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2013

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The Vietnamese Bauxite Mining Controversy: the Emergence of a
New Oppositional Politics

By

Jason Morris

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

In

Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management

In the

Graduate Division

Of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jeff Romm, Co-chair
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Professor Cihan Tugal

Fall 2013

Abstract

The Vietnamese Bauxite Mining Controversy: the Emergence of a New Oppositional Politics

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management

University of California, Berkeley

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In the first half of 2009, a highly controversial public debate emerged in Vietnam over government plans to mine bauxite in the remote upland regions of the Central Highlands. Many and diverse persons and organizations spoke out vociferously against these plans. They included, among others, government scientists, artist-intellectuals, domestic reporters, activist bloggers, religious leaders, overseas Vietnamese, and retired high level state officials, including no less than the iconic military leader of the anti-colonial revolution and “wars of independence,” General Võ Nguyên Giáp. Their means for engaging state authorities on bauxite mining were also many and diverse. They included organizing workshops and seminars, publishing articles in the domestic press, writing open letters and petitions, posting information and commentaries online, and, in a few exceptional cases, demonstrating publicly, distributing “no bauxite” T-shirts, and filing a lawsuit against the Prime Minister. The critiques raised against bauxite mining were also wide-ranging. While early discussions emphasized a wide range of social and environmental impacts of bauxite mining, these discussions quickly became embroiled with such divisive issues as national security, Sino-Viet relations and, not least of all, the relations of the communist party to the Vietnamese people.

This widespread opposition to bauxite mining generated one of the most significant domestic confrontations with the party-state since at least the Vietnam War. This dissertation provides a detailed ethnographic examination into this controversy and the different groups, people and processes that made it happen. It argues that the bauxite mining controversy signalled the emergence of strong “political cultures of opposition” in contemporary Vietnam. Political cultures of opposition are significant for their capacity to bring many and diverse groups and processes together and translate their diverse grievances into a common opposition to the ruling regime. As such, they can also signal a potentially pivotal moment in processes of broad socio-political transformation. The research for this dissertation is based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, while I was living in Hanoi, Vietnam, from 2009 to 2011. It comprised in-depth and semi-structured interviews with sixty different informants, whom I interviewed on nearly one hundred distinct occasions; the collection of hundreds of different types of texts that were

generated from the bauxite mining controversy; and participant observation in various settings.

I dedicate this work to my parents *Robert and Janice Morris*, whose loving compassion and support have always been the bedrock to my own achievements.

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Acknowledgement

To say that this work would not have been possible without the help and support of so many others is a truism. Yet so true it is that I feel almost fraudulent for signing my own name to it. For this final honour, I have many people to thank.

First of all, I want to thank the four outstanding members of my dissertation committee. My co-chairs Jeff Romm and Nancy Peluso belied the common stereotype of dissertation supervisor as distant and difficult to access. They were tremendously supportive, personal and caring throughout my doctoral studies. In particular, I thank Jeff for always pushing me, despite my own resistance, to see things with fresh eyes and I thank Nancy for our many fecund conversations and her tireless efforts to take my analyses that one step further. I also greatly thank my outside advisors, namely Peter Zinoman for his critical role in helping me develop my research topic and guiding me through a complex war-torn scholarship on Vietnamese history and politics and Cihan Tugal for his tremendous lucidity in helping me navigate a vast and at times vertiginous sociological literature on movements, revolutions and state-society relations. This opportunity to work so closely together with each of you has been a true honour and a privilege for me. Your footsteps will be hard to follow.

Many others have also helped along the way. I would like to thank Kate O'Neill and Ananya Roy, both of whom were committee members for my Qualifying Examinations and with whom I had the great opportunity to learn from and work with in different capacities while at UC Berkeley. I would also like to thank the long list of participants to Nancy Peluso's "Land Lab" over the years, especially Derek Hall, Mike Dwyer, Jenny Baca, Alice Kelly (also for doing the run-around that enabled me to actually file my dissertation from abroad), Mez Baker, Margo Higgins, Sidney Jones, Hekia Bodwitch and Ashton Wesner for comments on particular parts of the dissertation. I thank Alec Holcombe, Jason Picard, Trang Cao and Siti Keo for being great readers and healthy companions along our long and often tortuous sojourn researching and writing about Vietnam. I would also like to thank Martha Lincoln for her supportive and astute comments, especially during those particularly ugly stages of early dissertation production.

This research would also not have been possible without the tremendous generosity, patience and knowledge of many friends and colleagues in Vietnam. First, I would like to thank several people who were central to the bauxite mining controversy itself. Their warm reception to my research interests and willingness to share their insights and experiences with me helped me to see Vietnam—after having previously lived and worked there for more than half a dozen years—in a completely new light. In particular, I would like to thank Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Huệ Chí, the original authors of the crucial online petition and operators of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website; Nguyễn Ngọc, whose lifelong experience with and dedication to the Central Highlands people and place was a shining beacon throughout the bauxite mining debates; and Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, whose long history with Vietnamese ambitions for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands and temerity to speak out against them made the public debate on bauxite mining possible in

the first place. Your energy and tireless dedication to justice and good sense—often in the face of significant personal and professional risk—are a burning inspiration to me.

I also thank Director Hoàng Văn Thắng and the many old and new friends I gained at the Centre for Research on Environment and Society (CRES), who generously and actively supported my fieldwork on different levels while I was in Vietnam. I thank Director Phạm Quang Tú and Trần Trung Kiên of CODE for being so helpful and supportive of my investigations on the bauxite mining controversy, especially for the more discreet early period. I would also like to thank Director Chu Hào and Phương Loan for their support and warm welcome to the intellectual seminars at the Knowledge Publish House. I would also like to thank journalist Đoàn Trang for her many stimulating conversations and on-going insights into current events in Vietnam. There are many other persons I would also like to thank by name, but the list is almost interminable and, in certain cases, I choose not to in respect for your confidentiality in this research project.

I must thank several funding organizations who made this research materially possible. I thank the Trudeau Foundation for its generous support of my doctoral studies and field research and the tremendously privileged re-introduction it provided me to the world of Canadian public policy and academic research after fifteen years of living abroad. I also thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Foundation of Canada and UC Berkeley for their generous funding of my doctoral studies over several years. For funds to support more particular parts of my research and studies, I thank the Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS), the Human Rights Center, the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies and my department, ESPM, at UC Berkeley, and the University of California's Pacific Rim Research Program.

Not least of all, I want to thank my beautiful family who make all the toil and struggle worthwhile. I thank my beautiful daughters, Zara Kim and Dan-Thanh Alina, for being endless founts of love, joy, and hugs. I also thank my equally beautiful wife for her on-going support and sustenance of my reckless decisions and still believing, after all of this, that our marriage has been worthwhile. You are a wonderfully caring wife and mother. I thank also my parents, Robert and Janice Morris, to whom I have dedicated this work.

I thank also Cathy Louie for her timely editing and proofreading.

As always, all errors are mine alone.

Chapter 1

Introduction: the Vietnamese Bauxite Mining Controversy

For decades, the scholarly literature has described Vietnamese politics as moribund. Occasionally, it has been lit up by individual acts of “dissidence,” but these acts have been as quickly snuffed out by the repressive arm of the party-state. However, neither is state repression all of the problem. It is difficult to speak of state repression in Vietnam in the same way as we might in Burma, North Korea, or perhaps even China. Rather, the problem also appears to lie in what Dan Slater (2009) has described as Vietnam’s “chronic quiescence,” defined as the “chronic absence of democratic mobilization” (p. 205). Meanwhile, promises of a burgeoning civil society following the market reforms of the late 1980s continue to remain elusive, and the dynamism of local politics revealed in what David Koh (2006) has called the “penumbra of state-society relations” (p. 2) appears to remain confined to just that, shadows at the local level.

Yet the widespread controversy in late 2008 and 2009 over government plans to mine some 5.4 billion tons of bauxite from the Central Highlands of Vietnam showed something different. Many and diverse voices from a wide cross-section of Vietnamese society spoke out in common opposition to a major policy of the party-state. Even if at first these voices kept a low profile and sought informal collaboration with state authorities, they soon became highly public, outspoken and confrontational. Neither were they confined to local levels. Rather, the chorus of voices against bauxite mining extended across the country and around the world. But how and why did all this happen? Why now? And why over bauxite mining?

The answers to these most basic of questions begins with the organizing of a small and newly established Vietnamese NGO in mid-2007. This NGO coordinated a small network of Vietnamese scientists and experts to develop a “policy dialogue” on bauxite mining with local government. Through informal meetings and one particularly spectacular regional workshop in late 2008, which included some twenty representatives of the domestic press, these scientists and experts laid bare the government’s ill-conceived and hastily prepared plans to mine bauxite from the Central Highlands. Furthermore, their lurid descriptions of a toxic “mud bomb” hanging over southern Vietnam and an ensuing “war” over water rekindled sentiments of the great military and historical significance of the Central Highlands to the modern Vietnamese nation.

These debates took another turn when, on January 5th of 2009, the 98 year-old military mastermind of the anti-colonial revolution and Vietnam War, General Võ Nguyên Giáp, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister to protest bauxite mining. His intervention on these debates highlighted the national security dimensions of bauxite mining and brought explicit attention to the “hundreds of Chinese labourers already working on the construction sites (with estimates that these numbers will reach several thousands per project)” (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009, January 5). While others had alluded to concerns over a Chinese threat in mining bauxite, General Giáp was among the first to say so publicly.

Even as the Prime Minister banned the domestic press from further reporting on bauxite mining, the public debate began to spread like wildfire. Its primary vector was Vietnamese language websites and blogs. Over the next few months, more and more Vietnamese persons from across the country and around the world joined in on the growing chorus of opposition to bauxite mining. Many other prominent persons from a wide cross-section of Vietnamese society also came forward, such as former member of the Prime Minister's Research Council Nguyễn Trung, outspoken National Assembly delegates Nguyễn Lan Dũng and Dương Trung Quốc; former southern correspondent for the Voice of Vietnam, Lê Phú Khải; internationally acclaimed and exiled writer Dương Thu Hương; leader of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thích Quảng Độ; and representatives of the outlawed democracy and human rights organizations Bloc 8406 and Việt Tân.

The thought of a “Chinese threat” galvanized these debates. Major General and former Ambassador to China, Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh, captured these fears vividly in his own letter to the Politburo:

We all know that China is building a powerful naval base at Tam A on Hainan Island [northeast of Vietnam]. Let's be frank, it is not being built to protect China from foreign invasion, but rather to threaten Vietnam. It is ready and waiting there for an opportunity to annex the rest of our Spratly Islands after the Paracel Islands [in the Eastern Sea] were so quickly taken away from the Saigon government [during the Vietnam War]. Now, again, if we let China mine bauxite in the Central Highlands, there will be five, seven or ten thousand Chinese labourers (or soldiers) coming to live and get busy there. In this infinitely important militarily strategic region of ours, they will turn the place into a “Chinese town,” a “military base” (where bringing in weapons would not be difficult either). To the North, on the sea, China has a powerful naval base, while, to the Southwest, China has a totally equipped military force. And so what will all this mean for our precious sovereignty that we had to earn with the blood and bones of millions of lives? (Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh, 2009, February).

Such statements were nationalistic, perhaps even xenophobic. However, even these sentiments would lead to a more pointed purpose in the events that followed.

On April 12th, 2009, literary scholar Nguyễn Huệ Chi, writer Phạm Toàn and hydrologist Nguyễn Thế Hùng drafted and circulated their own petition on bauxite mining. When it came back to them, it carried the signatures of 135 of some of the most widely known and accomplished Vietnamese “intellectuals” (*giới trí thức*), as they came to refer to themselves, from across Vietnam and around the world. The opening lines of this remarkable document indicated the source of their frustration:

We, the people of Vietnam, who endured many decades of war to earn our independence and reunification, are now mobilizing all of our physical, material and intellectual resources to build this country in an entirely new orientation . . . It is a pity that, in the bauxite mining situation today, the honest people of our country are suddenly realizing that the old ideology of hand-in-hand building the nation together has all but disappeared because of how our governing

organizations are currently running the country (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009a).

This passage juxtaposes the “people of Vietnam” against their “governing organizations.” It derides the “old ideology of hand-in-hand together building the nation together,” which was once a popular communist slogan to express the indissoluble union between people and party. In sum, it challenged the long-held notion that the Vietnamese Communist Party was the perfect representation of the Vietnamese people and, in doing so, it created an opening for a new type of oppositional politics in Vietnam.

While oppositional voices have existed in communist Vietnam since its beginnings, they have been mostly marginalized and isolated. This petition and the website that emerged from it, *Bauxite Vietnam*, helped forge the diverse groups and processes that had emerged with the bauxite mining controversy into a common opposition to the party-state. It also helped shift from a more instrumental approach to policy advocacy to a more performative politics. From now on, each expression of opposition to bauxite mining became another act in a public spectacle that exposed the incapacity or unwillingness of the current political system to hear and address the concerns and interests of the Vietnamese people.

However, the growing opposition to bauxite mining—which now also included an explosive debate in the bi-annual meeting of the National Assembly in May and June 2009, an overnight vigil in the Thai Ha parish of Hanoi with more than 1,000 Catholics attending, a “no bauxite” T-shirt campaign distributed in major Vietnamese cities, and a lawsuit suing the Prime Minister personally on bauxite mining—was also matched with equally repressive state actions. They included a series of arrests of prominent bloggers in May and June of 2009, legislative action to curtail scientific research and intellectual works in July 2009, and the defamation and harassment of the leaders of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website in late 2009 and early 2010. Meanwhile, the government continues unto this day with its plans for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands, despite a few uncertain concessions.

While the bauxite mining controversy may have meant business as usual for the party-state, it was a watershed moment for Vietnamese society. Vietnamese society showed itself not as chronically quiescent, but rather as an “active society” (Burawoy, 2003). Like “active society,” it appeared to rise up spontaneously as a collective force to protect society from the combined predations of state socialism and global capital. It pushed for important transformations in Vietnamese politics and society. I argue in this dissertation that the bauxite mining controversy signaled the emergence of strong “political cultures of opposition.”

John Foran’s (2005, 1997) conceptualization of political cultures of opposition offers a more syncretic approach to examining the many and diverse groups and processes that come together in forming a collective opposition to a ruling regime. They also play a pivotal role in translating widespread grievances into more direct political action and social mobilization. Examining the bauxite mining controversy as the emergence of a political culture of opposition helps to bring together different scholarly approaches to Vietnamese politics and society and convey in a more comprehensive way the political force and historical significance of this controversy. For the remainder of this chapter, I review these different approaches to Vietnamese politics and society and

how they can be brought together and transcended with a notion of political cultures of opposition. I also present background information on the Vietnamese government's plans for Central Highlands bauxite and the debates that emerged around it.

Approaches to Vietnamese Politics and Society

In this section, I examine four dominant scholarly approaches to Vietnamese politics and society. They are state corporatism, civil society, local politics and environmental activism. Each approach offer useful insights into different aspects of the bauxite mining controversy, but, as I show here, each one alone is limited in providing a more complete account and rendering broader significance of this controversy to Vietnamese politics and society.

State corporatism

Yeonsik Jeong (1997) was among the first to use state corporatism as a model for describing how different and emerging interest groups engage with the party-state in contemporary Vietnam (Jeong, 1997; Kerkvliet, Ân, & Sinh, 2008; Kerkvliet, 2001). State corporatism is a model of state-society relations derived from Iberian and Latin American societies, whose rich traditions of Catholicism generated the strong social unity necessary for corporatization (Jeong, 1997, p. 155). It is based on a system of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated organizations (Schmitter 1974, as cited in Jeong 1997, p. 155). Under state corporatism, each organization is guaranteed a representational monopoly over its categorical interest group (e.g., Women, Veterans, Buddhists). In exchange, however, these organizations must observe restrictions and controls imposed upon them by the state (e.g., selection of leaders, types of state support).

Jeong described the emergence of state corporatism in Vietnam as a state strategy to deal with the “wave of democratization” following from the collapse of Eastern European communism and the Chinese Tiananmen Square Massacre in the late 1980s. However, its basic form can be perceived from the party-state's structure of “mass organizations” (e.g., Farmers' Union, Women's Union, Youth's Union) and vast network of professional associations and research institutes. The party-state sometimes has also corporatized or created “official” organizations as a tactic for eliminating political challengers. For example, the Vietnam Committee of Catholic Solidarity was formed in 1955 as a strategy for containing the growing Catholic problem, followed the Geneva Accords in 1954 that provided for mass migrations of northern Catholic communities to South Vietnam. Another example is when the party-state created the Veteran's Association in 1989 to stave off a political challenge from a group of southern veterans known as the Club of Freedom Resistance Fighters.

Hence, state corporatism enables state authorities to monitor and control social interest groups within Vietnam, while also allowing these organizations a certain degree of influence and liberty so long as it does not conflict with state interests. Many of the main opponents to bauxite mining also belonged to the “official” organizations of state corporatism in Vietnam. However, they usually spoke out against bauxite mining in spite of rather than due to their place in this system. Indeed, they often had to emphasize that they spoke and acted as individuals rather than as representatives to their respective

organizations precisely to avoid creating conflict between themselves and their organization. Hence, while state provides a certain “official” way to engage state authorities, it is by no means the only one.

Civil society

One of the main alternatives to state corporatism has been to suggest an emerging civil society in Vietnam as distinct and separate from the state. Optimism for a burgeoning civil society grew especially in the early 1990s, following the *đổi mới* reforms of the late 1980s and the “explosion of organizational activity at all levels” it stimulated (Thayer, 2009b, p. 4). However, these early promises have remained elusive and more fully developed Vietnamese civil society seems to remain forever nipped in the bud.

If state corporatism was all state, then civil society has been premised on a clear separation, if not opposition, between state and society. Liberals tend to envision a teleological development of civil society from what it also considers as the anachronistic state-society relations of the authoritarian state to more modern capitalist societies. However, in Vietnam, assumptions about clear divisions between state and society and teleological progress towards a modern capitalist society are difficult to sustain.

As result, early approaches to civil society in the scholarly literature tended to focus on organizations, especially NGOs (Bạch Tân Sinh, 2001; Kerkvliet et al., 2008; Norlund, 2007). This literature generated different typologies for classifying “civil society organizations,” which have included policy and research institutes, universities and professional associations, business and commercial associations, peasant associations and collectives, religious groups, political activists groups, and even mass organizations, among others (see review in Thayer 2009). However, closer examination also revealed them to tightly bound by state organizations, even NGOs. NGOs in Vietnam, domestic or foreign, rarely oppose major policy objectives of the party-state. Rather, they tend mostly to work mostly in the areas of service delivery and try to complement pre-determined state policy agendas (Hayton 2010, Thayer 2009, Gray 1999).

Carlyle Thayer (2009) has drawn attention to a minor group of more marginalized “political organizations” inside Vietnam that advocate for democracy and human rights. He has referred to them collectively as “political civil society” to emphasize their more confrontational political activity vis-à-vis the party-state. He also suggests growing “cross-fertilization” (p. 2) among them recently, while also counting on resources and technological support from overseas Vietnamese organizations. However, these organizations are still heavily repressed by the party-state and marginalized in Vietnamese society, as evinced in his primary example of this growing “cross-fertilization” in the coalition of democracy, labour rights and religious freedom activists Bloc 8406. Bloc 8406 was formed on April 8th of 2006 (from which it takes its name), but in little more than a year was disbanded by the party-state and its leaders arrested and imprisoned.

Andrew Wells-Dang (2010, 2011) has tried to shift focus on civil society away from the idea “autonomous organizations” towards one that concentrates on networks. He has argued for Vietnamese civil society as “a process of building cross-sectoral networks” (p. 3). As he has written, these networks are “built on personal connections and develop into flexible, often informal structures that engage in path-breaking

advocacy with authorities and elites" (p. 3). Similarly, Hunter Marston (2012) has used the Vietnamese bauxite mining controversy to suggest that Vietnamese civil society is more like an "expanding and contracting [political] space" (p. 174). However, the success of such network often depends on carefully avoiding confrontation with the party-state on major policy issues, not too much unlike the NGOs discussed above.

These various approaches to civil society development in Vietnam reflected several different aspects of the bauxite mining controversy. It included one Vietnamese NGO (i.e., CODE), Bloc 8406, the overseas Vietnamese political organization Việt Tân, and much informal networking. However, the bauxite mining controversy was both more directly confrontational on a major policy of the party-state and counted on extensive support from within Vietnamese society. Furthermore, there is tendency to label any kind of conflict in Vietnam outside of state organizations as reflective of civil society. However, such assertions provide little specification of who or what exactly is at stake in these incidents. Rather, such a broad notion of civil society tends to gloss over precisely those key distinctions and divisions among the different groups that made their collective opposition to bauxite mining so significant.

Local politics

Another alternative to state corporatism has been to focus on Vietnamese state-society relations at the local level. This body of research has been spearheaded largely by anthropologists and ethnographers, whose more grounded research on the implementation of state programs and policies has demonstrated remarkable dynamism. These studies have been carried out across a wide range of domains, including national development programs (Sikor & Truong, 2002; Tan, 2006; Taylor, 2007), selection of local leaders (Koh, 2006; Malarney, 1997), village tax collection and licensing (Hy Văn Lượng, 1993), regulation of industrial pollution (O'Rourke, 2004), and traffic and construction regulations (Koh 2006). In contrast to both the state corporatism and civil society approaches, local politics tends to suggest a more "accommodating state" in Vietnam characterized by pragmatism and flexibility.

To understand the local politics, David Koh (2006) rejects any notion of a monolithic and all-powerful central state that radiates its dominance down and outwards to every level of society. Rather, he emphasizes the "disaggregated state" as an assembly of many different, often competing, parts and levels. From this perspective, it can be more readily seen how Vietnamese citizens—usually as individuals or small community groups—are able to gain influence with state officials and evade state control by exploiting its gaps and contradictions.

Koh's (2006) shows how Vietnamese citizens are able to take advantage of "confusion of roles" and "other weaknesses of the administrative system," such as result from low salaries, high levels of corruption and incompetence, and moral and cultural contexts that emphasize compassion for villagers and residents (p. 10). They are also able to leverage officials and organization off of one another, who are themselves competing for influence and resources. However, in doing so, Vietnamese citizens do so much cross the lines of state authority, but rather find clever and conniving ways to shift them just enough to serve their own more immediate purposes.

The main limit of this approach, however, is that its findings have not easily translated to the level of national politics. The bauxite mining controversy showed

similar types of dynamism, except on a national and even international level. Furthermore, the bauxite mining controversy clearly crossed the lines of state authority. It challenged state authorities not issues of only local or individual relevance, but rather nationally and historically important ones.

Environmental activism

The controversy over bauxite mining further suggests the growing relevance of environmental activism to state-society relations in Vietnam. A vast scholarly literature has shown that activism around environmental issues can be highly successful in challenging and transforming social and political norms at different levels (Doyle & McEachern, 2007; Evans, 2012; Guha & Martínez-Alier, 1998; Guha, 2000; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Peet & Watts, 2004). Mining is a particularly destructive form of development that has instigated many kinds of activism, which has also been effective in negotiating better development benefits for local communities and forming powerful coalitions with broader national and trans-national movements (Bebbington, Hinojosa, Bebbington, Burneo, & Warnaars, 2008; Bebbington, Bebbington, et al., 2008; Richards, 2009).

Communist countries do not take exception to this trend, as shown in the public response to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that catalysed the downfall of the Soviet Union (Goldstone 2001). Environmental movements also played important roles in bringing down communist regimes in Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Economy, 2010; Ho & Edmonds, Richard Louis, 2008). In the more closely comparable context of China, the explosive growth and success of environmental organizations and movements has generated a literature arguing that environmental activism has been a leading sector in civil society development (Cooper, 2006; Economy, 2010; Ho & Edmonds, Richard Louis, 2008; Ho, 2001; Yang, 2010). These organizations are considered as better organized, better resourced, and more successful in winning public and state support than other types (Jung Jin, 2003). Literature on environmental activism in Vietnam, however, is rare, for which Dara O'Rourke's work on community-driven regulation of industrial pollution is an exception (2004).

For these reasons, at least one representative of a major international environmental organization viewed the widespread opposition to bauxite mining as "the beginning of a more autonomous environmental movement in Vietnam" (Marston 2012, p. 186). However, to examine the bauxite mining controversy strictly as environmental activism would clearly miss much. Environmental issues were clearly important, especially in the earlier discussions, but they became politically powerful only as they were articulated with other concerns of national security, independence, and a historical resistance to foreign domination.

These different approaches to Vietnam politics and society offer valuable insights on different aspects of the bauxite mining controversy. However, each alone is limited in its capacity to capture more fully the diverse range of actors, processes and discourses that constituted this controversy. What is lacking is an approach that can bring together the many and diverse aspects of the bauxite mining controversy under a more comprehensive framework. To do this, I propose to make use of the concept of "political cultures of opposition."

Social Movements and Revolutions: Political Cultures of Opposition

Social and revolutionary movements: structure versus culture

The above discussion has shed light on the many and diverse ways that citizens attempt to influence or elude state authority in Vietnam. However, it has largely failed to offer explanations as to how and why different groups in Vietnam might mobilize to act collectively on particular issues, as happened in the bauxite mining controversy. Following Jack Goldstone and others, I highlight recent convergences between the scholar literature on social movements and revolutions to address these questions (Goldstone, 2001; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 1994).¹ Both of these literatures were marked strongly by currents of Marxian structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s and then the “cultural turn” that swept the American and British social sciences from the 1980s forward. The result has been a vast body of literature that has been as prolific in its production of conceptual and methodological tools as it has been vast in its geographic and historical coverage.

Early social movements literature began by emphasizing organizations (i.e., “social movement organizations”) and their capacity to mobilize organizational resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978). Gradually, this literature expanded its focus to the broader “political opportunity structures” (primarily conceived of as the state) and the social networks from which and through which social movements emerged and expanded (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; McAdam, 2010). Indeed, the network provided a basic structure for social movement, which came to be seen as a set of “complex and highly heterogeneous networks” (Diani & McAdam, 2003, p. 1). However, emphases on structural similarities across movements also led to an overly static and deterministic approach to social movements, as the pioneers of these approaches themselves began to admit in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Goodwin, Jasper, & Khattrra, 1999; McAdam et al., 2001).

Recognition of these limits began with the “cultural turn” that swept over the American and British social sciences from the 1980s forwards. New emphases on the cultural and historical context that shaped social movements coincided with an increased attention to matters of contingency, consciousness and human agency (Goodwin et al., 1999). A wide range of empirical studies also began to move beyond the locus of Europe and North America and, in turn, challenged conventional models for understanding social

¹ Some scholars have brought these literatures together under the phrase of “contentious politics” (Goldstone, 2001; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). As Sidney Tarrow (1994) writes, “The irreducible act that lies at the base of all social movements and revolutions is *contentious collective action*” (Tarrow 1994, emphasis in original). Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow’s more recent volume on *Contentious Politics* (2007) offers the following definition: “Contentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interest or programs, in which government are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (4).

movements (McAdam et al., 2001).² These trends spawned drew attention to questions of narrative and framing, perception and emotion, symbolic and ideological resources, and the creation of collective identities (Goodwin & Jasper, 2009; Johnston, 2009; Melucci, 1996; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, 2007; Touraine, 1977).

Similarly, the sociology of revolutions came to maturity amid strong structuralist currents, as epitomized in the classic works of Barrington Moore (2003[1966]) and Theda Skocpol (1979). This scholarship tended to relegate humans to the role of unwitting actors performing the deeper and inexorable forces of economic (i.e., structural) change. Skocpol spoke for a generation of scholars when she said, “Revolutions are not made, they come” (as cited in Foran 1997, p. 200). Goldstone (2001) has referred to this body of scholarship as the third generation of revolutionary theory. However, he describes a fourth generation of revolutionary theory as greatly influenced by the “cultural turn” and its inquiries into the more contingent and contextual factors that include human agency, leadership, ideology, discourse, culture, and history (Goldstone 2001).

The result has been a remarkably vast and diverse body of literature that has been divided by structural versus cultural approaches, or what Sydney Tarrow (1994) has labelled specifically for the social movements literature as “social networks” versus “cultural symbols.” One of the main challenges for the field today is synthesis and the development of more comprehensive approaches. As John Foran (2005) has argued:

So many factors have been “brought back in” to the study of revolutions in recent years: states, people, culture. It is now time to find the relation among these and political economy, rather than continue to insist on single overarching principles of explanation . . . It is important now that a *balance* among them be struck, and that this synthesis be clear about how each contributes to the origins of revolutions (Foran 2005, p. 18, emphasis in original).

Foran has dedicated his own scholarly enterprise precisely to this task.

A more syncretic approach: political cultures of opposition

Political cultures of opposition refers to the emergence of “one or more powerful political cultures of resistance” (Foran 2005, p. 22) in the processes leading up to revolution or attempted revolution. However, these political cultures are typically diverse and eclectic. They draw on a wide array of symbolic and organizational

² The early models of social movements were recognized for not traveling well outside of the United States and Europe. They did not reflect well the struggles of poor and poorly resourced populations, who engaged in “shadowy” (Piven and Cloward 1977), “submerged” (Melucci 1989), and “hidden” (Scott 1990) forms of resistance that might or might not lead to collective action (as cited in Edelman, 2001, p. 290). As McAdam et al. (2001) also explained, their accounts of movements “worked best as a story about single unified actors in democratic polities; it worked much less well when it came to complex episodes of contention, both there and especially in nondemocratic states” (p. 18). In the context of Latin America Edelman (2001) argued, “it was difficult, especially under authoritarian regimes, to imagine political opportunity as a significant explanatory category” (p. 291).

resources to express grievances and opposition to the ruling regime. As he explains, by political cultures, "I mean not the 1960s American political science concept, but the plurivocal and potentially radical ways of understanding one's circumstances that various groups within a society sometimes articulate to make sense of the political and economic changes they are living through" (Foran, 1997, p. 201).

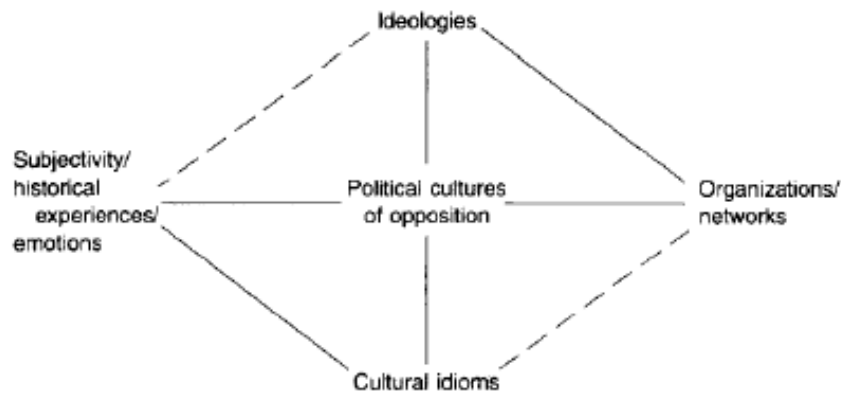
As such, these political cultures of opposition are pivotal in translating the widespread, if scattered and amorphous, grievances caused by structural forces into direct political action. They provide an answer to that elusive question of the structuralist, which was why people who shared grievances might organize and act on them collectively when in most cases they did not (McAdam et al 2001, 15). As Foran (1997) writes, "To move toward revolution from the structural determinants . . . broad segments of many groups and classes must be able to articulate the experiences they are living through into effective and flexible analyses capable of mobilizing their own forces and building coalitions with others" (p. 21). Such analyses form the bases of a political culture of opposition.

Foran has proposed a schematic representation that situates political cultures of opposition at the centre of two axes (Figure 1). The horizontal axis represents a spectrum of cultural and ideological expressions and behaviour, which ranges from the more deeply ingrained cultural idioms of everyday life to the more formally stated ideologies of organizations and political parties (Foran, 1997). As Foran describes, these expressions and behaviours may include "formal ideologies, folk traditions, and popular idioms, ranging from ideas and feelings of nationalism (against control by outsiders), to socialism (equality and social justice), democracy (demands for participation and an end to dictatorship), or emancipatory religious appeals (resistance to evil and suffering)" (Foran 2005, p. 21).³

The vertical axis represents a spectrum of the ways or forms by which these cultural and ideological expressions are enacted or embodied. It ranges from everyday subjectivity, historical experiences and emotions to formal and informal networks and organizations. The purpose of this diagram is to provide an analytical schema by which we can understand how multiple and diverse processes are working together—often despite their own complexities and internal contradictions—to generate a more collective, cohesive and powerful opposition to the ruling regime.

³ In an earlier formulation of what he then called "political cultures of resistance and opposition," Foran similarly described their composition as "such cultures tap everything from historical memories of past conflicts to inchoate sentiments about injustice, to long-standing religious idioms and practices, to more formally elaborated political ideologies" (Foran 1997, p. 202)

Figure 1. *Political Cultures of Opposition* (Foran, 2005)



Note: Solid lines indicate stronger and more direct connections, while broken lines indicate weaker ones.

Political cultures of opposition are relevant to the Vietnamese bauxite mining controversy in at least two important ways. First, they emphasize the heterogeneity and complexity of the opposition that emerged around bauxite mining. While recent literature on Vietnamese civil society has also emphasized “cross-fertilization” and networking among social groups (Wells-Dang 2011, Thayer 2009), political cultures of opposition go further by identifying the diverse processes by which they come together and emphasizing that they are complex formations. As Foran (1997) insists, political cultures of opposition “can be secular as well as religious, and . . . different social groups may embrace different versions [of them]” (p. 202). They reflect different perspectives and approaches that become superimposed upon one another through political struggle and that may be only partially elaborated or take on multiple and contradictory forms.

Second, the purpose and effect of their coming together is to oppose the ruling regime. Opposition is a tricky word to use in the Vietnamese context, precisely because it has been used by state authorities to marginalize and isolate political challengers. However, here I mean to refer to a wide range of acts and expressions of resistance and opposition. Political cultures of oppositions emphasize how these acts and expressions can accumulate and transform into powerful collective expressions of opposition, even despite ambivalence or differing degrees of oppositional sentiment among groups. Political cultures of opposition emphasizes that opposition is an important element of Vietnamese politics, especially in contrast to other approaches to Vietnamese state-society relations that have tended to mute or downplay in Vietnamese society.

A political culture of opposition is a heterogeneous and complex political formation, for which the articulation of diverse discourses is critical to its formation and emergence. In Vietnam, oppositional voices have existed since the very beginnings of the Vietnamese party-state. However, the main difference with the bauxite mining controversy is that it brought elements of these voices into a more mainstream political discussion. Their cumulative effect was to present one of the most powerful expressions of domestic opposition to the party-state since at least the Vietnam War, the effects of which are still unravelling in Vietnamese politics and society today.

Plans for Bauxite-Alumina Production in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

The bauxite mining controversy emerged in response to government plans for massive projects to produce bauxite and alumina in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. In this section, I present background information on the geology and technology of bauxite-alumina production and the Prime Minister's Decision 167 that outlined the government's plans for the Central Highlands.

The bauxite reserves of the Central Highlands

Bauxite is the primary raw material for producing aluminium around the world today. Aluminium is the most common element in the Earth's crust, making up some 8% of its total weight (Crockett, 1981). However, its high chemical reactivity causes it to occur almost always in combination with other minerals, which makes the production of aluminium from bauxite technologically complicated and involves first processing it into the intermediary product of alumina (see Annex 1 for more detail).

Vietnam is considered to have the world's third largest bauxite reserve. It is generally estimated to contain between 5.5 to 8.0 billion tons of bauxite, though the Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng at one time suggested that it was as much as 11 billion tons ("Vietnam's bauxite reserves," 2010, November 24)⁴. Up to 96% of this reserve is located in the Central Highlands, which is broadly contiguous with other large bauxite deposits on the Bolaven Plateau in southern Laos and eastern Cambodia. Indeed, mining giant BHP Billiton had originally planned to connect bauxite mining operations in Vietnam and Cambodia by joining them with railway line that would bring the bauxite to the Vietnamese coast.

The Central Highlands (*Tây Nguyên*) comprises the five southern provinces of Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Gia Lai, Kon Tum and Lam Dong. The region is made up of a series of contiguous plateaus that range in elevation from 500 to 1500 metres along the southern Annamite Mountain Range (*Truong Son*) on the easternmost part of the Southeast Asian Massif (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010). It covers a total area of 54,600 km², wedged between Vietnam's lowland coastal provinces to the east and the Lao and Cambodian borders on the west. This region is traditionally home to hill tribes and indigenous populations of the Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian language groups. It forms part of the region that has been recently referred to as Zomia (Michaud, 2010; Scott, 2009).

The bauxite deposits in the Central Highlands run through the Southern Annamite Mountain Range from Kon Tum to Binh Phuoc, constituting one of Vietnam's three main veins of bauxite (Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009, p. 186).⁵ The region's relatively flat

⁴ Nguyễn Đình Hoè (2009) has further noted that only 2.2 billion tons have actually been explored and confirmed there (186).

⁵ The first one extends about 180 km with a width of 1-50 km from Ha Giang through Cao Bang to Lang Son, while the third one extends along the coast of the Central provinces from north of Quang Ngai to Phu Yen (Dang Trung Thuan 2010, 39). Vietnam's bauxite deposits are located in twelve provinces, namely Dak Nong, Lam Dong, Dak Lak, Kon Tum, Binh Phuoc and Dong Nai in the Central Highlands; Phu Yen and Quang Ngai in the Central Region; and Nghe An in the Central Northern Region and

topography, rolling hills, hot climate and volcanic activity during pre-historic eras created ideal conditions for bauxite formation. They were formed over ten million years ago from volcanic activity on basalt rock. Over several millions of years, the basalt surface was weathered into a bauxite laterite crust, mainly of the *gibbsite* variety, which is the bauxite variety considered to have the highest quality and the one most suitable for aluminium production (Nguyễn Khắc Vinh, 2009, p. 47).⁶

This geological formation process has also generated mostly shallow deposits scattered over an extensive area on the highland plateau. Most deposits measure between one and fifteen meters in length and less than three meters deep. The overburden typically consists of soft soils, which makes extraction technically simple, just dig and scrape. Many deposits are located right on the surface. However, these deposits have been estimated to cover some 20,000 km², more than one third of the entire area of the Central Highlands (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010; Nguyễn Đình Hoà, 2009, p. 186).

Bauxite has been mined in Vietnam since French colonial times. However, this has been almost entirely in the north in small quantities.⁷ It has also been of the lower quality *diaspora* variety, which is mostly unsuitable for aluminium production. Government exploration into the southern deposits began shortly after the Vietnam War. However, after many starts and stops, ambitions to develop these deposits did not finally materialize until the late 2000s (see Annex 2 for more details). The Vietnamese

Ha Giang, Cao Bang and Lang Son in the North Eastern region on the bordering with China (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010). By 1995 report, 147 deposits have been identified in Vietnam, of which five are considered as large, twelve as medium and 43 as small (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010, p. 38).

⁶ “Vietnam has five broadly-defined metallogenic epochs. In general, the younger the setting, the more abundant the deposits. There are only a few deposits hosted by Precambrian rocks, principally iron, gold and graphite. The Early to Mid-Paleozoic contains small deposits of iron ore and lead-zinc, and large deposits of potash. During Indosinian time -- Early Carboniferous to Late Triassic -- larger deposits of iron ore, ilmenite, gold, nickel-copper and bauxite were formed. The principal resources of tin, tungsten, antimony, molybdenum, gold, REE, barite, fluorite and kaolin-pyrophyllite were formed during the Late Mesozoic to Early Cenozoic, with the tin deposits largely related to Late Mesozoic granitoids. *Middle Triassic volcanic* units host epithermal gold veins. There are large Neogene-Quaternary deposits of bauxite and alluvial chromite, as well as smaller deposits of alluvial tin, ilmenite and gold” (“Mineral potential in central and east Asia,” 2004). “Larger deposits of iron ore, ilmenite, gold, nickel-copper and bauxite were formed during the early Carboniferous/late Triassic” (“Vietnam: regulations under review,” 2004).

⁷ Bauxite was first identified and confirmed in northern Vietnam by French geologists in the early twentieth century (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010, p. 37). By 1938 and 1939, the French were mining 90 tons of bauxite from two mines in the northern border provinces of Lang Son and Ha Giang. From 1938 to 1943, the Japanese mined bauxite in the Red River Delta province of Hai Duong, which, since being taken over by the Vietnamese Communists since 1960, has produced 1000 tons per year of refined bauxite ore for a grindstone factory also in Hai Duong. Since 1996, 50,000 tons of bauxite diluvium has been mined from a mine in Lang Son to serve a cement factory there.

government made official its plan to produce bauxite and alumina in the Central Highlands on November 1, 2007, through the enactment of the Prime Minister's Decision 167.

Prime Minister's Decision 167: the Master Plan for bauxite-alumina production

The Prime Minister's Decision 167, enacted on November 1st of 2007, officially described as the Vietnamese government's "Master Plan" or "Zoning Plan" (*Quy hoạch*) for "exploration, mining, processing and use of bauxite reserves" throughout the country ("Quyết định số 167/2007/QĐ-TTg," 2007). The Plan covered two phases of implementation from 2007 to 2015 and 2016 to 2025 across the country. However, 5.4 of the 5.5 billion tons of the bauxite targeted in this Plan are located in the Central Highlands.

The Plan identified some 25 mines in the Central Highlands to be exploited, most of which are located in the provinces of Dak Nong (13 mines, 3.4 billion tons) and Lam Dong (5 mines, 970 million tons). It proposed to build seven different bauxite-alumina and alumina processing factories to serve various mine clusters, including four in Dak Nong and one in each of Lam Dong, Kon Tum, and the nearby coastal province of Binh Phuoc. It also included the output of two already existing alumina hydroxide factories in Lam Dong, where bauxite has been mined in smaller amounts for several decades.

The smallest alumina plants under the Plan were expected to produce 300,000 to 600,000 tons of alumina per year by 2015 and 600,000 to 1.2 million tons by 2025. The largest ones were expected to produce 1.5 to 2.0 million tons by 2015 and 3.0 to 4.0 million tons by 2025. In total, these projects were expected to produce 700,000 to 1.0 million tons of alumina per year by 2010, 6.0 to 8.5 million tons by 2015 and 13.0 to 18.0 million tons per year by 2025 (see Table 1). As one government scientist noted, these were highly ambitious expectations, especially given that the total global production of alumina is only 74 million tons per year (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008b, October 24).

The Plan also include key infrastructure investments to transport alumina from the landlocked Central Highlands to the Vietnamese coast, where it can be shipped away for export. The first was the expansion of a deep-sea port in either Bac Hon Gio or Hon Ke Ga in Binh Thuan Province. The port would be able to accommodate 30,000 to 50,000 ton ships and have a loading capacity of 10 to 15 million tons per year by 2015 and 25 to 30 million tons by 2025. The other was to build a new railway line of some 270 km from the Central Highlands to the deep sea port in Binh Thuan. The projects described under the Plan also entailed other infrastructure investment in roads, water reservoirs and hydro-electric dams, but they were not provided for under the Plan.

The Plan named the Vietnam Coal and Mining Corporation (Vinacomin) as the sole owner (*chủ đầu tư xây dựng*) of all bauxite and alumina projects proposed for the Central Highlands, excluding the two aluminium hydroxide plants already operated by Vinachem. The Plan permitted Vinacomin to form joint stock companies for these projects, so long as Vinacomin maintained a majority share of more than 50%. Vinacomin is one of Vietnam's largest state-owned enterprises (Cheshier & Penrose, 2007). It originated as the Vietnam Coal Corporation in 1995 and merged with the Vietnam Minerals Corporation in 2007 to form Vinacomin, notably, the same year Decision 167 was enacted. Vinacomin has extensive experience in coal mining, but almost none in bauxite or alumina production (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008b, October 24).

The total investment cost for the Central Highlands component of the Plan was estimated between 11.8 and 15.6 billion USD, of which 1.9 billion USD was estimated for infrastructure. This amount was equal to about 15-20% of Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product in 2007 (i.e., 71 billion USD).⁸ The listed sources of financing for mining operations included selling national and international stock shares, bonds and borrowing. However, estimated amounts from each source were not specified in the Plan.

Table 1: Bauxite and Alumina Factories and Production Targets for Central Highland Provinces

	Mines	Production Target	
		2007-2015 million tons/yr	2016-2025 million tons/yr
Lam Dong Province			
Alum. Hydroxide Factory Bao Loc 1	Mỏ Đồi Thẳng Lợi vùng Bảo Lộc - Di Linh	0.1	0.1
Alum. Hydroxide Factory Bao Loc 2	Mỏ Bảo Lộc vùng Bảo Lộc - Di Linh	0.55	0.55
Combination Bauxite-Alumina Complex Tan Rai-Bao Loc	Mỏ Tân Rai và các mỏ lân cận vùng Bảo Lộc - Di Linh	0.6	1.2-1.8
Dak Nong Province			
Alumina Factory Dak Nong 1	Nhan Co and nearby mines	0.3-0.6	0.6-1.2
Alumina Factory Dak Nong 2	1/5 and nearby mines	1.5-2.0	3.0-4.0
Alumina Factory Dak Nong 3	Gia Nghĩa and nearby mines	1.5-2.0	3.0-4.0
Alumina Factory Dak Nong 4	Tuy Đức, Đắk Song and nearby mines	1.5-2.0	3.0-4.0
[Gia Lai Province]			
Alumina Factory Kon Ha Nung	Kon Hà Nùng and Măng Đen mine	1.0-1.5	1.2-1.8
Binh Phuoc Province			
Alumina Factory	Mines in Binh Phuoc	---	1.0-1.5

Source: Selected info from Section 5 and Annex 3.

Note: Expansion in production capacity for Dak Nong factories is stated as "depending on market demand" (Art. 1.5(e)).

⁸ Source:

<http://search.worldbank.org/data?qterm=2007%20gdp%20vietnam%20&language=EN>, Retrieved February 19, 2013.

The first two bauxite-alumina projects: Tan Rai and Nhan Co

By the time Decision 167 was enacted, one bauxite-alumina project was beginning preparations for construction and another was in the process of being approved. The first was proposed for the Tan Rai and Tay Tan Rai mines in Bao Loc District of Lam Dong Province (hereafter known as the Tan Rai project).⁹ Initial production capacity for the alumina processing plant targeted 600,000 tons per year by 2010 and then 1.2 million tons per year thereafter (Decision 167, Article 5(d)). According to Vinacomin, the project would occupy a total area of 207 km² (2.1% of total provincial area), including 140 km² for bauxite deposits (1.4%), and it was expected to operate for fifty to sixty years (TTO [theo TP], 2003, September 11). It would also be the first one in the country to produce alumina for aluminium production. Construction began on this project in July 2008.

The second project was proposed for the Nhan Co and other nearby mines in Dak R'lap District of Dak Nong Province (hereafter known as the Nhan Co project).¹⁰ This project would be the first of four alumina processing plants to be constructed in Dak Nong, whose bauxite deposits comprise 62% of Vietnam's total reserve and 20% of the world's (*Reuters*, as cited in *Thanh Nien Online*, 2007, November 7; Saigon Giai Phong, as cited in *Thanh Nien Online*, 2007, July 20).¹¹ According to the Regional Director of Alcoa for the Asia-Pacific, they are regarded as among "the world's greatest underdeveloped deposits" because of high quality, high purity and proximity to surface ("Alcoa sees Vietnam bauxite," 2006, September 5). They are also estimated to cover one to two thirds of the province's total area. Initial production capacity for the Nhan Co alumina processing plant is targeted at 600,000 to 650,000 tons of alumina per year by 2010 and then 1.2 million tons per year thereafter.

These first two projects were also two of the largest ones under Decision 167—a detail that was not usually recalled when the government belatedly referred to them as "pilot projects." The Tan Rai project was owned by Vinacomin, while the Nhan Co project was owned by the Nhan Co Alumina Joint Stock Company, for which Vinacomin owned a controlling share. Fixed term Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contracts for both projects were signed with Chalico, a subsidiary of the state-owned China Aluminium Corporation (Chalco). By these contracts, Chalico was

⁹ An initial construction Feasibility Study worth US\$ 487 million was approved for this project for the Vietnamese National Mineral Corporation (prior to its merger with the Vietnam Coal Corporation as Vinacomin) in January 2006, while the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Tan Rai project was approved by MONRE with Decision 828/QD-BTNMT on June 15, 2006 (Nguyễn Mạnh Quân 2009, 5). The Lam Dong People's Committee licensed what was now Vinacomin to begin construction on and operate the Tan Rai project on November 16, 2007, a little more than two weeks after Decision 167 was enacted (*Thanh Nien Online*, November 19, 2007). Construction was reported to have begun in July 2008 (Vietnam News Agency, July 28, 2008).

¹⁰ EIA approved by MONRE with Decision 2102/QD-BTNMT on December 18, 2007 (Nguyễn Mạnh Quân 2009, 5). Estimated cost for construction of the alumina factory is US\$ 735.2 million (VietnamNet, April 24, 2009).

¹¹ Five out of eight districts in Dak Nong have bauxite deposits, covering an area of 1900 km², of which 1400 km² is planned for mining (Nguyễn Đình Hoà 2009, 187).

responsible for the construction and design of the alumina plants and mining sites and it would also operate these projects for two years before handing them over entirely to the project owners.

Criticisms and Concerns

As one mineralogist and former manager at Vinacomin, Nguyễn Văn Bản, pointed out, there are several good reasons for wanting to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 64). Vietnam has one of largest bauxite ore reserves in the world. Many of the mines identified in Decision 167 are large enough to produce more than one million tons of alumina per year for several dozen years and, in some cases, more than one hundred years. Furthermore, the deposits are easily accessible, cost-efficient and technically simple to extract. Many deposits are only one meter below the surface layer, while in some areas they are on the surface. Bauxite can also be washed and beneficiated to alumina in a cost-efficient way with the Bayer process. Finally, as central and provincial government officials were usually quick to point out, the Central Highlands is an impoverished region in need of investment, revenue and development.

However, Nguyễn Văn Bản continued, the reasons against mining bauxite in the Central Highlands are overwhelming. In this section, I review some of the key debates and concerns that emerged around the government's plans for mining bauxite and producing alumina in the Central Highlands.

Land loss, deforestation and soil erosion

One of the most impressive features of government plans for bauxite mining in the Central Highlands was its sheer scale. As mentioned above, the bauxite deposits were reported to cover an estimated 20,000 km² of the Central Highlands. The deposits in Dak Nong were reported to cover an estimated two thirds of that province's total area. The technology used for bauxite extraction entailed that all of this area would be strip-mined, which means complete removal the topsoil and everything upon it.

Among the first concerns to emerge about bauxite mining was deforestation and biodiversity loss, though the actual area of forest to be cleared was never very clear. However, the Central Highlands is also the source of at least four major rivers and the upper watershed region for South and South Central Vietnam (Hồ Sĩ Giao, 2008; Nguyễn Anh Ngọc, Đỗ Đức Dũng, & Nguyễn Vũ Hu, 2008; Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009). Deforestation and mining in the watershed raised major concerns over freshwater supply and regulation to the agricultural, industrial and urban zones of the southern region (Tấn Đức, 2007). It also raised concerns about micro-climate and increased vulnerability to drought and floods in the lowlands. Concerns were also raised about extensive soil erosion in a region that was famous for its rich basalt soils and high agricultural productivity (Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009).

Vinacomin, however, refuted these ideas, arguing that the areas with bauxite had little forest cover and low agricultural productivity. The Director of Vinacomin, Đoàn Văn Kiên, used Landsat images from the Forest Inventory and Protection Institute (FIPI) to suggest that 90% of bauxite deposits were outside of forest areas in Dak Nong (Đoàn Văn Kiên, 2009b, p. 18). He suggested that the total forested area would increase after

bauxite mining because of new plantations on the mined areas, as part of their environmental rehabilitation strategy (Đoàn Văn Kiên, 2009b, p. 18). Vinacomin likened their environmental rehabilitation strategy to “rolling up a straw mat” (*cuốn chiếu*). This referred to rolling back the topsoil, storing it away while the bauxite is scraped out from underneath, and then replacing it with trees replanted on top.

Critics countered that Vinacomin’s figures were misleading. They argued that Dak Nong is currently about 370,000 ha (59% of total area) (Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009, p. 187) and, in Lam Dong, 60% of the deposit area is forest or regenerating areas and 40% is tea and coffee plantation (Hoàng Sĩ Sơn, 2009, p. 42). Ecologist Nguyễn Đình Hoè argued bauxite was the “sturdy skeleton of this area’s topography . . . it is an essential component of the highlands’ topographical structure” (Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009, p. 186). It functions like a protective cap on the hilltops that stabilizes the rich basalt soils that have amassed on the hillsides and in the valleys. The problem was not that, as Vinacomin stated it, bauxite did not affect the fertile areas, but rather that bauxite held these fertile areas in place. Nguyễn Đình Hoè argued that mining bauxite would destroy the topographical structure and wash away these rich soils.

The critics also ridiculed Vinacomin’s environmental rehabilitation strategy. Government scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn argued that if the soil was not completely restored and settled between the rainy periods—a window of about six months—then it would quickly disappear with the monsoons (Tân Đức, 2007). They also looked to Vinacomin’s track record of environmental rehabilitation in its coal mining operations in the northern province of Quang Ninh, the nation’s largest coal deposit. Nguyễn Đình Hoè (2009) described them as a “nightmare,” one that has turned the once clear waters of UNESCO Heritage Site Halong Bay to a brownish gray. He also noted that of the 36 ha that have been mined for bauxite for many years in Lam Dong, only 2 ha have been “rehabilitated” (p.191). Similarly, writer Nguyễn Ngọc argued:

I have been to all of those areas that are being called “fully restored” and it is only a few hectares in a famous tea growing area of Bao Loc. Now there are only a few acacia trees. As for tea, the people say that it will take at least 100 years before they can plant tea again, meaning that the soil base for tea and coffee have been lost. (Mặc Lâm, 2009, March 25)

Displacement of local and indigenous communities

Strip mining affects not only forests and vegetation, but also people and their properties. A report released by the government suggested that bauxite mining would displace a few thousand households in the Tan Rai and Nhan Co projects alone, including a substantial number of ethnic minority households (Table 2).

Table 2: Affected and relocated households

	Tan Rai	Nhan Co
Affected	1639	861
Ethnic minority	404	15
Relocated	700	83
Ethnic minority	230	0

Source: 91/BC-CP dated 22-5-2009

The critics, however, expected the area of displacement to be substantially larger. Relocation and displacement would likely also have knock on effects for further deforestation, watershed degradation and possibly other population displacements.

