumes the presence of a relatively organised and politically alienated minority diaspora and a homeland that professes “the right, even the obligation, to defend” it (Brubaker, 1996, p. 57). In these circumstances the homeland, often moved by political or economic interests, can supply diasporas with otherwise unattainable resources and open up new avenues for violent conflict (Caspersen, 2008; Kemp, 2004; Sisk, 1996).

Close ties between diasporas and their homelands are thus a cause of concern among host-states. Yet, the same can be said of antagonistic relationships between the two. Strained relations can, too, compromise international stability or prompt undesired interventions by the homeland into the host-state’s territory (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). The latter prospect arises when homelands themselves see diasporas as a threat and attempt to control them and prevent them from forming an opposition force

overseas. Such behaviour usually meets the opposition of the host-state, which sees it as an interference in its internal affairs. The only conditions under which this behaviour is tolerated is when both the host-state and the homeland perceive the diaspora as a threat and have a shared interest in keeping it under control. An example of this is France and Tunisia's cooperation to prevent Islamist expansion (Brand, 2006).

The instances reported above demonstrate that host-states frequently perceive diasporas as a threat and view their (close or conflictual) relations with the homeland as potentially menacing. Yet, a number of studies have emphasised that diasporas can also benefit the host-state by contributing to peace building and conflict resolution with the homeland. These studies have illustrated several "action spheres" in which diasporas could have a positive impact; namely the political, economic, and social spheres. However, examples of peace-building initiatives have been hypothetical rather than concrete and the absence of systematic data has caused this body of literature to be dismissed as largely speculative (Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009). The view of diasporas as resources has been decidedly more widespread among homelands rather than host-states (Ragazzi, 2014).

Over the past two decades, homelands have in fact realised and tried to harness the ethno-cultural, (geo) political, and economic resources that diasporas represent (Smith, 2003; Waterbury, 2009). Material incentives have been the most common explanation for this renewed interest. Diasporas can be conspicuous source of economic support in the form of remittances and investment, which guarantee a regular influx of foreign currency into the homeland. They also provide new markets for homelands' exports and a labour pool that can help ease unemployment rates. Finally, they can contribute to "human capital upgrade" (Bauböck, 2003) with the skills and expertise that they share while abroad or bring with them in case of return (Barry, 2006; Faist, 2000; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Itzigsohn, 2000; Mahler, 2000). For these reasons, diaspora populations have often been seen as catalysers of growth in the homeland, with many studies exploring the nexus between diasporas and development.

From a political point of view, diasporas can benefit the homeland in two crucial ways, pertaining respectively to the geo-political and the domestic realms. In terms of geopolitics, homelands can use diaspora communities to influence the political dynamics of neighbouring countries or, more generally, to lobby host governments on their behalf

(Waterbury, 2014; Itzigsohn, 2000). Diasporas have often proved their ability to influence policy in their host-states. US-based Lebanese groups, for instance, played a significant role in the 1997 lift of the travel ban to Lebanon, which had been in place since 1987 (when Western people were frequently captured by pro-Iranian forces) (Brand, 2006). Likewise, in occasion of the Croatian War of Independence, the Croatian diaspora donated over \$30 million and successfully pressured the European Union for an early recognition of the new Croatian state (Varadarajan, 2010). In terms of domestic politics, homeland elites can use the support of diasporas as a basis for political legitimation (Waterbury, 2010b). This is especially true in times of regime change and economic or political hardship. In her discussion on Mexico's changing policies, Rachel Sherman noted that states reach out to their populations abroad when their political legitimacy is being challenged and the state is trying to consolidate a particular institutional order (Sherman, 1999 *as cited in* Waterbury, 2010b).

Diasporas are an important source of political legitimacy because of their symbolic value, which is represented by their contributions to state-building, national identity, and cultural (re)production. According to Waterbury (2010b), diasporas are particularly useful in the construction of national myths, which underpin nationalist political agendas and the modalities of inclusion and exclusion that determine who has access to political power and state resources. Diaspora populations often feature in myths which illustrate the forces that threaten the survival or expansion of the cultural and linguistic nation. In the case of homelands with a history of imperial or colonial occupations, diasporas who inhabit historical territories also symbolise the enduring influence of the homeland and evoke moments of past grandeur. In essence, diasporas are an important symbolic resource because they can be used to spur nationalist sentiments at home (Waterbury, 2010b).

Homelands' perceptions of diasporas as economic, political, or symbolic resources are not mutually exclusive. The same group can be seen, for instance, as both an economic and a symbolic resource. Furthermore, the seemingly antipodal views of diasporas as a threat and a resource can also co-exist. Homelands' view, or combination of views, on their populations abroad inform the specific policies that they adopt towards them. These policies are the focus of the next section, in which I also discuss the host-states' practices of integration and assimilation of incipient diasporas.

(iii) *States' strategies of diaspora engagement*

As with states' perceptions of diaspora groups, recent literature on diaspora engagement has focused mainly on homeland states and the multiple strategies that they employ to "tap" on diasporas as resources (Gamlen, 2014). The attitudes of host-states have only sporadically been taken into account. Again, the reason for this is that multi-generational diasporas are assumed to be citizens of the host-state. State citizenship is granted in an effort "to bring the formal membership status of migrants (or their descendants) into alignment with their substantive positions as long-term residents whose lives [...] are firmly anchored in the country of settlement" (Brubaker, 2010:72). Having spent a significant amount of years in the host-state, diasporas are also assumed to have undergone a process of integration or assimilation in the earlier stages of their settlement.¹⁷

Integration and assimilation are the most common forms of politics of belonging. Albeit often used interchangeably, the two are substantially different terms. With the former, the state merely sets the parameters of integration; there are no guaranteed results, and immigrants and diasporans themselves decide whether to integrate or not. More importantly, there is no mandate for people to adopt the host-state's culture, which is the defining feature of assimilation practices (Joppke and Morawska, 2002). As Joppke and Morawska (2002:5) pointed out, "the essence of old-style assimilation" is indeed cultural assimilation: "a sort of alchemy through which an immigrant [is] transformed into a standardized unit of the state-bearing nation". Whilst both integration and assimilation aim to turn migrants into members of the nation, as well as the state¹⁸, assimilation considers membership into the nation a *precondition* to membership into the state.

According to Brubaker, after a period of globalisation-driven euphoria, the recent climate of distrust and fear has led to a renewed emphasis on (more) assimilationist politics of belonging (Brubaker, 2010). The enduring normative appeal of assimilation can be explained by host-states' understanding of it as a "process of change in identity" (Friedman, 1994:28) that leads to a wholehearted identification with the values, history,

¹⁷ States' policies towards migrants are widely covered in migration research. The predominant focus of the latter on *immigration* policies also explains diaspora studies' almost exclusive interest in homelands (Gamlen, 2014). Very few studies have considered the policies of both.

¹⁸ This points to the enduring relevance of the "nation-state" model in policies concerning the membership status of populations within the state's territory.

and culture of the host-society (Brinkerhoff, 2008). Combined with the legal recognition of diasporans as members of the state (i.e. state citizenship), this is believed to secure the loyalty of diaspora groups as well as the host-state's exclusive control over their activities. Such assumption is, however, misleading. As Brinkerhoff (2008) noted, assimilation can take different forms. Even fully assimilated diasporas can experience a renewed attachment to their ancestral homeland or maintain some level of identification with it despite losing its customs and language (Grosfoguel & Cordero-Guzmán, 1998). Indeed, diasporic identities are characterised by some level of hybridity. Rather than being a zero-sum game between one culture and the other, they are an amalgamation of features from the homeland, the host-state, and diasporas' lived experience (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Smith, 2008). Such amalgamation takes place in integrated and even assimilated diasporas, engendering the aforementioned "divided loyalties" that are at the basis of host-states' suspicion of diasporic groups.

Host-state's perception of diasporas as (potential) threats stands in contraposition with the homelands' widespread view of diasporas as resources and the related efforts to harness them. Homelands can choose between a wide range of tools to establish and maintain access to the resources that diasporas represent, as for instance the full or partial extension of political and/or social citizenship (e.g. voting rights, access to the welfare state and the labour market); or the symbolic inclusion in the ethno-cultural community through actions such as ethnic identity cards and exchange programmes (Waterbury, 2010b). These and other policies are part of the external politics of belonging of the homeland and vary according to the homeland's prevailing interests at a given time (Brubaker, 2010; Gamlen, 2006). They are typically enacted through embassies and consulates - the extra-territorial extensions of the state.

Embassies and consulates fall under the purview of either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or one of the increasingly common state departments tasked with the oversight of populations abroad. A few examples are the Ministry of Diaspora in Serbia and Armenia; the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in the Philippines (see e.g. Gonzales 1998); the Office of Overseas Chinese in China; and Russia's Council of Compatriots (see e.g. Brand, 2006). Through the work of these institutions, homeland states seek to incorporate and control transnational linkages with populations abroad. In the attempt to mould these relations and harness targeted members of the diaspora, homelands "extend

their sovereignty and redefine the boundaries of citizenship and membership [...] through institutionalised packages of engagement policies” (Waterbury, 2010b:16).

At the furthest end of the engagement spectrum is the contentious policy of dual citizenship. Within the panoply of eligible policies, dual citizenship is the most effective one in creating a system of rights and duties that binds even averse and detached diasporas to the homeland (Waterbury, 2009). Furthermore, from the perspective of the diaspora itself, it has the merit of recognising not only the responsibilities of the people, but also those of the state (Varadarajan, 2010). Albeit increasingly accepted and widespread, dual citizenship is however a frequent object of controversy in both host-states and homelands (Faist, Gerdes and Rieple, 2006; Ragazzi, 2014). On the one hand, host-states often see it as a threat to their sovereignty and integration or assimilation policies. On the other, homelands have to deal with the discontent of their citizens, who worry about issues such as the cost of extending the state’s obligation to new members and the impact of “new votes” on domestic politics (Waterbury, 2009).

A similar argument can be made in relation to non-resident dual citizenship or, as Bauböck calls it, “ethnizenship” (2007). Ethnizenship is a form of external quasi-citizenship that consists of extra-territorial benefits or special status to diaspora members who travel to the homeland (Waterbury, 2009). Some states may afford fast-track access to citizenship to diaspora members who do not live (and may have never lived) in their state of origin or introduce the preferential naturalisation of diasporas (Pogonyi 2011; Waterbury, 2014). Whilst entailing special concessions and mobility, ethnizenship is more of a symbolic form of membership and nation-building, which may or may not result in the actual enjoyment of the aforementioned benefits (Waterbury, 2009). As such, ethnizenship is less problematic than dual citizenship. Nonetheless, it can still be met with opposition by the home society. The Hungarian people, for instance, protested the introduction of the 2001 “Status Law”, which proposed to make regional diaspora members “more than tourists, less than citizens”. At the basis of such opposition were the issues of representation without taxation, absentee voting, the provision of both homeland-centred and extra-territorial benefits, and the potential repercussions on relations with neighbouring states (Waterbury, 2009:6).

Home societies’ resistance to ethnizenship unveils their apprehension over the inclusion of diasporas into the political community of the state (and especially enfranchisement).

Given the potential costs of overly inclusive policies, homelands prefer to expand thinner versions of membership. Some examples are dual nationality, that is “citizenship without the right to vote or hold office” (Gamlen, 2006:11); or the expansion of civil and social rights. In 2007, for instance, Poland passed the long-contested “Polish Charter”, which recognised ethnic Poles’ belonging to the Polish nation and afforded them several social rights in the homeland. As part of this “semi-citizenship”, Poland distributed a Polish identity card which was issued by consulates and worked as a “lifetime nationality visa” (Waterbury, 2009:6). Consular cards are an increasingly popular tool for states with large diasporas and can translate into privileges or the removal of previously-held duties (Gamlen, 2006).¹⁹

Purely symbolic tools of engagement also exist. Homelands may engage diasporas through state-sponsored institutions and initiatives, such as the establishment and funding of centres that teach their national language, history, and culture (e.g. UK’s British Council, Italy’s Istituto Dante Alighieri, and Turkey’s Yunus Emre) (Ragazzi, 2014). Alternatively, they may include them in celebrations of national holidays, conferences and heritage tourism campaigns, and, often undertaking sudden rhetorical shifts, depict them as national heroes (Gamlen, 2014; De Haas, 2006; Martinez-Saldana, 2003; Varadarajan, 2010). These initiatives have an overtly symbolic value. They are intended to strengthen the diaspora’s attachment to the homeland and support the survival of the nation.

By contrast, when homelands view diasporas as (primarily) economic resources, state-led initiatives take an overtly economic orientation. Thus, homelands may encourage money flows through tax-free remittance systems or ensure diasporas’ preferential access to the labour market (Waterbury, 2010a). These policies are typically beneficial to both the homeland and the diaspora: in order to gain durable and legitimate access to their financial resources, homelands must in fact present diasporas with credible incentives. Through the association “Amicales des travailleurs et commerçants”, for instance, Morocco afforded its diaspora favourable conditions in terms of investment,

¹⁹ Among the states who have introduced them are India (Person of Indian Origin cards) (Varadarajan, 2005), Croatia (Cro-cards), and Turkey (Pink Cards) (Ragazzi, 2014). Ethnic identity cards Turkey’s pink cards were said to facilitate the relinquishment of Turkish citizenship by affording former citizens all rights except for voting (Bauböck, 2010). In some US countries, undocumented migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Brazil, can use consular cards in lieu of local documentation to open bank accounts or obtain driver’s licenses (Ragazzi, 2014; Pérez Juárez, 2003).

land and property ownership and, more generally, loans and purchase/sale negotiations (Brand, 2006).²⁰ All of these moves reflect the economic value of the Moroccan diaspora. Nonetheless, Morocco also used the Amicales as a means to control potentially dangerous criticism from its population abroad (Brand, 2006; Van Heelsum, 2002). Morocco's stance, which De Haas (2007) aptly described as in "between courting and controlling", is important for two reasons: first, it demonstrates that homelands' engagement is often informed by overlapping (and sometimes competing) views of the diaspora. Second, it reminds us that there may be another side to diaspora engagement.

As Dèlano and Gamlen (2014:46) pointed out, diaspora policies may aim to control diasporas and institutionalise their links with the homeland in order to "reproduce the citizen-sovereign relationship beyond territorial borders". Gamlen (2006) argued that engagement policies, and especially symbolic policies, serve to create a homogeneous, state-oriented diaspora with a shared mentality. In other words: they seek to transform co-nationals abroad into governable subjects through the transnationalisation of governmentality (Gamlen, 2006). According to Laurie Brand, attempts to monitor and control the economic and political activities of diasporas are characteristic of illiberal homelands and more easily carried out in illiberal host-countries, which are less likely to oppose them than liberal states (Brand, 2002; 2010).

As I point out in the next section, illiberal host-states are seldom analysed in the literature on state-diaspora relations.²¹ The latter has been characterised by a predominant focus on Europe and the United States (Brand, 2006) which in turn affects the accounts of the reasons, modalities, and consequences of engagement that I have highlighted above. In this section, I have shown that existing studies usually depict diasporas as representing either a threat or a resource to the states, with the former view most commonly associated with the host-state and the latter with the homeland. Depending on their view(s), the two states employ different policies towards diasporas; these usually entail citizenship in the host-state and a certain degree of inclusion into the homeland nation and/or state. It follows that, whilst the two states may "compete" for the loyalty of the group, diasporas

²⁰ In the early 1990s, the "*amicales*" counted 128 associations in France alone. It was later substituted with a full-fledged ministry concerned with the affairs of Moroccans abroad and a second institution called "Foundation Hassan II pour les marocains résidant à l'étranger" (The Hassan II foundation for Moroccans Resident Abroad) (Brand, 2006).

²¹ By contrast, there are several studies exploring states' relations and engagement with more recent migrants (e.g. labour migrants) in illiberal host countries (see e.g. Sabban, 2002; Jureidini and Moukarbel, 2004; Kapiszewski, 2017).

can often benefit from their dual engagement with the homeland and the host-state. In the next section, I discuss what I believe to be the main limitations of this picture painted by the literature and reflect on how the case study of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia can contribute to debates on state-diaspora relations.

2.3 Investigating state-diaspora relations in illiberal contexts

As mentioned above, the first limitation of the literature is that it tends to focus on diasporas in Europe and the United States – that is, in liberal and economically developed countries of the West (Brand, 2006). Such focus informs the predominant features of the literature that I highlighted in the previous paragraphs and, consequently, some of the criticisms that I address later in this section. Here, I start by questioning the understanding of diasporas as homogeneous groups that fall under the categories of “threat” and/or “resource”. These two categories are at least partly determined by the aforementioned geographical focus: in liberal and developed states, diasporas have greater opportunities to accumulate wealth, express political dissent or support for the homeland, and be chosen as a symbol of national pride. These possibilities are inextricably linked to diaspora’s inclusion into the host-state, and more specifically their access to citizenship status and rights. This leads me to my second point: the need to pay greater attention to the role of host-states in (co-)shaping diasporas.

Host-states are important for two reasons: first, they determine the diaspora’s position within the host-society, and thus the extent to which they can be a “threat” or a “resource” to the homeland (as well as the host-state itself). Second, the host-state’s regime type and relationship with the homeland influence the extent to which the latter can engage its populations abroad and the forms that such engagement can take. Connected to both points is my third criticism of the recent literature: the implicit assumption that diasporas can (and often do) benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state by enjoying *formal* and/or (aspects of) *substantive* citizenship in both (Brubaker, 2010). I elaborate on each one of these observations in the paragraphs below.

(i) Diasporas as homogeneous threats and/or resources

In Section 2.4., I showed that states usually view diasporas as a threat, a resource, or a combination of both. These views generate more or less restrictive politics of belonging on the side of the host-state (e.g. integration, assimilation); whereas homelands can

resort to an array of strategies aiming to control the diaspora and harness its symbolic, political, and/or economic value. As previously stated, the literature has paid greater attention to the different strategies deployed by homelands. Several scholars have produced typologies of diaspora policies and frameworks for the study of state-diaspora relations (see e.g. Waterbury, 2009; Ragazzi, 2014; Gamlen 2014; Delano and Gamlen, 2015). Albeit recognising homelands' multiple and sometimes competing views of diasporas, much of the existing scholarship has however treated the "diaspora" as a single, homogeneous group towards which the homeland deploys a single, homogeneous policy. The limits of such approach have been highlighted by Délano and Mylonas who, in the introduction to their special issue on the "micro-foundations of diaspora politics", invited scholars to "move beyond generalisations" and recognise "the heterogeneity within diaspora groups" (2017:3). Their call was answered by Mylonas and Žilović (2017) who, writing in the same special issue, accounted for the variation between diaspora policies toward different sub-groups of the Serbian and Greek diasporas.

Focusing on ethnic return migration policies, Mylonas and Žilović (2017) argued that homelands' (more or less favourable) policies toward sub-diaspora groups depend on their foreign policy goals toward these groups' host-countries. If a homeland has a revisionist stance over a host-state, it will pursue less favourable repatriation policies than those targeting diasporas who live in countries over which it has no claims. The reason for this is that in the former case, the homeland can use its diaspora to exert leverage in inter-state relations, whereas in latter the diaspora can better serve the national interest by being located in strategic areas or amending a workforce deficit within the homeland itself (Mylonas and Žilović, 2017). According to Mylonas (2013), foreign policy goals are also at the basis of the Republic of Korea's differential treatment of various sub-diaspora groups. Here, the treatment of sub-diasporas is determined by the role that they play in the host-country versus the role that they would play in the homeland. To put it simply, diaspora policies depend on whether each subgroup is more useful from an economic, political, or geo-political point of view in the host-state or in the homeland.

A similar argument was put forward by Gerasimos Tsourapas (2015), who investigated Egypt's multi-tier emigrant policies while paying attention to state actions towards both emigrant and diaspora groups. He found that Egypt engaged in the differential treatment of skilled population groups living in Western countries and low/middle-skilled

population groups living in Arab countries and suggested that this variation could be explained by Egypt's domestic political economy and foreign policy goals. More specifically, he argued that multi-tiered policies were based on the perceived utility of a group abroad *versus* the perceived utility of its return to the homeland. In the case of Egypt, the perceived utility of skilled Egyptian abroad was negative: not only did the group represent Egypt's "brain drain", they were also vocal critics of the regime, and thus useless in the advancement of its foreign policy goals. This, combined with the useful skills that the group could contribute, prompted Egypt to devise a policy that encouraged their return (Tsourapas, 2015). The opposite was true for low and middle-skilled emigrants living in Arab countries. Their emigration helped to preserve Egypt's relevance in the region while at the same time ensuring a steady flow of remittances and reducing the problems of overpopulation and underemployment. Their perceived utility abroad was therefore positive, prompting Egypt to minimise policy towards them to avoid compromising relations with the host state and discourage their return to maximise the length of their permanence abroad (Tsourapas, 2015).

My argument is similar to Tsouparas', Žilović's, and Mylonas's in that it points to the existence of "diasporas within the diaspora" and the homelands' differential treatment of distinct sub-groups on the basis of their domestic and foreign policy goals. However, unlike these three authors, my research is not founded on the assumption that there is a significant utility to diaspora groups abroad. This is of course dictated by the case study that I focus on: that of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia is made up mostly of poor fishermen who have been unable to obtain Cambodian citizenship despite having spent decades in the host-country. Whilst in the past they represented a resource to both states, they have now lost most of their political value. Furthermore, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have not been represented in Cambodian politics and have not been active in (or informed about) Vietnamese politics. As such, they are an example of diaspora that is neither a significant "threat" nor a significant "resource" to the homeland. These two categorisations are in fact more representative of populations who live in countries that are both economically developed and liberal. Here, diaspora communities have greater opportunities to flourish as friends or opponents of their homeland state. From a political point of view, they can form organisations; critique and protest against homeland regimes, or lobby the host-government on their behalf. From an economic point of view,

they can accumulate wealth more easily than diasporas in developing states and send substantial remittances to the homeland. Finally, and linked to the previous points, their (perceived) success in “rich” countries makes them particularly fit for the role of “national heroes” and symbolic flag-bearers.

The situation is significantly different in less-developed, illiberal regimes – of which Cambodia is an example. The Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia is unable to organise politically or contribute remittances to the homeland; given its status, it is also unlikely to have a significant symbolic value and be depicted as a symbol of the Vietnamese nation abroad. This is especially true if we compare it to the Việt Kiều (Overseas Vietnamese) living in developed countries.²² The contrast between these two sub-groups within the larger Vietnamese diaspora exemplifies the non-homogeneous nature of diaspora populations. This non-homogeneity is reflected in the way homelands view different groups within the diaspora and in how they engage them. Both of these aspects are, in turn, influenced by two, inter-related, elements, which have been often overlooked in the literature on diasporas: the diasporic group’s position within the host-state and bilateral relations between the host-state and the homeland.

(ii) *The importance of the host-state: domestic politics and bilateral relations with the homeland*

Homelands’ views and treatment of diaspora groups are inextricably linked to the position that diasporas occupy within their host-countries. The opportunity to become a “threat” and, especially, a “resource” is in fact contingent on diasporas’ access to the civil, political, economic, and social rights that citizenship bestows. Mainstream literature tends to assume that diasporas are citizens of their host-states. Again, such assumption stems from the predominant focus on diasporas living in developed and liberal states, where citizenship is the usual outcome of long-term settlement. This, however, is often not the case in illiberal contexts. This is partly due to the enduring salience of ethnicity as a determinant of citizenship: in Cambodia, like in many illiberal Southeast Asian states, ethnicity goes hand in hand with nationhood: Anderson’s

²² Wealthy Vietnamese in developed host-states have represented a professional, economic, and symbolic resource to the Vietnamese state. I elaborate on this in Chapter Five.

“imagined communities” (1983) are defined along ethnic and racial lines, and *ethno-nationalism* is the glue that holds nation and state together.²³

As Heder and Ledgerwood (1996:20) noted, “the Khmer discuss themselves as a single line of descendants, with a corresponding centrality assigned to notions of flesh and blood”. Such emphasis on ethnicity appears to validate the primordialist contention that nations have developed from ancient *ethnie* (which would make my previous use of “imagined communities” unfitting). To accept the primordialist explanation would however mean to neglect a central feature of Khmer ethno-nationalism: its use and abuse by political elites (Edwards, 1996). Political competition has been one of the main forces fuelling the (re)production and mobilisation of ethnic differences. In *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (1991), Paul Brass observed that competition for power often involves the politicisation of cultural values, forms and practices of ethnic communities. In the next chapter, I explain in detail how Cambodia’s political elites, and especially opposition parties (from FUNCINPEC to the CNRP), have mobilised ethno-nationalist sentiments over time. For now, it is sufficient to know that ethno-nationalism in Cambodia has explicitly targeted the Vietnamese, causing them to become Cambodia’s quintessential “other” and underpinning the Cambodian government’s stance towards the group (Edwards, 1996).

Unlike the great majority of diasporas in liberal host-states, the Vietnamese have not been fully included in the Cambodian state and nation. Such “full” inclusion has also not been the Vietnamese government’s goal: whilst the Politburo has been making efforts to encourage the return of wealthy and skilled diasporans, applying the same policies to the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia would have been detrimental to the government’s economic interests. Furthermore, Vietnam has not taken any significant steps to pressure the Cambodian government to grant citizenship to the diaspora. Despite Cambodia’s recent cosying up to China, the two countries have in fact enjoyed thirty years of friendly ties. This brings me to my second point regarding the host-state: the importance of its relations with the homeland in determining the extent and form of diaspora engagement. As we will see in the next chapter, Cambodia-Vietnam relations have been characterised by extensive cooperation and the mutual respect of ASEAN’s principle of non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. Combined with the

²³ This is exemplified by the conflation of the terms *Khmer* and *Cambodian* (e.g. Khmer/Cambodian nation; Khmer/Cambodian citizenship), which I discuss in Chapter Five.

disadvantages that both states associate with the inclusion of the Vietnamese and the illiberal nature of their regimes, the two elements suggest that the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments may collaborate rather than “compete” over the Vietnamese diaspora. This, in turn, points to a situation in which the diaspora may not benefit from its dual ties with the homeland and the host-state. I discuss the potential implication of diaspora engagement in the following paragraphs.

(iii) *The “perks” of being diaspora*

As I noted at the end of Section 2.2, recent literature on state-diaspora relations often implies that diasporas benefit or have the potential to benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state. Most notably, policies such as dual citizenship and ethnizenship allow diasporans to access citizenship status or social/ political rights. Hence, dual ties can translate into *formal* and/or (some aspects of) *substantive* citizenship in both states (Lister, 1998; Brubaker, 2010). The concepts of formal and substantive citizenship refer, respectively, to formal state membership and “the ability to act as a citizen and to be respected as one” (Staeheli, 1999:64). To better understand and operationalise these notions, I suggest juxtaposing them to the three dimensions of legal status, rights, and political activity (Bosniak, 2000; 2006). These dimensions, which were identified by Linda Bosniak as the three main facets of the concept of “citizenship”, allow us to expand on the above definitions and provide a more detailed account of what formal and substantive citizenship entail.²⁴

In this thesis, I understand legal status to be a reflection of *formal citizenship*. State membership indeed means “formal, juridical membership in an organised political community” (Bosniak, 2006:19). It is conferred through legal documents, which are granted (or should be granted) in accordance with the two principles of *jus sanguinis* (law of the blood) and *jus soli* (law of the soil); or through naturalisation (Bosniak, 2000). By contrast, I view the dimensions of rights and political activity as manifestations of *substantive citizenship*. Understood as the aforementioned “ability to act as a citizen” (Staeheli, 1999:64), *substantive citizenship* encapsulates the liberal and

²⁴ Linda Bosniak added a fourth dimension, that of identity/solidarity, to her account of the different meanings associated with the concept of “citizenship”. Citizenship as identity/solidarity refers to the psychological dimension of citizenship: “the affective ties of identification and solidarity that we maintain with groups of other people in the world” (Bosniak, 2000:479). Whilst partly linked to people’s relationship with their homeland and host-state, such dimension also has independent sources in culture and society (Bosniak, 2000). For this reason, I chose not to include it in my own definition of (substantive) citizenship to avoid veering away from my main focus overcomplicating my argument.

civic republican traditions of citizenship. The former highlights the enjoyment of rights as the characterising feature of social membership: “citizenship requires the possession of rights [...] and those who possess rights are usually presumed thereby to enjoy citizenship” (Bosniak, 2006:19). The latter draws upon the Aristotelian conception of engaged citizenship, placing more emphasis on the responsibilities of the citizen - and particularly his or her contribution in decision-making (Lister, 1998). The rights and political activity dimensions of citizenship are entangled and overlapping. As Lister (1998) argued, citizenship rights enable people to be active members of the political community. Furthermore, both are shaped by political and economic factors (Sandel, 1996).

In existing literature, diasporas one or more of the dimensions of status, rights, and political activity in the homeland and all of them in the liberal host-state (of which they are citizens). As a matter of fact, in liberal host-states even non-citizens can sometimes enjoy rights or participate in the political community at various levels despite the governments’ reluctance to grant them citizenship status. However, as I suggested in the previous section, the situation is likely to be different in illiberal contexts. Diasporas’ access to Bosniak’s dimensions of citizenship in the host-state is indeed dependent upon inclusion through assimilation or integration which, as we have seen, is not always a given in illiberal states such as Cambodia. Moreover, access to one or more dimensions in the homeland is contingent upon the “value” of diaspora groups. Diaspora policies aim to attract, and are thus attached to, the economic, political, and symbolic resources that diasporas represent. If, as again is the case of the Vietnamese in Cambodia, diasporas are not sufficiently valuable to the homeland, the latter is unlikely to deploy engagement strategies that afford access to status, rights, or political activity. Then how, if at all, do diasporas in illiberal contexts benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state?

To answer this question, I draw upon Victor Turner’s notion of liminality, which is defined as the transitional period between “two relatively fixed or stable conditions” (1967:95,96). Living between Cambodia and Vietnam but not being formal citizens of either state, the Vietnamese inhabit a “liminal space between insiders and outsiders” (Swerts, 2014:296). According to Turner, such transitory space has an empowering and transformative potential. This view has been embraced and advanced by scholars working on migrants, refugees, and stateless populations, who have explored how

liminality can offer opportunities for contestation and resistance (see e.g. McNevin, 2006; Nyers, 2011; Isin and Nielsen, 2013; Isin and Nyers, 2014; Swerts, 2017). Nonetheless, when protracted indefinitely, liminality can also breed insecurity, therefore losing its empowering potential (Menjívar, 2006). In Chapter Seven, I show that in the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, liminality is (re)produced by the two governments to ensure that the Vietnamese are more easily governable. As such, whilst encompassing access to (some) rights in the two states, liminality ultimately constrains the agency of the Vietnamese rather than empowering them. This reflection answers my research question on the implications of the states' engagement on the diaspora. As I anticipated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, my other two questions concern the reasons and modalities of diaspora engagement in illiberal contexts, thereby relating to the previous discussions on diasporas as non-homogeneous groups, and the role of host-states and host-state/homeland relations in determining the form and extent of diaspora engagement.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the existing literature on state-diaspora relations and highlighted what I believe to be its main limitations while drawing upon the case study of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. In the first section of the chapter, I discussed the features and the ambiguities of the main terms that inform my theoretical and empirical discussions, namely the “state”, the “nation”, and the “nation-state”. In the second section, I introduced the notion of “diaspora” and reviewed existing studies on state-diaspora relations. Here, I paid particular attention to how both host-states and homelands perceive and engage diasporas. I pointed out that states tend to view diasporas as a threat and/or a resource in economic, political, and symbolic terms. These views are commonly associated with the host-state and the homeland, respectively, and inform the policies that the states employ towards the diaspora itself.

Recent literature has focused mainly on engagement strategies by the homeland. Homeland states can engage diasporas through a variety of tools ranging from dual citizenship and “ethnizenship” (Bauböck, 2007), to purely economic and symbolic policies. Whilst happening at different levels, most of these strategies share the potential to benefit diasporas, for they enable diasporans to access rights and opportunities in the homeland whilst also being citizens of the host-state. As such, many existing studies

assume that diasporas enjoy *formal* and *substantive citizenship* in the host-state and at least some dimensions of both in the homeland (Brubaker 2010). This (generally positive) picture painted by the recent literature may however be misleading.

Studies on state-diaspora relations have focused predominantly on diasporas living in liberal and economically developed countries. This geographical bias is at the basis of most of the limitations that I presented in the third section of the chapter, where I used the case study of the Vietnamese in Cambodia to suggest that: a) diasporas are not homogenous groups which fall under the categories of threat and/or resource; b) their position and, accordingly, the modalities and extent of homeland engagement are (co)determined by their status within the host-state and the host-state's bilateral relations with the homeland; c) their dual ties with the homeland and the host-states may not translate into rights and/or benefits in both states. These observations point to the need for further research on diasporas living in less developed and illiberal host-states. My thesis aims to be a step in this direction.

Through the investigations of the research questions introduced in Chapter One, I aim to expand on each one of the points above. The research questions will thus be at the centre of my empirical chapters, which will focus on the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' perceptions and engagement of the diaspora and the consequences of such engagement on the diaspora itself. Before I discuss the empirical findings of my research, I shall however introduce the historical and political context of my study. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical and (Geo)Political Background

Introduction

“Be careful not to spill your master’s tea” is a popular Cambodian saying. It refers to what many Khmer know as the *Prayat Kompup Te Ong*, a ferocious slaughter that took place at the beginning of the 19th century and in which the Vietnamese allegedly buried the Khmer up to their necks and used their heads as a support for the boiling water of their superiors’ tea. Alongside the Vietnamese serving as ogres in Khmer folklore, the saying shows how the image of “the dangerous Vietnamese” has become embedded in Khmer culture and everyday life (Becker, 1986). Since their first incursions into Cambodian territory in the tenth century, the Vietnamese have in fact been known and feared for their belligerent nature and expansionist aims. Such characterisation has been nurtured and exploited by political elites from the French colonial state to the most recent (and recently dissolved) opposition party CNRP.

In the first section of this chapter, I retrace the evolution of Khmer ethno-national sentiments and explore how they have affected the treatment and legal status of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia at different points in time. Echoing Brass (1991), I argue that elite competition has been the main driver of Khmer people’s anti-Vietnamese and ethnonational attitudes. The sustained deployment of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric across parties and time has contributed to the credibility of its core insinuations, thereby enhancing its resonance among Khmer voters and cementing its vote-winning appeal among political parties. The past and present ascendancy of anti-Vietnamese discourses have underpinned the Cambodian government’s view of the Vietnamese diaspora and, consequently, the diaspora’s legal status in the country. As I explain in Chapter Five, both have been heavily influenced by domestic politics and the Cambodian government’s bilateral relations with the Vietnamese government.

The latter factors are the main focus of the second section of this chapter. Here, I demonstrate that Hun Sen and the CPP have managed to stay in power due to a combination of domestic patronage politics and external support by the Vietnamese and, more recently, the Chinese regimes. Counter to the popular argument that the

Cambodian government's relationship with the Vietnamese government has been compromised by the one with Beijing, I show that Cambodia-Vietnam cooperation has continued to increase. Over the past ten years, the two countries have strengthened economic, political, and military cooperation. Furthermore, they have collaborated on a series of "unofficial" matters such as the issue of Vietnamese Montagnard refugees and illegal logging and timber trade. Cambodia and Vietnam's "unofficial" cooperation has reflected the "special relationship" between the two states (Heder, 2018). As with Cambodia's history of ethnonational manipulation by political elites, understanding this "special relationship" helps us to paint the background to the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' view and engagement of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom.

3.1 Historical Background: the evolution of Khmer ethno-nationalism

In this section I analyse the historical evolution of Khmer ethno-nationalism from the pre-colonial period to today (2018). In line with Brass's modernist (or, as he calls it, "instrumentalist") understanding of ethnic identity formation, I show that there was nothing inevitable about the rise of ethno-nationalist and anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Cambodia (Brass, 1991). Political elites from seemingly antipodal forces have appropriated the anti-Vietnamese discourse and tailored it to the needs of different political and economic contexts. It was the latter, not ethnic groups' cultural values, which posed the basis for ethnic mobilisation. Ethnic identity and nationalism were thus part of "a process created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities" (Brass, 1991:16). Whilst this process did tap into Khmer cultural values, it only did so to select those which could be politically valuable and manipulate them to either legitimise or challenge power. Both Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge have used "Khmerness" in both ways: first, to strengthen their mandate as protectors of the Cambodian nation; and later, to challenge the legitimacy of the PRK/SOC and the CPP. I discuss this at length in the following paragraphs, which begin with an analysis of Vietnamese migration and Khmer-Vietnamese ethnic competition under the French Protectorate (1863-1953).

(i) *Pre-colonial and Colonial period*

Vietnamese migration into Cambodian territory began well before French colonialism.²⁵ Between the tenth and the nineteenth century, Vietnam extended South and encroached onto the Kingdom of Champa and the Mekong Delta, bringing the first Vietnamese settlers into (what is now) Cambodia (Ehrentraut, 2013; McHale, 2013).^{26,27} This expansion culminated in the partial annexation and occupation of Cambodia between 1835 and 1845 (Ehrentraut, 2013). During this time, Vietnam aspired to a certain degree of cultural assimilation of the Khmer, as proven by Emperor Minh Mạng’s assertion in the 1830s that: “[The Khmer] should be taught to speak Vietnamese. [Our habits of] dress and table manners must be followed. If there is any out-dated or barbarous custom that can be simplified or reprised, then do so” (Gottesman, 2004:159). Whilst failing to “Vietnamize” Cambodia (Gottesman, 2004:160), Vietnam’s expansionist and assimilationist goals resulted in a sense of historical injustice and fear of extinction that the Khmer associated with Vietnam and its people (Ehrentraut, 2013; Edwards, 2007).

Such feelings were capitalised on by the French colonial state, which justified its intervention by invoking Cambodia’s need for protection against the “Thai tigers and Vietnamese crocodiles” that surrounded it and aimed to swallow it (Goscha, 2012; Heder

²⁵ The colonisation of the territories that formed what became known as French Indochina took place gradually in the second half of the 19th century. The French conquest began in 1862 in Cochinchina - the southern part of what the French referred to as “Empire of Annam” (Goscha, 2012). Throughout the next thirty years, the French pushed North and divided the central and northern sections of the Empire into the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin (Goscha, 2012). In the same period, France established the French Protectorate of Cambodia (1863) and the French protectorate of Laos (1893). These territories were formally brought together in 1885 under the name of French Indochina.

²⁶ By using the terms “Cambodia” and “Vietnam”, I do not mean to suggest that there have long been two nation-states called by these names. Rather, I use “Cambodia” and “Vietnam” for convenience when referring to prolonged periods of time encompassing different shapes and forms of the two states. Between the tenth and nineteenth century, for instance, “Vietnam” has been called Đại Cồ Việt (968-1054), Đại Việt (1054-1400), Đại Ngu (1400-1407), Giao Chi (1407-1427), Đại Việt (1428-1804), and Việt Nam (1804-1839). As Goscha (2016) pointed out, “Vietnam” in its current form has only existed for a little over eighty-five years. A similar argument can be made in relation to “Cambodia”, whose history is also characterised by three centuries of Dark Ages (between 1431 and 1863) of which little is known – including the state’s official name(s).

²⁷ At the time, the Mekong Delta was inhabited by ethnic Khmer and had been claimed by the Cambodian monarchy. Whilst modern Vietnamese maintain that Cambodian monarchs “ceded” the territory in 1757, Cambodians argue that the cession was forced: “the term cession poorly characterizes these incessant [Vietnamese] encroachments, which did not ratify any formal act” (Aymonier, 1904: 787;788). The issue was a matter of contention before and after the French Protectorate, and has been revived regularly until the present day.

and Ledgerwood, 1995).²⁸ Despite their claims that “latent animosity” already existed between Khmer and Vietnamese, the French played a significant role in fomenting ethnic hatred between the two populations. Through the colonial “divide-and-rule” strategy, the French persuaded the Khmer that the Vietnamese were a threat to their survival while depicting themselves as Cambodia’s saviours from extinction (McHale, 2013; Barnett, 1990). Their behaviour is the first testimony of how political elites in Cambodia constructed and emphasised ethnic differences to gain or maintain power. It also demonstrates that the current perception of the Vietnamese has built upon colonial discourses and stereotypes (Edwards, 1996).