Of special concern were the impacts of both relocation and environmental degradation on the indigenous people of the region. As writer Nguyễn Ngọc (2008) elaborated, their traditional lifestyles and social structures are intimately and inextricably connected to land and forests in the region, even if these lifestyles and relations are increasingly becoming undone by the economic “development” and massive flux of lowland Vietnamese to the region. He described the bauxite mining projects like a continuation of thirty years of government programs that have displaced and destabilized the indigenous communities of the region. He worried now that bauxite mining, because of its tremendous scale and devastation, would bring them to a point of no return.

Vinacomin defended its projects by suggesting that long-term land use (i.e., 30 to 50 years) was required only for processing plants and other infrastructure (e.g., water dams, tailings ponds, resettlement areas). It calculated this to be a mere 2000 ha for Tan Rai and 4400 ha for Nhan Co, amounting to less than 1% of total land area in each province. The rest, Vinacomin argued, would be mined in lots of 70 to 100 ha at a rate of about one lot every two years, completely restoring and replanting each lot before moving on to the next one. As the Director of Vinacomin chimed, “mining goes first and rehabilitation follows right behind” (Đoàn Văn Kiên, 2009a, p. 14). In this way, land would be only “rented” from owners and then returned with a “thick layer of fertile soil” (*Thanh Nien Online*, May 12, 2009). However, Vinacomin presented no clear plans for who would gain access to these parcels of land after bauxite mining.

Mining waste and “red mud”

Bauxite mining generates extensive amounts of by-product and water waste. Generally speaking, the recuperation rate from the bauxite rock is only about 50% or less (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 64). Government scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn suggested that around two thirds of the actually deposits will be unused (Tấn Đức, 2007, May 17). Large amounts of waste water are also produced. One government scientist estimated the Tan Rai project would produce 4.6 million m³ of waste water per year, while the Nhan Co project would produce 11.0 million m³ per year (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008c).

However, one of the most ominous aspects of bauxite mining is the inordinate amount of caustic bauxite residue it generates, commonly known as “red mud.” Red mud is a caustic sludge that emerges during the Bayer process as a muddy backwash with a high pH level (usually around 13). It contains elements that cannot be destroyed, transformed and do not decompose, such as hematite, sodium aluminosilicate, calcium titanate, monohydrate aluminium and trihydrate aluminium (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008, October 25). In its wet form, red mud risks contamination to soils and freshwater sources, as was tragically witnessed in the Hungarian red mud spill that “extinguished” all life in the Marcal River in late 2010 (BBC, 2010, October 6). In its dry form, also known as “red dust,” the residue has been associated with lung disease, cancer and birth deformations (Zelder & Africano, 2003).

The amounts of red mud to be generated in the Central Highlands were gargantuan. By Vinacomin’s own estimates, every four to five tons of bauxite would

generate three tons of red mud. I will leave the reader to calculate exactly how much red mud this would mean for 5.4 billion tons of bauxite, but it would be an enormous amount. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn estimated that the Tan Rai project alone would produce 80 to 90 million tons of red mud over its lifespan, while also noting that Vinacomin had designed cesspools with a maximum capacity of only 25 million tons (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008, October 25). The Dak Nong project was estimated to produce 6 to 8 million tons of red mud per year (Hồ Sĩ Giao, 2008).

Different options are available for storing red mud. Vinacomin proposed to store the red mud indefinitely in its wet form in a network of cesspools in the Central Highlands. These cesspools would be lined with a special fabric to reduce the risk of seepage and be left open until a thick crust of dry mud formed on the surface. After that, they would be covered with concrete, topsoil and replanted with trees and vegetation.

However, few persons appeared showed themselves as reassured with these designs. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn commented that it would be difficult to contain the red mud from seepage and “flowing down into the coastal regions” (Tân Đức, 2007, May 17). He argued that this method is effectively used on the world’s largest bauxite deposit in northern Australia, where the landscape is flat, the climate is dry, and the inhabitants are sparse. However, the Central Highlands is a highly populated region at high elevation with a monsoon climate. He described these “red mud” cesspools—in a much quoted phrase—like a ‘mud bomb’” hanging over southern Vietnam (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, October 25, 2008).

Alternative storage methods include dry stacking or pumping the red mud through a pipeline to the coast for partial treatment in saltwater. However, as noted by Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, wet mud storage is the cheapest option. Even more, he suggested that the Chinese contractor, Chalico, opted for the wet storage method—even while the global trend is towards dry storage, including in China—it was now trying to sell off its old technology like “scrap iron” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, February 20, 2009). Hồ Sĩ Giao, Head of the Mining Sciences Association of Vietnam, was more optimistic. He argued that controlling the threat of a red mud spill is “entirely possible,” though he also qualified this statement with an emphasis on the right budget and technology (Hồ Sĩ Giao 2008, 77).

Water consumption and use of resources

The large amount of freshwater required for mining bauxite and producing alumina was another major topic of contention. Even though Vinacomin argued that it would use only surface water and much of it would be treated or recycled, the sheer numbers put forward shocked many observers (Đoàn Văn Kiến, 2009a, p. 14). For example, Vinacomin reported that the Nhan Co project would use 14.8 million m³ per year, of which 12.2 million would be used for washing bauxite rock and 2.4 million for beneficiation (Đoàn Văn Kiến, 2009a, p. 14).

Furthermore, this water was not available from a nearby source. It had to be pumped from the Dong Nai River over a distance of some 40 km and reaching elevations of up to 400 to 500 metres (Nguyễn Trung, 2009; Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 66). The Dong Nai River Basin is a water source for some 20 million people, including Ho Chi Minh City. The Ho Tri An Reservoir on the Dong Nai River is also the main water

source for Dong Nai Province, which is one of the country's most important industrial zones.

Meanwhile, water scarcity is a growing concern for the Central Highlands. Government data has shown that decreasing levels of freshwater availability in the Central Highlands will reach “alarming” rates in the next ten, twenty and thirty years (Nguyễn Đình Hoè, 2009, p. 192). Such projections are what provoked Đào Công Tiến of the National Economics University in Ho Chi Minh City to comment, “The water sources of the Central Highlands have been heavily depleted in recent years. If we use these water sources to mine bauxite, for certain the Central Highlands will die for a lack of water” (Nguyễn Triều, 2008, October 23). Prominent economist Trần Đình Thiên added, “If bauxite mining is done like the Coal and Mineral Company [i.e., Vinacomin] proposes, it is easy to predict that a conflict will arise in the Tay Nguyen like has never happened before. It will be a ‘war’ over water: water for agriculture, water for electricity, for the residential needs of the local people – with mining” (Trần Đình Thiên, 2008, October 23).

Substantial electricity consumption was also a concern, though not as much as it is for aluminium production. Vinacomin argued that electricity is readily available in the region because of its high potential for hydroelectricity. Vinacomin even proposed to build a new hydroelectric dam to serve the Tan Rai Project, though it was not included in Decision 167. However, critics responded that every KWh used for mining bauxite was a KWh lost to the national electricity grid, which has experienced recurring shortages and implemented rolling blackouts in recent years. They argued that electricity used for mining bauxite should be counted as an opportunity cost for other industries and businesses.

Jobs, income and economies: local and national benefits

Critics also questioned the economics of bauxite mining and their benefits to both local and national populations. They disagreed with the number of local jobs that the government and Vinacomin suggested that bauxite mining would create. They argued that most local people lacked the necessarily skills and training for mining bauxite and pointed to the hundreds or thousands of workers that Chalieco had proposed to bring in from China for these tasks. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn calculated that bauxite mining requires on average 2.5 ha to create one job, noting that “the Tan Rai project uses an area of up to 4,200 ha, but only creates a work place for a total of 1,668 labourers” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008, October 25). Furthermore, he argued that mining bauxite would hinder regional agriculture and forestry through competition over limited land and freshwater resources (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2007, May 31). He also argued that it would hamper region's high potential for hydro-power development because of river siltation resulting from bauxite mining.

Critics further argued that bauxite mining would destroy the region's growing tourism sector, especially nature tourism. Government argued that these projects would complement eco-tourism by developing public infrastructure and attracting more outside interest to the region. Ideas had circulated of developing hotels and tourist infrastructure around the red mud “lakes.” Mathematician Ngô Bảo Châu wryly commented on these ideas, “in regards to the idea of building a tourist centre with hotels, tours and entertainment organized around the red mud lakes, I do not find it very convincing (Ngô

Bảo Châu, 2009, May 27).

Economic benefits at the national level were also dubious. Domestic demand for alumina is insignificant. Vietnam currently consumes only 100,000 to 150,000 tons of alumina per year. International demand is high, but it also entails high transportation costs and, therefore, means that Vietnam can only export its product at a low price (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a, October 24). It amounts to only approximately 11-15% of the value of aluminium (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 61). Meanwhile, Decision 167 does not include aluminium smelting because the electricity costs would be prohibitive (Nguyễn Mạnh Quân, 2010, p. 5). Nguyễn Thanh Sơn drew up cost comparison tables showing that budget contributions, net profit and other factors were lower in bauxite mining per invested dollar than rubber and coffee. Another government scientist, Nguyễn Văn Bản (2010), opined, “If we compare our laterite bauxite mines with bauxite mines around the world, we find that we have few advantages and higher production costs” (64).

These analyses made observers wonder for whose development bauxite mining was being carried out. As economist Trần Đình Thiên point out, “Our problem today is that we depend too much on exploiting [natural] resources, or to speak plainly on digging them up and selling them. But our strategy cannot only be based on exploiting [natural] resources and selling them like spring rice [i.e., unprocessed]” (Trần Đình Thiên, 2008, October 24). Similarly, policy analyst Nguyễn Trung similarly asked whether bauxite mining was “an optimal choice for a nation with a small territory and large population” (Nguyễn Trung, 2008b).

Nguyễn Thanh Sơn accused the bauxite mining projects of being “just political concerns and will on paper” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a, October 24). He argued that the Bao Loc – Di Linh projects in Lam Dong province, producing 3.96 million tons of bauxite and 0.6 – 1.2 million tons of alumina per year; the Konpong-Kanak projects in Dak Nong, producing 6-9 million tons of bauxite and 1-1.5 million tons of alumina per year, and the Nhan Co in Dak Nong province, producing 1.8 million tons of bauxite and 0.3-0.6 tons of alumina will turn “the whole Central Highlands region of Vietnam . . . [into] a ‘backyard,’ a source of raw materials every aluminium factory of the foreign aristocrats” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a, October 24).

Table 2: Comparison of bauxite production with rubber and coffee

Criteria	Unit	Bauxite	Rubber	Coffee
Total investment	10 ⁹ VND*	2,938.8	2,938.8	2,938.8
Land area used	Ha	4,000	35,754	58,777
Receipts	10 ⁹ VND	1,450	2,242	5,878
Contribute to budget	10 ⁹ VND	30	701	2,175
Net profit after tax	10 ⁹ VND	301	1,061	3,703
Capacity to liquidate		1.9	9.0	9.0
Recuperate investment	Years	<5	>3	>1

Labour	Person	5,000	173,000	588,000
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* 1 USD ~ 20,000 VND

Source: Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008

Technology, management and financing

Many concerns were also raised about the capacity of the Vietnamese government and Vinacomin to carry out these complex and risky projects. These concerns were technical, managerial and financial. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn was probably the best placed person to speak about these matters, having worked in senior management with Vinacomin since 1994. While government argued that these projects could turn Vietnam into a “world aluminium power” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008c, October 28), Nguyễn Thanh Sơn noted that Vietnam’s human resources and technical capacity for producing bauxite and alumina is near zero. Vinacomin’s only extensive mining experience is in coal.

Nguyễn Thanh Sơn also pointed out that capital needs are high, which means that the main source financing will be from foreign sources at a low rate of return (14.98% before financial crisis and rising cost of energy). He added that only two reserves have been assessed adequately, while “nearly all of the bauxite in the Central Highlands has still not been assessed at the necessary level, there is no agreement on data, and topographical surveys do not yet meet requirements” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a, October 24). The Bayer process for beneficiating alumina is still untested on Vietnamese bauxite and Vietnam has no experience with it. Finally, information is lacking about environmental impacts and the institutional capacity for environmental management and impact assessment is very low.

Many critics also disagreed with the technology being used for these projects. As Nguyễn Thanh Sơn averred, as someone who has extensive experience with the bidding process within Vinacomin, “I can affirm that, if the bidding was done in a transparent way, according to the law, and using criteria with maximum long-term benefits for the nation (not for the investor), then no Chinese bidder could win any bauxite project whatsoever” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2009a). He further suggested that the Chinese partner recommended doubling productive capacity from original designs and beginning simultaneously with the two largest projects because they were not interested in producing on a small scale and that the alumina will be produced at a low quality so that China can buy at a low price.

Critics also looked to the track record of Vinacomin, notably in coal mining in Quang Ninh, which, according to Trần Đình Thiên, has become a symbol of wastefulness, corruption and conflict (Trần Đình Thiên, 2008, October 25). Despite the extensiveness of the coal deposits there, Vietnam will soon become a net coal exporter. Part of this is due to increased consumption, but also to wasteful extraction primarily by Vinacomin. Even the Deputy Chairman of Dak Nong Province, Trần Phương, opined that “Vinacomin had not done any scientific research on the potential effects of bauxite mining on the local environment and the lives of Central Highland residents . . .” (Tran Huu Hieu, 2008, October 25).

The debates I have reviewed here reflect some of the most basic criticisms and concerns levelled against government plans for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands.

As the bauxite mining controversy progressed, they became only more elaborate and penetrating, as well as speculative and wide-ranging. However, these critiques formed the initial basis for the controversy that would ensue.

Dissertation Outline and Methodology

Chapter outline

In the following chapters, I examine the many and diverse groups and processes that constituted the bauxite mining controversy. In Chapter 2, I focus on the network that emerged in opposition to bauxite mining. I argue that it was more socially heterogeneous and geographically expansive network than any previous domestic confrontation with the party-state since at least the Vietnam War. I identify ten key groups that constituted this network, namely government scientists, domestic reporters, non-governmental organizations (NGO), artist-intellectuals, retired high-level officials, activist bloggers, government officials, religious leaders, political activists and organizations, and overseas Vietnamese communities.

The next three chapters present a chronicle of the bauxite mining controversy from May 2007 to February 2010, focussing on the evolution of the controversy from embedded advocacy to a more oppositional politics and the party-state's two-handed response to these events. Chapter 3 examines the emergence of the public debate on bauxite mining in 2007 and 2008 to the government's initial attempt to close it down in April 2009. This chapter shows both the power and limits of "embedded advocacy," as a type of informal, low profile and non-confrontational approach to policy advocacy that is characterized by its embeddedness within the political strictures of the authoritarian state. Embedded advocacy was successful in generating a public debate where one did not exist before. However, as these debates took on more issues and more diverse groups became involved, the political calculus of embedded advocacy was exceeded and the government had to try to re-embed that debate through its own highly contrived "Scientific Workshop."

Chapter 4 examines a relatively short period of time mostly in April 2009, but it focuses on arguably the most significant event of the bauxite mining controversy, the Petition of the 135 Signatures. The Petition of the 135 Signatures was a challenging and defiant document undersigned by 135 of some of the most widely-known and well-respected Vietnamese scholars, writers, scientists, professionals, journalists and artists from across the country and around the world. It announced the reconsolidated Vietnamese "intellectuals" (*giới trí thức*) as a new political identity in the bauxite mining debates. Through the *Bauxite Vietnam* website that emerged from this Petition, the intellectuals helped forge these diverse discourses on bauxite mining into a more pointed attack on the party-state.

Chapter 5 closes off this chronicle by examining the two apparently contradictory responses of the party-state to the controversy. One response highlights the discussions that took place during the bi-annual meeting of the National Assembly in May and June 2009, while the other focuses on the more repressive measures that were carried out by the state authorities between May 2009 and February 2010. However, rather than viewing these two responses as distinct and contradictory, this chapter focuses on how

they worked together towards a common goal, which was to uphold the authoritarian rule of the party-state.

In the final and concluding chapter, I examine the main themes of this dissertation and some of the repercussions of the bauxite mining controversy on Vietnamese politics and society. The Vietnamese controversy over bauxite mining was a remarkable event. It revealed not a quiescent, but an “active society” (Burawoy 2003). The anti-bauxite coalition brought together diverse and multiple groups and forged them into a common opposition to the party-state. The result has been arguably the most significant public confrontation with the party-state since at least the Vietnam War. Furthermore, it has led to new networks and processes for political activism that continue to grow and develop in Vietnam today.

Methodology and limitations

The methodology used for this study can be broadly described as ethnographic. It consisted primarily of identifying, meeting and discussing with the persons directly involved in or with other relevance to issues surrounding the bauxite mining controversy; collecting and reviewing the hundreds of texts and documents that drove this controversy; and observing in different settings the networks and organizations it involved. Through these methods, I aimed to view the events surrounding the controversy from my research subjects’ own perspectives and generate a fuller and more nuanced account of them through corroborating their diverse perspectives. The research was also a single case study. However, it was important both as a historical event in Vietnam and as an extremely rich window for looking into the dynamics of state-society relations and socio-political activism in contemporary Vietnam. Its value is not so much in its generalizability to other populations or even movements, but rather in how it helps us to refine and elaborate further on previous historiography and theory.

For my fieldwork, I resided in Hanoi from mid-2009 to mid-2011. My fieldwork also included trips to Ho Chi Minh City in the south, Da Nang in the central region, the Central Highlands and Beijing, China. However, the main source of data for this dissertation is the hundreds of texts and documents that were generated through the bauxite mining controversy, many of which were circulated only online and have since disappeared. This was partly because the bauxite mining controversy was generated mostly through the production of texts, like General Giáp’s letter or the online bauxite petition, and these texts generally provided me with richer and most detailed accounts of the controversy that I could find. These documents included newspaper and magazine articles, technical reports, workshop proceedings, letters and petitions, full websites and blogs, and official government documents. Apart from a few articles and blogs, all of them were in Vietnamese.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I also conducted nearly one hundred in-depth and semi-structured interviews on the bauxite mining controversy with sixty different informants. Most of these interviews were with persons who had formed part of the opposition to bauxite mining, most of whom were also located in Hanoi. However, they also included representatives from the domestic press, private sector mining companies, foreign and domestic NGOs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and foreign experts on bauxite technology, particularly as they concerned an earlier version of these projects proposed to the Soviet dominated Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in the 1980s.

The main challenge of these interviews was encouraging subjects to speak openly and candidly about the bauxite mining controversy because of its high political sensitivity. It was often only after I had befriended my subjects and met with them on several different occasions that I felt a more genuine conversation had emerged between us. Because of the sensitivity of my research topic, especially at the time, I also chose not to record my interviews.¹² Instead, I generally took hand written notes during the interview and then typed these notes into my computer as soon as possible afterwards. Most of these interviews were also conducted in Vietnamese and without a translator. Again, I did this in my effort to create a less intrusive and more familiar environment for the interviews, but limits in my Vietnamese language skills and the challenge of keeping up with my notes in Vietnamese also hampered my transcription of them. Most of these interviews were conducted in the confidentiality of the research subject, unless the subject gave me written permission otherwise.

Because of the difficult conditions in which these interviews were carried out, I have not used them extensively as direct sources for this dissertation. More often, I relied on the texts I had collected. However, these interviews were more generally helpful in allowing me to piece together the different and almost clandestine events that made possible the bauxite mining controversy, as well as for helping me to sharpen my senses and forming my opinions on these people, processes and events that constituted the controversy.

I also engaged in participant observation in at least two distinct settings. One was with the Vietnamese NGO CODE. My participation mostly consisted of repeated conversations with CODE's staff and helping them with some of their later projects on the broader topic of mining in Vietnam—which was less sensitive than bauxite mining but still enabled them to keep up with those debates. In this way, I developed a more intimate familiarity with CODE and the network of scientists it helped coordinate in the early stages of the bauxite mining debates. The other main setting was the intellectual seminars and workshops organized in Hanoi by the Knowledge Publishing House and together with the French cultural Centre L'Espace. This enabled me to observe and participate in many of the discussions among the networks of intellectuals that were also prominent in the bauxite mining controversy.

This study has also had several limitations. One of the most notable ones was that I was never able to visit the localities of the bauxite mining projects. I had applied for permits to do so, but, without much surprise, was never granted them. I also had a lot of difficulty gaining access to representatives from government and Vinacomin, which is perhaps why their perspectives may be presented less sympathetically here. I also limited this study to what has subsequently called the “first wave” of the bauxite mining controversy. A “second wave” occurred in October and November of 2010 in the wake of the “red mud” catastrophe in Ajka, Hungary. I mention this incident briefly in the conclusion to this dissertation, but I do not engage in an extended analysis of it because the main networks and processes that drove it were already established during the first wave.

¹² On a few occasions, when I was feeling more confident or familiar with the research subject, I asked to record the interviews. However, in almost all of these cases, the research subject declined, further confirming my initial concerns about recording.

As a final note on the text itself, all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Most often this was because no translation was available or, even if it was, I tended to prefer my own. I have used Vietnamese diacritics for all Vietnamese words and people's names. I refrained from using them for place names to remain consistent with the more familiar spellings of Vietnam, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and other major cities to English language readers.

Annex 1. From Bauxite to Aluminium: Geology, Technology and Production

Geological formation of bauxite

Bauxite takes its name from Les Baux, France, where it was first recognized by French geologist Pierre Berthier in 1821 as containing high concentrations of aluminium (Gow & Lozej, 1993). Bauxite is not a mineral, but rather a rock composed mainly of aluminium oxide and hydroxide minerals. By some definitions, bauxite is any rock containing more than 32% aluminium content (Persaud 1980, as cited in Zelder & Africano, 2003). Because of the high chemical reactivity of aluminium, bauxite also contains lesser amounts of clays, silts, iron oxides and other minerals (Gow & Lozej, 1993). Bauxite can be used for a variety of purposes, but its most common one today is as raw material for the production of aluminium.

Most bauxite deposits have been formed through the laterization of various silicate rocks, such as granite, gneiss, basalt, syenite and shale, over hundreds of thousands or millions of years. Laterization is an extreme weathering process that slowly over time dissolves and dislodges soluble substances out of the rock, while simultaneously concentrating and compacting the insoluble ones, such as hydrated aluminium. The formation of lateritic bauxite is most favourable in hot climates with periods of heavy rainfall. This is why the largest bauxite deposits tend to be in the tropical regions. It is also favoured by a relatively flat or unperturbed topography, whose water table is close to the surface, as in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

As a result of this geological formation process, bauxite deposits tend to be shallow and scattered over wide areas. Most bauxite deposits are two to three metres thick, often with little or no overburden (i.e., surface layer). The larger bauxite deposits, such as in Guinea and Australia, were formed only 65 million years ago, while older deposits tend to be more fragmented and eroded. Bauxite typically comes in the three forms, depending on concentration of aluminium. *Gibbsite*, which is found in the Central Highlands, is softer and the most highly prized by investors because its solubility demands less energy for refining (Gow & Lozej, 1993). *Diaspore*, which is the form most common in China and northern Vietnam, is harder and less soluble.

Bauxite reserves are abundant. The total world bauxite reserves, referring to the amount of known deposits that can be economic exploited at current levels of technology, are estimated between 55 to 70 billion tons (Bray, 2010). However, supply is relatively abundant and market advantage depends mostly on being able to reduce cost, especially through transport. The reserves of Australia, Guinea and Jamaica alone are expected to be adequate for yet another 200 years (Barham, Bunker, & O'Hearn, 1994, p. 42).

Bauxite, alumina and aluminium production technology

Aluminium is the most abundant element in the Earth's crust, making up some 8% of its total weight, and the third most abundant element on the planet after oxygen and silicon (Crocket 1981, 4). However, because of its high chemical reactivity, aluminium rarely occurs naturally as a "free metal" and this has typically made production complicated and costly. Rather, aluminium typically occurs in combination with any of more than 270 different minerals, for which reason it has had to await technological achievements in the late 1800s century before it could be produced commercially (Shakhashiri, 2008).

Although ancient Greek and Roman society used aluminium salts in dyeing mordants and astringents, aluminium was first named only in 1808 by Sir Humphry Davy. Danish chemist Hans Christian Oersted produced a first sample in 1825, but it was very impure and German chemist Friedrich Wohler spent the next 20 years improving on it. Henri Sainte-Claire Deville then improved it further in 1854 and displayed it at the Paris Exposition of 1855. It was billed as “silver from clay” and exhibited in bars alongside France’s crown jewels. It was the most expensive metal at that time, valued at \$115 per pound. Napoleon III is said to have kept a prized set of aluminium cutlery for only his most esteemed guests, while others had to content themselves with gold or silver.

However, commercial production of aluminium had to wait more technological advancements still. The first step is the simplest, which is simply extracting and collecting bauxite. Because bauxite deposits are typically shallow with little overburden, more than 80% of world bauxite production is extracted from shallow open-pit mines (Gow & Lozej, 1993; UNCTAD Secretariat, 1996). Open-pit or strip mining is one of the most disruptive and destructive mining practices because it requires complete removal of the surface layer and everything that grows or lives on top of it. Furthermore, the shallowness of bauxite deposits usually also means strip mining over an extensive area for it to be economically profitable. Once the bauxite is dug up, it also needs to be crushed up and washed to prepare for the next more complicated process of beneficiation into alumina.

Beneficiating bauxite is a process of separating out its alumina oxide content from the iron, silicon, titanium or other oxides with which it naturally occurs. The process most commonly used to beneficiate bauxite into alumina is the Bayer Process, which was discovered by Austrian chemist Carl Josef Bayer in 1887, even though his main purpose at that time had been to produce alumina as a mordant for the cotton industry.¹³ The Bayer Process consists of crushing the mined bauxite into a powder and then mixing it in with a solution of water and caustic soda (NaOH). This slurry is then heated at high temperatures (up to 1,300 degrees centigrade) in a high-pressure container, where the caustic soda dissolves the alumina while the impurities are solidified and filtered out (Barham et al. 1994, 44). The resulting sodium aluminate is then seeded with particles of aluminium hydroxide, upon which form crystals of alumina that are then dried into a white powder. The Bayer Process consumes an extensive amount of freshwater, both for washing the bauxite and mixing the caustic soda, and generates an inordinate amount of a caustic bauxite residue, commonly known as “red mud.” Red mud is largely untreatable and usually stored in a wet or dry form for indefinite periods, as discussed further below.

Smelting alumina into aluminium requires a separate process that was discovered independently by both the American Charles Martin Hall and the French Paul L.T. Héroult in 1886, one year prior to the Bayer Process. The Hall-Héroult process, as it has since become known, is an electrolytic process. It involves dissolving the alumina powder into an aqueous solution and then running a strong electric current through it to separate the aluminium from impurities in the aluminium oxide. The extracted aluminium is then re-melted to remove further impurities, which can produce aluminium

¹³ A few years before, Henri Sainte-Claire Deville had already discovered another method for beneficiating alumina, but it was more complicated and soon abandoned after Carl Bayer’s discovery.

that is more than 99 percent pure. However, smelting requires extensive amounts of electricity, which is typically the principal constraint of its production. Smelting aluminium generally requires a cheap source of nearby electricity, as some 30-40% of production costs are usually for electrical energy.

Producing bauxite into alumina and then aluminium are complicated processes that require a substantial amount of technological know-how and investment. Furthermore, this entire process consumes an extensive amount of freshwater, electricity and generates inordinate amounts of bauxite by-product. These conditions have limited the capacity for many underdeveloped states to develop their own bauxite reserves by themselves and, in most cases, prohibited them from partaking in the step with the most significant value added, namely smelting aluminium.

Political economy of the world aluminium industry

Lightweight, durable, flexible and shiny, aluminium has been dubbed the metal of the 20th century. As D.H. Wallace wrote in 1937, “If steel was the workhorse of the industrial revolution, the light metal [aluminium] has become the queen of the newer technology bridging the gap from railroad to rocket ships” (D.H. Wallace 1937, as cited in Graham, 1982, p. 14). Since 19th century, aluminium production has doubled almost every decade and by the 1970s it became the second most widely used metal in the world (R. Graham, 1982, p. 5).

In the early 1900s, aluminium was marketed as light, fast and efficient. It was used primarily in the construction of trucks, motorcycles, cars, bicycles, buses, and airplanes. By the 1920s, aluminium was the material of choice for the modern furniture movement and their avant-garde expressions of material and ideals for industrial design [source: designmuseum.org]. Demand for aluminium soared during World War 2, as supply was consumed by military airplanes, boats and motor vehicles. After World War 2, aluminium became the ubiquitous metal of advanced western industrialized life, used for soda cans, household appliances, installations and so many other uses. It has also become a symbol of modern environmentalism because of its recyclability. Some two thirds to three quarters of all aluminium ever produced is still in use today (Zelder & Africano, 2003).

In contrast to the near ubiquity of aluminium use, the aluminium industry began under monopoly conditions on national markets and gradually transformed into an international oligopoly as bauxite and alumina production expanded overseas. The national monopolies were made possible primarily by proprietorship of the Hall-Héroult technology. In the US, co-discoverer of the Hall-Héroult process, Charles Martin Hall founded the Pittsburg Reduction Company in 1888 with a small group of industrialists, which, in 1907, changed its name to the Aluminium Company of America (Alcoa). Aluminium smelting patents created a “first-mover advantage” that enabled Alcoa to acquire the best bauxite reserves and hydroelectricity sites in the country for aluminium production (Barham et al., 1994, p. 58). Similarly, aluminium smelting patents enabled the formation of Alusuisse and the French Pechiney in Europe also in 1888.

For the next fifty years, Alcoa enjoyed a monopoly over US aluminium production, until high demand during World War 2 prompted the US government to help establish the competitor companies Reynolds in 1941 and, later, Kaiser in 1946. After World War 2, the US government forced Alcoa to deconcentrate, which included forming

its Canadian subsidiary into the separate company Alcan. The government also supported Reynolds and Kaiser with subsidies and helped them acquire access to newly discovered Jamaican bauxite. In Europe, aluminium competitors in other European countries had developed earlier, but by the post-World War 2 era the main producers continued to be these six companies, namely Alcoa, Alcan, Kaiser, and Reynolds in North America and Alusuisse and Pechiney in Europe. Until now, they had produced aluminium from their national bauxite reserves, but by the 1950s these reserves were mostly depleted and the search for new reserves overseas had already begun.

This drive for overseas bauxite, together with growing demand for aluminium primarily from the advanced industrialized countries, created a cleft in the aluminium industry. Bauxite was increasingly sourced from developing countries, where the new reserves were mostly discovered, while aluminium smelting tended to remain in the home countries of the major aluminium firms, partly to remain close to aluminium markets. As Barham et al. (1994) have described, “The discovery of deposit sites increasingly distant from the core [i.e., industrialized countries of World Systems Theory] . . . resulted from the simultaneous depletion, demand growth, and attempts of different industrial nations to secure access to industrially critical materials” (41).

By 1950, bauxite reserves were discovered in 27 countries and estimated at more than 1.6 billion tons, including Jamaica (20% of world total), Hungary (15.6%), Ghana (14.3%) and Brazil (12%) (Barham et al., 1994, p. 41). By 1965, after discovering 2.1 billion ton reserve in Australia and 1.3 billion ton reserve in Guinea, total global reserves soared to 5.8 billion. Australia now owned 34.5% of the world bauxite reserves, Guinea 20.7% and Jamaica now only 10.3% (Barham et al., 1994, p. 41). Meanwhile, the main states and firms involved in these new discoveries were British, American, and, as a new entrant, Japanese.

The high concentration of bauxite reserves in part favoured tight oligopolistic control of the aluminium industry, but it also gave nations with big deposits an opportunity to secure more processing capacity and coordinate price controls. In 1971, Guyana was [among?] the first to nationalize its bauxite industry. However, a major attempt to control supply and prices occurred in 1974, when Australia, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Sierra Leone, Surinam and Yugoslavia formed the International Bauxite Association as a production cartel and were joined one year later by the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Ghana and Indonesia.

Woods and Burrows (1980) have argued that the IBA was inspired by OPEC success and push by Jamaica, who was undergoing a national economic crisis because of rise in oil prices and inflation on imported US goods. Jamaica took a leading role by passing the Jamaican Bauxite Act in 1974 to raise export tax by 800% (from US \$1.80/ton to \$15/ton), after failed negotiations with individual multi-national firms (Woods and Burrows 1980). Many other IBA countries followed suit soon after, except for the notable exception of Australia. Because Australia, as an advanced industrialized nation, also smelted aluminium, it was less committed in raising the prices of bauxite and alumina and this greatly undermined the IBA's efforts, especially as Australia controlled 34.5% of the world bauxite reserve. Furthermore, the IBA's efforts were also limited by the inability of producer nations to downstream aluminium production because of their own technological and mostly financial limitations (Woods and Burrows 1980).

As Emel et al (2011) have argued more broadly, efforts to nationalize mineral resources are often based on assumptions about state sovereignty over natural resources that fail to recognize the extent of their own dependence on foreign firms for capital and technology to develop these same resources. In the aluminium industry, firms tended to favour strong vertical integration, which further strengthened their negotiating position in regard to producer state. They were able to do so because of significant investments costs for bauxite production, uniform technology for alumina beneficiation,¹⁴ and the trend towards economies of scale in the mineral industry.

The overseas split between bauxite-alumina producers and aluminium smelters has also meant increased costs for overseas transport, as roughly 4 tons of bauxite had to be got for every 1 ton of aluminium produced, and many of the new reserves also required heavy infrastructural investment in the home country. The main ones were for rail and road transport infrastructure to reach sea ports and development of hydroelectric power facilities. The substantial lower cost of alumina production helped to overcome transport obstacles, but it alumina is still only about a tenth of the value of aluminium.

Today, global demand for bauxite remains steady, but the aluminium industry is still characterized by high degrees of concentration. Global use of aluminium has increased steadily since 1960 by an average of 4.8% and, from 2000 to 2007, it has increased by rate of 12.5% among developing countries (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 62). Global alumina production increased by 40% between 2000 and 2007, though it decreased significantly during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and 2009 (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 60). Global bauxite production has also increased by an average of 6.5% from 1993 to 2003 (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010). However, it has also been largely concentrated in a few countries.

In 1989, five countries produced 76% (76.3 million tons) of world bauxite (Gow and Lozej 1993). The world's production of high quality bauxite ore (i.e., over 50% concentration of Al_2O_3) is also divided up among five major transnational mining corporations. They are the Russian UC Rusal (3.3 billion tons [per year?]), the Canadian Rio Tinto Alcan (3.3 billion tons), the Brazilian Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (2.7 billion tons), the Chinese Aluminium Corporation (1.9 billion tons) and the American Alcoa (1.9 billion tons) (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 58). For these reasons, government scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn spoke derisively of mining bauxite in Vietnam only to serve the development of "foreign aristocrats," though, of course, one particular foreign power may have been on his mind then (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008c, October 28).

Despite the billions of tons of bauxite and alumina that have been mined and produced in developing countries, they appear to have staggered in generating industrialization while also leading to substantial environmental damage and social protest, most notably in Jamaica, Guinea and, more recently, Orissa, India. Even in Australia, bauxite and alumina production has also generated social conflict in a poor and remote region (Brueckner, 2010). For these reasons, Graham (1982) described the

¹⁴ Because alumina plants must be tailored to the chemical characteristics of individual bauxite deposits, plant-owning firms tend to prefer to secure supplies to specific sources of bauxite (Barham, Bunker, & O'Hearn, 1994, p. 40). The higher the average silica content and tighter bonding of silica to aluminium, the more caustic soda, higher temperatures and pressure are required to beneficiate the bauxite into alumina.

aluminium industry as based on a class struggle operating on several levels. As he described in 1982:

The most direct form of class struggle, between capital and labour within the industry, has successfully been defused by the continued expansion of the industry in the core capitalist countries and the attempt to create an aristocracy of labour in Third World smelters and mines . . . But, overall, the most direct opposition to the continued expansion of the aluminium industry has come from the relatively disorganised peasants of Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Brazil and the Philippines who have seized their land seized by the state for the construction of vast hydro-electric schemes to supply power to the North American and Japanese aluminium companies. The seizure of land for bauxite mining has similarly caused a great deal of hostility in various exporting countries, but only the Aborigines in Australia have continued to struggle both 'legally' and 'illegally' for the return of their land rights and the payment of compensation. (Graham 1982, 10)

Similarly, Barham et al. (1994) concede that in the aluminium industry "the vast majority of rents are captured by the foreign monopolist" (68). Of course, the exact shape of the industry may vary from case to case.

Annex 2: History of Government Plans for Central Highlands Bauxite

While a public debate did not occur until late 2008, government interest in Central Highlands bauxite goes at least as far back as the 1970s.¹⁵ The late geologist Nguyễn Văn Chiển is reputed to have first reported these deposits to the Vietnamese government shortly after the Vietnam War. At that time, he was directing a team of Vietnamese scientists to examine the resource potential of the Central Highlands under the government-sponsored Central Highlands Research Program (1976-1980).¹⁶ As another member of his team, a young biologist at the time, Võ Quý, recounted to me, “We just went places and you could see it [i.e., bauxite] . . . In some places, where they had dug up a road or something, it was right there in front of us” (Interview 017).

These initial discoveries encouraged the Vietnamese government to propose an investment project to the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (COMECON),¹⁷ which Vietnam had just joined in 1978, for bauxite, alumina and

¹⁵ Bauxite was first discovered and mined in northern Vietnam much earlier. French geologists first identified bauxite deposits in northern Vietnam in the early twentieth century (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010, p. 37). From 1937 to 1944, some 36,000 tons of bauxite were mined from the Lỗ Sơn and Bản Lóng mines in Hải Dương and Lạng Sơn provinces of the Northeast Region, initially by the French colonialists and then briefly by the occupying Japanese forces. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam also operated bauxite mines at Mt. Thiên Ân in Quang Ngãi province from 1979-1982 and again from 1988-1989 for a nearby painting factory (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a). The Socialist Republic of Vietnam also continues to operate a bauxite mine in Tam Lung in Lạng Sơn province for the Hoàng Thạch cement factory, extracting some 50,000 tons per year (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a). However, these amounts are miniscule compared to the millions of tons per year to be mined in the Central Highlands under Decision 167 and they were mined primarily for industrial purposes, rather than as raw material for high value aluminium production, because of their low grade.

¹⁶ It is likely that both the French and the American administrations in Vietnam had been aware of these deposits, though neither had the interests or the conditions to develop them at the time (Đặng Trung Thuận, 2010, p. 37). The Americans had built a small bauxite processing plant on the outskirts of Saigon in the 1960s, in an area that is now in Tân Bình District. However, this factory imported bauxite for the plant from Malaysia and Indonesia (Nguyễn Văn Bản, 2010, p. 67). The South Basic Chemicals Limited Company, under the state-owned Vietnam National Chemical Group (Vinachem), continues to operate this plant today, sourcing around 20,000 tons of bauxite per year from a mine in Bao Lao District of Lam Dong Province, very near to the Tân Rai project.

¹⁷ COMECON was an organization of Soviet-friendly nations for economic cooperation originally established in 1949, partly as the Soviet Union’s reply to the formation of an earlier version of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) between the United States of America and western European capitalist countries in 1948. COMECON initially comprised the Soviet Union and the six Eastern Bloc countries. They were later joined by Mongolia in 1962, Cuba in 1972 and Vietnam in 1978. The latter three were regarded as the “developing” nations in the association, which benefited most from Soviet overseas development assistance funds. For example, in 1987, Cuba received \$4 billion in economic assistance from COMECON and Vietnam received \$2

aluminium production.¹⁸ At this time, COMECON had nearly no bauxite of its own and the Soviet Union, in particular, was very interested in the Vietnamese deposits. Only Hungary had a sizeable amount of medium quality *boehmite* bauxite that could be beneficiated relatively easily and inexpensively for aluminium production (IV039.1), while the Soviet Union could only process its own low quality bauxite through highly capital- and energy-intensive processes.

The Russians concentrated on the “May 1st” deposit in Dak Nong Province (near today’s Nhan Co project), while the Hungarians concentrated on the Tân Rai deposits in Lam Dong Province (Trần Minh Huân, n.d.). Since the early 1970s, the Soviet Union and Hungary had been cooperating with Vietnam in bauxite exploration in the northeastern provinces of Hải Dương and Lạng Sơn, respectively, which had put them in a strong position for cooperation on the southern deposits.¹⁹ On the Vietnamese side, General Giáp, then Vice-Prime Minister for Science and Technology, was delegated to preside over the Joint Committee established for this task (Interview 015). As he wrote in his letter of January 2009, “I was delegated to direct and monitor this program” (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009, January 5).

In the end, however, COMECON allegedly opted against investing in Central Highlands bauxite. General Giáp also wrote that COMECON decided against bauxite mining because of “long-term and very serious ecological consequences . . . not only in the local area but for the entire rice producing regions of the South Central Region” (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009, January 5). However, the actual reasons are less than clear.

Vietnamese and foreign informants, who have been previously involved with research and planning for Central Highlands bauxite, suggested that lack of capital may have been a more likely reason.²⁰ A former Minister of Industry, who was a part of these

billion, though, in Vietnam’s case, about half of that was in military aid. (US Library of Congress, n.d.).

¹⁸ One informant, who has been involved in research into the Central Highlands bauxite since the 1980s, believed that these initial discussions between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and COMECON took place in 1978, but he could not confirm it (Interview 039.1). However, as early as 1981, a conference was held in Ho Chi Minh City to discuss southern bauxite exploration with non-ferrous metallurgists from the Soviet Union, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Cuba (“Vietnamese Bauxite,” 1981).

¹⁹ In particular, the Hungarian Company Aluterv, the engineering arm of the Hungarian Aluminium Corporation, had conducted feasibility studies on the deposits in Lạng Sơn, which is why it found itself in a strong position to advise the Vietnamese government on the southern deposits (Interview 039.1).

²⁰ One of them, a bauxite expert from the Eastern Bloc, described the idea that the Soviet Union would reject bauxite mining on environmental grounds as “inconceivable” (Interview 039.2, Interview 039.3). This informant also reported that he had never heard that COMECON had even opted against them. A post to the *Mining Journal* from that time also cited “a shortage of capital” as the main constraint to the development of copper and bauxite reserves in Vietnam in 1989 (“Mining in Vietnam - a door ajar,” 1989). The Vietnamese Deputy General Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is also reported to have “appealed for [foreign] investment to develop the

discussions in the 1990s, has suggested that environmental arguments might have been used a smokescreen to dissuade other investors from going after these deposits. As he wrote:

. . . the Soviet experts might have attempted to dissuade Vietnam from the utilization of its bauxite reserves by arguing that such an exploitation and refining would risk serious ecological damages. This is because the Soviets experts believed the potential of these reserves could fulfill the needs of COMECON (and, above all, of the Soviet Union). They invested time and money in exploration, especially for the deposit named “May 1st,” which they considered as “theirs.” However, they did not have the resources at the time to build and operate a refinery, only enough power to block its development. (Trần Minh Huân, n.d., p. 4, original English text has been emended for grammar and readability).

The United Nations’ Industrial Development Organization’s (UNIDO) appeared to pick up the slack from COMECON in the late 1980s by sponsoring research projects on bauxite and alumina production in southern Vietnam²¹. UNIDO helped build bauxite and alumina research centre in an old American military base of Biên Ho City in Đồng Nai Province, on the southern border of the Central Highlands. The project’s Chief Technical Advisor was a former Director of the Aluterv-FKI company and most of the foreign consultants to the centre also came from this company. Vietnamese experts were mostly delegated from the Institute of Mining and Metallurgy in Hanoi.

However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, so too did its interests in Vietnamese bauxite. Soon after, the UNIDO project terminated and, in 1993, the research centre was closed. Some of its equipment was moved to Saigon, while the rest of it went north to be usefully stored in VIMLUKI’s Research Centre for Mining and Metallurgy (Interview 039.3, Interview 034).

However, the Vietnamese government was not dissuaded. Its plans for mining Central Highlands bauxite were revived in 1994, when the 30-year trade embargo with the US was lifted. Over the next, ten to fifteen years many different foreign companies and powers expressed interest in mining bauxite from the Central Highlands. The Korean Daewoo and the French Pechiney expressed interest and conducted feasibility studies in the late 1990s, though they were mostly abandoned in the wake of the Asian Financial

country’s mineral wealth, which includes bauxite reserves of 3,000 Mt, with ore grades of 40-43%, but no production” (“Vietnam appeals for investment,” 1991). Unfortunately, I was never able discover any documentation of this research undertaken by COMECON. One informant close to MOI assured me that nobody in Vietnam had a copy of that study anymore and another informant close to UNIDO highly doubted they would have a copy and surely did not know where to look for one. Võ Quý suggested to me that the expert “reports” to COMECON were mainly oral ones or “direct reports” (*báo cáo trực tiếp*).

²¹ Supported primarily with Soviet and Hungarian expertise, this program produced a series of preparatory studies on the uses of southern Vietnamese bauxite (i.e., *gibbsite*) with such titles as the “Establishment of an industrial scale resource based opportunity study” and the “Determination of the comparative export value and comparative processing value of the Vietnamese bauxite” (DP/VIE/85/006 and UD/UC/VIE/88/042).

Crisis in 1997 and 1998.²²

A few years later, however, interest resurfaced. This time the main contenders were the Australian BHP Billiton, the American Alcoa and the state-owned Chinese Aluminum Corporation (Chalco).²³ Other companies like Russia's RUSAL, a couple of Japanese companies and the Director-General of the Primary Industries and Mines Department of Thailand also officially expressed interest in Central Highlands bauxite. However, by the time of the bauxite mining debates in 2008 and 2009, only Chalco had made concrete progress.

Chalco's discussions with Vietnam on Central Highlands bauxite can be traced back to 2001, but the precise nature of these discussions is unclear. High-level discussions between the two nation's leaders appear to have occurred as early as 2001. At that time, Vietnamese newspapers reported on a framework agreement between the two countries that briefly mentioned business cooperation for bauxite and aluminium projects in Dak Nong. In 2005, another announcement was made on a framework agreement for the establishment of a Joint Venture between the state-owned Vietnam Coal and Mining Corporation (Vinacomin) and Chalco. However, this Joint Venture was never established and a former high-level official of Chalco suggested to me that it had failed in 2006. In the end, the only publicly known information is that Chalico, a subsidiary of Chalco, was awarded fixed-term Engineering, Procurement and Construction contracts for the construction of the Lam Dong and Dak Nong projects.

²² In 1997, South Korea's Daewoo Corporation signed a letter of intent with state-owned Vietnam Minerals Corporation (VIMICO) to develop a bauxite mine and alumina refinery in Dak Lak province, estimated at a value of US\$ 1 billion to produce 1 Mt/yr. of alumina ("Daewoo's Vietnamese intent," 1997). Daewoo aimed to set up a Joint Venture with Vimico and suggested the possibility of developing an aluminium smelter if it received infrastructure support from the Vietnamese Government. One year later, Vimico conducted a pre-feasibility study on Tân Rai deposit in Lam Dong province in cooperation with the French Pechiney. This study proposed a US\$ 500 million project with a capacity for 150,000-200,000 tons of alumina per year and 75,000-100,000 tons of aluminium ("Vietnam," 1998, "Vietnam," 1999).

²³ In 2004, BHP Billiton opened an exploration office in Vietnam ("BHPB's Vietnam venture," 2004) and, in 2006, applied to MONRE for a license to build a bauxite mining plant in Dak Nong province with an investment plan of 1.6 billion USD (Red Nova in TNO 2005-09-05). BHP Billiton entertained elaborate plans to mine the large bauxite deposits in Dak Nong together with substantial bauxite deposits in adjacent Cambodian provinces and then transport it by rail to a sea port in Binh Thuan province on the South Central Vietnamese coast. However, for reasons that were never made public, BHP pulled out of these projects in the mid-2000s. In 2006, the American Alcoa signed an MoU with Vinacomin to conduct feasibility study for constructing and operating a bauxite mine and aluminium refinery at the Gia Nghia deposit in Dak Nong. By the time of the public debate of 2008 and 2009, Alcoa still maintained an active interest in mining bauxite in the Central Highlands (no doubt siding with the public's skepticism over the government's bidding process that selected the same Chinese corporation for both of the Lam Dong and Dak Nong projects)

Chapter 2

The Anti-Bauxite Coalition

The widespread opposition to Vietnamese government plans for bauxite mining emerged like a Polanyian double movement (Polanyi, 1944). Groups and individuals from different corners of Vietnamese society rose up more or less spontaneously together to voice their opposition to bauxite mining. Like Polanyi's underlying analyses to the double movement, this opposition rose up to protect society from the predations of global capital, albeit through the active ushering of the party-state. In other words, its scope and aims went beyond the highland communities most directly and immediately affected by bauxite mining (whose voices, indeed, were conspicuously absent throughout the bauxite mining debates) to reflect the wider concerns and interests of what Michael Burawoy (2003) has referred to as "active society."

In this chapter, I focus on the composition and character of this opposition or what I am calling, following Thayer (2010), the anti-bauxite coalition. I argue that the anti-bauxite coalition was more socially heterogeneous and geographically expansive than previous major public confrontation with or manifestations against the Vietnamese party-state.²⁴ Their heterogeneity and expansiveness is worth emphasizing. Jack Goldstone (2001) has argued that one of three key ingredients to successful revolutionary movements is the formation of what he calls "cross-class coalitions." Without them, he argues, revolutions are "unlikely to develop" (p. 174).²⁵ Similarly, Korten (1990) has argued that the power of "voluntary action" arises not so much from the size and resources of any particular group or organization, but rather from the formation of "vast and constantly evolving networks" (as cited in Wells-Dang, 2011, p. 42). Recent literature has also highlighted the importance of widening networks and "cross-fertilization" among groups in Vietnamese politics and society (Thayer, 2009b; Vasavakul, 2003; Wells-Dang, 2011).

As I show in this chapter, at least ten different major groups figured prominently in the bauxite mining controversy. In categories I have devised for the purposes of this analysis, they were:

²⁴ I am excluding from my analysis the North-South conflict during the Vietnam War. Rather, I mean to refer to public confrontations or manifestations against the communist state under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (a.k.a., North Vietnam) from 1945 to 1975 and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam after 1975.

²⁵ I reiterate that I do mean to suggest that the opposition that emerged against bauxite mining was a revolutionary movement. By Goldstone's (2001) typology of revolutionary movements, the anti-bauxite coalition was most like an "oppositional movement," precisely because it opposed the regime without an explicit aim to "take power" (143). Goldstone's other two key ingredients are "vanguard groups" and "interpersonal networks," both of which, as this dissertation shows, were also important in forging the anti-bauxite coalition.

- Scientists and technocrats
- Reporters and the domestic press
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Artist-intellectuals
- Retired high-level officials
- Activist bloggers
- Government officials and the National Assembly
- Religious leaders
- Political activists and organizations
- Overseas Vietnamese communities

Each of these categories reflects the different social identities of each group and their historical relations with the party-state, as I elaborate on below.

At its peak expression, the coalition was a loose and flexible network.²⁶ It had evolved from a small and relatively exclusive interpersonal network into a larger and more amorphous one, which relied increasingly on “virtual” associations through the Internet. This looseness and flexibility facilitated rapid expansion, while also helping to disperse and limit the risk of state retribution on any particular group. What made the many individual participants identifiable as a network, both among themselves and for those outside the coalition, was that they had spoken out publicly against bauxite mining. Their opposition may have taken a wide range of forms, from writing an open letter to signing an online petition, but in all cases an individual or organization publicly identified themselves as in opposition to or at least critical of bauxite mining.

A quick survey of the most important public confrontations in the history of the Vietnamese party-state shows that, in comparison, the anti-bauxite coalition counted on more different groups, as well as stretching over a wider national and international geography. Beginning with the *Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm* affair in the late 1950s, which took its name from two arts and literature periodicals of the time, it confronted the party-state through satirical poetry, fictional writings and journalistic exposés published primarily in these two periodicals. However, the *Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm* was largely contained to military writers and artists and colonial-era intellectuals in northern Vietnam. Furthermore, it narrowly focused on censorship, bureaucracy and corruption in the arts and literature. As historian Peter Zinoman (2011) has argued, they remained largely aloof from other issues of more direct and immediate concern to other politically active

²⁶ As Wells-Dang (2011) has noted and usefully summarized, social networks can take on various shapes and structures. They include hierarchical (e.g., pyramid), centralized (e.g., hub and spokes) or segmented or decentralized (e.g., web, clique). Variations in structure may also reflect variations in size (i.e., number of units), density (i.e., number of ties per unit), cohesion (i.e., a measure of “tie strength” between units), equivalence (i.e., similarity of units or ties), prominence and marginality (i.e., degree of proximity to top or center) or range and brokerage (i.e., range of different units or ties), as well as relative “openness” or “closure.” By these typologies, the anti-bauxite coalition was a largely open and decentralized network characterized by high numbers, low density and variable measures of cohesion and tie strength.

groups or potential allies in Vietnam at the time, notably farmers, workers, students and the hundreds of thousands of unsettled Catholics migrating south under in fear of reprisals from the communist state. Partly because of this narrowness, the party-state was also so effectively able to suppress the movement by targeting harsh measures on only a dozen intellectuals and their families (Zinoman 2011).

A second major confrontation with the party-state occurred in the late 1960s, misleadingly labelled as the Anti-Party Affair. Although the Anti-Party Affair later turned into a “round-up” of potential political opponents to then General Secretary Lê Duẩn, it began with a group of some fifty senior and mid-level party officials (Pribbenow, 2008; Quinn-Judge, 2005). They questioned party policy that, at the time, leaned towards a more militant Mao-inspired solution to South Vietnam over a more Khrushchevian doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” (Nguyễn Liên-Hang T., 2006). Elements of this discussion were also carried out in the domestic press. However, it remained largely restricted to mid and upper level party officials and a limited group of Vietnamese intellectuals, while the state repression of the movement got swept up in a debacle that resulted in hundreds of detentions and arrests of party officials and intellectuals (Pribbenow, 2008; Quing-Judge, 2005).

A couple of highly visible confrontations also emerged in the immediate aftermath of the *đổi mới* reforms in the late 1980s. One revolved around the *đổi mới* writers, which included the likes of Dương Thu Hung, Nguyễn Huy Thiệp, Bảo Ninh and Phạm Thị Hoài, and the then editor of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s arts and literature magazine *Văn Nghệ*, Nguyễn Ngọc—who was also a key figure in the anti-bauxite coalition. With the personal backing of General Trần Độ, Nguyễn Ngọc actively published the *đổi mới* writers in *Văn Nghệ*, whose satirical writings mocked and challenged glorified party narratives of the war effort and the immiserated post-war period (Zinoman, 1992). Nguyễn Ngọc then himself became the subject of controversy when he was forced to resign as editor of *Văn Nghệ* (Abuza, 2001).²⁷ This affair was similar to the *Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm* with its basis mostly among writers, artists, academics and journalists, though their writings may have encompassed a somewhat broader set of social and historical questions. However, the narrowness of their membership also resulted in a similar pattern of targeted repression by the party-state.

The other confrontation of importance around the same time came from a group of former southern military commanders, who formed the Club of Freedom Resistance Fighters. Although the Club initially focused on Hanoi’s treatment of southern veterans, its later activities expanded the scope of their criticism to the party-state’s handling of the economy, corruption and bureaucracy, as well as advocating for a north-south national reconciliation process in the legacy of the Vietnam War (Abuza, 2001). While the Club had begun to attract a wider public interest through its newsletters and conferences, the party-state also descended quickly on its narrow membership by co-opting key members into the party-controlled Veterans’ Association and then, later, quietly outlawing the Club

²⁷ Nguyễn Ngọc’s resignation also engendered support among the Vietnamese arts and literature community. Notably, Dalat writers Bùi Minh Quốc and Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự, who organized a cross-country march recruiting participants through the Writers’ Associations as they went along to protest the party-state’s disposal of Nguyễn Ngọc. Bùi Minh Quốc and Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự also formed parts of the anti-bauxite coalition.

and cracking down on its leaders (Abuza, 2001).

Recent studies on civil society in Vietnam have also highlighted the emergence of more cross-sectoral networks and coalitions in recent years. One of the most important was the formation of Bloc 8406 on April 8th of 2006, the date from which it takes its name. Bloc 8406 brought together a diverse coalition of democracy and human rights activists, labour organizers and religious leaders to advocate for more protection of human rights and democracy in Vietnam (Thayer, 2009b).²⁸ However, like the Club of Freedom Resistance Fighters, it also suffered an early demise at the hands of the party-state while its leaders have monitored, harassed and imprisoned by state authorities. The other was the campaign that successfully turned away plans for a luxury hotel in Hanoi's Reunification Park in 2008 and 2009. This campaign counted on Vietnamese community organizations, professional and scientific associations, the domestic press, and NGOs. However, it was also a one-issue affair and the network itself dissolved shortly after the campaign was won (Wells-Dang, 2011).

Other groups in Vietnamese society have been involved in more on-going confrontations with or manifestations against the party-state, such as the Vietnamese Catholic community or the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (both of which are discussed below as parts of the anti-bauxite coalition). However, their struggles have mostly been one-on-one encounters with the party-state and generated little public support or interest from within Vietnam. Incidents of mass protests and demonstrations have also emerged periodically in Vietnam, though they too have tended to remain highly localized and failed to address wider political themes or other groups.

This brief history of public confrontations with the party-state has also demonstrated the historical fragmentation and political isolation of different politically active groups under the party-state and how effective the party-state has been in keeping them that way. Precisely because of this history, many observers of the bauxite mining controversy have highlighted the wide range of different groups that came together in opposition to bauxite mining (Marston, 2012; Thayer, 2010; Vuing, 2010).²⁹ Alexander

²⁸ Thayer (2009) has argued that Bloc 8406 comprised a “diverse network of professionals widely dispersed throughout the country” (p. 14). He has shown that signatories to their *Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam* included 31% teachers and lecturers, 14% Catholic priests, 13% university professors, 7% writers, 6% medical doctors and remaining 29% intellectuals, engineers, nurses, Hao Hao religious leaders, businessmen, army veterans, technicians, ordinary citizens and one lawyer (N=118). However, they were also mostly an urban-based network with 38% of signatories from Hue, 15% from Ho Chi Minh Cit and another 30% from Hai Phong, Hanoi, Da Nang and Can Tho, while remaining signatories were mostly from southern provinces and Bac Ninh (north) and maybe Quang Ngai (central south). Later, Bloc joined with Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam as Vietnam Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights, modelled on Aung Sang Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

²⁹ Thayer (2009) describes a widespread elite opposition, beginning with environmentalists and scientists acting as a “chorus of critical views” at a national seminar and then more specifically refers to Gen. Võ Nguyên Giáp, Gen. Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh, several deputies of the National Assembly, Thích Quảng Độ (UBCV), two Redemptorist priests, Cardinal Phạm Minh Mẫn (Archbishop of Saigon), and lawyer Cù

Vuving has described their coming together as a “dramatic development of civil society” (p. 377), while Hunter Marston has called it “one of the most telling contemporary examples of the changing nature of state-society relations in Vietnam” (Marston 2012, p. 187).

This chapter continues these first forays into the composition and character of the anti-bauxite coalition. However, what is lacking from these previous analyses is a more detailed and in-depth inquiry to who are these groups exactly and what might they in Vietnamese politics and society. Part of these questions also requires understanding how they can be categorically constituted as a group. These questions are what drive this chapter. Only in this way, I believe, can both the significance and potency of the anti-bauxite coalition to Vietnamese politics and society be well understood.

The structure of this chapter is straightforward. Basically, I examine each group roughly in the order of they appeared in the bauxite mining controversy, beginning with those government scientists that first spoke out publicly against bauxite mining. For each group, I try to convey a sense of their history and their historical relations with the party-state. I also include a short section on other groups that might have been expected to be a part of the coalition, but for different reasons were not. From this discussion, I aim to show how the social heterogeneity of these different groups brought to the anti-bauxite coalition different sets of hope and aspirations for Vietnam, as well as particular histories of conflict and collaboration with the party-state. This chapter also provides an initial sketch of their geographic expansiveness, though a more developed picture of their geographic coverage will emerge through subsequent chapters as I delve into more detail on the individual members from these groups.

Some of these members also acted not so much in accordance with as in contravention to the practices and behaviour that defined their respective group. In this sense, they were renegades or “fence-breakers,” rather than “representatives” in a strict sense. However, it is important to remember that they acted within a highly repressive context. That they were able to contravene group identity to join in on these discussions was symbolically, if not representationally, important. In this regard, the anti-bauxite coalition was more of a hopeful projection of what an oppositional movement could be rather than what it actually was. Their participation was sometimes more metonymy than metaphor.

Scientists and Technocrats

Vietnamese scientists first sounded the alarm on government plans for bauxite mining. Government scientists were the first to raise their concerns about these plans to the domestic media in May 2007. The scientists’ extensive analyses and lurid

Huy Hà Vũ. Marston (2010) mentions “many environmentalists, national ministers and religious leaders” (p. 181), “Vietnam’s online community and countless bloggers” (p. 183), “volley of criticism at the [April 2009] conference” (p. 183), “prominent intellectuals” that signed the online petition (p. 184), “retired state officials”, scientists and “public intellectuals” (p. 186), “grassroots activists and reformist political leaders” (p. 187). He also specifies the same persons as mentioned by Thayer (2009) and National Assembly delegate Dương Trung Quốc. Vuving describes a “forged coalition of nationalists and environmentalists” (p. 379).

descriptions of bauxite mining as a “mud bomb” hanging over southern Vietnam and causing a “war” over water drove the regional workshop in October 2008 that brought their concerns to a wide national audience. Scientists and experts also penned the first petition to the nation’s leaders against bauxite mining in November 2008 and provided providing a scientific foundation to the public discussion throughout the bauxite mining debates. However, these outspoken scientists were a minority among their peers and colleagues. They broke with tradition in speaking out publicly against the government, but, in doing so, they reflected the concerns and aspirations for a more careful and scientific policy-making process among many Vietnamese people today.

By scientists, I mean to refer to those intellectuals teaching and researching in the experimental sciences or mathematics. Among them, I also include policy analysts and other experts who have had a formal education in the experimental sciences or mathematics, for which reason I also refer to them as technocrats. I distinguish them here from scholars and artists in the arts and humanities, whom I have categorized below as artist-intellectuals, to reflect distinct historical trajectories and particular relations with the Vietnamese state.

Under the Mandarin educational system in imperial Vietnam, the experimental sciences and mathematics barely existed or played second fiddle to the arts and humanities. Even during colonial times, the “pure sciences” were poorly developed. For example, a faculty of natural sciences was not made part of the University of Indochina until thirty-six years after it was first established in 1905 (Marr, 1981, pp. 342–343; Zink, 2011, p. 55). Not until the Vietnamese communists consolidated power in North Vietnam in the late 1940s and 1950s did scientific education receive more state support.

An aggressive push for scientific development and education was common among socialist states because it provided the tools for modernization and rapid industrialization (L. R. Graham, 1992). As Kim Ninh (2002) has written of Vietnam in the 1950s, “science” stirred an emotional hope of progress and deliverance from traditional “backwardness.”

Advanced scientific education became more widely available to Vietnamese citizens from the 1950s onwards, especially through bilateral educational cooperation with the Soviet Union. David Marr has estimated that some 100,000 Vietnamese students attended universities in the Eastern bloc countries under the Soviet aid programme from 1951 to 1989 (as cited in Bayly, 2004).

Strong state support for scientific education also helped cemented loyalties between these new generations of scientists and the party-state. During the impoverished conditions of the post-war period, opportunities to study abroad were highly coveted—if only for the opportunities they presented for contraband of foreign goods³⁰—and state authorities doled them out carefully among the select few. Upon return to Vietnam, these scientists were guaranteed life-long job security in a government office or research institute. Certain tensions may have existed between scientific and state authority, but,

³⁰ Bayly’s (2004) informants, trained as scientists and technocrats in the 1950s and 1960s, also describe earnings gained from participating as experts in international cooperation missions to various African countries in the 1970s and 1980s as a “lifeline” to existing income.

for the most part, these government scientists and technocrats tended to toe the party line (Ninh, 2002).

Since the *đổi mới* reforms, the salaries and other income opportunities for government scientists have not kept pace with other sectors of the economy (Zink, 2011). Meanwhile, new generations of younger scientists following the paths of their forefathers now find themselves better educated but lower down on the organization hierarchy in their respective organizations. This bars their access to more lucrative income opportunities and hinders in conducting their own independent research (Zink, 2011, Bayly, 2004).³¹

This new situation has engendered new tensions between scientists and the party-state, or at least helped bring them to the surface. In the 1990s, one of the most outspoken advocates for multi-party democracy in Vietnam was mathematician and informatics expert Phan Đình Diệu. Another scientist, biologist Nguyễn Xuân Tú (penname Hà Sĩ Phu), also became a high profile “dissident” when he joined a group of writers and artists based in the Central Highland city of Dalat, who regularly denounce the party-state records on human rights and censorship. Other scientists have advocated issues more cautiously and deferentially, but have also won a few *causes celebres*. Notably, a group of scientists organized around the government’s Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations were able to petition government into scaling down the proposed scale of construction for the Son La Hydroelectric Dam in 2004.

In a similar way to the scientists that protested the Son La Hydroelectric Dam, groups of scientists also tried to protest government plans for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands. Although only a few dozen in number, they appealed to wide sections of the Vietnamese population through their analyses, reasoning and scientific credibility.

Reporters and the Domestic Press

The domestic press played a pivotal in launching the bauxite mining debates by publishing those first critical articles on bauxite mining by government scientists and then providing national coverage to the workshop of October 2008. However, the domestic press was also prohibited by the Prime Minister from reporting on bauxite mining for several months and then, after this period, appeared to do so with more state control. Even so, individual reporters and journalists also crossed these lines in making their own statements critical of bauxite mining. These different roles played by the domestic press in the bauxite mining controversy highlights both its possibilities and limits for fostering public debate on “sensitive” issues in Vietnam.

The size and reach of the domestic press in Vietnam is impressive. According to government sources, Vietnam is home to 786 print media agencies with more than 1000 publications of different formats and some 17,000 licensed journalists (Thu Hoa, 2012, May 9). These figures are also roughly consistent with BBC reporter Bill Hayton’s (2010) suggestion of some 800 newspapers and magazines produced in the country in the

³¹ Eren Zink (2011) has shown that the low salary levels of Vietnamese researchers and professors causes many of them to supplement their income with private consulting, extra teaching and operating small businesses, including NGOs (Zink 2011, pp. 64-65). These additional activities also inhibit them from dedicating more time and resources to conducting independent research.

late 2000s. Although numbers on readership are not easily found, high rates of literacy and the fact that most of these publications, since *đổi mới*, survive on their own revenue suggest that it is substantial, especially in urban areas. For example, Thomas and Heng (2001) found in a Hanoi-based sample that newspapers were “widely read” and the average Hanoi resident “has access to, and very often reads” four papers per day (as most of these papers are short format of around four to five pages) (p. 289).

The Vietnamese press is said to have originated in the early 20th century under the auspices of the French colonial state (Peycam, 2013). However, it then became instrumental in generating widespread anti-colonial sentiment and certain press agencies were in a constant struggle over content and censorship with the colonial state. Under the Vietnamese communists, the mass media were conceived as “a propaganda organ” to serve ideological objectives, and even today this principle remains entrenched in the Press Law (Hayton, 2010; Heng, 2003, p. 561; Templer, 1999).³² After the *đổi mới* reforms, the press enjoyed a brief moment of relaxed censorship and liberalization, as described above, but soon after state censorship and control of the domestic press reverted back largely to what it had been during the pre-reform era and continues in this way up until today. The international Committee to Protect Journalists has described Vietnam as “Asia’s second worst jailer of the press, trailing only China” (no page).

Russell Hiang-Khng Heng (Heng, 2001) has outlined four main mechanisms by which the party-state monitors and controls the domestic press, as I paraphrase them here: (1) proprietorship of all forms of mass media, thereby excluding private ownership, (2) decisive role in staffing, especially for senior positions, (3) guidance in the form of regular directives and (4) custodial institutions to ensure all of the above. Nearly all media organizations are owned by a government, party or military organization. Even the most “progressive” ones, such as *Tuổi Trẻ*, *Thanh Niên* and *Người Lao Động*, are owned by branches of the Youths’ Union and Labour Union, which themselves are under

³² As Bill Hayton (2010) notes, Article 6 of the 2006 Press Law outlines two potentially contradictory tasks of the domestic media. One is to “provide honest information about the domestic and international situations,” while another is to “carry out propaganda [for], disseminate information about and contribute to the building and protection of directions, orientations and policies of the Party and the law of the State” (as cited in Hayton 2010, p. 144). Hayton (2010) further suggests that the latter statement can be used to clamp down on and punish representatives of the domestic media. Trying to navigate the dilemma of wanting to represent oneself as a modern nation and still feeling the need to control information, state officials have resorted to arguments of “collective rights” to justify censorship and state-control over domestic media. Former Prime Minister and General Secretary Đỗ Mười once made the following statement: “In Vietnam, press freedom is meant to serve the interests of the entire people, the whole country and the new political system . . . We will not allow the *abuse of press freedom* by people who seek to destabilise the socio-political situation in our country and impede us in our development and our integration into the world community” (as cited in Templer 1999, p. 160, emphasis added).

the Vietnamese Communist Party's Fatherland Front.³³ All media organizations are also licensed and regulated by the Ministry of Information and Propaganda.

High-level state organizations also actively intervene on appointments and production. Chief editors are required to be party members and their appointments must first be approved by relevant state organizations (Hayton, 2010; Heng, 2003). The Ideology Commission reserves the right to call up individual editors at any time to ask questions or voice concerns (Heng, 2003). The Ministries of Public Security and Foreign Relations and Politburo members are known to have special influence in vetting media material and editorial choices (Heng, 2003). Party cells are installed in every media organization, which meet regularly to monitor and guide reporting (Templer, 1998, p. 161). As one journalist remarked, "the most influential figure in the paper is the newsroom secretary, who is always a Party member. 'They decide what goes on the front page and in the other parts of the paper'" (Hayton, 2010, p. 144). Vietnamese journalists also suggest that the government maintains a "black list" to monitor their movements, telephone conversations and online activities (Crispin, 2012).

Despite these strict conditions, certain elements of the domestic press continue to push and challenge the boundaries of state control. Since *đổi mới*, the domestic press has won several *causes celebres*, including one that resulted in the disposition of a Central Committee member in 1986 (Heng, 2004; Hayton, 2010). However, the domestic press has also been severely manipulated by state authorities, as in the recent case where reporters from the *Thanh Niên* and *Tuổi Trẻ* newspapers exposed an extensive gambling network within a Project Management Unit of the Ministry of Transportation that led all the way to the Vice-Minister. These reporters had clearly received information from higher levels to write the stories, but were then also arrested and imprisoned for their initiative (Hayton, 2010).

Online content has also become a booming area for the domestic press, one that has also been more difficult for state authorities to censor and control. According to Surborg (2008), seventy-three electronic newspapers were licensed between 1997 and 2005. The most popular ones have been *VietnamNet*, *VNExpress* and *Dân Trí* (Surborg, 2009).

The domestic media provided the key channel through which government scientists could reach a wider public on bauxite mining, while certain individual reporters and journalists also played important roles in advancing those public discussions. However, they did so within strict limits imposed upon them by the party-state and causing them to respond in more subtle and cautious ways.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Collective organizing around bauxite mining began in mid-2007 with a newly established Vietnamese NGO called Consultancy on Development (CODE). CODE was largely responsible for pursuing the concerns initially raised by government scientists and the domestic press, coordinating a network of scientists and organizing the workshop in October 2008 that made bauxite mining a national issue. However, CODE also retreated

³³ Referred to in Vietnamese as "*lê trái*" which translates directly as the left. However, this should not be confused with "leftist." The "left way" is used to distinguish it from the party line, which is called "*lê phải*" or the right way.

into a more behind-the-scenes role as the public debate over bauxite mining became more heated and explicitly political. CODE was also nearly the only NGO in Vietnam, whether domestic or foreign, to play an important role in these debates. This testifies to both the potential and constraints of NGOs for advocating on “sensitive” policy issues in Vietnam, especially at the national level.

Apart from the various relief organizations active during the Vietnam War, an NGO sector did not emerge in Vietnam until the early 1990s. Normalization of relations with the United States in 1994 stimulated an influx of foreign NGOs and overseas development assistance funds, which in turn stimulated further demand for Vietnamese domestic NGOs and local partners (Norlund, 2007). Many of these domestic NGOs were reinvented government organizations, who had lost state funding with the *đổi mới* reforms, or thinly disguised consulting operations for well-connected senior and retired government officials (Gray, 1999). From almost none in 1990, Norlund (2007) identified 1,320 domestic NGOs active by 2000 and at least 550 foreign NGOs by 2006. Together, they commanded some US\$ 216 million worth of development projects (Norlund 2007, p. 77).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, NGOs became a focal point for an international development community seeking an alternative to state-led development programs. However, closer examination has shown that NGOs in Vietnam are also closely monitored and controlled by state organizations. Like media organizations, all NGOs in Vietnam must be registered under a government organization. Domestic NGOs much register under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and at least one line Ministry and foreign NGOs must register under the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kerkvliet et al., 2008). Furthermore, a lengthy and complicated “permission-granting” regime together with a vague and sometimes arbitrary regulatory environment help to keep NGO activities in check (Kerkvliet et al., 2008).³⁴

As a result, NGO activities tend to remain “within the letter of the law” (Thayer, 2009b, p. 7). Even those engaged with policy advocacy have tended to work “in direct support of existing government programmes” or “larger state-approved policy goals” (Thayer, 2009b, p. 7). An informant to Kerkvliet et al (2008) euphorically summed up this situation by describing NGOs as “working shoulder-to-shoulder with the state for the good of the people” (18).³⁵

³⁴ Kerkvliet et al. (2008) cite one informant as describing the context of permissible activities of NGOs in Vietnam as “people can do whatever is *not prohibited* by the law rather than what the law allows them to do” (p. 13, emphasis added), testifying to the ambiguities in the legal context. Another said that “It also helps . . . if the organization’s activities do not meddle with government directly” (p. 13) and yet another advised “don’t directly oppose their [i.e., government] interests” (p. 13), translating for “interests” a Vietnamese word (i.e., *lợi ích*) that also means “benefits” or “remunerations.”

³⁵ This situation has led some observers to suggest that NGOs in Vietnam are little more than extensions of the state. They focus on delivering services that the state is unable to provide to populations it is unable to reach (Hayton, 2010; Thayer, 2009; Gray, 1999). Other informants of Kerkvliet et al. (2008) described the state as a big ship and NGOs as the smaller boats needed to pass through every canal or as the state being a sphere inside the cube of Vietnamese society, for which NGOs were needed to reach its corners. In

Kerkveliet et al. (2008) summarize that the general picture that emerges from studies on NGOs and other civil society organizations is that “the impact is modest at the national level—especially regarding policy-making, channeling citizens' views, and holding authorities accountable” and impacts at the sub-national level are based “not so much on policy [changes] but on conveying local residents [sic] concerns, providing services, and monitoring authorities' behaviour” (no page). Interestingly, Kerkveliet et al. (2008) also note that the CSO that has most influence on national policy are “usually mass organizations, not other types” (no page). In contrast, Wells-Dang (2011) has argued that NGOs that know how to play the system can find enough wiggle room within the vague regulatory environment to engage in “path-breaking advocacy,” as indeed CODE had done. However, he also concedes that, even in his case studies, such campaigns are more often the exception than the rule and rarely do they lead to more enduring advocacy networks or social movements.

Even though NGOs have often been portrayed as the main form or representatives of “civil society” in Vietnam, it is unclear whom exactly they represent. In addition to their program beneficiaries, NGO activities are guided by the shifting priorities of international development agendas, their own organizational guidelines, and, not least of all, the state organizations that regulates them. All of these factors often limit their capacity to react to emerging situations from the ground up, especially where they involve sensitive or controversial issues for state authorities. For these reasons, CODE was the exception and not the rule in the bauxite mining controversy. However, without CODE, that controversy may never have happened at all.

Artist-intellectuals

The artist-intellectuals made a decisive intervention on the bauxite mining controversy with their petition of April 2009. Other artist-intellectuals had been involved earlier in the debates, most notably writer Nguyễn Ngọc, but their petition helped to forge diverse discourses on bauxite mining into a more common opposition to the party-state. As with the scientists and technocrats, these artist-intellectuals were a minority among their colleagues, but they also brought to these debates a history of state repression and isolation that heightened the stakes of their common opposition.

By artist-intellectuals, I mean to refer to artists and scholars in the arts and the humanities. I use this term to distinguish them partly from the scientists and technocrats and partly from the more general term of “intellectual.” The Vietnamese term for “intellectual” (*trí thức*) has a complicated historical usage in Vietnam, which is both too general for my more specific purposes here and so important to the evolution of the bauxite mining debates that I save it for another part of my analysis in Chapter 4. In that chapter, I will argue that the Vietnamese intellectual emerged as a newly articulated and reconsolidated identity in the bauxite mining controversy. For the moment, however, I want to focus on this more specifically defined group of artist-intellectuals.

Artist-intellectuals are as old as Vietnamese civilization, at least in its dynastic form. During the colonial period, it was also more possible for a Vietnamese citizen to make a living as an artist-intellectual (e.g., artist, writer, cultural or literary commentator)

each of these metaphors, NGOs are depicted as complementary to the state, distinguished by their division of labor but identical in their ideology and goals.

and it did not necessarily require a high level of formal education. In the mid-1940s, artist-intellectuals were actively recruited to Ho Chi Minh's anti-colonial movement to promote and propagandize the revolutionary cause (Marr, 1981; Ninh, 2002). However, artist-intellectuals increasingly came into conflict with state officials as the Vietnamese communists increasingly consolidate power. While they agreed on the objective of an independent Vietnam, they argued over who should be the moral and intellectual leaders of the new nation (Ninh, 2002). According to Ninh (2002), the balance of power tipping decidedly in favour of state officials in 1948. From this point forward, state officials began developing an array of state organizations to guide and manage the artist-intellectuals. Among them was the Ministry of Culture of Culture, established in 1955. The array of professional organizations, such as the Writers' Association, also became a powerful means by which state authorities could monitor, censor and, where necessary, punish artistic and intellectual expression.

From the 1950s forwards, artists-intellectuals found themselves having to choose between serving as a mouthpiece for the party-state or continuing to assert their artistic and intellectual independence, sometimes at great personal and professional risk. Most chose the former, though they did not resign themselves without incident. As recounted above, two of the most significant domestic confrontations with the party-state prior to *đổi mới* counted on the leadership of artist-intellectuals, namely the Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm Affair of the late 1950s and the Anti-Party Affair of the 1960s.

Today, many artists-intellectuals continue to agitate against the party-state today, both from inside and outside of Vietnam. In the late 1990s, Robert Templer (1999) has argued that art and literature were among "the few ways that Vietnamese persons can challenge the state's versions of history, of morality and identity" (p. 203). However, many have also paid a high price for these challenges. Most of them venture not too far from the party line, at least in a public context.

Like the scientists and technocrats, the artist-intellectuals that spoke out against bauxite mining were also only a few dozen in number, but their voices resonated with a wide public because of their contributions to Vietnamese history and culture. Furthermore, the history of repression against artist-intellectuals under Vietnamese communism also add a new and more oppositional dimension to the public discussion on bauxite mining.

Retired High-Level State Officials

When revolutionary general, Võ Nguyên Giáp, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in January of 2009 to protest bauxite mining, it raised the national controversy to a new level. From this forward, it was no longer simply an environmental, social or even economic problem, but rather a complicated problem of national security made worse by the presence of Chinese interests. However, General Giáp was not the only former high-level state official to speak out against bauxite mining. Former Vice-President Nguyễn Thị Bình also exchanged letters with the Prime Minister's office on bauxite mining in late 2008, though it was more private exchange. After General Giáp, Major General Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh wrote an open letter to the Politburo and led another petition against bauxite mining and Lieutenant General, Đồng Sĩ Nguyên, who worked under General Giáp in building the Ho Chi Minh Trail, also made critical public

statements against bauxite mining. Even if in numbers these retired high-level officials were small, their impacts were large.³⁶

As Zachary Abuza (2001) has written about Vietnam, “Most of the dissent comes from an unlikely source: within the party’s own ranks” (p. 1). Although Abuza was writing more than a decade ago, it remains true that party officials, especially high level ones, have been among the most important and illuminating sources of dissent against the party-state. They have expressed their dissent through letters, articles, petitions, interviews and memoirs, which have also generated some of the most revealing glimpses of high-level internal politics in Vietnam (Abuza, 2001; Thayer, 2003). A group of high-ranking southern veterans also formed the Club of Freedom Resistance Fighters in the late 1980s, as discussed above.

Their criticisms often begin as loyal to the Vietnamese Communist Party and reformist in spirit. They generally seek to save the Party rather than to bring it to its demise. However, on-going frustration or other reasons have turned some of them to become more radical in their views and more public in expression of them. This has led some of them to become exiled, excommunicated from the Party and treated by state authorities as dissidents.

High level state officials are important not only for the content of their own statements, but also for the support and protection they may provide to other critics of the party-state. For example, General Tran Do offered personal backing to Tran Dan in the Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm Affair and, again, to Nguyễn Ngọc to publish the *đổi mới* writers in the Vietnamese Communist Party’s arts and literature magazine *Văn Nghệ* in the late 1980s. General Giáp was said to have played a similar role in the bauxite mining debates.

In the bauxite mining controversy, only a handful of former high level state officials intervened on the public discussion, partly because they themselves are only a small elite as in any other society. However, their interventions were among the most important ones. General Giáp, in particular, raised the public discussion on bauxite mining to a new level and gave a protective cue to a wide range of other Vietnamese groups who then spoke up about bauxite mining after him.

³⁶ I distinguish here the critical and dissenting voices of retired party leaders and state officials from the problem of internal factionalism among active state leaders today. For example, Vuving (2010) argues that three members of the Politburo quietly supported the anti-bauxite coalition as part of Trương Tấn Sang’s bid to replace either Nguyễn Tấn Dũng or Nông Đức Mạnh in a top party leadership position. Vuving further argues that the support of these Politburo members enabled the public debate on bauxite mining to take place. While elements of this argument may indeed be true (for which I had no access to sources that could verify this information one way or another), these officials never came out publicly with their positions on bauxite mining. Indeed, Trương Tấn Sang signed the Politburo’s “conclusion” that confirmed the party-state’s support for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands. For these reasons, I do not include them as parts of the anti-bauxite coalition.

Activist Bloggers

After the Prime Minister's injunction on the domestic press, the Internet became the main public forum for pursuing the bauxite mining debates. This was partly a sign of the times, as a new age of blogging and electronic communications had only recently dawned on Vietnam, but behind these new technologies were many activist bloggers that mobilized them to their cause. They sought out alternative sources of information, provided critical commentaries, circulating texts, and established new websites to protest bauxite mining. The *Bauxite Vietnam* website that emerged in April 2009 as a new hub for the public debate was a product of these trends.

Internet became publicly available in Vietnam for the first time in 1997 (Surborg, 2009). After a slow first few years, usage grew rapidly from an estimated 1.8 million in 2003 to 19 million only five years later (or from little more than 3,000 subscribers in 1998 to 5.6 million in 2008) (Surborg, 2009, Table 1). Today, an estimated 30.8 million persons or 34% of the national population use the Internet in Vietnam.³⁷ The majority of them are reported to access the Internet from public places, such as the more than 4000 cyber cafes in Hanoi alone (Cullum, 2010). However, Surborg (2009) has also shown that usage is clustered in urban areas and biased towards the wealthier ones.

Blogging began to become popular in Vietnam around 2005, notably when Yahoo! launched its Yahoo! 360° domain. This domain hosted some two million blog sites inside Vietnam up until this service canceled internationally in 2008 (Crispin, 2012).³⁸ One prominent Vietnamese blogger described this period as the “boom years” of Vietnamese blogging, during which also emerged several controversial blog sites from inside Vietnam because of their sensitive social and political content (Đoan Trang, 2012).³⁹ Although Vietnam's community of bloggers became more dispersed after Yahoo! 360°, they have continued to thrive on other popular domains, such as Wordpress, Blogger, Multiply and Weblog.

Blogging and online media in Vietnam have emerged as a crucial alternative to the domestic press, or what has also been referred to as “citizen journalism.”⁴⁰ However,

³⁷ Source: Internetworldstats.com/asia/vn.htm, retrieved October 22, 2012.

³⁸ Yahoo! cancelled this service globally and it has denied claims that it was under any pressure from the Vietnamese government to do so. Furthermore, in response to the service's popularity in Vietnam, Yahoo! created and still maintains Yahoo! 360° Plus Vietnam, which is a host domain for blogs in Vietnam. However, it is not as popular among Vietnamese users, partly because it does not connect them directly to a wider web of bloggers around the world. Crispin (2012) referred to the canceling of Yahoo! 360 in Vietnam as “fragmenting what had been a cohesive and insulated online community” (no page), presumably because they operated on the same blogging host. However, he does not elaborate on how they operated or even saw themselves as an “online community.”

³⁹ Đoàn Trang (2010) gives examples of Vàng Anh (whose philosophy for blogging was “sex, politics and thrillers”), Người Buôn Gió (Wind Trader) and Anh Ba Sàm (by a former public security officer).

⁴⁰ Citizen journalism refers to the activities of those persons who seek an audience to inform and communicate about current events and situations, hold an “independent” voice from mainstream media, and be both users and producers of content, which undergoes a certain “collective filtering” through on-going commentary and discussions

An Duc Nguyen (Undated) has argued, “the most pronounced contribution of citizen journalism in Vietnam so far is not grassroots reporting but rather its capacity to bolster critical discussions on public affairs among different groups of the public, especially the young” (p. 4). Nguyen adds that citizen journalism and blogging have also enabled Vietnamese inside Vietnam to (re)connect with large communities of Vietnamese outside Vietnam. As he writes, blogging has become “the first authentic shared space between the domestic population and the more than three million-strong homeland-dedicated Vietnamese communities around the world” (p. 5).

Many websites and blogs operated by Vietnamese overseas have also emerged as important sources of information and critical commentary for Vietnamese inside Vietnam. The ones with sensitive social and political content are usually firewalled from within Vietnam, though firewalls are also easily navigable with proxy servers. Examples of some of the more popular ones include *Talawas*, a website on Vietnamese literature founded by *đổi mới* writer Phạm Thị Hoài while exiled in Germany; *Diễn Đàn* co-founded by Nguyễn Ngọc Giao in France; and Viet-Studies.

Vietnamese language versions of certain international news and radio agencies are also important for providing outside perspective on news inside Vietnam. Among the most important ones are Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio France Internationale (RFI) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), each of which had also provided such services to the Vietnamese population by radio broadcast in previous decades.

The party-state has increasingly tried to gain control over online discussions in the same way it does for the domestic press, but this is a difficult and complicated task. The main strategies have been to erect firewalls, pose as ordinary users—popularly known as “red guards”—to criticize and harass targeted bloggers (Crispin, 2012); and deploy “botnets” into software applications that to monitor user activity or coordinate Denial of Service (DNS) attacks on targeted websites (Cullum, 2010). However, to date, the use of these controls has appeared highly uneven and arbitrary.

When all else fails, state authorities have also resorted to harassing, detaining and imprisoning “cyber dissidents” (Thayer, 2003).⁴¹ According to Freedom House (2011), “Vietnam now imprisons the second-largest number of bloggers in the world, with at least 16 behind bars by year’s end” (no page). The Committee to Protect Journalists classifies Vietnam as among the ten worst countries for blogging (Crispin, 2012) and

(Katz and Chih-Hui Lai, 2009). Certain journalists and reporters in Vietnam also use blogging to report and comment on news and events in ways that are not possible in their day jobs, though they may do so at the risk of losing their job or facing other punishment (Crispin, 2012). While information is less standardized and may not be always verifiable, blogging and citizen journalism provide more opportunities for direct and immediate interaction with a wide range of different persons and groups, especially on social and political issues, than any other means currently available inside Vietnam (Nguyen, 2010; Katz and Chih-Hui Lai, 2009).

⁴¹ Among the first “cyber dissidents” identified by the state were were Nguyễn Khắc Toàn, Lê Chí Quang, Bùi Minh Quốc, Trần Khuê, Phạm Hồng Sơn and Nguyễn Vũ Bình (Thayer, 2003). For more information on individual bloggers arrested and imprisoned since 2002 see Cullum (2012), Crispin (2012), Vuving (2010), Surborg (2008) and Thayer (2003).

Reporters Without Borders lists Vietnam as an “enemy of the Internet” (as cited in Cullum, 2010). While some have argued that the party-state has relaxed control measures in recent years (Nguyen, 2010, p.6), testing of online censorship has revealed that the “technical sophistication, breadth, and effectiveness of Vietnam’s filtering [of the Internet] are increasing with time, and are augmented by an ever-expanding set of legal regulations and prohibitions that govern on-line activity.” (OpenNet Initiative, Undated, p. 3).⁴²

The result has been a blogging environment that is dominated by self-censorship, anonymity and fear (Katz & Lai, 2009; Nguyen, Undated). This helps to keep bloggers unknown to one another and isolated from broader society. As one Vietnamese blogger suggested, “It’s hard to know the line because even the Communist Party doesn’t seem to know what it’s doing . . . We don’t know how to protect ourselves. It’s a big fear that prevents us from raising our voices” (as cited in Crispin, 2012, no page).⁴³ Even so, the growing importance of blogging and online media to political discussions in Vietnam cannot be denied, as shown in the bauxite mining debates. Like the domestic press, bloggers and online media played a critical role in providing a voice to opponents of bauxite mining and circulating commentary and information widely.

Government Officials and the National Assembly

Online media operated by overseas Vietnamese also helped to bring out other groups relevant to the bauxite mining debates. Among them were government officials. As the public debate picked up online in February 2009, Radio Free Asia interviewed two delegates of the National Assembly. They spoke warily about bauxite mining, but just the fact that they had spoken to a foreign media agency that was firewalled inside Vietnam on a topic that was banned from the domestic press appeared significant. It may have been only a sign of things to come, however. When the National Assembly convened its bi-annual meeting in May and June of 2009, a handful of Assembly delegates made bauxite the center of an explosive discussion, including one who accused the government of “evading the law” (Lê Nhung, 2009f, May 26).

⁴² Surborg (2008) describes the ambiguous situation as one of “flexible control,” whereby the government “selectively enforces some rules more stringently than others and monitors political information more closely than other types of Internet use” (Surborg 2009, p. 237). Surborg (2008) argues that “control is exercised in a highly flexible manner, allowing for some officially unwanted or illegal activity to occur. At the same time, authorities can apply Internet regulations, if it serves their political objectives” (p. 344). This “flexible” approach may not always be entirely intentional, but it also enables state authorities, as with the domestic press, to mobilize certain blogging communities when and as desired, while being able to crackdown on others. As Surborg (2008) argues more specifically, Internet controls in Vietnam are set up to enable capital flows for the “emerging property owning class” (p. 238) but restrict political information.

⁴³ Even Nguyen (2010) concludes somewhat pessimistically that because the Vietnamese language blogosphere remains “substantially controlled, although indirectly, by the state . . . it would not be easy for citizen journalism to make any major impact beyond a relatively small community of technically savvy and socio-politically active Vietnamese users” (p. 8).

The National Assembly is, in theory, “highest representative organ of the people and the highest organ of State power of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” (1992 Constitution, Art. 83). It is the only legal body with constitutional and legislative powers in Vietnam. Its delegates also elect the nation’s top leaders, namely the President, Prime Minister, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Head of the Supreme People’s Procuracy of Vietnam (Hayton, 2010, p. 94). The National Assembly is also the only popularly elected body of the government at the national level, even though the Vietnamese Communist Party plays a significant role in guiding and intervening upon those elections (Malesky & Schuler, 2009).

The National Assembly’s five hundred seats are designated for representatives from Vietnam’s sixty-three provinces and municipalities, as well as on behalf of certain population groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, youth, veterans, certain religious groups and so on. However, the hierarchical structure of the Assembly and the Vietnamese Communist Party’s prominent role in nominating and electing delegates limits the degree to which the Assembly accurately represents other interests (Malesky and Schuler, 2009).⁴⁴ As Hoàng Minh Chính made the point in 1996, only about 2 million of Vietnam’s 75 million people are party members, while 93 to 97 percent of Assembly delegates are party members (Abuza, 2001, p. 97).

For most of its history, the National Assembly has been a “rubber stamp” to the directives of the government. However, since the *đổi mới* reforms, it has become more assertive and critical in its role of selecting and overseeing government.⁴⁵ The amended Constitution of 1992 further enhanced the law-making and legislative powers of the National Assembly. The election law of April 1997 further allowed independent or self-nominated candidates in the National Assembly and expanded the scope of delegates’ activities (Abuza, 2001). Nonetheless, independent candidates still normally make up less than five percent of elected delegates. The large majority of National Assembly

⁴⁴ The National Assembly is headed by an 18 member Standing Committee (NASC), which has powers to independently pass resolutions, organize elections and set the agenda of the National Assembly. These members are usually among the highest ranked persons in the Vietnamese Communist Party and government. The fact that new members are nominated by previous ones helps to ensure that this particular composition does not change much. The National Assembly then has about ten committees, though this number can vary with each new election of delegates. The number of committees has increased in recent years thanks to efforts by recent Chairman Nguyễn Văn An, who had aimed to have as many Assembly committees as government departments. Each committee is comprised of one chair, three to five deputy chairs and thirty to forty members. However, these committees are “for all intents and purposes” run by the chairs themselves (Malesky and Schuler, 2008, p. 10).

⁴⁵ For example, in the late 1980s, the National Assembly pro-actively criticized—with some prodding then from General Secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh—the government’s management of the macro-economy, high inflation rates and famine relief efforts, while also organizing extra sessions to discuss amendments on the Constitution (Abuza, 2001, 97). In June 1988, an unprecedented 168/464 (36%) delegates voted against the Vietnamese Communist Party’s preferred candidate for Prime Minister, Đỗ Mười, in favour of Võ Văn Kiệt (Abuza, 2001, p. 97).

delegates also work part-time only and they are typically constrained by lack of information and experience, including on the laws and policies for which they are called on to vote (Malesky and Schuler, 2009).⁴⁶ Delegates are also able to question government officials openly in a public context, which, since the late 2000s, has also been televised.

If the National Assembly is emerging as an important critical voice in Vietnamese politics in recent years, this is largely due to the bravery of a handful of delegates. However, their voices carry much weight as the only elected representatives of the nation, even if only in theory. In the bauxite mining debates, National Assembly delegates and a few other government officials played an important role in generating support for opposition to bauxite mining from within the government itself.

Religious Leaders

Despite an extensive public discussion, the bauxite mining controversy generated only one sizable public demonstration. That was a candlelight vigil held by some 1,000 Catholics in the Thai Ha parish of Hanoi in April of 2009. It had been organized by the Redemptorist Priest Fr. Peter Nguyễn Văn Khải. Other religious leaders also spoke out against bauxite mining. Thích Quảng Độ, leader of the outlawed United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), made a call for civil disobedience to protest bauxite mining in March 2009. Joseph Lê Quang Uy, a Redemptorist Priest in Ho Chi Minh City, created an online petition against bauxite mining for Catholics in April 2009. And the Archbishop of Saigon, Cardinal Jean Baptiste Phạm Minh Mẫn, wrote a pastoral letter to condemn government plans for bauxite mining and called on Catholics to protect the natural environment as a “Christian’s duty.” The intervention of religious leaders was a sure sign the bauxite mining controversy was becoming a hot political issue. Their capacity to mobilize millions of believers presented a new kind of threat to the party-state in the bauxite mining controversy.

Official sources in Vietnam indicate that less than twenty percent of the Vietnamese population belongs to a major world religion (General Statistics Office Of Vietnam, n.d.). Buddhists comprise 9.3% of the national population, Catholics comprise 6.7% and other religions comprise another 3%. However, other sources suggest that 50% or more of the national population is Buddhist alone (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2006). Even so, these minor percentages still translate into 8.5 million Buddhists and over 6 million Catholics. They are still large numbers, especially when compared to the 3.6 million members of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Protestantism is the fastest growing religion in Vietnam, especially among highland ethnic minorities (Abuza, 2001; Anonymous, 2006). The mass demonstrations that took place among

⁴⁶ In 2007, only 140 of 493 delegates were employed full-time. Part-time delegates go to Hanoi only two times per year for the Assembly’s bi-annual meeting. Furthermore, the turnover rate among delegates is very high, at least 70%, which impedes delegates from accumulating experience. The Assembly also has no independent research team, while the government has an extensive network of research institutes and budget for research (Malesky and Schuler, 2008).

indigenous ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004 were reported to comprise up to 70% of Evangelical Protestants (Anonymous, 2006)⁴⁷.

Historical relations between the Vietnamese communists and religious groups can largely be described as opportunist or conflictive. As Robert Templer (1999) has described, the communists courted alliances among religious groups against the French from 1945 to 1954; stepped up repression of religion after 1954 in the north, especially on Catholics, while also courting their alliances against the Republic of Vietnam in the south; and then rounded up these same leaders and sent them to “re-education” camps after military victory in 1975. Following the Vietnam War, the general policy of the party-state towards religious groups has aimed at preventing any of them from presenting a serious challenge to its authority. As Templer has further suggested, “Party policy is to disconnect priests from their parishioners and to prevent the church from acting as an organised force outside the control of the Fatherland Front” (pp. 270-271).

The Catholics and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam have been two of the most oppositional groups against the Vietnamese communists from since before the Vietnam War. Because of their real and alleged links to the French colonial regime and their flight from North Vietnam after the Geneva Accords, Catholics have long been targets of state suspicion and oppression.⁴⁸ In 1955, the government established the

⁴⁷ The Vietnamese government estimated these incidents to have included several thousands protestors, while human rights organizations and other observers suggested that they were in the range of 20,000 or 30,000 (Anonymous 2006). Ethno-nationalist groups were also known to be involved in the demonstrations, though it is unclear exactly to what extent (Anonymous 2006, 2002). One was the Unified Front for the Struggle of the Oppressed Races (FULRO, after the French *Front Unifié de la Lutte des Races Opprimées*). FULRO was established during the Vietnam War as secessionist organization representing Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, Mnong and Stieng ethnic groups in Vietnam and Cambodia, resulting from a merger among three other organizations, including Bajaraka headed by a French-educated Rhade civil servant in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government declared FULRO defunct in 1992.

⁴⁸ The first Catholics to Vietnam were Portuguese missionaries arriving in the beginning of the 16th century. Their presence increased with the growing presence of the French in the region starting from the 17th century and became more fortified under French colonialism from the late 19th until the mid-20th centuries. Throughout their history in Vietnamese territories, Catholics have suffered persecution at the hands of the state and another hostile forces, which has included massacres, torture and ostracism at the hands of the Nguyễn Emperors and again from anti-colonial crusaders during the colonial period (Templer, 1998). Templer (1998) cites some gory examples, such as the French missionary who was captured and tortured by Emperor Minh Mạng for taking part in a local rebellion in 1830; Catholic communities that Emperor Thiệu Trị ordered to be branded on the face as “infidels” and foreign priests who had been drowned or sawn in half lengthwise (such incidences provided the pretext for French invasion in 1863); rebel Trương Định was known for his massacres of Christians from 1859 to 1864; and the Scholars’ Uprising reportedly killed 4,500 Catholics in one month alone and cut the noses and feet off of survivors. Catholic communities were also allegedly targeted for public denunciations and executions during the Land Reform of 1956 to 1958. Catholics led

Vietnam Committee of Catholic Solidarity (*Ủy ban Đoàn kết Công giáo Việt Nam*) under the control of the Vietnam Fatherland Front. However, many Catholic leaders refused to shift their ultimate allegiance from the Vatican, which has resulted in a schism within the Vietnamese Catholic community that endures unto this day.

The Vietnamese government enacted policies in the late 1980s that appeared to loosen up its grip on religious organizations, including an agreement reached with the Vietnam Council of Bishops to allow both the Vatican and the Party to veto church appointments and activities (Hayton, 2010). However, mass protests and demonstrations among Catholics against expropriated properties and denial of religious rights continue and have possibly increased in recent years (Thayer, 2010)⁴⁹. Certain Catholic priests have also led the struggle for religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam.⁵⁰

The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam was originally established in 1964 as an umbrella organization for eleven of the fourteen Buddhist churches that then existed in South Vietnam (Abuza 2001, p. 191).⁵¹ UBCV monks became famous for their protests against the Vietnam War and religious intolerance under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime by

one of the first well-known mass demonstrations against the party-state in the Catholic District of Quynh Luu in Nghe An Province in 1956 (Templer, 1998).

⁴⁹ Church authorities allege that the state has expropriated 2,250 properties from the Catholic Church since 1954 (Thayer, 2010). Other important ones occurred in the southern province of Dong Nai in 1997 and 1998 over confiscated properties; in a village of another southern province, Ba Ria – Vung Tau, when a northern immigrant refused to follow a court order to return property to the Catholic Church, and in two areas of Hanoi in 2008 over land claims dating back to the 1950s (Wells-Dang, 2010; Hayton, 2010).

⁵⁰ In particular, Father Nguyen Van Ly in Hue has been a vocal spokesperson. Since 1975, he has spent 15 years in jail and most of the rest of his time under house arrest. In 2006, Father Nguyen Van Ly together with two other Catholic priests from Hue and another from Ho Chi Minh City drafted an appeal for freedom of speech, entitled *We are No Longer Afraid. We Ought to Know the Truth*. This document condemned the Vietnamese Communist Party for “Poisoning and suppressing the conscience of the people, turning them into masses of obedient servants” (as cited in Hayton, 2010, p. 115) and called on members of the party and armed forces to desert while other parties should assert themselves, in an unmasked appeal to democratic pluralism. Father Nguyen Van Ly also penned one of the founding documents for the political organization Bloc 8406. He is also advisor to the Vietnam Progression Party, which advocates for multi-party democracy and religious freedom (Thayer, 2009), as discussed below under “Dissidents and political organizations.”

⁵¹ Activities of the UBCV include both religious and social welfare works, including the establishment and operations of various hospitals, orphanages and elementary schools throughout southern Vietnam. The monks of the UBCV had become internationally famous for their protests of the Vietnam War and religious intolerance under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime by self-immolation. The UBCV unified shortly after the assassination of Ngô Đình Diệm in 1963 and the brief moment of increased religious tolerance that ensued in its wake (Abuza, 2001, p. 191). However, after this brief reprise, the Church has continued to face harassment and repression by the state by both the US-backed southern regime and the northern communists.

self-immolation. Following harsh crackdowns in 1979 and 1980, the party-state tried to unify all Buddhist organizations under the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in 1981. According to one government official, “the aim was to split monks and nuns from the laity by organising a church that would be in charge of Buddhist ritual and worship but would not have any social role” (Templer, 1998, p. 279). However, the UBCV refused to join the organization and has continued to exist as an unofficially banned organization.

UBCV supporters have carried out many public protests and mass demonstrations, such as in response to the expropriation of a Church-run orphanage in 1977, expropriation of An Quang Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City in 1982, over the party’s attempt to control the funeral rites of Supreme Patriarch and to join farmer protests over land expropriation in Ho Chi Minh City in 2007 (Abuza, 2001, pp. 192–193; WSJ, 2007, August 15). The UBCV also allied itself with Bloc 8406 (see below) in October 2006 to create the Vietnam Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights.

As American journalist Robert Templer (1999) once wrote, “The [Vietnamese Communist] Party is haunted by a past when religions ran private armies, amassed vast properties and commanded extraordinary loyalty. It still remembers the religious role in the fight against colonialism and later the symbolic power of self-immolating monks and the way those appalling suicides galvanised opposition to the south Vietnamese government of Ngô Đình Diệm” (p. 282). However, at the same time, the party-state has also developed a more complicated approach to religious groups based on state corporatism. As British journalist Bill Hayton has written, “By distinguishing ‘good’ Buddhists and Catholics from ‘bad’ ones and substituting itself for the landlord class in village spirit ceremonies, the Party is trying to create a ‘post-political’ position for itself. If all goes to its plan religion will become a way of demonstrating loyalty to the state and to the elite now in charge of the state” (p. 224). However, agitation by religious leaders during the bauxite mining controversy was a prickly reminder of these deeper smouldering conflicts.

Political Activists and Organizations

Among those that spoke out against bauxite mining were some of Vietnam’s most prominent and outspoken “dissidents,” speaking from across the country and around the world. Among them were Hanoi mathematician Phan Đình Diệu, internal exiles poet Bùi Minh Quốc and biologist Nguyễn Xuân Tụ (pen name Hà Sĩ Phu) in Dalat City, human rights lawyer Lê Công Định and blogger Người Buôn Gió (“wind trader”) in Ho Chi Minh City; and, outside the country, exiled *đổi mới* writer Dương Thu Hương, and former Deputy Editor of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s daily *Nhân Dân*, Bùi Tín. Important “dissident” organizations also spoke out against bauxite mining, notably Bloc 8406 and the US-based Vietnam Reform Party (Việt Tân). While the oppositional voices of Vietnam’s “dissidents” tend to lurk on the margins of public debate, with the bauxite mining controversy they joined the mainstream.

As can be seen from even this brief list, the political activist is a cross-cutting category that counts on representatives from nearly all of the groups discussed so far. However, what they share in common is that their activism has led them into an oppositional stance with state authorities. At times, this is because they have explicitly called for the end of communism or they have simply called for changes that the state authorities deemed as harmful to their authority. For these reasons, they are often referred

to as “dissidents.” I describe them here as “political activists,” following Thayer’s (2009b) denomination of “political organizations,” to emphasize their activism on a range of social and political causes rather than their particular confrontation with the party-state.

By the tenets of democratic centralism, internal criticism among party members is acceptable. However, when these criticisms go public or persist after a collective decision has been taken within the upper echelons of state leadership, they become dissent. As Templer (1999) has colourfully described, “[s]tatements that might have been tolerated within the close confines of the super-family of the Party became criminal acts when spoken outside” (p. 114). For those who are not privy to these internal discussions in the first place, their social or political activism is perceived as dissidence when it challenge state authorities on known taboo or “sensitive” topics. Hence, those groups or individuals that become labeled as “dissidents” can be of any type.⁵²

However, political activism is often an individual endeavour, not least of all because of the party-state’s iron-fist determination to disperse and isolate their opponents. However, this trend may be changing, especially with the emergence of an increasing number of what Thayer (2009b) has called “political organizations.” These are organizations operating from both inside and outside of Vietnam, largely dedicated to matters of democracy, human rights protection, religious freedoms and the livelihood rights of farmers and workers.⁵³ Thayer has argued that “Due to increasing networking

⁵² Religious groups have always been eyed suspiciously by the party because of their capacities to mobilize masses of the faithful and, in the case of Catholicism, former affiliations with the colonial state (Marr, 1981). Artists and intellectuals have also been in the forefront of challenging state authority in different period (Ninh, 2002). For similar reasons, journalists and publishers have also been caught up in on-going confrontations with state authority and, more recently, blogging has opened up a new terrain for challenging state relations. More recently, struggles among workers, farmers and ethnic minorities has also led them to form “political” organizations to fight for their civic and moral rights (Thayer, 2009). They are seen as dissident by the state precisely because they have chosen to act outside of the hub and spokes model of state corporatism.

⁵³ They include such organizations as the People’s Democratic Party of Vietnam, founded by a Vietnamese-American in California with “like-minded Vietnamese in Vietnam” (Thayer, 2009b, p. 11); the Vietnam Populist Party, founded in Houston, Texas, by a group of Vietnamese exiles and later connecting with Vietnamese in Vietnam; the Free Journalists Association of Vietnam, which was established by overseas Vietnamese working together with an “underground network of bloggers and dissident journalists inside Vietnam” (p. 12); and Việt Tân (shortened for *Việt Nam Canh Tân Cách Mạng Đảng*), formed in 1980 by former Republic of Vietnam Navy Admiral Hoang Co Minh, which initially promoted armed struggle to overthrow the communist regime but since 2004 avows for peaceful transition (even so, it has been officially labeled by the state as a “terrorist organization”). On occasion, these organizations have attempted with varying degrees of success to organize protests and campaigns in Vietnam. However, more often their support is less direct, such as by providing international media attention, logistical support and small funds for computers, cell phones and SIM cards (Thayer, 2009b).

between politically active civil society groups[,] cross-fertilization is taking place and a nascent movement has gradually taken shape despite state repression” (Thayer, 2009b, p. 2), for which he presents Bloc 8406 as a primary example.

In the bauxite mining debates, a wide cross-section of political activists and organizations also joined in on the public critique. Their dissenting voices and histories of fragmentation, isolation and repression at the hands of the party-state helped bring out the more oppositional elements of the bauxite mining debates. Meanwhile, the bauxite mining debates also provided them with a new platform upon which they could publicize their own grievances against the party-state.