As Christopher Goscha noted, colonial stereotypes influenced the way colonial populations came to view one another during and, to a certain extent, after the colonial period. In colonial times, the Vietnamese were considered “industrious”, “intelligent”, and “cunning”; whereas the Khmer were portrayed as “childlike”, “sweet”, and “lazy” (Goscha, 2012:95). For the Vietnamese, this meant that the “lazy” Khmer owed them gratitude for their contribution to the development of Cambodia (Goscha, 2012). The Khmer, on the other hand, took such categorisations as an indicator of their moral superiority over the “mendacious, dirty thieving” Vietnamese (Edwards, 1996:54). As Edwards pointed out, such “seemingly definitive categories” have been used by Cambodian politicians up to the present day and have “laid the groundwork for the ethnic nationalism that has been featured so strongly in representations of nationhood plied in post-colonial Cambodia” (Edwards, 1996:53,54).

Colonial stereotypes have also contributed to shaping ethno-nationalist sentiments by exacerbating Khmer people’s resentment towards the Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, whilst depicting the latter as a menace to Cambodia’s survival, the French relied almost exclusively on “dynamic” Vietnamese bureaucrats and workers to fill the lower echelons of the colonial state in Cambodia. This contradictory move engendered the first mass migration of ethnic Vietnamese into the country and had significant demographic, social, and political effects which sparked heated debates that outlived the French protectorate

²⁸ The epithets of “Thai tigers” and “Vietnamese crocodiles” appear in the old Khmer proverb: “When you go into the water, crocodiles await you; and when you go onto the land, tigers devour you” (Schier, 1986:139).

(Goscha, 2012).²⁹ Such debates marked the beginning of Cambodian nationalism as we know it today. As Goscha put it, the Cambodian nationalist elite was:

“[...] increasingly opposed to the growing role that the Vietnamese were playing in the administration and modernization of *their* state, colonial or not, and increasingly angry at the French colonizer for allowing these “foreigners” to do so. [...] [Cambodian] nationalists increasingly began to construct the Vietnamese as “outsiders”, a threat to an emerging, inclusive national identity in the making *during* the colonial period” (Goscha, 2012:97).

Cambodian nationalists were worried that sustained Vietnamese immigration would result in a mass of non-assimilated foreigners who lived and worked in Cambodia, but were outside of Cambodia’s jurisdiction (for they were subject to French law). To address the issue, and to the surprise of the French and the Vietnamese, the most vocal nationalists proposed the assimilation of the Vietnamese through a process of “Khmerization” - that is transformation (from French) into *Cambodian* subjects (Goscha, 2012).³⁰

The support for assimilation, rather than exclusion, emerged clearly in a series of letters published by *La Presse Indochinoise* between 1934 and 1937. The letters expanded upon a debate that had started in the early 1930s over the unilateral expulsion by the Cambodian Résident-Superieur of an “Annamese mayor” (in this case meaning ethnic Viet village leader) who had been born in Cambodia. The controversy was the first documented debate over the legal status of the Vietnamese living in Cambodia: at its core was the question of whether a fellow colonised of the same French Indochinese colonial state should be legally considered a “foreigner” in one of its member *pays*; and the degree to which ethnicity/race (*jus sanguinis*) or place of birth/territory (*jus soli*) should determine legal belonging in the colonial state (Goscha, 2012). For the

²⁹ Goscha (2012) reported that: “in 1874, an early colonial census noted 4,452 Vietnamese out of a total Cambodian population of 746,424. In 1911, after significant Vietnamese immigration, the totals were 79,090 Vietnamese versus 1,360,188 Cambodians. Ten years later, however, the Vietnamese population in Cambodia almost doubled to 140,225 out of a total Cambodian population of two million [...] In 1936, the Cambodian population topped three million, with the Vietnamese numbering 191,000”.

³⁰ In *Going Indochinese* (2012), Christopher Goscha reported the letters of four Cambodian writers known by the pseudonyms of Nimo Rathavan, “I.K.”, Khemarak Bottra, and Khemeravanich. All four called for the “Khmerization” of the Vietnamese, that is their transformation (from French) into *Cambodian* subjects. The problem, of course, was that at the time Cambodia was not an independent state, but a sub-unit (*pays*) of the Indochinese Union. This was the main argument of the Vietnamese who, appalled by the prospect of assimilation, began to push for the creation of an Indochinese Federation and a corresponding Indochinese colonial citizenship. An Indochinese Federation would have had a Vietnamese majority, thereby trumping all efforts to assimilate ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia.

Vietnamese colonial elite, there was no doubt: territory trumped ethnicity and the Résident-Supérieur's expulsion of the Annamese was illegal. As mentioned above, *jus soli* had similar traction among the Cambodian nationalist elite, who however maintained that foreigners could and should become Cambodian on the condition that they embraced Khmer culture and were held accountable before Cambodian courts (Goscha, 2012).

The debate did not produce any concrete results in favour of either “soft” or “hard” forms of inclusion of the Vietnamese into Cambodian nationality. On the contrary, the Royal Ordinance No 66 of the 5th of June 1934 (known as “1934 Nationality Law”) defined Cambodian nationality on the basis of the *jus sanguinis* principle without including a *jus soli* provision (Nguyen and Sperfeldt, 2012). Specifically, the 1934 Nationality Law defined “Cambodians” as being:

- Article 22(1): Individuals born of Cambodian parents;
- Article 22(2) and 22(3): An individual born of a Cambodian father or mother, regardless of the nationality of the other parent, unless that nationality is French, in which case the child takes on French nationality;
- Article 22(4) and 22(5): Individuals born of an unknown father and a Cambodian mother, or unknown parents (unless French nationality is attributed by the competent French authorities, the father, or both parents, although their nationality is unknown, are presumed to have French nationality in accordance with conditions stipulated by French law).
- Article 22(6): Individuals who are part of an ethnic group “fixed” in Cambodia and not forming part of an independent political unit, such as “les Malais, Cham, Kha, Kouy, Phnong, Por Stierend, etc”.

Despite the presence of a significant Vietnamese population in colonised Cambodia, the 1934 Nationality Law made no mention of the group. Thus, albeit being the main driver of Vietnamese migration into the country, the French colonial state did not address the issue of the Vietnamese' access to Cambodian nationality.³¹ As I argued above it did, however, play a significant role in setting the tones of Cambodian ethno-nationalism.

³¹ France's stance contrasts with its approval of an assimilationist definition of nationality in colonial Laos (Goscha, 2012).

This will become even more apparent over the next paragraphs, where I discuss the situation of the Vietnamese since Cambodian independence.

(ii) *Cambodian Independence and the first Sihanouk Regime (1953-1970)*

Cambodia became an independent state in 1953. The end of World War II in 1945 marked the beginning of a wave of anti-colonial movements in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, which all joined forces and obtained independence from France in the early 1950s. The “face” of Cambodian independence was King Norodom Sihanouk, who campaigned and negotiated with the French until he was granted authority over the country’s armed forces, judiciary, and foreign affairs in 1953 (Chandler, 2008). Sihanouk then abdicated in 1955 and founded his own political party, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (SRN, People’s Socialist Community), which dominated the newly-independent Cambodia throughout the first Sihanouk administration (1955-1970). As David Chandler (2008) pointed out, Sihanouk became the embodiment of the Cambodian nation - an image that he himself fostered by referring to himself as the “father” of the nation and describing all Cambodians as his children.

Given his huge popularity, Sihanouk’s use of nationalist and anti-Vietnamese rhetoric contributed to sharpening Khmer people’s animosity towards Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Despite having collaborated with the Vietnamese state in the struggle for independence, Sihanouk was in fact suspicious of the eastern neighbour and continued to decry past territorial losses (most noticeably the “lost territory of Kampuchea Krom”) whilst warning his people against the ever-present threat of Vietnamese invasion (Berman, 1996). In the 1960s, he stated that “no Annamite (Vietnamese) will sleep peacefully until he has succeeded in pushing Cambodia towards annihilation, having made it first go through the stage of slavery” (Klintworth, 1989 as cited in Berman, 1996:829). Through utterances of this kind, Sihanouk manipulated people’s fear of cultural annihilation and strengthened his mandate as defender of Cambodia’s newly acquired independence. Like the French colonialists before him, Sihanouk exploited and deepened the Cambodian people’s ethno-nationalist sentiments against the Vietnamese.

The portrayal of the Vietnamese as Cambodia’s archetypal enemy was part of a wider nation-building project. The independent Cambodian state needed a nation to legitimise it, and indigenous ruling elites rushed to form one by establishing “national ‘identities’

coterminous with their inherited borders” (Edwards, 1996:52). “Khmerness” became the locus of national identity and came to be defined according to Sihanouk’s new taxonomy of ethnic groups. The latter distinguished between those who belonged to the Cambodian nation, namely indigenous peoples, Cham, and Khmer Krom; and those who did not, namely Chinese and Vietnamese (Ehrentraut, 2011). In contrast with the assimilationist ambitions of colonial nationalists, the post-colonial Khmer elite therefore believed that Vietnamese could *not* become Cambodians.

This was reflected in the 1954 Nationality Law, which postulated that citizenship should be conferred to children with at least one Cambodian parent and anyone born in Cambodia after 1954 whose parents were also born in Cambodia (Ehrentraut, 2011; Nguyen and Sperfeldt, 2012). Crucially, the law introduced a *jus soli* avenue to citizenship. Yet, a naturalisation law from the same year required applicants to have five years of continuous residence in Cambodia and a “sufficient knowledge” of Khmer language in order to be considered for citizenship. This was complemented by “sufficient assimilation to the customs, morals, and traditions of Cambodia” in an amendment of 1959 (Ehrentraut, 2011:784). Such provisions clearly penalised Vietnamese residents and were topped off by the suggestion, at the 15th National Congress, that naturalised Cambodians should be investigated to verify that they had actually adopted Khmer customs and the unanimous recommendation to refuse naturalisation to all Vietnamese on the basis that they were “unassimilable” (Willmott, 1967).

The legal provisions introduced by the Sihanouk administration were underpinned by a clear anti-Vietnamese strategy. Yet, discriminatory laws in the domestic arena stood in contrast with Sihanouk’s failure to oppose the communist Vietnamese regime over the 1960s. In the attempt to minimise the effects of the Vietnam War on Cambodia, Sihanouk even signed a secret agreement with North Vietnam in 1964. The agreement allowed Northern Vietnamese troops to station in Cambodian territory and receive military aid from China through the port of Sihanoukville and led to the establishment of the “Sihanouk Trail”, a logistical supply route used by the by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) (Chandler, 2008). Sihanouk’s assistance to the Communist bloc angered the United States., which Sihanouk had previously alienated, and was exploited by General

Lon Nol. Lon Nol undermined Sihanouk's popularity by accusing him of being pro-Vietnamese and stirring up Khmer people's nationalist and anti-Vietnamese sentiments (Pouvatchy, 1986). Backed by the United States and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak (Sihanouk's cousin), he ousted Sihanouk in March 1970 and proclaimed himself the president of the Khmer Republic (Chandler, 2008).

(iii) *Khmer Republic (1970-1975) and Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*

As mentioned above, Sihanouk's removal took place amidst vehement anti-Vietnamese campaigns. When Lon Nol took office, the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia deteriorated further. Lon Nol promoted what he called "neo-Khmerism" and advanced the superiority of the Khmer race (Jordens, 1996). He proclaimed that the Cambodian state had no nationality other than the Khmer and introduced a new constitutional definition of "Cambodian" as someone who possessed "Khmer blood, Khmer traditions, Khmer culture, Khmer language and who were born on the territory that is the heritage of our Khmer ancestors" (cited in Edwards, 2007:252). Such definition officially excluded the Vietnamese from Cambodian citizenship. In addition to this, the Khmer Republic introduced a number of discriminatory policies against the country's Vietnamese population: Vietnamese people were only allowed to go out between 7 and 11 am; they were "advised" not to speak Vietnamese in public; Vietnamese fishermen were revoked their fishing licenses; and public and private organisations were prohibited from hiring Vietnamese staff (Amer, 2014).

Such discriminatory measures wiped out virtually all possibilities of employment for the Vietnamese living in Cambodia. They, however, were not the main challenge that Cambodia's Vietnamese population had to face. During the Lon Nol regime, the Vietnamese became the target of frequent and violent attacks. Vietnamese houses, boats, and religious landmarks were regularly vandalised and ethnic Vietnamese were physically removed from Cambodia through forceful repatriation or, in the worst scenario, pogroms (Ehrentraut, 2013; Amer, 2014). According to Goshal, Ku, and Hawk (1995), approximately half of Cambodia's estimated 450,000 Vietnamese (in 1970) were killed, deported, or fled to South Vietnam over the five years of the Lon Nol rule. The remaining half was displaced and massacred at the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

“On the morning of April 17, 1975”, wrote David Chandler, “columns of Communist troops dressed in peasant clothes or simple khaki uniforms, ominously silent and heavily armed, converged on Phnom Penh from three directions” (Chandler, 2008:254). This was the beginning of Democratic Kampuchea (also known as “Khmer Rouge Regime”), the darkest chapter of Cambodia’s history. The Khmer Rouge retained and advanced Lon Nol’s policy of ridding Cambodia of all Vietnamese. Like others before them, they utilised a strident anti-Vietnamese rhetoric and referred to the Vietnamese as:

“One type of foreigner that was very strongly poisonous and dangerous to our people [...] since they came to wolf us down, came to nibble at us, came to swallow us, came to confiscate and take away everything, and came to endanger our nation and our people, and they have caused us to lose much territory in the past” (*Revolutionary Flag Magazine*, 1976 as cited in ECCC, 2015).

In 1975, both Pol Pot and Nuon Chea announced their plan to eradicate the entire Vietnamese population from Cambodia, confirming the Khmer Rouge’s commitment to solving the “issue” “completely and permanently” (Kiernan, 1996). They started by deporting the Vietnamese to Vietnam by foot, train, or boat (ECCC, 2015).³² Between April and September/October 1975, an estimate of 150,000-170,000 Vietnamese was forced out of the country and into the Vietnamese provinces of Đồng Tháp, An Giang, and Tây Ninh. Many of these are likely to have been killed before reaching Vietnam (Amer, 2006; Kiernan, 1996).

In the following year, the Khmer Rouge’ anti-Vietnamese propaganda escalated further and by mid-1976 the Vietnamese were forbidden to leave Cambodia (Kiernan, 1996). Pol Pot’s Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) incited hatred against the Vietnamese and encouraged its cadres to do the same. Forced confessions of captured Vietnamese soldiers were broadcasted on the radio, admitting to the Vietnamese regime’s plan to swallow Cambodia and annihilate Khmer people. In a 1977 edition of the *Revolutionary Flag Magazine*, the Khmer Rouge explicitly called on the Cambodian population to “seek out” and “smash” the Vietnamese, “some of whom still remain after we have smashed them to bits”.³³ In 1978, the same magazine reminded the Khmers of their “duty”

³² The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) embraced the policy of expelling the Vietnamese even before it took office in 1975. The CPK started expelling Vietnamese from its liberated zones as early as 1973 (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996).

³³ Both documentary and oral evidence from former Khmer Rouge cadres confirms the implementation of this genocidal policy. According to the ECCC documentation on the “Treatment of the Vietnamese”, Khmer Rouge soldiers carried out their killing in a methodical manner, and even prepared a list of

to eradicate Cambodia's "national enemy"; and in 1979, a CPK directive from Office 87³⁴ invited "the entire Kampuchean people, the entire Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea, and all the combatants male and female, all the cadres in every office and ministry" to "raise the spirit of revolutionary vigilance [...] to track down and search out *Yuon*³⁵ enemy agents and not allow them to hide anywhere at all, to eliminate them and gain timely mastery" (ECCC, 2015, no page).

By the end of 1978, there were virtually no Vietnamese left in Cambodia (Nguyen and Sperfeldt, 2012). The majority had been massacred and many had fled or had been deported to Vietnam. In 1978, Vietnam requested the UNHCR's assistance for the support of approximately 341,400 refugees from Cambodia, 170,300 of which were Vietnamese (Amer, 1994). Among these were the elder participants to my research, who recalled the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge and contrasted them with the "warm welcome" they received in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Government of the time in fact provided them with food and, in some instances, jobs (mainly manual labour). However, whilst recording their names, Vietnamese authorities did not give them any Vietnamese documents. This shows that Vietnamese diasporans were seen as refugees who had temporarily settled into Vietnam and would eventually return to Cambodia.

(iv) *People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) and State of Cambodia (1989-1992)*

Most displaced Vietnamese did return to Cambodia after the Vietnamese regime ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979. In late December 1978, the armed forces of Vietnam invaded Cambodia. A month later, in January 1979, Vietnamese forces and the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS) captured Phnom Penh and established the

Vietnamese names following orders from the "upper level". The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) based the policy on a theory of matrilineal descent. Thus, "if a Vietnamese man was married to a Cambodian woman, only the man would be killed and the woman and any children would be spared. However, if a Vietnamese woman was married to a Cambodian man, the woman and any children of the marriage would be killed, while the man would be spared" (ECCC, 2015, no page). Several sources explained that if the mother was Vietnamese, the children would be killed because they had "sucked such the milk of the mother"; or again because "the umbilical or the blood comes from the mother". The Khmer Rouge posited that "the Vietnamese race should neither exist anymore, nor should it be allowed to reproduce" (ECCC, 2015, no page). The children of Cambodian mothers were not always spared.

³⁴ This was the Phnom Penh office where the Standing Committee of the CPK (also known as "Angkar") conducted its work.

³⁵ "Yuon" is a derogatory Khmer term meaning "Vietnamese" which is still in use today.

People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).³⁶ The Vietnam-led PRK allowed Vietnamese refugees to return to Cambodia (alongside Khmer refugees), prompting the re-emergence of a Vietnamese minority diaspora in the country. In 1983, the PRK also encouraged the reintegration of these Vietnamese through a government bulletin titled "Policy of the People's Republic of Kampuchea with Regard to Vietnamese Residents", which stated that "local authorities and populations shall give [the Vietnamese] assistance and create the conditions for them to quickly settle down to a normal life" (cited in Goshal, Ku and Hawk 1995:21). According to my interviewees, under the PRK regime Vietnamese people were distributed Cambodian ID cards, thereby effectively becoming Cambodian citizens.

In addition to supporting the return of Vietnamese refugees, the PRK authorised "Vietnamese people with relatives in Kampuchea to join them and live and work [in Cambodia] in accordance with Kampuchean law" (PRK, 1983 as cited in Vickery, 1986:165). Furthermore, in 1983 a border agreement between the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments permitted both Khmer and Vietnamese people living in border regions to "engage in cross-border trade, to check on family members, and, with the permission of local authorities from both countries, to build houses, farm, take timber, herd and kill animals [...] and conduct fishing in the country's territory" (Gottesman, 2004:162). Whilst the official policy was to regulate Vietnamese immigration into Cambodia, the PRK failed to effectively control its borders and by mid-1983 a significant number of Vietnamese (both "old" and "new") had moved to the country.³⁷

This new wave of Vietnamese migration sparked a predictable reaction by the Khmer public and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) – the united political front formed by the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK, former Khmer

³⁶ The KUFNS was a multifarious political organisation which was established under Vietnamese auspices in December 1978 and was made up mainly of Khmer Rouge officials who had defected to Vietnam between 1977 and 1978 - including Hun Sen and National Assembly president Heng Samrin (Van Der Kroef, 1979). Heng Samrin has continued to head the KUFNS, now "Solidarity Front for Development of the Cambodian Motherland" (SFDCM), to the present day (Jacques, 1996; Gottesman, 2004). Whilst the organisation has lost most of its political relevance, it has continued to support the CPP and cooperate with the Vietnamese Fatherland Front (VFF). Among its members has been the Vietnamese Association, who has also served it in an advisory capacity in the past and of which I speak at length in Chapter Six (Jordens, 1995).

³⁷ In 1983, the PRK declared that there were approximately 56,000 in Cambodia in 1983. The estimate contrasted sharply with CGDK's claim of 600,000 Vietnamese settlers in 1984. Scholars believe the actual number to have been somewhere between the two, in the range of 300,000 – 450,000 i.e. roughly the same size of the pre-1970 population (Amer, 2014; Vickery, 1986).

Rouge); the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF); and Prince Sihanouk's Front Uni National Pour Un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC). Formed in 1982, the CGDK brought together royalist, republicans, and communists whose only common ground was the shared opposition to the "puppet" PRK regime (Gottesman, 2004). In an effort to undermine the legitimacy of the latter, the coalition revived the familiar anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of its predecessors, fuelling Khmer ethno-nationalism and the ever-present fear of "Vietnamization". The CGDK raised concerns over "the spectre of massive Vietnamese resettlement" and suggested that the growing number of Vietnamese immigrants inside Cambodia was indicative of "Hanoi's long-term intentions towards Kampuchea" (Vickery, 1986).

Making these alarmist claims particularly convincing was a series of PRK policies which were perceived as a threat to "Khmerness". Some examples are the restriction of pre-revolutionary Cambodian art and imported art and films; and the compulsory teaching of Vietnamese language in Cambodian schools, which was seen as an attempt to indoctrinate Cambodian youth (Gottesman, 2004).³⁸ As Gottesman (2004:140) pointed out, "the Vietnamese occupation instilled in many Cambodians a sense of political and cultural disorientation and suspicion that Cambodia had suffered a loss of nationhood". Such feelings were expertly exploited by the CGDK, who also capitalised on people's discontent for the recruitment of Vietnamese in factories, warehouses, rubber plantations, and infrastructure projects where they frequently occupied higher positions than the Khmer. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, in the minds of many Khmer the Vietnamese were being favoured by the PRK regime. The latter had even established Overseas Vietnamese Associations across the country to help Vietnamese residents and appointed representatives of the Vietnamese community to work alongside Khmer authorities. This proved, as KPNLF President Son Sann put it, that Hanoi had moved "hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese nationals into Cambodia as new masters of the land" as part of its grand plan to swallow Cambodia (KPNFL Bulletin as cited in Gottesman, 2004:161).

³⁸ This suspicion was exacerbated by the "advanced education" of thousands of young Cambodians in Hanoi, which was taken to indicate that Hanoi was "attempting to kill the Khmer identity and Khmer soul" (Sann, 1983:566,567). The Vietnamese regime was also accused of more insidious machinations, such as secretly raising Cambodian orphans in Vietnam to later introduce them into the Ministries of Defence and Interior (Gottesman, 2004).

The CGDK coupled allegations of Vietnamese invasion with old and new stereotypes of the Vietnamese. They evoked historical facts and legends to prove their aggressive nature and belligerent aims and present-day factors (such as their place of residence and economic roles) to attest the damaging effects that they were having on the Cambodian nation and state. Vietnamese fishermen living on Cambodia's waterways, for instance, were accused of depleting the country's otherwise abundant resources and bereaving the Khmer of their fish. Similarly, more recent Vietnamese migrants living in urban centres were depicted as a horde of economic parasites depriving Cambodians of profitable jobs (Jordens, 1996). Thus, the Vietnamese were portrayed not only as the "racial enemy" who was trying to wipe out the Cambodian nation, but also as the underlying cause of the Cambodian state's economic, political, and social issues (Jordens, 1996). Unsurprisingly, CGDK's utterances gained a lot of traction among the Khmer public. The PRK government knew that the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric was likely to resonate with the Cambodian population; even more so as one of its proponents was Prince Sihanouk, whose image as Father of the Cambodian nation had only been reinforced by his absence during the Khmer Rouge and his second exile in 1979 (Gottesman, 2004).³⁹ Yet, the PRK lacked the means to curb immigration and found Vietnam to be unhelpful in addressing its concerns. Its counterargument that Sihanouk was an ally of what was formerly the Khmer Rouge also proved ineffective.

In 1989, the Vietnamese regime withdrew from Cambodia following the dismemberment of the Soviet bloc and pressures from China and the US (Chandler, 2008). The PRK held an extraordinary meeting and decided, among other things, to change its name into State of Cambodia (SOC). This was a change in form, rather than substance, for the Cambodian state was still being ruled by the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), and thus the same pro-Vietnam leaders who had headed the PRK (most noticeably Heng Samrin and Hun Sen). The sentiment among the Khmer public also remained the same, with the "new" government being accused of following the orders of the Vietnamese regime. In the face of unremitting anti-Vietnamese rhetoric (and perhaps preparing for the years to come), the SOC however did more to distance itself from the Vietnamese population than its "predecessor" PRK.

³⁹ During the Khmer Rouge Prince Sihanouk was placed under "palace arrest" (Chandler, 2008).

As Jordens noted, between 1989 and the arrival of the first UN forces “the Hun Sen administration took pre-emptive measures to deflect accusations that it had facilitated the ‘Vietnamization’ of Cambodia during Vietnam’s ten-year occupation” (1996:142). One such measure was the revocation of the Cambodian ID cards that had been given to Vietnamese communities under the previous government. Jordens (1996) reported that his interviewees recalled SOC authorities collecting identity cards and substituting them with immigration documents (1996). My respondents confirmed this version, although some of them said that their PRK identity cards were taken after the end of the UNTAC rule (i.e. 1993). Regardless of the exact time, after Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia the Vietnamese in the country were stripped of their citizenship and downgraded to immigration status.

(v) *United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (1992-1993) and the Kingdom of Cambodia (1993 - today)*

The SOC continued to keep the distance from the Vietnamese under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was established in 1992 to implement the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements and oversee the Cambodian state’s transition towards peace, stability, and democracy (Widyono, 2015). From the beginning of the UNTAC mission, Hun Sen clarified that SOC would not oppose any anti-Vietnamese demonstrations organised by the opposition. He asserted that, in the event of anti-Vietnamese protests, “UNTAC police will have to intervene, not my police” (Jordens, 1996:114). SOC’s stance was a timely display of indifference (if not aversion) towards the Vietnamese and it had tragic consequences on the Vietnamese population itself (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996). Despite its peace-building aim, UNTAC’s two-year rule was in fact characterised by several violent attacks against the Vietnamese. In 1993, Amnesty International reported that the PDK (former Khmer Rouge) had carried out a series of massacres ahead of the May election, leaving two hundred Vietnamese dead. The most infamous of these attacks took place in Chong Kneas village, where on the 10th of March 1993 thirty-three ethnic Vietnamese were shot and drowned by PDK soldiers (Human Rights Watch, 1993).⁴⁰ The massacre prompted a mass exodus of as

⁴⁰ The SOC police in Chong Kneas village admitted that they had been monitoring PDK radio communications and had known for a month that the massacre was going to take place. Yet, on the evening

many as thirty thousand Vietnamese who fled to Vietnam on a flotilla adorned with SOC flags – another public display of SOC’s determination to “return” the Vietnamese to the neighbouring homeland (Edwards, 1996).

The other opposition parties (i.e. FUNCINPEC and KPNLF’s successor Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party) did not immediately and unequivocally reprehend the anti-Vietnamese raids. FUNCINPEC’s first response was silence: given the “sensitivity” of the issue, the royalists asserted that they would not “condemn or approve” the killings. It was only a week later that the party echoed Prince Sihanouk’s condemnation of the massacre. Sihanouk denounced the violence, but he also stated that he could no longer be responsible for the safety of Vietnamese residents in the Kingdom and invited them to return to Vietnam (Jordens, 1996). Son Sann’s Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) went even further and regarded the attacks as “a simple and effective solution to the ‘problem’ of the Vietnamese in Cambodia” (Jordens, 1996:141). Such reactions were not unexpected. As I explained in the previous section, the PDK, FUNCINPEC, and the BLDP shared the same antagonistic view of the Vietnamese regime and people. All three had previously criticised UNTAC for not addressing the “Vietnamese problem” and turning a blind eye to illegal Vietnamese immigration into Cambodia. The PDK, in particular, had used the presence of the Vietnamese to undermine UNTAC’s credibility in the country, accusing it of violating the Paris Peace Agreements and colluding with the Vietnamese regime. In 1993, they broadcasted a message stating that:

“The strategy of the Western allies is to join hands with the Yuon aggressors and their puppets in an attempt to smash the Cambodian national resistance forces, particularly the DK, through which they will be able to destroy the Cambodian nation and people [...] The [Cambodian] people have no choice but to unite, rise up, and attack and completely smash [the Vietnamese] because at present the Cambodian people are outnumbered by the Yuon settlers. UNTAC has not only refused to verify the Yuon withdrawal but has allowed more Yuon to come” (VGNUFC, 1993 as cited in Edwards, 1996:65).

The PDK’s propaganda, alongside that of FUNCINPEC and the BLDP, revived ethno-nationalist sentiments and the image of the Yuon as the cause of all the woes that were affecting (and had affected) the Cambodian people. UNTAC was unable to prevent nor

of the attack, they did not respond until after the perpetrators had fled the scene (Jordens, 1996). SOC’s actions reflect their desire to distance themselves from the Vietnamese and counter their reputation as “puppets of Vietnam”.

oppose this. As a matter of fact, the provisions of the Paris Agreements which dealt with the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia were not those concerning human rights but Article 8 of Section Four, which summoned the permanent withdrawal of any foreign forces remaining in the country (Jordens, 1996). Thus, notwithstanding politically motivated violence, UNTAC made no concrete effort to protect the Vietnamese population in Cambodia. Their priority was to lay the basis for the country's first democratic elections and addressing anti-Vietnamese violence could have proven detrimental to their goal. In 1992, UNTAC clarified that whilst foreign forces were their responsibility, the issue of foreign settlers was to be addressed by the post-UNTAC elected government (Jordens, 1996).

The post-UNTAC government which was elected in May 1993 was a coalition of FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen's CPP (the "new" KPRP) with some BLDP elements.⁴¹ PDK's anti-Vietnamese raids continued under the new administration, allegedly to prevent the Vietnamese from returning to their villages on the Tonle Sap Lake. Nevertheless, neither SOC nor its coalition partners took action to stop PDK's killings and abductions. On the contrary, the government appeared to place additional obstacles to the Vietnamese' return: the Cambodian People's Armed Forces (CPAF) were removed from their checkpoints at the lake's entrance and SOC officials prevented ethnic Vietnamese to re-cross the Cambodia-Vietnam border and return to their homes. According to Jordens (1996), both CPAF and SOC police were instructed not to intervene in episodes of ethnic violence against the Vietnamese. As in the pre-election period, such "calculated negligence" aimed to serve the interests of the CPP by reiterating its distance from the Vietnamese population in the country (Jordens, 1996:144). It also accommodated FUNCINPEC's stance, which, as we have seen, was strongly anti-Vietnamese.

FUNCINPEC and the CPP had an uneasy partnership. The coalition government was characterised by a constant struggle for power by the two parties and, in particular, their leaders. The tug-of-war between Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen culminated in the 1997 coup, which established the supremacy of the CPP as a party and of Hun Sen as an

⁴¹ FUNCINPEC actually won forty-five percent of the total vote, while the CPP received thirty-eight percent (Un, 2005). However, the CPP did not accept the defeat and by the end of 1993 the two parties agreed to form a coalition government with two Prime Ministers: Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen (Chandler, 2008). This was the first government of the "Kingdom of Cambodia" - Cambodia's official name to the present day.

individual (Un, 2005). While FUNCINPEC's influence waned, a new opposition party entered the political scene: following his dismissal from FUNCINPEC and the National Assembly, Sam Rainsy founded the Khmer Nation Party in 1995 (Un, 2005). Due to internal conflict with a pro-CPP faction, the KNP was later dissolved and in 1998 Sam Rainsy founded the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), which was renamed Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2012 after merging with Kem Sokha's Human Rights Party. Sam Rainsy's SRP and CNRP have been the main opposition forces in modern-day Cambodia. They advocated for freedom and human rights, free and fair elections, and the protection of Cambodia's "national integrity". The latter issue was strategically linked to the alleged invasion of Vietnam and the Vietnamese - a mantra that accompanied Sam Rainsy's career and stood in awkward contrast with his cries for justice and democracy.

In his twenty years as opposition leader, Sam Rainsy built much of his political rhetoric around the issues of the Cambodia-Vietnam border and the "Yuon". Echoing Hun Sen's previous opponents, he repeatedly accused the Prime Minister of being a puppet of the Vietnamese regime and aiding Hanoi's expansionist efforts. To substantiate his claims, he pointed to the presence of old and new Vietnamese migrants in Cambodia, the role of Vietnamese logging companies in land grabbing and deforestation, and the Cambodian government's alleged use of a fake map (favouring Vietnam) in the on-going border demarcation talks (Oesterheld, 2014; The Cambodia Daily, 2015). In a rally before the 2013 elections, Sam Rainsy promised his supporters to:

"Collect all of Cambodia's property and give it back to Cambodia. It's been said that the Vietnamese are coming and removing border posts in our territory. [...] [Khmers] have lost their farmland, because the Yuons are always coming in, and the authorities do not protect their fellow Khmers at all, but protect the invading *Yuons*. Now they have brought *Yuons* to vote for Hun Sen, so Khmers should vote for Sam Rainsy to protect our territory" (as cited in Oesterheld, 2014).

Sam Rainsy's accusations enticed Khmer voters, fuelling the populations' simmering hatred towards the Vietnamese people and regime and bringing the CNRP very close to winning the 2013 general elections. In addition to being the probable cause of Hun Sen's subsequent attacks on the CNRP, such success corroborates the unfailing ascendancy of anti-Vietnamese discourses over the Khmer public. It demonstrates that ethno-nationalism has been the most effective weapon available to Cambodian politicians and

that leaders of very different parties have harnessed and manipulated it to either legitimise or undermine power.⁴²

Cambodia's ethno-nationalism has translated into anti-Vietnamese discrimination and violence, which has regularly increased ahead of the general elections. Furthermore, it has translated into law - and more specifically legal obstacles to the Vietnamese' acquisition of Cambodian citizenship. Under the first administration of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the National Assembly in fact passed the 1996 Law on Nationality (still in use today) which featured both *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* provisions, making it nominally possible for non-Khmer to become citizens. Nevertheless, the law also limited the *jus soli* conferral of citizenship by stating that "shall obtain nationality/citizenship by having born in the Kingdom of Cambodia [...] any child who is born from a foreign mother and father (parents) who were born and living legally in the Kingdom of Cambodia" (1996 Law on Nationality, Art. 4(2)). Virtually no Vietnamese could obtain Cambodian citizenship by proving that they and their parents had been "living legally" in the country: as I stated earlier in the text, most of them had lost their documents during the Lon Nol and Khmer Rouge pogroms. Some of my interviews even declared that they had never received any documents at all: this is also plausible, for official residency documents were only consistently distributed after the adoption of the 1994 Immigration Law (Ehrentraut, 2011).

In theory, Cambodian citizenship could also be acquired through naturalisation. In order to do so, the candidate should have presented "a paper certifying that such person has her/his residence in the Kingdom of Cambodia and has been living continuously for seven years from the date of reception of a residence card which was issued under framework of the Law on Immigration" (1996 Law on Nationality, Art. 8). As noted by Nguyen and Sperfeldt (2012), this requirement was however problematic in a number of ways: first, as the Immigration Law was introduced in 1994, applications for naturalisation were only possible from 2001. Second, the actual issuance of residence cards by local authorities began many years after the Law was adopted. Third, the

⁴² Sam Rainsy's anti-Vietnamese rhetoric has been met with disarming indifference by Cambodia's human rights activists and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The number of organisations and human rights projects working on Vietnamese communities has indeed been very limited: according to Christie (2012:157), the reasons for this may lay in both the sensitive nature of the matter and what he described as a strategy aimed at "reproducing the notion that the Vietnamese are not a natural part of the Cambodian state".

procedure for applying for naturalisation was only clarified in 2013 with the sub-decree no. 287 on the “Forms and Procedures for Acquisition of Citizenship through Naturalization”. I should add that, even after the introduction of the sub-decree, the naturalisation law was rarely (if at all) implemented. As I demonstrate in Chapter Seven, this is due to the Vietnamese’ limited access to information on citizenship and the frequent confiscation of old documents.

In this section, I have shown that the great majority of the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been *de facto* stateless. Devoid of Vietnamese documents and unable to access Cambodian citizenship, Vietnamese diasporans have fitted the definition of “stateless person” put forward in UNHCR’s 1954 Statelessness Convention, namely: “one who is not considered to be a national of any state, under the operation of its law” (UNHCR, 1954).⁴³ The impossibility to become Cambodian citizens has been coupled with decades of unremitting violence and discrimination. These have been the result of Khmer people’s long-standing anti-Vietnamese sentiment, which has been mobilised and exploited by the country’s political elite aiming to legitimise or challenge power. The evolution and manipulation of Khmer people’s anti-Vietnamese sentiments has underpinned the current situation of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia and has gone hand in hand with the state of Cambodia-Vietnam relations. The latter also helps to explain the host-state’s and homeland’s treatment of the Vietnamese and is the focus in my next section. Here, I expand upon Chapter One’s discussion on the illiberal nature of the Cambodian regime.

3.2 (Geo-)Political background: Cambodia’s domestic patronage politics and the “special relationship” with Vietnam

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Hun Sen and Norodom Ranariddh became co-Prime Ministers of Cambodia in 1993. In 1997, Hun Sen carried out a coup which

⁴³ As stated above, the great majority of Vietnamese diasporans in Cambodia has never obtained any documents from Vietnam. It follows that they are not and have never been Vietnamese citizens: according to Art. 14 of the 2008 amended Law on Vietnamese nationality, “a person is determined to have Vietnamese nationality/citizenship on one of the following grounds: 1. By birth, as prescribed in Articles 15, 16 and 17 [...]; 2. Having been naturalized in Vietnam; 3. Having Vietnamese nationality restored; 4. On the grounds defined in Articles 18, 35 and 37 of this Law (concerning abandoned new-borns and adopted children); 5. On the grounds defined in treaties to which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a contracting party”. Their exclusion from Vietnamese citizenship is further evidenced by the fact that Vietnamese returnees from Cambodia have been told that they could obtain Vietnamese citizenship after five years of residence in the homeland, which is in line with the requirements of Art. 19 the “Conditions for naturalization in Vietnam” (I52, personal communication, 18 August 2016).

resulted in the ousting of Ranariddh and his ascendance as sole Prime Minister of Cambodia in 1998. His rule has continued unabated ever since.⁴⁴ Hun Sen's supremacy has been possible through a series of domination strategies which have evolved according to changing political and economic scenarios (Un, 2005). In occasion of the 1993 general elections, Hun Sen and the CPP used their dominance over the state and security apparatus to intimidate (sometimes through violent means) opposition parties, especially FUNCINPEC. This strategy, however, did not win them the elections. Thus, having skilfully weakened FUNCINPEC with the 1997 coup, the CPP shifted to a subtler form of control. As Un (2005:220) put it, the CPP realised that:

“coercion is not a sign of permanent strength, nor is it a solid base for the party's external and internal legitimacy. With this in mind, the CPP shifted its focus toward material inducements to win the “hearts and minds” [of the Khmer] and undercut competition from opposition parties”.

Due to his close ties with business tycoons, Hun Sen has been able to ensure the crucial support of the rural electorate through the distribution of “gifts”. Through a tactic known as “*choh moulthan*” (going down to the base), members of CPP's working groups (*krom kar ngear*) have provided basic infrastructures (e.g. roads, schools, or pagodas) and donations of money, food, and clothing to rural villages.⁴⁵ Whilst donations have been distributed throughout the year, they have typically increased in the run-up to the elections, sending a manifest message and posing the basis for a national chain of patron-client networks (Norén-Nilsson, 2016). As Hughes pointed out, in Cambodia “political power is also economic power” (Sørensen, 1998 as cited in Hughes, 2000:122). In exchange for their economic support, business tycoons have been awarded the highest honorific titles (most noticeably the title of *Okhna*) and granted access to state resources and protection. Furthermore, they have enjoyed tax exemptions that have allowed them to accumulate greater capital and fuel the vicious cycle of corruption and rent-seeking (Un, 2005).