Overseas Vietnamese

One of the salient features of the Petition of the 135 Signatures was that nearly half of the signatures were from Vietnamese living overseas. Prior to this, several overseas Vietnamese individuals and organizations had helped advance the public discussion on the Internet. Following from the Petition, groups of Vietnamese from all over the world engaged in different activities to protest bauxite mining, including a Facebook campaign organized by young Vietnamese from all over the world, an online petition by the Oregon-based NGO Viet Ecology Foundation, a workshop held at Berkeley, California, and a public demonstration in San Francisco. These initiatives gave an international dimension to the bauxite mining controversy while remaining entirely Vietnamese.

Overseas Vietnamese (Việt Kiều) is a difficult group to categorize. The label glosses over a tremendously diverse and geographically spread group of persons. It also cross-cuts with nearly every other category discussed above. However, I maintain it as a category to recognize the many Vietnamese people outside of Vietnam that continue to be actively involved in the social and political life of Vietnam, as they were in the bauxite mining controversy.

As of 2010, well over three million Vietnamese persons are living outside of Vietnam (Valverde, 2013). However, they are mostly concentrated in the United States, especially in California and Texas. More than one and a half million overseas Vietnamese live in the United States. This is largely due to the special relations of the United States with refugee communities emerging from Vietnam after the Vietnam War. Large concentrations of more than 150,000 persons also currently live in Europe (especially France and Germany), Canada and Australia, while even larger ones live in the neighboring countries of Laos, Cambodia and Taiwan.

Emigration of the South Vietnamese emerged in three main waves after the Vietnam War ended in 1975. The first wave came simultaneously with the collapse of South Vietnam, who have been dubbed as the '75ers. They arrived as refugees and asylum-seekers fearing retribution from the communist state. The next wave came in sporadic bursts from the late 1970s up until the early 1980s. They also fled hardship and persecution under the new communist regime. They represent what is now stereotypically described as the “boat people.” The third wave came under the auspices of the United Nation’s Orderly Departure Program (ODP), which was established in 1979 out of concern for the “thousands . . . dying at sea during their escape” and to better regulate incoming flows (Valverde, 2013, p. 9). The ODP admitted 450,000 Vietnamese

persons into the United States alone between 1979 and 1994, when it was formally concluded.

These three different waves also produced different socio-economic characteristics of emigrants. Participants in the first wave tended to be of a higher social and economic standing, including high-ranking soldiers and professionals. They were the ones who had connections and resources to escape at the last minute from South Vietnam. Emigrants from the second and third waves came from a wider diversity of backgrounds, including a greater number of poor and unskilled labourers. Following these three initial waves, especially after the *đổi mới* reforms, Vietnamese began emigrating for a wider range of reasons.⁵⁴

According to Caroline Valverde (2013), the most salient and divisive feature among these three waves of overseas Vietnamese that endures unto this day is the continued prevalence of anti-communist sentiment and ideology (Trinh Vô, 2003; Valverde, 2013). As Valverde (2013) has noted, many of the 75ers left Vietnam with the hope that they would be able to return as soon as the country was taken back from the communists. This never happened, but the hopes and sentiment attached to that possibility persist. Some formed organizations that advocated explicitly for overthrowing the Vietnamese communists. One of the most renown ones is the Vietnam Reform Party (or Việt Tân, as abbreviated from Việt Nam Canh Tân Cách Mạng), which the Vietnamese government has labeled as a “terrorist organization.”

Việt Tân was initially established by two southern military commanders as the National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (NUFLVN) (Valverde, 2013; Thayer 2009). The NUFLVN sought to retake Vietnam by force and had begun training soldiers in the border areas of Thailand. However, as these ambitions became progressively unlikely, the NUFLVN changed its name to Việt Tân and moderated its goals for peaceful transition to democracy in Vietnam.

More commonly, however, individuals and organizations among communities of overseas Vietnamese have advocated for multi-party democracy, civic and human rights and protection of religious freedoms. Many, who have had academic and professional success abroad, have also maintained close connections with Vietnamese politicians and policy-makers as another way to influence state policy. Others have helped establish development projects and programs of all kinds in collaboration with state organizations in Vietnam. Still others continue to invest their energies in newsletters, radio stations and online media to generate more critical commentary on the social and political life of Vietnam. More recently, blogging and establishing websites dedicated to Vietnamese arts, literature, sciences and society have also been a forum for maintaining discussions on Vietnamese politics.

Scholars continue to debate what role overseas Vietnamese communities can play in transforming Vietnam’s domestic politics. Scholars ranging from Abuza (2001) to Wells-Dang (2011) have argued that it is little. In contrast, Thayer (2009b) has suggested that they serve important functions in providing technical and financial support to under-resourced political activists inside Vietnam. They can also help bring a higher profile to

⁵⁴ These three waves, however, also do not account for large communities of emigrants to Laos, Cambodia and Taiwan, or those who went to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe under programs sponsored by the Vietnamese government.

their causes through online and other media. In the bauxite mining controversy, overseas Vietnamese played a very important role. They helped to advance the public debate when it was banned in the domestic press and their coming together with Vietnamese inside the country on the petition of April 2009 was one of the petition's most salient and remarked upon features.

Some Conspicuous Absences

In addition to the groups that played an important role in the bauxite mining controversy, I also want to mention a few conspicuous absences. I call their absence "conspicuous" because of either their proximity to the issues involved (e.g., environmental NGOs, ethnic minorities) or because they are groups that have been important forces of social and political movements elsewhere (e.g., workers, students).

International NGOs and environmental organizations

Perhaps one of the most surprising absences in the bauxite mining debates was that of international NGO and environmental organizations. Several major environmental organizations have been operating in Vietnam for more than a decade, including the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). However, none of them made public statements against bauxite mining, even when the Vietnamese NGO CODE had solicited at least one of them to take part in these activities. CODE had also appealed to certain international NGOs to take part in the Dak Nong workshop, but they were also unable to attend (Interview 018.1, Interview 023). Foreign embassies and other donors of overseas development assistance in Vietnam also remained largely aloof from these debates, apart from the gentle urging of a handful of diplomats in June 2009 (see Chapter 5).

The reasons for the absence of NGOs in the bauxite mining controversy are discussed above. They are even more relevant for international ones, who usually work under the auspices of the Vietnamese government. Furthermore, many of the larger organizations are also directed by their own organizational priorities and committed to particular geographic areas, which further limits their capacity to respond more spontaneously to issues like bauxite mining (Interview 022, Interview 053). This does not deny the important work these organizations might be doing in Vietnam, but it puts in evidence their limited capacity to be more politically active in Vietnam.

Ethnic minorities and local communities

Arguably the more important absence in the public discussion on bauxite mining were the voices of those ethnic minority groups and local communities directly affected by government plans. This is significant given that ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands have been very vocal about their needs and concerns previously. The largest known mass demonstrations against the government and local corruption in recent years emerged among indigenous minority groups in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004. According to official reports, some 5,500 protesters descended upon the Central Highlands provincial capitals of Pleiku (Gia Lai) and Buon Ma Thuat (Dak Lak) in 2004. Other organizations have estimated that there were as many 20,000 protesters in 2001 and 30,000 in 2004 (Anonymous, 2006). As mentioned above, most of them were

Evangelical Protestants and some of them included members of the former ethno-nationalist secessionist group FULRO.⁵⁵ Official reports also documented two deaths among protesters, while Human Rights Watch reported ten deaths and two hundred injuries (Anonymous, 2006).

The reasons for the absence of ethnic minority and local communities in the bauxite mining debates is complex. One reason is likely that they lack the resources and socio-political connections to do so. Government also blocked initiatives to involve them more directly, as in the regional workshop of October 2008. Nonetheless, their absence is significant. Rather, their voices were indirectly represented by both state officials and the opponents of bauxite mining. While both sides may argue over who represented their interests more accurately, it remains true that their views were only ever indirectly represented without even yet considering the more complicated issue of recognizing differences and conflicting views within those communities themselves.

Workers and farmers

According to Party rhetoric, two of the most important political forces in the nation are workers and farmers. Indeed, the Vietnamese communists' rise to power was largely carried out in their names. However, as such, workers and farmers have also been an important source of contention to the now ruling Communist Party.

This is especially true where conflict has revolved around land, especially agricultural land. As journalist Bill Hayton (2010) has written, "Land disputes continue to be the hottest political issue in Vietnam, far more corrosive to the legitimacy of the Communist Party than calls for multi-party democracy" (p. 41). Land disputes have also occasioned a steady flow of community appeals and public protests directed at local and national government offices. A former Deputy Head of the National Land Administration estimated that around 15,000 land disputes occurred nationwide in early 2007, including "the vast majority of officially registered complaints – around 10,000 – came from the seizure of land for development and arguments over compensation" (Hayton, 2010, p. 42). Groups of demonstrators can frequently be seen traveling to Hanoi and camping out on the lawns outside the offices of the National Assembly and the government to protest land disputes.⁵⁶

However, protests around land are rarely known to have erupted into larger conflicts or form broader alliances with other sectors of the Vietnamese population. One exception occurred in Ho Chi Minh City in August 2007, when hundreds of farmers from

⁵⁵ FULRO is a secessionist organization ostensibly representing Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, Koho, Mnong and Stieng upland minority groups in Vietnam and Cambodia that was established during the Vietnam War. However, it emerged partly from a precursor organization in Vietnam headed by a French-educated Rhade civil servant. The Vietnamese government declared it defunct in 1992.

⁵⁶ For example, Wells-Dang (2010) relates anecdotally that "In 2007–8, several dozen such demonstrations occupied the pavement and sometimes blocked streets in front of the Hanoi city government, National Assembly offices, and the Ministry of Justice. Numbers ranged from about 30 to several hundred people, and demonstrations lasted an average of two or three days, with participants sleeping on site. Police, both uniformed and plain-clothes, were always present, but usually at a distance" (p. 100).

seven southern provinces occupied a major downtown street for twenty-seven days (Wells-Dang, 2010). They were publicly endorsed by the leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thích Quảng Độ, and the Việt Tân Party, who also posted information about them on Internet and radio. The *Wall Street Journal* opined, “This marks the first convergence of basic land protests and the human-rights movement. It may be a sign that some aggrieved peasants are starting to view their complaints as connected to the more abstract principles of freedom and democracy” (WSJ, 2007, August 15).⁵⁷

Worker strikes have also become increasingly prevalent in recent years, though they are often limited to particular firms and settings. From 1998 and 2005, government sources report some 50,000 worker strikes to have occurred (Kerkvliet, 2010b). Kerkvliet (2010b) describes them as poorly organized and appearing to “erupt spontaneously” (p. 176). They are also almost all illegal, though both the companies and the state have generally avoided pursuing legal action against them. Companies seem to prefer to respond with modest concessions, while the state authorities may target “ring leaders” with more repressive measures. Kerkvliet also notes that these workers strikers almost never join up with one another or effect “sympathy protests” among other workers sympathetic to the strikers’ cause, in notable contrast to the worker strikes that occurred in anti-communist South Vietnam. Also in contrast to this earlier history, today’s striking workers rarely connect their complaints and grievances to broader social and political issues.

In the bauxite mining controversy, some persons signed the petition of April 2000 as “farmers” (*nông dân*) or “workers” (*công dân*), but that was the extent of their intervention in the bauxite mining debates. This is indicative of their political isolation under the party-state.

Students and youth

The student movements that have spurred democratic mobilization in other parts of Southeast Asia, China and communist Europe have been almost completely absent in Vietnam. However, there is some evidence of growing youth and student activism in Vietnam. In December 2007, massive street protests were held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to protest Chinese plans to establish an administrative capital (i.e., Sansha City) for the Spratly and Paracel islands. As Nguyen (2010) described them, “for the first time in more than three decades, hundreds of young Vietnamese – most of them university students – poured into and marched through the major streets of Hanoi and HCMC” (p. 4). Other protests occurred in April 2008 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to protest Beijing’s Olympic Torch Relay, as had happened elsewhere around the world. These protests were also organized and carried out primarily by Vietnamese youth and students (Đoan Trang, 2012).

Blogging and the Internet is also a way for more young people to become more involved in the political discussions in Vietnam, as discussed above. Coming together

⁵⁷ In contrast, Wells-Dang (2010) suggests that the role of the UBCV and other organizations, including the domestic press, was more opportunistic and for self-promotion. Both accounts are anecdotal, however.

online is always a new way of associating that can lead to other actions. For example, both the protests discussed above were coordinated through online communications.

However, apart from a few dozen high school students that signed the online petition of April 2009 and one student who wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister to protest bauxite mining (Nguyễn Tuấn Anh, 2009, March 9), students were largely absent from the bauxite mining controversy.

The groups I have discussed in this sub-section all had reasons to participate in the bauxite mining debates, but who did not or did so only marginally. Apart from the international organizations and NGOs discussed at the outset, what is common among them is their lack of political resources and leadership acting on behalf of their collective, despite their massive bases in the population.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, I described the formation of the anti-bauxite coalition like the spontaneous rising up of a Polanyian double movement. In doing so, they created—or began to create—what Michael Burawoy (2003) has referred to as an “active society,” which is his term for describing how reconstitutes itself as an active political force. It is also distinct from conventional notions of “civil society” by drawing attention to the more contingent formation of an active society through sets of cross-sectoral alliances, rather than as a sector of society automatically assumed to be politically active or guaranteed to exist by the presence of “civil society” institutions.

Far from the “chronic quiescence” with which Dan Slater (Slater, 2009) has described Vietnamese society, the anti-bauxite coalition showed signs of an active society. As I have argued in this chapter, the political force and historical significance of this coalition owes much to its socially heterogeneous and geographically expansive composition and character. In comparison, the *Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm* Affair of the 1950s, the Anti-Party Affair of the 1960s, the movements surrounding the *đổi mới* writers and the Club of Freedom Resistance Fighters in the late 1980s, and even the more recent Bloc 8406 coalition and Reunification Park campaign comprised four or five different groups at best and more often only two or three.

In this chapter, I have identified ten key groups, whose made a major contribution to the bauxite mining controversy. They were scientists and technocrats, domestic reporters, non-governmental organizations (NGO), artist-intellectuals, retired high-level officials, activist bloggers, government officials, religious organizations, political activists and organizations, and overseas Vietnamese communities. Sometimes they broke fences with their own group identity to do so, but even in this way their participation was symbolically significant.

The anti-bauxite coalition brought together groups that were historically fragmented and political isolated under the party-state. One key line of difference was between those groups that have traditionally been more loyalist to the regime and those who have been more daring in their opposition and dissidence. That these diverse groups and individuals were able to suspend their differences to form a common opposition to a major policy of the party-state was remarkable. While it may be objected that some of these groups were simply opportunists, using the bauxite mining debates only to bring attention to their own particular grievances with the party-state, this point should not

detract from the fact of their coming together nonetheless or the basis they created for further activities of this networks and its different parts.

The anti-bauxite coalition was also more geographically expansive than any of the other domestic confrontations mentioned above. In particular, it counted on a sizable portion of representatives from northern and southern regions of Vietnam and from both inside and outside of the country. These geographic divisions are important not only for their extensive coverage, but probably even more so because they span socio-geographic divisions enduring in the legacy of the Vietnam War. This chapter has been able to show this geographic coverage in only a general way. However, a more detailed picture will emerge in subsequent chapters as I focus more on the individual members of these different groups.

In recognizing these important differences, key similarities should also not be forgotten. One of the most prominent ones was that these groups by and large represented a mainstream elite in Vietnamese society. Where they were not elite, they at least came from an urban middle class. This makes the conspicuous absence of ethnic minorities, farmers and workers all that more pronounced. However, the purpose of this chapter has not been to argue how representative, democratic or just was the composition of the anti-bauxite coalition, but more simply to recognize its social heterogeneity and geographic expansiveness. Another key similarity was that these groups and their members were almost all, if not all, Vietnamese. To the degree that the anti-bauxite coalition had a transnational element, it was with Vietnamese living outside of Vietnam. This further emphasizes the degree to which the bauxite mining controversy addressed problems of national and historic importance. Over the next three chapters, I provide a chronicle of this controversy.

Chapter 3

Emergence and Evolution of the Bauxite Mining Controversy: the Power and Limits of Embedded Advocacy

The origins of the Vietnamese bauxite mining controversy are not well known. This is not without reason. Early efforts to organize a public discussion around bauxite mining were kept deliberately discreet and low profile. They reflected an advocacy approach that Peter Ho and Richard Edmonds (2008) have described as “embedded advocacy.” Embedded advocacy refers to the typically informal, low profile, and non-confrontational approach with state authorities that has characterized successful examples of social and environmental activism in China recently. It is “embedded” because it does not seek to challenge or oppose but rather remains embedded within the political structures of the “semi-authoritarian” state. Andrew Wells-Dang (2011, July) has argued convincingly that embedded advocacy has also been used effectively by civil society organizations and networks in Vietnam, especially when used in combination with media communications and community advocacy strategies.

However, a recognized limitation of this approach is that it becomes less effective at the national level or on issues deemed “sensitive” by state authorities (Lu Yiyi, 2007). While embedded advocacy may be successful in championing particular issues or cases at sub-national levels, it is hard pressed to bring about more transformative changes in the broader political system precisely because it is, by definition, embedded within that system itself. Rather, argues David Schwartz (2004), embedded advocacy operates in a “political space” that is more “conferred” by the state than “captured” by civil society. It reflects a political calculus of the party-state, which can be effective in generating certain kinds of influence with state authorities but is also limited in important ways.

The emergence and evolution of the bauxite mining controversy showed both the power and limits of embedded advocacy. Early discussions on bauxite mining began with one domestic NGO and a small network of Vietnamese scientists. They initially approached local government discreetly and in a collaborative manner and then carried on discussions in this way for more than a year before bauxite mining exploded into a national controversy. They also emphasized a “scientific” approach and focused on “environmental” issues. This provided them with what Elizabeth Economy (2010) has described as a protective “shield” from accusations of opposing the party-state.

However, as more and more different kinds of people became involved in these discussions and a wider range of issues were brought into the conversation, these discussions began to overflow the political calculus of embedded advocacy. The revolutionary icon, General Võ Nguyên Giáp, helped break through these confines by publicly drawing attention to one issue that many people had already been aware of but had not dared to speak out about yet. It was the involvement of Chinese worker and capital in mining Vietnam’s bauxite.

The China issue exploded on the Internet. Discussions now included artist-intellectuals, government officials, bloggers, religious leaders, political dissidents and overseas Vietnamese, as well as more scientists and technocrats, reporters and journalists, and retired political and military leaders. Furthermore, their tone became increasingly direct, accusatory and confrontational. Indeed, they seemed to have become disembedded from the norms of political discussion inside the Vietnamese party-state. At the same time, the government became increasingly busy trying to regain control of this increasingly volatile public discussion, which it did by organizing its own “Scientific Workshop” and reducing a complex set of issues into a discussion about management, technology and “environmental” problems.

In this chapter, I provide an account of the emergence and evolution of the bauxite mining controversy from May 2007 to April 2009. This is not the full course of the controversy, which I cover over the next two chapters. However, it covers the segment from the public murmurings of discontent about bauxite mining until at least one representative from each group in the anti-bauxite coalition had publicly intervened on the public discussion. This period of the controversy shows how embedded advocacy was effective in beginning a public discussion on an issue of national importance. However, it also shows how the controversy overflowed the political calculus of embedded advocacy, as more and more people became involved and they addressed the party-state in increasingly confrontational ways.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the organizing efforts of one domestic NGO and its small network of scientists, who, together with the domestic media, helped to launch a public discussion on bauxite mining from mid-2007 to the end of 2008. Their efforts strongly reflected a strategy of embedded advocacy. The second section focuses on the period beginning from General Giáp’s letter to the Prime Minister in January 2009 and continuing through the next three months, as the public discussion on bauxite mining became increasingly disembedded from its “scientific” and “environmental” confines. The final section examines the “Scientific Workshop” organized by the government as an attempt to re-embed these discussions within the strictures of the Vietnamese political system.

This chapter also highlights the diverse processes that enabled these many and diverse groups to join in on the public discussion over bauxite mining. They included publishing articles in the press, organizing seminars and workshops, signing a petition, writing letters, giving interviews, posting blogs, and, in one case, calling for a general strike. Taken together, they combined processes that were “traditional” and “modern” (e.g. letter writing vs. online petition), formal and informal (e.g., workshops vs. networking), and collaborative and confrontational ones (e.g., government workshops vs. call for a boycott). This chapter also introduces some of the key persons, who drove the bauxite mining debates.

Embedded Advocacy: the Quiet Smouldering of an Explosive Debate

Early warnings of an “internal critic”: government scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn

While a public debate on mining bauxite in the Central Highlands may not have emerged until 2008, the Vietnamese government had been discussing such ideas since at least the 1970s. As General Giáp indicated in his letter to the Prime Minister, the Soviet-

led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) had already assessed a Vietnamese government proposal to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands in the 1980s, although it finally opted against bauxite mining because of “long-term and very serious ecological consequences” (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009a, January 5).

One person who had worked with COMECON at the time was government mineralogist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn. Like many scientists of his generation, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn benefitted from Soviet-sponsored educational programs to earn a university degree in mining engineering in the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Upon his return to Vietnam, he was employed at the Ministry of Coal from 1977 to 1982 and then delegated to the COMECON Secretariat from 1982 to 1986. During this time, he participated on a Joint Committee with COMECON to assess the potential for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands, while also earning his PhD from the Moscow Mining University.

In 1989, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn had written an article for the Ministry of Energy’s *Energy Magazine*, of which he was then Editor-in-Chief, which gave an economic rationale against mining bauxite. However, that was about the extent of a public debate on bauxite mining at that time. Rather, as Nguyễn Thanh Sơn later wrote, the government’s proposals for bauxite mining appeared to disappear for “twenty years of lying in ambush” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008b, October 24) before they resurfaced again in the early 2000s.

Since 1994, after working for eight years at the Ministries of Energy and Agriculture, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn was employed as a senior manager at the state-owned Vietnam Mining and Coal Cooperation (Vinacomin), where he is currently the Director of one of its subsidiaries, the Red River Energy Company. This is where Nguyễn Thanh Sơn first got whiff of renewed government interest in bauxite mining in the early 2000s. Internally, he tried to dissuade his superiors from these plans, but his intentions were quickly frustrated.

A new path for Nguyễn Thanh Sơn’s concerns opened up in May 2007, when a reporter from the *Saigon Economic Times* approached him to discuss the government’s recent approvals for a bauxite-alumina factory in Lam Dong Province. This article, which also included comments from another government scientist, Nguyễn Khắc Vinh⁵⁸, then Director of the Office for Environmental Impact Assessment, warned of the “irreversible consequences” of mining bauxite in the Central Highlands (Tấn Đức, 2007, May 17).

Both scientists spoke about the extensive environmental consequences of bauxite mining and they were especially critical of the government’s process for Environmental Impact Assessment. As Nguyễn Khắc Vinh attested, “I can confirm that 100% of environmental impact assessment reports in Vietnam are of low quality . . . Those data usually say little about anything” (Tấn Đức, 2007, May 17). Nguyễn Thanh Sơn wrote his own follow up article, which was published in the *Saigon Economic Times* two weeks later. It also revisited the economic arguments made in his earlier 1989 article, while also adding a new section on “environmental pollution” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2007, p. 13, May 31).

⁵⁸ The name attributed to the interviewee in this article is Nguyễn Khắc Kinh. However, this is likely an erratum.

As provocative as these criticisms of bauxite mining were to become, both scientists felt firmly within their rights and responsibilities to give out their expert opinion on an important policy issue. For Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, he was just repeating what he had already done in 1989. Their seniority as government officials and respected scientists perhaps enabled them to be more outspoken than usual, but they did not expect these articles to trigger a major political debate at this time.

Challenging the policy monologue: CODE organizes a "policy dialogue"

Even so, both articles may have passed quickly into oblivion—environmental degradation and government inefficiency are hardly news in Vietnam—had they not been espied by staff at a newly formed NGO, named Consultancy on Development (CODE). CODE, together with Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, then organized a small network of scientists, who approached local government about developing a “policy dialogue” on bauxite mining.

CODE was officially established on May 7th, 2007, only ten days prior to the first article in the *Saigon Economic Times*. CODE was founded by Trần Thị Lanh, who is a well-known firebrand in the Vietnamese NGO community, and a Dutch counterpart, under the 2003 Law on Science and Technology.⁵⁹ CODE proposed to do something that they felt was still largely lacking in Vietnam, which was a more authentic “policy dialogue.” While other NGOs do advocate on policy issues in Vietnam, they usually do so in a way that supports or advances policy directions already established by the government and Vietnamese Communist Party, as has also been suggested by academic literature on NGOs in Vietnam (Gray, 1999; Thayer, 2009a). In fact, it was more of a policy monologue.

At the time it was first established, CODE comprised only half a dozen of mostly young Vietnamese staff, US\$ 200,000 in seed funding from a Dutch NGO, and the top two floors of a shared office space in one of those tall narrow Hanoi city houses with an editor of the *Saigon Economic Times*, Nguyễn Cao Thượng. With the stacks of newspapers and magazines that typically clutter an editor’s office, CODE staff began flipping through them in search of a first issue on which to focus their attention. They looked for something that was both a national policy and directly affected ethnic minorities. That is when they happened upon those two articles in the *Saigon Economic Times* on bauxite mining.

CODE’s next step was to contact scientists and experts with more expertise on bauxite mining, beginning with Nguyễn Thanh Sơn. Through Nguyễn Cao Thượng, CODE contacted Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and he, showing great interest in CODE’s initiative, introduced them to other scientists and experts. After meeting and speaking with this small group of experts, CODE then organized a field trip to the Central Highlands to hold meetings with the Dak Nong provincial government, where the next and largest bauxite mining project was being planned by Vinacomin. CODE approached local government

⁵⁹ Trần Thị Lanh established one of the first post-*đổi mới* NGOs in Vietnam in the early 1990s called Towards Ethnic Woman (TEW). Through a series of organizational changes and mergers, TEW has since transformed into the Social Policy and Ecological Research Institute (SPERI), of which Trần Thị Lanh is the current Director.

with an idea of holding a more “scientific” discussion on bauxite mining and so they agreed to co-organize a small seminar in Dak Nong Province in December 2007.

This seminar comprised a couple dozen members from local government and a handful of scientists coordinated by CODE. These scientists included Nguyễn Thanh Sơn; Vũ Văn Mạnh, professor of Technology at the Hanoi Polytechnic University, who presented on mining technologies; Hồ Sỹ Giao, Director of the Planning for Mining Institute, and Lê Văn Khoa, lecturer in the Environmental Department at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi, who both presented on environmental impacts; and Hoang Hiệu Cải, instructor at the Ho Chi Minh City Agriculture and Forestry University, who presented on land rehabilitation. CODE’s Director, Phạm Quang Tú, also presented on local social impacts.

These scientists were not only experts in their fields, but also persons with public reputations and authority. For example, Lê Văn Khoa is widely known for directing many government commissions on natural resources and the environment since the 1980s. The government has recognized him as a Distinguished Educator (*Nhà giáo Ưu tú*) and awarded him with the National Environment Award, three medals of service for Science and Technology, Education and Labour, and the Medal for Resistance against the Americans (“Giáo sư Tiên sĩ Lê Văn Khoa,” n.d.). Hồ Sĩ Giao is reputed as one of Vietnam’s top experts on open face mining. The government has also recognized him as a Distinguished Educator and awarded him with medals of service for Science and Technology and Education and the Medal for Resistances against America (“PGS. TS. Hồ Sĩ Giao,” n.d.).

This seminar was also a closed-door affair. No representatives of the public or press were present and neither were any documents or reports from the seminar made public. However, the scientists must have made a good impression because the Dak Nong government then agreed to organize a larger regional workshop. They agreed that Dak Nong government would invite government representatives, at all levels, while CODE would invite the scientists and experts. They also agreed to invite Vinacomin as co-host to the workshop.

During this same month, December 2007, urban protestors were carrying out demonstrations in the streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to protest Chinese aggression in the Eastern Sea. Farmers from seven different provinces also converged on Ho Chi Minh City to protest local land expropriation and corruption. Members of the democracy activist group Bloc 8406 and Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Độ, leader of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, publicly supported these farmers, in a rare show of cross-sectoral solidarity in Vietnam. One month earlier, General Giáp had also just penned a letter to save the old National Assembly building from demolition. One daring newspaper, *Đại Đoàn Kết*, even ignored a government instruction and published this letter, though its editor-in-chief and deputy were fired one year later (Hayton, 2010, p. 84). However, at this point in time, all of these actors and events were almost completely disconnected from one another. The discussions that ensued on bauxite mining would start to bring them closer together.

“The Central Highlands will die... because of bauxite mining”: the Dak Nong Workshop

The regional workshop in Dak Nong launched the public debate on bauxite mining. Workshops are celebrated events in Vietnam, as flipping through the pages of

the Vietnamese Communist Party's daily *Nhân Dân* and other Vietnamese newspapers will quickly reveal. They create for the party-state impressions of edifice, organization, working together and modernization. One of the essential preparations to the workshop is the highly ornate signboard that invariably states the workshop's title, place and date and is hung as backdrop to the speakers' table. Another equally essential detail is the "group photo," which is taken in front of this signboard with workshop participants to commemorate their participation, at least up until the first coffee break.

Such attention to display and formality may not always make for the most engaging discussion. However, workshop organizers also have this problem covered by an elaborate system of what can be for some generous "travel allowances." These are usually circulated around the first coffee break or lunch, after which attendance tends to plummet. Indeed, several participants at the regional workshop in Dak Nong tried to impress on me the particularity and intensity of this workshop by noting that nearly all participants had stayed for the whole two days until the very end.

Any workshop of importance—or, at least, to be perceived as one—requires a government co-host, as CODE had proposed with the Dak Nong government and later Vinacomin. However, this also enables government representatives to monitor and control the workshop in subtle ways. It generally allows them a veto power over workshop participants and agenda. It also typically involves them in chairing workshop sessions, where they can monitor and mediate discussion. Individual representative may perform these duties with different degrees of ardour, but just their presence at the speaker's table reminds the audience of the presence of state authorities.

The regional workshop in Dak Nong was finally scheduled for October 22 and 23, 2008. It was a large event with more than 160 persons attending.⁶⁰ The invitation list included seventy-five representatives from central and provincial government, thirty researchers and scientists, twenty representatives from industry, and twenty reporters from the domestic press. Notably absent, however, were representatives from affected local communities and ethnic minority groups. CODE had suggested them to local government, but was denied because they were deemed to be already represented by government officials.

In addition to the scientists and experts from the earlier seminar, CODE had also invited such notable figures as Phạm Duy Hiền, former director of the Dalat Nuclear Institute; Đặng Trung Thuận, President of the Vietnam Association of Geology and Chemistry (who, like Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, had also worked with the COMECON Secretariat on bauxite mining in the mid-1980s); Phùng Chí Sỹ, Vice-Director of the Ho Chi Minh City Institute for Tropical Technology and Environmental Protection; Trần Đình Thiên, former Director of the Vietnam Economic Institute; Vũ Ngọc Hoàng, Vice-

⁶⁰ One article reported in attendance at the workshop "scientists of economics, culture, society, environment and mining technology based in universities and research institutes; representatives from Central managing organizations from the Central [Vietnamese Communist] Party Office, Ministry of Environment [and Natural Resources], Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Industry and Trade; leaders of the Party, government and branch organizations of the Central Highlands provinces. Moreover, the workshop also drew the special concern of more than 20 reporters from Local and Central press and television organizations" (Thieu Tâm, 2008, October 27).

Director of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Office of Propaganda; and Nguyễn Ngọc Anh, Vice-Director of the Institute for Irrigation Planning in the Southern Region, among several other professors from universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. There was also a group of six researchers from the Central Highlands University, commissioned by CODE to conduct a study on the local social and economic impacts of bauxite mining specifically for this workshop.

The agenda for the workshop allowed for four half-day sessions on the following topics: (1) provide an overview of the plan for bauxite-alumina production in Vietnam; (2) assess the “positive and negative impacts” of these projects on the “economy, society and environment of the Central Highlands and the Southern Region”; (3) discuss strategies to reduce negative impacts; and (4) focus on integrating bauxite-alumina production into a “context for sustainable development” (*Tài liệu hội thảo khoa học Dak Nong*, 2008, pp. 183–184). Another item that CODE had wanted to include on the agenda was a discussion of Strategic Environmental Assessment, but was made to be content with a more general discussion on “sustainable development.” The purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment is to assess the cumulative social and environmental impacts of multiple development projects in a region, rather than the more limited thematic and areal coverage provided by Environmental Impact Assessment. However, Strategic Environmental Assessment could also be seen as a way to terminate the projects rather than just try to improve them.

The conference began with a pair of overview presentations by Vinacomin on the Decision 167 and the production technology for bauxite and alumina production. Vinacomin declared that its production model and technology would be “greener and environmentally friendly based on using bauxite resources sparingly, maximum reduction of industrial waste, and establishing balanced and responsible relations between industry and community” (Tập đoàn TKV, 2008, p. 14). It also affirmed that the planned projects would be in accordance with national targets for “clean industrialization,” based on principles of “greening the projects” and managing environmental pollution for a “green, clean and beautiful aluminium” (p. 14). In doing so, Vinacomin was showing that the “environment” was also a useful shield for presenting its interest and perspectives too.

Next followed the scientists, led by Nguyễn Thanh Sơn. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn criticized the government's plans and Vinacomin from top to bottom. He criticized their unfounded ambitions, excessive scope and scale, unmanageable risks, and other important problems that had not yet been considered (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008a). He also presented cost-benefit analyses comparing bauxite mining unfavourably to coffee, rubber and tea plantations, especially in terms of land use requirements, employment and revenues. Most memorably, he described Vinacomin's plans for storing hundreds of millions of tons of caustic “red mud” indefinitely in the Central Highlands like hanging a “mud bomb” over the entire southern region.

On the whole, scientists at the workshop presented a range of opinions, at least on a spectrum running from vehemently against to mildly supportive of bauxite mining. What was more constant about them was their highly technical language and oodles of quantitative data. To be sure, this reflected their own scientific backgrounds, but it also enabled them to speak about bauxite mining without appearing too personally or politically invested. Indeed, their personal opinions on bauxite mining were often difficult to deduce from these reports alone.

There was, however, one notable exception. This was writer Nguyễn Ngọc. Nguyễn Ngọc holds no PhD, nor does he have any formal scientific training. He is a writer, journalist, philanthropist and someone who has spent more than half a century in the Central Highlands (Nguyễn Ngọc, 2008). He first went to the Central Highlands as a high school student, where he was posted as a soldier and later as a military reporter during the first Indochinese War (1945-1954). Even today, Nguyễn Ngọc continues to frequent the Central Highlands regularly, which he himself describes as one of his three homes, together with Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Nguyễn Ngọc became famous for his fictional writing on the contributions of the indigenous populations in the Central Highlands. One of his famous characters is the Bana hero “Anh Núp,” who joined the Viet Minh to fight the returning French. However, later in his life, Nguyễn Ngọc also became an outspoken critic of the party-state. He was at the forefront of the controversy that emerged around the *đổi mới* writers in the late 1980s. Indeed, he was the main person publishing their work in the Vietnamese Communist Party’s *Arts and Literature (Văn Nghệ)* magazine, for which he was eventually removed from office. Since then he has continued to be an outspoken voice in the media and elsewhere on important cultural and educational issues in Vietnam.

Nguyễn Ngọc presented at the Đắc Nông Workshop on the “cultural and social impacts” of bauxite mining, notably for the M’Nong and other indigenous minorities located in the immediate vicinity of the projects (Nguyễn Ngọc, 2008). However, his report was rooted in a story of ethnic relations between the upland indigenous peoples and the ethnic Vietnamese in the lowlands. He spoke about how government programs and lowland immigration into the Central Highlands over past thirty years were implemented “as if there were no people [there], not knowing or caring at all about the most basic and essential features of that land and people” (p.94). He spoke about how this resulted in heavy deforestation and taking land from the indigenous people that has gravely affected their traditional livelihoods and social and spiritual communities. The bauxite mining projects were just the next step in this long and destructive history, except they they were larger and more destructive than ever before. They risked pushing the indigenous peoples to “react in an unfathomable manner” (p. 97), he argued, hinting at the ethno-nationalist secessionist movements that still smouldered since the Indochinese Wars.

Nguyễn Ngọc’s discourse on ethnic relations, the culture of the upland indigenous people, and the potential repercussions for Vietnam as a nation began expanding the discussion on bauxite mining beyond its more environmental framing and rigidly scientific language. His words gave new weight to Nguyễn Thanh Sơn’s warning of the “mud bomb,” as well as by others, such as Trần Đình Thiên, who warned about competition over freshwater sources causing “war . . . over the Central Highlands like has never happened before” (Trần Đình Thiên, 2008, October 24) and Đào Công Tiến, former Head of the National Economics University in Ho Chi Minh City, who feared that the Central Highlands would “die” because of bauxite mining (Nguyễn Triều, 2008, October 23). Such cultural and historical concerns expressed through the language of environmental risk and disaster are also what most captured the headlines of the domestic press.

Early Signs of a Disembedded Discourse: Responses to the Dak Nong Workshop

Responses in the domestic press

As mentioned above, some twenty domestic reporters and journalists were also invited to the Dak Nong Workshop. Their inclusion was also largely due to CODE. Their reporting on the workshop completely reversed dominant discourse in the domestic press on bauxite mining up until then.

Prior to this workshop, reporting on bauxite mining in the Central Highlands was typically brief and matter-of-fact. It was typically printed in the “business” or “economy” sections of the media and contained little commentary or analysis, let alone critique. These terse reports conveyed optimism and their statements were typically hyperbolic. The Lam Dong project was hailed as the “largest bauxite-alumina project in the country” (TTO [theo TP], 2003, September 11) and “the first of its kind in Vietnam” (VNS, 2006a, April 8). A representative of Alcoa was quoted for calling the bauxite deposits in Dak Nong province as “among the richest in the world” and stating that, if approved, “[t]he project would be the largest of its kind in Southeast Asia” (VNS, 2006b, September 2). Such statements were also presented with hyperbolic numbers on the millions of tons of bauxite to be mined or the millions of US dollars of foreign investment.

Bauxite mining was also represented in the press as a boon for local and national development. The chairman from Alcoa was quoted as stating, “thousands of local workers would be employed once the [bauxite-alumina] facility is fully operational” (VNS, 2006b, September 2). Even at a time when bauxite production in Vietnam was nearly non-existent, it was described as among the nation’s “most important industrial sectors” (Trần Thủy, 2006, January 12). In 2005, then Deputy Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng described the bauxite industry as “expected to help improve the region’s economic growth rate and create jobs for local rural employees” (VNS, 2005b, November 2). During a three-day visit to Dak Nong Province in September 2006, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nông Đức Mạnh, affirmed his strong belief that Dak Nong would become “a rich province” if it made “the best use of its natural resources, like land, forestry, *bauxite* and hydropower” (VNS, 2006c, September 14, emphasis added). These statements were backed further by provincial officials, such as the Deputy Director of Lam Dong’s Planning and Investment Department, who said, “We hope the [bauxite] project will create an economic zone in the region” and that “when the plant becomes operational, many firms producing aluminum-based products will move into the area” (VNS, 2007, November 20).⁶¹

⁶¹ Amid these general trends in the early reporting, a few murmurs of discontent were also present. For example, in a brief mention for an article on development strategies for the Central Highlands, policy analyst Nguyễn Trung wrote:

. . . soon [the development trend] will be bauxite ore in the Central Highlands . . . is this an optimal choice for a nation with a small territory and large population? [Is it optimal] to continue with economic projects that create so much environmental pollution that the media has to award [the companies] with the name “killer of the silent people” . . . [and] the nation is full of “dead” rivers and

Neither were these narratives limited to government officials and business reporters. An article published in the “Discovery” section of the *Tuổi Trẻ* newspaper, entitled “Wild Gia Nghia,” the provincial capital of Dak Nong, described the prospect of bauxite mining like a gold rush. After a romantic tribute to the “wild nature and beautiful people, this reporter suggested that once this province becomes an “alumina refining province, Gia Nghia will become even more valuable” (TTO [theo Văn Oanh], 2007, December 24). The reporter noted that the reserve in Dak Nong province is the largest in the country and the second largest in the world; that the ore exists in many places throughout the province; that experts from China, Australia and Holland had already come to explore it; and that China had proposed a \$1 billion investment (already five or six times the province’s gross domestic product) and would include a new rail line to the coastal region. The reporter also mentioned the proximity of bauxite mining to several tourist destinations, such as Dieu Thanh Waterfall, Dak Tik Bridge, Xuan Huong Lake and the Vietnamese mountain resort Dalat City. It was as if these natural and cultural assets would fit seamlessly together with bauxite mining.

All of this changed with media coverage of the Dak Nong Workshop. The press headlines coming out of this workshop were that “The Central Highlands will die because... of bauxite mining” (Nguyễn Triều, 2008, October 23). Others re-evoked Nguyễn Thanh Sơn’s image of the “mud bomb” by forewarning of an “environmental atomic bomb” (Trần Đức Tà, 2008, October 24) or “enormous bomb in the heart of Dak Nong” (Thanh Tùng, 2008, October 24). Reporters now emphasized scepticism and concern rather than optimism and anticipation. They introduced the government’s plans as having “Many problems, still no solutions” and admonishing that “We cannot trade away the future” (TTO, 2008, October 24). They also spoke of “Many disheartening problems” (Trần Ngọc Quyên, 2008, October 23), “The problems have been forewarned” (Hoàng Thiên Nga, 2008, October 24), “The benefits do not justify the harms” and the “Need to consider carefully” (Hoàng Thiên Nga, 2008, October 23; Thanh Thương, 2008, October 24).

Domestic online media also ran headlines of “The dream of escaping poverty with bauxite and its terrifying consequences” (Hoài Giang, 2008, October 26); “Many potential risks in bauxite mining” (Thanh Tùng, 2008a, October 24); and hesitated on “Should we or should we not?” while there were “Still too many [unanswered] questions!” (Nguyễn Danh Phương, 2008, October 28; Thiêu Tâm, 2008, October 27). It seems that only the VCP’s *People’s Daily* (*Nhân Dân*) maintained the party line, placing its emphasis on “Economic Benefits and Environmental Protection” (Thảo Lê, 2008, October 22). Even the *Vietnam News Agency*, which had previously extolled these projects, now forewarned, “Bauxite mining threatens the Central Highlands” (Tran Huu Hieu, 2008, October 25).

Rather than the typical hope and self-congratulation portrayed at government workshops, these reporters described the discussions that took place in Dak Nong like a “blazing explosion” (Trần Đức Tà, 2008, October 24) and “lightning” (Hoài Giang, 2008, October 26). One reporter described Nguyễn Thanh Sơn as showing “outrage [giận dữ]

cancer villages? . . . Do the late developing countries necessarily have to accept all of those things that the earlier developed countries are now rejecting? (Nguyễn Trung, 2008a, April 1).

when his warnings were not being accepted in a scientific spirit” and commented that many other participants also shared his frustrations (Trần Đức Tà, 2008, October 24). Another reporter betrayed the usual tenor of such workshops by writing “many ideas were discussed, *even opposing ones*” (Trần Ngọc Quyền, 2008, October 23, emphasis added). Reporters also noted, “the majority of the participants criticized the bauxite mining projects” (Hoàng Thiên Nga, 2008, October 23). Another wrote with a bit more nuance, “there was complete rejection of bauxite mining in this region, but also with feelings of regret about what would happen if the ‘natural resources were not exploited’” (Hoài Giang, 2008, October 26).

To have such sensationalist reporting in the Vietnamese domestic press is not so unusual. As described in the previous chapter, the party-state has elaborate measures to help ensure the reporters and media organizations keep away from notably “sensitive” topics. However, bauxite mining had clearly not made it on the black list yet, though this would change by the time of the government’s own “Scientific Workshop” in April 2009. What was most clear was that the enthusiasm over bauxite mining that had been previously propagated in the domestic press had now been turned on its head. Following from this workshop were a few other key initiatives that helped advance the public discussion further, notably by online newspaper *Tuần Việt Nam*, a Scientists’ Petition and the government’s own Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA).

The online newspaper Tuần Việt Nam and reader responses

In the five days immediately following the Dak Nong Workshop, the editorial branch of the online newspaper *VietnamNet*, *Tuần Việt Nam*, posted four editorial-style pieces by Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and one by Nguyễn Ngọc. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and Nguyễn Ngọc were two of the most vocal critics of bauxite mining at the Dak Nong Workshop. These pieces were around 8-10 pages each and they provided a clear opinion on and strong argumentation against bauxite mining. They were also a way for *Tuần Việt Nam* to publish critical opinions on bauxite mining while minimizing risk for their own reporters.

One of the most striking aspects of these pieces was their extensive lists of online reader responses. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn’s articles received a total of sixty comments, while Nguyễn Ngọc’s received thirty-four. Most of these comments were only a paragraph in length, though some were longer. What was perhaps most remarkable about them was their near unanimous opposition to bauxite mining (I could find only one in explicit disagreement). This first comment on Nguyễn Thanh Sơn’s first article is a typical example:

I also disagree with a project like this. Today environmental problems are urgent issues for nearly all countries around the world. Yet, here, a project that hardly has any economic or environmental benefit gets approved. This must be explained to the press and the public! (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008b, October 24, Reader comments)

Several comments thanked and praised the scientists for their role in speaking out about bauxite mining and contrasts it with the apparent lack of knowledge or concern displayed by state authorities, as does this one:

We are secretly happy deep-down inside to find such an honest and earnest person like Nguyễn Thanh Sơn. However, we are also deeply worried to find so few public officials that recognize this as a major problem. Securing our freedom and independence [from foreign aggression] was already difficult, but saving this country from reckless destruction is going to be ten times more difficult. (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008b, October 24, Reader Comments)

Here is also an excerpt from a rare local voice (though his name suggests that he is ethnic Vietnamese), Võ Đình Nhân:

As both a person and scientist that lives in the Central Highlands (Bảo Lộc – Lam Dong), we are very worried about [these projects]. Only the investors are getting any benefits, while we and our children will be forced to suffer the environmental consequences. (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2008c, October 25, Reader comments)

Although many commentators remained relatively anonymous, more than a third disclosed where they resided in Vietnam. They mostly came from the north (at a ratio of 2:1), including one quarter from Hanoi and another eight from Ho Chi Minh City (n=65). Ten also came from provinces in the Central Highlands, while others represented a smattering from provinces in all of Vietnam's seven main regions, including ten from Vietnam's Northwest and Northeast regions mostly in response to Nguyễn Ngọc's article. A couple also indicated their affiliation with governmental offices, such as the Legal Department of Sơn La Province (Northwest) and the Department of Planning and Investment of Thanh Hóa Province (North Central Coast).⁶²

While November is often busy with coverage on the National Assembly's bi-annual meeting in November, in early December *Tuần Việt Nam* attempted to push the public discussion on bauxite mining further. Starting with an article by policy analyst Nguyễn Trung, *Tuần Việt Nam* announced a new series on bauxite mining, as follows:

In the spirit of critical debate and diverse perspectives, *Tuần Việt Nam* will now begin posting a series of analyses and opinions by scientists and managers from many different angles in the hopes of supporting policy decision-makers to find the most appropriate way to approach bauxite mining for the sustainable development of the Central Highlands, a region that is important to Vietnam politically, culturally and for national security. (Nguyễn Trung, 2008c, December 2).

⁶² The online version of *Tuổi Trẻ* also published one article to give a sample of the reader comments that had been sent to the newspaper in response to its articles on the Dak Nong Workshop (TTO, 2008, October 24). Like the comments to *Tuần Việt Nam*, they also expressed a near unanimous disagreement with bauxite mining.

Once again scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and artist-intellectual Nguyễn Ngọc were main contributors. Nguyễn Trung also became a prominent critic of bauxite mining through a few articles he posted under this series.

Nguyễn Trung is a well-known policy analyst. He was a member of the former Prime Minister's Research Council, initially established under the late Võ Văn Kiệt (1922 – 2008) and later dissolved by current Prime Minister Nguyễn Tân Dũng. Nguyễn Trung was also a former Ambassador of Vietnam to Thailand. He had approached CODE on his own accord because of his interest in bauxite mining, one that likely dates back to his service in the Prime Minister's Research Council under Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải. Phan Văn Khải had proposed to ban the export of raw bauxite from Vietnam in 2005 (VNS, 2005a, October 13). His initial article for *Tuần Việt Nam* emphasized the ill-suitability of bauxite mining for a country with little land and high population.

Tuần Việt Nam's initiatives showed how even state-owned media seeks new ways to expand the bounds of public discussion on important policy. However, it also ran up against an old problem when the Prime Minister issued an injunction on the domestic press from reporting on bauxite mining in January 2009.

The Scientists' Petition

As *Tuần Việt Nam* organized its new editorial series, the scientists also organized their own follow-up activities to the Dak Nong Workshop. They met discreetly in outdoor restaurants and cafes and decided to send a petition on bauxite mining to the nation's top leaders. The first meeting took place in a café of the Hanoi Hotel. The café provided both a more discreet and relaxed environment for discussion. As Nguyễn Thanh Sơn described the occasion, "That morning, we drank coffee together and discussed the draft for a petition that we intended to send to the leaders of the Party, National Assembly and Government about bauxite in the Central Highlands" (Nguyễn Thành Sơn, 2009, July 28).

This meeting included many of the scientists and experts that had participated in the Dak Nong Workshop and some new ones. The most notable among them was the late Nguyễn Văn Chiên (1919 – 2009). At the age of 90, Nguyễn Văn Chiên was a highly respected figure in the Vietnamese scientific community. He was the former Director of the Vietnam Sciences Institute and Vietnam Federation of Geology and the government has honoured him with the Ho Chi Minh Medal for public service and as a "Teacher of the People" (*Nhà giáo nhân dân*), which is the highest award the government can confer upon an educator. He is also alleged to have first reported the Central Highlands bauxite deposits to the Vietnamese government, while he was Vice-Director of the first government-sponsored Central Highlands Research Program from 1976 to 1980.

A second meeting took place at a restaurant on Thuyen Quang Lake, near the centre of Hanoi. This time they met on the occasion of Nguyễn Văn Chiên's birthday. They used this occasion to discuss and finally agree upon the text of petition. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn recalled Nguyễn Văn Chiên at these meetings as having a "strong and inspiring voice" (*giọng bác mạch lạc, truyền cảm*) and "just eating and talking, remembering different occasions, and inquiring about his former students" (Nguyễn Thành Sơn, 2009, July 28). However, he also recalled Nguyễn Văn Chiên reminding

CODE's Director, Phạm Quang Tú, upon saying goodbye, "be sure to send it [i.e., petition] as soon as possible."

The petition was dated on November 5th, 2008. It included seventeen signatures, led by Nguyễn Văn Chiển. In addition to Đặng Trung Thuận, Lê Văn Khoa, Phạm Duy Hiền, Trần Đình Thiên, Nguyễn Ngọc, Nguyễn Trung, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, Nguyễn Cao Cương, Trần Thị Lành and Phạm Quang Tú, as discussed above, it also included Trần Nghi, Sediment Director of the Vietnam Geology Association and Distinguished Teacher of the People; Không Diển, former Director of the Ethnology Institute and the Academy of Social Sciences for the Central Region and Central Highlands; Hà Huy Thành, Director of the Institute of Research on Environment and Sustainable Development; Đoàn Văn Cảnh, Deputy Director of the Geology and Environment Research Center in the Mining and Geology University; Đào Trọng Hưng, ecologist at the Vietnam Institute of Science and Technology, and Đỗ Thị Vân, Head of Department for the Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA).

The text of the petition described the signatories as "scientists of many generations, from Research Institutes, Universities, Socio-professional organizations and as independent experts" ("Kiến nghị về chương trình," 2008, November 5), for which reason I refer to it shorthand as the "Scientists' Petition." The petition addressed the "highest leaders of the country, policy-makers and relevant authorities," namely Nông Đức Mạnh, General Secretary of the Communist Party; Nguyễn Minh Triết, President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV); Nguyễn Phú Trọng, President of the National Assembly; Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, Prime Minister of the SRV; Politburo member; Huỳnh Đám, President of the Vietnamese Community Party's Fatherland Front; and a general address to all relevant Ministers.⁶³

The text of the petition was hardly three pages. It reflected many of the points that had been raised at the Dak Nong Workshop. However, it also placed a new emphasis on the importance of the Central Highlands as a region, especially in regards to national security. Its preamble emphasized first that the Central Highlands occupies a "position of strategic importance" for national security and socio-economic development ("Kiến nghị về chương trình," 2008, November 5, p. 1). The next two points of the preamble highlight that the Central Highlands is an "ethnic region" and a "religious region," which are among two of the most volatile sources of socio-political conflict around the world and in history. However, the petition concludes with recommendations to conduct a Strategic Environmental Assessment, implementing the first two projects in Lam Dong and Dak Nong as "pilot projects," and also coordinate with bauxite and alumina projects in Laos and Cambodia.

⁶³ Trương Tấn Sang's name is the only one that seems possibly out of place in this list, since he does not hold a top position of leadership. Perhaps it was because of his growing influence in the Politburo (he was seen as Nguyễn Tấn Dũng's main rival at the 11th Party Congress in 2011, though he eventually lost out and was named only as President, considered to be the weakest of the top three positions in the party-state) or, as it was rumored, because he was known to be against bauxite mining (or at least thought he could use it in his rivalry against Nguyễn Tấn Dũng). However, he was also the one that signed the Politburo's Decision 245 in April 2009, which affirmed the government's plans for bauxite mining.

The scientists, however, chose not to publicize this petition. Instead they published an extended analysis of the economic, financial, technical, managerial, environmental, and socio-cultural risks associated with bauxite mining on the website of *Tia Sáng* magazine two days later. This longer seven-page article made reference to the petition, but did not include its text. However, it also included a section that was neither a part of the petition, nor mentioned explicitly among the reports to the Dak Nong Workshop. This was a criticism of the bidding process for construction of the first two bauxite-alumina projects, both of which were won by a subsidiary of the state-owned Chinese Aluminum Corporation (Chalco). Without exactly declaring itself, the article asks a series of rhetorical questions:

The question to ask here is that while Vietnam's technical capacity for processing alumina is zero, why does Vinacomin then choose a technology package supplied by Chinese companies—a country whose technical sector is still not very high? Why does Vinacomin not examine two different bids from two different companies to be able to compare, especially in the technological aspect? Would not that make for a better choice for the future of these factories? (“5 nguy cơ, rủi ro và giải pháp,” 2008, November 7)

However, government censors were not caught off-guard this time. Only a few days later, this article was removed from *Tia Sáng*'s website, although by this time it had already begun circulating widely on the Internet.