The CPP's politics of patronage and corruption have been further strengthened by strategic marriage bonds between the children of key players, which have knitted

⁴⁴ Hun Sen has been Cambodia's Prime Minister for thirty-two years (since 1985) and is currently the world's longest serving Prime Minister (The Economist, 2017).

⁴⁵ According to Norén-Nilsson (2016), the distribution of donations has been managed through a top-down apparatus that stretches from the Deputy Prime Minister to single ministries, controlling the province to the village level.

together political, economic, and military powers (Heder, 2005).⁴⁶⁴⁷ This political juggernaut has also controlled the courts (as evidenced by the Supreme Court’s recent decision to dissolve the CNRP) and nearly all television and radio stations (Levistky and Way, 2010). Independent voices and newspapers have been under increasing threat, and some, such as the English-language newspapers *The Cambodia Daily*, have already been silenced. Despite using formal democratic institutions to compete for power, the CPP has thus secured its dominance through “electoral manipulation, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence” (Levistky and Way, 2010:3,4).

In addition to the domestic factors highlighted above, the CPP’s dominance has been supported by the intervention (or lack thereof) of foreign actors. The first element to take into account is the fading interest of Western powers after the UN-sponsored 1993 elections (Brown and Timberman, 1998). Ever since the elections were judged “free and fair”, international pressure has in fact decreased, allowing the CPP to reconsolidate power while receiving millions of dollars in foreign aid each year (Levistky and Way, 2010). At the same time, Hun Sen has enjoyed the unwavering support of the Vietnamese and, more recently, the Chinese governments. Due to its direct links with the CPP and Prime Minister Hun Sen, the Vietnamese regime has long been the Cambodian government’s closest ally. Yet, the brotherly relationship between the two is said to have teetered as a result of the Cambodian government’s recent cosyng up to China, whose interests have been to access the Kingdom’s abundant natural resources and, more generally, to exert greater influence in the Southeast Asian region (Burgos and Ear, 2010).

China has become Cambodia’s biggest donor and investor, providing around USD \$500 million per year and seemingly unconditional loans, grants, and aid (Deth, Moldashev, and Bulut, 2016). Given its tumultuous relationship with Beijing, the Vietnamese government has been believed to oppose the Cambodian government’s vicinity with

⁴⁶ This includes the Hun family, whose huge network of deal-making and nepotism has been exposed by the 2016 Global Witness report: “Hostile Takeover: the corporate empire of Cambodia’s ruling family”. In 2007, Global Witness had also reported on Cambodia’s “kleptocratic elite” and its wealth-making strategies, particularly the seizure of public assets.

⁴⁷ The children of CPP leaders have also been frequently appointed to ministerial positions or as leaders of CPP’s “youth groups”. The latter have aimed to breed a new generation of CPP officials and recruit their members from government institutions and universities. CPP’s youth groups have been structured in a similar way to the party itself, with several groups falling under the umbrella of Hun Sen’s and other CPP leaders’ sons. They have engaged in rural development projects and, following the example of their seniors, built links with the rural public through personalised base politics (Un, 2005).

China. Such view would be reinforced by Cambodia's support of China in the South China Sea dispute (which resulted in ASEAN's failure to produce a Joint Communiqué at its 2012 Annual Ministerial Meeting in Phnom Penh)⁴⁸ and the fact that Cambodia has been thought to use its newly-acquired ally to counterweight Vietnam (The Economist, 2017b). Nonetheless, contrarily to popular assumptions, there has been no evidence of compromised relations between the two neighbours. If anything, Cambodia-Vietnam cooperation has been on the increase, as confirmed by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc's declaration in April 2017 that: "especially in the recent years and months, Vietnam-Cambodia relations have been much more familial, affectionate, trusting, and intimate" (Heder, 2018:113).

The statement above suggests that the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have continued to enjoy what both sides described as a "special relationship" (Heder, 2018).⁴⁹ The two states have cooperated extensively in the economic, political, and military areas. In terms of economic cooperation, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have established six special economic zones along their shared border since 2007 (Council for the Development of Cambodia, 2011). Bilateral trade has soared from US\$184 million in 2001 to US\$ 3.5 billion in 2015, making the Vietnamese state one of Cambodia's strongest trade partners within ASEAN. Finally, and controversially, Cambodia has been the Vietnamese regime's larger supplier of timber, much of which has been logged illegally or under the cover of economic land concessions (ELCs). ELCs have been an especially contentious feature of Cambodia-Vietnam relations: Vietnamese firms have been allocated extensive areas of land to establish rubber plantations, which the CNRP has described as a manifestation of Vietnam's enduring influence in the Kingdom (The Diplomat, 2016a). Whilst such allegations have been difficult to prove⁵⁰, the issue of ELCs and illegal logging does reflect the different (and often covert) forms that Cambodia and Vietnam's "special relationship" has taken.⁵¹

⁴⁸ The Vietnamese regime, like the Philippines, was a claimant state in the South China Sea dispute, and has heavily criticised the Cambodian government's move.

⁴⁹ The term was initially used to describe the relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam (as well as Laos and Vietnam) between 1979 and 1990 (Heder, 2018).

⁵⁰ According to LICADHO, Cambodia has granted ELCs to Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, Malaysian, Singaporean, Thai, and Korean companies. Whilst most of these are Vietnamese (55), China was allotted the greatest amount of land (369,107 Ha against the 356,560 owned by Vietnamese firms) (LICADHO, 2018).

⁵¹ In early 2016, Cambodia's Coalition Committee for Forest Crime Prevention instituted a log export ban and the closure of the border with Vietnam to timber (EIA, 2017). Despite the government's widely

This is also evident in the countries' cooperation on defence, which has featured a close collaboration between the Vietnam's People's Army (VPA) and the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF). A 2014 CVP policy resolution by the CPV Central Military Commission indeed complemented the VPA's task of preventing political change in Vietnam with a stronger cooperation with Cambodia's RCAF. The VPA asserted its readiness to assist the RCAF "in all circumstances", a stance that the Director of Vietnam's National Defence Academy justified on the basis that Cambodia's "political security" helped to "protect the security of Vietnam" (Heder, 2018:114). In order to attain this "security goal", between 2014 and 2016 the Vietnamese government gave the Cambodian government at least US\$29 million in defence aid. The sum was devoted to the direct twinning of Cambodian and Vietnamese national defence units, the construction of training facilities in Cambodia, and the education of Cambodian personnel inside Vietnam.⁵² Similar projects were carried out within police-to-police relations which, like army-to-army relations, were designed to defeat "all plots of hostile forces and targets acting detrimentally to the interest of security of each country" (VOV, 2017 as cited in Heder, 2018:117).

The reference to "hostile forces" points to the political interests that have underpinned the aforementioned defence relations. In Cambodia, the terms "hostile" and "unfriendly" forces were used by CPP senior officials to describe the CNRP, which was dismantled on the basis that it posed a threat to national security and stability and was planning a "colour revolution" to overthrow the government (Heder, 2018:115). This view was readily accepted by the Vietnamese government, who had long shared Hun Sen's apprehension over the CNRP's ever-growing popularity and, accordingly, his interest in eliminating the opposition party from the Cambodian political scene. The Vietnamese government's stance was largely motivated by the CNRP's anti-Vietnamese rhetoric that I described in Section 3.2. Especially troublesome were Sam Rainsy's insistence on the issues of Vietnamese illegal immigration, the Cambodia-Vietnam border, and the "rightful restoration" to Cambodia of the historically Cambodian territories of

publicised crackdown on illegal logging, a 2017 report by EIA (Environment Investigation Agency) however revealed that log-smuggling operations were still taking place with impunity. The report highlighted the interests and complicity of the two governments, whose partnership goes beyond official statements and agreements.

⁵² VPA education of RCAF personnel has been taking place since 1980. So far, Cambodia has sent approximately 17,000 RCAF personnel to train in Vietnam. In 2017, 300 soldiers were scheduled to undergo long-term training, and more than 1,000 short term training (Heder, 2018).

Kampuchia Krom, or at least the full respect of minority rights for ethnic Khmer living in the area (Heder, 2018). These points formed the backbone of CNRP's political strategy and gave the Vietnamese government a glimpse of what could happen if the party were to take power.

Whilst the CNRP promised to be a thorn in Vietnam's side, the CPP has (mostly) defended its interests. An example of this is the Cambodian government's refusal to intervene in the protection of the persecuted Khmer Krom minority in Vietnam. In response to pressures by the CNRP and human rights NGOs, Heng Samrin stated that the Khmer Krom were already protected by the Vietnamese state and had to comply with Vietnamese law (The Cambodia Daily, 2007).⁵³ The Cambodian government's complicit stance has been further reflected by its treatment of the Montagnard minority who fled persecution in Vietnam and sought asylum in Cambodia. Cambodian authorities accused the group of being "illegal immigrants" who wanted to move to a third country because they were "too lazy to work and want to be fed" (The Phnom Penh Post, 2016a). In 2015, Khmer authorities did not allow UN representatives to reach the asylum seekers and until 2016 most Montagnards were prevented from registering their asylum claims or sent back to Vietnam before they had the chance to be assessed (The Phnom Penh Post, 2016a). In an appalling move, the Cambodian government even allowed Vietnamese police to enter the country and question a group of approximately 150 Montagnards living in Phnom Penh (RFA, 2016).⁵⁴ When asked about the episode, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior General Khieu Sopheak declared that the acceptance of refugees from any country was "unconstitutional" and likely to compromise the "happiness and harmony" of Cambodia and its people (The Phnom Penh Post, 2015). He explained that the Constitution described Cambodia as a neutral country which should refrain from taking sides. Inadvertently contradicting his claims,

⁵³ Heng Samrin's remarks enraged Khmer Kampuchia Krom Associations, who complained that Article 33 of the Cambodian Constitution established that "Khmer citizens residing abroad enjoy the protection of the state". Given the commonplace conflation of the terms "national" and "citizen", on which I elaborate in the Chapter Five, the Constitution suggested that Khmer Krom should be entitled to Cambodian citizenship and, accordingly, to the assistance of the Khmer government. Yet, albeit recognising that Khmer Krom were protected by Cambodia, the government asserted that they were under Vietnamese jurisdiction, adding that the suggestion to "automatically issue Cambodian passports or ID papers to all Khmer Krom is out of the question [...] as it would encourage people to immigrate to Cambodia, creating more social and political problems" (The Cambodia Daily, 2007).

⁵⁴ By doing so, the Cambodian government disregarded its international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and other human rights treaties of which it is signatory, as well as accusations of political interference by local and international human rights groups.

Phay Siphon however stated that the Cambodian government would not accept any more Montagnard asylum seekers because it lacked the resources to assist them and did not want to “provoke relations with Vietnam by establishing a refugee camp” (Gleeson, 2017 - online).

The two instances reported above again shed light on the different forms cooperation between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam has taken. Alongside illegal timber trade with Vietnam, the Cambodian government’s stance on the Montagnards and the Khmer Krom demonstrates that mutual assistance between the two countries has gone beyond official deals and agreements. Official and unofficial cooperation in the economic, political, and military spheres have characterised the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ “special relationship”, which is crucial to understanding the states’ view and treatment of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom (Heder, 2018). As I show in Chapter Six, such treatment has, too, featured a degree of cooperation between the two governments, who have co-governed the diaspora through the work of the AKVKC. Together with Cambodia’s domestic politics and its history of Khmer ethno-nationalism, Cambodia-Vietnam relations thus pose the background to the research puzzle that I address in the next chapters.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the history of Cambodia’s anti-Vietnamese sentiment and the state of Cambodia’s domestic politics and bilateral relations with Vietnam. In the first and longest section of the chapter, I retraced the evolution of Cambodian people’s anti-Vietnamese sentiment whilst examining its consequences on the legal and social status of the diaspora. I demonstrated that, far from being inevitable, ethno-nationalist and anti-Vietnamese feelings in Cambodia have been constantly fuelled and manipulated by Cambodian elites from all sides of the political spectrum. In addition to this, Cambodia’s political leaders have introduced legal provisions that have prevented the Vietnamese from accessing Cambodian citizenship (with the only exception of the PRK). These factors have underpinned the current situation of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom. More specifically, they have determined the extent to which anti-Vietnamese sentiments have shaped Cambodia’s political scene and, consequently, the government’s policies towards the diaspora (which I discuss in Chapter Five).

The Cambodian government's treatment of the Vietnamese has also been influenced by its past and present relationship with Vietnam. This was the focus of the second section of this chapter, in which I argued that, despite rumours of its replacement by China, the Vietnamese state has remained Cambodia's closest ally. Its unwavering support has long complemented the CPP's domestic politics of corruption and patronage and ensured the continuation of Hun Sen's rule. The latter has benefitted Vietnam in two ways: first, it has prevented the rise to power of anti-Vietnamese parties that could compromise the Vietnamese regime's interests in the country. Second, and connected to the previous point, Vietnam has been able to count on the CPP's cooperation on official and unofficial matters such as timber trade and the issues of Montagnard asylum seekers and the Khmer Krom minority. This does not imply that Vietnam has "dominated" Cambodia (as proven, *inter alia*, by Cambodia's alignment with China on the South China Sea debate); rather, it points to the shared interests of the two countries, which have culminated in their mutually beneficial "special relationship" (Heder, 2018). Such special relationship helps us to understand the views that have underpinned the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the diaspora, the (often covert) forms that engagement has taken, and its implications on the diaspora itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

Introduction

Before I analyse the reasons, modalities, and implications of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora, it is important that I provide some background on the data that inform the empirical chapters of my thesis. In this chapter, I discuss my methodology by focusing on issues of data collection and the challenges that I encountered during my fieldwork. I pay particular attention to how the regime type of Cambodia and Vietnam and mine and my interpreters' positionality have shaped the relationships and dynamics of my research. These two themes are a recurrent feature of the following paragraphs, which are (as far as possible) organised in chronological order.

In the first section of the chapter, I justify my methodological approach and explain why I chose in-depth interviews over more extensive ethnographic fieldwork. In the second section, I consider the processes of negotiating access to and entering the field, and more specifically the selection of field sites and my relationship with gatekeepers. I then reflect on the complexities of working with interpreters and how my two assistants in Cambodia and Vietnam affected the nature and interpretation of my data. Next, I focus on data collection. For my research, I conducted eighty-three interviews over eight months - sixty of which with Vietnamese diasporans in Cambodia and Vietnam and the remaining twenty-three with experts, staff of local NGOs, and members of the local and national elites (including representatives at the AKVVC at different levels). I begin the second section of the chapter by reflecting on my experience interviewing Vietnamese villagers and elites as well as my access to and use of documentary sources. In the final section, I discuss the gaps in my data and the overall limitations of my research.

4.1 Choosing a methodological approach

The central objective of my PhD project evolved *during* my fieldwork, as I became aware of the Vietnamese government's enduring involvement with the diaspora in Cambodia and the extensive role that the AKVVC played within Vietnamese communities. As my research interests became clearer, I decided not to limit my

investigation to the relationship between the diaspora and the host-state and instead explore the triadic nexus between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the diaspora. Such shift in focus was made possible by the qualitative nature of my research, which enabled me to take a flexible, iterative approach to my project and adjust it according to my field observations.

Naturally, my choice to use a qualitative methodology was underpinned by certain ontological and epistemological assumptions, that is assumptions on the nature of (political) reality and how it can be studied (Savigny and Marsden, 2011). I approached this project from an interpretivist standpoint, which posits that reality is multiple and relative and that knowledge is socially constructed (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Savigny and Marsden, 2011). My ontology and epistemology also shaped my research strategy and my view of the relationship between theory and social research. My thesis is an inductive study, where “theory is the *outcome* of research. In other words, the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations” (Bryman, 2012:26). The methods that I used to collect data are a reflection of all these factors. Like my research focus and questions, they evolved after I arrived in the field.

Initially, I had planned to use mixed qualitative methods and combine two main research tools: ethnography and the collection of documentary sources. Conducting long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a single Vietnamese village would have given me the chance to establish trust and build organic relationships with my interviewees, allowing for a greater involvement of my participants in the research process (Bourgois, 2002; Iphofen, 2013). Following my first visit to Village One, I however decided against this approach. The reasons for this were manifold: first of all, I judged that my “new” research question would be better addressed by a comparison between more villages. A crucial component of my project was in fact the intermediary role of the AKVVC: in order to make generalisations about this role, I needed to make sure that there was some level consistency in the activities of the AKVVC across the Kingdom.

Practical and ethical considerations also contributed to my decision. As the village where I had been given permission to reside in order to conduct ethnographic fieldwork was on water, I would have needed a boat to go from one place to another. Thus, I anticipated that there would have been limited opportunities to make casual encounters and conversations. This would have defied the very essence of ethnography, which is largely

dependent on participant-observation and “incidental ethnographic encounters” (Pinsky, 2015). Furthermore, I considered the risks and benefits of conducting ethnographic research to both myself and my participants. As a white, female researcher, my long-term presence in a floating village would have not gone unnoticed, potentially raising suspicion among authorities and attracting unwanted attention to my research and my interviewees. Finally, given the extensive monitoring role of the Vietnamese Association and the difficulties in understanding who was part of it (which I discuss later in the chapter), I concluded that residing in a single field site could have resulted into greater interference on the side of the AKVVC. I thus chose to substitute ethnographic fieldwork with in-depth interviews in different locations, which I complemented with the analysis of documentary sources. Documentary sources allowed me to triangulate my interview data and gain an insight into the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ official stance on the Vietnamese diaspora.⁵⁵ I provide a detailed account of these two tools later in the chapter, following the next section on accessing the field.

4.2 Negotiating access and entering the field ⁵⁶

As mentioned above, one of my main sources were in-depth interviews with Cambodian and Vietnamese elites (in Cambodia), and Vietnamese diasporans in Cambodia and Vietnam. In order to gain access to and interview these groups of people, I had to rely on different gatekeepers and interpreters. In the next sub-sections, I reflect on my relationships with these actors and the challenges that they entailed.

(i) Selecting field sites and dealing with gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are individuals, groups, and organisations who control “opportunities to interact with others in the chosen field site” (Hay, 2000:114). As such, gatekeepers act as intermediaries between participants and researchers and are often crucial in facilitating access to sites and interviewees (De Laine, 2000; Clark, 2010; Reeves, 2010). In my research, the first gatekeeper I got in touch with prior to and after entering the field was MIRO (Minority Rights Organization), one of the few local NGOs who worked with the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia.

⁵⁵ To “triangulate” means to provide a cross-reference between different data sources to enhance the validity of research findings (Mathison, 1998; Davies, 2001).

⁵⁶ My research was approved by the University of York Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) - application number 187/2015-16.

MIRO introduced me to the first two communities that I visited and helped me to obtain permission to conduct research from local authorities (Liamputtong Rice, 2000). In Village One, their facilitator accompanied me to the field site and informed me about recent events that had taken place in the community – i.e. the petition that villagers had organised and the subsequent arrest of their self-proclaimed leader (I discuss this in detail in Chapter Five).⁵⁷ For he had worked in the area for several years, the MIRO facilitator also enjoyed the trust of villagers and local authorities and even negotiated with the latter on my behalf. In Village One, the gatekeeper therefore facilitated both my “physical” and “social” access to the community (Cassell, 1988), allowing me to develop frank and productive relationships with my participants (Clark, 2010; Sixsmith, Boneham and Goldring, 2003). This, however, was not replicated in Village Two.

Whilst the same MIRO collaborator accompanied me to my second Vietnamese village in Cambodia, Village Two was outside his area of supervision. Hence, he was not as well-known as in Village One and his mediation was not sufficient to gain access to the community. Here, the role of gatekeeper was fulfilled by the AKVKC (the Vietnamese Association) which, as I explain in the next chapter, has links with both the Cambodian and the Vietnamese governments and has acted as a “middle man” in the triadic nexus between the two states and the diaspora. The MIRO facilitator organised a meeting with the AKVKC as soon as we reached the village. The local branch of the Association looked like a normal floating house, the only difference being a sign at the front.⁵⁸ Inside the house, AKVKC representatives from the village, commune, and provincial levels were expecting me. It was not difficult to obtain the AKVKC’s permission to conduct interviews; nevertheless, the Association insisted to assign me a Vietnamese “guide” who could introduce me to potential interviewees. This guide, who also worked for the AKVKC, drove the boat and chose where to take me. It was not long before I realised that most of the interviewees he was selecting were, too, members of the Association. In addition to this, he often wanted to participate in interviews and sometimes answered in lieu of my respondents, thereby compromising the quality of my data.

⁵⁷ Due to the events that unfolded in Village One (which have also been covered by Cambodian media), the village is easily identifiable. My respondents have been informed of this at the beginning of each interview, and have agreed to speak with me on the condition that their names remained anonymous.

⁵⁸ This was not always the case in other villages. In Village Three and Village Four, for instance, the local AKVKC branches were the houses of the village and Association leaders and were unmarked.

On the first day I politely asked my “guide” to stay on the boat during the interviews and explained to him that I had to follow specific University guidelines whereby interviews had to be conducted in private. He disregarded my request with a smile and assured me that people knew him and trusted him, and that it would have been easier for me to get the information that I wanted with his help. I chose not to insist for the time being and instead took advantage of the situation to gain a deeper understanding of the AKVVC. My visit to Village Two was invaluable in this regard, for it allowed me to delve into the size and workings of the Association while also being the very target of their “monitoring” role. This enabled me to get closer to the reality of my respondents and become part of the phenomenon that I was studying (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Yet, it was not fruitful in terms of understanding villagers’ opinion of their relationship with the AKVVC. As a matter of fact, although on the third day (out of five) my “guide” agreed not to join the interviews, he still accompanied me to the respondents’ homes. It follows that I was still being associated with him, which is likely to have affected the content of my interviews and, particularly, people’s accounts of the Vietnamese Association.⁵⁹

My experience in Village Two points to the potential for unwanted intrusion by gatekeepers (Curran and Cook, 1993; Clark, 2010). It also evidences the power imbalance that can characterise researchers’ relationship with them (McCareavey & Das, 2013). As I explain later in the chapter, such imbalance is partly informed by the positionality of the researcher and it may be extremely difficult to overcome. Refusing the help of the AKVVC, for instance, would have been inappropriate due to my gender and “rank” and could have compromised my access to interviewees. I felt powerless against the AKVVC’s interference, but I knew that I had to go through them in order to conduct fieldwork without putting myself and my participants at risk.

I negotiated access with the AKVVC/village leaders in all the Vietnamese villages that I visited in Cambodia. Fortunately, AKVVC representatives in Villages Three and Four were not too concerned about my research and allowed me to conduct interviews without interfering. In these villages, I chose not to take advantage of MIRO’s mediation; instead, I identified the communities’ locations through newspapers’ articles and the help of my interpreter. The reason for this is that in my first two field sites I noticed that MIRO’s degree of involvement in the village affected the way communities spoke about

⁵⁹ Even though I only asked general questions about the AKVVC, I noticed that many of my interviewees were reluctant to talk about it.

themselves and their rights – e.g. in Village One, where MIRO had carried out most of its advocacy work, Vietnamese respondents were aware of and valued their right to become Cambodian citizens. Whilst they described the authorities’ invalidation of documents as a normal and unavoidable practice, they knew that it was “wrong”. By contrast in Village Two, where MIRO’s engagement was limited and intermittent, many respondents were unaware of the right to obtain citizenship; some even claimed not to care – their priority, they said, was to have (any kind of) legal status and be able to earn a living. In light of this, I judged it important to interview Vietnamese communities that were not linked to MIRO or other NGOs in order to paint a more representative picture of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia.

The opportunity to visit returnees’ communities in Vietnam presented itself towards the end of my fieldwork, when a master’s student who was also doing research on the Vietnamese diaspora introduced me to a Vietnamese contact who had offered to accompany him to hard-to-find returnees’ villages in a border region of Vietnam. Such villages consisted of ethnic Vietnamese who had lived their whole lives in Cambodia and had only recently “returned” to the homeland following the Cambodian government’s introduction of stringent fishing bans and new, expensive, foreign resident documents (which I describe in detail in Chapters Six and Seven). Given the *impromptu* nature of the visit and some unexpected dynamics that I discuss in the next section, I only spent one day interviewing these returnees in Vietnam – with the main aim of finding out about the process and requirements (e.g. documents) of their return. I negotiated access with local authorities, who seemed to know my Vietnamese contact quite well. This facilitated the negotiating process; yet, it also alerted me and my interpreter, who additionally noticed that my contact had “military manners” - a very particular way of carrying himself and speaking. Although not certain, we suspected that he himself may be a member or a close collaborator of the local police.

Like my “guide” in Village Two (in Cambodia), my contact in Vietnam insisted to join the conversations with villagers. As I did not want him to think that I had something to hide, I allowed him to do so for the first two meetings, during which I asked very general questions concerning the respondents’ time in Cambodia, the differences between living in Cambodia and Vietnam, and fishing-related issues (e.g. the declining number of fish in the Tonle Sap, fishing bans, and legal and illegal fishing techniques). Then, I politely asked him to wait for us by his motorbike and explained that people may have felt

uncomfortable talking about illegal fishing in front of him. Perhaps convinced that we were not a threat (or perhaps moved by his apparent romantic interest in my interpreter), he accepted such explanation and accommodated my request. Without him, I felt freer to follow up on matters regarding people's perceptions of the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam in case my interviewees introduced them.

As a rule, however, I kept my initial questions as open-ended and general as possible. The reason for this was two-fold: on the one hand, I wanted my respondents to choose whether they felt comfortable or not discussing certain topics (Longhurst, 2003). On the other, the events described above and my interviews with AKVVC members in Village Two alerted me to the risk of "not knowing who was who"; in other words, who among my gatekeepers and respondents belonged to or collaborated with local elites/authorities and in what capacity (Strasser, 2014). Asking general questions (at least in the beginning) allowed me to navigate this issue. For example, instead of asking directly about the Vietnamese Association to Vietnamese villagers in Cambodia, I asked whether there were any organisations that provided help and guidance to their community (in some cases adding "*such as* NGOs, religious organisations, *and* the Vietnamese Association"). Leaving the question somewhat open allowed me not to give away what I was most interested in – which could have proven counterproductive in case the person I was talking to turned out to be linked to local authorities or the AKVVC.

(ii) *Working with interpreters*

Having highlighted the dynamics and challenges of my relationships with gatekeepers, I now turn to another category which played an important role during my fieldwork: that of the interpreter (Hennink, 2008; Liamputtong, 2010; Mosley, 2013). For my research, I had to work across two cultures and languages: Khmer and Vietnamese. Most of my fieldwork took place in Cambodia, which meant that I needed Khmer to arrange transportation and accommodation, ask for directions, and communicate with Cambodian authorities in case any problems arose. However, the majority of my respondents spoke Vietnamese as their first language, with some having limited knowledge of Khmer. Vietnamese language was therefore crucial to my interviews. As I explain in Chapter Five, the use of Vietnamese as first language was an indicator of the diaspora's enduring ties with Vietnam and their (limited) level of integration within Cambodia (Cara, 2013). Furthermore, it created a sense of shared identity and

community amongst the Vietnamese in Cambodia. I estimated that conducting my interviews in Vietnamese would enable me to “engage with interviewees on a personal level, in order to establish an atmosphere of rapport and trust that [would] allow interviewees to produce genuine and open responses” (Welch and Piekkari, 2006:420).⁶⁰ In Douglas’ words (1985:118), it would facilitate the creation of a “situated friendship” with my respondents, thereby improving the quality of my interactions and findings.

The desire to create such “situated friendship” (Douglas, 1985:118) was also the reason I chose to learn Vietnamese rather than Khmer language. Within the time and financial constraints of a self-funded PhD in the UK, studying both Khmer and Vietnamese would have been unfeasible. I decided to focus on Vietnamese in order to be able to have basic interactions with my participants: I did some language training in York and spent the first month of my fieldwork attending an intensive language course in Ho Chi Minh City.⁶¹ This allowed me to obtain a simple linguistic competency which helped me to understand (some of) the issues discussed in the interviews and, more importantly, establish a rapport with my interviewees (Bowler, 1997). It was not, however, enough to conduct in-depth interviews on my own.

During my fieldwork, I relied on two interpreters: one for the four Vietnamese villages that I visited in Cambodia; and one for the returnees’ villages that I visited in Vietnam. As my interviews were audio-recorded, I also hired a native Vietnamese speaker to double check all of my transcripts and let me know whether anything had been mistranslated (Irvine, Roberts, and Bradbury-Jones, 2008).⁶² My first (and main) interpreter was recommended to me by a contact who worked in a Cambodian university: due to limited funds, I could not afford to hire a professional translator and asked my acquaintances whether they knew any talented and trustworthy graduate student who could accompany me to the field (Andrews, 1995; Mosley, 2013). Naturally, the challenge was finding someone who was fluent in Khmer, English, and

⁶⁰ The emphasis on “accessing the beliefs, sensemaking and inner motives of interviewees” is in line with an interpretivist epistemology.

⁶¹ As the majority of Vietnamese diasporans in Cambodia are originally from the Mekong Delta region, I chose to study the Southern Vietnamese accent, which differs from the Northern Vietnamese accent in its use of tones.

⁶² Both my interpreters and the person who checked my transcripts signed a confidentiality agreement. The person who checked the transcripts was a Vietnamese student in Cambodia who had no links to my participants or the Vietnamese Association.

Vietnamese.⁶³ I was given the names of two potential candidates: K., an ethnic Khmer graduate who had grown up in a border region between Cambodia and Vietnam; and N., an ethnic Khmer Krom who was born in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta and had moved to Cambodia in his teenage years.

Initially, I did not think that N. would be suited for the job. Like most Khmer Krom in Cambodia, he came from the “lost” territory of Kampuchea Krom, whose annexation by Vietnam was still contested and described as forced and unlawful by members of the Cambodian public and elite - and Khmer Krom themselves (Takei, 1998; Kiernan, 2006). Furthermore, the Khmer Krom minority was known to suffer discrimination and abuse in Vietnam, which caused many of its members to flee to Cambodia and take a strong anti-Vietnam stance (Khmer Times, 2017; MIRO, 2014).⁶⁴ Whilst the group’s resentment was typically directed at the Vietnamese government, I worried that it could be projected onto my Vietnamese respondents and affect interviews and/or interpretations. Consistent with an interpretivist epistemology, I in fact believed that assistants’ and interpreters’

“gender, ethnicity, social status, economic situation and personality all influence the establishment of the social encounters through which data are collected. How research assistants translate and reflect upon informants’ statements, and the assistants’ involvement in the research process itself, have direct impacts on the researcher’s perspective and contribute to shaping the research” (Cornet, 2010:140)

Aware of this and of the interpreter’s “power to elicit, clarify, translate, omit, or distort messages” (Kaufert and Putsch, 1997:72), I went into my interview with N. with certain preconceptions regarding his own preconceptions and the challenges that they may have posed to the research project (therefore ironically becoming what I did not want my future interpreter to be). As we spoke, I however felt that the antagonistic sentiments that I expected him to nurture towards the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia were not there: although he did criticise the Vietnamese government, he displayed a sense of solidarity towards the diaspora, who he compared to the Khmer Krom in Vietnam due to their inability to “be accepted” by either state.

⁶³ For not all Vietnamese diasporans knew Khmer, I did not want to risk skewing my data by conducting interviews in Khmer and only talking to people who could speak it.

⁶⁴ This was demonstrated, inter alia, by the 2014 protest in front of the Vietnamese Embassy - in which hundreds of Khmer Krom (especially monks) and Khmer nationalists burnt Vietnamese flags and demanded an apology for the Vietnamese Embassy’s spokesperson’s statement that Kampuchea Krom had belonged to Vietnam “long before France’s official transfer of the land in 1949” (The Diplomat, 2014).

Of course, this attitude may have been motivated by his desire to be selected for the role. One of the challenges of working with interpreters is that there is no way of really knowing whether any bias exists (it is difficult enough to recognise bias within ourselves). This, however, applies to all interpreters, not only those belonging to a particular group. N. had experience working as a research assistant, polite manners, and an enterprising personality, and not choosing him on the basis of his ethnicity would have been unethical.⁶⁵ I thus decided to overcome my own prejudice and ask him to join me to the first fieldtrip, which I described as a “trial” period to see how we worked together.

Since the first day in the field, I started to see the positive side of N.’s positionality (Cornet, 2010), which conferred him a first-hand knowledge of what it meant to be a member of an excluded minority. This “shared experience” with Vietnamese respondents proved instrumental to the interviews. For he looked Khmer, most conversations started with interviewees asking him where he was from and how he knew Vietnamese. When he told them that he belonged to the Khmer Krom minority and had grown up in the Mekong Delta, many respondents either asked him about the situation of the Khmer Krom in Vietnam or talked about the places that they had visited in the Mekong Delta. In either case, despite not being “culturally matched”, N. was able to establish a connection with respondents (Liamputtong, 2010). As I explain later in the chapter, this meant that I was sometimes “reduced to third party status” (Karseras and Hopkins, 1987:23). This was a frustrating position to be in, but I did not want my interpreter to perform a stereotypical “handmaiden” role and (try to) “disappear” (Edwards, 1998) during the interviews. I recognised the importance of N.’s own interactions with interviewees and chose not to interfere with them. I did, however, ask him to keep me informed on what was being said, which he did either skilfully during the conversation or later when we discussed the interviews.

When we had time between interviews or at the end of the day, N. and I had a debriefing session during which we talked about particular passages in the conversations with respondents and their interpretation (Baker, Hussain, and Saunders, 1991; Edwards, 1998; Liamputtong, 2010). As Liamputtong (2010:147) noted, “without discussing with

⁶⁵ There is an interesting tension between the desire to conduct “ethical” research and make the best choices for our participants; and acting ethically in the research process as a whole, which includes the selection of research assistants and translators.

the interpreters/translators their perspectives of the issues, differences in understandings of words, concepts or worldviews across languages will be lost". N.'s perspective was essential in clarifying meanings of words: in the four villages that we visited, for instance, the great majority of our respondents described their relationship with Khmer people as "normal". When I asked them what they meant by normal, none of them elaborated - they simply repeated: "normal". I thus consulted N. on the matter and he explained to me that the term pointed to a certain distance between the two communities: normal meant "neither good nor bad", but it also implied a lack of interaction between ethnic groups. In this and other cases, N. illuminated the implicit meaning of terms which as a non-native speaker I would have not otherwise grasped (Mosley, 2013). He also advised me on the difference between legal and illegal activities and legally and illegally obtained documents, thereby helping me to rephrase or altogether avoid questions that could put my respondents in a difficult position. Thus, N. was more of a "key informant" than a simple interpreter, and played a vital role in helping me to make sense of what people said and the context in which they said it (Edwards, 1998; Mosley, 2013).

The same is true for C., the translator who accompanied me to my field trip to returnees' communities in Vietnam. Whilst N. assisted me in all of my visits to Vietnamese villages in Cambodia, he was unable to join me in Vietnam.⁶⁶ I thus decided to contact C., a Vietnamese girl who I had been introduced to by a common friend during my month of language training in Ho Chi Minh City. C. was passionate about Italian culture and language, and we had spent several afternoons discussing Italian and Vietnamese traditions and helping each other out with the respective languages. Before she became my interpreter, C. was a friend and a window into Vietnamese culture and I immediately thought about her when looking to replace N.. Given the limited time that I had to organise the trip and the even shorter time I would spend in the field, I in fact preferred to draw from my informal network and bring with me someone I knew I could trust (Edwards, Temple, and Alexander, 2005). Before we went on fieldwork, C. and I had a meeting to discuss her role as an interpreter, the research topic and aims, and the confidential nature of the interviews (Edwards, 1998; Baker, Hussain, and Saunders, 1991; Freed, 1988). We also discussed the potential challenges of our trip, but we

⁶⁶ I initially asked N. to come to Vietnam with me in order to maintain a certain consistency throughout the translations/interviews.

neglected to consider (and prepare for) the risks related to being two young women in the field.

Several authors have reflected on how gender has shaped the research experience (e.g. Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016; Sharp and Kremer, 2006; Arendell, 1997; Green, Barbour, Barnard and Kitzinger, 1993). As Chiswell and Wheeler (2016) noted, some aspects of being young and female are altogether advantageous to the research process: for instance, females are generally perceived as “warmer and less threatening than males” (Gurney, 1991: 379) and may find it easier to convince people to take part to the research project. On the other hand, females may face difficulties in gaining respect and credibility from their respondents (Green, Barbour, Barnard and Kitzinger, 1993; Gurney, 1991) and are more vulnerable to interference, intimidation, and harassment (Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016; Sharp and Kremer, 2006; Paterson, Gregory, and Thorne, 1999; Arendell, 1997).

C.’s presence in the interviews undoubtedly helped putting my respondents, especially female respondents, at ease. Yet, whilst the interactions with interviewees were positive, those with our Vietnamese gatekeeper (the Vietnamese contact who took us to the villages) presented some problems: he had a clear interest in C. and asked her several personal questions, including where she lived and whether she was married. Despite C.’s efforts to discourage him, his advances grew more insistent as the day progressed; after it got dark, he delayed our return into the main town and repeatedly invited us to go for a drink.

As I am not Vietnamese and all of these requests were not directed at me personally but were translated to me by C., I did not know how to appropriately deal with the situation. I asked C. to tell him that we wanted to go to bed early, as the following day we may have wanted to visit the villages again. We managed to return to town by 10pm and drove to the hotel where we had previously booked a room. Here, we were however told that there was no reservation to our name; we thus had no choice but to ask our gatekeeper to take us somewhere else. He drove us to a love hotel. The choice in itself made us uneasy: whether he had meant it or not, we could not help but thinking that there was a malicious side to it. To add to the discomfort, he tried to call C. twice during the night, at midnight and at 1am.

We had little or no sleep that night. C. was visibly distressed and I felt anxious and helpless. Although I wanted to visit returnees' communities again the following day, I was conscious of my utter dependency on my Vietnamese gatekeeper: the villages were located in a remote area at more than an hour's distance from town and neither me nor C. remembered how to reach them. After consulting C., I thus decided that the safest thing to do was returning to Ho Chi Minh City early in the morning and wait until we were on a bus to let our contact know that we had had to leave due to an emergency.

I am not sure he believed our excuse. Regardless of whether he did or not, he kept calling C. for the following two weeks. This experience made me reflect on issues of gender and safety and researchers' responsibility to keep themselves, their respondents, *and* their collaborators out of harm's way. Whilst scholarly literature (e.g. Howell, 1990; Paterson, Gregory, and Thorne, 1999; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000; Bahn and Weatherill, 2013) and ethical guidelines (e.g. Ethical guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth; the European Commission's Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology) have been concerned with the safeguard of researchers and research participants, assistants' and interpreters' safety has rarely been touched upon (a few exceptions are e.g. Du Toit, 1980; Fujii, 2008). Scholars have increasingly acknowledged the importance of assistants' positionality (Pasquini and Olaniyan, 2004; Cornet, 2010) and their role in and contribution to the research process (Edwards, 1998; Jentsch, 1998; Turner, 2010). Yet, they have seldom recognised that assistants, like respondents, often remain in the field after the researcher leaves and, as such, deserve the same level of concern as participants themselves (Taylor, 1991; Michailova et al., 2014).