A petition of this kind was not without precedent. Scientists organized by the Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations had submitted a petition to government in 2004 to protest the risks posed by the Son La hydro-electric dam. That petition helped convince government to compromise on the scale of the dam. However, a key difference was that the earlier petition was endorsed by VUSTA, while this one was submitted by a groups of individuals with only the protection of the public prestige of such persons like Nguyễn Văn Chiển.

The Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) gets involved

The Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Association (VUSTA) also became more directly involved in these discussions in the months following the Dak Nong Workshop. VUSTA is a government organization that is responsible for coordinating and monitoring science and technology associations in Vietnam. However, it also functions as a quasi-NGO by organizing activities among NGOs and other organizations that are not directly mandated by government directives, such as the petition for Son La hydroelectric dam just mentioned above.

Starting around December, VUSTA began to organize its own workshops on bauxite mining. A first one was based on discussions with many of the scientists organized for the Dak Nong Workshop. Another one was organized at the instigation of scientists and experts from Vinacomin. After these workshops, VUSTA also organized field visits to the sites of the proposed bauxite mining projects in the Central Highlands. In February, VUSTA also helped organize a closed-door seminar on bauxite mining with the Vietnamese Communist Party.

However, all of these workshops maintained a very low profile, as CODE had done when first approaching the Dak Nong government. They had no press coverage or other information made publicly available from them. However, through this process they also expanded the network of scientists and experts involved in the bauxite mining debates. Among the more notable ones were, Nguyễn Đình Hoà, Professor of Ecology and Vietnam National University; Nguyễn Khắc Vinh, former Director of the Vietnam Research Institute on Mining and Metallurgy; Nguyễn Văn Thắng; Quang Thái, Vice Director of the Vietnam Economics Association and former Vice-Director of the Institute of Strategic Development; Nguyễn Văn Bản, former Director of Vinacomin's Titan - Aluminium Project, though now a critic of the proposed plan's; Nguyễn Ngọc Trần, former Director of Foreign Relations Committee of the National Assembly; and Lê Văn Cương, former Director of the Ministry of Security's Scientific Institute of Strategy.

The organizational capacity and financial resources of VUSTA played an important role in continuing these discussions among scientists and with government. However, the nature of this role played by VUSTA was also ambiguous. On one hand, VUSTA generated extensive scientific criticism through its dialogues and recommendations. On the other hand, it also maintained these debates firmly within the state's own strictures of allowable critical discussion and publicity. However, one of the persons who also attended one of these workshops was Võ Thị Hoà Bình, the daughter of the revolutionary General Võ Nguyên Giáp.

The beginnings of a public discussion on mining bauxite in the Central Highlands were a discreet, informal and a relatively slowly evolving process. It began with a couple of articles by government scientist and "internal critic" Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and an initiative by the newly formed Vietnamese NGO, CODE, to develop a "policy dialogue" on an issue of national importance. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and CODE organized a small network of scientists and experts, who initiated meetings with local government in Dak Nong Province and increasingly pulled in other scientists, colleagues, and friends into these discussions. However, these discussions kept a low profile and emphasized collaboration with the authorities, reflecting an embedded advocacy approach. The tenor of these discussions began to change with a regional workshop organized in Dak Nong Province in October 2008. The inclusion of a wider network of scientists and experts from across the country and one particularly outspoken artist-intellectual in the figure of Nguyễn Ngọc helped push these debates beyond their until then relatively strict "environmental" framing and rigid scientific language. Some twenty domestic journalists attending the workshop also helped bring these debates to a wider Vietnamese public.

From this point forward, these debates began to overflow the political calculus of embedded advocacy, especially as they led to new initiatives that included a critical editorial series on bauxite mining in the online newspaper *Tuần Việt Nam*, a Scientists' Petition addressed to the nation's top leaders, and a series of workshops organized by the government's own Vietnamese Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA). However, these were still only the first signs of a more disembodied discussion that was soon to follow.

Disembedded Advocacy: General Giáp Rouses a Nation, Again

General Giáp's letter

The bauxite mining debates reached a turning point on January 5th, 2009. On this date, General Võ Nguyên Giáp, at the ripe age of 98, penned a letter to the Prime Minister to protest bauxite mining in the Central Highlands. This short letter of less than one page in length reiterated many of the concerns already raised by the scientists and domestic media. However, his enormous stature as revolutionary hero and military mastermind behind the “wars of independence” highlighted the issue of national security. In addition to this, he also noted, the “first hundreds of Chinese labourers [were] already working on site (with estimates reaching up to several thousands per project)” (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009a, January 5). Five days later, a copy of this letter was posted on the *Viet-Studies* website and, four days after that, it was posted on *VietnamNet* (Vuving 2010).⁶⁴

Born in 1911, General Giáp (1911-2013), who recently passed away, was at that time the last surviving “founding father” of modern Vietnam, a triumvirate generally including Hồ Chí Minh (1980-1969) and Phạm Văn Đồng (1906-2000). General Giáp was the right hand man of Hồ Chí Minh during the anti-colonial revolution and Indochinese Wars. He led the Việt Minh’s decisive victory over the French colonial forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and he is credited for master-minding the guerilla warfare tactics that ousted the Americans from the Vietnam War in 1973 (Currey, 2005). He is also said to have directed the construction of the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail that supplied the Việt Công, which also ran through the Central Highlands.

However, General Giáp was also gradually marginalized from the core of political power in Vietnam, starting from as early as the 1960s. Historians have argued that the “Anti-Party Affair” of the late 1960s was manipulated by an ascendent Lê Duẩn – Lê Đức Thọ faction specifically to weaken the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp (see Chapter 2). General Giáp was then relieved of field command from the Vietnam People’s Army in 1972, demoted from 4th to 6th in Politburo ranking in 1976, dismissed as Minister of Defense and demoted from 1st to 3rd Deputy Premier in 1981, and finally removed from the Politburo altogether in 1982 (Currey, 2005). In the years

⁶⁴ General Giáp, however, was not the first former high-level leader to write the Prime Minister on bauxite mining. Earlier in December 2009, former Vice-President, Nguyễn Thị Bình, famous for her role in negotiating the Paris Peace Accords of 1973, had also initiated a written correspondence with the Prime Minister. Like General Giáp, Nguyễn Thị Bình is also a revolutionary icon. She is a grand-daughter of Phan Chu Trinh, one of the first leaders of the Vietnamese anti-colonial movement. She also served as a distinguished member for the Viet Cong and had previously been jailed by the French colonial authorities from 1951 to 1953. Even more explicitly than General Giáp, she emphasized that bauxite mining was “not just a problem of planning and the environment. We must recognize that we need to assess the bauxite projects with a political mindset, based on an awareness of the position of the Central Highlands” (Anonymous personal communication, December 2008, p.1). However, her letters were a private correspondence that did not reach the public until much later and so they can be said only to have indirectly formed a part of the public debate at that time.

that followed, he also suffered several other snubs from the regime, leading biographer Cecile Currey (2005) to comment, “Despite his former glory and substantial contributions, Giáp was tossed away like an old shoe” (p. 313).

Although General Giáp may have been gradually removed from power, he still remains as an influential person within high-level political and military circles. He has also been an outspoken critic of the nation’s leadership in recent years. He has written letters to state authorities to protest various issues, including the scandal on inner-Party espionage that led to the deposition of General Secretary Lê Khả Phiêu in the 1990s. However, General Giáp has always been a loyalist. His criticisms of the Vietnamese Communist Party have always been aimed at reforming rather than replacing it. Partly because of this, General Giáp has also been criticized for not being critical enough and failing to support other state officials that have been bolder in their push for political reforms (Templer, 1999).⁶⁵

General Giáp wrote his letter on the occasion of a Prime Minister’s meeting with his cabinet to discuss bauxite mining.⁶⁶ It is difficult to know what exactly the Prime Minister thought of this letter because he never responded to it, but his conclusions to this meeting were revealing. First, the Prime Minister reaffirmed that bauxite mining was consistent with government and Party policy—a line that would become a recurring refrain for state officials as the bauxite mining debates became more heated—and instructed the Ministry of Industry and Trade to prepare a report for the Politburo to request permission for continuing to mine bauxite.

In regards to the growing public debate, however, the Prime Minister’s last two conclusions were the most significant. First, he delegated Deputy Prime Minister Hoàng Trung Hải to organize a “Scientific Workshop” (*Hội thảo khoa học*) on “solutions for overcoming environmental pollution” (“Thông báo số 17/TB-VPCP,” 2009) in bauxite mining. Second, he instructed the Ministry of Information and Communication to “guide the mass media in not giving out any information on the environmental impacts of mining

⁶⁵ Journalist Robert Templer (1999) has argued, “Giáp is a contentious figure in Vietnamese politics, admired by many but also vilified for what is seen as his cowardice in the face of Communist Party hardliners” (Templer, 1999, p. 22). According to Templer, Bùi Tín appealed to General Giáp to “take over” just ahead of the 6th National Party Congress in 1986 (i.e., the ones that brought in the *đổi mới* reforms, after Lê Duẩn’s death). “Tín and other army officers pleaded with Giáp to take over, to use his credibility and popularity to push through reforms. Giáp refused, saying that he could not act alone and was fearful of the possible repercussions if his attempt to win power failed” (p. 123).

⁶⁶ According to an official government communication (Thông báo số 17/2009/TB-VPCP), the meeting included four Deputy Prime Ministers; Ministers of Industry and Trade, Environment and Natural Resources, Planning and Investment, Agriculture and Rural Development, Science and Technology, Transport, Sports and Tourism; and representatives from Dak Nong, Lam Dong and Gia Lai (the three provinces where bauxite mining projects were currently in construction or being planned), the Office of the Government, and Vinacomin. At the meeting, the Ministry of Industry presented its report on the situation and then each of the invited entities made their own observations and comments.

and processing bauxite ore, producing alumina and refining aluminium in the Central Highland provinces” until this workshop was convened (“Thông báo số 17/TB-VPCP,” 2009). However, despite the Prime Minister’s injunction on the domestic press, the public discussion became only more wide-ranging and vociferous.

The public debate spreads like wildfire on the Internet

The effect of General Giáp’s letter would take yet another three or four weeks to appear, quite possibly because most people were too busy then getting ready for Tết (Lunar New Year). However, in the next two months following Tết, the public discussion on bauxite mining greatly expanded, especially through the Internet.⁶⁷ The Internet had been an important venue for spreading the public discussion on bauxite mining at least since the Dak Nong Workshop. However, its significance only grew with the Prime Minister’s injunction on the domestic press. It was important both as a place for posting new information and commentaries on bauxite mining, as well as for circulating the key texts continued to drive these discussions.

On the occasion of the Prime Minister’s new year meeting with the press, an intrepid reporter from *Tuổi Trẻ* reporter asked if the Prime Minister had seen General Giáp’s letter. The Prime Minister replied that he had, but reaffirmed that bauxite mining was a “major policy of the Party and State” (*chủ trương lớn của Đảng và Nhà nước*). He noted that bauxite mining had been mentioned in official resolutions (*nghị quyết*) of the Tenth Party Congress (Hoà Vân, 2009, February 6).

These responses proved inadequate for many people. A couple of widely circulated commentaries on the Prime Minister’s remarks were posted on the *Diễn Đàn* webpage, a France-based Vietnamese-language website dedicated to critical social and political commentary on Vietnam. One blogger, Hoà Vân, reviewed documents from the Tenth Party Congress and attested that bauxite had been mentioned only once.

⁶⁷ During this time, the Vietnamese Communist Party also organized an internal seminar with the scientists now being coordinated by VUSTA in February 2009, which was chaired by two members of the Politburo, namely Trương Tấn Sang and Ngô Văn Dụ. It was a very discreet affair with no press coverage or public information made available. Because of the secretiveness of this meeting, it is difficult to ascertain exactly who attended and what discussions took place there. However, experts whose reports were included in the proceedings were Nguyễn Quang Thái, Đặng Trung Thuận, Trần Thị Lanh, Lê Văn Khoa, Nguyễn Ngọc, Nguyễn Trung, Trần Thị Lanh, Nguyễn Văn Ban, Đoàn Văn Cảnh and the Geology Association of Vietnam under Director Nguyễn Khắc Vinh, which provided recommendations and technical analyses for the proceedings. Others that personally attested to have attended were Nguyễn Thanh Sơn (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2009a, March 22), Lê Văn Cương (Lê Văn Cương, 2009, March 3) and Phạm Quang Tú. The reports included in the proceedings do not necessarily mean that their authors were able to present them at seminar itself (or, indeed, actually attended). Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, for one, complained in his written comments submitted to Politburo members that the time of the workshop was limited and he did not have any opportunity to speak up (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2009a, March 22). From reports I heard, this conference was very heated like the Dak Nong Workshop, but it was not a major part of the public debate because it was kept so tightly behind closed doors.

Furthermore, it was only listed in the Economic Report among a group of minerals that the government hoped to develop. The blogger added that the more important Political Report had a policy “to limit export of raw materials” (Hoà Văn, 2009, February 6).

One week later, another blogger, Nguyễn Phong, revealed a couple of diplomatic communiqués on bauxite mining between China and Vietnam from 2001 and 2006, which he discovered on the Vietnamese Embassy’s website in San Francisco (Nguyễn Phong, 2009, February 12). Both communiqués showed high-level communications between General Secretaries of the both the Vietnamese and Chinese communist parties for economic cooperation on bauxite exploitation in Dak Nong Province.⁶⁸ The 2001 communiqué mentioned a framework agreement, in which China provided preferential credit to Vietnam while Vietnam “agreed to actively support long-term collaboration between [Chinese and Vietnamese] companies for the bauxite-alumina projects in Dak Nong” (*Thông Tin Xã Hội Việt Nam*, December 3, 2001).

While such postings provide perspective and insight, they can also sometimes fan rumour and speculation. Another widely circulated posting from the Change We Need’s Blog, allegedly operated by Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức and renowned human rights lawyer Lê Công Định, provided a detailed but unverifiable account of how the bauxite mining projects were offered to the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party in return for financial support during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The posting recounted how Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary Nông Đức Mạnh and President Nguyễn Minh Triết were each sent to China and the United States, respectively, to seek for solutions to Vietnam’s financial woes. However, after failing to secure concrete support from the United States, Vietnam found itself having to resort to China, which made financial assistance conditional upon access to the bauxite deposits in the Central Highlands.

Certain blogs and websites operated by overseas Vietnamese communities also played a critical role in seeking out and circulating information and commentary, such as *Diễn Đàn*, Viet-Studies, X-café and Dân Luận. The Vietnamese language versions of Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio France Internationale (RFI) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were also important. Even though all of these websites are firewalled inside Vietnam, they are easily navigable by through proxy servers. These international media agencies also helped less usual critics speak out in these debates.

⁶⁸ The 2001 communiqué as a Vietnam-China Joint Declaration on the occasion of a visit by then Chinese President and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Jiang Zemin [Giang Trạch Dân] to the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nông Đức Mạnh, in Vietnam. In the same paragraph, the communiqué mentions that China and Vietnam have signed a framework agreement for China to provide preferential credit to Vietnam and that both sides are “agreed to actively support long-term collaboration between companies for the bauxite-alumina projects in Dak Nong” (*Thông Tin Xã Hội Việt Nam*, December 3, 2001). The 2006 communiqué was another Joint Declaration from a visit by then Chinese President and General Secretary Hu Jintao [Hồ Cẩm Đào], in which it is briefly noted that in discussions on economic cooperation both sides “began to discuss and implement major cooperation projects like Dak Nong bauxite” (TTO [theo Web chính phủ], 2006, November 18).

For example, RFA posted interviews with two outspoken National Assembly delegates. They were Nguyễn Lan Dũng (Assemblies X, XI and XII), a professor of biology who became a household name during his role on Vietnam's first popular science TV show in the 1990s called "Ask a Question and Get an Answer" (*Hỏi gì đáp nấy*) and Dương Trung Quốc (Assemblies XI and XII), a historian who had developed a reputation for his frankness and direct style of questioning in the National Assembly (Thiên Giao, 2009a, 2009b, February 18 and 19). Although they spoke carefully, mostly calling for more transparency and a wider public debate, the fact that they spoke at all to a foreign news agency on a topic that was blocked in the domestic press was significant. RFA also published an interview with the Director of VUSTA, Hồ Uy Liêm (Thiên Giao, 2009c, February 26), who warned that bauxite mining in the Central Highlands "must be developed with extreme care!"

Other former military leaders also spoke out against bauxite mining. Another revolutionary general, Major General Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh, wrote a letter to the Politburo on bauxite mining that was widely circulated on the Internet.⁶⁹ General Vĩnh was also the Vietnamese Ambassador to China from 1974 to 1989, during some of the most turbulent years of Sino-Viet relations in recent history. He warned of Chinese soldiers posing as workers, smuggling in weapons, and even establishing a military base there. One blogger commented that this letter was the "first article by somebody inside Vietnam that addresses the risks to national security of the Central Highlands bauxite projects in a straightforward and detailed way" (Mê Linh, 2009, February 18).

More artist-intellectuals also started to raise their voices in these debates, including ones who were under house arrest or have been exiled abroad. Poet Bùi Minh Quốc, living under house arrest in Dalat City, gave an interview to RFI that described bauxite mining as "a very serious and complicated political problem carrying the risk of losing our country" (Thanh Phương, 2009, April 7). In an interview with the BBC, exiled *đổi mới* writer Dương Thu Hương warned that allowing the Chinese to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands was like "opening one's sleeve to let a snake in" (Dương Thu Hương, 2009, March 1).

Lê Phú Khải, former southern correspondent for the Voice of Vietnam, also wrote a letter to the VCP General Secretary (Lê Phú Khải, 2009, March 23). In this letter, he confessed, "I never thought there would come a day when I would pick up a pen and write a letter to the exclusive authority of the General Secretary. But the things that are going on in our country right now have made my meals unappetizing and my sleep restless, lying awake thinking for so many nights" (Lê Phú Khải, 2009, March 23). Bùi Tín, former Deputy Editor of the Vietnamese Communist Party's daily *Nhân Dân*, whose calls for democratic reform and pluralism since the 1990s have resulted in excommunication from the Party and urged him to reside in France, also posted several critical commentaries of bauxite mining on the X-Café blogsite.

⁶⁹ The exact date that this letter was written, sent and posted online are all uncertain. The letter itself is undated. Its posting on Diễn Đàn Forum is also without a date. However, Hoàng Cơ Định's blogsite dates the letter as February 17th (http://hoangcodinh.multiply.com/journal?&=&page_start=260, Retrieved November 7, 2012) and it appears on other blog sites on February 18th (e.g., *Dân Luận, Tự Do Ngôn Luận*).

The growing debates also began to attract comments from some of the more politically contentious groups and mass organizations in Vietnam. Leader of the United Buddhist Church Movement, Thích Quảng Độ, called for civil disobedience and “protest at home” (*biêu tình tại gia*) for the month of May. He accused the party-state of “taking the people’s Gold and transforming it into Aluminium for foreigners” (Thích Quảng Độ, 2009, March 29). The catholic priest Father Nguyễn Văn Lý, one of Vietnam’s most closely monitored religious leaders by the party-state, also posted in his online bimonthly newsletter *Tự Do Ngôn Luận* several articles and documents on bauxite mining.

These statements generated support from far and wide. On April 11th, a conference on bauxite mining with over 60 delegates was organized by an overseas Vietnamese community in Paris to show solidarity with Thích Quảng Độ (Thiện Giao, 2009b, April 19). The Vietnamese Reform Party (Việt Tân), a self-declared oppositional group to the Vietnamese Communist Party considered as a “terrorist organization” by the Vietnamese state, also posted an open letter on its website protesting bauxite mining and urging international environmental organizations and human rights groups to “pressure the Hanoi government to cease the bauxite projects” (Việt Tân, 2009, March 20).

Inside Vietnam, the outlawed democracy and human rights advocacy coalition, Bloc 8406, also declared its support for Thích Quảng Độ’s statements and announced its own “campaign to boycott the Vietnamese Communist Party’s decision to allow China to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands” (Thanh Quang, 2009, April 8). Even an unknown student wrote a letter to the Politburo and the Prime Minister to protest bauxite mining and then posted it online (Nguyễn Tuấn Anh, 2009, March 9).

As the government’s “Scientific Workshop” approached in early April, the muzzle on the domestic press also seemed to loosen a little. In the days leading up to it, a few more government scientists came forward with articles and statements on bauxite mining, including former President of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and the Vietnam Association for Information Processing, Nguyễn Quang A, and former Director of the Central Committee’s Institute for Economic Management (CIEM) and IDS member, Lê Đăng Doanh. Both spoke critically of bauxite mining in interviews with RFA.

VietnamNet also published long critical articles on bauxite mining by economist Việt Nguyễn, and former National Assembly delegate Nguyễn Ngọc Trần (Nguyễn Ngọc Trần, 2009a, April 8; Việt Nguyễn, 2009, April 7). Scientists in southern Vietnam also came forward with their views, such as Tô Văn Trường, former Director of the Southern Irrigation Planning Institute, who posted his own extensive analysis of bauxite mining on the website of the Hanoi Association of Literature (Tô Văn Trường, 2009, February 18) and Hồ Sơn Lâm, Director of the Institute of Applied Material Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City, who conceded a telephone interview to RFA (Gia Minh, 2009, March 2).

Shortly after General Giáp’s letter to the Prime Minister in January 2009, the public debate on bauxite mining—despite the Prime Minister’s injunction on its discussion in the domestic press—spread like wildfire. The “policy dialogue” initiated by CODE had now become a major national issue that had brought together many and diverse groups in common opposition to bauxite mining. This opposition now counted on representatives from each of the groups reviewed in the previous chapter. However,

since January 2009, the government had already been preparing steps to get the discussion back under control with its own “Scientific Workshop.”

Re-embedded Advocacy: the Government’s “Scientific Workshop”

The government’s “Scientific Workshop” finally took place on April 9th. On the face of it, this workshop bore many resemblances with the Dak Nong Workshop. However, there were important, if subtle, differences in organization, participants, and press coverage. This time, instead of the NGO CODE, the government organization VUSTA was responsible for organizing the workshop. VUSTA co-hosted the workshop not with local government, but rather with the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The workshop itself was chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Hoàng Trung Hải.

The Deputy Prime Minister was reported to have chaired the workshop even handedly. He opened the meeting by reading a second letter by General Giáp on bauxite mining, which was addressed to the participants of this workshop. One informant suggested to me that he “wisely” opened with this letter to give the impression that the government was with rather than against the great General. The Deputy Prime Minister also uttered a phrase that became a common refrain for those continuing to rally against bauxite mining, namely that it “should not be mined at any cost” (Thu Hà & Phuong Loan, 2009, April 10).

The scientists and experts that had attended the previous workshops organized by CODE and VUSTA were also invited to this one. However, their role was different. Rather than being invited to present a wide range of perspectives on bauxite mining, only one or two of them made a presentation this time around.⁷⁰ This time government officials, industry representatives, and mining experts from government research institutes dominated the presentations, beginning with the Director of Heavy Industry in the Ministry of Investment and Trade, followed by Vinacomin (two reports) and representatives from each of the Dak Nong and Lam Dong provincial governments, all of whom made explicit their support for bauxite mining.

Their presentations were followed by ones from the Director of the Geology Association Conglomerate of Vietnam (namely Nguyễn Khắc Vinh, who was among the more critical voices in this group), representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment and the Ministry of Science and Technology, three experts on metallurgy, a representative of Atmosphere Research Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a representative of the Vietnam Association for Mining Planning and Industry (namely Hồ Sĩ Giao, who had been a supportive voice for bauxite mining at the Dak Nong Workshop), and representatives from Chalco and Alcoa (which was still trying to negotiate some kind of involvement in these projects at that time), as well as from other

⁷⁰ Several of the scientists coordinated by VUSTA submitted reports, namely policy analyst Nguyễn Trung; Nguyễn Đình Hoà of the NGO Vietnam Association for Nature and Environment (VACNE); Phạm Bích Sản, Deputy Secretary of VUSTA; Lê Ngọc Thắng, General Secretary of the Ethnology and Anthropology Association of Vietnam; CODE’s Phạm Quang Tú; and Nguyễn Văn Ban, former Director of the Aluminium Project for the Mining Corporation of Vietnam submitted reports. However, only one or two of them were actually presented at the government’s workshop, while the rest were included as part of the proceedings.

government offices and research institutes. If the presentations at the Dak Nong Workshop were highly technical, these ones were extremely technical. Their reports helped to “scientize” the discussions, but offered little in the way of critique or even commentary.

Like the Dak Nong Workshop, this workshop also followed a presentation followed by comments and questions structure. However, time limits and the processes for submitting questions restricted the possibility for discussion. Because the workshop was scheduled for only one day, the time available for discussion was greatly reduced. One reporter wrote that the workshop had comprised “25 reports and 18 ideas,” giving some sense of the ratio of presenters to commentators (Phuong Loan & Thảo Lam, 2009, April 9). Furthermore, persons wanting to make comments had to submit their names through the chair and wait for the Deputy Prime Minister to call on them, who tended to prioritize the most prominent and senior participants. This meant that a few of the scientists and experts coordinated by VUSTA were able to speak, such as Nguyễn Ngọc, Nguyễn Trung, and Lê Văn Cương, but many others were not.

Finally, another not so easily discernible difference with the Dak Nong Workshop was the context for press coverage. Indeed, a couple of reporters from *VietnamNet* made the mistake of thinking that this workshop was Dak Nong 2008 all over again. On the same afternoon of the workshop, reporters Thảo Lâm and Phuong Loan posted an article with a title reminiscent of the Dak Nong Workshop. It read, “Bauxite conference: many economic and environmental risks and concerns” (Phuong Loan & Thảo Lam, 2009, April 9). This article was dedicated mainly to the criticisms raised against bauxite mining.

The article quotes Nguyễn Trung lambasting government officials and asking rhetorical questions:

To talk like this is nonsense. The Ministry of Industry says that mining bauxite in the Central Highlands will boost development in the region. Where does he get that from? I am skeptical. For more than 60 years [Vinacomin] has been mining coal in Quang Ninh province, but has that helped to develop this province? Has it made any contribution to the development of the country? The state budget has poured thousands of billions of Vietnamese dong to support the Central Highlands, but still it hasn't improved much. And now with only this investment in bauxite this entire problem will be solved? (Phuong Loan & Thảo Lam, 2009, April 9)

The article also reports on Nguyễn Ngọc challenging the Deputy Prime Minister's reaffirmation of the bauxite mining projects as a “major policy of the Party and state.” Implicitly using the arguments of blogger Hoà Vân (above), Nguyễn Ngọc remarked that only the Economic Report of the 10th National Party Congress mentioned bauxite, while the more important Political Report restricted exports on raw materials. Nguyễn Ngọc also asked rhetorically, if bauxite mining is a major policy, then why was it never passed through the national legislature?

Other critiques reported in the article included those of Nguyễn Văn Bản, warning that Vinacomin's economic forecasts were illusory and criticizing the choice of Chinese technology and contractor; National Assembly delegate Dương Trung Quốc, commenting

on the historical and “special” regional importance of the Central Highlands; and Major General Lê Văn Cương, admonishing that “The Central Highlands is the roof of Indochina. Whoever is master of the Central Highlands will be the master of Indochina.”

This article seems to revive the “critical spirit” that had inspired the press coverage from the Dak Nong Workshop. However, by midnight of the same day, this article was replaced with another one from the same two authors. The new article was now entitled “The Government will review the economic benefits of bauxite mining in the Central Highlands.” The multiple perspectives presented in the former article were now mostly reduced to a monologue of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The criticisms by scientists and experts were now reduced to this single line, “Writer Nguyễn Ngọc, National Assembly delegate Dương Trung Quốc and many scientists doubted and hesitated [*nghi ngại*]” (Phuong Loan & T. Lâm, 2009, April 10).⁷¹ Their reasons for doubt and hesitation were also no longer about a national policy decision, but rather they had reverted to policy implementation. As the authors wrote, “the investors had said good things about environmental management and technology, but Vietnam’s actual experience with implementing them is often inadequate.”

The article also concludes with a reaffirmation of bauxite mining. It reports on the Deputy Prime Minister stating, “the important thing is to make financing available, balance the economic benefits of the projects, take a serious approach to developing the projects and strict monitoring,” while also taking note of “cultural and indigenous peoples issues.” The article even provides a summary table of the “duties” assigned to each relevant ministry, provincial governments and Vinacomin. The final impression is not one of doubt and questioning, but rather of governmental management and resolution.

This comparison of these two articles shows the differences between the government’s “Scientific Workshop” and the discussions at the Dak Nong Workshop in 2008. The primary purpose of the government’s “Scientific Workshop” was to make an exhibition of its science and management. The government showed that it is equally able to mobilize the language of science, scientific institutions and scientists to restrain a multi-stranded public debate. It effectively reduced what had come to be a very complex, wide-ranging and multi-dimensional problem into a largely technical, managerial and “environmental” one. Not only did this help the government steer away from more potentially volatile aspects of the discussion, it also presented a set of problems that further justified government intervention. It attempted to re-embed these discussion into a format and language that reconfirmed the ultimate authority of the party-state on bauxite mining.

Conclusion

In examining the discreet beginnings of the public discussion on mining bauxite in the Central Highlands, I have shown how the Vietnamese NGO CODE and its small network of scientists used an embedded advocacy approach to this national-level policy

⁷¹ Informants in the domestic media suggested to me that Phuong Loan had been disciplined and suspended from journalism for several months because of her reporting on this and other issues, but I was unable to confirm this information. Phuong Loan herself denied meeting with me.

issue. They operated largely through informal and low profile processes, they emphasized collaboration over confrontation, and they began with local government. Furthermore, their emphasis on a “scientific” approach and framing of bauxite mining as an “environmental” problem helped to shield them accusations of opposing the government.

I have argued above that embedded advocacy is based on a political calculus of the party-state that allows for a constrained sort of apolitical discussion on state policy, while ensuring that the discussion and their proponents present no challenge to the norms and strictures of the political system. However, as these debates on bauxite mining got going and their expansive examination of environmental processes associated with bauxite mining raised a wide range of other problems, these discussions also began to overflow this political calculus.

While the Dak Nong Workshop began a series of processes that attracted a wider interest in bauxite mining and moved the locus of debates from the local level to Hanoi capital, the debate seriously began to challenge the bounds of its “scientific” and “environmental” framings after a letter written to the Prime Minister by General Võ Nguyên Giáp in January 2009. The great General is best described as a reformer and party loyalist. However, his enormous public stature as the military architect of the anti-colonial revolution and “wars of independence” highlighted problems related to national security and the role of Chinese interests in bauxite mining.

General Giáp’s letter and the Prime Minister’s concurrent injunction on the domestic press from reporting on bauxite mining led to an even more explosive public discussion on bauxite mining on the Internet. Over the next few months, Vietnamese bloggers from both inside and outside the country heated up the discussion further by focusing on Chinese involvement in bauxite mining and thinly veiled accusations of the Vietnamese Communist Party selling out the country to its historical nemesis. Meanwhile, comments, interviews, letters and other statements emerged from a wide range of persons, representing each of the many and diverse groups that constituted the anti-bauxite coalition. If the tactic of the party-state for managing social and political conflict is to keep it local, isolated and fragmented, then the bauxite mining debates appeared to have become disembedded from the political norms and practices of the party-state.

In an attempt to regain control on this volatile situation, the government then hosted its own “Scientific Workshop.” This workshop showed that government authorities were capable of deploying science and “environmental problems” to contain the bounds of public discussion. By performing a spectacle of public dialogue while deploying its own officials, organizations and experts to reduce very complex and multi-dimensional issues into simple solutions of economic and environmental management, the government attempted to re-embed this unwieldy discussions into the political calculus of embedded advocacy. However, as I show in the next chapter, the effectiveness of this attempt was limited.

In his reflections on embedded advocacy, Peter Ho (Ho, 2008) has also described it as a “transient phenomenon, a particular type of Party-state-society interaction shaped by the semi-authoritarian nature of Chinese society” (p. 21). Such a statement begs the question of what comes next. Despite the Prime Minister’s own hopes, the bauxite mining debates did not end with the Scientific Workshop. Rather, they became only

more intense, controversial and expansive. In the next chapter, I examine how the re-emergence of the Vietnamese intellectuals, as a reconsolidated political identity, capitalized on the tremendous social and political pressures that had been created with the bauxite mining debates to move them from embedded advocacy into a more oppositional politics.

Chapter 4

The Petition of the 135 Signatures: a New Oppositional Politics and the Re-Emergence of the Vietnamese Intellectuals

For Hanoi literary scholar Nguyễn Huệ Chi and writer Phạm Toàn, the government's "Scientific Workshop" on bauxite mining was clearly not enough. Rather than feeling reassured by it, they now felt more incensed than ever. It prodded them into action. Three days later, they drafted their own petition on bauxite mining and, together with Da Nang hydrologist Nguyễn Thế Hùng, circulated by email to a few dozen trusted colleagues and friends. When the petition came back to them, it carried 135 names of some of the most renowned and accomplished Vietnamese writers, artists, academics, scientists and professionals from across the country and around the world.

This Petition of the 135 Signatures, as I am calling it, marked a decisive shift in the bauxite mining controversy. The tone and presentation of the petition was no longer discreet, collaborative or kept in low profile, but rather it was challenging, direct and made highly visible. The drafters of the Petition posted it online, where it collected another one thousand signatures in only five days, and created the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, which became a new hub for the public debate on bauxite mining. This Petition and website suggested a new type of oppositional politics in the party-state. Furthermore, the collective knowledge, experience and public prestige of the first 135 signatures together with their, at least, symbolic union across key socio-political and geographic divisions enduring from the Vietnam War and decades of communist rule suggested one of the most significant and sizable oppositions to the Communist regime since at least the Vietnam War. At the center of this new opposition were the Vietnamese intellectuals.

The Vietnamese word for intellectual, *trí thức*, combines characters for "awakened" and "mind." They suggest alertness, awareness and activity as characterizing the processes of thinking and learning. However, who or what exactly could be considered as an intellectual requires a more socio-historical examination of the term. A recent article in the online newspaper *Dân Trí* asked several prominent Vietnamese "intellectuals" to define precisely this term, as follows:

Prof. Nguyễn Huệ Chi: "To be an intellectual one must have scope [of vision], responsibility and a duty towards society."

Dr. Giản Tư Trung [Educational activist, President of the Institute for Research on Educational Development]: "An intellectual is a person that has understanding and knows how to wake up society."

Prof. Cao Huy Thuần [Political scientist, Université de Picardie, France]: "An intellectual is somebody that doesn't let society fall asleep."

Prof. Nguyễn Văn Tuấn [Epidemiologist, New South Wales University, Australia]: intellectuals are people who “wreck their brains over the fate of the nation and are ready to plunge headlong into a cause for it...”

Former Vice President [of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam] Nguyễn Thị Bình: “An intellectual must be someone who always maintains his or her virtue.”

Reporter Phan Quang: “An intellectual is true to oneself and never cowardly”

Reporter Hữu Thọ: Intellectuals have three criteria: “one, they have a high level of study (though this does not necessarily mean having a high level degree); two, they have an exemplary personality, like a role model for society; and three, they have the probity to stand up for truth and justice. If one is missing any one of those three criteria, than s/he cannot be called an intellectual.”

Dr. Phạm Song [Former Minister of Health]: “No probity, no intellectual. Not dare to speak the truth, then not an intellectual. Not defend the truth, then not an intellectual.”

Dr. Chu Hảo [Former Deputy Minister of Science and Technology]: “Somebody who is called (or calls oneself) an intellectual, apart from having a certain level of education, must be someone who is concerned with ‘hot’ political and social issues and s/he must hold an opinion on them. In particular, an intellectual must be able to be critical and lead the public opinion.”

(Bùi Hoàng Tám, 2012, February 6)

These intellectuals strongly associated the more strictly intellectual activities of learning and study with an active engagement in socio-political issues and a personal probity and courage to pursue them. A couple of them appeared to connect the “awakened” (*thức*) element of the “intellectual” to a definition of the intellectual’s duty as rousing society from its deep sleep of submission and domination. Rather, in the terms I have been using in this dissertation, the intellectual’s role was to help create an “active society” (Burawoy, 2003).

The drafters of the Petition of the 135 Signatures also endorsed this perspective of the intellectual and, indeed, they seemed to reinvigorate its debate in contemporary Vietnam by producing this Petition. A couple months after the Petition came out, a reporter from the *Vietnam Students Magazine* interviewed Nguyễn Huệ Chi on precisely this question of what is an intellectual (Lê Ngọc Sơn, 2009, June 23). Nguyễn Huệ Chi identified two main criteria for being an intellectual, which explain how intellectuals are able to carry out their public function. The first is that, in addition to having an advanced knowledge in a particular field, they must have hold a “general knowledge.” This provides them with a “broad vision for society’s development” and it is what enables them to “raise their voice when an urgent problem threatens the existence of the entire people or entire nation.” Second, in order to do so, intellectuals must also be able to

maintain an independent opinion, “free from ideology” or intervention by other forces, such as state authorities.

Nguyễn Huệ Chi adds, however, like Hữu Thọ above, that an intellectual does not need to hold a PhD or have a high level of formal education. More important was that they showed an “intellectual spirit” and were ready to take on “personal sacrifice” for the sake of truth and justice, for which Nguyễn Huệ Chi gave the examples of writer Nguyễn Ngọc and his co-author to the Petition, Phạm Toàn. Neither of them had PhDs, but both played critical roles in the bauxite mining controversy. Similarly, Phạm Toàn also made statements that an intellectual has two primary responsibilities, namely “one responsibility to their discipline, and another responsibility towards society” (Phạm Toàn, 2012, January 25).

These ideas on the intellectual strongly reflect what Jerome Karabel (1996) has referred to more broadly as the “moralist tradition.” The moralist tradition defines an intellectual as a person who is not only an intellectual in the strict sense, but also a socio-political and public activist. Karabel traces this tradition back to the French “intellectuals” and the Russian “intelligentsia” of the 19th century. Notably, these are also two of the nations that have had arguably the most significant impact on modern Vietnamese education and intellectual development, and especially among those persons that were most important to the Petition of the 135 Signatures.

However, Karabel also emphasizes that the moralist definition is a normative definition, which he contrasts with what he proposes as a “sociological realist” one. The moralist definition is based more on what intellectuals *should* be than what they actually *are*.⁷² Karabel argues that a more analytical definition of the intellectual demands a sociological investigation of their attributes and characteristics. This notion was also reflected among certain Vietnamese intellectuals, most notably Ngô Bảo Châu, who has commented, “I disagree that social criticism is a criteria for identifying ‘intellectuals.’ At one point then do we fully become an intellectual?” (Thu Hiện, 2012, January 20).

Indeed, Ngô Bảo Châu’s comment is partly what sparked the 2012 debate on the intellectual, as collected by *Dân Trí* and expressed by Phạm Toàn above. However, in the practice of being an intellectual, the aspiration behind the term is at least as important as how it is operationalized in practice. Here I am less interested in the sociological question of how an intellectual fits into society, which have been taken up by a wide range of scholars. What is more important is how those persons who represented themselves as the “intellectuals” understood this term. It is something more of what

⁷² From this standpoint, Karabel (1996) arrives at his own definition of intellectuals “as a potentially competing elite, rooted in the cultural sphere, which under certain historical conditions has both the inclination and the capacity to mount a challenge to the elites that preside over the political and economic domains” (p. 210). However, I find the “sociological realist” position somewhat tautological because to identify an “intellectual” for study requires some kind of definition of what is an intellectual in the first place. Gu and Goldman (2003) identify a third tradition, which they refer to as the “publicist tradition.” By this tradition, one is an intellectual simply if, in addition to being in the business of producing knowledge, one has an “active involvement in public life.” However, this subtle distinction from the moralist seems less significant to the current discussion.

social theorists refer to as an articulated identity. It is based on the articulation of different elements from culture and history for the purpose of creating a new political position (Hall, 1986; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

The history of the “intellectuals” in Vietnam is a little researched topic, partly due to its sensitivity within Vietnamese communist history, and much debate remains on who exactly characterizes the intellectuals in Vietnamese history, especially from a Vietnamese perspective. Do they include the ancient mandarins, who were greatly subservient to dynastic authority? Or do they begin with the highly learned “grandfathers” of the anti-colonial revolution epitomized by figures like Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Bội Châu.⁷³

However, by the time of the anti-colonial revolution, the intellectuals were widely understood to be both learned persons and revolutionaries. They were actively recruited into the Việt Minh in the late 1940s. As historian David Marr (1981) has written, “Their skills as writers, speakers, teachers, and administrators proved extremely valuable,

⁷³ Chu Hảo, former Vice-Minister of Science and Technology and current Director of the Knowledge Publishing House, had drafted an initial introductory paper as a part of a larger research project into the history of the intellectuals in Vietnam, which was posted to the Dân Luận website on June 2010 (Chu Hảo, 2010). In this paper, argues against defining the Vietnamese and Chinese Mandarins of the dynastic era as intellectuals. He argues that the Mandarin system “created the enslavement of ‘educated’ persons by their subjugation to the feudal State.” According to Chu Hảo, intellectuals came into being as a class only for a short period in the first half of the twentieth century. The possibility for such a social class began with the arrival of the French in the mid-19th century that gradually displaced the feudal regime in imperial Vietnam. At the beginning of the 20th century, western ideas of democracy and science and technology also began to reach Vietnamese society through Japanese and Chinese influences. Furthermore, the expansion of the Romanized alphabet and improving economic conditions enabled a new class of persons to live primarily by their intellectual work. “The historical context made it so that some persons had the conditions to be relatively independent from the state. They could make a living from their intellectual labour without having to be a bureaucrat, and their voice every day gained more prestige in society.” The emergence of this class of intellectuals also helped spur the earliest anti-colonial movements like Duy Tân and Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục, which assembled these burgeoning groups of intellectuals. Intellectuals also became an important segment of the Việt Minh. However, as Chu Hảo argues, this situation continued only until Hồ Chí Minh declared national independence in 1945, at which point President Hồ “assembled that class of intellectuals to join the administration.” However, because of the high sensitivity, Chu Hảo did not dare go further in the history. Chu Hảo could only write, “It’s a pity that in the 1950s . . . our intellectual class . . . again fell into a particular period of its development.” This “particular period of development” was marked by the party-state’s crackdowns on writers, artists and other intellectuals in the *Nhấn Văn Giai Phẩm* Affair of the 1950s and the Anti-Party Affair of the 1960s (see Chapter 2). Unfortunately, Chu Hảo’s research project on the Vietnamese intellectuals was also suspended because of concerns among researchers over the topic’s sensitivity, which testifies further to the repressive conditions under which Vietnamese intellectuals continue to work today.

perhaps essential” (p. 12). However, this happy marriage between socialism and the intellectuals came under increasing stress as the Vietnamese communists increasingly took power over the Vietnamese state apparatus after 1945.

Party officials and intellectuals struggled over who provided the moral and intellectual leadership to the newly independent nation. However, party officials quickly gained the upper hand and the intellectuals were forced into having to choose between acting as a mouthpiece for the party-state or continuing with one’s own ideas at the risk of obviation or worse (Lại Nguyễn Ân & Holcombe, 2010; Zinoman, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 2, a few high profile confrontations between the intellectuals and the party-state occurring in the late 1950s, 1960s and, again, in the late 1980s. However, in each of these cases, the intellectuals’ opposition was met with harsh punishment from the heavy hand of the party-state, which endured for decades and drove the socio-politically engaged intellectual into dark decades of suppression and hiding that continues until this day.

Hence, to represent oneself as the “intellectuals” was both a complicated and daring manoeuvre. One hand, it revived the revolutionary spirit of Vietnam’s early intellectuals. However, on the other hand, it also highlighted the harshness and oppression of the party-state in its historical dealings with intellectual dissent. At the same, the “intellectual” also evoked modernist aspirations of science and rationality, which had been actively embraced by Vietnamese socialism, but also contrasted these aspirations with the more apparently crass and arbitrary decision-making of the state authorities in the bauxite mining controversy. In this regard, the term “intellectual” suggested certain lines of division between Vietnamese nationalist struggle and rule by the socialist state, one that starkly contrasted the party-state’s pairing of these two elements as nationalist-socialist struggle or party-state.

Furthermore, the intellectual also brought together two key types of advocacy politics that had emerged with the bauxite mining debates. One strand I have described as “embedded advocacy,” which was embraced primarily by scientist and technocrats and initially drove public discussions on bauxite mining. The other strand is the more oppositional discourses that came more into public view after General Giáp’s first letter to the Prime Minister and was represented more by those groups that had been oppressed or exiled by the party-state, which included the artist-intellectuals. The intellectual now brought the scientists and the artist-intellectuals, as well as the journalists, bloggers, religious leaders and many others, together as the “intellectuals.”

The unity of these diverse groups was further represented in the first 135 intellectuals that signed the Petition, who brought together party loyalists and dissidents, Vietnamese nationals from the north and south, and Vietnamese persons from inside and outside the country. In other words, they spanned socio-political and geographic divisions that endure from the legacy of the Vietnam War and under decades of communist rule. In this regard, the intellectuals emerged with the Petition as a newly articulated and consolidated socio-political identity.

This chapter examines the emergence of the Petition of 135 signatures and the events and activities that resulted from it, including the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. After a presentation of the text of the Petition, I examine its genesis through the new partnership between Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn that emerged from a petition to reinstate a banned volume of Trần Dần’s poetry in 2008. The Trần Dần petition also provided

Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn with a model for the petition on bauxite mining. Then I examine the risky and uncertain process by which Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Thế Hùng drafted, circulated and this new petition online.

Next, I examine who were the “intellectuals,” who signed this Petition, even though they had not yet publicly identified themselves as such. I highlight how they represented the “best and brightest” of Vietnam and how their coming together on the Petition symbolically represented new unity across enduring socio-political and geographical divides enduring from recent Vietnamese history. I also examine how delivering the Petition to the offices of the government and National Assembly almost inadvertently generated a kind of public performance, so that the act of writing a petition became more publicly performative than instrumental. Its purpose was less about trying to influence the behaviours and opinions of high-level state officials (a lost cause to begin with, they learned) and more about exposing certain realities of the Vietnamese political system through the odd and dismissive reactions of state officials to the Petition itself. The last section examines the *Bauxite Vietnam* website that emerged from the Petition and how it simultaneously became a new hub for the public discussion on bauxite mining and a new platform for the Vietnamese intellectuals.

Period of time covered in this chapter is a relatively short one, hardly more than one month. However, as I have tried to argue here, it was a critical one. It signaled a shift in approach from an embedded advocacy to a more oppositional politics. At the center of this shift were the newly consolidated Vietnamese intellectuals. This detail alone is not insignificant. In the history of revolutions, intellectuals and other elites have played pivotal roles in swaying popular support away from the ruling regime towards other contending forces. Among the earliest sociologists of revolutions, Crane Brinton (Brinton, 1965 [1938]) identified the “desertion of the intellectuals” as one of the first tell-tale signs of revolution.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Goldstone (2001) has argued, “[w]hat is crucial for political crises to emerge is for elites to be not only divided but polarized—that is, to form two or three coherent groupings with sharp differences in their visions of how social order should be structured” (p. 150). Of course, revolutions are the result of many complex and interrelated factors. However, the reemergence of the Vietnamese intellectuals onto the political landscape in Vietnam could well be a sign of important, if subtle, socio-political changes.

The Text of the Petition

Writing letters and petitions to state authorities has a long tradition in Vietnam. It is reflected in the popular folkloric belief that even the poorest villager could write a

⁷⁴ Brinton (1938) also notes that their desertion further exposes political problems within the regime through their own high profile defections, although he does not elaborate much on this point. However, he borrows his phrase the “desertion of the intellectuals” from Lyford Edwards’ (1927) “transfer of the allegiance of the intellectuals,” which is more suggestive of the sway in political power being exposed by the intellectuals’ “desertion.” The desertion of intellectuals should also be seen as part of the elite divisions that play a critical role in the breakdown of states, as well as how “elite pacts” have been able to restore state stability from periods of tumultuousness and violence (Goldstone, 2001, p. 150).

letter the Emperor to plead for assistance or denounce local officials, provided he or she could write at all. What a villager could not do, however, is opposed or rail against the Emperor himself, which risked being considered as seditious behavior or treason. Under socialism, writing letters to state authorities is a common and acceptable form of drawing attention to an individual's or a community's grievances and complaints. Members within the administration may also use such letters to criticize one's superiors, provided that it remained an internal matter. Indeed, such letters have, sometimes inadvertently, launched the "dissident" trajectories of many former party loyalists in Vietnam. Sometimes persons will also join together in writing a petition to appeal the party-state's benevolence and good reason on particular issues, as did a group of scientists and technocrats organized by the government's Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations against the Son Law Hydroelectric Dam in 2004.

In this regard, the Petition of the 135 Signature emerged from these long standing traditions in Vietnamese social and political life. However, it also broke from them in important ways. Notably, its tone was more confrontational, its argumentation challenged rather than endorsed the authority of the party-state, and, in the events that followed from the Petition, it became a highly public document that was meant to expose more than influence the representatives of the party-state. To begin this chapter, I provide the full text of the Petition here:

Petition on the Master Plan for Bauxite Mining Projects in Vietnam

To:

Nguyễn Minh Triết, President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam;
Nguyễn Phú Trọng together with the entire National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam;
Nguyễn Tấn Dũng and members of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

[1] We, the people of Vietnam, who have signed our names below, who are concerned about the fate of our nation as it concerns bauxite mining in the Central Highlands, submit to the respectable organizations this petition.

Dear organizations:

[2] Our people of Vietnam, who have endured many decades of war to secure national independence and unity, are now mobilizing all of our physical, material and intellectual resources to rebuild the nation in an entirely new way.

[3] In rebuilding our nation, there is, in principle, no difference between the rights and benefits of the State and those of the people – our people inside as well as outside the country, those who hold positions of leadership as well as ordinary people, all of us want our nation to grow each day more civilized and prosperous, so that we become one big family, happy, fulfilled and dignified.

[4] Unfortunately, in the bauxite affair going on right now, the honest people of our country are suddenly realizing that the old ideology of hand-in-hand building the country together has more or less disappeared because of how the state organizations are currently running the country, a situation that needs to be analysed as follows.

Dear organizations:

[5] Exploiting our country's natural resources, which also includes bauxite resources, is an important work, but not one to be done at any cost!

[6] The preparations for the bauxite project have already been shown by many scientists to be entirely inadequate. Only the two letters of General Võ Nguyên Giáp are enough to show these deficiencies in regard to the political situation, national security, environment, economics and technology, as well as the petition of Dr. Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, Professor Phạm Duy Hiền, and other independent researchers inside the country, such as writer Nguyễn Ngọc, scholar Nguyễn Trung, reporter Lê Phú Khải, writer Phạm Đình Trọng, and outside the country, such as Dr. Nguyễn Đức Hiệp, an expert on environmental pollution in Australia, Consulting engineer Đặng Đình Cung, an expert on mining in France... they all provide the "technical" rationale behind the heartfelt letters of the General.

[7] All of these recommendations indicate the shortcomings and mistakes in the bauxite policy that are difficult to accept, and only these three points are enough to make anyone who has a conscience think twice:

- The policy to establish the project was enacted at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, but in reality it was signed off with the Chinese many years before without any consultation with our elected National Assembly. All of the feasibility studies have never yet been disclosed to the people or our official representatives in the National Assembly.
- The Chinese have closed down bauxite mines in their own country to shift production to Vietnam, thereby shifting the heavy environmental burden of its pollution to the Vietnamese people of today and many generations to come. It will be like those very same activities that the Chinese have done and continue to do in Africa with the help of the corrupt regimes there, which the global community has following closely and is downright offensive.
- Science, technology and labour are expected to be imported mainly from China, an emerging power with an increasingly strongly economy but still plagued internally with no small number of difficult situations. Among them is China's worldwide "fame" as the top environmental polluter, not to mention other "problems" without even considering for its wealthy but still has more than a few incredulous internal situations. Among them are ones like the bauxite mine that have made China famous as the world's number one

polluter, not to mention other related “problems” (for example, only this past March the Australian government had to cancel a mineral extraction project in Southern Australia signed with China for reasons of national defense).

Dear organizations:

[8] The nation is the property of all the people, not only for the benefit of one group, one privileged group, or any one organization no matter how elite.

[9] Anyone who is concerned for the people and the nation laments these things that are not being watched carefully in the bauxite affair and all feel the necessity to raise one’s voice.

[10] So we recommend:

- 1) The Central Highlands bauxite project and each of its related policies must be passed and decided upon by the National Assembly;
- 2) The Central Highlands bauxite project must be suspended immediately and monitored closely until the National Assembly is able to review the entire feasibility study and make an appropriate assessment. We also request the National Assembly to consider thoroughly the wishes of the great majority of people, who do not want this project to continue because of all of its disastrous implications;
- 3) All feasibility studies for the Central Highlands bauxite must be discussed widely and monitored closely.

Dear organizations:

[11] The people who have signed the petition below express their deep concern about the inadequate and incomplete preparations on many aspects of a project of strategic importance for the life or death of our nation like the bauxite project.

[12] We request these organizations to consider our deep concerns and we hope that you will understand thoroughly the widespread consternation among us from both inside as well as outside the country.

[13] On this occasion, we would also like to call on the people of China and especially its intellectuals to support the people of Vietnam, help the environment of your southern neighbour to remain healthy, and help with many of the on-going problems between our two countries to be resolved in a peaceful and friendly way.

Vietnam, April 12, 2009

Signed by:

Prof. Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Writer Phạm Toàn and Prof. Nguyễn Thế Hùng

The Petition is a remarkable document. It casts the bauxite mining issue not simply as a mining, environmental, economic or even national security problem, but rather as one that concerns nothing less than the “fate of our nation” (Para 1). It is a matter of “strategic importance for the life or death of our nation” (Para 11).

The text of the petition does not yet identify its signatories as the “intellectuals”—a term that will emerge more in the events that ensue from this Petition—but rather identify themselves as representatives of “We, the People of Vietnam” (Para 1). As those persons who have “endured many decades of war to secure national independence and unity” [Para 2], they are fundamentally nationalist and patriotic. However, they harbour an ambition to “rebuild the nation in an entirely new way.”