In the future, I will pay greater attention to gender-related issues when recruiting and training my interpreters. Whilst I still believe that research by two women is possible (and, in certain cases, desirable), I will consider more carefully the potential risks of fieldwork and discuss them with my candidates before we both decide whether we want to work together. I will also take care to plan the field trip in greater detail and try not to be overly reliant on a single contact/gatekeeper, particularly if male: to this end, it may be helpful to arrive to the field site or the closest city a couple of days in advance to check that everything is in place (e.g. accommodation, transport), explore the area, and make additional local contacts. Whilst I do not presume that this will obliterate the risks and vulnerabilities of being two women in the field, I do hope that it will help to prevent

some of the challenges that I recounted above. Future trips, I am afraid, will hold more lessons. I return to issues of positionality in the next section, where I reflect on the process of conducting interviews.

4.3 Collecting data: in-depth interviews and documentary sources

As previously stated, for my data collection I relied on qualitative methods, namely documentary sources and in-depth interviews. The content of both was heavily influenced by the research context of Cambodia and Vietnam. Research in illiberal regimes is in fact noticeably more challenging than that carried out in “open” (i.e. “Western”, “liberal”, and “democratic”) contexts (Koch, 2013). As Goode noted in relation to Russia, (growing) authoritarianism often engenders a “shrinking of the field and a corresponding adjustment of fieldwork” (Goode, 2010:1055). This was evident in my negotiations with gatekeepers and featured even more prominently in my interviews with villagers and elites. Here, research contexts interlocked with issues of positionality and shaped people’s attitudes towards myself and my interpreters (Scott, Miller, and Lloyd, 2006; Koch, 2013; Tuner, 2013a; 2013b). In this section, I reflect on how being a young, female, and foreign researcher working in an illiberal context affected the collection of my data. I start by recounting my experience interviewing villagers and elites and end with a discussion on documentary sources.

(i) Interviews with vulnerable Vietnamese villagers

Over the course of my fieldwork, I visited four Vietnamese villages in four different provinces of Cambodia; and two villages of returnees in Vietnam. All of them were “pure Vietnamese” villages, meaning that they were separate from Khmer communities and presented a minimal percentage of mixed marriage (out of my sixty respondents, only two were married to a Khmer). I interviewed a total of sixty villagers, whom I selected through convenience sampling – that is, based on who was available and willing to talk to me at the time of my trip (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Whilst I aimed to interview a representative sample of people in terms of gender and age, my priority was in fact not to interfere with the daily routines of my respondents and cause a potential loss of income (Scott, Miller, and Lloyd, 2006).

I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible technique in which the interviewer designs a general structure by choosing in advance the topics to cover and the main questions to ask (Drever, 1995). The latter are usually fairly general,

allowing the researcher to ask further questions in response to significant replies (Bryman, 2012). This, of course, still entails some level of “prior contamination of the social world”: by designing a loose structure, I made some assumptions about what I would find and the nature of the social reality that I would encounter (Bryman, 2012:404).⁶⁷ To eradicate this issue, I would have needed to use unstructured interviews. Yet, by allowing the informant to direct the conversation, unstructured interviews would have risked not covering the issues that I was most interested in (Dunn, 2005). In light of this, I chose semi-structured interviews to follow “a consistent line of inquiry” while also pursuing the themes introduced by my interviewees (Yin, 2003:86). This meant that my research could be at least partly shaped by my participants and what *they* deemed to be important to tell me.

Of the villages that I visited in Cambodia, three were on water and one was on land, whilst all villages in Vietnam were on land. Communities were often located in remote areas and respondents had seldom gone through the formal education system: a few middle-aged villagers had been able to attend three or four years of elementary school, whereas the elder ones had never been to school. The first challenge that I encountered was therefore to explain what my research was about in order to obtain informed consent. Emanuel, Wendler, and Grady (2000:2703) define informed consent as “the provision of information to participants, about the purpose of the research, its procedures, potential risks, benefits, and alternatives, so that the individual understands this information and can make a voluntary decision whether to enrol and continue to participate”. To illustrate the purpose of my research proved particularly difficult as my interviewees were not familiar with the concept of a PhD (and, in some cases, of university in general). This also caused them to conflate my role as a researcher with the three “outsider” figures that they had been exposed to in the past: government employees, NGO staff, and journalists (Lammers, 2003; Suzuki, 2004; Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009; Wasamba, 2009).

As a consequence of the above, my interviews were sometimes characterised by an element of suspicion or hope from the informants. I tried to navigate the former by

⁶⁷ Qualitative research typically tries to avoid such prior contamination in the attempt to see social phenomena through the eyes of the people being studied (Bryman, 2012).

substituting written consent forms (which had been approved by the Ethics Committee) with oral consent. People were in fact uncomfortable “signing” a form that they could not read and associated written documentation with formal government procedures (Shapiro and Meslin, 2001; Creed-Kanashiro, Ore, Scurrah, and Penny, 2005; Shaibu, 2007). I also made it clear that participation was completely voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question and stop the interview at any point. With regard to the risk of giving false hopes, I specified that I was not a human rights advocate and that participation in my project was unlikely to translate into tangible benefits – especially in the short-term (Iphofen, 2013).

This was one of the hardest parts of my research. As I was talking to my participants, I reflected on what would be a realistic and sensible way to “give back” to the communities (Wolcott, 1995; LeCompte and Schensul, 2015); I found no acceptable answer. I could not provide an economic remuneration for their time, which would have probably been their preference, and I could not promise that my research would result into a positive change for them. If anything, due to the Cambodian government’s reluctance to accept outsider political advice, I could more confidently state the opposite. I therefore chose to be honest about the limitations of my project and tell my participants that I aimed to publish within and outside of academia and raise awareness on their situation, but that this was unlikely to have any major implication on their daily lives. At the same time, I brought small, symbolic gifts to show my gratitude and, when possible, I helped them with their daily chores (e.g. feeding fish; mending fish nets; looking after children) in order to avoid wasting their time and being a major disruption in their daily routines (Lassiter, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2005).

Taking part in my interviewees’ daily lives also helped me to reduce the “distance” between myself and some of my female respondents. Whilst being a young, female researcher may have allowed me to be perceived as less threatening by men (Gurney, 1991; Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016), it often placed me at the highest echelon of an unwanted power dynamic with women (especially younger women). A few female respondents made remarks on how “beautiful and white” my skin was compared to theirs; or how they wished they could have gone to school like me; or again apologised for the modesty of their homes. Helping them with their chores while telling them about

myself and my country allowed me to establish a connection and overcome the initial embarrassment (on both sides).

My interpreters were also crucial in this and used different aspects of their identity to put people at ease (Cornet, 2010). C.'s sweet and cordial manners, combined with her genuine interest in Italian culture, helped to bridge the gap between me and my participants: when she told them that she studied Italian, people often became curious and took a genuine interest in us. They wanted to see photos and asked us as many questions as we asked them, allowing for a more balanced conversation. On the other hand, N.'s experience as a member of an excluded minority made my respondents feel comfortable sharing theirs. As mentioned in the previous section, this meant that I sometimes had to stay in the "background" of the interview, guiding it from behind the scenes while trying (as much as possible) not to disrupt the conversational flow. I found this particularly challenging: my limited knowledge of Khmer and Vietnamese already meant that I did not have full control of the interview, as I could not check whether N. was being accurate in his translations. This was exacerbated by the imperative to keep the dialogue as informal and natural as possible, especially with shy and wary interviewees. It took me some time to adapt to whichever role the situation required and strike a balance between assertiveness and discretion. Eventually, I became accustomed to alternating between lead and "background" interviewer and so did N.. Halfway through my fieldwork, this "dance" had become automatic for the both of us and we performed the appropriate role without the need to discuss it (Karseras and Hopkins, 1987; Freed, 1988; Edwards, 1998).

(ii) *Interviews with elites*⁶⁸

In addition to villagers, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven members of the Vietnamese Association at the village, commune, and provincial level, and the AKVKC Chairman Chau Van Chi. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the work and goals of the Association and test the consistency of their narrative across different provinces and levels.⁶⁹ As I was also interested in the

⁶⁸ By "elite", I mean people occupying positions of political authority (Sabot, 1999; Cochrane, 1998). This includes members of the Vietnamese Association.

⁶⁹ AKVKC representatives at the village, commune, and provincial level, for instance, were open about the Association's link to the Vietnamese government. By contrast, AKVKC Chairman Chau Van Chi (like

Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' official stance on the diaspora, I made several attempts to schedule an interview with the Vietnamese Embassy. However, despite a promising first response, I then waited for several months until my contact stopped answering my calls and e-mails. I had a similar experience with the Cambodian Department of Immigration: despite having been introduced by government spokesperson Phay Siphon, the department turned down my request for an interview. In terms of elite interviews, I was thus only able to interview Phay Siphon and an advisor to the Ministry of Interior who wished to remain anonymous.⁷⁰

Interviews with political elites entailed very different challenges from those with villagers. Here, I had the feeling that my identity as a young, foreign, female researcher caused me to be perceived as harmless and naïve (Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016). On the one hand, this made it easier for me to access sensitive information, as interviewees were generally relaxed and not overly cautious about what they said. Members of the AKVKC at the local level, for instance, told me about the structure of the Association and its links with the Vietnamese Consulates and Embassy. Furthermore, in Village Two I witnessed the village chief and four members of the AKVKC compile a list of "all the Vietnamese who had been able to vote in the past" (I20, personal communication, 1 May 2016). The list, which carried the logo of the CPP, confirmed allegations that some Vietnamese have been allowed to vote in the general elections despite lacking Cambodian ID cards.⁷¹ Both this information and the aforementioned links with Vietnam had the potential to spark outrage among the Cambodian public and my respondents may have not felt comfortable sharing them with a more senior and/or Khmer researcher. Thus, in this regard, my identity as a young, female, and foreign researcher aided my data collection.

On the other hand, when suspicion persisted, these same traits made me more vulnerable to intimidation and interference (Gurney, 1991; Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016). An example of this is the episode with the AKVKC "guide" that I was assigned in Village Two which I recounted in the previous section. In that occasion, I felt that my gender and age relegated me to the losing end of the negotiating table: as a matter of fact, the

Cambodia's spokesperson Phay Siphon) told me that the Association had nothing to do with Vietnam, for it was under the Cambodian Ministry of Interior.

⁷⁰ Both Phay Siphon and AKVKC President Chau Van Chi gave me permission to use their names.

⁷¹ When I asked the five men whether the people in the list held Cambodian ID cards, they candidly answered that they did not. According to a source, the list may have been compiled in preparation for the 2017 commune election i.e. to allow the Vietnamese to vote.

subordinate nature of women and younger people in the Cambodian culture implied that I had less power vis-à-vis my male gatekeepers and respondents (Sharp and Kremer, 2006). Furthermore, I did not want to lose the veneer of naïveté which continued to prove useful in my interviews with members of the AKVVC. Refusing the assistance of my “guide” could have also given the impression that I had something to hide, further jeopardising my access to interviewees and altering the AKVVC’s own attitude towards myself and my research.

My positionality also played a key role in my conversation with the Cambodian government’s spokesperson Phay Sihan. Here, the authoritative position of my interviewee contrasted with my perceived inexperience, engendering an “inevitably asymmetrical” relationship (Desmond, 2004:265). Over the course of the interview, I was often implicitly or explicitly reminded of my young age and my outsider status. During the first twenty minutes, for instance, I was hardly given a chance to speak: Phay Sihan was reciting an “overview of Cambodian history” and every time I attempted to take control of the interview I was told that I did “not need to ask questions” and that he was going to “walk me through each step” (Phay Sihan, personal communication, 26 July 2016). Whilst I was eventually able to intervene, there were several other things that I either did “not need” to do or was “not allowed” to do. For instance, when I asked Phay Sihan whether he could put me in touch with the Vietnamese Embassy, he answered⁷²:

“No. You are *not allowed* to contact them [...] Because you don’t need to know what’s going on with the Vietnamese Government. You want to know what is going on with the Cambodian government as a *host country* to those Vietnamese” (Phay Sihan, personal communication, 26 July 2016; emphasis added)

Episodes like this one made me wonder whether Sihan would have used the same peremptory with an older, male researcher. His attitude suggested that whilst he may have seen me as a potential threat, he was confident that he could easily control me. My age was undoubtedly a factor in this, especially in the aforementioned context of Cambodia’s social hierarchy and culture.

⁷² He had previously called the Embassy in front of me to ask for the contact of the Vietnamese Association.

In my interview with Siphon, my foreignness was also used against me. Siphon frequently reminded me of my outsider status, hinting at “foreigners” who misunderstood and criticised the Cambodian government:

“I like it that we challenge each other between Cambodians, but we don’t need any foreigner to interfere” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016).

He reiterated this point several times, including when talking about Kem Ley, the political analyst who was murdered in July 2016 in what was widely believed to be a politically motivated attack by the Cambodian government (The Diplomat, 2017). Siphon complained about the attention that Kem Ley’s death received in Western countries and particularly the “prejudiced” US (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016). Although I tried to appear neutral and emphasise my Italian origins, I felt that I was being associated with an adversarial and all-encompassing “West” whose main aim was to discredit the Hun Sen government.⁷³ Being aware of this, I found myself agreeing with many of Phay Siphon’s statements and, to a certain extent, “playing dumb” at different points during the interview (McDowell, 1998:2138). I was hoping that this would have encouraged him to be less defensive. Yet, whilst my strategy may have (slightly) softened his stance towards me, it had the counter-effect of reinforcing my “reputation” as an inexperienced researcher, making me an even easier target for orders and derailment.

Like with the AKVVC in Village Two, I felt that I was hostage of the role that I had been attributed and which I had performed and played up to my advantage. I judged that being too assertive could have proved counterproductive, attracting too much attention to myself and my research. In hindsight, I may have been overly cautious in some of my interviews. This, however, is one of the side-effects of conducting research on vulnerable populations in semi-authoritarian contexts. In my interviews with elites, I was mindful of the risk of losing access to the villages or revealing information that could have compromised my participants. My hesitation to raise or delve deeper into some issues (e.g. Vietnam’s involvement with the populations in my interview with

⁷³ In informal talks with members of the CPP, Italy’s lack of involvement (past and present) in Cambodia and Southeast Asia played to my advantage for, despite being part of the EU, it was not seen as an “enemy” country.

Phay Siphon) led to some gaps in my data. I tried to fill these gaps through the use of documentary sources, which I briefly discuss in the next section.

(iii) *Documentary sources*

I used documentary sources to verify some of the information that I was provided during my interviews, identify the governments' official stance and laws concerning the Vietnamese diaspora, and map important events that had affected the Vietnamese population in Cambodia. In order to do this, I relied on two main types of documentary evidence: news reports (including news concerning the AKVVC that I found on the Vietnamese MoFA website); and official laws and policies by the two governments. In both cases, I sought sources from both countries. Nevertheless, given my limited language skills, I relied mainly on English-language sources.⁷⁴

Cambodian newspaper articles provided useful records of anti-Vietnamese sentiments and attacks over the past two decades, and how Cambodian authorities portrayed them and addressed them within local media. Statements by government representatives were a reliable indication of how the Cambodian government wanted to be perceived in relation to the "Vietnamese issue". The hardening stance against "illegal Vietnamese", for instance, reflected the government's desire to be perceived in opposition to, rather than in cooperation with, Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Recent statements about the documentation distributed to Vietnamese diasporans since 2015 were also a valuable proof that the introduction and price of the new documents (which I discuss in Chapter Six) were not a result of corruption at the local level as Phay Siphon claimed, but a national policy that was being carried out across the country. In this case, statements within newspapers helped to compensate for the lack of access to written official documents (where they existed) and representatives of the Ministry of Interior.

On the Vietnamese side, newspapers articles allowed me to gather information on the activities of the AKVVC. Stories concerning the Vietnamese Association in Cambodia

⁷⁴ These were fairly easy to find in Vietnam, where many governmental documentation and newspapers articles are translated into English. Albeit limited, my knowledge of Vietnamese also allowed me to find Vietnamese-language sources which I then translated into English with the help of google translate and my research assistant. My assistant also helped me to look for relevant sources in Khmer. Whilst we found material on anti-Vietnamese protests and a few sub-decrees concerning immigration procedures, we did not find much concerning the Vietnamese Association. As I cannot read Khmer, I am unable to determine whether this was the result of a "wrong search", or an objectively limited reporting of the AKVVC's activities within Cambodia.

(like those on Vietnamese Associations across the world) were regularly shared by Vietnamese news outlets and the website of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). Furthermore, government-controlled media were again useful to understand the image that the Vietnamese government wanted to project – both of itself and of its stance towards the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia.

I compared newspapers' sources with Cambodia and Vietnam's introduction and implementation (or lack thereof) of laws and policies concerning the Vietnamese. This allowed me to unveil the inconsistencies and limitations of the governments' rhetoric.⁷⁵ Vietnam and, especially, Cambodia's laws on nationality and immigration also shed light on the anomalies of the states' treatment of the Vietnamese diaspora – e.g. their lack of access to Cambodian citizenship despite qualifying for it under Cambodia's law on naturalization, their ability to travel between countries without a passport, and so on (I elaborate on this in Chapters Six and Seven). In summary, combining and triangulating documentary data and interviews with villagers and elites allowed me to gain insight into the reasons, modalities, and consequences of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora.

4.4 Limitations of the study

Notwithstanding my attempts to fill the gaps in my data, my study suffers from a number of limitations. My limited access to government officials, for instance, prevented me from delving deeper into the governments' positions. Furthermore, official documentation regarding the Cambodian government's policy towards the Vietnamese was also inaccessible, with AKVVC Chairman Chau Van Chi claiming that he had received all the information "orally". These are certainly shortcomings of my research. Yet, the lack of (access to) data was also, in itself, data. The strategies that embassy and government officials employed to avoid being interviewed reflected the veil of secrecy that shrouded their engagement and treatment of the Vietnamese diaspora. The same was true for the purported lack of official documentation detailing Cambodia's policy towards the Vietnamese. Whether real or not, the claim that there was no written evidence of the government's decisions concerning the group suggested that such

⁷⁵ Whilst reiterating that the diaspora in Cambodia is an "integral part of Vietnam", for instance, in 2016 the Vietnamese government introduced a sub-decree aiming to reduce the number of diasporans "returning" from the neighbouring state (Department of Justice, 2016). I elaborate on this in Chapter Five.

decisions were not meant to reach the public.

In addition to being affected by my limited access to government representatives and documentation, my data was shaped by the timing and location(s) of my fieldwork. I was in Cambodia between January and August 2016, which was a time of significant change for the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom: as I explain in Chapter Six, at the end of 2015 Vietnamese communities had been informed of the Cambodian government's long-term plan to relocate them on land. Roughly at the same time, they had also been instructed to pay USD\$62.50 for the new Cambodian foreign resident documents which, as they later learnt, ended up being covered by the Vietnamese government. These factors are likely to have affected my respondents' accounts of the two states. As a matter of fact, they could alone explain the generally negative perception of the Cambodian government and the generally positive perception of Vietnamese government.

To overcome this issue, I tried to expand the scope of my questions to include the states' past *and* present engagement and treatment of the group. This allowed me to paint a more comprehensive picture of the situation. Yet, the latter also suffers from limitations: retracing the evolution of the Vietnamese' situation in Cambodia proved especially difficult. In particular, it was impossible to build a detailed and reliable chronology of events, as respondents often provided contradicting and confused statements. This was partly due to years of nebulous and inconsistent policies by the Cambodian government, which are exemplified by the vast range of different documents distributed to the Vietnamese (which I present in Chapter Seven).

Finally, the locations of my fieldwork are also likely to have affected the data that I collected. As I stated earlier in the chapter, the villages that I visited in Cambodia were all "pure Vietnamese". However, although rarer, mixed Khmer-Vietnamese communities also existed. These communities may have been subject to different policies by the two governments and may have had different relationships with the Khmer people, the two states, and the AKVVC. Unfortunately, the current research is not representative of these groups, but it would be interesting to make a comparison in the future.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reflected on the dynamics of data collection and the challenges that they entailed. In the first section, I justified my methodological approach and elaborated on why I changed my initial plan to carry out ethnographic fieldwork. In the second section, I discussed my relationships with gatekeepers and translators, who played a crucial role in hindering and/or facilitating my physical and social access to diaspora villages in Cambodia and Vietnam (Cassell, 1988). My interpreters provided invaluable help in my interviews: using different aspects of their identity, they acted as a “bridge” between myself and my respondents, allowing for more relaxed and natural conversations. By contrast, with the exception of the local NGO MIRO, relationships with gatekeepers often involved a degree of interference which I was not always able to navigate. This was largely due to the juxtaposition of an illiberal research context and my identity as a young, female researcher which, in the context of Cambodian culture, required me to display a greater level of deference than I would have normally accepted.

My identity also shaped my interviews with local and national elites and Vietnamese villagers in Cambodia and Vietnam. With regard to the former, my gender and age often helped me to be perceived as less threatening by elites (especially at the local level). Nonetheless, when suspicion persisted, the same traits made me an easier target for intimidation and interference. This was certainly the case in my interview with the Cambodian government’s spokesperson Phay Siphon, who also insistently reminded me of my outsider status. In my interviews with Vietnamese diasporans, my identity played a very different role: as a foreigner, I often elicited feelings of suspicion and hope among my respondents. Such feelings were naturally affected by the illiberal environment in which I conducted my interviews, which also explains my limited access to representatives of the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. The latter is one of the limitations of my study. Whilst I tried to mitigate it through the triangulation of interviews and documentary sources, my data remains incomplete. I reflected on this issue in the last section of the chapter, where I also discussed how the timing and locations of my fieldwork are likely to have influenced the data that I collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

Between Imagined Nations and Physical States – Cambodia and Vietnam’s perceptions of the Vietnamese diaspora

Introduction

Having highlighted the methodology of my research, I now turn to my empirical findings. In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of Khmer ethno-nationalism and the “special relationship” (Heder, 2018) between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. Cambodia’s domestic politics and Cambodia-Vietnam relations have informed the states’ perception and treatment of the Vietnamese diaspora, which are the main focus of the current chapter. Here, I argue that the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments have viewed the Vietnamese in Cambodia as inconvenient subjects and have engaged, respectively, in the *bounded exclusion* and the *bounded inclusion* of the group. In the first half of the chapter, I look at the Vietnamese diaspora from the perspective of the Cambodian government. I show that, due to the country’s highly politicised anti-Vietnamese sentiment, the Hun Sen regime has refrained from granting citizenship to Vietnamese communities, instead toughening its stance towards them in order to send a “positive” message to Cambodian voters. The Cambodian government’s exclusionary attitude has however been limited by the Vietnamese government, who has opposed the “repatriation” of diasporans from Cambodia and repeatedly encouraged their equal treatment in the Kingdom.⁷⁶ Caught between a powerful neighbour and its own electorate, the Cambodian government has thus engaged in the *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese, keeping them outside the “imagined community” of the Cambodian nation whilst allowing them within the territory of the state (Anderson, 1983).

A similar argument can be made in relation to Vietnam. The Vietnamese government’s perception of the neighbouring diaspora is at the centre of the second half of this chapter. Here, I begin by exploring the Communist Party’s inclusive stance towards the Vietnamese diaspora in general, which provides a background for the more specific case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. In section 5.3, I discuss the Politburo’s depiction of the Vietnamese in Cambodia as an integral part of the Vietnamese nation. I

⁷⁶ I use the terms “return” and “repatriation” in quotation marks because many Vietnamese diasporans from Cambodia have never lived in Vietnam.

argue that the reason for this is twofold: firstly, the Party has embarked on a nation-building project which has called for the (seemingly) consistent treatment of all diaspora sub-groups. Secondly, the regime has felt a sense of moral responsibility towards “friendly” Vietnamese diasporans in the region, many of whom played a crucial role in the country’s expansionist past. The Vietnamese government has therefore adopted an inclusive rhetoric toward the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Yet, such inclusion has come with limitations. The recent “return” and settlement of thousands of Vietnamese from Cambodia has in fact spawned a fear of mass migration by the Vietnamese government, who has attempted to limit their influx into the homeland. By doing so, the Politburo has engaged in the *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese, embracing the diaspora as part of the Vietnamese nation while keeping it outside the physical boundaries of the state. The *bounded exclusion* and *inclusion* of the Vietnamese have been reflected in villagers’ discourses of *home*: whilst providing different (and sometimes contradicting) accounts of home, Vietnamese villagers tended to describe Cambodia as *home* in terms of territory. Vietnam, on the other hand, was associated with the sense of *feeling at home* - which is inextricably linked to belonging to a nation. I elaborate on people’s accounts and the difference between the two in the last section of this chapter.

5.1 A note on “Boundedness”

Before exploring the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ stance on the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, it is important to clarify the meaning of what I describe as *bounded inclusion* and *bounded exclusion* of the group. The reference to *boundedness* in my argument draws attention to the enduring relevance of imagined and physical boundaries in delineating the position of diaspora populations. In Chapter Two, I briefly discussed the scholarly critique of “methodological nationalism” and the corresponding efforts to move beyond a “nation-state definition of society” and the “use of Westphalian borders as analytical frontiers” (Sutherland, 2016:91). As the latter quote suggests, such efforts have been taking place at the analytical level and have not intended to deny the importance of the nation-state model and its boundaries. Albeit taking a decidedly less territorial form, the nation-state ideal has continued to influence states’ internal and external politics of belonging (Brubaker, 2010). The same is true for boundaries.

In the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, the physical border between Cambodia and Vietnam has affected the Cambodian government's stance towards the diaspora in two ways: on the one hand, border disputes and the steady influx of Vietnamese immigrants into the Kingdom have underpinned the electorate's widespread fear of Vietnamese invasion, which in turn has motivated the Cambodian government's exclusion of the group from the national citizenry. On the other, such symbolic exclusion has not translated into physical exclusion (i.e. forced "repatriation" to Vietnam) due to the regime's need to maintain "good neighbourliness, traditional friendship, comprehensive and long-term cooperation" with its more powerful neighbour (Thayer, 2012:75).⁷⁷ The Vietnamese government's attitude towards the diaspora has, too, been inextricably linked to the Cambodia-Vietnam border. The geographical proximity of the host-state has in fact augmented the risk of mass "return" of the diaspora in times of hardship. As I will evidence in Section 5.3, a significant number of Vietnamese diasporans have already migrated to the neighbouring homeland, prompting the Vietnamese government to limit its inclusive stance towards the group. This demonstrates that, in the triadic nexus between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the Vietnamese diaspora, physical boundaries have continued to be significant – even more so because of their permeable and volatile nature.

In addition to exposing the enduring salience of physical boundaries, the case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia points to the importance of symbolic boundaries. In Cambodia, such boundaries have been (re)produced by decades of discourses aimed at mobilising ethnic difference. Ethno-national manipulation has been the most popular political strategy among ruling and opposition parties over time, and has contributed to cementing the "walls in the head" that have long separated the Khmer from the Vietnamese (Sutherland, 2018:36). As mentioned above, these have affected the Cambodian government's stance towards the diaspora and the extent to which it could be seen to accommodate it. At the same time, whilst permanently placing the Vietnamese in Cambodia outside of the Cambodian nation, symbolic boundaries have encompassed the group into the "great family of the Vietnamese nation" (Vietnam Diplomatic Handbook, 2010:82). Like physical boundaries, symbolic boundaries have thus played

⁷⁷ Linking back to Chapter Three, the shared border between the two states also explains why the Cambodian government could not afford to turn its back to the Vietnamese government in favour of a closer relationship with China.

a crucial role in determining the fate of the diaspora. The reference to boundedness in my argument serves as a reminder of this. In the following paragraphs, I use the notions of *bounded inclusion* and *exclusion* to highlight how physical and symbolic boundaries have affected the extent to which the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been excluded and included by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam.

5.2 Outside the imagined Nation, inside the physical State: The Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia

In the current section I look at the Cambodian government's perception and treatment of the Vietnamese diaspora. I begin by interrogating the government's exclusion of the Vietnamese from the Cambodian nation. First, I analyse the rhetorical constructions of "Khmer nation" in official documents and discourses. I pay particular attention to the meaning of "Khmer/Cambodian citizen" and its juxtaposition to the Vietnamese "other", which has been interchangeably referred to as Vietnamese national, illegal immigrant, permanent resident, and refugee. I then analyse the extent to which this rhetorical exclusion of the Vietnamese has translated into practice and note how the Cambodian government's stance has been influenced and constrained by both domestic factors and its bilateral relations with the Vietnamese regime.

- (i) *The Khmer's "other": The Vietnamese diaspora outside of the Cambodian Nation*

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF CAMBODIA

Being the heirs of a great civilization, a prosperous, powerful, large and glorious nation whose prestige radiated like a diamond;

Having endured suffering and destruction and having experienced a tragic decline in the course of the last two decades;

Having awakened to stand up with resolute determination and commitment to strengthen our national unity, to preserve and defend Cambodia's territory and its precious sovereignty and the prestige of Angkor civilization, to build the nation up to again be an "Island of Peace" based on a liberal multi-party democratic system, to guarantee human rights and the respect of law, and to be responsible for progressively developing the prosperity and glory of our nation.

WITH THIS RESOLUTE WILL

We inscribe the following as the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia”

The preamble of the 1993 Constitution of Cambodia is a good starting point for understanding the foundations of the modern Cambodian nation and the place that the Vietnamese have occupied within it. When the new Constitution was written, Cambodia was emerging from nearly twenty years of conflict and authoritarian rule, having to rebuild both the state and the scarred nation. Discourses of “Khmerness” united Cambodian people under a common history, one that took pride in the glory of the Angkorian era whilst remembering the angst and devastation of war. Yet, they also acted as a repressive force. As Edwards noted, Cambodian identity “was built around the ‘ideal type’ and ‘moral superiority’ of the dominant ethnic group” (1996:53). The “moral” Khmer was juxtaposed against the treacherous “other”, who was deemed intrinsically untrustworthy based on the a priori assumption that he or she was loyal to another nation (Edwards, 2006; Hinton, 2006; Aguilar, 2007).

The Vietnamese were often subject to such accusations. Having been Cambodia’s historical enemy and, more importantly, the most recent invader of its territory and “precious sovereignty”, the Vietnamese regime was associated with the darker side of Cambodia’s past (its “tragic decline”) (The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 2003). Due to its expansionist goals and its negative representations by Cambodian political elites, the eastern neighbour was seen as hindering, rather than facilitating, the re-birth of the Kingdom. Accordingly, the diaspora was suspected of being the Vietnamese regime’s fifth column in the country – informants, spies, and troops who “never left Cambodia, but merely discarded their uniforms and melted into the Vietnamese settler communities” (Goshal, Ku and Hawk, 1995:23). As we have seen in Chapter Three, these feelings of distrust and hostility have persisted to the present day and the Vietnamese have continued to be considered “unassimilable” by both Cambodian citizens and members of the political elite (Willmott, 1967:35).

The exclusion of the Vietnamese has been reflected in the 1993 Constitution of Cambodia, which specifies that *Khmer citizens* are the equal beneficiaries of rights and duties. The ambiguity of the term *Khmer citizen*, which may translate as “Cambodian” (i.e. inhabitant of the Kingdom of Cambodia) or “ethnic Khmer”, has led scholars and international organisations to express concerns over the rights of “anyone so unfortunate

as to be labelled non-Khmer” (Edwards, 1996:68).⁷⁸ This applied especially to the Vietnamese: during debates over the meaning of “Khmer” in the 1993 Constitution, members of the National Assembly in fact agreed to expand the definition to include Cham and ethnic Chinese. Yet, they excluded ethnic Vietnamese, re-confirming their place outside the “imagined community” of the Cambodian nation and, accordingly, of the Cambodian citizenry (Amer, 2014; Anderson, 1983).⁷⁹

Ambiguity has been a leitmotif of the government’s strategy for dealing with the issue of the Vietnamese. Whilst allowing Vietnamese communities to reside within its territory, the Cambodian government has been intermittently treating and referring to them as immigrants, temporary/permanent residents, or refugees. In somewhat of a contradictory statement, the Cambodian government’s spokesperson Phay Siphon declared that:

“Those people are living legally in Cambodia. Those people are registered as residents in Cambodia: permanent residents... Even though they are temporary. “Temporary” means that they have the right to pursue their own naturalisation, to become Cambodian citizens. So they have the right already! Even though they are not Cambodian yet, they are protected by Cambodian law” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016).

Later in his interview, Siphon stated that the government respected “refugees” and “settlers”. He also claimed that he wanted to help Vietnamese “refugees”, for he had been a refugee himself: “I used to be a refugee in the United States. I know how I felt as a refugee” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016). The shift from one definition to the other (permanent residents, refugees, and settlers) shows that flexible Vietnamese subjects are made to fit multiple categories depending on the situation and the actor describing them. The categories used by Phay Siphon underscore the legality of Vietnamese communities’ presence in the country, which however has not “yet” resulted into citizenship. Despite reassurance that the Vietnamese have the right to

⁷⁸ A definition of “Khmer citizen” can be found in the 1996 Law on Nationality, which states that “any person who has Khmer nationality/citizenship is a Khmer citizen”. As mirrored by the English version, the meaning of “Khmer citizen” remains ambiguous, for the original Khmer term *sancheat* can translate as both citizenship and ethnicity. This allows for two different interpretations: in one, “the article states that every Khmer citizen is a Khmer citizen, which has no definitional substance. Alternatively, it means that everyone of Khmer ethnicity is a Khmer citizen, which would exclude all residents that are not ethnically Khmer” (Ehrentraut, 2011:790).

⁷⁹ Such definition confirms the enduring appeal of the internally homogeneous character of the “nation-state” model - where ethnic minorities are either integrated/assimilated or excluded.

obtain citizenship, both the terms “refugee” and “settler” counterpose the Vietnamese to the Cambodian citizen, remarking the distance between the two.

The same is true for the reference to the diaspora as “Vietnamese citizens/nationals” and “immigrants”. The former has been often used in joint statements between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam, reinforcing the notion that the Vietnamese “are not a natural part” of Cambodia (Christie, 2012:157). As I explain in more detail in section 5.3, both states have accepted that the diaspora belongs to Vietnam. This attitude has been further confirmed by the Cambodian government’s consistent treatment of the Vietnamese as immigrants. In 1993, whilst encouraging the repatriation of refugees from Thailand, government officials prevented thousands of Vietnamese who had fled the Khmer Rouge regime from returning to Cambodia. The United States’ Department of State reported that, “although the vast majority of these people were born in Cambodia, the government insisted it would deal with the ethnic Vietnamese as an immigration issue” (as cited in Owsley, 1995:388).

To this day, government officials have pledged to reduce the number of “Vietnamese immigrants” in the country, thereby portraying the image a single, homogeneous group, and placing the diaspora on the same level as more recent economic migrants. Whilst excluding the Vietnamese from the Cambodia nation, the Cambodian government has however been limited in the extent to which it could physically remove the Vietnamese diaspora from Cambodian territory. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the shared border between Cambodia and Vietnam has had a constraining effect on the Hun Sen regime’s exclusionary stance. In the following paragraphs, I illustrate the government’s difficult position between its own electorate and the SRV (Socialist Republic of Vietnam) and its interest in being perceived as addressing “the Vietnamese issue” without upsetting its powerful neighbour.

(ii) *The Cambodian government’s “Bounded Exclusion” of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia*

In an interview of April 2017, Interior Minister Sar Kheng and director-general of immigration Sok Phal announced that “the Ministry of Interior [planned] to retroactively strip citizenship from children of immigrants whom they say were mistakenly awarded Cambodian nationality as long as 30 years ago” (Phnom Penh Post, 2017c). The policy,

which according the Ministry of Interior “would mostly affect Vietnamese immigrants living in Cambodia”, was enacted in August of the same year with the introduction of a sub-decree that ordered the annulment and confiscation of all “irregular” Cambodian documents held by foreigners. The move was one of the most recent reminders that, regardless of the length of their stay in Cambodia, the Vietnamese could not become Cambodian citizens. Interestingly, it came after the introduction in 2014 of new and expensive foreign resident documents which effectively re-started the count of the years that Vietnamese diasporans had spent in the Kingdom.⁸⁰

As I will show in Chapter Six, the invalidation of past documentation has not been uncommon among Vietnamese communities in Cambodia. The aforementioned sub-decree has only provided an enhanced legal basis for a practice that has been taking place for decades. By stripping the Vietnamese of old documents and substituting them with new, temporary ones, the Cambodian government has been able to postpone the granting of citizenship while ensuring that Vietnamese communities held legal status in the country. This behaviour can be explained by the CPP’s desire to accommodate both its own electorate and the Vietnamese government. The Vietnamese regime has indeed been actively monitoring the situation of the diaspora in Cambodia. The issue has been firmly on the states’ agenda since the early 1990s, with Vietnamese leaders often thanking or encouraging the Cambodian government’s equal treatment of “Vietnamese nationals” in bilateral meetings and joint communiqués. A recent example of this is Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc’s request to the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to

“Assist in removing challenges faced by Vietnamese nationals living in the country, particularly related to their legal status. Addressing these issues would allow overseas Vietnamese to live more stable lives and to contribute to the host country’s socio-economic development and the friendship between the two countries.” (Việt Nam News, 2016)

The statement hints at the relevance of diaspora communities in the context of the bilateral relationship between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. The Vietnamese government’s persistence on the issue has led the Cambodian Government to promise to consider speeding up the process of granting legal status to Vietnamese

⁸⁰ I discuss these documents in Chapters Six and Seven, where I also elaborate on the practice of invalidating and confiscating past documents held by Vietnamese.

nationals “based on Cambodian law, especially the law on immigrant management, and agreements on the management of overseas Vietnamese in Cambodia signed by the two countries” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Department of External Relations, 2009).

Such position has been at complete odds with the rhetoric of intervention put forward in the domestic arena, where the Hun Sen regime has been adopting an ostensibly tougher stance on Vietnamese “immigrants”. The latter has been a response to the Cambodian public’s ever-growing anti-Vietnamese sentiment, which has been fuelled and exploited by opposition leaders from FUNCINPEC to the CNRP. The Vietnamese regime’s alleged encroachment of Cambodia’s territory has been a cornerstone of the CNRP’s political strategy and has contributed to getting former CNRP leader Sam Rainsy dangerously close to winning the elections in 2013. At the time, Rainsy was allowed to return to Cambodia after four years of self-imposed exile, which followed a sentence that convicted him to two years in prison for moving border posts at the frontier with Vietnam and disseminating false information about the Cambodia-Vietnam border (The Guardian, 2013).

As mentioned both previously and in Chapter Three, a history of territorial disputes, invasions, and attempted “Vietnamization” of Cambodia has underpinned the widespread suspicion of the eastern neighbour among the public, making anti-Vietnamese claims highly likely to resonate with the Khmer electorate.⁸¹ Such animosity has been embedded in party politics due to Prime Minister Hun Sen’s past role as foreign minister of the Vietnamese-installed PRK government, for which he has long been accused of aiding Hanoi’s expansionist efforts. The steady presence of old and new Vietnamese in Cambodia has been one of the main arguments in support of these charges, making it paramount for Hun Sen to counteract these allegations and prevent them from eroding the legitimacy of his rule. As Phay Siphon pointed out,

“[...] Politically, it’s tough to make the Vietnamese citizens. Even though everyone [in the CPP] understands that it’s a human right. [...] we cannot do

⁸¹ Demonstrations against Vietnam and the Vietnamese have been commonplace in Cambodia and have typically intensified closer to the elections. In June 2015, a conflict erupted in Svay Rieng province between Vietnamese Villagers and Cambodian activists who were inspecting border posts in a disputed area. A year earlier, in 2014, a group of 600 demonstrators burnt a Vietnamese flag in front of Vietnam’s embassy in Phnom Penh to protest against the contested annexation of the lower Mekong Delta by Vietnam, which Khmer have long referred to as “the lost territory of Kampuchia Krom”.

anything. It's a political matter: we don't want everyone to accuse the CPP of being a puppet [of Vietnam]" (Personal communication, 26 July 2016).