This new way is based on upholding “no difference in between the rights and benefits of the State and those of the people” (Para 3). More pointedly, it is based on the defining principle that the “nation is the property of all the people, not only for the benefit of one group, one privileged group, or any one organization no matter how elite” (Para 8).

It is not difficult to guess who is meant by that “one privileged group.” The Petition mocks that “old ideology of hand-in-hand building the country together” as something that the “honest people of our country are suddenly realizing . . . has more or less disappeared” (Para 4). This allusion refers to a popular party slogan of the Party and People hand-in-hand building the nation together. However, the erosion of this reality, which has been made apparent through the bauxite mining controversy, is a result of the “state organizations . . . currently running the country” (Para 4).

In elaborating on its analysis of the bauxite mining controversy, the Petition chooses to highlight three main points. Each of them is related to Chinese interests in bauxite mining. They criticize the backroom deals made between the Chinese and Vietnamese authorities on bauxite mining, China’s use of Vietnam as a backyard for its own development, and the importation of technology and labour from the world’s “top environmental polluter” (Para 7). However, the real thrust behind these points is not made apparent until the Petition’s recommendations are stated.

The recommendations of the petition are not directed towards China. Rather, they are directed at the Vietnamese political system. In particular, they demand that the National Assembly, the only publicly elected national level body of the party-state, and the public be made a central part of the decision on whether or not to mine bauxite in the Central Highlands. The nationalist sentiment roused by the points raised on Chinese interests in bauxite mining is used as a stick with which to beat the party-state. The Petition is making the argument that the nation’s leaders are themselves unpatriotic and—as the state has charged against so many “dissidents”—against the Vietnamese nation-state.

If only to make the point more clearly, one of the most significant details of the petition is an omission. Among the top leaders of the party-state addressed in the petition, the only one that is absent is the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party. How is it that the leader of the organization designated by the

National Constitution as the “leading force of the State and society” (Constitution 1992, Art. 4) is not party to a discussion on “the fate of the nation”? That, Phạm Toàn once confided to me, was exactly the point.

The Book Ban on Trần Dần: a New Model Emerges for Engaging the Party-State

Prior to the Petition of the 135 Signatures, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn did not know each other well. As parts of the Vietnamese literati, they frequented a similar milieu, but they had not developed a close relationship with one another. Born in 1938 and 1932, respectively, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn were both of the same generation. They both live in Hanoi and both are currently retired, though still very busy as each of them invariably emphasized to me each time we met. However, their careers and personalities are also marked by several important differences.

Nguyễn Huệ Chi is a reputed scholar of classical Vietnamese literature. His anthology on poetry from the Lý (1009-1225) and Trần (1225-1400) dynasties is an authoritative text in the field. He joined the Vietnam Institute of Literature in 1951, where he also earned his PhD in 1991 and has held senior positions as President of the Scientific Association and Head of the Department for Classical and Modern Literature. In this regard, Nguyễn Huệ Chi is more of a traditional or establishment intellectual. As he himself recognized, during his career he was more likely to conform with than challenge the directives of his superiors.

In contrast, Phạm Toàn never earned a PhD. He was originally trained as a schoolteacher and his first job was teaching to ethnic minority children in the comparatively poorer northern regions of Vietnam. However, he gained national fame as a writer of short stories in the 1950s (under the pen name of Châu Diệm) and later also as a translator of literary and scientific works, for which he has been recognized with national awards. His professional career has developed in a complex relation with state authorities, especially in the early 1990s when he began collaborating with Hồ Ngọc Đại on a network of “experimental schools” across Vietnam.⁷⁵ When the government legislated a single official curriculum for all public schools in Vietnam (which effectively terminated all state support for Hồ Ngọc Đại), Hồ Ngọc Đại and Phạm Toàn became embroiled in a public controversy with the Minister of Education that resulted in their marginalization from the party-state’s national educational system. Phạm Toàn is well-known for his outspoken statements on Vietnamese socialism and the party-state, notably to the law enforcers among the “cultural police.”

Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn first got to know each other better through a circle of friends and colleagues, who had decided to write a petition to the Ministry of Culture on its recent ban of a posthumously published collection of works by Trần Dần in 2008. Trần Dần (1926-1997) was the alleged ring-leader of the Nhan Van Giai Pham

⁷⁵ Hồ Ngọc Đại is a son-in-law of the longest serving General Secretary Lê Duân (1907-1986), who had studied developmental psychology in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and 1970s. When he returned to Vietnam in 1976, he managed to secure government support and resources to develop a network of “experimental schools” throughout Vietnam. However, in the early 1990s, the Ministry of Education fixed a single curriculum for all schools in Vietnam, which effectively terminated all support and investment for the “experimental schools.”

Affair, who was imprisoned, banned from publication and dismissed from the Writer's Association for several decades and then re-instated during the government's brief offering of the olive branch to writers in 1988.

Nguyễn Huệ Chi first became involved with this group very haphazardly and almost reluctantly. As he himself has described "At first, I didn't know anything about it. I didn't understand why they wanted to pull Huệ Chi into this. But I agreed to go along. We met several times to discuss it. We would go to eat *phở* [Vietnamese noodle soup] together, just eating and talking about it together in the *phở* stands of Hanoi."⁷⁶ However, the more they discussed, the more Nguyễn Huệ Chi also became involved:

So we had to draft the petition. So this person wrote a bit, then another wrote a bit more and then another a bit more. So then I said, 'OK, they say that I am a scholar with a very strict writing, so why don't you give it to me and I will revise it,' as I hadn't had a turn with it yet. So they agreed to let me take it back, rework it and revise it. But those people tend to write in such an embellished and turgid way that I didn't agree with, as you know how writers are often this way. What's more, their writing was so random. I didn't agree with that either because I knew that speaking randomly was risky. So I rewrote and rearranged the text in time for another meeting, where everyone agreed on my text . . . Then it was time to sign the petition. Then all of the others were like the mice in LaFontaine's famous fable *Belling the Cat*. Each of them was enthused by the plan, but tell any of them to go string the bell on the cat and they were all scared. So then they started passing the buck back and forth. 'OK, Mr. Huệ Chi go first,' they said. In the beginning, it surely wasn't me volunteering to go first! But they pushed me to go first. So, finally I said, 'OK, I will sign it.' And that is how I came to be the first signature on the petition. I wasn't scared.

As Nguyễn Huệ Chi describes so vividly, the petition emerged in a very gradual, uncertain and almost reluctant way, as all of its contributors appears sharply aware of the risks associated with it.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, quotes by Nguyễn Huệ Chi and other information pertaining to him in this chapter are derived from an unpublished interview conducted with Nguyễn Huệ Chi on October 2010 in Berkeley, California, by Peter Zinoman and Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm, who have kindly granted permission for its usage here. I also want to thank Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm for drawing my attention to the Trần Dần petition early on in my research.

⁷⁷ The text of the Trần Dần petition rallied not against this particular instance but also the country's long history of censorship on literary and artistic works. It recommended, "this uncivilized behavior [of censorship] that also lacks any legal basis towards the literary and artistic works in particular and on the creative spirit in general must be stopped" (BBC, 2008, March 4). The petition further argued that in previous cases of censorship never had any official document been produced that gave reasons for why the work had been censored or explained them to those who made formal complaints about the censorship." This petition was addressed to the Head of the Culture, Science and Education Committee and the Legal Committee of the National Assembly, the Ministry

However, this group made an even bolder move by posting the petition online. There it collected a total of 134 online signatures, each of which included one's name, organizational affiliation and address.⁷⁸ In a discussion with the BBC, poet Hoang Hung, who was also among the signatories, opined that this was “the first time such an open letter had appeared in Vietnam” (BBC, 2008, March 4). A small group of them, with Nguyễn Huệ Chi, also hand delivered the petition to the Ministry of Communication and the National Assembly.

Only a few days later, the petition appeared to have a surprising result. An article appeared in the *Tiến Phong* newspaper reported that the ban on the Trần Dần collection had been lifted. The Ministry of Culture had decided only to issue a fine of 15,000,000 VND (around US\$ 750 at the time) for an administrative violation (Trần Tuấn, Dương Thị, & Trần Thanh, 2008, March 9). Indeed, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Communication claimed that there never was any problem with the content of the work itself. This spokesperson also made no mention of the petition, nor did the Ministry ever communicate back to Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his group about it. However, Nguyễn Huệ Chi's group still understood that their petition had made the difference. As he later recounted, “For a while after that . . . we were so elated because of the extraordinary impact of our petition.”

This initial enthusiasm was somewhat dampened, however, when a few weeks later the police made house calls to Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Hoang Hung and Dinh Ba Anh—suggesting that the state had indeed taken notice of the petition. The police also made phone calls to Phạm Toàn and poet Dương Tường. Hoang Hung and Dinh Ba Anh were forced to sign statements declaring that they would no longer contribute to the controversial blogsite *Talawas* of former *đôi mới* writer Phạm Thị Hoài, while the others were let known that the authorities had marked them as “disturbers.”

Nevertheless, their overall feeling of success prevailed. The lesson that Nguyễn Huệ Chi took from the experience was, “as it turned out, we can now write petitions. The authorities might twist and turn at them, but they are unable to do anything to us like before.” This petition became the beginning of a new partnership between Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn and a model for their petition on bauxite mining.

The Birth of a Petition: a Literary Scholar, a Writer and a Hydrologist

By the time of the government's “Scientific Workshop” on April 9 of 2009, both Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn had been aware of the bauxite mining debates. The two had even discussed between themselves the possibility of writing another petition on it. As Nguyễn Huệ Chi has recounted, “the two of us, me and Phạm Toàn, were discussing this [idea of a petition] forever.” Then finally one day Phạm Toàn piped up and said, “Let me write it!” However, after he did write it, Nguyễn Huệ Chi did not like it. It was too risky. As he described:

of Information and Propaganda, who had issued the decision to censor the Trần Dần volume, and couple of other government organizations (“Thư ngỏ về tập thơ Trần Dần,” 2008).

⁷⁸ The similarity of this number to the 135 that signed the anti-bauxite petition is coincidental. Only a few names are in both groups, namely Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Dương Tường, Nguyen Trong Tao, Hoang Hung and Phạm Toàn.

. . . near Phạm Toàn's house, there is a duck-meat restaurant and so I called him up. And there we were, just the two of us, eating duck-meat and talking about the petition. But I just couldn't accept what Phạm Toàn had written. Written like that would only send us to jail. To write "these thugs were selling out the country" would be the death of us! So, I said to Phạm Toàn, "This is like asking them to throw us in jail!"⁷⁹

With the help of a close friend, whom they called up to join them at the duck-meat restaurant, Nguyễn Huệ Chi persuaded Phạm Toàn against this first draft of the petition. It was a moment that revealed important differences of perspective between these two individuals and one that Phạm Toàn appears to have lamented, as he later wrote:

That's rough. We go out together, yet we don't know each other. [Pham] Toan doesn't do something just to go through the motions of it. If I am going to do something, it must be radical. OK, sometimes, like everyone, I too am forced to just to go through the motions of things. But when I do this I feel unkind, like I am deceiving my friends. It is like I am inviting them to tea with water that's not yet boiled. It makes them feel uneasy in their guts. (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19)

Nevertheless, Phạm Toàn put away his text for the petition and the two of them did not discuss it again for several weeks.⁸⁰ Then, one day Phạm Toàn's phone rang again, probably right after the government's "Scientific Workshop"⁸¹:

Again it was Huệ Chi. "You have to draft a petition immediately! It's very urgent. My pulse is already at 97..." he said. But then he also didn't forget to add, "but you have to write it mildly, as if they [i.e., authorities] were just like us, also worried about the nation, but keep it vague on solutions . . . that's all . . ." ⁸²
(Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19)

⁷⁹ Phạm Toàn gives a similar account of his first attempt to draft the petition, though it all seems to be conflated with details from the events that surrounded production of the second draft. As he wrote, "So then suddenly this Mr. Huệ Chi calls me to say, "You have to draft this petition immediately." Then, a few hours later, Huệ Chi calls again, "I've read it but it is no good. Written like that is no good, written like that will only send us all to jail." (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19).

⁸⁰ Nguyễn Huệ Chi described these discussions as gestating over a period of two months, while Phạm Toàn's account suggests a much shorter period of time.

⁸¹ Phạm Toàn does not state when exactly he received this phone call, but most likely it was right after or very soon after the government's "Scientific Workshop," as I discuss below.

⁸² Phạm Toàn's text does not clarify who exactly is being referred to by "those people" [các ông ấy]. Indeed, he alludes to them like this twice. However, in the first instance, the text seems to imply that he is alluding to state authorities, while in the second instance it is even less clear. It may be the scientists from the "Scientists Workshop" or simply the persons that actually did end up signing the petition.

What had probably boosted Nguyễn Huệ Chi's pulse to 97 was the government's "Scientific Workshop." Nguyễn Huệ Chi was incensed by that workshop. He described to me the Deputy Prime Minister, who chaired the workshop, as manipulative and deceptive. He also singled out "this Đoàn Văn Kiên guy," then Director of Vinacomin, for his "reckless" way of speaking. "[Đoàn Văn Kiên] described these projects like a 50-50 chance. Everything was 50-50. He spoke like he was gambling. Every point of contention was a 50 percent chance of winning, 50 percent chance of losing."

Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn also used this workshop as a rallying point when they announced the petition to collect signatures. This announcement asked:

Are we going to let the echoes of the Workshop disappear into the abyss when this extremely dangerous problem of bauxite mining has the whole country on tenterhooks? Are the intellectuals not going to respond to the heartfelt words of Nguyễn Ngọc [who called the bauxite mining projects "illegal"] and, by doing so, also help to protect him [i.e., from state retribution]?" (*Diễn Đàn*, 2009, April 17)

And so, Phạm Toàn drafted a new text for the petition and, after some back and forth revising between them, they both agreed on it. However, Nguyễn Huệ Chi then felt that a literary scholar and a writer were inadequate to write petition on mining, or perhaps he too felt the need for some protective cover in the form of science, as discussed in the previous chapter. That is when he remembered Nguyễn Thế Hùng, a hydrologist at the Da Nang Polytechnic University.

Born in 1957, Nguyễn Thế Hùng is of a younger generation than both Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn. He also lives in Da Nang City and currently teaches at the Da Nang Polytechnic University. Like Nguyễn Huệ Chi, he also built his career in state organizations, namely as a government official to the Irrigation Office for Quang Ngai Province in the early 1980s and later, after a short stint as Assistant Lecturer at the Hanoi Irrigation University in 1989, as Professor at the Da Nang Polytechnic University. At the University, he became Departmental Director for Irrigation and Hydroelectricity, earned his doctoral degree in 2005, and was recognized as a Professor of Distinction in 2006 ("Nguyễn Thế Hùng," n.d.).

However, Nguyễn Huệ Chi remembered Nguyễn Thế Hùng particularly for his personal character. They first met at a workshop commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Einstein's Theory of Relativity in the Central Vietnamese city of Hoi An in 2007. Many important Vietnamese scientists and scholars also attended.⁸³ Yet Nguyễn Huệ Chi's noticed this one particularly "stiff-necked" guy, who seemed willing and able to criticize anything or anyone, as he described:

⁸³ Nguyễn Huệ Chi gave examples of mathematician Phan Đình Diệu, the first Director for the National Institute of Science and Technology and widely known for his pioneering efforts in developing an information technology sector in Vietnam; and physicist Phạm Duy Hiền, former Director of the Nuclear Research Centre in Dalat. Phan Đình Diệu also signed the anti-bauxite petition, as discussed below, while Phạm Duy Hiền had signed the earlier petition by the scientists in November 2008, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Whenever somebody spoke, this unknown guy got up, raised his hand and criticized them from top to bottom. So I thought to myself, “Well, this is odd. Here in Da Nang is someone who, whenever anyone else speaks, is able to stand up and criticize them so obstinately like this.”

However, after apparently “singing only praises” (*khen mù trời*) for Nguyễn Huệ Chi, who had presented on the ideology of modernism, the two of them became acquainted.

Nguyễn Thế Hùng then came to Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s mind as he thought about who they could include as a scientists on their petition. When he called Nguyễn Thế Hùng about it, Nguyễn Thế Hùng agreed immediately. The three of them signed the petition and then circulated it by email to a few dozen of their trusted colleagues and friends (Mặc Lâm, 2009b, April 19). When it came back, it carried 135 signatures of some of the most well-known and accomplished Vietnamese persons from across the country and around the world.

The First 135 Signatures: the Newly Reconsolidated “Intellectuals”

Even though the people who signed the Petition of the 135 Signatures did not refer to themselves as “intellectuals” in the text of the petition itself, they gradually came to identify themselves in this way and correspondences surrounding the petition also show clearly that they had already been thinking of themselves in this way.⁸⁴ Furthermore, what seemed to attract most attention about the petition was the illustrious group of intellectuals that had signed it. When the popular France-based blogsite *Diễn Đàn* introduced the new petition, it did not elaborate so much on the text or arguments of the petition itself, but rather it highlighted the “famous persons” that had signed it, as follows:

Among this first list [of signatures], besides the three that created the petition, we find so many famous persons from inside the country like professors Hoàng Tuy, Phan Đình Diêu, Trần Văn Khê, Nguyễn Lân Dũng (National Assembly delegate), writer and translator Dương Tường, poet Nguyễn Trọng Tạo, film-

⁸⁴ For example, the announcement to the Petition described the text as “expressing the hopes of our Vietnamese intellectuals” (Diễn Đàn, 2009, April 17). In a blog Phạm Toàn later posted about the birth of the Petition, he explained that he used the more general phrase the “people of Vietnam” because he did not consider himself an intellectual because he did not hold a PhD. However, he also admitted that after looking through the 135 signatures that came back to him, “it was true, so many of the signatures on the petition are true intellectuals” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). In a subsequent open letter to the National Assembly on bauxite mining, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn also refer to this earlier petition as a document representing the “Vietnamese intellectuals from inside and outside the country” (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009d, May 7). Later, in their efforts with the petition and the Bauxite Vietnam website, they would be widely referred to as the intellectuals. The Bauxite Vietnam website was also eventually sub-titled as a platform for “critical voices from many perspectives of the intellectuals” (Annex 2).

maker Trần Văn Thuỷ, architect Trần Thanh Vân (a person who has many times raised her voice to protect the Hanoi environment), etc.

From outside the country, there are the famous mathematicians Ngô Bảo Châu and Đinh Tiến Cường, astronomers Nguyễn Quang Riệu and Trịnh Xuân Thuận, professor Trần Văn Thọ, historians Vĩnh Sính, Lê Xuân Khoa, Ngô Vĩnh Long, and United Nations expert Vũ Quang Việt... (*Diễn Đàn*, 2009, April 17)

In this section, I examine who these persons were and what they represented in Vietnamese society and history. This first list of 135 signatures⁸⁵ was critical because it signaled *who* was behind that petition and *what* it might represent.⁸⁶ Like the Trần Dần petition, each signatory was requested to provide a name, organization and address.⁸⁷ What made the petition spectacular was that, as suggested by *Diễn Đàn*, it comprised the best and the brightest of Vietnam. Furthermore, their coming together on this petition represented, symbolically, at least, a new unity across key socio-political and historical lines that had divided the Vietnamese intellectuals in the legacy of the Vietnam War and under communist rule. For easy reference, I also include in parenthesis each persons' rank on the petition, which appeared partly to reflect an order of prestige and partly the random sequence of their signing⁸⁸ (to consult the full list of signatories, please see Annex 1).

Geographic and socio-demographic characteristics

One of the most salient features of the petition was its combination of Vietnamese living inside and outside of the country. Indeed, the numbers between them were almost evenly split at 69 and 62 (n=131),⁸⁹ respectively. Furthermore, signatories within Vietnam were from both the north and the south, as well as from the central region (Figure 1). Most were from Hanoi (30) in the north or Ho Chi Minh City (19) in the

⁸⁵ There is some confusion on whether 133, 134 or 135 persons signed this list. These variances, as far as I can tell, are because of enumeration errors and a few people being taken off and added on in different versions of the list. The version posted on the Bauxite Vietnam website enumerates 135 names, though my own count yields only 133 because of irregularities in enumeration. Calculations of the numbers below are based on a population of 133, though exact numbers vary according to variable.

⁸⁶ The Trần Dần petition was similar with the first fifteen signatures representing the group of literati that drafted the petition and then the 134 electronic signatures that supported it. In the case of the bauxite petition, the list of 135 signatures, which included Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Nguyễn Thế Hùng and Phạm Toàn as the first three, represented those who were behind the petition.

⁸⁷ This data formed the basis for my limited analysis on the geographic and socio-demographic information on this group. However, this information was also provided inconsistently and so the sample sizes vary for the different categories.

⁸⁸ A quick glance at this list strongly suggests that the most important names deliberately placed near the top. However, this does not appear to have been done in a systematic way, especially in the latter half of the list. Most likely, these names were ordered according to a mix of importance and sequence of signing.

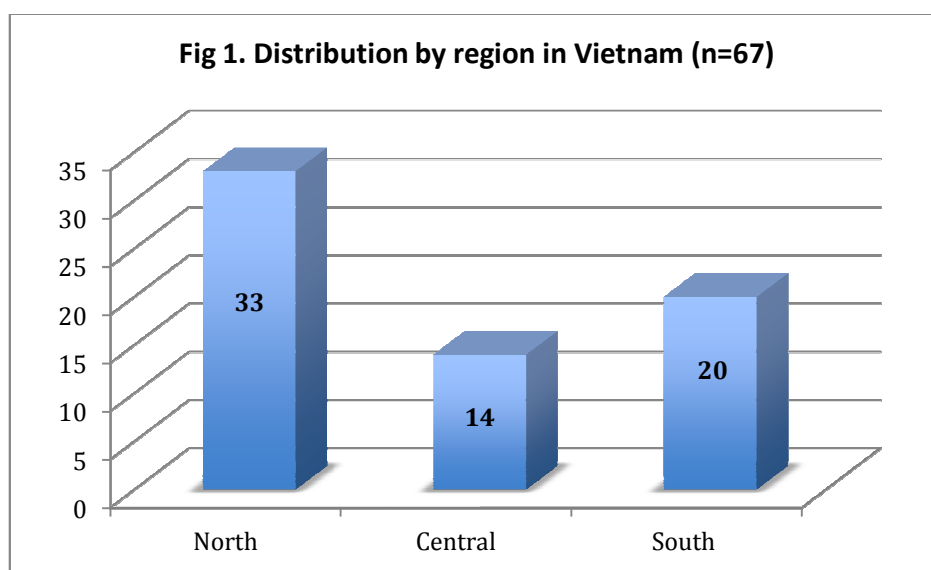
⁸⁹ Two signatories indicated no address.

south (n=67).⁹⁰ However, the list also included six signatures each from Da Nang City and Thua Thien Hue City in the North Central Coast and four from Lam Dong Province in the Central Highlands. Single representatives also came from Ba Ria - Vung Tau in the south, Khanh Hoa and Binh Dinh in the South Central Coast, and Hai Phong, Nam Dinh and Quang Ninh in the north. Notably, most and perhaps all lived in cities.⁹¹

Signatories from outside of Vietnam also represented different concentrations of overseas populations, notably in the United States (22, including six in each of California and Texas), France (15) and Australia (12), while three or less came from each of Canada, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Japan and Singapore (see Figure 2).

Not surprisingly, the signatories comprised a highly educated group. Fifty-five signatories indicated that they held a graduate degree, of which a major portion of them (43) were PhDs.⁹² Among those without a graduate degree, the ones from inside Vietnam were mostly writers, artists, and journalists and those from outside Vietnam were consultants (*tu vấn*), engineers (*ky sư*) or worked in other professions that normally require a university education.

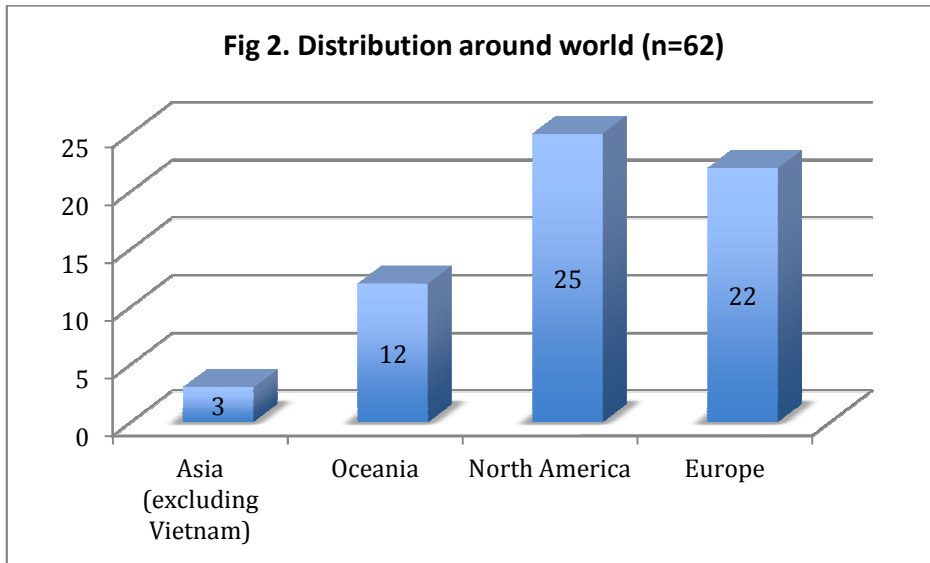
In sum, these signatories represented a geographically expansive, highly educated and professionally diverse group. However, what remained common to every single name on this list was that it was clearly a Vietnamese one, a trend that would persist with the near 3,000 signatures that would eventually add their names to the petition.



⁹⁰ Two signatories indicated only “Vietnam” as an address.

⁹¹ The only ones that were not clearly based in a city were six signatories, who listed their address as a province without a clear indication of whether they lived in an urban or rural area.

⁹² PhD was counted for indications of Dr., PhD or TS (Tiến sỹ). For the purpose of this analysis, I have assumed that GS (Giáo sư/Lecturer), PGS (Phó Giáo sư/Assistant Lecturer) or ThS (Thác sỹ/Master’s degree) did *not* hold a PhD/TS unless specifically indicated, as in the common titling of GS.TS or PGS.TS.



Scientists and artists

The Petition of the 135 signatures also brought together both scientists and artist-intellectuals, who were, despite a few exceptions, largely absent from the Scientists' Petition of November 2008. Inside Vietnam, a significant majority (30) can be described as artist-intellectuals, either as literary scholars and translators (12) and writers and artists (17) (Table 1). Meanwhile, a lesser number (19) were scientists, mathematicians and engineers. Conversely, among those outside Vietnam, the large majority (42) were scientists, mathematicians, engineers and other professionals with a background in the hard sciences or mathematics. Only eleven could be considered as artist-intellectuals, which also included historians, interior designers and educators.

Among those within Vietnam, many, like Phạm Toàn, were writers and translators. They included three who had also signed the Trần Dần petition, namely poet-translator Hoàng Hưng (#25), celebrated Hanoi poet-translator Dương Tường (#45), and poet, musician and artist Nguyen Trong Tao (#73), who won the National Arts and Literature prize in 2012. The list also included nationally renown writers Y Nhi (#63), winner of the National Book of the Year Award in 1984 for poetry and short stories, among other honours; Bùi Ngọc Tấn (#66) in the northern port city of Hai Phong; and Võ Hồng (#31) in the southern resort city of Nha Trang, as well as several other less known writers.

Others writers and translators included translators Nguyễn Trung Thuận (122) and Nguyễn Thụy Anh (#130) and writers Trần Thị Trường (#70) and Phạm Đình Trọng (#46), a student of Nguyễn Huệ Chi, in Hanoi; poet Trần Thị Dũng (#76) in Ho Chi Minh City; and “dissident” poet Bùi Minh Quốc in Dalat. The list also included a new and younger generation of translators in the likes of Phạm Duy Hiền (#33) in the southern port city of Vung Tau and Trịnh Lữ (#44).

The list also included other types of artists. Classical Vietnamese musician and musicologist Trần Văn Khê (#5) is among the most famous of them.⁹³ Born in the southern province of Tien Giang in 1921, Trần Văn Khê comes from a family of four generations of classical musicians. He moved to France in 1949 to further his musical education. There he eventually became professor of ethno-musicology at Sorbonne University and a Director of Research at the prestigious French Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). In 1999, he returned to Vietnam to reside in Ho Chi Minh City, though he still travels abroad frequently to perform and promote classical Vietnamese and Asian music.

Trần Văn Khê has won numerous international awards, including the Prize of the UNESCO International Council for Music in 1981 and the *Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Ministry of Culture and Information in 1991. He has also been awarded Medals for Ethnic Culture (1998) and Labour (1999) by the Vietnamese government. He is a member of numerous professional musicology societies in France, United States, Germany and Asia and has been conferred an honorary doctoral degree in music from the University of Ottawa, Canada.

Other artists of national repute included Hanoi artist Trần Nhuong (#40) and painter-sculptor Trần Lương (#41) in Hanoi, painter Trịnh Cung (#32) and sculptor Phan Phương Đông (#49) in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as the nationally and internationally recognized documentarist Trần Văn Thủy (#11), whom I discuss more below under dissident intellectuals.

Among the literary scholars on the list, like Nguyễn Huệ Chi, were Nguyễn Đăng Mạnh (#19), a leading scholar in modern Vietnamese literature, who has been recognized as a “Teacher of the People” (*Giáo sư nhân dân*), the highest honour the government can confer upon an educator in Vietnam; Trần Thị Băng Thanh (#27), who was the first woman to teach at the Han-Nom University and who is commonly dubbed as the “Chinese Master” [*Bà đồ nho*] for her many publications in that field; Đoàn Phan Tân (#39), former Vice-Rector of the Vietnamese Literature University; and Hoàng Dũng (#25) and Lại Nguyên Ân (#47), two of the most extensively published Vietnamese scholars of Vietnamese language and literature.⁹⁴

A smaller number (9) of those living outside of Vietnam can also be included among the artist-intellectuals, mostly as academics and researchers in the arts and humanities. One of the most famous was historian Ngô Vĩnh Long (#17). Born in a province of the Mekong Delta in 1944, Ngô Vĩnh Long was the first ever Vietnamese student to study at Harvard University in 1964. Ngô Vĩnh Long also became a prominent anti-war activist in the early 1970s. Currently, he is a professor at Maine University. Other artist-intellectuals living outside Vietnam included, Nguyễn Bá Chung (#57), literary scholar and translator at Massachusetts University; Vĩnh Sính (#64), Professor

⁹³ His own website describes him as “one of the greatest masters of the traditional Vietnamese music” (source: <http://www.philmultic.com/tran/english.html>, retrieved November 14, 2012).

⁹⁴ Other scholars of language and culture included Hà Hải Châu (#115), former Head of Department in Foreign Languages for the Phạm Ngọc Thạch Medical College in Ho Chi Minh City; and Trần Hậu Yên Thế (#72) in the Vietnam Arts University.

Emeritus of history at the University of Alberta, Canada; and Trần Quang Hải (#132), musicologist at Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris, France.

Among the 45 signatories from outside Vietnam who also indicated their profession, most of them (35) were scientists, mathematicians, engineers or other professionals with a background in the hard sciences or mathematics. Many of them have taught and researched in some of the world's most prestigious research and educational organizations. They included Vũ Quang Việt (#7), former Chief of the National Accounts Section at the United Nations Statistical Division in New York from 2003 to 2008; Astrophysicist Nguyễn Quang Riệu (#16), retired professor at Sorbonne and Emeritus Research Director at the French CNRS; physicist Phạm Xuân Yêm (#20) and nuclear physicist Đỗ Đăng Giu (#23), both also researchers at CNRS; and Trương Hồng Sơn (#35), researcher for NASA from 1980 until he retired in 2006, as well as former editor of *The Vietnam Review*.

Other persons of note included epidemiologist Nguyen Van Tuan at the University of New South Wales in New Zealand, who has nearly 150 scientific publications in his field; Philosopher Lê Xuân Khoa, Visiting Professor at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies; Trần Văn Thọ (#14), professor of economics at Waseda University in Tokyo; Trịnh Xuân Thuận (#24), who earned his PhD in astronomy from Princeton in 1970; and Phùng Liên Đoàn (#63), who has a PhD in nuclear physics from MIT in 1972. Several of them have also been recognized with prestigious honorary titles, degrees and international awards, such as Trịnh Xuân Thuận, who won UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for work popularizing science in 2009; Nguyễn Ngọc Giao (#81), who won the French Palmes Award in 1998; and Nguyễn Đăng Hưng (#9), Professor at Liege University, Belgium.

However, the one who was to become the most famous of them all is the comparatively young mathematician Ngô Bảo Châu (#21). As a youth, Ngô Bảo Châu was widely known in Vietnam for his success at national and international contests in mathematics. While in grade 11 and 12, he became the first Vietnamese student to win two gold medals at the International Mathematics Olympiad. Born in Hanoi in 1972 into a family of academics,⁹⁵ Ngô Bảo Châu moved to France in 1992 to study mathematics at the university level. In France, he became a professor and researcher of mathematics at Paris University and CNRS, before moving to Princeton and now Chicago universities in the United States.

In 2010, Ngô Bảo Châu was awarded the Fields Medal in mathematics, commonly dubbed as the Nobel Prize of mathematics.⁹⁶ With this prize, he became a national hero, for which the government has awarded him a Hanoi apartment worth an estimated 600,000 US dollars and named him Director of the newly established the Vietnam Institute for Advanced Study in Mathematics (VNB, 2010, August 28).

Although living outside Vietnam, many in this group continue to follow closely social and political developments inside Vietnam. For example, Vu Quang Viet, who left Vietnam before 1975, is known to have advised Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach on

⁹⁵ Both of Ngô Bảo Châu's parents held doctoral degrees, while his grandfather was also a professor of mathematics.

⁹⁶ Ngô Bảo Châu won the Fields Medal for his work on proving a long-standing conjecture in algebraic geometry known as the Fundamental Lemma.

economic policy when the latter was visiting the USA in 1977. Both Vu Quang Viet and Trần Văn Thọ had also served as advisory members on economic policy to the Prime Minister's Research Councils of the late Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and Pham Van Khai. Others frequently visit Vietnam, collaborate on research and training projects with Vietnamese organizations, and/or publish actively in the Vietnamese press and other media.⁹⁷

Others have organized workshops, forums and blogs sites outside of Vietnam that discuss socio-cultural, political and economic issues of contemporary Vietnam. Of note, Hà Dương Tường (#78) and Nguyễn Ngọc Giao operate the *Diễn Đàn Forum*, while Võ Thị Điều Hằng (#82) operates *Viet-studies*. Among the frequent contributors to these sites are Phạm Xuân Yêm (Dan Luan), Trần Minh Khôi (#79) (Dan Luan), art critic Bùi Như Hương (#51) (*Talawas*), historian Vĩnh Sính (#64), and economist Trần Nam Bình (#67).⁹⁸

The number of scientists from Vietnam on the list was proportionally less (12). However, they included some of the earliest and most famous ones. The most famous among them was arguably mathematician Hoàng Tụy (#4). Born in 1927 in the central province of Quang Nam, Hoàng Tụy was among the first cohort of Vietnamese students to be trained in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries.⁹⁹ In 1959, he became one of the first two students from Vietnam to defend what was then considered known as a pre-doctoral degree (*phó tiến sĩ*).

Hoàng Tụy's national and international distinctions include the Ho Chi Minh Award for lifetime achievement in 1996 and an honorary doctoral degree from Linköping University in Sweden in 1995. Hoàng Tụy is probably also the first Vietnamese academic to make a substantial contribution to international scholarship with his work on convexity cuts, also known as "Tụy's cut." For his "pioneering work and

⁹⁷ For example, Trần Văn Thọ is a member of the Vietnam Asia-Pacific Economics Center in Hanoi; atmospheric scientist Nguyễn Đức Hiệp for the Australian government collaborates with the Center for Environmental Technology and Protection in Ho Chi Minh City; IT specialist Hà Dương Tuấn, currently retired and living in France, collaborates with Vietnamese business on developing their information technologies; poet, translator and essayist Nguyễn Bá Chung, a visiting faculty at Massachusetts University, coordinates a yearly Summer Study Program with Hue University; and epidemiologists Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, have been active in campaigns to support victims of Agent Orange, and Nguyễn Đình Nguyên, who was active in limiting the spread of the H5N1 virus in Vietnam.

⁹⁸ VietnamNet described Trần Nam Bình as someone who has written "Many outstanding articles on education and economics that have not only contributed to the environment of debate but have become focal pieces for many people in these debates" (Hồ Duyên, 2007, March 1).

⁹⁹ Hoàng Tụy was born into a mandarin family ancestrally related to legendary governor Hoang Dieu (1828-1882). Hoang Dieu is nationally commemorated for his fierce though ultimately unsuccessful defense of Hanoi against French invasion in 1882. Hoàng Tụy's father was a mandarin under Emperors Duy Tân and Khải Định (though both were figureheads under French colonial rule), of whose seven children five earned PhDs, including Hoàng Tụy.

fundamental contributions” to global optimization theory, he also became the first recipient of the Constantin Caratheodory award in 2011.¹⁰⁰

Other distinguished mathematicians and scientists from inside Vietnam included Phan Đình Diệu (#6), former President of the Vietnam Association for Informatics and Vice-Director of the National Centre for Scientific Research of Vietnam and pioneer of new information technologies in Vietnam; Nguyễn Lâm Dũng (#8), the National Assembly delegate, who is a professor of biology that became famous in the 1990s for his regular appearances on the popular TV show “Ask a Question, Get an Answer” (*Hỏi gì đáp ngay*); Nguyễn Quang A (#15), a recognized mathematical prodigy in his youth, who has since worked for many important government and private-sector organizations and co-founded the controversial Institute of Development Studies; and biologist Hà Sĩ Phu (#95) in Dalat, who is also well-known for his “dissident” writings, as discussed below.

Those from inside Vietnam also included many representatives from the media and other professions. Among the best known was Tống Văn Công (#29), who was former Editor-in-Chief for *Báo Lao Động* and who later in life became more outspoken and wrote critically of the Vietnamese leadership on foreign websites under the name of Thiện Ý.¹⁰¹ Another was Lê Phú Khải (#83), former reporter for the Voice of Vietnam in the south, who had also written his own personal letter to the General Secretary Nong Duc Manh prior to the petition. Others working in important media and publishing organizations included Ngô Thị Kim Cúc, editor and reporter for *Thanh Niên* newspaper, one of the most widely read progressive newspapers in the country, and Hồ Thị Hoà, editor at the Knowledge Publish House, which is an independently funded publishing house directed by former Vice-Minister of Science and Technology Chu Hào. Others who signed as editors and reporters without indicating organizational affiliation included Dương Khánh Phương (#68), Vũ Thị Thu Nhi (#75) and Ngô Mai Phong (#116)¹⁰².

Many other professionals were also on the list, the most famous of which was architect Trần Thanh Vân (#111). Others included financial consultant Nguyễn Hồng Khoái, member of the National Accountants’ Club and the Vietnam Association for Taxation Consultants in Nam Dinh; Nguyễn Thị Thanh Thúy (#43) from the Science and Technology Department in Quy Nhon and Quy Nhon University; Nguyễn Trường Tiến (#56), President of the Vietnam Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering and Vietnam Geotechnical Institute, among a long list of other companies and associations for which he has been a senior administrator; Trần Cát (#60) of the Vietnam Association for the Conservation of Nature and Environment in Da Nang; Lê Thành Bắc (#71), Vice-Inspector of Da Nang University; Nguyễn Biên Cương (#80), Vice-Director of the Department for Roads and Bridges at the Da Nang Polytechnic University; Đỗ Xuân Thọ (#96), member of the Vietnam Science and Technology Institute for Transportation; engineer Võ Minh Thế (#100) of the Hồ Chí Minh – Long

¹⁰⁰ Source: <http://isogop.org/?q=node/34>, Retrieved September 19, 2012.

¹⁰¹ He is also believed to be monitored closely by the state (Pers. Comm. Dương Tường, August 2012).

¹⁰² Several writers listed above also indicated that they wrote articles for the press, namely poets Hoàng Hưng Trần Tiến Dũng (#76) in Ho Chi Minh City, writer Trần Thị Trường (#70) and poet Nguyễn Trọng Tạo (#73) in Hanoi, and poet Bùi Minh Quốc (#88) in Dalat.

Thành – Dầu Giây Highspeed Highway Project; Nguyễn Huy Hoàn (#102), member of the Vietnam Science and Technology Association for Roads and Bridges in Da Nang; Lương Tuấn Anh (#103), member of the Vietnam Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment in Hanoi; and biologist Văn Thị Hạnh (#110) in Ho Chi Minh City.

Together, these signatories represented a wide range of academic disciplines and professions, among which were economists and historians, medical doctors and epidemiologists, nuclear and astrophysicists, philosophers and mathematicians, musicologists and art critics, atmospheric scientists and aero-spatial engineers, financial analysts and IT consultants. Furthermore, they were also connected to a formidable network of world renown academic and professional organizations, such as Harvard, Princeton, Sorbonne, CNRS, the United Nations and NASA. Together they represented a new unity between scientists and artists-intellectuals, who had long been divided in political matters under Vietnamese communism.

Table 1: Distribution by Profession

	Literary scholars & translators	Writers and artists	Other arts & humanities	Scientists & engineers	Mathematicians & economists	Other maths & sciences	Media & publishing	TOTAL
Inside Vietnam	12	17	1	15	3	1	7	56
Outside Vietnam	2	4	5	22	7	5	1	46
TOTAL	14	21	6	37	10	6	8	102

Establishment and dissident intellectuals

In addition to the wide range of intellectual fields and professions represented in the list, it also counted on those who made their careers as “establishment intellectuals” and those who had fallen out with the establishment as “dissidents,” as well as those of many shades in between. Of the former type, some were like Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Lê Phú Khải, who had surprised even themselves with their outspokenness on the bauxite mining issue (see Chapter 3). Another was writer Pham Dinh Trong, a student of Nguyễn Huệ Chi who was relatively unknown as a writer until he signed this petition and began writing more and more on contemporary social and political issues in Vietnam. In 2009, he also renounced his Party membership. Ngô Bảo Châu is another one who appears to have become increasingly outspoken after the bauxite mining debates. After signing this petition, he wrote a personal letter to the Prime Minister on bauxite mining one month later and then several others letter over the next couple of years denouncing the state’s treatment of certain “dissidents” and intellectuals.

Many others on the list had built their careers within state organizations, but at different points of time and in different ways became more outspoken in their views and

critical of state organizations. Among the more nationally and internationally acclaimed yet controversial figures was documentarist Trần Văn Thủy (#11). Born in the northern province of Nam Dinh in 1940, Trần Văn Thủy has won many honours, including the Silver and Golden Dove Prizes at the Dok Leipzig international film festival (1988), the Best Short Film Award at the Asia Pacific Film Festival (1999), and the Silver and Golden Lotus Prizes and the Best Director awards at the Vietnam Film Festival (1970, 1980, 1988, 1999). The Vietnamese government has also recognized Trần Văn Thủy as an “Artist of the People” (*Nghệ sĩ nhân dân*), which is the highest honour the state can confer upon an artist. However, Trần Văn Thủy has also been controversial political character.

Like the *đổi mới* writers of his generation, Trần Văn Thủy questioned and challenged the glorified depictions of the Vietnam War and post-war era by the Vietnamese Communist Party through his artistic works. In 1985, the government banned his first two-part documentary of *Hanoi in One’s Eye* (1982) and *Story of Kindness* (1985) on the hardship and suffering that followed the Vietnam War. The latter film was described as the “bomb from Vietnam,” when it won the Silver Dove at the Dok Leipzig festival in 1988. Trần Văn Thủy himself was allegedly put under state surveillance from 1982 to 1987 and may have escaped imprisonment only by a personal intervention from former Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng.¹⁰³ However, the government reversed its stance on Trần Văn Thủy in the late 1980s during its brief period of liberalization in the arts and literature (see Chapter 2). It removed its bans on his earlier films and commissioned his award-winning film the *Sound of the Violin in My Lai* (1998). Trần Văn Thủy continues to be a controversial political figure today, speaking out frequently on the need for democracy and political transition in Vietnam (Sprole, 2003, November 19).

A few names on the list were more extreme “dissidents,” who have endured imprisonment, house arrest and constant monitoring and harassment at the hands of the party-state. Most notably among them were three members of the “Friendly Dalat Group” (*Nhóm thân hữu Đà Lạt*), namely poet Bùi Minh Quốc, biologist Hà Sĩ Phu, and educator Mai Thái Lĩnh (#37). Bùi Minh Quốc is a former revolutionary soldier and communist poet, who, together with Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự, organized in the early 1990s a march of “intellectuals”¹⁰⁴ from the south to the north of Vietnam to clamour for the reinstatement of Nguyễn Ngọc as Editor-in-Chief at *Văn Nghệ* magazine. Hà Sĩ Phu was imprisoned in 1991 and 1995 for his outspoken views and publications on multi-party democracy.

Hence, the list of signatories to the Petition also combined diverse perspectives on Vietnamese that ranged from newly outspoken establishment intellectuals to long-standing “dissidents,” who had already experience other and more violent encounters with the party-state. While the Vietnamese government has mostly been able to

¹⁰³ One informant suggested to me that it was only his personal connections to Phạm Văn Đồng that saved him from imprisonment during this period (Anonymous Pers. Comm., July 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Mostly they were recruited from the Writers’ Associations across the country. Note that Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự also later signed the Intellectuals’ Petition as number 216.

marginalize and isolate these dissidents from other sectors of Vietnam society, in this petition they spoke together with other more mainstream intellectuals.

Intellectuals across generations

Another important aspect of the petition was that it spanned several generations of intellectuals. Among them were representatives born in every decade from the 1920s to the 1970s. I am unable to provide a reliable statistical breakdown of age because my data is based only on what my informants and I could incompletely piece together about them, which was for about one third of signatories. However, what I am arguing was most important the impression they gave, their symbolism over their quantity. As an illustration, the list included at three or four mathematicians who were the beacons of Vietnamese mathematics of their generation. They were Hoàng Tuy, who, born in 1927, had witnessed the success of the anti-colonial revolution as a young man and, as mentioned above, was among the first Vietnamese students to be trained in the Soviet Union; Phan Đình Diệu, born in 1936, and Nguyễn Quang A, born in 1946, who had lived through the Indochinese wars as young men and were among the first generations to personally experience living outside of communist countries; and Ngô Bảo Châu, who grew up in the post-war state subsidy period, experienced the *đổi mới* reforms as an adolescent, and was educated in the capitalist countries of the west.

The first 135 signatories to the online petition against bauxite mining were an intellectual elite. They had been trained by and worked in many of the most prestigious and powerful research and training organizations around the world and across the country. However, not only did they represent the best and brightest of Vietnam, their convergence of diverse experiences and locations suggested something of a reconsolidation among them. In a nation whose politics is still divided by the alliances and divisions that emerged from the Vietnam War, this list brought together intellectuals from the north and the south of Vietnam, those who had fled the war and those who had stayed behind, those who remembered the war and those who had only heard about it, and those who had spoken out against the regime, at times at great personal cost, and those who had been still working quietly within it. In this petition, they emerged as a more cohesive opposition to the party-state on bauxite mining.

Delivering the Petition: Experiencing and Exposing the Party-State

As with the Trần Dân petition, Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Thế Hùng decided to deliver the Petition themselves to the relevant government offices. However, because there was no designated contact with which to arrange an appointment at the Prime Minister's or President's Offices, they simply had to show up. That is what they did on the morning of April 17th. Nguyễn Thế Hùng had flown up the night before from Da Nang to join them and on that morning a friend drove them to the government's offices at 1 Hoàng Hoa Thám Street in Hanoi. In delivering this petition to these offices and later in writing about it online, these three began a public spectacle that exposed certain realities about the Vietnamese government and political system.

Phạm Toàn captured their early optimism with his lyrical account of this Hanoi morning, almost wistful of another era:

It was a cool April morning. The waters of West Lake were still dusky, while the early hour made the Botanical Gardens appear deeper and richer in colour than usual, as if the leaves were still hanging onto the autumn. The beauty of Hanoi at this hour can bring a tear to your eye, my friends! (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19).

The mood changed, however, as they approached the government gate. A security guard approached and told them, “nobody has permission to enter here.”

Undeterred, Nguyễn Huệ Chi proceeded to introduce themselves as “representing the renown intellectuals” of Vietnam. This seemed to perplex the guard. By Phạm Toàn’s account, the guard was “embarrassed and smiling nervously—for sure he found all of this very strange!” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). So then another guard came towards them. Nguyễn Huệ Chi repeated his message and handed him a copy of the petition. According to Phạm Toàn, the guard read the title and then turned straight to the list of signatures. The guard then instructed them to wait while he went inside to inform somebody else.

After a moment, the guard returned and invited in Nguyễn Huệ Chi. However, Nguyễn Huệ Chi refused. He insisted that the three of them enter together. The guard agreed. “This guy was easy going,” noted Phạm Toàn (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). Inside, however, the buildings had a more Kafkaesque feeling:

After the gate, we passed along a large corridor, passing by each door labeled “Room No 1” until “Room No 5.” However, all of these rooms were locked. So then this guard in the green shirt led us as we knocked on a few other doors, but still we couldn’t find anyone anywhere. Even the guard seemed disappointed, like he too had no idea what was going on. So, finally, there came another guard from even deeper inside the building. He was tall, dark and had an athletic build. He didn’t shake our hands, but he brought us back to the room before Room No. 1, which had a placard on the door, “Room for receiving documents.” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19)

This room had a table and four chairs, but nobody was invited to sit down. Still, awkwardly, they all sat down. The guard then explained that he was unable to receive the petition because he had no procedure for it. He said that if they wanted the government to receive it, they had to go back to the post office and mail it. “The three of us were stupefied,” recounted Nguyễn Huệ Chi. “So we suggested just leaving a few copies behind. But, ‘No,’ [the official] responded, ‘if you leave them here, they will just get thrown into the garbage.’”

Then, in a moment of almost comic juxtaposition, Nguyễn Thế Hùng took out his camera to take a picture of the placard on the door, “Room for receiving documents.” The guard stopped him immediately. Both Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn had to suppress their surprise. Neither could believe that “somebody could be so plain and unaffected as to try to take a picture of that sign!” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19).

As they were leaving, another revealing difference of perspective arose between Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn. As Phạm Toàn was thanking the guard who had brought them inside, Nguyễn Huệ Chi suddenly turned around and said, “Today, only

you comrade have been sympathetic to our efforts. All the rest of them are just bureaucrats. On behalf of more than 130 signatories, I thank you comrade” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). “That’s great, really great,” thought Phạm Toàn, “Even at this minute, we are still comrades!” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). In spite of their common mission, they situated themselves differently in relation to the socialist state.

The visit to the National Assembly’s office was more hospitable, partly at least because they had pre-arranged the meeting with the same delegate Nguyễn Minh Thuyết, the same person they had met at the National Assembly for the Trần Dần Petition. However, this encounter was not without tension either. Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Minh Thuyết were old rivals in the field of education. Nguyễn Minh Thuyết had been one of the officials behind the development of the state’s official curriculum that had scuttled the “experimental schools” of Hồ Ngọc Đại and Phạm Toàn in the 1990s. As Nguyễn Huệ Chi recounted with some concern, “Here we were coming to meet Nguyễn Minh Thuyết and one of us was holding his nose up to him.” Nguyễn Huệ Chi decided to act quickly to defuse the situation and nipped in front of Phạm Toàn to greet the Assembly delegate on behalf of their delegation. Here they were also joined by poet Dương Tường, who had also joined Nguyễn Huệ Chi to the National Assembly for the Trần Dần petition.

After chatting in his office over tea, Nguyễn Minh Thuyết then led the delegation to the Vice-Chair of the National Assembly (*Phó văn phòng Quốc Hội*), Nguyễn Sĩ Dũng. Espying a map on the wall, Phạm Toàn asked the Vice-Chair whether he marked an “x” on the spot for bauxite mining yet. The two of them were old acquaintances and Phạm Toàn began to tell of how they had both been honoured as “Representatives of the People” (*Người đại biểu nhân dân*) in the same year in 2004 until his reminiscing was cut short. By Phạm Toàn’s account, the “head of the delegation” got to work again, “[o]ne hundred and thirty signatures... intellectuals... fate of the nation... responsibility... future of the Vietnamese people... and snap a picture!” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19).

Nguyễn Huệ Chi then asked the Vice-Chair to help them forward their copies of the petition to the Assembly delegates. The Vice-Chair brought out a book with their addresses. Nguyễn Huệ Chi asked if they could take a copy of it, but the Vice-Chair refused, saying that it was one for “office use” only. Thus, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Nguyễn Thế Hùng busily got to work addressing and stuffing envelopes with their petition. They addressed individual copies to Nguyễn Phú Trọng, Chair of the National Assembly, each of the three Vice-Chairs, the Executive Committee, Assembly delegates (in general), the Legal Committee, National Security Committee, Economic Committee, Ethnic Minorities Assembly and, finally, particular delegates that were known for their “active” participation in Assembly meetings (*Bauxite Vietnam*, May 19, 2009).

As they were leaving the National Assembly office, heading back home just in time for lunch, Phạm Toàn commented to the Vice-Chair, “We are doing this just to do it, but I don’t believe it will have any effect. But if we don’t do it, then we don’t feel good inside.” To this, Phạm Toàn recalled the Vice-Chair replying something about “having to answer to their grandchildren.” “That’s really good!” Phạm Toàn later reflected, “Everybody feels responsible, but nobody has the right to do anything. And so all of our discussions are just to equivocate among ourselves” (Phạm Toàn, 2009, April 19). His comments reflected both the sense of importance that they felt about delivering the petition, as well as recognition of the hopelessness of their efforts. All of their efforts and

achievements in bringing the petition together seemed almost pointless in the recognition of how impervious state officials seemed to be to outside influences.

However, as Phạm Toàn returned home later that day and wrote a blog about his experiences that day, he also began to uncover a more important purpose to their actions. This purpose was less instrumental in its ambitions to influence state authorities than performative in raising awareness about the Vietnamese political system. How could the leaders of the nation possibly be receptive to their ideas when they had no channel for hearing them, when security guards were so estranged by their efforts that they did not know where to take them, and when state authorities had to emerge from the bowels of government office only to send them back to mail the petition by post? As the petition developed into the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, these awareness raising aspects of their efforts only grew in importance.

The *Bauxite Vietnam* Website: a New Platform for the Intellectuals

The day after Nguyễn Huệ Chi returned from delivering the petition, a small group of former students and friends in southern Vietnam urged and helped him create a blog site for the petition. A few days later, it was online and became an instant hit. In only five days, the petition collected 1,100 online signatures and the blog site itself had registered some 32,000 hits (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009b, April 27). Indeed, the traffic on the blog had become so heavy that Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his assistants had to chastise its contributors for posting too much on topics not directly related to bauxite mining (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al., 2009b, April 27).

Nonetheless, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his assistants decided to create a larger format website for the petition. On April 27th, 2009 it was announced the new *Bauxite Vietnam* website. Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Thế Hùng were listed as its owners. The website was also an instant hit. In just one month, the petition reached 2,500 signatures (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009f, May 26). After only three months, the website had registered 3.5 million hits (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009h, July 23). This website quickly turned into a new hub for the public discussion on bauxite mining and a new platform for the intellectuals. In this section, I review the presentation and functions of this website.

The *Bauxite Vietnam* website was similar to other Vietnamese language blogs and websites that carried critical social and political content, such as *Diễn Đàn* or *Viet-studies*. Its main distinguishing feature was its focus on bauxite mining—and that, for a while, it was not firewalled from within the country. The initial presentation of the website declared this focus loud and clear (see Annex 2).¹⁰⁵ The title of the website “BAUXITE Vietnam” was written in bold steely—or, more properly, aluminiumish—letters, and below it read the sub-title “a source of information on bauxite issues in Vietnam.” The presentation of the page was dominated by the orangey-red colours of bauxite clay. The title bar displayed monochromatic images of bauxite excavation and “red mud” cesspools, contrasted with one image of highland minorities dressed in colourful ceremonial garb.

As the origin of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, the link to the Petition of the 135 Signatures was posted top and center on the page, with further links to its English and

¹⁰⁵ My content analysis here is based on a snapshot of the website from July 7, 2009.

French translations. By clicking any one of these links, a visitor could read and sign onto the petition. Below were lists of other signatures on the petition, copied and posted from different periods of time.

The website also highlighted the importance of the bauxite mining controversy and the website's own patriotic allegiances by featuring an image of General Giáp in the upper left hand corner of the page and providing links to the three letters that he would eventually write to protest bauxite mining. The image is taken from a foreign media agency and beside it reads the caption, "He slaughtered the French. He humiliated the Americans. Now Vietnam's General Giáp faces his last battle."¹⁰⁶ Immediately below the links to General Giáp's letters is another link to another petition protesting bauxite mining signed by a group of veterans led by Major General Nguyễn Trọng Vĩnh. A comment also notes that this petition was sent personally by Major General Vĩnh to post on the *Bauxite Vietnam* website.

The upper half of the page, as I have just described, represents the fixed content of the webpage. The lower half is formatted more like a blog site with different columns for new postings of news, information, documents, and forum discussions. In this regard, *Bauxite Vietnam* operated both like a website to provide information and a blog site with more interactive and up to date commentary. It represented both a defined group or network as does a website, while also providing a platform for that group to interact directly and regularly with its audience, as does a blog site.¹⁰⁷

The *Bauxite Vietnam* also functioned as a platform for Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Huệ Chi, who were the official voices behind "*Bauxite Vietnam*," to produce further petitions, open letters and, later, editorials in protest of bauxite mining. However, these initiatives cease in July, partly because the public discussion on bauxite mining had died down and partly because the party-state had begun to mobilize a more forcible repression of public debate, as discussed in the next chapter.

The *Bauxite Vietnam* website, however, continued to function but shifted focus to other sensitive social and political issues, most notably on-going conflicts with China in the Eastern Sea and the on-going intimidation and harassment of Vietnamese fishing boats by Chinese military vessels. As it shifted focus, *Bauxite Vietnam* also re-designed its presentation that helped accentuate the nature of these changes. Notably, it now added to its subtitle a line that described the website as the "critical voices from many perspectives of the intellectuals." It now represented the network that had emerged around opposition to bauxite mining at least as much as the topic itself.

The new design, launched on July 7th, had a new look (see Annex 3). The orangey-red of the previous version was mostly gone. The pictures of bauxite excavators and red mud cesspools were now replaced with stylized drawings of the same bull-dozing over trees under a blood red sky and clawing into the purple earth. It appeared to suggest invading tanks as much as machines of mining. The formerly metallic letters of the

¹⁰⁶ This image and its caption is reprinted in English from an article in *Al Jazeera* (Fawthrop, 2009, May 7).

¹⁰⁷ Later in the fall, it was also used to organize a charity relief mission for flood victims in the Central Vietnam, an activity that Nguyễn Huệ Chi believes spurred state authorities to attack and dismantle the website in December of 2009, as discussed in the next chapter.

“Bauxite” title were now written in golden yellow with a red “X” in the middle, reflecting the red and gold of the national flag. An image of General Giáp remained, but it was a different one now. Rather than just staring angrily with pursed lips, he was now pictured with his finger in the air and his lips parted, as if giving orders or quite literally speaking out. The new design was also now formatted more like blog site, emphasizing public interaction more than its fixed contents. All of these adaptations seemed to suggest a nationalist and patriotic opposition to an oppressive force.

The *Bauxite Vietnam* website evolved from “a source of information on bauxite mining” to all that and a new platform for “the critical voices from many perspectives of the intellectuals.” Nguyễn Quang Lập, operator of another popular blog inside Vietnam named *Quê choa*, commented, “It is fair to say that nobody among the Vietnamese intellectuals does not read Bauxite [Vietnam] info . . . as soon as I open my eyes [in the morning], I go to the Bauxite webpage. Before I go to sleep, I also have once last glance. In short, four or five times a day I am like this [checking the *Bauxite Vietnam* website]” (Nhật Hiên, 2009, December 29). Similarly, as Radio Free Asia described, “From starting out only as a website to provide information and introduce ideas on Vietnam’s bauxite mining plans, it quickly became a platform for Vietnamese intellectuals and youth to follow and discuss the contemporary situation in Vietnam” (Trần Văn, 2010b).

To be sure, other websites existed upon which these intellectuals had been posting their blogs and commentaries for several years now. However, none of them had attracted so much mainstream attention as did *Bauxite Vietnam* then. By the time the website was successfully hacked and paralysed in December of 2009, it had registered some 17 million hits (BBC, 2009e, December 20).

Conclusion

With the Petition of the 135 Signatures emerged a different kind of politics from the embedded advocacy that had begun the public debate on bauxite mining. In contrast to the Scientists’ Petition of November 2008, which was low profile and deferential, this Petition was posted online for everyone to see and its text confronted and challenged state authorities. Rather than seek their collaboration, this Petition accused state authorities of betraying the revolution and selling out the Central Highlands to the nation’s historical nemesis, China. Also in contrast to the Scientists’ Petition, this Petition was not instrumental. Its chief objective was not to persuade government leaders argument and good sense, but rather to expose the empty rhetoric and devious ways of state officials. It was a more performative politics, as became increasingly evident when in the delivery of the Petition to government offices—which had no protocol even for receiving such documents and ludicrously instructed its deliverers to return home and send the Petition in by mail—and other events that ensued from it.

This new type of politics was a more oppositional one than what is made possible by embedded advocacy. It directly challenged top-levels of the party-state in highly public ways. It shared this sense of opposition with the more acrimonious voices that had emerged on the Internet after General Giáp’s letter in January of 2009, especially among the more politically active and dissident groups that then joined in on the bauxite mining debates, such as bloggers, religious leaders and political activists. However, it was different from these voices in the way that it brought this sense of opposition into a more

mainstream political discussion. It criticized the party-state from within its own discourses of revolution and nation. Indeed, the Petition of the 135 Signatures helped bring together these two distinct approaches and forge them into a more mainstream opposition to the party-state.

At the center of this shift towards a new politics were the intellectuals. Indeed, scientists and technocrats had been at the forefront of starting the public debate on bauxite mining and artist-intellectuals were the ones that originally drafted the Petition of the 135 Signatures. However, through this petition, they now came together as the newly reconsolidated Vietnamese “intellectuals.” The intellectuals was a new sort of political identity that combined their long-standing contributions to the party-state, especially as represented in the figure of the scientists and technocrats, and the histories of repression and retribution that had been raised against them by the party-state, especially in relation to the artist-intellectuals. As the intellectuals, they now figured as both the leading voice in the bauxite mining debates and a microcosm of the many and diverse groups that had come together in opposition to bauxite mining.

The first 135 signatures on the Petition were the best and brightest of Vietnam. However, they also symbolized newfound unity across key socio-geographic divisions that had endured from the legacy of the Vietnam War and decades of communist rule. They included those from regions who had fought on both sides of the war (i.e., north and south, as well as other regions across Vietnam), those who had left or were forced to leave the country after the war and those who had stayed behind to rebuild it (i.e., national and overseas Vietnamese), those who had obediently served the party-state and those who had dared to speak out against it (i.e., loyalists and dissidents), and those who remembered the war with those who had only heard of it (i.e., across many generations). For both their personal prestige and statement of unity, this Petition suggested a formidable force of opposition to the party-state.

The *Bauxite Vietnam* website that was initially established as a blog site to host the Petition also became a new hub for the public debate on bauxite mining. Initially, this website was established as a source of information on bauxite mining. It operated as both a clearing house for information on the controversy and provided daily updates and commentaries on the events surrounding the controversy. It also became a new platform for Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Thế Hùng to pursue their more oppositional and performative politics with further petitions, letters and, later, editorials. The website became a new platform for the intellectuals. However, as their activities attracted more attention and became more prominent, they also required a more decisive response from state authorities, as I discuss in the next chapter.

Annex 1: Original Petition and 135 Signatures

Bài này được đăng lúc 12:43 ngày Thứ Ba, 02/06/2009 trong mục [Thông báo](#).

12/04/2009 Kiến nghị về quy hoạch và các dự án khai thác Bauxite ở Việt Nam

[\[Vietnamese\]](#) [\[English\]](#) [\[France\]](#)

Kính gửi:

- Ông Nguyễn Minh Triết Chủ tịch nước CHXHCN Việt Nam ;
- Ông Nguyễn Phú Trọng cùng toàn thể Quốc Hội nước CHXHCN Việt Nam ;
- Ông Nguyễn Tấn Dũng cùng các thành viên Chính phủ nước CHXHCN Việt Nam

Chúng tôi, những người Việt Nam ký tên dưới đây, lo lắng trước vận mệnh nước nhà về vụ khai thác bauxite ở Tây Nguyên, xin kính gửi quý cơ quan bản kiến nghị này.

Thưa quý cơ quan,

Dân tộc Việt Nam chúng ta trải qua nhiều thập kỷ chiến tranh giành độc lập và thống nhất, ngày nay đang huy động tổng lực sức người sức của và sức trí tuệ vào công cuộc xây dựng đất nước theo định hướng đổi mới toàn diện.

Trong công cuộc xây dựng mới đất nước ta, trên nguyên tắc, không có sự đối lập về quyền lợi giữa Nhà nước và nhân dân – nhân dân ta ở trong nước cũng như ở ngoài nước, người giữ cương vị lãnh đạo cũng như người dân bình thường, ai ai cũng muốn đất nước ngày càng giàu mạnh, ngày càng văn minh, cả dân tộc sẽ là một gia đình lớn, vui tươi, ấm no, hạnh phúc.

Tiếc rằng, trong vụ bauxite đang diễn ra, những con người trung thực của đất nước bắt đầu thấy hẫng hụt, lý tưởng chung tay xây dựng đất nước gần như đang ít nhiều suy giảm vì cách làm việc của cơ quan điều hành đất nước, một tình trạng cần được phân tích ngắn gọn như dưới đây.

Thưa quý cơ quan,

Việc khai thác tài nguyên của đất nước, trong đó có tài nguyên bauxite, là việc làm cần thiết, nhưng đó không thể là việc làm bằng mọi giá!

Công việc chuẩn bị cho dự án bauxite đã được nhiều nhà khoa học chỉ ra những thiếu sót toàn diện, mà chỉ riêng hai lá thư của Đại tướng Võ Nguyên Giáp cũng đủ cho thấy những bất cập về chính trị, quốc phòng, môi trường, kinh tế, kỹ thuật, và kiến nghị của Tiến sĩ Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, của Giáo sư Phạm Duy Hiến, và của các nhà nghiên cứu độc lập khác ở trong nước như nhà văn Nguyễn Ngọc, học giả Nguyễn Trung, nhà báo Lê Phú Khải, nhà văn Phạm Đình Trọng, và ở ngoài nước như Tiến sĩ Nguyễn Đức Hiệp chuyên gia về ô nhiễm môi sinh ở Úc, Kỹ sư tư vấn Đặng Đình Cung chuyên gia về mỏ ở Pháp... là những bổ sung toàn diện mang tính chất “kỹ thuật” cho hai lá thư tâm huyết của Đại tướng.

Tất cả các kiến nghị đó đã chỉ ra những kẽ hở hoặc những sai phạm khó chấp nhận trong chủ

trương làm dự án bauxite này, mà chỉ ba điều sau cũng đủ để tất cả những ai có lương tri phải suy nghĩ:

- Chủ trương lập dự án được công khai hóa vào cuối năm 2008 sang đầu năm 2009, song thực ra nó đã được “kỳ tất” với người Trung Quốc từ nhiều năm về trước mà không hề xin ý kiến nhân dân thông qua Quốc Hội do dân bầu ra; toàn bộ báo cáo tiền khả thi chưa bao giờ được trình ra trước nhân dân và đại diện của nhân dân tức Quốc Hội;

- Người Trung Quốc đóng cửa các mỏ khai thác bauxite của họ để chuyển sang khai thác ở Việt Nam, định trút gánh nặng ô nhiễm môi trường cho các thế hệ Việt Nam hôm nay và nhiều đời mai sau – những hành động y hệt như họ đã và đang làm ở châu Phi với sự giúp sức của những chế độ cai trị tham nhũng tại châu lục này, và đang bị dư luận thế giới theo dõi chặt chẽ và hết sức công kích;

- Kỹ thuật, công nghệ và nhân công khai thác dự định du nhập chủ yếu từ Trung Quốc, một cường quốc mới nổi dậy với nền kinh tế đang giàu lên nhưng bên trong vẫn chứa đựng không ít thực trạng bất khả tín, trong đó liên quan đến vấn đề khai thác bauxite là sự “nổi tiếng” của Trung Quốc trên toàn thế giới hiện đại như là một quốc gia gây ô nhiễm môi trường vào bậc nhất, chưa kể những “vấn nạn” khác (chỉ mới trong tháng Ba vừa rồi Chính phủ nước Úc đã phải hủy bỏ một dự án khai thác khoáng sản ở Nam Úc ký với Trung Quốc vì lý do quốc phòng).

Thưa quý cơ quan,

Đất nước là của chung của cả dân tộc, chứ không là của riêng của một nhóm người nào, của một nhóm quyền lợi nào, hoặc một tổ chức nào dù tinh hoa đến đâu cũng vậy.

Tất cả những người có ý thức với dân tộc, với đất nước, xót xa trước những việc làm không được kiểm soát chặt chẽ xoay quanh vụ bauxite, đều thấy cần thiết phải lên tiếng.

Chúng tôi kiến nghị:

- 1) Phải đưa vấn đề dự án bauxite Tây Nguyên ra trước Quốc Hội và mọi chủ trương liên quan phải được Quốc Hội quyết định;
- 2) Dự án bauxite Tây Nguyên phải chính thức dừng ngay lại, có giám sát chặt chẽ cho tới khi Quốc Hội xem xét toàn bộ báo cáo tiền khả thi và đưa ra những phê chuẩn thích hợp. Kính mong Quốc Hội thấu suốt được tinh thần của đại đa số dân chúng không muốn dự án này tiếp tục vì tất cả những hệ lụy nặng nề của nó;
- 3) Những nghiên cứu tiền khả thi với vấn đề bauxite Tây Nguyên cần được dư luận rộng rãi tham gia và theo dõi.

Thưa quý cơ quan,

Những người ký tên dưới bản kiến nghị này bày tỏ sự lo lắng khôn cùng trước phương cách làm việc chưa thấu triệt và hoàn bị về nhiều mặt cho một dự án có tầm chiến lược sống còn của đất nước như dự án bauxite.

Xin quý cơ quan nhận ở đây lòng kính trọng của chúng tôi và rất mong được thông hiểu cho nỗi trăn trở của chúng tôi cả ở trong nước lẫn ở ngoài nước.

Nhân dịp này, chúng tôi cũng kêu gọi người Trung Hoa nhất là giới trí thức hãy ủng hộ dân tộc Việt Nam, giúp cho môi trường sống của nước láng giềng phía Nam được trong lành, giúp cho nhiều vấn đề còn dỏ dang giữa hai quốc gia được giải quyết trong hòa bình và hữu nghị.

Việt Nam, ngày 12 tháng 4 năm 2009

Ký tên

GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Nhà văn Phạm Toàn và GSTS Nguyễn Thế Hùng

Thứ tự	Họ và tên	Ghi chú cần thiết
01	GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi	Nguyên Chủ tịch Hội đồng khoa học Viện Văn học, Ủy ban Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam
02	GS TS Nguyễn Thế Hùng	Trường Đại học Bách khoa, Đà Nẵng, Phó Tổng thư ký Hội Cơ học Thủy khí Việt Nam
03	Phạm Toàn	Dạy học, viết văn, dịch sách
04	GS TS Hoàng Tuy	Nguyên Viện trưởng Viện Toán học Việt Nam, Chủ tịch Hội Toán học Việt Nam
05	GS TS Trần Văn Khê	Nguyên giám đốc Trung tâm Quốc gia Nghiên cứu Khoa học CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), Viện sĩ thông tấn Viện Hàn lâm khoa học, văn chương, nghệ thuật châu Âu, Chủ tịch Hội đồng Khoa học Viện quốc tế nghiên cứu âm nhạc đối chiếu của CHLB Đức
06	GS Phan Đình Diệu	Nguyên Phó Viện trưởng Viện Khoa học Việt Nam
07	TS Vũ Quang Việt	Nguyên chuyên viên cấp cao về thống kê kinh tế của Liên Hiệp Quốc
08	GS TS Nguyễn Lân Dũng	Đại biểu Quốc hội Khóa 12, Ủy viên Ủy ban Trung ương Mặt trận Tổ quốc Việt Nam, Chủ tịch Hội các ngành Sinh học Việt Nam
09	GS TSKH Nguyễn Đăng Hưng	GS thực thụ danh dự Trường Đại học Liège, Bỉ
10	GS TS Nguyễn Văn Tuấn	Supervisor Đại học Y khoa Australia, Viện Đại học New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
11	Nghệ sĩ nhân dân, Đạo diễn Trần Văn Thủy	Nhà làm phim độc lập
12	GS TS Nguyễn Văn Hạnh	Nguyên Thứ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục, nguyên Phó trưởng ban Văn hóa văn nghệ TW
13	GS Lê Xuân Khoa	Nguyên GS thỉnh giảng Trường cao học Nghiên cứu Quốc tế, Đại học Johns Hopkins, Washington, DC
14	GS TS Trần Văn Thọ	Chuyên gia kinh tế học, Đại học Waseda, Tokyo, Nhật Bản
15	TS Nguyễn Quang A	Chủ tịch Hội IDS
16	GS TS Nguyễn Quang Riệu	Nguyên Giám đốc Nghiên cứu tại Trung tâm nghiên cứu Khoa học Quốc gia Pháp và Đài Thiên văn Paris
17	GS TS Ngô Vĩnh Long	Khoa Lịch sử Stevens Hall Trường Đại học Maine, Mỹ
18	Nhà thơ Hoàng Hưng	Làm thơ, viết văn, viết báo
19	GS Nguyễn Đăng Mạnh	Giảng dạy, nghiên cứu, phê bình văn học, Đại học Sư phạm Hà Nội
20	GS TS Phạm Xuân Yêm	Nguyên Giám đốc Nghiên cứu CNRS và Đại học Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, Pháp
21	GS TS Ngô Bảo Châu	Giảng dạy toán học ở Đại học Paris Sud và Thành viên của Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton, Mỹ
22	GS TS Đinh Tiến Cường	Giảng dạy toán học ở Đại học Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, và thành viên của Institut Universitaire de France
23	GS TS Đỗ Đăng Giu	Giảng dạy vật lý ở Đại học Paris Sud; nguyên Giám đốc Nghiên cứu CNRS
24	GS TS Trịnh Xuân Thuận	Chuyên gia ngành thiên văn, Đại học Virginia, Mỹ
25	PGS TS Hoàng Dũng	Khoa Ngữ văn, Trường Đại học Sư phạm TP HCM
26	Nguyễn Khắc Mai	Nguyên Vụ trưởng Ban Dân vận TW
27	PGS TS Trần Thị Băng Thanh	Nguyên Phó trưởng ban Ban văn học Cổ cận đại, Viện Văn học Việt Nam
28	TS Nguyễn Đình Nguyễn	Chương trình Loãng xương và Sinh học xương
29	Nhà báo Tống Văn Công	Nguyên Tổng biên tập báo "Lao động"
30	Kỹ sư Ngô Hoàng Long	- Tư vấn kỹ thuật cầu đường, công trình ngầm - Công ty tư vấn và quản lý XD T.L.D
31	Nhà văn Võ Hồng	Viết văn, dạy học, đã nghỉ hưu

32	Hoa sĩ Trịnh Cung	Vẽ tranh độc lập
33	Kỹ sư Phạm Duy Hiền	LDDK "Vietsovpetro", dịch sách
34	Kinh tế gia Vũ Giản	Chuyên gia tư vấn kinh tế, tài chính, Bộ Kinh tế TS
35	TS Trương Hồng Sơn	Chuyên gia nghiên cứu hàng không vũ trụ, nguyên chuyên viên cơ quan vũ trụ NASA
36	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Đức Toàn	- Tư vấn kỹ thuật cầu đường, hầm, địa kỹ thuật - Dự án Metro (tàu điện ngầm) Hà Nội - Hội viên Hội Địa kỹ thuật Việt Nam
37	Mai Thái Linh	Nhà giáo, nhà nghiên cứu, cựu Phó Chủ tịch HĐND TP Đà Lạt
38	Nguyễn Hồng Khoái	Chuyên viên tư vấn tài chính; Hội viên CLB Kế toán trưởng toàn quốc; Hội viên Hội tư vấn Thuế Việt Nam
39	PGS TS Đoàn Phan Tân	Nguyên Phó Hiệu trưởng Trường Đại học Văn hóa Việt Nam
40	Nhà thơ Trần Nhung	Làm thơ, viết văn kiếm hội họa, Hội Nhà văn Việt Nam
41	Trần Lương	Nghệ sĩ thị giác
42	TS Phạm Văn Đình	Chuyên ngành Vật lý khí quyển, Vật lý vi bụi, Ô nhiễm môi trường khí quyển
43	Th.S Nguyễn Thị Thanh Thúy	Phòng Khoa học & Công nghệ, Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn
44	Trịnh Lữ	Dịch giả
45	Nhà thơ Dương Tường	Làm thơ, dịch sách
46	Nhà văn Phạm Đình Trọng	Viết văn, ký giả
47	Lại Nguyễn Ân	Nhà văn, nhà nghiên cứu độc lập
48	TS Dương Tấn Trung	Chuyên gia điện toán
49	Phan Phương Đông	Nhà điêu khắc
50	Ngô Thị Kim Cúc	Viết báo, viết văn, Biên tập viên báo "Thanh niên" TP HCM
51	Bùi Như Hương	Nghiên cứu, phê bình mỹ thuật
52	TS Đặng Đình Thi	Đang làm nghiên cứu sinh sau Tiến sĩ về kỹ thuật hàng không tại Học viện Công nghệ Virginia Tech., Hoa Kỳ
53	Nguyễn Đức Hiệp	Atmospheric Scientist (chuyên gia khí quyển) Department of Environment & Climate Change, NSW
54	Hà Dương Tuấn	Chuyên gia công nghệ thông tin ở Pháp, đã nghỉ hưu
55	Th.S Nguyễn Hồng Quân	Chuyên ngành công nghệ điều khiển học Trường Đại học công nghiệp Đông Kinh (Tokyo Institute of Technology) đã hưu trí
56	GS TS Nguyễn Trường Tiến	Chủ tịch VSSMGE; Chủ tịch VGI; Chủ tịch Hội đồng khoa học và công nghệ AA-Corp; Phó Chủ tịch Hancorp; Trưởng phòng Đăng ký VIFCEA
57	Nguyễn Bá Chung	Nghiên cứu văn học, dịch giả, Trường Đại học Massachusetts, Boston
58	TS Huỳnh Kim Lâm	Đang làm nghiên cứu sinh sau Tiến sĩ ngành công nghệ hóa học tại Trường Đại học Mô Colorado, Hoa Kỳ
59	PGS TS Quang Hà	Trường Điện, Cơ khí và Hệ thống Cơ khí điện tử, Khoa công nghệ thông tin Viện Đại học Công nghệ Sydney, Australia
60	PGS TS Trần Cát	Hội Bảo vệ thiên nhiên và môi trường thành phố Đà Nẵng
61	Nguyễn Văn Tạc	Nhà giáo hưu trí
62	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Đình Khoa	Làm việc tại Vought Aircraft Industries, Texas, Hoa Kỳ
63	Nhà thơ Ý Nhi	Nguyên Trưởng chi nhánh tại miền Nam NXB Hội nhà văn
63	Phùng Liên Đoàn	TGD Công ty tư vấn nguyên tử và môi trường PAI Corporation, Chủ tịch sáng lập Hội Khuyến khích Tư Lập và Hội Khuyến học Việt-Mỹ
64	GS TS Vĩnh Sinh	Khoa Liền s ư và Giáo dục Công nghệ Trường Đại học Alberta, Canada
65	Ông Đinh Đức	Nguyên cán bộ TCT Thép Việt Nam, hưu trí
66	Nhà văn Bùi Ngọc Tấn	Viết văn
67	PGS TS Trần Nam Bình	Viện Đại học New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
68	Dương Khánh Phương	Biên tập viên, ký giả
69	Trần Minh Thảo	Công dân Việt Nam
70	Nhà văn Trần Thị Trường	Viết văn, làm báo, biên kịch sân khấu âm nhạc
71	TS Lê Thành Bắc	Phó thanh tra Đại học Đà Nẵng
72	Trần Hậu Yên Thế	Phòng Quản lý khoa học Trường Đại học Mỹ thuật Việt Nam
73	Nhà thơ Nguyễn Trọng Tạo	Làm thơ, viết báo, sáng tác nhạc
74	Nguyễn Đức Vương	Giảng viên Trường ĐH GTVT Hà Nội; Nghiên cứu sinh tại CHLB Đức
75	Vũ Thị Thư Nhi	Biên tập viên
76	Trần Tiến Dũng	Làm thơ, viết báo
77	Trịnh Thị Thu Thủy	Nhân viên ngành du lịch đưa nhiều khách QT đi Tây Nguyên
78	Hà Dương Tường	Điều hành trang mạng "Diễn đàn"; nguyên Giáo sư (professeur Emerite) Đại học công nghệ Compiègne
79	Kỹ sư Trần Minh Khôi	Kinh doanh tự do
80	ThS Nguyễn Biên Cường	Phó Chủ nhiệm Khoa Cầu đường, Trường Đại học Bách khoa, Đà Nẵng

81	Nguyễn Ngọc Giao	Dạy học, viết báo, điều hành trang mạng "Diễn đàn"; nguyên Giảng viên Université Denis Diderot (Paris VII)
82	Võ Thị Diệu Hằng	Dạy học, viết văn; điều hành trang mạng "Vietsciences"
83	Lê Phú Khải	Nhà báo tự do
84	Lê Tinh Tiến	Kế toán CPA PS Công ty Tư vấn 91 Woodlands Ave Sydney , Australia
85	Nguyễn Bình Phương	Hướng dẫn viên du lịch
86	PGS TS Phạm Quang Tuấn	Chuyên ngành kỹ thuật hóa (chemical engineering) Đại học New South Wales , Sydney , Australia
87	TS Kỹ sư Nguyễn Văn Hào	Giám đốc dự án Waterman Quốc tế
88	Nhà thơ Bùi Minh Quốc	Làm thơ, viết văn, làm báo
89	TS Lê Đình Tuyền	Chuyên ngành Vật liệu kiến thiết không gian (Structural Materials for Space Applications) The Aeronautics Space Co
90	Th.S Tô Thúy Nga	Giảng viên Trường Đại học Bách khoa, Đà Nẵng.
91	Trần Thị Vinh Tường	Nghiên cứu lịch sử Việt
92	Kỹ sư Phạm Danh	Công ty công nghệ máy bay Vought
93	Kỹ sư Trương Cương	Công ty công nghệ máy bay Vought
94	TS Trương Phước Trường	GS danh dự Trung tâm nghiên cứu Giao thông và Hậu Cần Phân khoa Kinh tế và Thương mại ĐH Sydney NSW 2006, Australia ; GS nghiên cứu Trung tâm nghiên cứu Kinh tế CHLB Đức Berlin , Germany
95	TS Hà Sĩ Phu	Chuyên ngành sinh học
96	TS Đỗ Xuân Thọ	Viện Khoa học công nghệ GTVT
97	Nguyễn Ninh	Nghiên cứu viên ngành hoá học - vật lý các chất rắn tại CNRS, Pháp
98	Đỗ Bá Thành	Giảng viên Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội; đang làm NCS tại Khoa Vật liệu khoa học và Kỹ thuật ứng dụng Đại học Michigan, H.H. Dow bldg, Hoa Kỳ
99	TS Võ Văn Châu	Kỹ sư hóa vật liệu, phụ trách điều hành kỹ thuật
100	Kỹ sư Võ Minh Thế	Dự án cao tốc Hồ Chí Minh - Long Thành - Dầu Giây
101	Vũ Văn Bách	Dự án cao tốc Hồ Chí Minh - Long Thành - Dầu Giây
102	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Huy Hoàn	- Đại diện Tư vấn WSP tại Đà Nẵng - Dự án Cầu mới Nguyễn Văn Trỗi - Trần Thị Lý (Đà Nẵng) - Hội viên hội Cầu đường Việt Nam (chi hội Đà Nẵng)
103	TS Lương Tuấn Anh	Viện khoa học Khí tượng Thủy văn và Môi trường, Hội viên Hội cơ học thủy khí
104	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Thế Tài	Chuyên ngành vật lý kim loại, Bruxelles, Bỉ
105	Nguyễn Kim Luân	Rue du Hal, 81190 Bruxelles, Belgique
106	Nguyễn Văn Thịnh	Giáo viên nghỉ hưu
107	Nguyễn Văn Dũng	Giáo viên nghỉ hưu
108	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Anthony	Công ty công nghệ máy bay Vought
109	Nguyễn Phạm Điền	Nghiên cứu lịch sử
110	TS Văn Thị Hạnh	Chuyên ngành sinh học
111	Kiến trúc sư Trần Thanh Vân	Kiến trúc cảnh quan
112	Phạm Mạnh Kha	Tiến sĩ Nông nghiệp, Giám đốc cty ASAHI PLANTECH Co., Ltd
113	Trần Đình Lôi	Việt kiều tại Mỹ
114	Nguyễn Quang Huy	NCS Việt Nam tại Trường Đại học Sherbrooke , QC , Canada
115	ThS Hà Hải Châu	Master Anh ngữ (Úc), Master Pháp ngữ (Pháp), Nguyên Trưởng khoa Ngoại ngữ đa quốc gia Y Pha Nga
116	Nhà báo Ngô Mai Phong	Viết báo, ký giả
120	BS Võ Văn Căn	Nguyên trưởng khoa Y học Hạt nhân, Bệnh Viện Chợ Rẫy
121	Nhà văn Hoàng Ngọc Biên	Viết văn, ký giả
122	Nguyễn Trung Thuận	Dịch giả, biên soạn từ điển
123	Kỹ sư Nguyễn Kim	Công ty công nghệ máy bay Vought
124	Kỹ sư Ngô Quốc Bảo	Làm việc tại L-3 Communication IS, Waco , Texas
125	Hồ Thị Hòa	Biên tập viên NXB Tri Thức
126	Nhà thơ Nguyễn Đỗ	Làm thơ, dịch sách
127	TS Trương Văn Tân	Senior Scientist
128	Nguyễn Ngọc Diệp	
129	Trần Đình Lôi	Việt kiều tại Mỹ
130	Nguyễn Thụy Anh	dịch giả
131	PGS TS Lê Minh Thịnh	Đại học Quốc gia Singapore
132	Trần Quang Hải	Nghiên cứu gia âm nhạc học dân tộc tại CNRS, Pháp
133	Kỹ sư Cao Thiện Phước	Chuyên ngành công nghệ thông tin, Paris , Pháp

134	Bác sĩ Vũ Văn Huân	Chuyên khoa ung thư Lyon, Pháp
135	ThS Nguyễn Phạm Tú Minh	Thiết kế trang trí hoa

Annex 2: Bauxite Vietnam Website in Original Format (before July 7, 2009)



BAUXITE Việt Nam
THÔNG TIN VỀ VẤN ĐỀ BAUXITE Ở VIỆT NAM

Trang chủ
Thông báo
Ký kiến nghị
Tư liệu
Tin tức
Tài liệu PDP
Bài viết/ý kiến
Hình ảnh
Ý kiến bạn đọc
Diễn đàn
Liên lạc



Trong vòng 6 tháng, Đại tướng Võ Nguyên Giáp đã gửi 3 thư đến các nhà lãnh đạo về vấn đề khai thác Bauxite Tây Nguyên

Thư số 1: Gửi TT Nguyễn Tấn Dũng (05/01/09)
Thư số 2: Gửi các nhà khoa học (09/04/09)
Thư số 3: Gửi BCH TW, Bộ CT, Quốc hội và Chính phủ (20/05/09)

Kiến nghị về quy hoạch và các dự án khai thác Bauxite ở Việt Nam (12/04/2009)

Kính gửi: English French

- Ông Nguyễn Minh Triết Chủ tịch nước CHXHCN Việt Nam;
- Ông Nguyễn Phú Trọng cùng toàn thể Quốc Hội nước CHXHCN Việt Nam ;
- Ông Nguyễn Tấn Dũng cùng các thành viên Chính phủ nước CHXHCN Việt Nam

Chúng tôi, những người Việt Nam ký tên dưới đây, lo lắng trước vận mệnh nước nhà về vụ khai thác bauxite ở Tây Nguyên, xin kính gửi quý cơ quan bản kiến nghị này. ► [Đọc tiếp](#)



<p>Tâm thư gửi các Đại biểu Quốc hội</p> <p>Thư này do tập thể những người ký, gửi trực tiếp cho trang Bauxite Việt Nam với ý nguyện cùng hợp sức với những người ký Kiến nghị 12-4-2009 đấu tranh đến cùng, để yêu cầu dừng lại các dự án gây nguy cơ khôn lường cho đất nước ► Đọc tiếp</p>	<p>Thư phúc đáp của Ủy ban Pháp luật của Quốc Hội về Kiến nghị ngày 12/04</p> <p>Thư của Chủ nhiệm Ủy ban Pháp Luật của Quốc Hội gửi GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi sau sự cố ghi nhầm họ tên người nhận và Thư của GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi phúc đáp lại thư của Ông Chủ nhiệm UB Pháp Luật</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 1</td><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 2</td></tr> <tr><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 3</td><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 4</td></tr> <tr><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 5</td><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 6</td></tr> <tr><td>Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 7</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 1	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 2	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 3	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 4	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 5	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 6	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 7	
Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 1	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 2									
Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 3	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 4									
Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 5	Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 6									
Danh sách kiến nghị đợt 7										

Thư ngỏ

Thư ngỏ số 3: Gửi các đại biểu Quốc Hội khóa 12, Nước CHXHCN Việt Nam (17/05/2009) ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Thư ngỏ số 2: Gửi quý vị lãnh đạo Nhà nước CHXHCN Việt Nam (07/05/2009) ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Thư ngỏ số 1: Gửi các Đại biểu Quốc hội Nước CHXHCN Việt Nam (30/04/2009) ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Xã luận

Chiếc áo Nghị trường

Xã luận nóng bỏng về lời giải đáp của ông Phó Thủ tướng và Kết luận của ông Chủ tịch Quốc hội về vấn đề bauxite. ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Ba kịch bản bauxite có thể xảy ra ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Độ tin cậy của một bản báo cáo ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Phản ứng

Xin kính cẩn gửi lời phân ưu tới gia đình Cu Nguyễn Hộ cũng như tới những ai không chút dè dặt tới ban Tư Bản Đô trong nước và ngoài nước, những ai có điều kiện hoặc không đến nghĩa trang Củ Chi tiễn biệt Cu Nguyễn Hộ nhưng khi nói, viết và nghĩ tới **Nguyễn Hộ** vẫn không hề xấu hổ với lương tâm mình. ► [Đọc tiếp](#)

Muốn vẫn tiếc thương,
Bauxite Việt Nam
Câu đối viếng Ông Nguyễn Hộ (Hà Sĩ Phu)

 <p style="font-size: x-small;">Khai thác bauxite ở Guinea: Từ thiên đường thành địa ngục</p>	<p>Hà Nội, ngày 11 tháng 6 năm 2009</p> <p>Thư ngỏ về vấn đề khai thác bauxite ở Tây Nguyên gửi các cơ quan Liên Hợp Quốc hoạt động tại Việt Nam</p> <p>GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Nhà văn Phạm Toàn và GSTS Nguyễn Thế Hùng</p> <p>Gửi tới các đại diện thường trực của NDP, WHO, UNIDO, UNICEF và UNESCO tại Việt nam ► Đọc tiếp</p>
<p>LS Cù Huy Hà Vũ khởi kiện TT Nguyễn Tấn Dũng vì đã phê duyệt QĐ 167/2007 /QĐ-TTg triển khai khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên, theo LS Vũ là trái với các pháp luật hiện hành của Việt Nam ► Nghe phỏng vấn ► Xem nội dung đơn kiện</p>	
<p>Hà Nội, June 11, 2009</p> <p>Professor Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Writer Phạm Toàn and Professor Nguyễn Thế Hùng</p> <p>To: The Representatives of UNDP, WHO, UNIDO, UNICEF and UNESCO in Vietnam</p> <p>Re: Projects of bauxite mining in Central Highlands of Vietnam ► more</p>	
<p>LS Cù Huy Hà Vũ tiếp tục kiện lên Tòa án Nhân dân tối cao ► Đọc tiếp</p>	

Tin tức

- Trung Quốc tăng nhanh tốc độ tập trung tài sản
- Vụ đập phá tu viện Bát Nhã, Lâm Đồng gây phẫn nộ
- Trung Quốc tăng cường tuần tra biển Đông
- Liên đoàn Luật sư Việt Nam: Ông Cù Huy Hà Vũ không phải là luật sư > *Như Bauxite đã từng viết, chuyên "vô duyên" nhất là việc Ông Cù Huy Hà Vũ có là Luật sư hay không là LS thì có ảnh hưởng gì đến việc kiện ông Thủ tướng? Chẳng lẽ một thương dân không có quyền kiện Thủ tướng (ở một nước tự xưng là dân chủ) hay sao mà hết Luật sư đoàn Hà Nội đến Luật sư đoàn quốc gia thay nhau xác minh với xác quyết ông CHHV không phải là Luật sư? Ai mà chẳng biết cái "vòng kim cổ" trên đầu các ông cơ chứ!*
- Đơn khiếu nại về thông báo của Đoàn luật sư Hà Nội về Cù Huy Hà Vũ > *Đừng như Bauxite Việt Nam đã từng nói, Thông báo của ĐLSHN về trường hợp LS CHHV xem ra với cảm nhận của nhiều người thì không "có... duyên" cho lắm. Đấy xin mời bạn đọc hãy xem Đơn khiếu nại của LS Vũ kèm bản scan Thông báo có dấu đỏ (nhưng lại không đánh số công văn) của ĐLSHN*
- Không trực xuất lao động ngoại > *Từ nay lao động chui từ nước ngoài (TQ) vào VN cứ yên tâm mà "chui" nhé, nếu có bị phát hiện thì chỉ... phạt lấy lệ rồi "sẽ được chuyển qua địa bàn khác" lại làm việc tiếp, vì "sắp xếp nhân công là chuyện nội bộ của doanh nghiệp" kia mà, chứ Nhà nước này có chủ trương trực xuất như các nước có luật lệ nghiêm minh đâu mà sợ. Nhà nước này vốn rất "nhân" với anh Hải 16 chữ vàng mà.*

Bên lề Bauxite

- Mekong 2009: Dòng sông cảm nín
- Một con người quyết liệt
- Xem hình ảnh ngư dân ta bị lính Trung Quốc bắt giữ: Nhục nhĩ
- Bauxite Việt Nam chân thành phân ưu cùng gia đình Cù Nguyễn Hộ
- Câu đối viếng ông Nguyễn Hộ
- Một cái nhìn khác về lao động TQ ở VN > *Báo chí Trung Quốc nhận xét: "Cùng với nạn tham nhũng, số lượng lao động Trung Quốc vào Việt Nam tiếp tục gia tăng."*
- "Vì sao họ trả nhiều tiền như thế?" > *Lâm ẩn ở các nước đang phát triển thì căn cứ các biện pháp nghiêm ngặt, hoàn toàn đúng. Nhưng làm ẩn ở Việt Nam thì... nghiêm ngặt đến đâu xem ra cũng bằng thừa.*
- Biển Đông "sùi tăm"
- "Phải xây dựng xã hội dân sự ở nông thôn" > *GS. VS. Đào Thế Tuấn nói: "Tóm lại, điều quan trọng chúng ta cần làm ở nông thôn bây giờ là xây dựng xã hội dân sự.". Bauxite Việt Nam nói: "Tóm lại, điều*

Diễn đàn góp ý báo cáo của Chính phủ

- Một số ý kiến về xử lý hồ chứa bùn đỏ, PGS, TS Nguyễn Hữu Hạnh
- Khai thác bauxite và ảnh hưởng môi trường: kinh nghiệm ở Tây Australia, TS. Nguyễn Đức Hiệp
- Khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên: cái nhìn từ một vài góc độ Kinh tế học, GSTS Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng
- Góp ý về khái niệm "phát triển bền vững" trong báo cáo của Chính phủ với QH về bauxite, TS Nguyễn Văn Phú
- Tại sao? Khó hiểu quá! Hồng LêThọ
- Cần cảnh giác: Nguy cơ đánh mất các dự án bauxite, Phạm Phú Quốc & Lê Vĩnh Triển
- Khai thác mỏ bauxite ở Tây Nguyên: Quan điểm của một kỹ sư, Đặng Đình Cung
- Bản báo cáo của Chính phủ với Quốc hội về bauxite: Cần chú trọng và minh bạch hơn, GSTS Nguyễn Ngọc Trân
- Sai lầm về giải pháp sử dụng nước mặt, Nguyễn Văn Hải
- Bản báo cáo của Chính phủ với Quốc hội về bauxite: Một chuyện hoang đường đến ngỡ ngàng! KS Khai khoáng, Châu Xuân Nguyễn
- Thư gửi đại biểu Quốc hội, GS TS Ngô Bảo Châu

Bài viết/Ý kiến

- Việt Nam: Tiến vào quỹ đạo của Trung Quốc > *Bài trên Straits Times (Singapore)*
- Từ quốc khánh Mỹ nghĩ về sức mạnh Việt Nam
- Không thể chậm chạp
- Vấn bản pháp luật và GDP > *Nếu đem QĐ 167/2007 QĐ-TTg của TT Nguyễn Tấn Dũng về việc bauxite so với tiêu chuẩn "8 không" được nêu ra dưới đây, có lẽ đạt 10/10 điểm!*
- Việt Nam chống tham nhũng như thế nào? > *Việt Nam chống tham nhũng thế nào? Cừ hỏi các ông Nguyễn Việt Tiến, Bùi Tiến Dũng, Huỳnh Ngọc Sĩ khác có câu trả lời.*
- Điều gì đang xảy ra trong bang giao Việt-Trung? > *Có lẽ nên giới hạn lại một chút thưa ông Dương Danh Dự: Cha ông chúng ta chưa bao giờ bị các ngài "miền trời" lừa. Lý Thường Kiệt chủ động đánh phá các căn cứ của Tống trước khi chúng kịp mở tay. Các vua Trần có vua nào chịu sang bộ phận vua Nguyên đâu. Lê Thánh Tông coi việc đi mất ở một trước núi tác động là có tội lớn với xã tắc. Còn Quang Trung chỉ đem một ông vua già sang mừng thọ Càn Long. Vậy thì từ bao giờ mới có chuyện "vua" ta sang cúi đầu chịu chực để được cầm tay vua Tàu? Và còn họ hàng ăn mặc cho một như "vua anh" thì đôn tiếp ông ta "tuần dư" trên đất Việt?*
- Tự do tư tưởng gặp rủi ro > *Nói "rủi ro" e vẫn còn quá nhỏ đôn, tự do tư tưởng đã có đâu mà "may" hay "rủi"*
- Kinh hoàng mỗi chuyến ra khơi > *"Người ta lớn bởi vì ta quỹ xuống / Có gì đâu, ta cầu khẩn van lơn" (Tố Hữu)*
- Đồn Biên Phòng Hoàng Sa, Huy Đức
- Kiến thủ tướng là đúng đối tượng > *Bất chấp ý dân*

Ý kiến bạn đọc

- Điều gì đang xảy ra ở đất nước tôi đây? > *Điều gì ư? Thì chính là International Herald Leader (trực thuộc Tân Hoa xã) đã nổi huych toét. Chính quyền Việt Nam không đủ khả năng để ngừng những việc đưa người trái phép, cư trú quá thời hạn và sử dụng visa du lịch vào Việt Nam. Điều đó, cộng với tham nhũng, chỉ cần tăng cao số lượng công nhân Trung Quốc vào Việt Nam mà thôi.*
- Đừng có nhầm tịt mắt lại thế! > *Có lẽ giờ đây lời răn của mẹ đã không còn hiệu nghiệm mà cần đến một cái tát của ông hàng thịt với anh tù tử trong "Nhà làm ngoại sử" thì mới mở mắt ra được*
- Nghịch lý Việt Nam > *Vâng, xem ra đã có thể tổng kết nghịch lý Việt Nam trong những từ ngữ sáng giá: Lẽ phải, Đồng thuận, 4 tốt, 16 chữ vàng, Tầm cao mới... xin mời bạn đọc bổ sung thêm cho đầy đủ.*
- Lời khuyên của ông BÍ thư Chi bộ > *Cứ làm như con đã điều rúc đầu xuống cát thì tránh được mọi hiểm họa bauxite.*
- Chớ quên cảnh giác!
- Xin một lần lắng nghe!

Tư liệu

- Thông báo của Tòa án Nhân dân Hà Nội trả lại đơn khởi kiện và Đơn kiến lên Tòa án Nhân dân tối cao của Luật sư Cù Huy Hà Vũ
- Nước xa - lửa gần
- Nội dung đơn của LS Cù Huy Hà Vũ kiến TT Nguyễn Tấn Dũng > *Về việc TT phê chuẩn QĐ 167/2007 /QĐ-TTg*
- Đánh giá tác động môi trường của nhà thầu và Báo cáo của UB Bảo vệ Môi trường > *Bài học từ nước ngoài, TKV cần phải học hỏi*
- Bức thư thứ ba của ĐT Vũ Nguyễn Giáp gửi BCH TƯ, Bộ CT, Quốc hội và Chính phủ về vấn đề bauxite Tây Nguyên
- Toàn văn báo cáo của Chính phủ gửi Quốc hội về bổ-xít > *Cần phải được phân biệt trước khi biểu quyết*
- Khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên, góc nhìn kỹ sư: Phần 4, Tiến bộ công nghệ > *Loạt bài của KS Đặng Đình Cung*
- Khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên, góc nhìn kỹ sư: Phần 3, Xáo trộn văn hóa xã hội > *Loạt bài của KS Đặng Đình Cung*
- Khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên, góc nhìn kỹ sư: Phần 2, Môi trường thiên nhiên > *Loạt bài của KS Đặng Đình Cung*
- Khai thác bauxite Tây Nguyên, góc nhìn kỹ sư: Phần 1, Khả thi kinh tế > *Loạt bài của KS Đặng Đình Cung*
- Nghị định 20/2008 ND-CP về việc tiếp nhận, xử lý phân ánh, kiến nghị của cá nhân, tổ chức về quy định hành chính > *Xin đọc Nghị định của Chính phủ do Thủ tướng Nguyễn Tấn Dũng ký ngày 14-02-2008, và chớ xem Văn Phòng Chính phủ có thực thi đúng trách nhiệm của mình không, trong quy trình nhận kiến nghị*

Annex 3: Bauxite Vietnam Website in Revised Format (after July 7, 2009)



bauxite Việt Nam

Thông tin, trao đổi về vấn đề bauxite ở Việt Nam
Tiếng nói phản biện nhiều mặt của người tri thức

PHIÊN BẢN CŨ
Trang chủ
Kỹ kiến nghị
Tuyển tập
Liên hệ
Tin vắn

Bài mới nhất

Đề nghị đình chính bài: [Giá alexa.com biết nói dối](#) của tác giả Anh Hoàng (12/9)

Ngon ngữ của kẻ liều - Chủ tịch TKV: Sợ bị kỷ luật, tôi đã không làm (12/9)
 Hãy xem ngôn ngữ của kẻ liều, không, còn hơn thế, kẻ đã "nắm thóp" được Nhà nước mà mình là một Nhóm lợi ích cực mạnh đứng phía sau.

Bức tranh nhiều mặt của CNXH độc đảng Trung Quốc: Trung Quốc đã bóp méo số liệu thống kê như thế nào? (12/9)

Thế kỷ 21: Ai soạn ngôi bá chủ Thái Bình Dương? (12/9) Washington và Bắc Kinh, ai sẽ là bá chủ quần s ở Thái Bình Dương trong thế kỷ 21? *Tuần Việt Nam* giới thiệu cuộc tranh luận thú vị giữa Aaron L. Friedberg, Giáo sư Chính trị và Ngoại giao của ĐH Princeton và Robert S. Ross, Cố vấn cấp cao của Chương trình Nghiên cứu An ninh thuộc Học viện MIT, trên tạp chí National Interest về chủ đề này.

Atlantic chuẩn bị thăm dò Bảo Lộc (12/9) Atlantic đang xem xét việc thành lập một liên doanh với TKV để thăm dò và khai thác bauxite trên khu vực rộng lớn hơn cả Bảo Lộc.

Xung quanh bài báo trên trang [Điện tử Đảng CSVN](#) - Tiến sĩ Luật Cù Huy Hà Vũ: "Bảo Điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam xâm phạm nghiêm trọng an ninh quốc gia" (11/9) "Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam hãy chính thức xin lỗi nhân dân về việc cơ quan trung ương của mình là báo [Điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam](#) đã đăng bài chối bỏ chủ quyền của Việt Nam đối với quần đảo Trường Sa, đồng thời ngay lập tức cách chức Tổng biên tập Đào Duy Quát, kỷ luật Trưởng ban Tuyên giáo trung ương Tô Huy Rứa, người chịu trách nhiệm trực tiếp về công tác báo chí, tuyên truyền của Đảng và khẩn trương chuyển vụ việc sang Cơ quan an ninh điều tra để xử lý theo quy định của pháp luật" (Cù Huy Hà Vũ).

Giới blogger yêu nước Việt Nam trút bỏ gánh nặng đang đè lên ngực (11/9) Chính phủ có thể đang tự bắn vào chân của mình. Sau khi blogger bị bắt, lượng bạn đọc của blogger đó thường sẽ gia tăng nhanh chóng.

[Giá alexa.com biết nói dối!](#) (11/9) Xung quanh thông tin báo [Điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam](#) bình quân mỗi tháng có trên dưới 25 triệu lượt người truy cập.

Xung quanh bài báo trên trang [Điện tử Đảng CSVN](#): Báo [Điện tử ĐCSVN](#) đã vi phạm các quy định pháp luật nào về báo chí? (11/9) "Được biết Tổng Biên tập Đào Duy Quát là một báo cáo viên có thâm niên và nổi tiếng trong việc giới thiệu cho các lớp học chính trị về các vấn đề lớn của Đảng cho nhiều cơ quan trung ương, đây là cơ hội để ông Đào Duy Quát nên trở lại ngay trên "sân nhà" của mình!" (Phạm Viết Đào)

Xung quanh bài báo trên trang [Điện tử Đảng CSVN](#): Thư của nhà văn Hà Đình Cẩn gửi [trannhuong.com](#) (11/9) "Xin nhẹ nhàng, tạo cơ hội cho ông Đào Duy Quát bình tĩnh uống ly cà phê rồi ngồi viết một cái đơn từ chức, rút lui trong im lặng, có lẽ hơn, vừa được người, vừa được việc. Ông ấy trọng nhân cách lắm,

Tìm kiếm



Trong vòng 6 tháng, Đại tướng Võ Nguyên Giáp đã gửi 3 thư đến các nhà lãnh đạo về vấn đề khai thác Bauxite Tây Nguyên. (#3) [Thư gửi BCH TƯ, Bộ Chính trị cùng Quốc hội và Chính phủ về vấn đề Bauxite Tây Nguyên \(#2\)](#) [Gửi các nhà khoa học \(09/04/09\)](#) (#1) [Gửi TT Nguyễn Tấn Dũng \(05/01/09\)](#)

Kiến nghị về quy hoạch và các dự án khai thác Bauxite ở Việt Nam (12/04/2009) Kính gửi: ● Ông Nguyễn Minh Triết Chủ tịch nước CHXHCN Việt Nam ● Ông Nguyễn Phú Trọng cùng toàn thể Quốc Hội nước CHXHCN Việt Nam ● Ông Nguyễn Tấn Dũng cùng các thành viên Chính phủ nước CHXHCN Việt Nam [\[Tiếng Việt\]](#) [\[English\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)

Danh sách kỹ kiến nghị:

[#1](#) [#2](#) [#3](#) [#4](#) [#5](#) [#6](#) [#7](#) [#8](#)

Thư phúc đáp của Ủy ban Pháp luật của Quốc Hội Thư của Chủ nhiệm Ủy ban Pháp Luật của Quốc Hội gửi GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi sau sự cố ghi nhầm họ tên người nhận và Thư của GS Nguyễn Huệ Chi phúc đáp lại

Xã luận

[Bàn tay che mặt trời!](#) [Chiếc áo Ngộ trường](#) Xã luận nóng bỏng về lời giải đáp của ông Phó Thủ tướng và Kết luận của ông Chủ tịch Quốc hội về vấn đề bauxite. [Ba kịch bản bauxite có thể xảy ra ĐỘ tin cậy của một bản báo cáo](#)

Thư ngỏ

#3: [Gửi các đại biểu Quốc hội khóa 12 \(17/05/2009\)](#) #2: [Gửi quý vị lãnh đạo Nhà nước CHXHCN Việt Nam \(7/5/2009\)](#) #1: [Gửi các đại biểu Quốc hội nước CHXHCN Việt Nam](#)

không đến nỗi có đấm ăn xôi đâu" (Hà Đình Cẩn).