The potential political costs of granting citizenship to the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been exacerbated by rumours concerning the CPP's distribution of voting cards to the group, who has been believed to support the ruling party in the elections. Such proposition contains an element of truth: some of my interviewees held voting cards, which they usually acquired between 1992 and 1998, and reported being able or having been able to vote despite not being Cambodian citizens.⁸² This may suggest that there has been an instrumental side to the presence of Vietnamese communities in Cambodia – in other words: that the Government may have allowed them to stay in the Kingdom to secure their support in communal and national elections.

The instrumental argument has been prominent in both popular and academic discourses and aligns with the theoretical perspectives on “diasporas as resources” outlined in Chapter Two. Yet, whilst Vietnamese votes may have been an important resource in the past, they are unlikely to bear the same weight in the recent political environment. As Cambodian people's anti-Vietnamese sentiment gained traction, the issue of “Vietnamese votes” attracted increasing attention and outrage among the public. Either voluntarily or encouraged by the opposition, people have even organised monitoring groups to prevent Vietnamese from voting in the elections. In 2013, LICADHO observers witnessed a group of “several hundred local residents” who “were blocking individuals from voting [...] due to their alleged Vietnamese ethnicity” (LICADHO, 2013:11). Some bystanders recognised long-term Vietnamese residents among those blocked, but local authorities reportedly made no effort to subdue the operation. The event, and many others like it, demonstrates that the CPP's strategic use of Vietnamese votes has become increasingly unsustainable. Vietnamese themselves have become scared of the violence that pervades Cambodian elections and many of them have preferred not to vote. The instrumental side of the Vietnamese presence has thus been fading, while the disadvantages of the CPP's perceived vicinity to the group have continued to grow.

It follows that, in recent years, the Cambodian government has perceived the Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects. The term “inconvenient subjects” indicates that their value has

⁸² See Chapter Seven for a more detailed account of the Vietnamese' access to the right to vote.

been overshadowed by the costs that they represent to the government. This does not imply that the diaspora has lost its value entirely or that the government has stopped using it to its advantage. Though to a far lesser extent, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have continued to support the CPP.⁸³ The term “inconvenient subjects” thus refers to a population which is *predominantly* inconvenient to the state. In the case of the Vietnamese diaspora, this is even more apparent if we consider the group’s implications on the Cambodian economy. Unlike the Vietnamese business community, which has been comprised mainly of newcomers, most long-settled Vietnamese have lived in poverty, relying on fishing as their main source of livelihood and earning an average of USD\$2-6 per day. Under these circumstances, the prospect of granting them citizenship has become increasingly cumbersome for the Cambodian government. As an advisor to the Ministry of Interior highlighted,

“History, culture, religion, tradition... Whatever. They matter, but when it comes to decision time, it’s always [about] how much you can get out of something. I think that giving citizenship or not will be based on the extent to which these immigrants can bring benefits to the country. It’s sad to say that, but every country makes the same calculations, right? I mean, it’s all [about] the economic value of immigrants. [...] I think the government also sets a list of priorities: you know, skills and some other criteria, on how much immigrants can bring, and so on”.

“Let’s say that the majority of the Vietnamese haven’t integrated themselves into the mainstream society: well, most of them don’t speak Khmer. So, what are the options on the table there? Give them jobs? What kind of jobs?” (CS03, personal communication, 11 July 2016).

According to this advisor, the Cambodian government has made a cost-benefit calculation on the granting of citizenship to the Vietnamese. However, the final decision has been informed mainly by what the Vietnamese *have not contributed*, rather than what they have contributed, to Cambodia - namely wealth and skills.

In addition to not bringing any significant benefits to the state, affording citizenship to the diaspora would seal the government’s responsibility towards Vietnamese communities and force it to devise an appropriate integration and support plan. The advisor to the Ministry of Interior reiterated this point later in his interview:

⁸³ Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility of them regaining political significance in the future.

“We cannot just tell them: “Ok, you need to learn Khmer culture and tradition, and forget about your own tradition and culture”. No, we have to create a curriculum that is reflecting the needs and concerns of the ethnic group, and doing that would put more strain on the national budget. [...] It’s easy to say: ok, you can be a citizen of this country. But the next question – and I am sure the international community will ask this- is: “Oh, now you are violating human rights because you don’t provide them with good living conditions”. The first part is easy, but the second part is a complex one when the country doesn’t have enough resources to really ensure good living conditions for every citizen. And Cambodian citizens, they can speak Khmer, they can write, some of them can calculate for example. So solutions for them can be easier than [those for] that group of [Vietnamese] people. A number of Cambodians are living on the poverty line or below the poverty line, but they still have land to live [on], for example. But these people [the Vietnamese] ... Many of them don’t have legal entitlement to land, for example. And how much land are you going to divide up and give them? [chuckles]” (CS03, personal communication, 11 July 2016).

The advisor’s statement confirms the Cambodian government’s perception of the Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects in economic, as well as political, terms. The costs of the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia have outweighed its benefits, making the instrumental argument for their presence in the country far less convincing. As a matter of fact, amid heightened political tension, the Vietnamese population in Cambodia may well be described as the Achilles’ heel of the CPP. The following statement by Phay Siphon suggests that the government has even attempted to “return” the diaspora to Vietnam, which has however opposed such initiatives:

“It’s difficult for Cambodia to decide on non-citizens. We have to send them back, repatriate them back to Vietnam. And what’s going on with Vietnam [is that] the Government doesn’t want to take them back”.

“[...] So the Cambodian Government would prefer to have them as citizens... I mean, as legal residents; legally residing in Cambodia. Because that way they are under Cambodian law [...] and it’s easier to manage them” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016).

The excerpt encapsulates the government’s critical position between its own electorate and the Vietnamese regime. Faced with domestic opposition to the Vietnamese on the one hand and the homeland’s refusal to “take them back” on the other, the CPP has been unable and unwilling to take a drastic stance in favour of either the inclusion or the exclusion of the diaspora. Trapped in this conundrum, the government’s best option has been to “integrate them very quietly” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July

2016) whilst shouting its commitment to addressing the issue of Vietnamese immigration.

This ambivalence has been epitomised by the Department of Immigration's announcement, in July 2016, of the arrest and removal of eighty-four illegal Vietnamese, which was belied by the Vietnamese Embassy's statement that all the Vietnamese were found to be long-term residents and allowed to return to Cambodia (The Phnom Penh Post, 2016). The Cambodian government later denied the embassy's account, unveiling its desire to be perceived in opposition to, rather than in cooperation with, the Vietnamese people and regime. Yet, its surreptitious accommodation of the neighbour's request (i.e. allowing the Vietnamese to return to Cambodia) has demonstrated that the government's primary concern was the appearance, not the substance, of its actions. Supporting this thesis is also the fact that the Cambodian government's increasing reporting of Vietnamese deportations has been paralleled by the issuance of (new) foreign resident documents to Vietnamese communities in the country, the cost of which has been covered by Vietnam.⁸⁴ The result has been a symbolic rather than physical exclusion of the Vietnamese, who are kept outside the Cambodian nation and citizenry but allowed inside the territory of the Cambodian state. This dual strategy is what I call *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese. It is complemented by the Vietnamese government's position towards its neighbouring diaspora, which I explore in the following section.

5.3 Inside the imagined Nation, Outside the physical State: The Vietnamese Diaspora in Vietnam

In order to understand the Vietnamese government's stance toward the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, it is important to understand the SRV's perception of the Vietnamese diaspora in general. In the first part of this section, I therefore take a detour from the focus on the Vietnamese in Cambodia to explore the Vietnamese government's inclusion of Việt Kiều (Overseas Vietnamese) at large. I argue that the Vietnamese government has used a rhetoric of national unity to legitimise its rule and attract the economic resources and expertise of overseas Vietnamese residing in wealthy states (noticeably North America, Europe, and Russia). Central to such rhetoric has been the

⁸⁴ I elaborate on the dynamics surrounding the distribution of these documents in Chapter Six.

image of Vietnam as a benevolent homeland which, alongside a sense of moral responsibility, has motivated the government's embrace of the Vietnamese in Cambodia as part of the Vietnamese nation. Yet, as with the Cambodian government's exclusion, the Vietnamese government's inclusion of this diaspora has been *bounded*. Its boundaries have been largely determined by the permeable nature of the Cambodia-Vietnam border, which has enabled the "return" of thousands of Vietnamese from the neighbouring Kingdom. Making similar cost-benefit calculations to those of its Cambodian counterpart, the Politburo has attempted to deter the return of the diaspora by improving its living conditions in the host-state. In doing so, the Vietnamese government has integrated the CPP's strategy by doing its exact opposite: embracing the diaspora inside the nation while keeping it outside the territory of the state.

(i) *Overseas Vietnamese inside the Vietnamese Nation*

*“Đoàn kết đoàn kết đại đoàn kết,
thành công thành công đại thành công”*

*“Unity, unity, great unity
Success, success, great success”
- Ho Chi Minh, 1961*

During the Vietnam War, President Ho Chi Minh used the slogan above to call on Vietnamese people to unite and fight against the common enemy. His emphasis on national unity was echoed by his successors, becoming a cornerstone of the CPV's ideology. "People of all ethnicities, religions, classes, strata, economic sectors, sexes, age groups, regions of the country and non-members of the Communist Party, in-service and retired" came to be embraced as members of "the great family of the Vietnamese nation" (Vietnam Diplomatic Handbook, 2010:82). This included the Vietnamese abroad, who became an integral part of the regime's domestic and foreign policy.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Review of Vietnamese Migration (2012), approximately four million people of Vietnamese descent have been living, working, or studying outside of Vietnam, with eighty per cent of them residing in developed countries. In occasion of the 12th National Party Congress in Hanoi, President Trần Đại Quang highlighted the Party's intention to:

“Actively mobilize and adopt policies to attract overseas Vietnamese to turn their thought to the homeland, build the country to be strong and prosperous, preserve

national identity and the images of people and land of Vietnam” (Communist Review, 2016).

The reference to national identity and the evocation of “images of people and land” reflect the intended symbolic value of the President’s statement. By explicitly re-calling Ho Chi Minh’s doctrine earlier in the speech, Trần Đại Quan fostered an understanding of national unity as inherent to the Party’s ideology, thereby obliterating (or hoping to obliterate) the memory of decades of considerable hostility towards overseas Vietnamese. Before the 1990s, overseas Vietnamese were in fact labelled “cowardly traitors” by the SRV (Socialist Republic of Vietnam) (Howard, 2011:12). The epithet referred specifically to Vietnamese who had fled the country in the aftermath of the fall of the pro-American Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976. War refugees and “boat people” have in fact made up the majority of Vietnam’s diasporic population. Many of them have been former RVN supporters and, presumably, opponents of the current regime (Sutherland, 2012b). Yet, they have also been the most numerous group of overseas Vietnamese and thus the main target of the government’s policies towards the diaspora at large.

Fearing that they would pollute the country with anti-communist, Western ideology, the Vietnamese Politburo initially kept these subjects at distance, making even communication with their relatives in the homeland difficult. However, during the economic reforms of the 1990s, the government came to understand that the presence of an extensive diaspora was a valuable asset which could contribute capital and skills to the developing state (Chan and Tran, 2011; Howard, 2011; Sutherland, 2012b). It was following this realisation that Ho Chi Minh’s rhetoric of national unity was (somewhat ironically) extended to overseas Vietnamese. The CPV coupled symbolic utterances with inclusive policies in the attempt to appeal to its diaspora abroad. In 1994, the Vietnamese government instituted the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese, which was placed under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and tasked with:

“(3) Coordinating with the concerned agencies in protecting the legitimate rights and interests of overseas Vietnamese on the basis of Vietnamese laws, laws of the countries concerned, and international law.

(4) Working out policies and methods for mobilizing overseas Vietnamese to raise their sense of community, unite and help one another, promote the patriotic tradition and preserve the national identity; creating favourable conditions for overseas Vietnamese to contribute to building the homeland and help their relatives living in the home country [...].

(5) Guiding and assisting overseas Vietnamese in their relations with the home country; introducing the potentials of overseas Vietnamese to people in the country; establishing, together with State agencies, mass organizations and socio-economic organizations in the country, the relationships of cooperation in the fields of economy, science, technique, technology, education, training and culture and other fields between overseas Vietnamese and the home country; helping intellectuals in the community of overseas Vietnamese to contribute to the national industrialization and modernization” (Decree No. 37-CP of April 26, 1997).

Point (3) mirrors the Vietnamese government’s desire to project a positive image of itself amongst Vietnamese abroad, especially “those with different political viewpoints” (Việt Nam News, 2007). This is further exemplified by Resolution 36-NQ/TW of March 2004, which stipulated that the Vietnamese state would take steps to “protect the legitimate interests of overseas Vietnamese and prevent discrimination and other acts against the Vietnamese people abroad”. By pledging to protect their rights and interests, the SRV has incarnated a homeland that cares for, rather than punish, its diaspora. Such metamorphosis has been paramount to the government’s nation-building project and its ultimate goal of enhancing the Vietnamese state’s prosperity and legitimacy (Sutherland, 2012b:6).

The instrumental aims of the Vietnamese government’s stance are reflected in tasks (4) and (5) of the above decree. As mentioned earlier in the section, diaspora policies have been primarily targeted at communities living in North America, Western Europe, Russia, and Eastern Europe, whose monetary and professional resources had “great potential to contribute to national development” (MoFA, 2012). Vietnam has made consistent efforts to attract these resources: in 1999, the Vietnamese government granted Việt Kiều the right to invest in the homeland and implemented new mechanisms to facilitate remittances.⁸⁵ In 2007, Overseas Vietnamese and their next of kin obtained a visa exception to travel to the homeland. In 2009, Việt Kiều were granted permission to buy real estate and land in Vietnam and establish companies in accordance with the Law on Promotion of Domestic Investment. Their rights were further enhanced in 2014, when the adoption of the new Law on Housing (No. 65/2014/QH13) allowed them to “own houses in the same way as local Vietnamese citizens without further residency

⁸⁵ See Decision No. 170/1999/QĐ-TTg, dated 19 August 1999; and its Amendment No. 78/2002/QĐ-TTg dated 17 June 2002.

requirements or any limitation on the type or quantity of houses to be owned” (VILAF, 2016).

In addition to attracting the resources of the diaspora, the policies listed above have aimed to encourage the physical presence of overseas Vietnamese in the homeland. The Vietnamese government has also tried to attract the skills and knowledge of Vietnamese experts abroad. Whilst it has not yet been able to exploit the full potential of the latter, the SRV’s economic measures have successfully encouraged remittances and investment. Statistics show that Vietnam has received approximately USD\$92 billion in remittances between 1991 and 2014, excluding USD\$10 billion circa of foreign direct investment by Việt Kiều (Việt Nam News, 2016).⁸⁶ Thanks to their contribution to national development, over the past twenty years overseas Vietnamese have gone from “traitors” to being regarded as a crucial and integral part of Vietnam. This gradual shift has been reflected in official documents and policies and has culminated in the National Assembly’s 2008 amendment to the Citizenship Law allowing for dual citizenship (Decision No. 24/2008/QH12); and the 2013 amended Constitution, which stated that “Overseas Vietnamese make up an inseparable part of the Vietnamese national community” (The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013).

The dramatic turn in the Vietnamese government’s perception of Việt Kiều in developed countries dovetails with the literature on “diasporas as resources”. Yet, as the case of the Vietnamese in Cambodia shows, the population of Overseas Vietnamese has not been limited to wealthy diaspora sub-groups. The instrumental argument does not fully explain the Politburo’s inclusive rhetoric towards the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia which, like most pre-1975 migrant populations settled in Southeast Asia, has not contributed any capital or skills to the homeland. In order to understand the relationship between the latter and the Vietnamese regime, the instrumental rationale should be considered alongside the notion of moral responsibility. In the following section, I explain how the two factors have shaped the Vietnamese government’s inclusion of the diaspora in Cambodia while also highlighting the limits of the homeland’s position.

⁸⁶ Remittances have been one of Vietnam’s main sources of external financing: in 2012, remittance flow was almost equivalent to foreign currencies coming from Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and 2.5 the amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) (MoFA, 2012).

(ii) *The Vietnamese government's "bounded inclusion" of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia*

In section 5.2 I showed that, since the end of the PRK, the SRV has been monitoring the situation of “Vietnamese nationals” in Cambodia (Amer, 2010). In the 1990s, the Vietnamese government denounced the frequent attacks suffered by ethnic Vietnamese in the country and invoked human rights conventions while requesting the intervention of the international community (Owsley, 1995). Over the course of Hun Sen’s thirty-years rule, the SRV has regularly reminded its Cambodian counterpart of the rights of the Vietnamese diaspora and has recently begun to make explicit references to their legal status in the host-state. Official statements on the population have been consistent with broader discourses on national unity, describing the group as an integral part of the Vietnamese nation and affirming “the Party and State’s responsibility to the Vietnamese community living abroad, including Việt Kiều in Cambodia” (Việt Nam News, 2007).

The Vietnamese government’s rhetoric on the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia has been coherent with the one directed at the diaspora in general, the only difference being a greater emphasis on the “protection” role of the homeland. The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, the government has been bound by its own inclusive stance toward the wider diaspora, which has been a cornerstone of its nation-building discourse. On the other, the neighbouring diaspora’s past role in supporting the regime has engendered a sense of responsibility from the homeland. I will start by analysing the former explanation.

Having relied on a rhetoric of national unity to appeal to the “wealthy” Việt Kiều, the Vietnamese government could not contradict itself by engaging in the differential treatment of poorer diaspora groups. The regime’s protective attitude toward the Vietnamese in Cambodia has served to reinforce its yearned-for image of benevolent homeland, which in turn has acted as an important nation-building tool. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in its 2012 Review of Vietnamese migration, the protection of the Vietnamese abroad has been a necessary move which has contributed “to enhancing the political position and prestige of the State in the world and in the eyes of overseas Vietnamese” (MoFA, 2012). To enhance the regime’s political position and prestige has meant to enhance the legitimacy of the Poliburo’s rule within and, in some instances, beyond the boundaries of the state.

The nation-building side of the Vietnamese government's inclusion of the Vietnamese in Cambodia can be thus considered to be instrumental in nature. Yet, the SRV has also had a moral responsibility toward the neighbouring diaspora. It is in fact worth remembering that, whilst former war refugees were considered "traitors", Vietnamese populations in Southeast Asia have been seen as "friends" of the regime. Most of them have supported (or, at worst, been indifferent to) the communist rule. Some were even sent to current host-state as part of the Vietnamese regime's expansionist endeavours - a strategy which earned them the reputation of fifth column of Vietnam (Chan and Tran, 2011; Poole, 1974). It follows that the SRV, like other post-revolutionary regimes, has felt a moral responsibility to safeguard these friendly diaspora populations (see e.g. Zevelev, 1996; Waterbury, 2009).⁸⁷ Coupled with instrumental motivations, such duty has informed the Vietnamese government's rhetorical stance towards the diaspora in Cambodia which, as mentioned above, has been coherent with that targeting the Vietnamese diaspora at large. Moving beyond rhetoric, however, there have been some important differences in the Politburo's treatment of the two groups.

In the previous section, I have highlighted the Vietnamese government's endeavours to attract the resources of Việt Kiều living in developed countries. These have included measures encouraging overseas Vietnamese' return to the homeland (e.g. visa exception; law on housing), pointing to the symbolic and practical nature of their inclusion. The same does not apply to the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. As mentioned above, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been mostly poor, unskilled communities. Whilst their inclusion in the nation could benefit the regime's nation-building project, their presence in the state could undermine it. As a consequence, the Vietnamese government has not encouraged their return. On the contrary, it has tried to prevent it. In the following paragraphs, I explore the regime's *bounded inclusion* of the Vietnamese, which has become ever more prominent over the past few years.

Since 2012, the Vietnamese government has in fact had to provide "unexpected support" to thousands of Vietnamese who "returned home from Cambodia" (Resolution No.

⁸⁷ Russia, for instance, has made Russians in the "Near Abroad" a pivotal point of its domestic and foreign policy. According to Zevelev (1996), such behaviour stems from a pervasive belief that Russia has a moral duty to safeguard ethnic Russians abroad. A similar position can be found in Hungary, where the constitution states that "the Hungarian government feels responsible for the fate of the Hungarians living beyond the borders, and it should promote the care of their relationship with Hungary" (Waterbury, 2006). In these two cases, the diasporas had a significant symbolic value.

181/QĐ-TTg, 2014). Faced with a severe decline in fish and stringent fishing bans in Cambodia, a conspicuous part of the diaspora has moved to Vietnam in search for better living conditions, posing a significant challenge to the Vietnamese state. In January 2014, Resolution no. 181/QĐ-TTg reported that there was a total of 8,989 returnees living in the regions of An Giang, Tây Ninh, Long An, Kiên Giang, Đắc Nông, and Bình Phước.⁸⁸ Whilst I was unable to access up-to-date data on the number of returnees, such number is certain to have increased after the Cambodian government's introduction of new foreign resident documents, which was decided later in 2014 and began to be implemented in the following year.⁸⁹ During my fieldwork in Village Two in Cambodia, members of the Vietnamese Association told me that there was an average of one family leaving every day. In Village One, I was told that around thirty to forty families had already left Cambodia since the beginning of the year. Regardless of their accuracy, these statements indicate that people's "return" to Vietnam has become commonplace in Vietnamese communities across the Kingdom.

Vietnamese authorities and officials have also acknowledged the phenomenon, with representatives of the main areas of settlement expressing concern over what has appeared to be an upward trend. The chairman of the People's Committee of Tân Thạnh commune, Long An province, stated that his district could "handle hundreds of families, but if the figure skyrockets to thousands, it's impossible" (VN Express, 2016). Abiding by the instructions of Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc and former Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, local authorities in Vietnam have given support to returnees by building homes, providing medical treatment and access to clean water and electricity, distributing rice, and allowing children to go to school despite the lack of legal documents. Resolution no. 181/QĐ-TTg established that the Ministry of Finance should devote VND6,396 million (USD\$281,538) and 405 tons of rice to Việt Kiều returning from Cambodia. These were taken, respectively, from the central budget reserve fund and the national reserve for a support period of three months.

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, the Vietnamese government has had to address the issue of the documentation of returnees. On the 29th of September 2014,

⁸⁸ The numbers of returnees in each region were the following: An Giang: 3,491 inhabitants.; Tây Ninh: 2,970 inhabitants; Long An: 1,433 inhabitants; Kiên Giang: 304 inhabitants; Đắc Nông: 24 people; Bình Phước; 767 inhabitants (Resolution no. 181/QĐ-TTg).

⁸⁹ I elaborate on this in Chapter Six.

former Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng signed decision No. 1748/QĐ-TTg, approving “The overall scheme for voluntary migration from Cambodia to Vietnam” and assigning to the Ministry of Justice the responsibility to coordinate with other ministries and central agencies and to guide provincial committees in the implementation of Sub-Scheme 2: “Citizenship, household status, household registration and other identification documents for voluntary migrants from Cambodia”. Nevertheless, the process of determining the status of returnees proved to be difficult and lengthy, with very few people qualifying for permanent residence and, subsequently, citizenship. As the head of the Justice unit of Tan Hung district, Long An province, pointed out: “most of them have been stateless for two or three generations, and they don’t even remember exactly where in Vietnam their family is from. But they are certainly Vietnamese based on their tongue and customs” (Tuổi Trẻ News, 2013). To further exacerbate the situation, most returnees did not know written Vietnamese, nor did they possess valuable skills besides fishing and (less frequently) farming. Under these circumstances, the Vietnamese from Cambodia were perceived as an undue burden by local actors, who have also worried that the Government’s 2014 support plan could constitute a pull factor for those still living in the Kingdom.

The fear of uncontrolled migration from the western neighbour has been shared by the Vietnamese government itself. With a population of approximately ninety-five million people (in 2017), the third largest in Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese Government has faced significant challenges in ensuring employment and a stable income for all of its citizens. Returnees from Cambodia have only added to a workforce that has been mostly low-skilled and poorly paid, while bringing no apparent benefit to the state. Combined with the sustained influx of returnees since 2012, this has motivated the SRV’s view of these Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects – with their symbolic value (in the nation-building project) being overshadowed by the costs of their presence in the country. Such view has prompted the Vietnamese government to adjust its “caring” role and introduce a limiting feature to prevent further waves of return migration from Cambodia.

In 2016, the Department of Justice organised a series of conferences aimed at disseminating the content of the sub-scheme “Citizenship, household status, household registration and other identification documents for voluntary migrants from Cambodia” to People’s Committees at the local level. In Sa Thầy district, Kon Tum province, local officials were reminded that the “Party and the State “considered Cambodia’s

Vietnamese as an integral part of Vietnam and were interested in stabilising their lives; promoting and preserving their national identity and culture; and working with the Cambodian Government to create favourable conditions to secure their stay in Cambodia and limit the number of Vietnamese migrants to Vietnam (Department of Justice of Vietnam, 2016). The last line of the statement epitomises the Vietnamese regime's bounded inclusion of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia, that is the Party's endeavours to embrace the diaspora into the symbolic Vietnamese nation whilst circumscribing their presence in the physical territory of the state.

The Vietnamese government's *bounded inclusion* of the diaspora has complemented the Cambodian government's *bounded exclusion* of the group, with neither state taking full responsibility for the group. The inclusion of the diaspora as part of either the nation *or* the physical territory of the state has in fact allowed the two governments to maintain some level of ambiguity on their relationship with (and, thus, responsibility towards) the Vietnamese. Such ambiguity has affected people's connection with the two countries and their narratives of *home* in Cambodia and Vietnam, which are at the centre of the following section.

5.4. Bounded exclusion and inclusion: the view from below

The Cambodian and Vietnamese states' *bounded exclusion* and *inclusion* of the Vietnamese was clearly reflected in diasporans' discourses of home. In their interviews, Vietnamese villagers designated both Cambodia and Vietnam as their home; nonetheless, they spoke of the two states in very different terms. More specifically, they described Cambodia as *home* in terms of territory, and Vietnam as *home* in terms of belonging to a common people/community. In the next paragraphs, I highlight the theoretical difference between these two understandings of home and link them to the Vietnamese diaspora's position vis-à-vis Cambodia and Vietnam.

Home is a complex and multi-layered concept which is "simultaneously material and imaginative": "home is a place, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and imagery that is imbued with feelings" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006:22). These feelings are feelings of belonging, familiarity, and intimacy which mirror the Freudian notion of "Heimlich" and evoke the "warm sensation" of being among people who understand both what we say and what we mean (Ignatieff, 1994:7). Furthermore, *home* can be in multiple locations. This is especially true for migrant and diaspora

communities, who often feel attached to more than one place in accordance with their (personal or collective) memories of the homeland and their lived experience of the host-state (Walter, 2001; Western, 2002; Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

Diasporas' ambiguous, multi-sited, and sometimes contradictory meanings of *home* have been at the centre of several studies which have emphasised diasporic groups' hyphenated subjectivities and the double consciousness that characterises the in-between and inter-cultural spaces that they occupy (Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1997; Walsh, 2006). Such emphasis has however mirrored the literature's predominant focus on diasporas living in liberal states: as mentioned in Chapter Two, in liberal host-countries diasporas usually undergo processes of integration and assimilation, thereby fully or (at least) partly blending into the host-culture and society. As such, most diasporans feel at home in the host-state while retaining various levels of identification outside of it (Walter, 2001).

For the Vietnamese in Cambodia, the situation was drastically different. Whilst they, too, provided ambiguous accounts of *home* (referring to it as Cambodia, Vietnam, or both), Cambodia was never associated with a sense of *feeling at home*. Instead, people described the host-state as a "foreign country" (I01, personal conversation, 8 March 2016) or someone else's house/land:

"If you live in your own house, you are the host; you can do whatever you want. But if you live in a house that is not your own, you don't dare to do what you want. Right now, we are like that" (Villager I05, personal communication, 9 March 2016).

"I feel like I am living on someone else's land. I want to have good relations with them, but the owners themselves don't want to have a good relationship with me" (Villager I49, personal communication, 18 August 2016).

These feelings of alienation were underpinned by both institutional and everyday forms of discrimination. Some respondents accused the government of not giving them "the chance to become Cambodian" (I09, personal communication, 10 March 2016) and protested their limited access to rights, especially the right to work.⁹⁰ Furthermore, whilst most people described Khmer-Vietnamese relations as "normal" (meaning "neither good nor bad"), some respondents complained about their Khmer neighbours calling them "*Yuon*" or "immigrants" and accusing them of committing crimes and

⁹⁰ I elaborate on the Vietnamese' enjoyment of rights in Chapter Seven.

stealing their land.

At times, alienation escalated into feelings of unsafety among diasporans in the Kingdom. This was particularly common during the general elections and in the case of elder respondents who still remembered the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. Villagers I02 and I31, for instance, told me:

“I don’t ever go to the Khmer village. I just stay in the Vietnamese village and take care of my grandchildren. I am afraid that [Khmer] people will attack me, and I will be lost, I won’t be able to complain [to the authorities] because I am Vietnamese [...] [Khmer people], they can fight us at any time, they can accuse us of anything, they can do whatever they want” (Villager I02, personal communication, 8 March 2016).

“I consider Vietnam [to be] my home. Life here is very hard. In 2013, during the elections, Khmer people went around looking for Vietnamese people in order to kill them; so Vietnamese people who can’t speak Khmer fluently just stay inside their homes. They don’t dare going out, because Khmer people will kill them or hurt them.” (Villager I31, personal communication, 24 May 2016)

Safety is a crucial component of feeling at *home*. The latter, in turn, is intrinsically linked with hegemonic ideas of (non)belonging (which, as we have seen, are often harnessed and fuelled by political elites) (Leung, 2007) and “the way in which processes of inclusion and exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances” (Brah, 1996:192). The Vietnamese’ knowledge that they could never become Cambodian, combined with Khmer people’s anti-Vietnamese sentiments and violence, engendered a stronger affiliation with Vietnam and/or a perception of Cambodia as an *unheimlich* (unhomely) home. Devoid of the “warm feeling” described by Ignatieff (1994), Cambodia was portrayed as home in terms of *place*, thereby reflecting the Cambodian government’s bounded exclusion of the Vietnamese.

By contrast, Vietnam was described as *home* in terms of (belonging to a) national community. The connection between *home* and *nation* is not a novel one: on the one hand, “nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space [...] We speak of nations as ‘motherlands’ and ‘fatherlands’ [...]. We talk of the family of Nations, of ‘homelands’ and ‘native’ lands” (McClintock, 1993:63). On the other, national belonging is a crucial component of *feeling at home* (Lam and Yeoh, 2004). As Ignatieff (1994:7) noted, the people who understand not merely what we say but we mean are usually those of our native land, who share with us traits such as habits,

traditions, and language.

Among these cultural factors, language is considered to be the most important one (Buonfino and Thomson, 2007). Language is in fact linked to particular ways of constructing, communicating, and interpreting situations and meanings (Therborn, 1991; Ilcan, 2002). As such, just as it can be used to exclude (e.g. in the politics of belonging), language can also engender a sense of community, shared identity, and intimacy (Ilcan, 2002; Hooks, 2009). This was evident in my interviews with Vietnamese diasporans, all of whom spoke Vietnamese as their first language. Many people had little or no knowledge of Khmer: as we will see in Chapter Seven, devoid of Cambodian citizenship, the Vietnamese have faced legal as well as financial barriers to accessing Cambodian education. By contrast, they could access basic education in AKVVC- or Church-ran schools that held classes in Vietnamese language. The lack of proficiency in Khmer exacerbated feelings of alienation from the host-society while increasing the cohesiveness of Vietnamese enclaves in the Kingdom: I24's family, for instance, moved from a Khmer village to a Vietnamese village because they "could not speak the local language" (Villager I24, personal communication, 20 May 2016).

A similar argument can be made in relation to diasporans' enduring connection with Vietnamese culture and tradition. In entering a Vietnamese village, the most apparent markers of "Vietnameseness" were the *nón lá*, Vietnam's traditional conical hat, and the familiar sight of Vietnamese food. Whilst a few people celebrated both Khmer and Vietnamese festivities, the great majority of my respondents followed the Vietnamese calendar. Particularly prominent was the celebration of Tết (the Vietnamese Lunar New Year), in occasion of which many Vietnamese travelled to the homeland to spend time with their relatives. Usually, religious events also took place separate from those of Khmer villages –in Vietnamese pagodas, if they were Buddhist; and in Vietnamese churches, if they were Christian. Again, these factors hindered the Vietnamese' integration into the host-state while reinforcing their sense of belonging to a Vietnamese community in Cambodia.



Fig. 2: Vietnamese seller wearing the traditional nón lá.



Fig. 3: Vietnamese church in a Vietnamese floating village.



Fig. 4: Funeral celebration in a Vietnamese floating pagoda.

Further evidencing the diaspora's affiliation with Vietnamese culture was the prominence of the cult of the ancestors, which Edyta Roszko described as “a long-standing religious tradition deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Vietnamese people” (Roszko, 2011). This deep-rootedness has been exploited by official Vietnamese nation-building, which has characterised ancestor worship as a unifying force across different ethnic and religious groups (Sutherland, 2012). As Jellema suggested, “with a little encouragement [from the state], filial piety in a family context might be translated into loyalty to the modern nation” (Jellema, 2007 *as cited in* Sutherland, 2012:6). Ancestors were an unfailing feature of my respondents' accounts of *home*. I was told that:

“Even if I was born in Cambodia, I always felt that I belonged to Vietnam. My great grandfather was born and lived his life in Vietnam. The origins of my family, my blood, my skin... I am Vietnamese” (Villager I48, personal communication, 18 August 2016).

“I have friends who were born in Cambodian and lived in Cambodia, but moved to Vietnam during the war and are still afraid to come back. But we have our ancestors' graves in Cambodia, so we had to return and take care of them. Some of them are buried in the place where they lived at the time, some are over there [indicates a point in the distance]. Since our ancestors are here we have to live in Cambodia and go take care of their graves once, twice, three times per year” (Villager I01, personal communication, 8 March 2016).

“Vietnamese people living here really try to adapt. We really try to be the loser in any conflict, because we want to live in peace. As we live in a foreign country, we have to respect its rules; we have to be inferior and not stand up against Khmer people. Our ancestors lived here, our friends are here... So we have to be silent and live here” (Villager I08, personal communication, 10 March 2016).

In addition to reiterating the Vietnamese’ difficulties in integrating in Cambodia, the above excerpts exemplify how ancestors were often at the basis of people’s decision to (return to) live in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge. The diaspora’s attachment to the Kingdom has thus been rooted in the intrinsically-Vietnamese cult of the ancestors. At the same time, the ancestors’ Vietnamese origins have engendered a lasting affiliation with Vietnam, as evidenced by interviewees’ frequent reference to their “Vietnamese blood”. As such, ancestors embody diasporans’ dual connection with the two countries and the very different meanings of *home* that they ascribe to them – as *place*, in the case of Cambodia; and as *nation*, in the case of Vietnam. Such meanings of *home* veer away from the “double consciousness” of integrated and assimilated diasporas (Walsh, 2006), instead reflecting the Cambodian and Vietnamese states’ *bounded exclusion* and *inclusion* of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the contours of the Vietnamese diaspora’s position between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. Departing from mainstream accounts, I argued that both states have viewed the Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects and have engaged in the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of the group. I started by focusing on the Cambodian government. Migration from Vietnam has long been a contentious issue within the Kingdom and has been capitalised on by opposition parties from FUNCINPEC to the CNRP. Met with the unfailing support of the electorate, the opposition’s anti-Vietnamese rhetoric has discouraged the Cambodian government from taking any steps that would be interpreted as favouring the Vietnamese – most noticeably granting them citizenship.

Furthermore, the decision to grant citizenship would call for a comprehensive integration programme, sanctioning the Cambodian government’s responsibility towards the Vietnamese and impinging on the national budget. In addition to losing its political value (in the form of irregular votes for the CPP), the Vietnamese diaspora has therefore posed a significant political and economic challenge to the Cambodian

government. As Phay Siphon's interview suggested, the Hun Sen regime has even attempted to "return" these Vietnamese to Vietnam. Yet, such attempts have been met with the opposition of the Vietnamese regime. As a consequence, the Cambodian government's best option has been to exclude the Vietnamese diaspora from the "imagined community" of the Cambodian nation while allowing it to continue living within the physical boundaries of the Cambodian State.

I described the Cambodian government's stance as *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese diaspora. Such *bounded exclusion* was mirrored by Vietnamese villagers' discourses of "home". Unlike mainstream diasporas, who are typically integrated or assimilated into the host-state, the Vietnamese I spoke with compared life in Cambodia to living in someone else's house/land. Such feelings of alienation were motivated by the Cambodian government's refusal to allow them "to become Cambodian" and the widespread anti-Vietnamese sentiments that underpinned it. Vietnamese respondents thus described Cambodia as "home" in terms of territory – the land one lives on. By contrast, Vietnam was associated with a sense of *feeling at home* – i.e. belonging to a community of people who share traits such as language, culture, and tradition.

The Vietnamese' enduring affiliation with Vietnam has been reinforced by the Vietnamese government's *bounded inclusion* of the group. Unlike the Hun Sen regime, the SRV has been consistently regarding the Vietnamese in Cambodia as part of the Vietnamese nation. Largely due to its goal of harnessing the professional and economic resources of wealthy Việt Kiều, the Communist Party has embarked on a nation-building project that has rested on Ho Chi Minh's principle of national unity. Albeit aimed at overseas Vietnamese in developed countries, such inclusive rhetoric has encompassed the diaspora in Cambodia for two reasons: a) the Politburo's desire to project an image of benevolent homeland as part of the aforementioned nation-building project; and b) the diaspora's past role as a "friend" of the regime, which has engendered a sense of moral responsibility on the side of the SRV. These two elements have co-existed and co-informed the Politburo's inclusive rhetoric towards the Vietnamese in Cambodia. The latter, however, has come with limitations.

The recent return of thousands of Vietnamese from Cambodia has in fact posed a significant challenge to the Vietnamese government, who has had to deal with issues of legal status and provide economic and humanitarian assistance to the newly settled

communities. Whilst including them as part of the Vietnamese nation and professing its responsibility towards them, the Vietnamese regime has, too, perceived these Vietnamese as inconvenient subjects. Fearing that an overly inclusive stance would work as a pull factor for communities still in Cambodia, the Vietnamese government has attempted to discourage the return and settlement of “the poorest of Việt Kiều” (Tanh Nien News, 2014). In other words: it has embraced them as part of the Vietnamese nation while excluding them (or attempting to exclude them) from the physical territory of the state. It follows that neither the Cambodian nor the Vietnamese state have taken full responsibility of the diaspora. On the contrary, in the next chapter I argue that the two governments have shared the custody of the group.

CHAPTER SIX

Sharing Custody – Cambodia and Vietnam’s engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora

Introduction

In this chapter, I detail the modalities of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. In Chapter Five I showed that, rather than viewing the Vietnamese as a resource, the two governments have perceived them as inconvenient subjects and have engaged in the *bounded exclusion* and the *bounded inclusion* of the group. In the next paragraphs I argue that, whilst neither government has taken full responsibility of the diaspora, the two states have shared the custody of the Vietnamese. In the first section of the chapter, I clarify the meaning of shared custody and the reasons that prompted me to choose this notion, namely the recurrence of family metaphors and discourses in my conversations with Vietnamese villagers. Next, I explore how the shared custody of the Vietnamese has worked in practice. I do so by looking at the role of the Association of Khmer Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia (AKVVC), which has acted as an intermediary in the triadic relationship between the homeland, the host-state, and the Vietnamese diaspora.

In analysing the functions of the AKVVC, I focus on its three main aims: encouraging the Vietnamese to live legally in Cambodia; providing humanitarian aid to poor Vietnamese families in the country; and improving education levels and teaching Khmer and Vietnamese culture and language. In addition to these, in Section 6.4 I examine the “unofficial” roles of the Association. I demonstrate that, through the activities of the AKVVC, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to co-govern the Vietnamese diaspora and alternate concessions and control while refraining from granting them citizenship. Such arrangement has affected people’s impression of the two regimes: in the third section of this chapter I examine the Vietnamese diaspora’s perception of the AKVVC and the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. I show that the diaspora has tended to associate the “control” side of the AKVVC with the Cambodian state and its “care” side with the Vietnamese state. Such views are likely to have contributed to the Vietnamese’ experiences of *home* that I explored in Chapter Five.

6.1 The notion of shared custody

“Cambodia is my Mother. Vietnam is my Father. I love them both”
(Villager I37, Personal communication, 3 August 2016)

Family was a recurrent theme in my interviews with members of the Vietnamese diaspora. It was the reason many diasporans had stayed in Cambodia: to look after their ancestors, preserve family unity, and build a support network for their children. Yet, it was also a metaphor that they used to rationalise their life in the Kingdom and explain it to an outsider like myself. Several of my respondents compared Cambodia and Vietnam to their mother and father and depicted themselves as the states’ children: “natural” or “blood” children, in the case of Vietnam; and “adopted” or “step” children, in the case of Cambodia. Drawing upon my conversations with Vietnamese villagers I, too, use notions of family to describe the triadic nexus between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the diaspora.

More specifically, I compare the states’ engagement with the diaspora to the shared custody of a child after their parents’ separation. “Separation”, in this case, is represented by the Vietnamese regime’s withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, which left the Vietnamese population in the Kingdom especially vulnerable. As I explained in Chapter Three, under the PRK rule Vietnamese communities enjoyed a period of safety and stability and were even granted Cambodian ID cards as an indication of their full inclusion into the country. Such level of inclusion, however, ended when the Vietnamese rule did. After the dissolution of the PRK regime, anti-Vietnamese sentiments were once again revived by the CPP’s opponents, prompting Hun Sen’s SOC government to distance itself from the diaspora in the attempt to quell accusations over its alleged complicity in the Vietnamese regime’s (past and future) plans to “swallow” Cambodia (Thayer, 1991; Metzl, 1995). As we have seen, such attempt involved stripping Vietnamese diasporans of the Cambodian ID cards that they had been given under the PRK (Jordens, 1996).

The 1989 “separation” between Cambodia and Vietnam thus posed the basis for the current situation. On the one hand, it started the vicious cycle of “perpetual temporariness” of the diaspora in Cambodia (Ehrentraut, 2011); on the other, it placed the pro-Hanoi Cambodian government between its powerful ally and an increasingly anti-Vietnamese electorate. The Cambodian government’s position has remained

virtually the same ever since. Coupled with the SRV's recent fear of mass repatriation from the neighbouring diaspora, such position explains my assertion that the two states have viewed Vietnamese diasporans as inconvenient subjects. Within this context, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have had two choices: to shift the responsibility of the group to one another, or to share it. Reflecting the cooperative relationship detailed in Chapter Three, I argue that the two governments have shared the responsibility of the Vietnamese. As an advisor to the Cambodian Ministry of Interior put it:

“The governments know that it is impossible to pass the burden to one side; there must be a solution that benefits the two countries; some sort of joint effort by the two governments to resolve this issue” (CS03, Personal communication, 11 July 2016).

The joint effort by the two countries is the shared custody of the Vietnamese, who have remained in Cambodian territory whilst being governed by both states. The term “custody” encapsulates the “control” and the “care” sides of the states’ engagement. Whilst seemingly antipodal, these two sides are interconnected and overlapping, and have mirrored a deliberately ambiguous strategy aimed at reproducing the *status quo* – that is, the liminality of the Vietnamese diaspora.⁹¹ The alternation of care and control has allowed the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam to fulfil the basic needs of the Vietnamese while making sure that they did not become problematic (e.g. by organising politically). I will elaborate on this later in the chapter; first, I shall however introduce the work of the AKVKC, which has acted as an intermediary between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the Vietnamese diaspora.

6.2 “A State within a State”: The Association of Khmer-Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia (AKVKC)

The AKVKC (in Vietnamese: *Tổng hội người Campuchia gốc Việt Nam tại Campuchia*) is the means through which the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have shared the custody of the Vietnamese diaspora.⁹² In the first half of this section, I discuss the structure and growth of the Vietnamese Association; in the second half, I map its ties with the two states. In doing so, I acknowledge the difficulties of researching the

⁹¹ I elaborate on this in Chapter Seven, where I discuss the consequences of the governments’ shared custody on the diaspora’s access to formal and substantive citizenship (Brubaker, 2010).

⁹² The AKVKC was previously known as Overseas Vietnamese Association (OVA) and General Association of Vietnamese Cambodians (GAVC), and has been most commonly known as “Vietnamese Association”.

AKVVC in Cambodia: its affiliation with the Vietnamese regime have made it a delicate and potentially dangerous matter to investigate in the Kingdom. As a consequence, the data that I collected presents a number of discrepancies: for instance, the statements and information that I was given at the local level contradict official narratives. To address this discrepancy, I hereafter combine and contrast primary data and secondary sources. Weaving together Vietnamese newspapers articles, official statements, and interviews with villagers and members of the Vietnamese Association at different levels, I demonstrate the AKVVC's affiliation with the governments of both Cambodia and Vietnam.

(i) *Structure and Growth*

The official birthdate of the AKVVC is the 14th of February 2003. On this day, explained AKVVC President Chau Van Chi, the Association was registered under the Ministry of Interior, which granted it permission to open branches in nineteen municipalities and provinces nation-wide (The Cambodia Daily, 2003). The decision was met with opposition by the Khmer Front Party and the Royalist Party FUNCINPEC, who feared that “the association’s expansion would saturate the government with Vietnamese political ideology” and increase Vietnamese immigration into Cambodia (The Cambodia Daily, 2003). The reason FUNCINPEC representatives spoke about *expansion* of the Association is that in 2003 the AKVVC was already well known among the typically anti-Vietnamese opposition parties. According to AKVVC informants, the Association had in fact been founded during the Vietnam-led PRK and had operated informally for over a decade before its recognition by the Ministry of Interior in the early 2000s (A02; A03; A04; personal communication, 29 April 2016).⁹³

At the time of my fieldwork, the AKVVC had chapters in all 25 provinces of Cambodia, with approximately 150 officials at all levels and over 58,000 members (Vietnam Plus, 2013; Nhân Dân, 2016). President Chau Van Chi described it as a non-profit organisation consisting of one central committee formed by one or two representatives from each province. During his interview, he highlighted the limited resources of the AKVVC and the difficulties that provincial branches faced in reaching remote

⁹³ Christopher Goscha (2012) also dated the emergence of the Vietnamese Association to the PRK regime.

Vietnamese communities. Yet, the data that I collected in the field pointed to a more extensive and ramified structure.

According to AKVVC officials at the local and provincial levels, the AKVVC was organised in a hierarchical manner mirroring that of the Cambodian administration system. At the lowest echelon was the Vietnamese Association at the village level, the leader of which also acted as village leader. The village leader was subordinate to communal and provincial tiers, which fell under three “regional offices” located in the provinces of Battambang, Phnom Penh, and Kampong Som (A02; A03; A04, personal communication, 29 April 2016). These, in turn, operated under the instructions of Chau Van Chi, the President of the Vietnamese Association at the national level. Information concerning the very top of the hierarchy were contested: whilst the Association has been registered under the Cambodian Ministry of Interior, all of the AKVVC representatives interviewed except for Chau Van Chi asserted that the Phnom Penh headquarters were “under the Vietnamese Embassy”. Villagers confirmed this view and referred to the AKVVC as “Vietnamese Association” and “Vietnamese Embassy” interchangeably. Supporting the statement is also the fact that the aforementioned “regional offices” did not parallel Cambodian administrative bodies, but corresponded to the three Consulates of Vietnam in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

(ii) *Relations with the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam*

The ubiquitous nature of the AKVVC and its relations with the Vietnamese Government have caused the ruling party and the past and present opposition to respectively downplay and emphasise its role and presence in Cambodia. In a private conversation, a former government official and member of the FUNCINPEC party characterised the AKVVC as “a state within the state”, encapsulating the suspicion of the Vietnamese regime’s enduring influence in the country abetted by Prime Minister Hun Sen (CS05, personal communication, 18 July 2016).⁹⁴ Given the resonance of Vietnam-related allegations with the Cambodian electorate, it is not surprising that the Cambodian government has attempted to conceal the AKVVC’s direct link to the Vietnamese state, instead asserting its own role in monitoring and approving the Association’s activities. In the course of his interview, government spokesperson Phay Siphon often invoked the

⁹⁴ Respondent CS05 consented to being reported on condition of anonymity.

Vietnamese Embassy in relation to the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. Nonetheless, he claimed that there was no connection between the Vietnamese Association and the Vietnamese government. As I reported in Chapter Four, when I asked him whether he could put me in touch with the Embassy, he even told me that I was “not allowed to contact them” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016).

Official documents recounting the relationship and responsibilities of the Vietnamese state, the Cambodian state, and the AKVVC with regard to the Vietnamese diaspora were not publicly available. Whilst my inability to access such documentation is certainly a limit of my research, it is also in itself interesting. As I stated in Chapter Five, a 2009 article published on the website of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made reference to the “agreements on the management of Overseas Vietnamese in Cambodia signed by the two countries”, suggesting that formal and written arrangements between the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam did exist (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Department of External Relations, 2009). Yet, Chau Van Chi and Phay Siphon denied the existence of any such agreement, affirming that both Vietnamese villages and the Vietnamese Association fell entirely under Cambodia’s authority and administration. Their reticence to discuss the AKVVC’s connection with the Vietnamese government reflects a secretive attitude towards the SRV’s involvement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia.

Notwithstanding the seemingly unofficial character of the relationship, the AKVVC is member of a wider network of Vietnamese Associations worldwide that is coordinated by the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs - an agency of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹⁵ The AKVVC has regularly attended international meetings and conferences and news regarding its work can be found on the website of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mofa.gov.vn) and sources within the state-run Vietnam News Agency (VNA). One such source evidenced the relationship between the Vietnamese Government and the AKVVC by reporting that:

“Foreign Ministry's Consular Department, which is on a working visit to Cambodia, praised the efforts of the Vietnamese Community Association in Cambodia over the recent past, and pledged to take measures to meet the Vietnamese community's just demands. Chau Van Chi, President of the

⁹⁵ See Decree No. 37-CP of April 26, 1997 on the Tasks, Powers and Organizational structure of the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Vietnamese Community Association in Cambodia, thanked the Vietnamese Party and State for their assistance to the Vietnamese community in Cambodia, and informed the Vietnamese officials about the community's situation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, 2005).

Further proof of AKVVC's affiliation with the Vietnamese Government is found in the AKVVC membership card, which villagers often referred to as "Vietnamese ID card" or "passport". During my fieldwork, I encountered two versions of the card: one older, and one newer. The old one began to be distributed at the end of the 1980s, under the PRK administration (Fig. 2). The back of the document read: "Embassy of Vietnam; Independence-Freedom-Happiness" (Vietnam's national motto, written in Khmer language); "Certificate of Overseas Vietnamese" (Giấy Chứng Nhận Việt Kiều); "number [of the document]". Inside, the certificate was written both in Khmer and in Vietnamese and detailed the name of the card holder; the date of birth; the places of birth and residence; the nation and nationality; and the job. All AKVVC cards stated "Vietnamese" under nationality, confirming the proposition that the Vietnamese regime has viewed the diaspora as an appendage of the Vietnamese nation. The document also included a photo and a stamp by the Vietnamese Embassy/Consulate in Cambodia.

The more recent version of the card made no reference to the Vietnamese Embassy, instead reading: "Kingdom of Cambodia; Nation-Religion-King" (Cambodia's national motto), and displaying the stamp and emblem of the Association of Khmer-Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia and the signature of President Chau Van Chi (Fig. 3). Villagers and members of the Vietnamese Association confirmed that the second document replaced the first one after the Association "changed its name" in 2003, that is when the AKVVC was registered under the Cambodian Ministry of Interior. Interestingly, 2003 was also the year of the third Cambodian general election, the second one since the end of the UNTAC rule. The run up to the 2003 election was characterised by "racist and provocative" campaigns by members of the opposition (NICFEC, 2003). The Sam Rainsy Party, in particular, employed a strong anti-Vietnamese rhetoric which contributed to bolstering its popularity among the Cambodian electorate.⁹⁶ The increasing resonance of anti-Vietnamese utterances may have been one of the reasons behind the aforementioned changes in the Association.

⁹⁶ In the 2003 elections, the Sam Rainsy Party ended up gaining seats to the expense of the royalist FUNCINPEC Party (Wheeler, 2003).

The removal of all references to Vietnam in fact reflects the Cambodian government’s interest in concealing the SRV’s continuing involvement with the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom. The ostensive and extensive presence of a Vietnam-backed AKVVC across Cambodia would reinforce suspicions over Hun Sen’s alleged abetment of a Vietnamese invasion and risk jeopardising the CPP’s success in the elections. At the same time, Cambodia’s limited resources have meant that the Cambodian government has needed the support of the Vietnamese state in “managing” the diaspora (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Department of External Relations, 2009). Trapped between the need for assistance and the fear of political backlash, the Hun Sen government has sought to conceal the Vietnamese regime’s role in the shared custody of the diaspora. In the following section, I explore the modalities of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ engagement with the diaspora through the work of the Vietnamese Association.



Fig. 5: First version of the Vietnamese Association membership card.



Fig. 6: Second version of the Vietnamese Association membership card.

6.3 Alternating care and control: The shared custody of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia

According to President Chau Van Chi, the AKVVC’s activities have revolved around three main areas: a) encouraging the Vietnamese to live legally in Cambodia by raising awareness of Cambodian laws and regulations; b) providing humanitarian aid to poor Vietnamese families in Cambodia; and c) improving education levels and teaching Khmer and Vietnamese culture and language (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016). I organise the following three sub-sections around these aims and add a final one on the additional roles that the AKVVC has covered, but which were not included in Chau Van Chi’s list of formal objectives. My aim is to show that, within and beyond the aforementioned areas, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to alternate the care and control of the Vietnamese diaspora.⁹⁷

(i) *“Encouraging the Vietnamese to live legally in Cambodia”*

As mentioned above, the first objective of the AKVVC has been to encourage the Vietnamese to “live legally” in Cambodia (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016). Within this area, the Association’s main role has been to inform Vietnamese

⁹⁷ “Care”, in this case, refers to concessions and aid by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam.

communities about immigration documents and the procedures to acquire them. As most Vietnamese are illiterate, they cannot access this information on their own. The Vietnamese Association (or, as many of my interviewees called it, the “Vietnamese authorities”) has thus cooperated with Cambodian authorities “and announced when and where to go to apply [for new documents]” (Villager I26, personal communication, 21 May 2016).

Villagers reported having had to change several papers throughout their life. Yet, they displayed limited or inexistent knowledge as to the nature and use of each document. The following excerpts exemplify the full reliance on the Association for matters related to documentation:

“I don’t know, I don’t know. They just tell me to make documents, and I follow [the instructions]. I don’t know much more [...] I changed documents several times, I don’t know exactly how often. The village, the commune, and the [Vietnamese] Embassy tell us about documents. Whenever the Cambodian Government wants us to do something, the Vietnamese Embassy is the one who tells us to do it” (Villager I29, personal communication, 21 May 2016).

“Whenever someone, like the Association, tells me to make them – I follow. I never think about doing something to get the documents, all I care about is earning money to make a living [...] I also don’t know [what they are], because I can’t read Khmer. I just follow the orders” (Villager I26, personal communication, 21 May 2016).

“We have been making many documents, but we don’t know what they are, or what their purpose is [...]. Since I came back from Vietnam [after the Khmer Rouge], I started making documents, documents, and more documents. But I have never known what their purpose was; I just kept making them. They keep changing; every time it’s a new one” (Villager I08, personal communication, 10 March 2016).

The acquisition and sharing of knowledge has been an important tool in the hands of the Vietnamese Association. Working alongside Cambodian authorities and the Cambodian Ministry of Interior, the AKVVC has been able to filter the information that have reached the Vietnamese population in Cambodia. The fact that Vietnamese communities across the country have never been educated about Cambodia’s Immigration and Nationality Laws is illustrative of the importance of disseminating the “right” information to ensure compliance with the state’s unwritten rules.

In addition to ignoring their right to apply for Cambodian citizenship by naturalisation, the above excerpts indicate that respondents have accepted the frequent and unjustified invalidation of old documents as normal.⁹⁸ Most of the villagers that I spoke with held a series of documents, some dating back as far as the 1980s. They painstakingly collected documentation, which they usually duplicated, and always laminated and stored in plastic folders to protect it from the water. This attentiveness mirrors the widespread anxiety of being arrested and deported if found devoid of legal papers, and demonstrates people's understanding of the nominal importance of documents. It has not, however, proved useful to the obtainment of citizenship.

Villagers stated that they could not use past documents as proof of their length of residence in the country. Some also reported authorities taking back their old documents or not recognising their validity. As I explained in Chapters One and Three, this practice has been common since the SOC Government (i.e. 1989), when Vietnamese communities were stripped of the Cambodian IDs that they had been given by the PRK regime. By aiding the distribution and withdrawal of documents, the AKVKC has carried out the Cambodian government's indefinite postponement of granting Cambodian citizenship while endorsing the idea that Vietnamese do not have *the right* to access it. Such a view emerged consistently across the four villages I visited, where respondents accepted that they could not become Cambodian citizens due to their Vietnamese origins.

Beside handling matters related to documentation, the AKVKC has assisted the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments in monitoring the situation of the Vietnamese population in the Kingdom. By facilitating or carrying out censuses for the Cambodian government and periodically distributing AKVKC membership cards to new arrivals, the Association has kept track of the size of the population on behalf of the two states. Furthermore, AKVKC provincial representatives have gathered regularly to report on the diaspora's economic, political, and social issues to the Vietnamese Embassy. Each meeting has needed the prior approval of Cambodian authorities, who have been notified of all the activities of the Association. The AKVKC has also helped Cambodian

⁹⁸ Article 8 of Cambodia's 1996 Nationality Law asserts that foreigners who have resided in Cambodia for seven continuous years from the reception of a residence card may apply for citizenship by naturalisation.

authorities in the mediation of conflicts and the maintenance of public order. The chief of the AKVVC in Village Two described himself as a “middle person”, adding that one of the roles of the Association was

“To explain to people that they have to submit to [Cambodian] authorities. They have to understand that we are the foster of children [of Cambodia]; not the natural children... and as foster children, we know that foster children and natural children will not be treated equally” (Villager I20, personal communication, 1 May 2016).⁹⁹

Similarly, a commune chief stated that the AKVVC had to “help Vietnamese people to submit to [Cambodian] authorities [...] because they are living on their land, and they have to respect Cambodian law” (A05, personal communication, 1 May 2016). The recurring emphasis on submission and obedience supports the argument, put forward in the previous paragraph, that the Association has contributed to normalising the discriminatory treatment of the Vietnamese by the Cambodian government and officials. Occupying a position of guidance, the AKVVC has played a key role in shaping people’s perception of their own rights. In the name of peace and order, the Vietnamese diaspora has been persuaded that, in the same way as they are not entitled to citizenship, they should not expect to enjoy the same rights as Cambodian citizens.

By moulding people’s understanding of their situation, the AKVVC has thus exercised a form of soft control aimed at creating self-governing Vietnamese subjects. Whilst this has normally been successful, the AKVVC has also resorted to harder forms of control in order to “encourage people to live legally” (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016). The events that unfolded in Village One are illustrative of this. Here, the AKVVC worked alongside Cambodian authorities to relocate a Vietnamese floating village to a different part of the river. The initial justification for the operation was the city’s subscription to a national “Clean City Contest”, which led to the relocation of Vietnamese communities a few kilometres down the watercourse to make them less visible to visitors. The Vietnamese Association prompted villagers to move, telling them that they were living illegally in their previous location and that they had a negative impact on the environment (AKVVC provincial vice-chief A01, personal

⁹⁹ Interestingly, Jordens (1996) also reported a quote by a Vietnamese interviewee stating: “We are the adopted children of Hun Sen, not the natural children”. The recurrence of the adoption metaphor across different field sites in Cambodia suggests that it may be part of the official rhetoric employed by the AKVVC and/or Cambodian authorities when communicating with the Vietnamese.

communication, 10 March 2016). The solution generated discontent for two reasons: first, it severely impaired fishermen's earning capacity due to the shallowness of the water and the distance of the new site from the city market.¹⁰⁰ Second, and more importantly, villagers were advised that the decision was the first step towards the permanent transferral of all families on land by 2019.

According to the Vietnamese Association, the land would be rented to villagers and "managed by local authorities until people are able to obtain citizenship" (AKVVC commune chief A05, personal communication, 1 May 2016). Anecdotal evidence suggested that the property had already been purchased by the Association and that it was located at a distance of almost two kilometres from the river. In addition to exposing the close ties between the Cambodian and Vietnamese authorities, the plan provoked apprehension over people's future employment and the fate of their few possessions (e.g. their floating houses, boats, and fish farms). To add to this, the news on the relocation of the village reached the community at the same time as those concerning the introduction of the new and expensive 2014 foreign resident documents.¹⁰¹

In response to increasingly alarming circumstances, one villager organised a petition asking to reduce the price of the new documents and find an acceptable compromise on the relocation.

"On the 4th of September 2014 there was that meeting [between the Vietnamese Association and the Cambodian authorities]. As a result, people were required to pay 250,000 Riel for the documents and move on land within 18 months. People here complained that the documents were very expensive and said that they could move on land, but only if they could live somewhere near the river. But these complaints were not effective, so I decided to organise a petition and send a request to the National Assembly and other related organisations, asking them to compromise. However, the Vietnamese Association sued me, accusing me of mobilising people, and acting against the Cambodian Law and the Vietnamese Association" (Villager I03, personal communication, 9 March 2016).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ In addition to fishing in the river, most families kept fish farms under their floating homes and sold the fish at the local market. In the temporary location, the water was too shallow for fish to survive, and the long distance from the market caused people to lose over half of their profits in fuel for their boats.

¹⁰¹ I discuss the new documents in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter Seven.

¹⁰² This was before the Vietnamese government announced that it was going to cover the costs of the new documents. As most villagers were fisherman, moving on land would have impaired their source of livelihood. Whilst accepting to be moved on land, villagers asked to be relocated near the river in order to continue fishing and keeping their fish farms.

The Association did not just aid, but started the repression of the peaceful protest, which resulted in the imprisonment of I03 for two months and twenty days without trial. The community collected donations and his wife borrowed an additional amount of money to pay for his bond. The episode reinforced people's distrust in the AKVVC, who was thought to control rather than help the Vietnamese community on behalf of the Cambodian Government. One of my respondents told me that,

“At first, we asked for help. The Vietnamese Association came once to talk about the payment [of documents], but they weren't very helpful. So I03 advocated for us, but they arrested him. Now we are afraid if we hear that the Vietnamese Association comes and helps, because they always come with a problem [...] I am very scared of being arrested” (Villager I01, personal communication, 8 March 2016).

Whilst Village One was not representative of the relationship between AKVVC and communities across the country, it did illustrate the extent to which the Vietnamese Association and Cambodian authorities could coordinate their activities. From this analysis it is clear that the AKVVC's objective to promote the rule of law could take place at various levels, ranging from the subtle filtering of information and the normalisation of discriminatory behaviours, to the active monitoring and control of Vietnamese communities and individuals. These forms of control by the AKVVC have been mostly exercised on behalf of and in cooperation with the Cambodian government and authorities. As mentioned at the beginning of the section, the control functions of the AKVVC have been counterbalanced by a degree of care by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. Focusing on the latter, in the next paragraphs I paint a more comprehensive picture of the seemingly antipodal roles covered by the AKVVC in accordance with the two states.

(ii) *“Providing humanitarian aid to poor Vietnamese families in Cambodia”*

The second main aim of the AKVVC as presented by Chau Van Chi has been to channel donations from the Vietnamese government. Donations pertain to the “care” side of the states' engagement with the diaspora and so do education and concessions, which I discuss later in the chapter. The donations distributed to the Vietnamese population in Cambodia have been mainly drawn from the Fund for Overseas Vietnamese Community (FOVC), which was established under the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 2002 for the purpose of “supporting the overseas Vietnamese community and

the work of mobilization of overseas Vietnamese, helping the community stabilize and develop, preserve the Vietnamese nation's identity, turn towards the country and contribute to the construction of the native land and the country” (Regulation on organization and operation of the Fund for Overseas Vietnamese Community, 2003). The FOVC has been prioritising projects targeting disadvantaged Overseas Vietnamese communities and has been actively supporting “poor Overseas Vietnamese” in Laos and Cambodia.¹⁰³

Support has come in the form of monetary assistance and food aid (usually several kilograms of rice), which have been allocated to villagers by the Vietnamese Association. AKVVC leaders at the village level have been tasked with recording the poorest families in the community, to whom the donations have then been directed. The Association has also distributed gifts to victims of natural disasters and families of ex-revolutionaries and provided free health check-ups and medicines (Nhân Dân, 2016). Importantly, since 2016 the Vietnamese government has even started to cover the costs of Cambodian documentation. This significant development has taken place after the Ministry of Interior introduced the new procedure for registering foreign residents’ legal status in 2014. At the time of my fieldwork, the procedure was being implemented throughout the country and required applicants to pay 250,000 Riel (approximately USD\$62.50) to receive the new “foreign resident card”, which should be renewed every two years at the same cost for a total of six years. On the seventh year, I was told that “there is the possibility that the Immigration Department will consider granting citizenship to the Vietnamese” pending good behaviour (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016).

As I explain in more detail in Chapter Seven, the vague information on the criteria for becoming a Cambodian citizen cast some doubts on the plausibility of the commitment. Furthermore, although the new regulation was said to apply to all foreigners residing in Cambodia, there is no evidence that residents of other nationalities have been subjected to the same process. Again, official documentation has been difficult to access: AKVVC President Chau Van Chi declared that all instructions were given orally by the Ministry

¹⁰³ FOVC Chairwoman and former Vietnamese Vice President Trong My Hoa described the “poor Overseas Vietnamese” as an inseparable part of Vietnam, and highlighted the need to improve their lives and enhance their national identity through aid and cultural exchange programmes. In 2009 and 2010, the FOVC raised VND 30 Billion for Vietnamese communities in Laos and Cambodia (Vietnam Plus, 2011).

of Interior (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016); whereas Government spokesperson Phay Siphon claimed that he was not aware of any new regulation, dismissing the move as “corruption at lower levels” (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016). The inconsistency of their accounts points once again to the lack of transparency of the Cambodian Government on matters related to the Vietnamese population in the country. Among the limited written evidence on the procedure, and contradicting Phay Siphon’s comment, is an interview by the Cambodia Daily with Ministry of Interior General spokesperson Khieu Sopheak, who stated:

“What we have is that there are more than 100,000 [Vietnamese migrants] [...] We have issued letters of immigration recognition for about 10,000 people. Each one pays tax to our state for being recognized as an immigrant by the state [...] We have issued them but some have not come to take them yet because they don’t want to pay. The payment is about 250,000 Riel in tax to the state for the legal immigration recognition papers” (The Cambodia Daily, 2014).

With each family having an average of five members, very few people could afford the new immigration cards when they were first introduced. Villagers were instructed to apply for documentation several times since 2014, but it was only in the second half of 2015 that documents started being distributed following the news that the Vietnamese government was going to cover the costs.

“They already asked us to get the immigration documents three times; this is the third time. The first time, no one did it; the second time, no one did it; they just now started to do it... Because now the Vietnamese Government is paying for it, so everyone is happy” (Villager I24, personal communication, 20 May 2016).

Respondents in all four sites of my fieldwork maintained that the Vietnamese state had paid for their documents (valid for two years). Twelve people declared that the Vietnamese Association was paying for the cards and twenty-six accredited the payment to the Vietnamese Government or Embassy.¹⁰⁴ The few families who had already paid for the documents on their own had been refunded by the Vietnamese Association. As I argued in Chapter Five, the Vietnamese government’s mediation has been motivated by

¹⁰⁴ This number includes five members of the Vietnamese Association at the local level. AKVVC President Chau Van Chi did not mention any connection with the Vietnamese Government, stating instead that the AKVVC was trying to collect donations from donors and investors in Vietnam. In one of the villages I visited, an NGO staff working with Vietnamese communities even told me that it was “illegal to say [that the money comes from] the Vietnamese Government or the Embassy. If asked where it comes from, people should answer that it is from donors” (CS02, personal communication, 30 April 2016).

fear of mass repatriation. The decision to intervene was in fact taken after thousands of Vietnamese “returned” to the homeland following the introduction of the new immigration cards and stringent fishing bans in Cambodia. Whilst portraying the diaspora as part of the Vietnamese nation, the Politburo’s interest has been to provide it with assistance without encouraging its return.

At first glance, this may point to an instance of shifting, rather than sharing, the responsibility of the diaspora, with the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments engaging in a ping-pong-like match and respectively hampering and facilitating the permanence of Vietnamese communities in Cambodia. Yet, the positions of the two states are not as incompatible as it seems. Anecdotal evidence by AKVVC officials suggested that the Vietnamese government would only cover the cost of the first one of the three payments necessary for the obtainment of citizenship. This indicates that the regime’s concern has been limited to ensuring that Vietnamese residents acquire legal temporary status, rather than full citizenship. It is also worth noting that the payment of documents through the Vietnamese Association have often occurred in the presence of Cambodian authorities and that all the activities of the AKVVC must have received the prior approval of the Cambodian Ministry of Interior. The Vietnamese government’s response has therefore taken place in accordance with, rather than in opposition to, the Cambodian Government, which has indirectly participated in the “care” of the Vietnamese diaspora. In between the two states, the AKVVC has simultaneously implemented the decisions of both. The cooperative nature of the relationship between the three actors will become clearer in the following sections on “improving education levels” and the additional roles of the Vietnamese Association.

(iii) *“Improving education levels and teaching Khmer and Vietnamese culture and language”*

The FOVC (Fund for Overseas Vietnamese Community) introduced in the previous section has also been used for the opening of schools in overseas Vietnamese villages. Such role has been praised for its contribution to the SRV’s nation-building project, and more specifically its contribution to “strengthening national unity” and increasing “the sentiment towards the native land among the young generations of overseas Vietnamese” (Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the USA, 2004). This has supported the third main task of the AKVVC: improving the level of education of

Vietnamese communities in Cambodia. The majority of the Vietnamese in Cambodia have in fact received little or no education, with families facing economic and legal constraints that have prevented them from enrolling their children into schools. On the one hand, parents have often been denied birth certificates, without which pupils were not allowed to study in Cambodian schools. On the other, children have been expected to help within the household or family business (e.g. fishing, selling) and for them to attend school has been considered a loss of income. The economic hurdles faced by families have been further exacerbated by the practice of paying daily bribes to teachers and the cost of fuel to reach schools.¹⁰⁵ These limitations have resulted in very low levels of literacy among the old and new generations of ethnic Vietnamese, some of whom have been speaking Vietnamese as their first language and have had very limited knowledge of Khmer. The issue of education has affected Vietnamese communities' prospects of integration into the Khmer society and reduced children's future mobility and employment opportunities.

In order to address the problem, the Vietnamese Embassy has been supporting the AKVVC in the opening of its own schools across Cambodia. A Vietnamese newspaper reported that, in 2013, the Vietnamese Association had opened fifty-seven schools majoring in languages with the assistance of ministries, localities, businesses, and benefactors in Vietnam (Vietnam Plus, 2013). In 2015, the AKVVC opened the Khmer-Vietnam Tan Tien primary school in Phnom Penh – the (so far) largest Vietnamese-Cambodian institution in Cambodia. The school has offered Vietnamese and Khmer language classes with curricula in line with, respectively, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training's benchmark standard and the Cambodian Ministry Education and Training. At the opening ceremony, the headmaster stated that “the school will do its utmost to help students preserve Vietnamese identities while attaining basic knowledge to integrate into the host community” (VietnamPlus, 2015).

The Vietnamese government has been consistent in its effort to encourage the diaspora's upholding of Vietnamese cultural identity. The latter has been a recurring theme in official statements by representatives of the AKVVC and of the Vietnamese Embassy, exemplifying the proposition, which I put forward in Chapter Five, that the Vietnamese

¹⁰⁵ This is especially true for families who lived on floating villages which were relatively isolated from Khmer communities.

regime has embraced the diaspora as part of the Vietnamese nation in order to support its nation-building goals. At the same time, the emphasis on integration into the host society has confirmed the SRV's interest in helping the Vietnamese *in Cambodia*, thereby reflecting the regime's bounded inclusion of the diaspora. By authorising the establishment of Khmer-Vietnamese schools, the Cambodian Government has demonstrated to support (or even favour) the SRV's policy, which has allowed it to partly or entirely delegate the provision and, thus, the costs of education to its wealthier neighbour. Hence, as in the case of documentation, both governments have directly (Vietnam) or indirectly (Cambodia) contributed to the provision of education to Vietnamese communities, thereby engaging in some level of "care" of the Vietnamese diaspora in the Kingdom. Such care has also been reflected in other concessions that the governments have made and which I explore in the next section of the chapter.

(iv) *Additional roles of the AKVVC*

Alongside the official aims listed by Chau Van Chi, the AKVVC has covered a number of other roles which have allowed the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam to balance the care and control sides of their engagement with the diaspora. In Prey Veng, for instance, the Vietnamese Association bought land for people to live on when the floating community reached a hundred households in the 1990s (Vietnam Breaking News, 2008).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in Meanchey district, Phnom Penh, the AKVVC raised funds to purchase an eight hectares-estate on which to relocate 1,230 Vietnamese families from different areas in the city (The Cambodia Daily, 2000). The Association has also bought land for cemeteries and religious ceremonies. A Vietnamese cemetery was subject of contention in Pursat Kandieng district, where Khmer communities lamented that the burial site was built on their farm land. In this instance, provincial authorities rejected Khmer citizens' request for a compensation and ruled in favour of the Vietnamese Association, pointing once again to the ties between Cambodian and Vietnamese "authorities" (The Phnom Penh Post, 2015b). By acting as an intermediary buyer, the Vietnamese Association has been able to circumvent the law and enable the Vietnamese diaspora to collectively use or inhabit land albeit lacking the documentation (and, thus,

¹⁰⁶ Each family contributed approximately 12,000 Riel (USD\$3) to the initial investment. The land was located near the river, allowing villagers to continue fishing as their main source of livelihood.

the right) to do so.¹⁰⁷ As with the payment of documents, this *escamotage* has been possible through the complicity of the Cambodian Government, whose less appealing alternative would have been to provide its own land for Vietnamese communities to live in.

A similar argument can be made in relation to the right to travel. Despite not holding a valid passport or national ID card, all participants to this research have been to Vietnam at least once in their lives, with some travelling regularly for business purposes or to visit their relatives. At the Cambodian border crossing, the Vietnamese have showed Cambodian immigration documents and/or payed a bribe. Entrance into Vietnam, on the other hand, has been described as “free”. In order to cross into Vietnam, people have displayed their membership card to the AKVVC. As in the case of land ownership, the interposition of the Vietnamese government through the Vietnamese Association has thus afforded the Vietnamese diaspora the *de facto* right to travel in and out of Cambodia and Vietnam.¹⁰⁸ This concession, however, has come with certain limitations. Respondents reported that:

“At the Vietnamese border the border authorities keep this document [membership to the Vietnamese Association], and I tell them how many days I am staying [in Vietnam]. When I go back, they return it to me” (Villager I36, personal communication, 2 August 2016).

Whilst allowing the diaspora into the country, Vietnamese authorities have thus monitored their stay and ensured (or attempted to ensure) that they returned to Cambodia by keeping their AKVVC cards for the duration of their visit. This behaviour has reflected the government’s fear of uncontrolled repatriation of the Vietnamese from Cambodia. In order to be allowed to move to Vietnam, the diaspora has in fact been required to follow a formal procedure. Respondents around different villages in Cambodia provided anecdotal information as to what this has involved:

“First, you have to contact the AKVVC leader here in the village; then you have to go to the Vietnamese Association at the provincial level; and after that you go to the [Vietnamese] Embassy, and the Embassy issues a letter for you to demonstrate to the Vietnamese government that you are a Vietnamese [national]

¹⁰⁷ Art. 44 of the Cambodian Constitution states that: ‘All persons, individually or collectively, shall have the right to ownership. Only Khmer legal entities and citizens of Khmer nationality shall have the right to own land’.

¹⁰⁸ This only refers to travel through official border checkpoints. A significant number of people have also used informal crossing points to travel to Vietnam.

living in Cambodia. After that, you [can] go to Vietnam, and you need to have a house, and land – and in around six to seven months, you will get the [Vietnamese] ID card” (Villager I43, personal communication, 3 August 2016).

This account is partially accurate. In one of the two communities of returnees that I visited in Vietnam, I was shown a letter that had been jointly issued by the AKVVC and the Consulate of Vietnam in Battambang (with both names appearing in the title). The letter was dated 2015 and titled “Confirmation of Residency Application” (*Đơn Xin Xác Nhận Cư Trú*). It listed the names of the members of the family of the applicant, and read:

“I ask the Vietnamese Association in Cambodia to confirm that I and my family have lived in the above address in Cambodia, so that I can report it to the relevant authorities in Vietnam. I swear that the present statement is true. If found to be false, I take complete responsibility before the Vietnamese Law”.

Vietnamese diaspora members wishing to move permanently to Vietnam had to request this document from the AKVVC and Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate in Cambodia. When they arrived to the Vietnamese province of intended residence, they had to show the letter and the AKVVC membership card to local Vietnamese authorities, who could then authorise their stay. This procedure mirrors the Vietnamese government’s attempt to regulate and control the repatriation of “the poorest of Việt Kiều” and the crucial role that the AKVVC has played within it (Tanh Nien News, 2014). It also shows that the distinction between care and control is not always clear-cut: practices of control sometimes contain an element of care, and vice versa.

This section has demonstrated that, through the work of the AKVVC, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to balance the care and control of the Vietnamese diaspora. The Cambodian government, for instance, has allowed the diaspora to acquire temporary legal status, live on water courses or land, and build Vietnamese schools in its territory. Yet, by limiting access to information regarding documents and silencing dissident voices, it has been able to control Vietnamese communities and delay the granting of Cambodian citizenship. In the same way, the Vietnamese regime has connived at irregular border-crossings into its territory but ensured that diaspora members returned to Cambodia by holding their documents at the border. These and other examples presented above illustrate the purposely ambiguous approach taken by the two states in the co-governing of the diaspora. This approach has

affected the ways in which villagers have perceived the AKVVC and the two states, which are at the centre of my last section.

6.4 Perceptions of the Vietnamese state, the Cambodian state, and the AKVVC

The ambivalence of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' stance and, accordingly, the role of the Vietnamese Association, has been reflected in villagers' perceptions on the three actors. In this penultimate section I explore the ways in which the seemingly contradictory positions represented by the AKVVC have been understood and rationalised by the Vietnamese diaspora.

Views on the Association varied across field sites, ranging from trust, to uncertainty regarding its activities, to suspicion or even fear. Generally, villagers associated the "control" side of the AKVVC to its close relations with the Cambodian government:

"In one year they [the AKVVC] have never come to visit us. They have never asked us about our lives, about our problems... However, we don't dare to say anything because it's a political matter. There is no evidence that the Association and the [Cambodian] authorities are working together, but from what we see and observe; from their behaviour... we can say that they have close relations."

"The Vietnamese Association has enough power and rights to solve the problem, but they don't do it [...] They say that we [negatively] affect the environment and that they don't want us to fish. You see, they want to make life difficult for us [...] I know that the Vietnamese Association helps the Cambodian government, but I don't dare to say it. If they really wanted to help us they would try to go against the [Cambodian] authorities and allow us to keep living here [...] But they have no will to help us [...] I am under their authority so I have to 'endure' it: if there's a dog in front of you and they order you to say it's a cat, you have to say it's a cat. You can't go against them" (Villager I09, personal communication, 10 March 2016).

The above statements were collected as part of an interview in Village One, where the community had witnessed and borne the consequences of the cooperation between Cambodian authorities and the AKVVC, which had culminated in the arrest of Villager I03 following his attempt to organise a petition. As mentioned above, Village One's incident appeared to be a unique and isolated case. Yet, it is worth noting that it was also the only instance (that I heard of) in which intervention by the AKVVC was required. Villagers in the other three locations of my fieldwork did not report episodes of social unrest. This, however, does not imply a lack of authority by the AKVVC and can be

explained by the Association's successful filtering of information concerning their rights.¹⁰⁹ Of particular relevance is also the fact that in Village Two I was taken to the interviewees' homes by a member of the Association. As I explained in Chapter Four, despite my several requests to travel independently, I was gently imposed the help of A03, who could "drive the boat and introduce [me to] people" (A03; A04, personal communication, 29 April 2016). A03 chose my respondents for me, which means that my information on people's perceptions of the AKVVC may be skewed.

In Village Two, respondents seemed to be either unsure or have a neutral opinion of the role of the AKVVC. This also applied to Village Three and Four. Across the three sites, some villagers compared the Association to "normal authorities" who "don't really help with anything" (Villager I15, personal communication, 30 April 2016); while others described its activities as "helping with paperwork and documentation" (Villager I42, personal communication, 3 August 2016). Negative views were limited to what was perceived to be an unfair distribution of donations coming from Vietnam. Perceptions of the Cambodian government were also more positive in these three villages, although faith in the Hun Sen's administration appeared to be slowly eroding.¹¹⁰

In contrast with Vietnamese villagers' ambivalent or negative view of the AKVVC and the Cambodian government, and in line with the discourses of *home* analysed in Chapter Five, the Vietnamese government was generally depicted as a benevolent homeland. Notwithstanding the limitations that came with its assistance, the Vietnamese regime was associated with the "caring" side of the AKVVC, who was meant to "help the Vietnamese government to check the standards of Vietnamese people in Cambodia" (Villager I14, personal communication, 30 April 2016). Even where the Association aided the surveillance of Vietnamese communities, its behaviour was thought to reflect the will of the Cambodian government, not that of the Vietnamese government. Such tendency is epitomised by the following excerpt from an interview in Village One:

"The Vietnamese Government really cares about the Vietnamese in Cambodia...
But they just get a report from the Vietnamese Association. They just read the

¹⁰⁹ Such filtering of information was not effective in Village One due to the advocacy work conducted by the NGO MIRO.

¹¹⁰ The stringent fishing bans introduced by the Cambodian government have also contributed to the negative perception of the Hun Sen regime by the Vietnamese diaspora. Fishing bans have been introduced as a result of the severe decline in fish in the Tonle Sap waters due to over-fishing, climate change, and the building of dams (RFA, 2015).

report: “everything is good, everything is good”. But in reality those people [the AKVVC] have no interaction with the local community [...] so even if the Vietnamese government cares about Vietnamese people living in Cambodia, Vietnamese people can’t improve their lives [...]” (Villager I03, personal communication, 9 March 2016)

The Vietnamese regime was not held accountable for the wrongful behaviour of the AKVVC. Yet, the connection between the two was acknowledged in relation to the building of schools and the support of communities through donations, for which the Vietnamese government was praised. Most interviewees were also confident that they would be able to obtain Vietnamese citizenship if they were to move to Vietnam and live there for a period of time, with some even asserting that once in Vietnam the government would provide food, land, and a house for them to live in.¹¹¹ Since the diasporans were considered “Vietnamese” in Cambodia, respondents maintained that the SRV would not deny them citizenship. “We are their children” (Villager I17, personal communication, 30 April 2016).

The above statement confirms the argument, put forward in the previous chapter, that the Cambodian government’s perceived hostility against the diaspora has engendered a stronger bond, real or constructed, with Vietnam. Only few respondents noted that it was only recently that the Vietnamese government had stepped forward to help Vietnamese communities, and no one believed it to be (partially) responsible for the predicament of the Vietnamese population in Cambodia. By aiding the Vietnamese in Cambodia (e.g. covering the costs of documents; building schools), the Vietnamese regime has thus been able to discourage their return “home” while projecting a positive and inclusive image of itself. The Vietnamese government’s bounded *inclusion* of the diaspora has therefore resulted in villagers associating it with the “care” side of the AKVVC activities. On the contrary, the Cambodian government’s bounded *exclusion* of the group has been linked to the “control” side of the AKVVC.

¹¹¹ Answers regarding the amount of time they would need to spend in Vietnam before obtaining citizenship ranged from “two or three months” (I28, personal communication, 21 May 2016) to a maximum of seven months. However, returnees in Vietnam asserted that they needed five years of continuous residence in the homeland in order to obtain Vietnamese citizenship.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I covered the modalities of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. I argued that the two states have shared the custody of the group through the work of the AKVVC, which has acted as an intermediary in the relationship between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese diaspora. In the first half of the chapter, I elucidated the structure of the AKVVC and its ties with the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. I explained that the politicised nature of the "Vietnamese issue" has caused the AKVVC's affiliation with the SRV to be kept somewhat secret in the Kingdom. Despite this, the AKVVC has been part of a wide network of Vietnamese Associations across the world coordinated by the Vietnamese State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs.

The work of the AKVVC has developed around three main areas: promoting legal life among Vietnamese communities in Cambodia; improving education levels; and distributing donations from Vietnam. Through these and other activities of the AKVVC, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to alternate the care and control of the Vietnamese population in the Kingdom. With regard to the control side of the states' engagement, I have shown that by handling the distribution of documents and document-related information the AKVVC has moulded people's understanding of their rights and normalised Cambodian authorities' discriminatory behaviours against the Vietnamese. Such forms of "soft" control have aimed to promote the self-government of the Vietnamese diaspora. Where they have not been successful, the AKVVC has resorted to harder forms of control, as represented by its suppression of the petition organised in Village One.

The monitoring role of the AKVVC has been counterbalanced by a degree of care by the two states. With the authorisation of the Cambodian government and the financial support of the Vietnamese government, the AKVVC has established Khmer-Vietnamese schools, allowing Vietnamese children to access education despite the lack of appropriate documentation. Through the AKVVC, the Vietnamese government has thus assisted or substituted the Cambodian government in the delivery of education. In the same way, the AKVVC has purchased land for religious purposes or for people to live on, thereby circumventing laws that prohibit non-citizens from owning land. Furthermore, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments have also tolerated travel

across the shared border, accepting AKVVC membership cards as an alternative document in the absence of passports. While doing so, Vietnamese authorities have however ensured that the Vietnamese returned to Cambodia by holding their card at the border for the duration of their stay.

This ambivalent stance by the Cambodian and Vietnam governments has affected the diaspora's perception of the two states. In the last section of the chapter, I showed that Vietnamese villagers have held a more positive view of the Vietnamese state, which has been associated with the "care" side of the AKVVC's work. The Cambodian state, on the other hand, has been associated with the "control" roles of the AKVVC. Whilst happening at different levels and in different forms, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' balancing of exclusion and inclusion, care and control, have had the same aim of sharing the custody of the Vietnamese and keeping them in a liminal space between the two countries. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this liminality by exploring how the governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese has affected the diaspora's access to *formal* and *substantive* citizenship in both countries (Brubaker, 2010).

CHAPTER SEVEN

(Re-)Producing liminality - The implications of Cambodia and Vietnam's shared custody of the diaspora

Introduction

Existing diaspora literature has often assumed that diasporas have the potential to benefit from their dual ties with the homeland and the host-state. Diaspora engagement has come with heightened economic opportunities, social and/or civil rights, and even access to dual citizenship. However, these “perks” have been typically associated with diasporas living in liberal host-states. As suggested in Chapter One, the situation is likely to be different in contexts such as the one of the Vietnamese in Cambodia, where both the homeland and the host-state are illiberal regimes and have viewed the Vietnamese as “inconvenient subjects”. In this chapter I investigate how, if at all, the Vietnamese diaspora has benefitted from its dual relationship with the states of Cambodia and Vietnam. I do so by analysing the Vietnamese’ access to the three dimensions of status, rights, and political activity (Bosniak, 2000), which allow me to explore the Vietnamese’ enjoyment of *formal* and *substantive citizenship* in both countries (Brubaker, 2010).

I open the chapter with a section on the legal dimension of citizenship, where I map the documents that the Vietnamese have received over time in order to shed light on their past and present status. The documents held by the diaspora also point to the rights that they should (and should not) access in Cambodia and Vietnam. Alongside the rights that the Vietnamese have accessed in practice, these form the bulk of the second section of this chapter. Here, I show that the group’s *de facto* enjoyment of some citizenship rights has been counterbalanced by the denial of rights attached to their foreign resident status. This confirms that the line between the states’ care and control is often blurred, as suggested in Chapter Six and further evidenced by the Vietnamese’ *de facto* right to vote. I explore the latter in the third section of the chapter, where I demonstrate that the diaspora has voted according to the instructions of the Cambodian authorities and the AKVVC. Thus, the right to vote should be seen as an instance of control over (rather than a concession to) the Vietnamese diaspora.

Overall, I argue that, albeit translating into a few benefits, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese has trapped them in a multi-level liminal space where their legal, social, and economic insecurity have been (re)produced and perpetuated. My findings also prompt me to reflect on the applicability of the concepts of *formal* and *substantive citizenship* to illiberal contexts: as they stem from states' concessions and control, even the aforementioned benefits in the areas of status, rights, and political activity are contingent and reversible. Citizenship status can be "downgraded" to immigration status, and *de facto* rights can be granted and revoked in accordance with the governments' strategic interests. These considerations unveil the need to re-think citizenship beyond liberal normativity, which I discuss in the concluding paragraphs of the chapter.

7.1 Access to Legal Status

In this section, I explore the documents that have been distributed to the Vietnamese in Cambodia to illustrate the diaspora's tortuous route to citizenship and how it has been affected by the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the group. As most of my interviewees had no Vietnamese documentation, I focus on Cambodian documents, of which respondents had a bountiful collection.¹¹² I start by looking at past documents and then move on to more recent ones, devoting particular attention to the foreign resident documentation which was introduced in 2014 (and which reflects the legal status of the Vietnamese as of 2018). The following account does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of all the documents ever held by the Vietnamese; as several of my respondents had lost them, had them collected by Cambodian authorities, or were uncomfortable showing their documents to me, this would be an unrealistic goal. Rather, in the following paragraphs I use the information that I *could* collect to grasp the temporal aspect of the diaspora's liminality, which is here represented by the retraction and perpetual postponement of Cambodian citizenship status to the Vietnamese.

(i) *Old documents*

As mentioned above, the Vietnamese that I interviewed while on fieldwork had a panoply of Cambodian documents, both recent and old. The oldest documents that I

¹¹² Only five participants reported having (had) Vietnamese ID cards. Four of them had lost or trashed the cards. The only surviving ID card that I was shown was dated 1976 and belonged to a Vietnamese who was born in Vietnam and who was however unsure of its validity.

came across were an “Acknowledgment of temporary status” (Fig. 8), a “Temporary ID card”, and a “Cambodian ID card” (Fig. 7) from the PRK government – i.e. between 1979 and 1989. The PRK “Cambodian ID card” was widespread among respondents, proving that the Vietnamese did become Cambodian citizens under the Vietnam-led regime. As stated in Chapter Three, such ID cards were however invalidated under SOC, when Prime Minister Hun Sen and the CPP began to be under pressure to take the distance from the Vietnamese people and government. SOC is also when the legal odyssey of the diaspora began, with increasingly fewer Vietnamese being able to obtain Cambodian citizenship legally.¹¹³ The first elected government after SOC and the two years of UNTAC was in fact the CPP-FUNCINPEC-BLDP coalition which, as we have seen, contained a strong anti-Vietnamese component. Both FUNCINPEC and the BLDP were known for their anti-Vietnamese rhetoric, which has also characterised the political strategy of later opposition parties (most noticeably the CNRP) and their efforts to discredit the CPP.

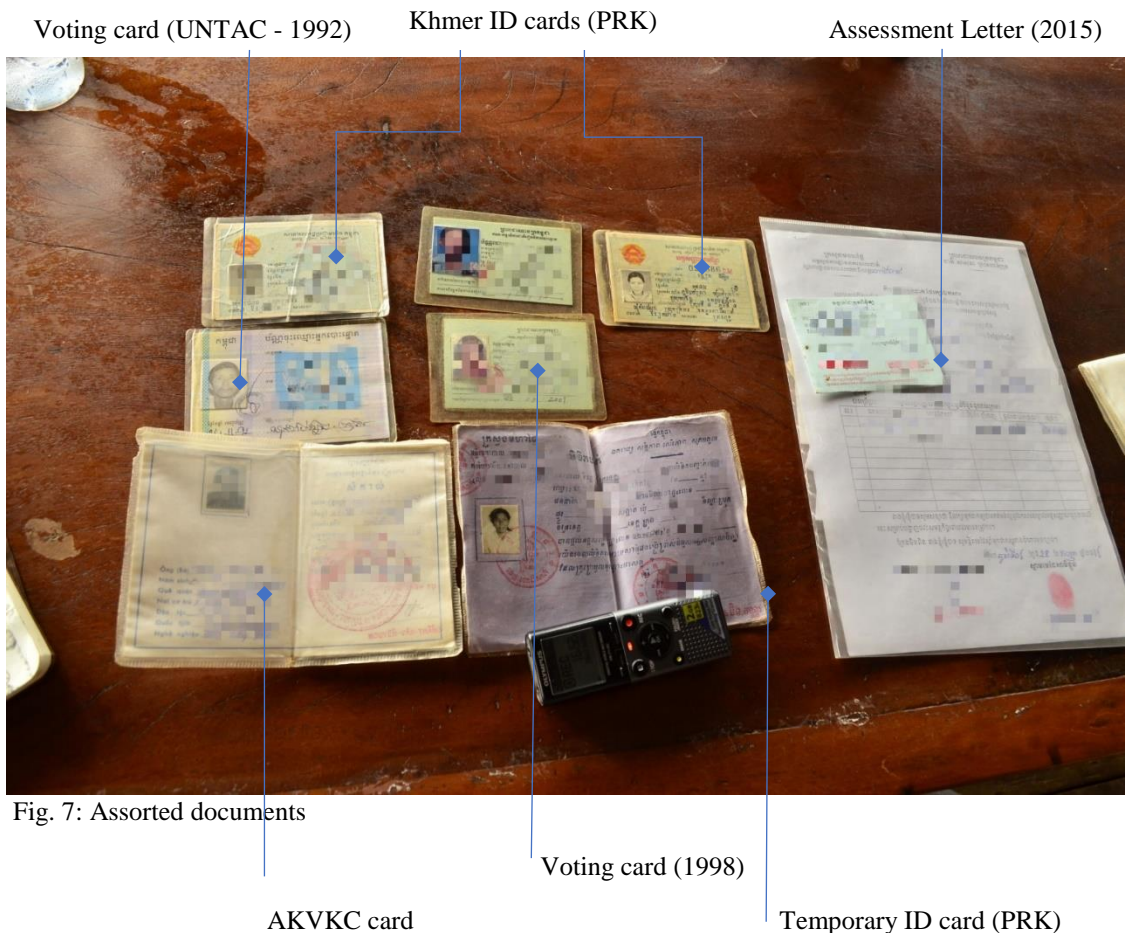


Fig. 7: Assorted documents

¹¹³ By contrast, until a few years ago illegally buying Cambodian IDs was reportedly easy, albeit expensive.

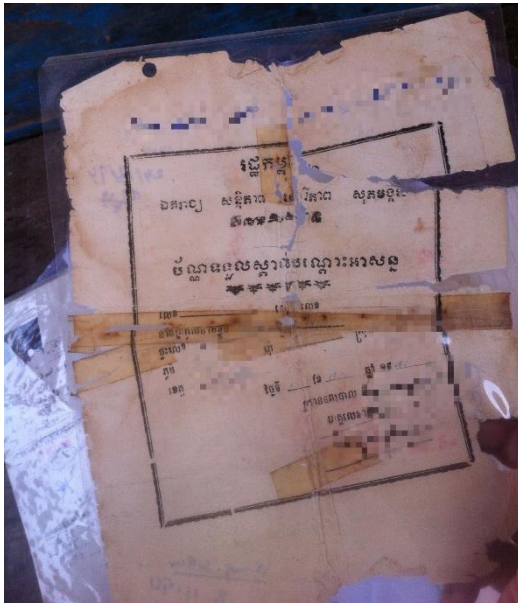


Fig. 8: Acknowledgement of temporary status, November 1980

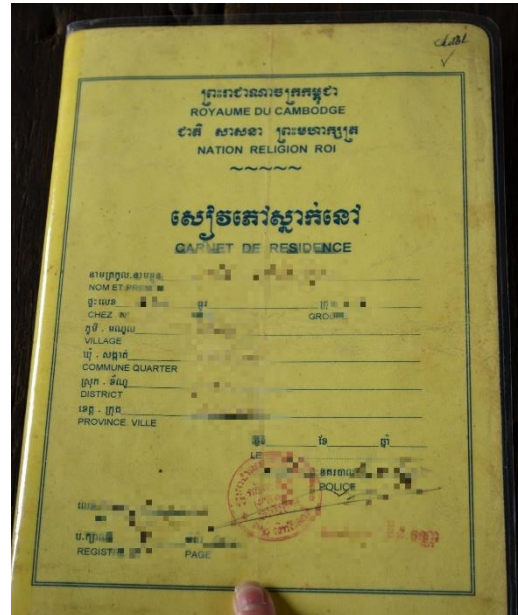


Fig. 9: Residence Book

Thus, since the early 1990s, it has been increasingly rare for Vietnamese people to (legally) obtain Cambodian ID cards. Those who did obtain them were unable to renew them or to access the benefits that came with Cambodian citizenship due to their Vietnamese origins. As a matter of fact, Cambodian ID cards held by Vietnamese nationals were often not recognised by Cambodian authorities. Villager I31, for instance, was told by the police that he would get arrested if he used his Cambodian ID card. I10, a fisherman in Village One, had a similar experience:

“They say that I am Vietnamese and they don’t allow me to hold this document. It’s the original one, but the police here accuse me that it’s fake. In Village C., where I previously lived, my neighbours [formally] recognised me and the local authorities [formally] recognised me, so I was able to get a Cambodian ID card. My whole family has it, but we can’t use it here. The police here don’t recognise it; they say that it’s fake. But it’s the original one; you know, the police can say whatever they want and the people in the village have to listen to the police” (Villager I10, personal communication, 10 March 2016).

Until recently, it was relatively easy for the Vietnamese to buy Cambodian documents. Although such practice has become more and more difficult as anti-Vietnamese sentiments (and, consequently, controls over the Vietnamese) increased, Cambodian authorities have continued to use it to justify the non-recognition of the Vietnamese’ ID cards. Such non-recognition has been accepted as normal, as confirmed by both I10’s

and I31's rationalisation of the authorities' behaviour through the assertion: "we are Vietnamese".

"We are Vietnamese" was also the standard answer of interviewees who had never obtained Cambodian IDs or had had them substituted with foreign resident documents. As I explained in Chapter Six, the acceptance of the authorities' discriminatory actions has been possible through the reproduction of truth discourses by the AKVKC. In addition to reflecting the control side of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the diaspora, the Vietnamese' inability to obtain and retain Cambodian citizenship or have their citizenship status recognised points to the blurred dichotomy between *formal* and *substantive citizenship* in illiberal contexts. In Cambodia, as in other illiberal states, legal citizenship status (and, thus, *formal citizenship*) indeed exists both in theory and in practice. Furthermore, *formal citizenship* is not fixed, but rather fluid and reversible. Unlike liberal states, where legal status is typically revoked in exceptional circumstances, in Cambodia legal ID cards held by Vietnamese diasporans have been routinely substituted with foreign resident documents.

Among these foreign resident documents was the "Resident book", which virtually all the Vietnamese families I interviewed held (Fig. 9). The resident book was similar to the Cambodian family book and it was used "as a police measure to collect information about the number of people living in each house" (Sub-decree No 73 ANK.BK, 1997). My respondents also referred to it as "resident card". However, resident cards are described in Art. 21 of the 1994 Immigration Law as being "valid for a period of two years" with the possibility of being extended every two years. By contrast, the resident books that I encountered had been issued in the 1990s and early 2000s and had never been renewed. This suggests that resident books and resident cards are two different documents; as a matter of fact, the Immigration Law's description of resident cards bears a greater resemblance with the "new" immigration documents which were introduced in 2014 and began to be distributed in 2015. I focus on the latter in the following paragraphs.

(ii) *Recent documents*

In Chapter Six, I mentioned the foreign resident documents that the Vietnamese had to obtain as part of the "new" seven-year procedure to acquire citizenship. When I

conducted my field research in 2016, the procedure was being consistently carried out across Cambodia: Vietnamese villagers were being given a small blue document titled “assessment letter” (Fig. 10) which recorded their name, sex, nationality (“Vietnamese”), address, and number of family members. According to an NGO staff, the assessment letter allowed people to “move freely and legally without the risk of being arrested while they wait[ed] for the ‘big document’” (CS02, personal communication, 30 April 2016). The “big document” referred to the “Announcement on the Recognition of Foreign Immigration” (Fig.11): this was the first step in the seven-year procedure. It costed USD\$62.50 and had to be renewed twice (at the same cost), thereby fitting 1994 Immigration Law description of “resident cards”.

Very few people had already received the announcement on the recognition of foreign immigration: the majority had applied for it and was waiting for the authorities to deliver it. As most of them were unable to read, Vietnamese villagers did not appear to be aware of the purpose of either the announcement or the assessment letter, with some of them even comparing them to Cambodian ID cards. Respondents also gave inconsistent accounts on the acquisition of the assessment letters: many reported having been visited by the department of immigration; some said that they had received it from the AKVKC; one respondent asserted that he had personally gone “to the Cambodian authorities” to request it; and two stated that they did not need the assessment letter because they had been counted in the 2002 and 2006 censuses. These discrepancies can be explained by the fact that the assessment letters were introduced after years of nebulous policies. The following summary by AKVKC President Chau Van Chi captures the chronology of events and helps to shed light on the current situation:

“The Law on Immigration was introduced in 1994, and there was a census in 2002 [...] There was no specific procedure on how it was done, but they asked all foreigners, including Vietnamese, to register their names at the Department of Immigration. There was the ‘Department of Immigration’ back then (in 2002), not the General Department of Immigration [...]

Although they [the Cambodian Government] carried out this census, there was no mentioning of what would be done next at the time. Then, I am not sure if in 2010 or 2012, there was a second census. The Immigration Department issued a resolution to acknowledge that the Vietnamese that had been registered in these two censuses were legal immigrants in the country. However, they were not recognised all at once: they circulated a paper that covered twenty or thirty people at the time. It’s an A4 paper and it records the names of Vietnamese

people and a statement saying that these are legal Vietnamese living in the country; and it's signed. Then, in 2014, those who had already been included in this paper were invited to go to the Department of Immigration and pay 250,000 Riel, and received a small card, about this size, which is an immigration card and expires after two years" (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016).

The "immigration card" Chau Van Chi referred to was the "assessment letter" discussed earlier in the section. His account suggests that the procedure is a result of, and in line with, the 1994 Immigration Law, which has only recently started to be consistently implemented. By triangulating his statements with villagers' reports, it appears that people who could afford the documentation when it was first introduced in 2012 received the assessment letter in 2014. The majority, however, obtained it in 2015 and 2016, following the news that the Vietnamese Government would cover the cost of the first payment. Recipients were not subject to a new census, but were identified on the basis of previous censuses. Whilst many villagers claimed to have been counted in a census in 2015, NGO staff CS02 told me that Cambodian authorities did visit Vietnamese villages, but only to confirm the legal status of residents:

"The Ministry of Interior already has all the names of the Vietnamese who will get the "big document" [Announcement on the recognition of foreign immigration]. The 2015 visit was to check the legal or illegal stay – then the "big document" will come from the Ministry and will certify that they are legal migrants. After they receive that, they will have to go through another procedure: they will have to make copies of it and bring them to the Vietnamese Association so that they can get money from them. Then, they will give the money to the authorities in exchange for a receipt stating that they have paid for the first two years" (CS02, personal communication, 30 April 2016).

The section concerning the payment is unsubstantiated, with several respondents asserting that they had not personally performed the transaction and that the Vietnamese Association had paid on their behalf. However, villagers did confirm that the assessment letter was a prerequisite to the obtainment of the Announcement on the Recognition of Foreign Immigration, which was followed by a receipt of payment (Fig. 12). The photographs in the next page show the documents in order of distribution.

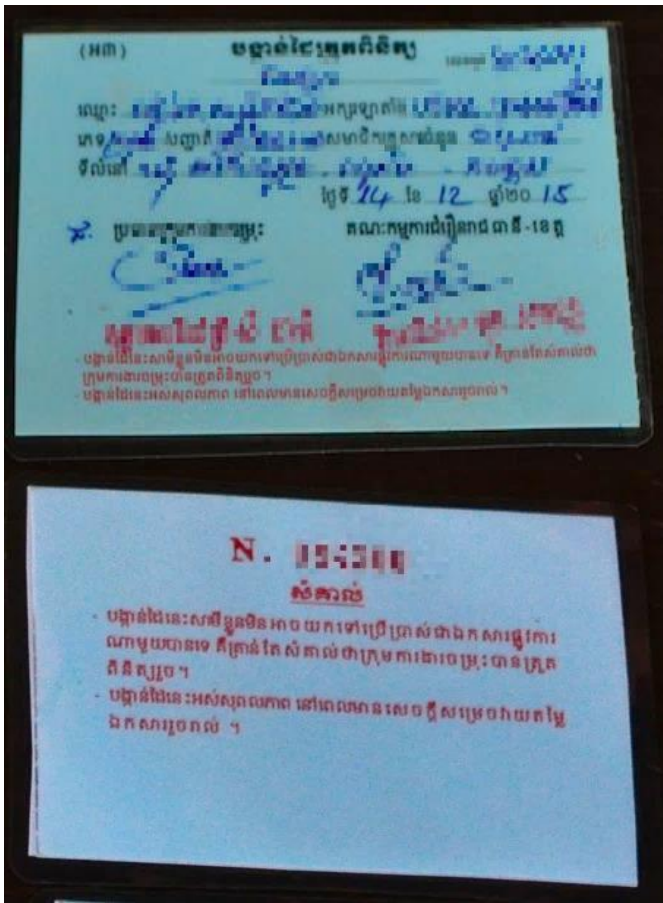


Fig. 10: Assessment letter. The back of the document specifies that “the letter is not for the holder to use as an official document. It only certifies that the working group has completed the assessment”; and that the letter “is invalid when the final assessment and decision are made”.



Fig. 11: Announcement on the Recognition of foreign Immigration



Fig. 12: Receipt of payment

These papers were the first step in the seven-year process that the Vietnamese had to undergo in order to obtain citizenship. As reported in Chapter Six, AKVVC President Chau Van Chi claimed that he had received “no specific document from the Department of Immigration” regarding the procedure, but that he had had

“[...] an oral conversation with people from the department, who said that in order to become citizens the Vietnamese should not have been involved in any illegal activity in the country [...] They have to be able to read and write in Khmer language; and they need to follow Cambodian traditions, like Khmer people” (Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016).

The above criteria, which correspond to the ones established by Art. 8 of the 1996 Nationality Law, sound a cautionary note. As a matter of fact, very few Vietnamese can read and write, and even fewer can read and write in Khmer. This is partly due to their limited access to Khmer education, which I will explore in the next section of the chapter, and the fact that Vietnamese communities have tended to live separate from the Khmer society. As I explained in Chapter Five, many diasporans have also continued to use Vietnamese as their first language and follow Vietnamese culture and traditions.

The meaning of “illegal activities” is also problematic, for it is likely to include breaking fishing bans and fishing in prohibited areas – crimes for which the Vietnamese have often been detained and/or fined by Cambodian authorities. These observations cast doubts on the plausibility of Vietnamese’ ultimate access to citizenship status. Furthermore, by not taking into account the total length of residency, the procedure effectively re-started the count of the years that Vietnamese have spent in Cambodia. Rather than “regularising” them and “opening a path to citizenship” (Nouv Leakhena as cited in the Phnom Penh Post, 2018), the seven-year procedure has thus added to the (previously unofficial) strategies aimed at postponing the granting of citizenship to the Vietnamese. Such strategies have been enabled by the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the diaspora through the AKVVC, leaving the Vietnamese *de facto* stateless and encapsulating the legal liminality of the group.

7.2 Enjoyment of Rights

Having explored the Vietnamese’ access to the legal status dimension of citizenship, in this section I investigate how the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the diaspora has affected the Vietnamese’ exercise of rights in the two

countries. I focus on the right to education; freedom of movement; residence and land ownership; and health care and employment. Such selection is based on what appeared to be the most important themes across the four villages that I interviewed. In order to avoid repetitions, the paragraphs on education and travel expand on the discussions presented in Chapter Six.

(i) *Right to education*

In Chapter Six I explained that the Vietnamese government has been funding AKVVC schools in Cambodia in order to improve Vietnamese communities' education levels. In addition to financial hurdles, Vietnamese families have faced legal barriers that have prevented them from accessing Cambodian education. Admission to Cambodian education has appeared to be a matter of degrees: several respondents asserted that children could study at different stages depending on the documents that they held. Without Cambodian birth certificates, they could only attend the first few years of primary school. With birth certificates, they could progress until secondary education; although very few have progressed further, anecdotal evidence suggests that they could not take the national exam unless they also had a Cambodian family book (the Cambodian correspondent of the residence book).

Most Vietnamese children did not have Cambodian birth certificates. Parents reported being unable to obtain them because of their Vietnamese origins or receiving what they called a "Vietnamese certificate": a certificate that stated "Vietnamese" under "nationality" (I42, personal communication, 3 August 2016). In order to send their children to Cambodian schools, some families resorted to illegal stratagems such as buying fake documents, changing the children's name into a Khmer name, or registering their children under a Khmer friend's household.¹¹⁴ This, however, was quite rare. Cambodian schools were usually far and expensive and the majority of families chose to send children to Church or AKVVC schools. The latter did not always teach Khmer language and, in the case of remote villages, only ran informal lessons on Vietnamese reading and writing.

¹¹⁴ In Village Two, which had a Church school but no AKVVC school, the Vietnamese Association reportedly advised people to change their children's names into Khmer names so that they could attend the local Cambodian school.



Fig. 13: AKVVC School in a Vietnamese village in Cambodia. The school received very limited funding from the Vietnamese government. It ran a single class for children of all ages and only taught Vietnamese language and maths.

In border areas, it was quite common for families to send their children to school in Vietnam. Here, too, access to different stages of education was determined by the children's documentation, but parents could more easily obtain Vietnamese birth certificates if mothers gave birth in Vietnamese hospitals. Furthermore, there have been instances in which Vietnamese authorities had facilitated diasporan children's admission into Vietnamese schools by waiving infrastructure fees and providing donations. This was the case in the Khan An Commune, An Giang Province, where in 2008 Vietnamese pupils from Cambodia made up sixty percent of the commune primary school and thirty percent of the secondary school (Việt Nam News, 2008). Whilst in Cambodia formal routes to education have been limited or inexistent, the Vietnamese government thus appears to have facilitated the diaspora's access to education in Vietnam and, through the opening of AKVVC, in Cambodia. As mentioned in Chapter Six, the establishment of AKVVC has been permitted by the Cambodian government, who has opened alternative routes to education while offloading their costs onto the Vietnamese state.

(ii) *Freedom of movement*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Vietnamese diasporans have been able to travel between Cambodia and Vietnam despite lacking the documents to do so. Anukret no. 30 (1996) on “The formalities and application for authorisation to enter, exit, and reside in the Kingdom of Cambodia by Immigrant Aliens” establishes that “any immigrant alien who wishes to temporarily leave the Kingdom of Cambodia shall apply for authorisation from the Ministry of Interior” and provide, among other items, a copy of the residence card and the passport. Participants were generally aware of the formal requirements for crossing the border, but never found it necessary to comply with them.

“There may be some problems with the police, but you deal with it by paying the officials [...] If you want to cross the border [legally], you need to get a passport. In order to get a passport in Cambodia you need to have a lot of [other] documents and spend a lot of money. But if you bribe [the authorities], it’s easier. Even if you have legal documents, when you go you still have to pay them” (Villager I02, personal communication, 8 March 2016).

When they travelled via regular border checkpoints, on the Cambodian side the Vietnamese usually bribed officials in order to cross the border. In addition to this, some people reported showing the “new” assessment letters since they received them in 2015. Whilst the widespread practice of bribing makes it impossible to determine the role of the Cambodian Government in allowing irregular border crossing, extensive media coverage on the topic suggests that the government has been aware of this behaviour and has turned a blind eye to it. On the Vietnamese side, respondents stated that they would have needed to show a permit issued by the Vietnamese Association, but that the AKVKC membership card was sufficient. It follows that Vietnamese diasporans have been able travel in and out of both countries.

The *de facto* right to travel across state borders stands in interesting juxtaposition to the Vietnamese’ limited ability to travel within Cambodia. “In principle”, according to Art. 17 of the 1994 Law on Immigration, as foreign residents the Vietnamese should be able to “freely travel within the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia”. Nonetheless, several respondents expressed fear of being arrested and deported if found travelling outside of their province of residence without a Cambodian ID card. Villager I50 recalled that the one time he did, the Cambodian police stopped him and fined him. His testimony was echoed by Villager I36 who, like many others, highlighted that freedom ended at the

provincial border and that when travelling to other provinces “whether you get arrested or not is a matter of luck” (Villager I36, personal communication, 2 August 2016). These statements suggest that, whilst enjoying some *citizenship* rights, the Vietnamese have been denied rights that come with foreign resident status. Furthermore, by being confined in their province of residence, the diaspora has been more easily governable by the Cambodian government, confirming that the line between care (in this case in the form of concessions) and control has often been blurred. The governability side of the states’ strategy has also been apparent in relation to residence and land ownership, which I address in the following paragraphs.

(iii) *Residence and Land ownership*

As I explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, most Vietnamese communities in Cambodia have lived on water. Previous studies have suggested that this has been a consequence of their lack of citizenship; that is, that they have lived in floating villages because they have lacked the right to own land (e.g. Ehrentraut, 2011; Nguyen and Sperfeldt, 2012). By contrast, the vast majority of my respondents *wanted* to live on water, and expressed gratitude to the Cambodian government for “allowing” them to do so. The government’s concession, however, came at a price. Over the course of my fieldwork, I came across numerous cases of displacement. Whilst displacement was not uncommon among Khmer communities, many Vietnamese had been forced to move more than once. Villager I24’s story is an example of this:

“In the past I lived by the big hotel. But since they wanted to build the hotel, I had to move [...] the government asked me to go elsewhere, so I moved to Village A. I only moved to this village, Village B, a year ago.

L: Why did you move from A to here?

For the same reason: the government told me to move”.

(Villager I24, personal communication, 20 May 2016)

The Cambodian Government has been unconstrained in its handling of Vietnamese communities. It has assembled villages, relocated them, and displaced people without providing them with alternative solutions. According to an NGO staff,

“Before the Khmer Rouge, they didn’t all live together as they do now. They were more dispersed [...] One community was only a few, maybe ten, houses. It was only lately that they brought all those people to live together in big communities. I spoke with the provincial authorities, who I know well. I asked

those who organised the relocation: “Why don’t you just have them living as before? Living separately... Why do you group them together? It looks like they are so many!” – and the guy shook his head and said: “this is the government’s strategy. It’s easier to control [them]” (CS02, personal communication, 30 April 2016).

The above excerpt illustrates how the Cambodian government has engineered Vietnamese villages so that they are more easily governable. In the past, they grouped Vietnamese communities together; recently, they have been moving them on land.

The incumbent relocation of Vietnamese communities on land was a recurring theme throughout my research. In Village One the process had already begun, whereas in other villages people were aware of the long-term plan but unsure of the timeline. Relocation was described as a pre-condition to citizenship and caused anxiety and uncertainty. My participants recognised the irrevocability of the Cambodian government’s decision, which had been communicated and carried out by the AKVKC, but they were worried about losing their property, finding jobs, and adapting to a different lifestyle.¹¹⁵ In village One, I was told:

“We really want to live on water, but if there is a regulation or order from the government to move on land, we can’t go against it [...] But we can’t imagine how life is going to be: we don’t know how to ride a motorbike, we don’t know how to farm... And our property is on water, how can we manage our property? We can’t bring our boats on land. We would prefer to live nearby the river, so that we can live on land without losing our possessions and our fish farms.

L: Would you consider moving to a different province?

Where would we go if we move? The problem would persist, because the government doesn’t want us to live on water. Also, our resident cards and documents are for here. If we go to a different province, we’ll have no documents there, so we’ll have more problems [...] Because of relocation on land, many people are going back to Vietnam” (Villager I06, personal communication, 9 March 2016)

The above quote encapsulates the anxiety and resignation of Vietnamese communities across the country and points to the constraints that they have faced in choosing their place of residence. The Cambodian government’s resettlement of communities has indeed stood in stark contrast with the Vietnamese’ own attempts to move, which

¹¹⁵ As mentioned in Chapter Six, the AKVKC has allegedly bought the land where the Vietnamese would be relocated.

have often been stopped by local authorities despite foreign residents' official right to change their residence (established by Art. 15 of the 1994 Nationality Law). As with the right to travel between provinces, such restrictions are likely to have been motivated by the Cambodian government's desire to ensure the governability of the Vietnamese population in the country.

(iv) *Health care and Employment*

All the respondents who discussed health care with me told me that they could access both public and private health services in Cambodia. People expressed a clear preference for private clinics, which they believed to provide more adequate care. Hospitals, on the other hand, were often depicted as hostile environments characterised by considerable levels of negligence and discrimination. Due to the high costs of private infrastructures, Vietnamese however preferred to go to the hospital in Vietnam. This is a very interesting aspect of the diaspora's position between the two states: penalised (in Cambodia) and at the same time empowered by their Vietnamese origins, Vietnamese diasporans have taken advantage of their *de facto* right to travel across state borders to access better healthcare. Two respondents even suggested that people who held AKVVC membership cards were entitled to a fifty-percent discount on the price of health care in Vietnam. Whilst I found no additional evidence in support of this claim, interviewees did praise the affordability of Vietnamese hospitals as compared to their Cambodian counterparts.¹¹⁶ Vietnamese diasporans have also travelled to Vietnam in search of employment opportunities. This was particularly true for people who lived in border provinces: an older respondent in Village Four told me that she had worked in Vietnam intermittently for decades, for a maximum of three months at the time.¹¹⁷ Other people also reported taking up temporary jobs in Vietnam in times of financial hardship or when the fish was particularly scarce. Vietnamese families' fishing revenues have in fact dropped as a result of the low water levels caused by climate change, and the Cambodian government's introduction of stringent fishing bans, which were a frequent subject of complaint among Vietnamese fishermen in Cambodia.

¹¹⁶ Khmer citizens, too, travel to Vietnam for medical care, but I was unable to collect information on the costs of the latter and whether they are different from the ones faced by the Vietnamese diaspora.

¹¹⁷ In order to be employed for more than three months, she would have needed a work permit, which she was reportedly unable to obtain due to her lack of Cambodian or Vietnamese documentation.



Fig. 14: Vietnamese woman fishing at low tide



Fig. 15: Vietnamese floating house at low tide. Vietnamese villagers usually kept fish farms below their homes. This, however, became increasingly difficult as the levels of the Tonle Sap waters decreased.

Vietnamese fishermen felt especially penalised by fishing restrictions, which they claimed to be harsher on them than on Cambodian fishermen. With their main source of livelihood under threat, they felt that they had no choice but breaking the law and fishing in prohibited areas, risking fines or even imprisonment. The alternative would have been to work on land which, in addition to being undesirable, was limited in terms of job availability. In the words of Villager I35, “no one will hire you if you don’t have a Cambodian ID card” (personal communication, 2 August 2016).

Villager I35, like other respondents, believed that Cambodian IDs and birth certificates were necessary to find employment. Nonetheless, art. 32 of the 1997 Kram on Labour law only specifies that foreign residents, like Cambodian citizens, should possess a work permit and an employment card in order to be eligible for hire. A possible explanation for the exclusion of the Vietnamese from the job market is that the employment card was meant to be distributed to “foreigners” who have “legally entered the Kingdom of Cambodia”; “possess a valid passport”; and “possess a valid residency permit” (Kram on Labour, 1997). As I have shown in the section on legal status, Vietnamese diasporans only fulfilled the latter requirement. The absence of a passport, combined with the complex migratory history of the group, may have hindered the Vietnamese’ access to employment cards and, consequently, jobs. Yet, it is important to note that none of my respondents mentioned employment cards or the impossibility to obtain them as an obstacle to being hired. Vietnamese may have therefore simply ignored the formal requirements for the employment of foreign labour. Discrimination by individual employers may, too, have been a factor in employment issues.

The first two possible causes for the limited employment of the Vietnamese (i.e. lack of passport and information) have been a direct consequence of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the diaspora. The lack of passports is linked to the Vietnamese’ inability to obtain citizenship and the Cambodian and AKVVC authorities’ continuous invalidation and/or confiscation of old documents. The lack of information regarding the criteria for employment has, too, been dependent on the AKVVC’s failure to disseminate such information. Furthermore, if occurring, even the Cambodian employees’ reluctance to hire Vietnamese may have been strengthened by the liminal legal status of the group. These considerations confirm that, whilst enabling the *de facto* enjoyment of some citizenship rights, the Cambodian and Vietnamese

governments' shared custody of the group has hindered the Vietnamese' access to rights attached to their foreign resident status. It follows that the diaspora has not unequivocally benefitted from its dual ties with the two states. Even the citizenship rights that they have enjoyed have indeed reflected the governments' interests and have been either counterbalanced or underpinned by a degree of control aimed at ensuring the governability of the Vietnamese.

7.3 Engagement in political activity

As Linda Bonsiak pointed out, political theorists have most commonly used the term "citizenship" to denote people's active participation in the life of the political community (2000). Such engagement has been founded on the tenets of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to vote, therefore overlapping with the previous dimension of citizenship as rights. In Chapter Six, I hinted at the Vietnamese' engagement in political activity when I related Village One's participation in a petition which resulted in the imprisonment of its organiser. The event was the only form of political mobilisation that I encountered during my fieldwork. Its outcome is representative of the state of freedom of association and expression in Vietnamese communities, where constraints have been even more critical than those faced by Cambodian citizens.

Vietnamese voices have been silenced at several levels. At the institutional level, Vietnamese diasporans have not benefitted from the decentralisation reforms, most noticeably the 2001 Law on Commune Elections and the Law on Administration and Management of Communes/ Sangkat (LAMC). The LAMC, which introduced the direct election of commune councils, specified that all candidates and voters should be "Khmer citizens" and have "Khmer nationality at birth", thereby excluding Vietnamese from actively and passively engaging in the democratic process (Ehrentraut, 2013). Confirming Ehrentraut's findings, my respondents asserted that Vietnamese could not fulfil administrative roles within the Cambodian political apparatus. The only link between the Vietnamese and state authorities were AKVVC leaders, who also performed the role of village chiefs.

Yet, AKVVC leaders at the village level were normally appointed by the AKVVC itself. Whilst they formally represented the Vietnamese population in Cambodia, villagers

appeared to play a rather passive role in their selection. One of my respondents explained to me that:

“The village leader is chosen by the Vietnamese Association; no one votes to elect him. Sometimes, the leader can be a volunteer who wants to do the job. We don’t need to vote: we just see that that person is a good one, and we let him be the leader.” (Villager I30, personal communication, 21 May 2016)

It follows that, even at the local level, Vietnamese communities in Cambodia have not been duly listened to. In some cases, village leaders were perceived as not caring about the community and pursuing their own personal interests instead. Furthermore, even where relations were good, villagers were aware of the leaders’ duty to ensure social order and compliance with the law and, with the exception of Village One, did not dare voicing their concerns. With no outlet for their grievances and further proving the internalisation and acceptance of their treatment, respondents stated that they had no right to complain about their situation.

In Vietnam, Vietnamese diasporans were also excluded from political life and were not allowed to vote in local elections.¹¹⁸ The only way through which the Vietnamese could be considered to have a political voice in the two countries was voting in Cambodia. Of the thirty-two interviewees who felt comfortable discussing voting, nineteen said that they had never been allowed to vote in the Kingdom. By contrast, thirteen people declared to have received voting cards between 1992 and 2002, many of which were purportedly still recognised at the polling stations (Fig. 4).¹¹⁹ Moreover, when I visited the house of the village and AKVVC leader in Village Two, he and other members of the AKVVC told me that they were compiling a list of approximately four hundred names of “people who are allowed to vote” and had “voted at any point until 2013” (Village Leader I20, personal communication, 1 May 2016). Whilst the village chief claimed that he did not know the purpose of the list, another informant told me that those names were likely to be registered to vote in the 2017 communal elections. The episode confirms that some Vietnamese could still exercise the right to vote – one of the

¹¹⁸ Yet, it should be noted that the Vietnamese diasporans that I spoke with had little or no knowledge of Vietnamese politics, and that the few who did expressed their wholehearted support for the communist party.

¹¹⁹ According to my interviewees, most voting cards were distributed during UNTAC (1991-1992) and in 1998 and 2001 – that is ahead of the 1993, 1998, and 2003 elections.

mainstays of citizenship rights. This, however, should be considered alongside other, important, elements.

Of the respondents who had been able to vote, very few displayed a knowledge of Cambodia's political parties and environment. The following example reflects a lack of political awareness among many of my participants:

L: How did you get these voting cards?

I11: The authorities called me [and asked me] to go to the office; they filled the form for me and took a photo of me [...] At the time, I didn't know anything, so I just voted, I just ticked...

L: Do you mind me asking who you voted for? You don't have to answer if you don't feel comfortable.

I11: I don't know how to read. I don't know who I voted for, I just ticked the box." (Villager I11, personal communication, 30 April 2016)

It is plausible to think that Villager I11 was given instructions on which box to tick. Other informants also reported having been "recruited" to vote by authorities, who are unlikely to have done so without the certainty that the Vietnamese would have casted their ballot in favour of the CPP. Driven by external pressure rather than free choice, for many Vietnamese the right to vote has been merely fictitious. This is further exemplified by the fact that the people who told me that they could not vote were unfailingly puzzled when I asked them whether they had ever tried. Their reactions, coupled with the excerpt above, embody a widespread understanding of the act of voting as the execution of an order rather than the expression of a position.

This is not to say that *all* Vietnamese were uninterested or uninformed about Cambodian politics. Over the course of my fieldwork, I encountered several people who displayed very strong political opinions. Some of them even expressed a clear preference for the CNRP, citing a need for change in Cambodia's ruler and institutions. Interestingly, these respondents were not (or no longer) allowed to vote. Whether a pure coincidence or the result of careful consideration, this suggests that, in addition to lacking its very foundation of free choice, the right to vote had an expiry date and was not accessible to all Vietnamese. The arbitrariness underpinning its acquirement and duration points, once again, to the fictitiousness of the right to vote among Vietnamese communities in Cambodia and the blurred line between the governments' care and control of the diaspora.

This, in turn, confirms that the Vietnamese have not unequivocally benefitted from their dual ties with their homeland and their host-state. Their enjoyment of citizenship as status, rights, and political activity has been intermittent, ambiguous, and mostly aimed at serving the governments' strategic interests and/or ensuring the governability of the group. Albeit involving a few benefits, such as access to education and health care, the Cambodian and Vietnamese states' shared custody of the diaspora has thus reinforced the liminality of the Vietnamese. Such liminality stands in sharp contrast with the dual membership of diasporas living in liberal states, who typically enjoy *formal* and/or (some aspects of) *substantive* citizenship in both the homeland and the host-state (Brubaker, 2010). In addition to providing an alternative to mainstream diaspora discourses, these observations interrogate the applicability of the concepts of *formal* and *substantive* citizenship to illiberal contexts.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the definition of *substantive* citizenship encapsulates the liberal and civil republican traditions of citizenship. The civic republican understanding of citizenship views the citizen as "an active participant in governance and politics for the good of the wider community" (Lister, 1998:6). Voting is a crucial component of this, reflecting Aristotle's definition of the citizen as one who both rules and is ruled (Pocock, 1995). Such definition, however, fits uncomfortably with the above account of voting by (some) Vietnamese diasporans in Cambodia. Here, the Vietnamese appear to have voted "on request" by the government. Not as rulers, but as ruled; not as citizen, but as subjects. Their exercise of the right to vote has therefore defied the very foundations of active citizenship.

Similarly, the Vietnamese' *de facto* enjoyment of some citizenship rights has been inconsistent and arbitrary, contrasting with the liberal definition of citizenship as people's *possession* of rights against the state (Bosniak, 2006; Mhurchú, 2014). Vietnamese diasporans cannot be considered to *possess* rights. Instead, their "rights" are contingent concessions by the two governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. Alongside the above considerations on the Vietnamese' access to citizenship as political activity, this confirms the inadequacy of the concept of *substantive* citizenship to describe the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia (and, plausibly, of other minority populations in illiberal countries). The same is true for the notion of *formal* citizenship: as highlighted earlier in the chapter, the fluid and reversible nature of legal status in

Cambodia in fact blurs the binary between *formal* and *substantive* citizenship. Thus, in addition to highlighting how the shared custody of the diaspora enhances the liminality of the group, the investigation of the Vietnamese' access to *formal* and *substantive* citizenship unveils the limitations of these terms and the need for greater reflection on the content and meaning of "citizenship" in illiberal states.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated whether the Vietnamese have benefitted from their dual ties with the Cambodian and Vietnamese states by exploring their access to status, rights, and political activity (Bosniak, 2000). My aim was to analyse the implications of the states' shared custody of the group in terms of the diaspora's enjoyment of *formal* and *substantive* citizenship (Brubaker, 2010). In the first section, I focused on the legal status of the Vietnamese by mapping the old and recent documents that they held. Recalling Chapter Six's discussion, I showed that the filtering of information and the periodic invalidation of old documents by the Cambodian government have enabled the indefinite postponement of citizenship to the diaspora. Albeit ostensibly more coherent, even the seven year-procedure introduced in 2014 bore some resemblance with past policies: the legal and linguistic requirements for the obtainment of citizenship indeed penalised the Vietnamese, reducing the chances for successful applications.

The Vietnamese' inability to become Cambodian citizens has had significant repercussions on their enjoyment rights. Yet, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have mitigated such negative consequences by making a number of concessions. The result has been a patchy access to rights in both countries: Vietnamese children have been allowed to attend school in both the homeland and the host-state, but the level to which they can progress has been dependent on the documents they hold. Moreover, the diaspora has accessed both Cambodian and Vietnamese health care, but has faced difficulties in accessing jobs. Finally, Vietnamese diasporans have been to travel across the Cambodia-Vietnam border. Yet, their movement within the Cambodia has been limited, and so has their choice of the area of residence. The *de facto* enjoyment of some citizenship rights has therefore been counterbalanced by the denial of rights attached to foreign resident status, confirming the blurring of the lines between the governments' care and control.

This has been even more apparent in the diaspora's access to citizenship as political activity, and especially the *de facto* right to vote. Far from being representative of the Vietnamese' political will, the right to vote has been exercised in accordance with the instructions of the Cambodian authorities and the AKVVC. These and other examples reported in the chapter point to the need to re-think about the content and meaning of citizenship beyond liberal normativity. Furthermore, and addressing the main question of this chapter, they demonstrate that despite partly benefitting the Vietnamese by affording them access to some dimensions of substantive citizenship, the shared custody of the diaspora has perpetuated the insecurity of the group, trapping them in a multi-level liminal space where they have been easily governable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Introduction

In this dissertation, I have analysed the reasons, modalities, and implications of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' engagement with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. The Vietnamese in Cambodia are an interesting case because, unlike the majority of diaspora groups explored in the existing literature, they have been marginalised in the host-state and have not represented a significant threat and/or resource to either the host-state or the homeland. As I explained in Chapter One, whereas in the past these Vietnamese were instrumental to both the Vietnamese regime and the Cambodian ruling CPP, recently they have lost most of their political value while contributing no capital or skills to the two states. Furthermore, although they could represent a threat by, for instance, organising politically, such threat has been kept under control through the shared custody of the Vietnamese by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. Alongside the illiberal regime type of the two countries, these factors have posed the basis for the main argument and contributions of my thesis, which are at the centre of this concluding chapter.

My research has been guided by two, interrelated, questions: a) *How do the Cambodian state and the Vietnamese state perceive of and engage with the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia?* b) *What are the implications of their engagement on this diaspora's enjoyment of citizenship?* In the first section of this chapter, I answer these questions by presenting a summary of my main argument. Then, I reflect on the wider significance of my thesis. I focus on five main points: a more nuanced understanding of diasporas as heterogeneous entities that do not represent a clear threat and/or resource to the states; the relevance of the host-state in shaping diasporas and diaspora engagement; the degree of cooperation between the homeland and the host-state in co-governing diasporas; the enduring salience of symbolic and physical boundaries in Southeast Asia; and the content and meaning of "citizenship" in illiberal contexts. Finally, in the last section of the chapter I outline possible avenues for future research.

8.1. The main argument of the thesis

In Chapter Five, I argued that the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments have both viewed the Vietnamese in Cambodia as *inconvenient subjects* and have engaged, respectively, in the *bounded exclusion* and the *bounded inclusion* of the group. Domestic and international factors have shaped the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' perception of the diaspora and underpinned these strategies. In Cambodia, the government's *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese has been the result of the CPP's difficult position between the Cambodian people and the Vietnamese state. As I showed in Chapter Three, the Cambodian government's "special relationship" with the SRV has stood in awkward contrast with a strongly anti-Vietnamese electorate, whose feelings of hostility against Vietnam have been fuelled by political elites from the French Protectorate to the CNRP.

Decades of ethno-national manipulation have crystallised the Vietnamese' position as the Khmers' "other". Such position has been reflected in legal and political debates and the 1993 Cambodian Constitution, confirming the Vietnamese' place outside of the Cambodian nation and, accordingly, the Cambodian citizenry (Edwards, 1996; Amer, 2014). Despite its close relations with the Vietnamese regime, the Hun Sen government has been unable and unwilling to reverse this situation. Rather, the increasing resonance of the opposition's anti-Vietnamese rhetoric with the Khmer electorate has prompted the Cambodian government to distance itself from the Vietnamese diaspora in the country. Whilst the CPP has continued to "use" the Vietnamese to cast (irregular) votes in its favour, such practice has also become increasingly hazardous in the recent political climate. Thus, the political benefits associated with the Vietnamese presence in the Kingdom have been fading, whilst its costs have continued to grow. Alongside the potential economic burden of devising and implementing an integration strategy for the Vietnamese, this has explained the Cambodian government's perception of the Vietnamese as *inconvenient subjects* and its reluctance to grant them citizenship.

According to Phay Siphon, the Hun Sen government has even attempted to "return" the Vietnamese to the SRV, which has however refused to "take them back" (Phay Siphon, personal communication, 26 July 2016). In the attempt to accommodate both its powerful neighbour and its strongly anti-Vietnamese electorate, the Cambodian government has resorted to the *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese – allowing them

to live within the physical territory of the Cambodian state whilst postponing their access to citizenship and keeping them outside of the Cambodian nation.

The Cambodian government's *bounded exclusion* of the Vietnamese has sat alongside the Vietnamese government's *bounded inclusion* of this diaspora. As I explained in Chapter Five, the Vietnamese regime has recognised the Vietnamese in Cambodia as part of the Vietnamese nation whilst discouraging their return into the physical territory of the Vietnamese state. Such position can be explained by three factors: the diaspora group's past role as "friends" of the communist regime; the Vietnamese government's desire to harness the human and economic resources of wealthy Vietnamese living in developed countries; and the challenges posed by the mass "return" of thousands of Vietnamese diasporans from Cambodia.

The first and second factors are interconnected. Over the past few decades, the Vietnamese government has realised the enormous potential of its diaspora abroad and has encouraged Vietnamese in developed countries to contribute money and skills to the homeland. In doing so, the Politburo has embarked on a nation-building project that has rested on Ho Chi Minh's rhetoric of national unity, depicting all Vietnamese as an integral part of "the great family of the Vietnamese nation" (Vietnam Diplomatic Handbook, 2010:82). Whilst not the main target of such strategy, the Vietnamese in Cambodia have also been included into the Vietnamese nation. In order to legitimise its rule and attract the loyalty of Vietnamese in developed states, the SRV has in fact attempted to project an image of benevolent homeland which would be undermined by the differential treatment of different sub-groups within the diaspora. Furthermore, the Vietnamese government has felt a moral responsibility towards the Vietnamese in Cambodia, many of whom supported its past expansionist efforts in the Kingdom (Goscha, 2013).

Like the Cambodian government's exclusion, the Vietnamese government's inclusion of the diaspora has however come with limitations. Over the past few years, the SRV has been faced with the "return" of thousands of Vietnamese from Cambodia. In addition to not bringing any benefits to the Vietnamese state (e.g. in the form of skills or economic contributions), these returnees have been a cost to the government, who has had to provide them with sustained economic, humanitarian, and legal assistance. As a consequence, the SRV has also seen the Vietnamese from Cambodia as *inconvenient*

subjects and has engaged in the *bounded inclusion* of the diaspora, embracing them as part of the Vietnamese nation whilst attempting to limit their presence in the physical territory of the state.

Hence, neither the government of Cambodia nor the government of Vietnam have taken full responsibility of the diaspora. Yet, in Chapter Six I showed that the two states have shared the custody of the group. They have done so through the work of the AKVVC, which has acted as an intermediary in the triadic relationship between the Cambodian state, the Vietnamese state, and the Vietnamese diaspora. The AKVVC has been organised in a hierarchical manner which has mirrored that of the Cambodian administration system, covering all administrative levels (i.e. village, commune, province, etc.) in all twenty-five provinces of Cambodia. Its work has developed around three main areas: a) encouraging Vietnamese populations to “live legally” in Cambodia; b) improving the education levels of Vietnamese communities in the Kingdom; and c) distributing donations and facilitating charitable activities from Vietnam (AKVVC President Chau Van Chi, personal communication, 31 July 2016). Through these and other activities, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to alternate the care and control of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia while preventing it from becoming problematic.

The AKVVC’s main role with regard to the objective of encouraging the Vietnamese to “live legally” in Cambodia has been to distribute and disseminate information concerning Cambodian documentation. Vietnamese villagers have had their documents (both immigration documents and Cambodian ID cards) frequently revoked and substituted with new, temporary, ones. Such practice has been accepted as normal by my Vietnamese respondents, most of whom could not read and did not know which documents they had surrendered and which ones they had received in exchange. In addition to facilitating or personally carrying out such document replacement, the AKVVC had never educated Vietnamese communities on the possibility to apply for citizenship through naturalisation (which has been in place, at least in theory, since 1994). On the contrary, the AKVVC had been advising the Vietnamese that they should not expect to obtain Cambodian citizenship or be treated like Cambodian citizens, while also reminding them to “submit” to Cambodian authorities.

The examples above are representatives of the “control” side of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the diaspora. Such control has been counterbalanced by a degree of care by the two states, which has again often been exercised through the work of the AKVVC. In accordance with its main aims, the AKVVC has facilitated the distribution of donations and aid from the Vietnamese government, has established Khmer-Vietnamese schools, and has bought land for the building of religious sites (e.g. cemeteries) or for Vietnamese communities to settle on. Crucially, since 2015 the AKVVC has also covered the first of three payments for the obtainment of the new Cambodian foreign resident documents on behalf of Vietnam. Through these and other activities of the AKVVC, the two governments have enabled the Vietnamese in Cambodia to access rights that they would not otherwise have, suggesting that the Vietnamese diaspora may have somewhat benefitted from the shared custody between its homeland and its host-state.

This was one of the points that I investigated in Chapter Seven, where I explored how engagement by the two states affected the Vietnamese’ access to *formal* and *substantive* citizenship (Brubaker, 2010). Adding to Brubaker’s formulation, I understood the two terms as involving the three dimensions of legal status, rights, and political activity (Bosniak, 2000; 2006). More specifically, I understood legal status as being a reflection of *formal citizenship*; and rights and political activity as being manifestations of *substantive citizenship*. Overall, I argued that, whilst partly benefitting the diaspora by granting it access to some aspects of substantive citizenship, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments’ shared custody of the group has trapped the Vietnamese in a multi-level liminal space where they have been easily governable.

The legal liminality of the Vietnamese is epitomised by both their past and recent documents. Whilst most of my respondents held no documents from Vietnam, they had a plentiful collection of documents from Cambodia. In Chapter Seven, I charted the documentation that I encountered whilst on fieldwork in order to grasp the temporal aspect of the Cambodian government’s postponement of granting citizenship to the Vietnamese. I paid particular attention to past Cambodian ID cards, which have been frequently invalidated, confiscated, or simply not recognised by Cambodian authorities; and the “new” foreign resident documents, which were introduced in 2014 and have been consistently distributed across Vietnamese communities since 2015. These foreign resident documents were the first step of a seven-year procedure which effectively re-

started the count of the years that the Vietnamese have spent in the Kingdom. Building on Chapter Six, I showed that whilst the procedure is meant to result into Cambodian citizenship, the elevated cost of the documents has made them unaffordable to most Vietnamese families. Although the Vietnamese government has covered the payment of the first iteration (valid for two years), anecdotal evidence suggests that it would not do so for the next two. Alongside the vague criteria for the final obtainment of citizenship, this has casted doubts on the positive outcome of the process, which could be aimed at further postponing, rather than guaranteeing, the diaspora's access to *formal citizenship* (Brubaker, 2010).

In the remainder of Chapter Seven I investigated whether the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese resulted in the group's enjoyment of one or both dimensions of *substantive citizenship* in Cambodia and Vietnam. I started by analysing the diaspora's access to rights, focusing on the core areas of education; freedom of movement; residence and land ownership; and health care and employment. Here, I demonstrated that the line between the governments' care (often in the form of concessions) and control has often been blurred, and that the enjoyment of *citizenship* rights has been counterbalanced by the denial of rights that the Vietnamese should hold by virtue of their foreign resident status. An example was the diaspora's enjoyment of freedom of movement: whilst the Vietnamese have been able to cross state borders, their movement within Cambodia has been limited to their province of residence. This has ensured the governability of the group by the Cambodian government, which has also engineered and relocated Vietnamese communities according to its political and economic interests.

Confirming the blurred line between care and control was also the Vietnamese' *de facto* right to vote, which has entailed the execution of instructions by the Cambodian authorities and the AKVVC. The fictitious right to vote has reflected the virtually inexistent political voice of the Vietnamese, who have been silenced and ignored at all levels. Vietnamese communities in Cambodia have even been unable to elect their own leaders, who have been appointed by the Vietnamese Embassy and the AKVVC. This and other examples encapsulate the political activity dimension of the diaspora's access to *substantive citizenship*. Alongside the above considerations concerning the Vietnamese' access to legal status and rights, the latter reflects the multi-level liminal space that the Vietnamese have inhabited. Such space has been (re)produced by the

Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the group, which has ensured the governability of the Vietnamese while perpetuating their legal, social, and economic insecurity.

8.2 The significance of the thesis

In the current section, I explain how my main findings complement and add to existing theoretical debates. The first contribution of my research is a more nuanced understanding of the term "diaspora". As I showed in Chapter Two, diaspora studies have tended to depict diasporas as representing a threat and/or a resource to their host-states and their homelands. The Vietnamese in Cambodia do not fit these simplified categories: comprised mainly of poor fishermen who live on Cambodia's watercourses, the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia has not contributed capital or skills to the two states. Furthermore, whilst in the past the Vietnamese have been an important political asset to both the Vietnamese regime and the CPP, recently they have lost much of their political value whilst representing an increasing political and/or economic cost to the two governments. Finally, although the group could represent a threat if it organised politically, such threat has been kept in check through the states' shared custody of the diaspora.

Thus, in my thesis I argued the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been viewed as "inconvenient subjects" by the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam. The term does not imply that the diaspora has lost its entire value or that the governments have stopped using it to their advantage. Rather, "inconvenient subjects" refers to a population that has been *predominantly* inconvenient to the two states. Such view contrasts with that of skilled and wealthy diaspora groups living (mostly) in developed states and points to the heterogeneity of diaspora populations, which include more or less instrumental sub-groups that are subject to different policies by the host-state and, especially, the homeland. This point has been recently raised by authors such as Délano and Mylonas (2017) and Tsourapas (2015), who have demonstrated that homeland states do not develop a single, all-encompassing policy for their all of their co-ethnics abroad and have called for a greater recognition of the heterogeneity of diaspora populations among diaspora scholars.

The heterogeneity of different diaspora sub-groups is largely dictated by the states they live in. My second contribution is the need to pay greater attention to the host-state, and

specifically how the host-state's regime type, domestic politics, and relationship with the homeland can affect diaspora groups and diaspora engagement. With regard to the former, I note that diasporas' ability to become a threat and/or a resource is dependent upon their access to citizenship in the host-state and the civil, political, and economic rights that this entails. Most of existing diaspora studies focus on diaspora populations who live in and have already become citizens of liberal host-states: this allows them to organise politically in support of or in opposition to the homeland regime, or accumulate wealth to send "back" in the form of remittances (Smith, 2003; Waterbury, 2009). By contrast in Cambodia, like in many illiberal countries, the Vietnamese diaspora has been unable to access Cambodian citizenship despite having spent decades, often generations, in the country. This has hindered their ability to access jobs and accumulate wealth. Further exacerbated by the repressive nature of the Hun Sen regime, it has also restricted their opportunities to organise politically.

For the Vietnamese, the impossibility of obtaining Cambodian citizenship has been heavily influenced by Cambodia's domestic politics. As I showed in Chapter Three, decades of political manipulation have caused anti-Vietnamese sentiments to become deeply entrenched in the Khmer culture and people. Ever since colonial times, the Vietnamese have been depicted as a dangerous people carrying out their homeland's plan to "swallow" Cambodia (Goscha, 2012). The French protectorate initially built upon historical fears of Vietnamese invasion to justify its presence in Cambodia and later reinforced the notion of the "dangerous Vietnamese" as part of its divide-and-rule strategy. The first leader of independent Cambodia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, also exploited the Cambodian people's suspicion of Vietnam to foster his own reputation as "father" and protector of the Cambodian nation (Chandler, 2008). Both General Lon Nol and his bloodthirsty successor, Pol Pot, took anti-Vietnamese rhetoric further and massacred and displaced thousands of Vietnamese living in the Kingdom. Albeit not with the same, tragic, consequences, anti-Vietnamese sentiments were again fuelled by the opponents of the Vietnam-installed PRK government, which, as we have seen, had ended the Khmer Rouge and formed the bulk of what is now the CPP.

Given the CPP's and Hun Sen's apparent links with the Vietnamese regime, it is not surprising that Khmer anti-Vietnamese sentiments have continued to be capitalised on to this day. The "Vietnamese issue" has been the most powerful weapon available to the CPP's opposition, making it highly inconvenient for the Cambodian government to grant

citizenship to the Vietnamese. Granting citizenship to the diaspora would indeed reinforce allegations over Hun Sen's complicity in the Vietnamese regime's plan to "swallow" Cambodia and undermine the solidity (and, possibly, the longevity) of the CPP's rule. This demonstrates that the position of the diaspora has been largely shaped by the domestic politics of the host-state. Similarly, the forms and extent of diaspora engagement have been affected by the host-state's relationship with the homeland.

Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) noted that "states only legitimately possess the power of coercion within their own borders, and consular activities abroad depend on the acquiescence of hosts" (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004:1180). Similarly, Laurie Brand pointed out that homelands weigh up bilateral and multilateral relations when devising policies towards their populations abroad. She brought the example of Korea, who decided not to offer dual nationality to overseas Koreans living in China for fear that the Chinese government would interpret this as an attempt to promote separatist movements (Brand, 2006). The instance of Korea shows that homelands employ different strategies in accordance with their amicable or antagonistic relationship with host-states. The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese diaspora, too, cannot be understood independently of the "special relationship" between the two states (Heder, 2018).

The aforementioned "special relationship" indeed explains the pervasiveness and the activities of the AKVVC, which is the means through which the two governments have alternated the care and control of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia (Heder, 2018). As I previously noted, the AKVVC has been allowed to establish chapters at all administrative levels in all twenty-five provinces of Cambodia. Due to its far-reaching structure, the AKVVC has been described as "a state within the state", highlighting to the suspicion that has surrounded the Association and its activities (CS05, personal communication, 18 July 2016). The latter have included the distribution of Cambodian documents, the building of schools, and the purchase of land for the Vietnamese to live on. As we have seen, these and other activities have been carried out with the permission of the Cambodian government and the financial support of the Vietnamese government, pointing to the collaboration between the two states.

In addition to unveiling the importance of the host-state's relationship with the homeland in shaping diaspora engagement, such collaboration adds to existing accounts on the

modalities of engagement. This is the third contribution of my thesis. The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the diaspora points to the degree to which homelands and host-states can coordinate their activities targeting diaspora groups. Whilst a few studies have considered homelands and host-states' collaboration in relation to issues of security and terrorism (Brand, 2006), the type of coordination that they described was very different from the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' shared custody of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. The shared custody of the Vietnamese diaspora has in fact involved the states' *co-governing* of the group through the alternation of "care" and "control", thereby representing a "novel" form of diaspora engagement which has featured a significant level of coordination between the homeland and the host-state.

The fourth point of this section is more of a reiteration than it is a contribution, and it concerns the enduring salience of physical and symbolic boundaries in Southeast Asia. In Chapter Two, I outlined the scholarly critique of "methodological nationalism", which has advocated the abandonment of the nation-state as a taken-for-granted unit of analysis (Glick Schiller, 2010). Answering the call of authors such as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002), scholars have attempted to move beyond the nation-state and the "use of Westphalian borders as analytical frontiers" (Sutherland, 2016:91). Yet, such move has taken place at the analytical level. Whilst gradually losing its territorial character, the nation-state ideal has continued to shape states' internal and external politics of belonging (Brubaker, 2010). Thus, the nation-state has maintained its relevance alongside the physical and symbolic boundaries that delineate it.

This has been evident in the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments' *bounded exclusion* and *bounded inclusion* of the Vietnamese diaspora. Physical borders have affected the governments' stance towards the group in different ways: in Cambodia, border disputes and the steady influx of Vietnamese immigrants have fuelled the Cambodian public's anti-Vietnamese sentiments and, consequently, the Cambodian government's decision not to grant citizenship to the diaspora. At the same time, the shared border with Vietnam has also prevented the Cambodian government's repatriation of the Vietnamese to the homeland due to the Hun Sen regime's interest in preserving the "special relationship" with its more powerful neighbour (Heder, 2018). The Cambodia-Vietnam border has also underpinned the Vietnamese government's attitude towards the group: the geographical proximity of Cambodia and the

permeability of the border have indeed enhanced the risk of mass migration of the Vietnamese from Cambodia, prompting the regime to try to limit the “return” of the group. The case of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia also points to the enduring relevance of symbolic boundaries in Southeast Asia. As I explained earlier in the text, in Cambodia the “walls in the head” (Sutherland, 2018:36) that separate the Khmer from the Vietnamese have been consolidated by decades of ethno-national manipulation by Cambodian political elite, permanently placing the Vietnamese diaspora outside of the Cambodian nation. At the same time, symbolic boundaries have included the group inside the Vietnamese nation, thereby affecting the extent to which the diaspora has been excluded and included by both the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam.

The last contribution of my thesis concerns the meaning of “citizenship” in illiberal contexts. In Chapter Seven, I have demonstrated that the notions of *formal* and *substantive* citizenship are ill-suited to describe the situation of the Vietnamese diaspora in Cambodia. I understood *substantive citizenship* as involving the citizenship dimension of legal status (Bosniak, 2000; 2006). In liberal states, access to legal citizenship status is permanent and unconditional, with citizen revocation being employed in exceptional circumstances such as individuals’ involvement in terrorist acts (Macklin, 2014; Gibney, 2018). By contrast, Vietnamese in Cambodia have had their citizenship status routinely stripped and unrecognised by Cambodian authorities. Citizenship status has thus existed both in theory and in practice, blurring the binary between *formal* and *substantive* citizenship.

In this thesis, I described *substantive citizenship* as the “the ability to act as a citizen and to be respected as one” (Staeheli, 1999:64). To better understand and operationalise this notion, I juxtaposed it to Bosniak’s dimensions of rights and political activity (2000; 2006), which reflect (respectively) the liberal and civic republican traditions of citizenship. My analysis of the Vietnamese’ access to *substantive citizenship* unveiled the inadequacy of this concept when applied to illiberal contexts. In Cambodia, like in other illiberal states, the content of *substantive citizenship* has indeed been radically different from that of liberal countries. The *de facto* enjoyment of rights, for instance, has been either counterbalanced or underpinned by the host-state and homeland’s efforts to control the Vietnamese. A similar argument can be made in relation to political activity, the extent and shape of which has been dictated by the strategic interests of the

two governments. It follows that access to both *de facto* rights and political activity have been arbitrary, intermittent, and reversible.

These considerations encourage us to think about the content and meaning of *formal* and *substantive* citizenship (and, thus, citizenship in general) beyond liberal normativity. As Mhurchú pointed out, “existing citizenship scholarship needs to be seen as one overarching debate which presents a spectrum of possible, yet limited, interpretive choices which are defined by a particular reality of what it means to ‘be’ a citizen (a political subject) in terms of sovereignty and autonomy, rather than a series of competing debates” (2014:28). Such reality has been grounded in the experience of liberal states, thereby overlooking the predicament of citizens and non-citizens in illiberal countries. In illiberal regimes, the concept of citizenship appears to be much more flexible than in its liberal counterparts. Dovetailing with Sadiq’s (2017) formulation of citizenship in postcolonial states, my findings suggest that citizenship in illiberal contexts is contingent, malleable, and open to redefinition. Echoing authors such as Balot (2017) and Sadiq (2017), my research therefore points to the need to move “beyond the tyranny of “Western” perspectives and presentism, to investigate the possible forms, activities, and ends of citizenship altogether” (Balot, 2017:16).

8.3 Avenues for future research

Building on the main findings and the wider relevance of the thesis, there are several themes which emerged and would deserve further attention. Firstly, it would be beneficial to follow up on the distribution of foreign resident documents as part of the seven year-procedure that the Cambodian government introduced in 2014 (and started to implement in 2015). As I am completing this thesis, the Vietnamese in Cambodia should be in the process of renewing their foreign resident documents. As mentioned in Chapter Six, this renewal costs USD\$62.50. Whilst the Vietnamese government covered the costs of the first one of three payments, anecdotal evidence suggested that it would not do so for the remaining two. With an average of five people per family, most Vietnamese households could not afford these documents for all of members. Thus, the next step of the seven year-procedure could further reinforce the legal liminality of the group. It would be interesting to follow up on the procedure whilst also interviewing more representatives of the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments. As noted in

Chapter Four, my restricted access to government officials was one of the limitations of my research. Addressing it would help to strengthen my findings.

Secondly, it would be interesting to conduct further research on returnee communities in Vietnam. For this thesis, I briefly visited two villages of returnees from Cambodia with the main aim of verifying the steps and requirements of their “return” (e.g. the document issued by the AKVVC and the Vietnamese Embassy which I described in Chapter Six). In the future, I would like to explore the meaning of such return, which many of them described as a “home-coming”. In particular, I am intrigued by the imagination *versus* the reality of “home”. From what I could see, returnees had been confined to remote areas at significant distance from the main residential zones, but close to watercourses where they could fish. Like in Cambodia, people could not travel outside of their province of residence and had limited access to jobs. Despite this, these returnees held a generally positive view of the Vietnamese state. In addition to investigating their understanding of a home they had never lived in, I would like to study the Vietnamese government’s integration of these communities.

Thirdly, future research could compare the situation of the Vietnamese to that of other minorities inside and outside Cambodia. In Cambodia, it would be useful to analyse the situation of the Chinese and the Cham. Both minorities have been able to access Cambodian citizenship, and the Chinese have successfully integrated into the Khmer society. Yet, an Overseas Chinese Association does exist, as demonstrated by Willmott’s account on “The political structure of the Chinese community in Cambodia” (1970). Whilst it does not appear to be as ramified and widespread as the Vietnamese Association, it would be interesting to investigate the scope and aim of the Chinese Association. Of even greater interest may be the case of Cham Muslims, the descendants of the ancient Kingdom of Champa which existed between 700-1471 A.D. The Cham in Cambodia have been discriminated and marginalised in Cambodia due to their religion whilst having no physical “homeland” to support them and to turn to. However, existing studies have suggested that the Cham have been connected to and aided by several countries across the Muslim world (American Institutes for Research, 2008). The shape and implications of transnational Muslim networks is a fascinating topic which provides an interesting comparison with homeland-based associations such as the AKVVC.

Lastly, the situation of the Vietnamese could be contrasted to that of the Khmer Krom minority in Vietnam. As the Khmer Krom have also lived between Cambodia and Vietnam, at several points during my fieldwork I felt that their predicament could add to or complement my account of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Whilst the Vietnamese have been excluded from the symbolic Cambodian nation, the Cambodian government has in fact stated that the Khmer Krom were recognised as Khmer citizens (CCHR, 2011). Nonetheless, the Cambodian government has not taken steps to protect the rights of the Khmer Krom minority in Vietnam, who has long undergone human rights abuses and discrimination at the hands of the SRV. As I explained in Chapter Three, the Cambodian government has justified its behaviour by claiming that the minority was already protected by the Vietnamese state. Furthermore, the Cambodian government has not granted Cambodian citizenship status to many Khmer Krom who have fled the Vietnamese regime and settled in the Kingdom (CCHR, 2017).

To conclude, through the case study of the Vietnamese in Cambodia I have added to the literature on state-diaspora relations in illiberal contexts. Yet, as with any study, my thesis could be strengthened and expanded in terms of data collection and scope. Furthermore, my study would benefit from a comparison with the situation of other minorities inside and outside Cambodia. I am hoping that both the contributions and the limitations of my thesis will inspire future research in this direction.

Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AHRC | Asian Human Rights Commission |
| AKVKC | Association of Khmer-Vietnamese in the Kingdom of Cambodia |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BLDP | Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party |
| CGDK | Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea |
| CNRP | Cambodia National Rescue Party |
| CPAF | Cambodian People's Armed Forces |
| CPK | Communist Party of Kampuchea |
| CPP | Cambodian People's Party |
| CPV | Communist Party of Vietnam |
| ECCC | Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia |
| ELC | Economic Land Concession |
| FOVC | Fund for Overseas Vietnamese Community |
| FUNCINPEC | National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia |
| KPNLF | Khmer People's National Liberation Front |
| KPRP | Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party |
| KUFNS | Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation |
| LAMC | Law on Commune Elections and the Law on Administration and Management of Communes/ Sangkat |
| LICADHO | Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights |
| MIRO | Minority Rights Organization |
| MOFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| NICFEC | Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |

| | |
|-------|---|
| ODA | Overseas Development Assistnace |
| PAVN | People's Army of Vietnam |
| PDK | Party of Democratic Kampuchea |
| PRK | People's Republic of Kampuchea |
| RCAF | Royal Cambodian Armed Forces |
| RVN | Republic of Vietnam |
| SOC | State of Cambodia |
| SRV | Socialist Republic of Vietnam |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNTAC | United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia |
| VPA | Vietnam's People's Army |

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