Công ty Trung Quốc nhòm ngó tài nguyên Australia (11/9) Nhân có tin Phó Thủ tướng Nguyễn Sinh Hùng phát lệnh khởi công gói thầu bóc đất tầng phủ dự án mỏ sắt Thạch Khê, mỏ sắt lớn nhất Đông Nam Á, tại Hà Tĩnh (<http://dantri.com.vn/c20/s20-348876/khoi-cong-goi-thau-o-mo-sat-lon-nhat-dong-nam-a.htm>), xin ngừng nghĩ câu sau đây của một nhà doanh nghiệp Australia: "Nếu bạn là một công ty quảng sắt, hoặc có từ 'sắt' trong tên công ty, hoặc có đề cập đến sắt trong thông cáo bất kỳ của công ty, chắc chắn là sẽ có một tổ chức Trung Quốc ở ngay cửa muốn thảo luận về đầu tư".

Việt Nam và áp lực từ Phương Bắc (11/9) "Bây giờ nếu Việt Nam không khéo thì như tôi đã nói nhiều lần, Việt Nam cũng giống như một tuýp thuốc đánh răng, Trung Quốc sẽ ép từ biên giới phía Bắc xuống, Biển Đông sang, nó bóp Việt Nam bây giờ anh có phọt ra Phú Quốc thì nó cũng không tha, giống như là nó ép Tướng Giới Thạch ngày xưa chạy ra Đài Loan [...]. Mà Việt Nam, tôi nghĩ rằng đi lá bài trong 2 năm qua càng ngày càng nghiêng về Trung Quốc, tướng rằng như vậy thì Trung Quốc sẽ tha, đây là lá bài sai" (GS Ngô Vĩnh Long).

Trung Quốc bắt đầu khai thác mỏ khí Ledong (LD) 22-1 trên biển Đông (11/9) Bất chấp mọi sự thật lịch sử, Trung Quốc hiện ngang nhiên coi biển Đông nơi có các quần đảo Trường Sa và Hoàng Sa của Việt Nam là ao riêng nhà mình.

Giáo dục Việt Nam - 'cần tính toán lại' (11/9) GS Nguyễn Minh Thuyết cũng đặt vấn đề cần tính toán lại việc lâu nay Việt Nam đưa vào giảng dạy bắt buộc ở bậc đại học và cao đẳng các môn học chính trị, tư tưởng Mác – Lênin, tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh và lịch sử đảng cộng sản v.v.

Hoàng Sa – Tưởng trình 34 năm sau (Kỳ 3) (10/9) Bạn đọc chắc sẽ ngạc nhiên, tại sao hai kỳ trước ghi 35 năm mà kỳ này lại ghi 34 năm? Thì đúng là 34, chứ không phải 35, vì thực ra Bùi Thanh (vốn là Phó Tổng Biên tập báo *Tuổi trẻ*, bị cách chức và rút thẻ nhà báo vì vụ đưa tin PMU18), tác giả của loạt bài tưởng trình này, đã viết xong từ tháng 1 năm 2008. Đây là phần mà báo *Tuổi trẻ* đã không thể đăng tiếp. *Bauxite Việt Nam* xin tình nguyện đưa tiếp phần "hằng hạt" ấy để bạn đọc có liên tục một mạch suy nghĩ.

Hoàng Sa - Tưởng trình 35 năm sau (Kỳ 2) (10/9) Xin xem thêm **Phụ lục** cuối bài, gồm Thông báo của *Tuổi trẻ* cùng bình luận của Blog Ó Sin, Blog Hồ Bất Khuất và *Bauxite Việt Nam*.

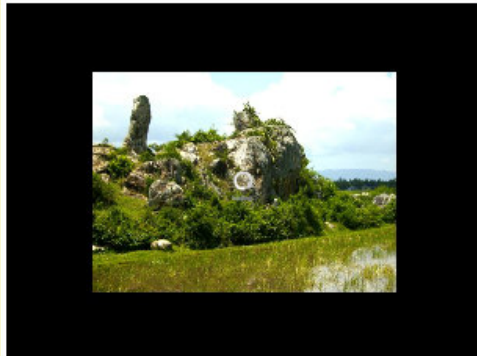
Xung quanh bài báo trên trang Điện tử Đảng CSVN: Thần kinh suy liệt? (10/9) "Giả thuyết thứ nhất: đây là sản phẩm của những kẻ nội gián Trung Quốc đang nằm trong bộ máy của Đảng và chính quyền Việt Nam? Chỉ có những kẻ làm việc cho Trung Quốc hay chịu sự chi phối của Trung Quốc (như nhận tiền lương, hối lộ) mới loan những tin có lợi cho Trung Quốc. Nếu giả thuyết này đúng thì cần phải truy tìm mấy tên nội gián hay Việt gian ẩn cớm quốc gia Việt Nam thờ ma Trung Quốc này để trừng phạt chúng. Thanh kiểm mà cụ Hồ từng tuốt ra trên lễ đài độc lập năm 1945 có thể sử dụng cho những tên Việt gian này. Giả thuyết thứ hai: đây là những tín hiệu của tình trạng suy nhược thần kinh ở những người có trách nhiệm. Suy nhược thần kinh là do giảm khả năng hoạt động tinh thần của con người. Giảm khả năng hoạt động tinh thần là do kém trí thức, lười biếng suy nghĩ, hoặc xa hơn nữa là do thiếu nền tảng văn hóa và tự trọng dân tộc" (GS Nguyễn Văn Tuấn).

Xung quanh bài báo trên trang Điện tử Đảng CSVN: Không coi thường chuyện nhỏ (10/9) "Vậy tại sao nhà cầm quyền không có phương án phòng xa, ngăn chặn khi chưa xảy ra, và xử lý tội phạm khi đã xảy ra rồi? Chẳng những thế còn trừng trị những người yêu nước, khác nào giữ muốn giữ tay họ cho những kẻ bán nước hành nghề. Thế là thế nào? Câu trả lời xin hỏi một trẻ thơ đang học phổ thông, bởi đáp án đâu có rắc rối gì, đã có từ muôn thuở" (V. Quốc Uy).

Bức tranh nhiều mặt của CNXH độc đảng Trung Quốc: Chuẩn hóa tiêu dùng theo chức vụ của cán bộ lãnh đạo Trung Quốc (10/9) Phải nói thẳng ra là tiêu

Tiếp cận vấn đề

- Đại dự án bô-xít Tây Nguyên: người trong cuộc để xuất gì?
- Khai thác bô-xít Tây Nguyên: cái nhìn từ một vài góc độ Kinh tế học
- 10 lý do đề nghị tạm dừng dự án bô-xít Tây Nguyên
- Thảm họa dự án khai thác bô-xít Tây Nguyên
- Ý kiến của Thiếu tướng Lê Văn Cương về dự án khai thác bô-xít
- Khai thác mỏ bauxit ở Tây Nguyên: Quan điểm của một kỹ sư



Nổi bật

Bauxite Việt Nam phỏng vấn tiếp TS Luật Cù Huy Hà Vũ về diễn tiến của vụ kiện Thủ tướng: Chánh án Tòa tối cao Trương Hòa Bình vi phạm luật tố tụng (29/8) "Tuy nhiên Chánh án Trương Hòa Bình không thể im lặng mãi được vì Chánh án Tòa tối cao mà cố tình vi phạm pháp luật tố tụng là sát hại Nhà nước pháp quyền Việt Nam mà vi này là đại diện, đồng nghĩa với tự sát chính trị. Mà người đời "sợ" để mà "sống" chứ chái ai "sợ" để mà "chết" cái!" (Cù Huy Hà Vũ).

Thư của Hội Sinh thái Việt và Trung tâm Khuyến khích tự lập: Tri thức người Việt khắp năm châu ủng hộ trí thức Việt Nam trong nước (24/8) Nếu Bạn chưa làm, thì mong Bạn nhập vào www.bauxitevietnam.info để ký tên ủng hộ **Kiến Nghị [12-4-2009]**. Với sự đồng góp của Bạn và những người Bạn quen biết, số chữ ký sẽ gia tăng mau chóng, và tiếng nói mạnh mẽ thống nhất này sẽ tỏ rõ cho chính quyền và Trung Quốc biết rằng người Việt luôn luôn có tinh thần Diên Hồng khi đất nước bị lâm nguy. Xin nói rõ, sự cổ động này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, không do bauxitevietnam hoặc ai yêu cầu vì họ có thể bị chụp mũ là "liên lạc với nước ngoài" (Trần Đình Dũng và Phùng Liên Đoàn).

Tâm thư của các nhà cách mạng lão thành: Vì sự nghiệp bảo vệ độc lập và quyền dân chủ của nhân dân, vì sự còn mắt của Đảng và chế độ (26/7) Thư do các nhà cách mạng lão thành trực tiếp chuyển đến *Bauxite Việt Nam* đề nghị đăng lên trang mạng.

Xã luận số 5: Bàn tay che mặt trời (25/7) Xã luận mới của

Chapter 5

State Response: the Two Arms of the Party-State

Now that the Vietnamese intellectuals had helped pushed the bauxite mining controversy towards a more oppositional politics, the party-state had to respond in new ways. Containing the debate through government workshops on “environmental” problems and behind-the-scenes manipulation of the media was no longer adequate. The bounds of embedded advocacy had already been crossed. On one hand, the opponents of bauxite mining and a growing chorus of ordinary Vietnamese citizens pushed for the National Assembly to decide on bauxite mining. Furthermore, an occasion was coming up for state authorities to respond in this way at the Assembly’s bi-annual meeting. On the other hand, state authorities were also now mobilizing a more repressive response to the public swell of criticism and opposition. Each of these responses illustrated a different side of the party-state, one that is more responsive and the other more repressive to public debate. However, in this chapter, I argue that it is important to examine these two facets of the party-state not as working at cross-purposes to one another but rather in consort for a more singular purpose, which is to maintain authoritarian rule.

The scholarly literature on the Vietnamese state gives the impression of a Janus-faced institutions. One scholarly tradition has emphasized state control based on the Vietnamese Communist Party’s structural dominance over public and political life, which has been variously described as bureaucratic socialism (Porter, 1993), mono-organizational socialism (Thayer, 1995, 2009b), state corporatism (Jeong, 1997) and, more recently, market-leninism (London, 2009). This tradition has tended to highlight the party state’s more repressive approaches to dealing with domestic criticism, particularly through academic and journalistic sketches of Vietnamese public and political life (Abuza, 2001; Hayton, 2010; Templer, 1999)¹⁰⁸. It also fueled arguments in the 1990s that Vietnam is a “strong” state, although the dichotomy presumed by this argument has since been taken apart and criticized (Kerkvliet, 1998, 2006; Koh, 2006).

The second tradition partly emerged from these criticisms of the strong state - weak state debate. It builds from work of the 1980s and 1990s that drew a picture of a more flexible and pragmatic state and emphasized the “bottom up forces” and “everyday politics” of Vietnamese citizens that were appeared to drive policy change, mostly notably in the historic decision to decollectivize agriculture in the late 1980s (Beresford, 1988; Fforde & De Vylder, 1996; Kerkvliet, 2005). David Koh (2006) has described this tradition as the “accommodating state” literature. This literature has also spawned a rich scholarship on local politics in Vietnam, which rejects any idea of an absolute or monolithic state effectively able to radiate its political power outwards. Rather, the local politics scholarship has examined the different ways that everyday actors barter and

¹⁰⁸ Of these three, Hayton’s (2010) more recent *Rising Dragon* is probably also the most nuanced, though this is probably also partly, at least, reflective of important changes in Vietnamese politics over the past decade since the other two were written.

negotiate power and influence with the different and often competing elements and levels of the “disaggregated state” (Koh 2006). This micro-politics approach to the party-state has shown its different elements to be more engaged and responsive to its citizens.

Benedict Kerkvliet (Kerkvliet, 2010a) is among the few who have tried to bring these two sides of the Vietnamese party-state together in his notion of the responsive-repressive state. He argues that “Vietnamese authorities also mix repression with toleration, dialogue and accommodation” (2), while emphasizing that even strict “repression is not uniform” (16). Similarly, although in primarily in prefatory remarks, Koh (2006) has also tried to argue for a more “mixed picture.” He has identified a “control mechanism” and a “mediation mechanism” as simultaneously working together in the party-state. As he has described, “The control mechanism squeezes tight, but can be loosened by the mediation mechanism” (x).

However, in both Kerkvliet and Koh, these two facets of the party-state appear to work as distinct from or even at cross-purposes with each other. They seem to reflect arbitrariness and contradiction rather than elements of a more systematic and comprehensive form of control, even if unevenly implemented. Here I want to argue that what is important about identifying these two aspects of the party-state is precisely how they work together. Rather than working against one another, repression enables accommodation and accommodation enables repression. Their common purpose is to maintain and reinforce authoritarianism. For example, when Koh comments that with the mediation mechanism “people breathe easier and are less likely to demand revolutionary change” (xi), he makes clear that the purpose of this mechanism is not so much to empower people as it is to manage their disempowerment. It does not so much make for a “soft” authoritarianism (or “semi-authoritarian,” as do Ho and Edmonds (2008) suggest in the Chinese case), but rather it helps to stabilize the grasp of authoritarian power.

In this chapter, I examine both of these repressive-controlling and responsive-mediating facets of the party-state in response to the more oppositional politics that had begun to emerge with the bauxite mining controversy. Accordingly, it is divided into two main sections. The first one focuses on the discussions leading up to and during the National Assembly’s bi-annual meeting. This includes the Politburo’s official conclusions on bauxite mining at the end of April 2009, which opened a door for the National Assembly to get involved, if not decide on, the bauxite mining debates, and the renewed capacity of the domestic press to push further on the controversy through its coverage of the bi-annual meeting in May and June. My analysis of these discussions shows how the party-state brought out its top brass, including both the Prime Minister and the Chair of the National Assembly, to try to close down public debate while still giving the impression of representing the voices of the people.

The second section focuses on the state’s more repressive tactics, at first, to chill the public and then, about six months later, after the bauxite mining debates had largely subsided, targeting the *Bauxite Vietnam* website more directly. The first attempts to chill the public debate targeted bloggers and bloggers and intellectuals through arrests and a legislative act to curtail academic freedoms. The later attempts to target the bauxite mining controversy more specifically included anonymous cyber-attacks that dismantled the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, infiltrating email accounts and spreading false rumours about its main operators, and police interrogating and intimidating the leader of the website, Nguyễn Huệ Chi, for twenty-two days. It is difficult to state with certainty who

was behind all of these incidents or what exactly was their rationale and motivation because of the high degree of secrecy within which all of those discussions take place. However, when examined together in the context of the public debate on bauxite mining at that time, it seems highly likely that these actions were party of a larger overall strategy to forcibly suppress a potential political opposition.

The Politburo Speaks, as the Public Debate Continues to Swell

Two weeks after the government's "Scientific Workshop," the Politburo finally pronounced itself on bauxite mining in an official "Communication" ("Thông báo số 245/TB-TW," 2009). Many opponents of bauxite mining had appealed to the Politburo to intervene, ranging from the Scientists' Petition of November 2008 and the great General Giáp to Voice of Vietnam reporter Lê Phú Khải and Princeton mathematician Ngô Bảo Châu. Even though two of the most important backers for bauxite mining were also Politburo members, namely Nguyễn Tấn Dũng and General Secretary Nông Đức Mạnh, many people suspected division within the Politburo. In particular, rumours circulated that the ranked number two in the Party apparatus, Trương Tấn Sang, was opposed to bauxite mining, even if only to advance his own ambitions of replacing Nguyễn Tấn Dũng in the nation's top seat (Vuving, 2010).

However, the Politburo re-affirmed its full commitment to bauxite mining. Echoing the conclusions of the Prime Minister in January 2009, the Politburo reiterated that bauxite mining was entirely consistent with state and Party policy, citing again the 9th and 10th National Party Congresses. It also made official a few key concessions. For one, it required the Master Plan for bauxite mining (i.e., Decision 167/QĐ-TTg) to be revised and re-assessed in closer consideration of socio-economic development for the region and country. The Politburo stayed firm in its resolve to implement the first two bauxite and alumina projects for Tan Rai and Nhan Co, but advised on holding off on the sale of stock shares in these projects to foreign individuals or organizations (albeit without specifying until when), using foreign labour only when essential (without any criteria on when that might be), and applying modern technology with strict regulations on environmental protection (again, without further specification).

The Politburo also required the government to desist from beginning any new projects until the costs and benefits of these two projects became clearer, which was widely interpreted as using them as "pilot projects." The idea of beginning with pilot projects had been circulating since at least the Dak Nong workshop in 2008. Using the Tan Rai and Nhan Co projects as "pilot projects" was in some measure a concession to these calls, though were also two of the biggest projects under Decision 167. The Politburo also required a Strategic Environmental Assessment to be conducted for the region, as had been recommended by CODE from early on, and the temporary suspension of the Nhan Co project until a complete re-assessment of its economic benefits and environmental impacts was completed.

The Communication took nearly another week before it became public. It was widely hailed as evidence that the party-state was listening. An editorial piece written for *Tuan Vietnam*, stated, "We can see this as a decision taken by our nation's leaders that is correct, timely and consist with the hopes and expectations of the people" (Lê Hồng Hiệp, 2009). Another one written by former National Assembly delegate Nguyễn Ngọc Tran and Lecturer of International Relations at the Vietnam National University in Ho

Chi Minh City also applauded the Communication and its contents (Nguyễn Ngọc Trần, 2009b). Even *Bauxite Vietnam*, in an open letter to the delegates of the National Assembly, suggested that the Communication “reflected a realistic attitude and respect for the public, an act of connecting with the public” (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009c). Others were more cautious, such as Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, who, simply recognized that the Politburo “has made its conclusions” and then once again directed his focus on key issues in bauxite mining in the hopes of once again “making clear” and “creating consensus” (Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, 2009b, May 4).

Indeed, the Politburo appeared to have heard and acted upon the many concerns raised during the bauxite mining controversy. In this sense, it was responsive. However, these responses were all geared towards government institutions and processes. In a way, they did little more than put the government even more in charge. However, a key demand that was not heeded by the Politburo was for the National Assembly to vote on bauxite mining. The Politburo made a gesture in this direction (it was still “listening”), but only in the form of requiring government to prepare a report on bauxite mining for the upcoming bi-annual meeting of the National Assembly, as part of its socio-economic report. This key issue motivated *Bauxite Vietnam*, in the figures of Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Thế Hùng, to write a “supplemental to the petition,” except this time addressed to the delegates of the National Assembly (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al., 2009c, April 30).

Bauxite Vietnam prodded the Politburo to really stand behind its show of responsiveness by making their recommendations law. As they wrote: “in the spirit of democracy and openness and building a modern rule of law State, it is certain that the Politburo also wants its conclusion to be made into law to have sufficient legal standing and force to implement them” (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al., 2009c, April 30). This would require, according to *Bauxite Vietnam*, nothing less than having the National Assembly decide and vote on bauxite mining. That is why *Bauxite Vietnam* wrote this letter, to remind delegates of the key issues at stake. However, after repeating several times “but surely every Assembly delegate already knows this” (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al., 2009c, April 30, Para 4, 5 and 6), the letter concludes by admonishing:

. . . even one little intervention, one time raising one’s hand even if hesitantly [i.e., to vote against bauxite mining], is one stone laid in the road to give our people and Nation a chance to raise our faces up to the five continents of the world [i.e., as an independent nation]. The reverse will be the death that has already been forewarned; it cannot be any other way! (Nguyễn Huệ Chi et al., 2009c, April 30).

As *Bauxite Vietnam* published these words, the bauxite mining controversy continued to spiral outwards. More and more different kinds of people were speaking out and they were doing so in increasingly radical ways. The first and only mass demonstration for bauxite mining inside Vietnam occurred on April 26th at the Thai Ha Catholic parish in Hanoi. Redemptorist Priest Fr. Peter Nguyễn Văn Khải organized a vigil of some 1,000 parishioners, where he circulated a petition against bauxite mining (AFP, 2009, April 26; CNA, 2009, April 28). Another Redemptorist Priest, Joseph L Quang Uy from Ho Chi Minh City, also posted an online petition against bauxite mining

in April for Catholics inside and outside of Vietnam (AsiaNews, 2009, April 29; CNA, 2009, July 7). These acts foreshadowed that of the Archbishop of Saigon, Cardinal Jean Baptiste Phạm Minh Mẫn, who, one month later, on May 28th, wrote a pastoral letter to condemn the bauxite mining plans and called on Catholics to protect the natural environment as a “Christian’s duty” (AsiaNews, 2009, May 30).

Overseas Vietnamese communities also became more active in organizing similar events around the world on bauxite mining. A French group organized a workshop in Paris on April 19th to support Thích Quảng Độ’s earlier call for civic disobedience in protest of bauxite mining. An American group organized a workshop to discuss bauxite mining at UC Berkeley on April 20th and a protest march against bauxite mining was held in San Francisco on May 22nd. On the occasion of Earth Day on April 22nd, Việt Tân organized a Save Tay Nguyen (i.e., Central Highlands) Facebook campaign against bauxite mining (Việt Tân, 2009). On May 1st, the US-based Viet Ecology Foundation also sent an English petition with 260 signatures to the United Nations to protest bauxite mining (Viet Ecology Foundation, 2009).

Overseas online media also became increasingly involved. Major international media agencies ran feature stories on the debate, including features by the *Economist* on April 23rd, the *Wall Street Journal* on May 2nd, the *Financial Times* on May 6th, *Al-Jazeera* on May 7th, and the *New York Times* on June 29th (Fawthrop, 2009, May 7; Hookway, 2009, May 2; Mydans, 2009, June 29; Pilling, 2009 May, 6; The *Economist*, 2009, April 23) Meanwhile, international agencies operating inside Vietnam, such as the Associated French Press, also began to cover these events more closely, albeit limited as always in their mobility and access to information sources. Websites operated by overseas Vietnamese followed the lead of *Viet-studies* and others by opening up threads specific to bauxite mining, such as *Diễn Đàn Forum* on April 20th. Famed bloggers also became more involved in the debates, such as *Osin’s Blog* (Huy Đức) (April 27th), *Ngươi Viet Online* (April 28th), *Everywhere Land* (April 29th) and *Người Buôn Gió* (May 12th).

Hence, while the Politburo’s concessions to its critics on bauxite mining were applauded by some, many others remained highly critical and suspicious. To emphasize their point, they continued to demand for the National Assembly to decide and vote on the bauxite mining projects. Meanwhile, an opportunity for this was approaching in the National Assembly’s month long bi-annual meeting in May and June.

A New Venue: the National Assembly’s Bi-Annual Meeting

The lead up to the National Assembly’s bi-annual meeting

Following the Politburo’s official Communication on bauxite mining, the domestic press began shifting its attention towards the National Assembly. In examining this meeting and the processes leading up to it, I rely particularly on the reporting of *VietnamNet*. I do this partly because *VietnamNet* was among the most pro-active domestic media agencies to pursue the bauxite mining issue. However, by following closely how this one agency investigated into and developed its story around the bauxite mining issue in the National Assembly, I also show how the domestic media uses other persons’s voices, notably state officials, and juxtaposition to develop its own story on a politically sensitive issue without necessarily exposing itself as too critical of the party-state. As one reporter from *VietnamNet* reminded me, although reporters in Vietnam are

often deterred from giving their own opinions, they can still do so by selecting who they speak to, what they highlight and how they compare and contrast different events and positions taken by their subjects (Interview 026). Because of already existing norms for reporting on the bi-annual meetings of the National Assembly, this meeting also allowed the domestic press to pursue the bauxite mining controversy further.

On April 30th, *VietnamNet* ran the following headline: “[Government] will report to the Party conference and National Assembly on bauxite” (Vân Anh, 2009a, April 30). This article simply reported on a Prime Minister’s instruction to his cabinet to prepare a report on bauxite mining for the National Assembly, as instructed by the Politburo. However, the BBC followed up the news by interviewing National Assembly delegates Nguyễn Lâm Dũng, who had also signed the Petition of the 135 Signatures, and Nguyễn Minh Thuyết, who had greeted Nguyễn Huệ Chi and company when they had delivered this Petition to the offices of the National Assembly (BBC, 2009a, May 1). Both delegates were sceptical about the government’s plans for bauxite mining, but, above, they emphasized the importance of discussing it at the upcoming bi-annual meeting.

The press also began reporting on meetings that Assembly delegates typically organize with voters in the provinces they represent to hear their concerns prior to the bi-annual meetings. This is a standard practice of the domestic press. However, one of the issues they picked up on most was bauxite mining. In early May, *VietnamNet* ran another headline, “Hanoi voters want the National Assembly to monitor the bauxite projects,” (Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 4).¹⁰⁹ Reporting on the meeting of the Chair of the National Assembly, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, with voters, this articles quoted concerns raised by several of them on use of foreign labour, economic feasibility and respect for scientific opinion in bauxite mining. The article also noted that many overseas Vietnamese had also expressed their interests in having the National Assembly directly monitor the bauxite mining project during the Assembly Chair’s recent travels abroad.

However, the article also contrasts these concerns with the Assembly Chair’s responses. Rather than use the opportunity to reaffirm the authority of the National Assembly, the Assembly Chair explains that “it’s not just any project that should be passed through the National Assembly, but rather it depends on the scale and size of each project. And in this case, the scale of the Tan Rai and Nhan Co projects is only around 600 million dollars” (Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 4). He also tried to reassure voters by noting that foreign labour will be not only from China but also “many other countries” and, in any case, these labourers will be strictly regulated by the law. He further emphasized that mining bauxite would help a poor region of the country and they will not be done if they are unprofitable. Finally, he impressed on voters that “these projects are only being piloted; there’s nothing to be concerned about yet”—though surely the Assembly Chair’s “yes” must have had an ominous ring to it.

¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that the VietnamNet article did not suggest in any way that the National Assembly should “decide” on these projects. Perhaps that statement was already forbidden to the press. At any rate, such reserve can be seen in how the VietnamNet reporter emphasized that “even though the policy is to start with pilot projects and only highly-skilled foreign labour is to be used, the reality is that many foreign workers are ‘spilling’ into many construction projects [in Vietnam]” (Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 4, voter is paraphrased).

Five days later, *VietnamNet* posted another article, reproduced from the government's own website, reporting on the meeting of the Prime Minister (who, like all government ministers, is also an Assembly delegate) with voters in the coastal city of Hai Phong. In this "honest and open" discussion, the Prime Minister did not mince his words. He assured voters that bauxite mining will go ahead, but it "will be managed seriously and monitored strictly to ensure that it is economically effective, environmentally sustainable, provides jobs to local people, and bauxite mining becomes a major industry of the country" (Công TTĐT Chính phủ & TTXVN, 2009, May 9). Compared with the more sceptical line of inquiry pursued by *VietnamNet*, this article reposted from the government's website presents a stark contrast and gives perspective on the government's attitude. With such firm insistence from the Prime Minister, the reader is left wondering what is the point of even discussing.

However, in the final week leading up to the bi-annual meeting, the messaging of these high level state authorities starts to waiver and becomes more confused. At a meeting of the National Assembly's Executive Committee on May 14th, the Assembly Chair asserted the National Assembly's authority by insisting that the government's report on bauxite mining be a separate one, rather than only as a section of the regular socio-economic report (Lê Nhung, 2009b, May 14). However, the next day, *VietnamNet* posted an article that contrasted this statement with that of the Deputy Prime Minister, Hoàng Trung Hải, who, "one day after the National Assembly Chair Nguyễn Phú Trọng recommended the Government to prepare a separate report on bauxite mining in the Central Highlands . . . instructed the Ministry of Planning and Investment to coordinate with the Ministry of Industry and Trade to complete soon the report on the bauxite projects *for a supplement to the socio-economic report*" (Vân Anh, 2009b, May 15, emphasis added).

As discussion started to heat up about whether the report should be separate or a part of the socio-economic report, the Deputy Chair of the National Assembly, Trần Đình Đản, then announced, "For sure the National Assembly will completely support bauxite mining" (Huy Đức, 2009, May 20; Lê Nhung, 2009d, May 18). Wittingly or not, his remark raised again question marks about why they were even having a discussion. One informant from the domestic media reported to me their shock when they heard the Deputy Chair explain to delegates that they were free to discuss the bauxite mining policy, but they were all finally required to support it (Interview 031.1). Meanwhile, *VietnamNet* further reported that the Vice-Director of the National Assembly's Committee for Science, Technology and Environment said on the same day that he had assigned neither tasks nor responsibilities to its Committee members for reviewing the government's report (Lê Nhung, 2009c, May 18). These statements seemed to suggest that the National Assembly's interest in bauxite mining was a mere formality, if not an empty spectacle.

Meanwhile, public pressure on the National Assembly continued to mount. *Bauxite Vietnam* sent another open letter to the Assembly delegates three days before the bi-annual meeting. This letter aimed to impress on delegates' that their duties in this meeting were "infinitely important" (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009e, May 17). On the day before the meeting, *VietnamNet* ran the headline "Assembly delegates demand to monitor the bauxite projects" (Lê Nhung, 2009e, May 19). This article was based on interview with two famously outspoken Assembly

delegates, namely Dương Trung Quốc, who had recommended that the National Assembly vote on the projects at government's Scientific Workshop, and Nguyễn Đình Xuân, a member of the National Assembly's Committee for Science, Technology and Environment. Dương Trung Quốc considered the government's quibbling over a separate report as resorting to "sophistry,"¹¹⁰ while Nguyễn Đình Xuân complained that the government's quibbling gave delegates no time to review the report, whether separate or joined. The BBC also published a long article by a Vietnamese student in Indiana, USA, who argued why the government should rightfully present the bauxite mining projects to the National Assembly. The student also cautioned for a more a "realistic" perspective on what could be accomplished at that meeting, given that 90% of delegates were also Party members (Thanh Thủy, 2009, May 6).

As the day of the meeting arrived, General Giáp sent his third letter on bauxite mining, addressed to the Party leadership and National Assembly. He reiterated his recommendation to "cease the Central Highlands bauxite projects, including the pilot projects" and urged the Assembly delegates to "mobilize democracy, discuss carefully, and make a serious decision" (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2009b, May 20). One week later, the prestigious mathematician Ngô Bảo Châu also sent his own personal letter to the National Assembly (which he sent by email to Nguyễn Huệ Chi to personally deliver to the National Assembly on his behalf). Ngô Bảo Châu suggested that China was practicing "neo-colonialism" through bauxite mining (Ngô Bảo Châu, 2009, May 29).

However, as the bi-annual meeting approach, the government had still not yet submitted its report, there was still discussion on whether it should be a separate or part of the socio-economic report, and bauxite mining was not scheduled on the meeting's official agenda. As the reporting by *VietnamNet* and other media indicated, there was still much confusion on what was the National Assembly's role in the bauxite mining controversy and, indeed, what position it might take on the issue.

An explosive debate in the National Assembly

The bi-annual meeting opened on May 20th. The Deputy Prime Minister Nguyễn Hùng Sinh helped open the meeting by reaffirming the importance of exploring and extracting minerals to support Vietnamese industrialization and recovery from the global financial crisis. He noted in particular the nation's bauxite ore reserves as second in importance only to its near ubiquitous supply of limestone (Lê Nhung & Vân Anh, 2009, May 22). The Minister of Environment, Phạm Khôi Nguyên, also made supportive

¹¹⁰ Dương Trung Quốc argued that "Until now, the conclusions of the Politburo along with the ideas of the National Assembly's Executive Committee and the Government's instruction to present the report [on bauxite mining] in the socio-economic report shows the sophistry/quibbling of their way of responding. However, even though the meeting's agenda doesn't include monitoring the bauxite issue, the public debate has shown the necessity of having a separate report on bauxite mining by the Government for the National Assembly to discuss it separately. However, in my opinion, whether a separate or a supplemental report, if the Assembly delegates fulfil their duties, contribute their ideas and reflect accurately the expectations of voters, it will have a positive to implement the projects better and attain a higher level of agreement" (Lê Nhung, 2009e, May 19).

statements on bauxite mining, confidently affirming that the “environmental problems can be entirely resolved” (*vấn đề môi trường là hoàn toàn giải quyết được*) (Lê Nhung & Vân Anh, 2009, May 22).

However, a handful of Assembly delegates harboured other opinions. Reporters met with them in the hallways of the National Assembly to hear their concerns and complaints. *VietnamNet* described Dương Trung Quốc as “annoyed” [*bức xúc*] about the lack of information from government, which hindered their capacity to discuss (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 21). The Director of the Assembly’s Committee for National Defense and Security, Lê Quang Bình, re-emphasized the need for a separate report, while also complaining about lack of information. He noted that Assembly delegates had received information only from the press, the scholars’ petition (*kiến nghị của giới học giả*) and scientists (Hoàng Phương, 2009a, May 21). He also affirmed his Committee’s readiness to monitor these projects (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 21).

Delegate Nguyễn Lan Dũng argued that the National Assembly should directly monitor bauxite mining, while a member of the Central Committee for the Fatherland Front, Nguyễn Anh Liêm, added that the National Assembly should decide on them (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 21). As he argued, “the voters have spoken clearly. This is a problem with many different ideas. They demand the National Assembly to discuss and decide on the matter to create unity in society and internal agreement, above all in the National Assembly” (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009a, May 21).

The government’s report was finally completed on May 22nd (“Toàn văn báo cáo bóc-xít của Chính phủ gửi Quốc hội,” 2009, May 24) and submitted to the National Assembly on May 23rd, three days after the bi-annual meeting had opened (Tuổi Trẻ, 2009, May 24). *VietnamNet* posted the entire report online. The report reaffirmed, once again, the government’s commitment to bauxite mining. It promised that bauxite mining would be economically profitable, the mining sites would use all Vietnamese labour once fully operational, and environmental protection measures would be effectively increased.

However, the report did not sit well with several certain delegates. They criticized it for being vague, simplistic and lacking foundations. As Lê Quang Bình expressed:

If you ask me, the report does not meet the expectations of National Assembly delegates. For example, the solutions proposed for the environmental problems are very general. They only say that with modern technology all of the environmental problems can be surmounted, including management of toxic waste. OK, management is good, but how they will manage it is not made clear. Similarly, with concerns about national security and defense, the report ensures that they will not be affected, but it does not give out any specific solutions on how to avoid these problems. (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009b, May 25).

Once again, domestic reporters intercepted delegates in the hallways to survey their opinions. Lê Quang Bình complained that because the National Assembly was not authorized to monitor the bauxite mining projects, delegates were only able to express their individual opinions rather than speak on behalf of the National Assembly or its

Committees. About the government's report, he said, "Assembly delegates are left to trust the Government is all" (Hoàng Phương & Lê Nhung, 2009b, May 25). Nguyễn Anh Liêm¹¹¹ defiantly claimed that the "National Assembly will not discuss something that is already done." A member of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and one of the few highland indigenous people among the Assembly delegates, Danh Út (Kien Giang) also voiced the need for more National Assembly delegates to speak up about these projects. Other delegates called for adding an extra day to the bi-annual meeting to allow for a whole day of discussion on bauxite mining.

Assembly delegates were finally allowed an opportunity to raise the issue of bauxite mining in the bi-annual meeting during the government's presentation of its socio-economic report on May 25th. Delegate Nguyễn Minh Thuyết captured the headlines in *VietnamNet* when he accused the government of "evading the law" (Lê Nhung, 2009f, May 26). By law, government projects that exceed 20 trillion VND (approximately 1 billion USD) in investment or exceed other criteria for national security, cultural heritage and natural environment must be approved by the National Assembly.¹¹² Nguyễn Minh Thuyết accused the government of having deliberately split up the bauxite mining projects into smaller individual ones to avoid having to pass them through the National Assembly.

He also expressed his skepticism at the bromides and promises made by government in the report and during discussions. As he said, "This morning I was very enthused to hear a National Assembly delegate from a Central Highlands Province say that the projects will contribute 500 billion [Dong] for the locality and 1,000 local works will be trained. I recommend the National Assembly to write down all of these numbers so that several years from now we can check back to see if they were correct or not" (Lê Nhung, 2009f, May 26).

Nguyễn Minh Thuyết's words were aimed at delegates from Dak Nong and Lam Dong. The head delegate from Dak Nong, an indigenous minority, Điều K'ré highlighted the economic and development benefits of the projects, while Lam Dong delegate, Lê Thanh Phong, said that "not because of environmental problems will we forego developing the region's natural resources, but also not only for the sake of economic gains will we develop these resources without special attention to the environment" (Lê Nhung, 2009f, May 26).¹¹³ However, as Nguyễn Minh Thuyết suggested, these statements seemed only to repeat an all too familiar refrain.

¹¹¹ Erratum in the article in the spelling of the delegate's name as Nguyễn Anh Liên.

¹¹² Those criteria are that the total investment capital exceeds 20 trillion VND, of which at least 30% is government invested, the project has a "large" negative impact on the natural environment, requires relocation for more than twenty thousand people in the mountainous areas (or 50,000 in other areas), it affects an area important for national defense, security or cultural and historical heritage, or for requires a special policy mechanism (BBC, 2009b, May 5; Lê Nhung, 2009c, May 18).

¹¹³ The Ministry of Environment also addressed the Assembly on the morning of May 27th once again reassuring his audience that all of the environmental problems could be resolved, while not forgetting to add that this will require some extra budget for his Ministry to address and monitor all of these problems effectively (Lê Nhung, 2009f, May

The discussion on bauxite mining then died away for a couple of weeks, as delegates turned to other topics on the official agenda. However, it returned with vigour during the question and answer periods in the meeting's closing stages. On the afternoon of June 11th, the Minister of Industry, Vũ Huy Hoàng, reiterated that neither of the bauxite projects currently under construction exceeded 20,000 trillion Vietnam Dong and so they did not require National Assembly approval. He added that the railway line and deep seaport required to bring bauxite-alumina to market would also be considered as separate projects because, "of course, they are also meant to serve residents and transport other goods than just alumina" (Lê Nhung, 2009g, June 11).

This did not convince delegate Nguyễn Đăng Trùng, delegate to Ho Chi Minh City. He pursued Nguyễn Minh Thuyết line of questioning by suggesting that these projects became separate only when the government cut them up and made them so. Furthermore, he argued, their impacts on the environment, economics and national security also required that they "absolutely must be decided on by the National Assembly" (Lê Nhung, 2009g, June 11). Delegate Nguyễn Văn Ba for Khánh Hòa added that the railway and port projects are essential, not independent, components of the bauxite mining projects and so they must be considered together with the bauxite mining projects.

However, to these objections, the Minister only replied, if somewhat ominously, splitting up the projects "was not the Ministry's idea but what was already in the Government's plan" (Lê Nhung, 2009h, June 12). Nguyễn Đăng Trùng returned that even this response was inadequate because the Ministry is a part of the government. He recalled the Politburo's recommendation to review the entire project and suggested that the Minister was bent on "mining bauxite at any cost," flipping around the phrase that the Deputy Prime Minister Hoàng Trung Hải had made famous at the government's "Scientific Workshop." Delegate Phạm Thị Loan (Hanoi) also complained of the government's self-justifying rhetoric, saying that every decision already "has a document or policy mechanism." She pointed out that mining bauxite contradicted the policy not to export raw materials. However, the Minister retorted that the government did not consider alumina as a raw material because it required processing.

On the morning of June 13th, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyễn Sinh Hùng took his turn on the rostrum. He trod a well-worn government strategy. He repeated common knowledge about the size of the bauxite reserves, restated their bases in the 9th and 10th National Party Congresses, minimized the concerns raised against these projects and then elaborated upon the government's solutions for a select few of them. He also emphasized that the government had listened to some "revolutionary veterans" (without naming names) and scientists, as well as organized workshops and seminars to hear their ideas and consult with them.

Dương Trung Quốc, for one, was not convinced. According to *VietnamNet*, "[r]ight away after the Deputy Prime Minister's presentation," he declared that "the Deputy Prime Minister has still not answered my question of whether the purpose of cutting up bauxite mining into smaller projects was to avoid having to pass them through the National Assembly?" (Lê Nhung, 2009i, June 13). He further accused the Deputy

26). The Minister further submitted his own report to the National Assembly, which included three full pages on bauxite mining (Xuân Linh & Lê Nhung, 2009, May 27).

Prime Minister of blaming the National Assembly for not having requested to review the projects itself.¹¹⁴

Finally, the Chair of the National Assembly, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, was charged with closing the meeting. He lauded delegates for “ideas that were constructive, responsible and honest” and avowed that “they were critical reminders for us, forcing us to be completely honest with ourselves” (Lê Nhung, 2009i, June 13). He also reminded the government to “continue” listening, provide information and be ready to change their opinions when necessary. However, in the final analysis, he reaffirmed once again that the “National Assembly together with the Government guaranteed [the safe and effective] implementation of these strategically important projects.” And with these words, the Chair concluded that the Assembly had now reached “consensus” (đồng thuận).¹¹⁵

As the Assembly delegates had no power to vote on the bauxite projects, these exchanges could not go beyond the government’s vague promises and personal reassurances. The explosive discussion on bauxite mining that had overwhelmed the National Assembly for a while seemed to be for nothing. As the meeting closed, *Bauxite Vietnam* wrote a critical perspective on the spectacle that state leaders had performed in the National Assembly, emphasizing in particular Nguyễn Phú Trọng’s attempt to bring it all to consensus. As *Bauxite Vietnam* described,

. . . speaking like a village elder with soft words and an intimate drawl, the [Assembly] Chair got up to give a comment on each delegate that spoke up during the question period (except for those delegates that he considered to have misbehaved, as if they were school children), in an atmosphere that the press described with words like “grading” [the school pupils] together with “praising and reprimanding” and “sound encouragement,” and then he *quickly proceeded to conclude* that the bauxite issue is *reaching consensus*, as if trying to make the public, who have been following the bauxite case, feel like they were participating in some fun game worth tens or hundreds of thousands of billion Vietnamese dong while the foundations of our independence were hanging by a thread. (Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Phạm Toàn, & Nguyễn Thế Hùng, 2009g, June 15)

To *Bauxite Vietnam*, these debates had only shown that, apart from a few brave delegates, the National Assembly was unable to hear or respond to the people. Democracy was only a show. What remained was not consensus, but rather deep and perhaps irreconcilable

¹¹⁴ “The Deputy Prime Minister says that he is not blaming the National Assembly, but when the Deputy Prime Minister says that the projects did not need to be presented [to the National Assembly] because the National Assembly did not raise the issue, it is like he is pushing the responsibility for them onto the National Assembly” (Lê Nhung, 2009i, June 13).

¹¹⁵ A few days after the bi-annual meeting, Nguyễn Phú Trọng visited again with voters in Hanoi, where he once again reassured them that these projects would be implemented in a way that is “tightly controlled, effective and responsive to the ideas of the former leaders of the Party and State and the scientists” (Xuân Linh & Lê Nhung, 2009, May 27, paraphrased).

division. However, by writing about it and reporting on it in the way that *VietnamNet* did, they helped to expose Vietnam's political system.

In the aftermath of the Assembly debates

The bauxite mining debates had gone to the highest organ of the state and reached a stalemate. The result was not entirely unexpected. In *February*, Nguyễn Ngọc had already commented, "If you allow me to speak honestly, I don't think that passing this issue [i.e., bauxite mining] through the National Assembly will reflect our criticisms or have the result that we all desire./ There have been other instances, such as criticisms and calls to cancel plans to expand Hanoi City limits [last year], but in the end they still did it. We are not that hopeful" (Thiện Giao, 2009c, February 26). Similarly, when I once asked Phạm Toàn what he thought the National Assembly would do if it could vote on bauxite mining, he replied that they would vote "with two hands in the air" (i.e., in a gesture of surrender) (Interview 001.1). So why had they pushed for the National Assembly in the first place?

However, this did not stop the public debate from continuing to widen. One of the groups that until now had remained conspicuously absent throughout these debates was the "overseas development community," notably diplomatic staff and international organizations. However, on the occasion of the mid-year meeting of the Consultation Group on June 8th and 9th, which is a partnership between government and development donors to discuss and harmonize their interests for Vietnam, the Norwegian Ambassador, Kjell Storlokken, personally visited the mining projects on behalf of the overseas development assistance donor community. Then, at the meeting, he warned the government about "protecting the interests of the Vietnamese people in mining bauxite, especially the ones in the Central Highlands" (Hoàng Phương, 2009b, June 9).

The Norwegian Ambassador's warnings were further echoed by Swedish, British and American diplomatic staff, who warned of long-term environmental impacts and resettlement issues (BBC, 2009c, June 9; Trọng Nghĩa, 2009, June 10). They also suggested that the government implement the projects "carefully" and "transparently," while also offering their own technical support to help do so. Even though these words were mild, or perhaps diplomatic, their new involvement in the discussion was likely to have provoked a new concerns among state authorities.

A more radical tactic was tried two days later, on June 11th, by Vietnamese lawyer Cù Huy Hà Vũ. He filed a lawsuit against the Prime Minister to the Hanoi People's Court on bauxite mining. He charged the Prime Minister for violating the laws on the environment, national security, protecting cultural heritage and administration of legal documents. His action was unprecedented. While petitions and letters had a certain tradition in the party-state, suing the Prime Minister surely had none.

Cù Huy Hà Vũ decided to sue the Prime Minister personally because he was the person who signed Decision 167 (BBC, 2009d, June 12). Later, he explained publicly that he was within his legal right to do so because the national Constitution declared all Vietnamese citizens as equal before the law, whether one is a Prime Minister or not (BBC, 2009g, September 24). However, the Vietnamese court system gave him a different opinion.

On June 15th, the Hanoi People's Court refused the case on the grounds that the "current law does not allow them [i.e., Hanoi People's Court] to accept the lawsuit of Mr.

V” (BBC, 2009g, September 24). The Court did not judge against Cù Huy Hà Vũ, but argued that it simply had no legal basis upon which to judge it (Công TTĐT Chính phủ, 2009, June 23). The response was reminiscent of the government’s lack of procedure to accept the Petition of the 135 Signatures (see Chapter 4).

Cù Huy Hà Vũ appealed the decision to the Chief Justice of the Hanoi People’s Court two days later, but it was upheld again. Then, on July 3rd, he filed his case with the Supreme Court of Vietnam. The Supreme Court also refused to hear the case. Even though, as Cù Huy Hà Vũ himself recounted, the representatives of the Supreme Court were sympathetic and helpful, they also let him know that the “official opinion of the Supreme Court is that, currently, Vietnamese law has no basis to allow (*cho phép*) for a citizen to sue the Prime Minister” (BBC, 2009g, September 24). However, it seems unlikely that Cù Huy Hà Vũ was surprised by these responses. Like the Intellectuals’ petition, he had made his point by revealing the true character of Vietnamese law.¹¹⁶

Another radical act was attempted in July. A group of anonymous individuals calling themselves “Vietnamese Who Love Vietnam” (*Người Việt Yêu Nước*) printed and distributed T-shirts protesting Chinese annexation of the Eastern Sea and bauxite mining. On the back, the T-shirts were printed with the acronym S.O.S. The “O” in the acronym was a red circle with a bar through the middle over the words “Chinese Bauxite” (*Bô xít Trung Quốc*) (See Figure 1). Below was written “Keep Vietnam Green and Nationally Secure” (*giữ màu xanh và an ninh cho Việt Nam*). On the front, the T-shirt read that the Paracel and Spratly Islands are Vietnamese.

Small groups were reported to have delivered at least one hundred of these T-shirts in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang and Da Nang. However, one informant reported to me that six people were also arrested for selling selling them (Interview 045.1). Later in August, three prominent bloggers Mẹ Năm (Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh), Người Buôn Gió (Bùi Thanh Hiếu) and Phạm Đoan Trang were also detained for interrogation about their involvement in this campaign. This group also began a blog site, in which they included pictures of people wearing the shirts in each of the four cities.

¹¹⁶ As surprising as Cù Huy Hà Vũ’s lawsuit was the fact that he was not punished for it, at least not yet. We can only speculate on the reasons why not. One reason is that Cù Huy Hà Vũ came from an illustrious line of revolutionaries and maintained connections with persons high up in the Party apparatus, including no less than General Secretary Nông Đức Mạnh, as we will see later. Because of this, he would not be an easy target for the party-state to come down on. Another reason has to do with party-state’s style of repression, as I discuss in the next section. Their mode of cracking down on dissidents tends to be more considered and coordinated than sudden reactions to this or that particular individual. However, Cù Huy Hà Vũ’s day would come in November 2010, when he was arrested and eventually sentenced to seven years in prison in April 2011. Before then, he would make many other denunciations and campaigns against the state leadership, while the latter also worked out an elaborate plan to both indict and defame the Vietnamese lawyer at the same time, as I discuss more in Chapter##.

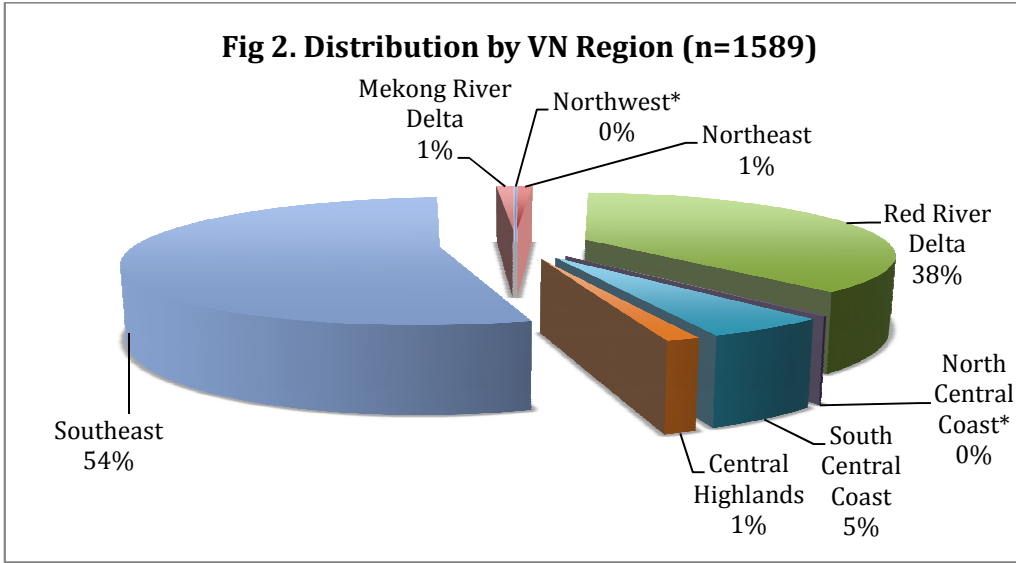
Figure 1: Backside sample of T-shirt by Vietnamese Who Love Vietnam group



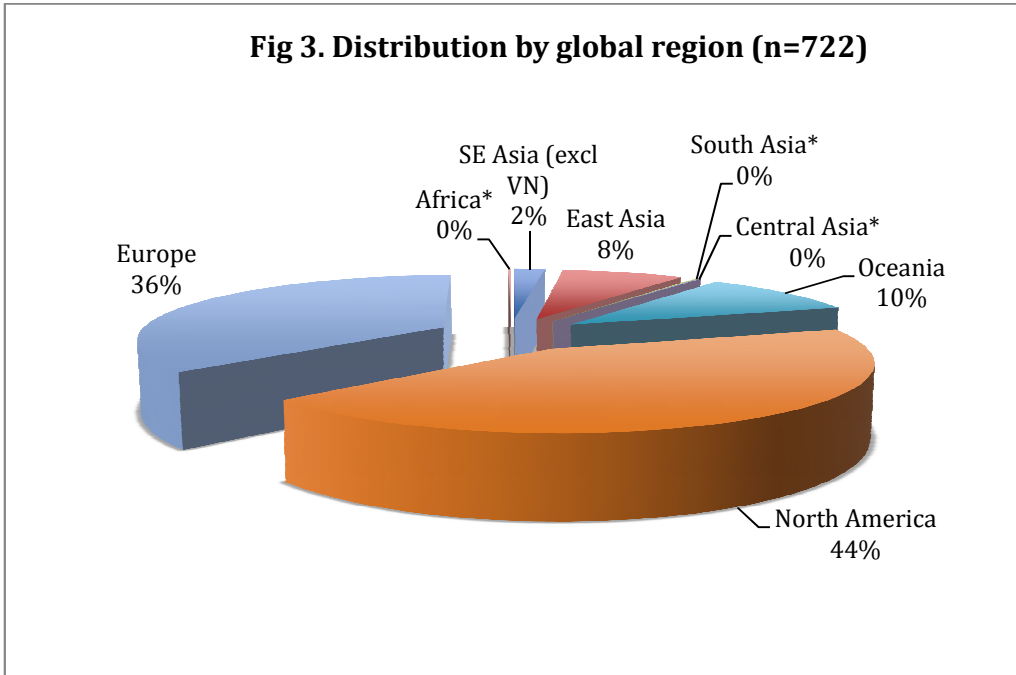
Source: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thaoluan9/message/44083>, Retrieved on January 5, 2013

By this time in July, the list of online signatures to the Petition of the 135 Signatures had also grown substantially. It had reached some 2,300 signatures. It showed how the opposition to bauxite mining had spread out to every corner and strata of Vietnamese society. More than two thirds of the signatories (68%) were from within Vietnam, while another third came from outside (32%). Furthermore, they came from every corner. Only ten of the country's 54 provinces counted on no representative in this list.¹¹⁷ They also came from the south (766 signatures), north (544) and central regions (92) of Vietnam. However, like the initial 135 signatures, the overwhelming majority was from each of those region's major cities, namely 661 from Ho Chi Minh City, 487 from Hanoi and 55 from Da Nang, respectively (see Figure 2). Among those from outside Vietnam, most came from North America (44%) or Europe (36%), while a smaller portion came from Australia (10%), East Asia (8%) and Southeast Asia (2%) (see Figure 3).

¹¹⁷ Interestingly, those provinces were Cao Bang, Bac Kan, and Lang Son in the northeast; Ha Giang, Lai Chau, Lang Son and Hoa Binh in the northwest; and Soc Trang, Dong Thap and Hau Duong in the Mekong Delta. All of these provinces contain high proportions of ethnic minority groups. They are all also relatively poor and remote. Most of the ones in the northwest and northeast are located on the northern borders with China and Laos.



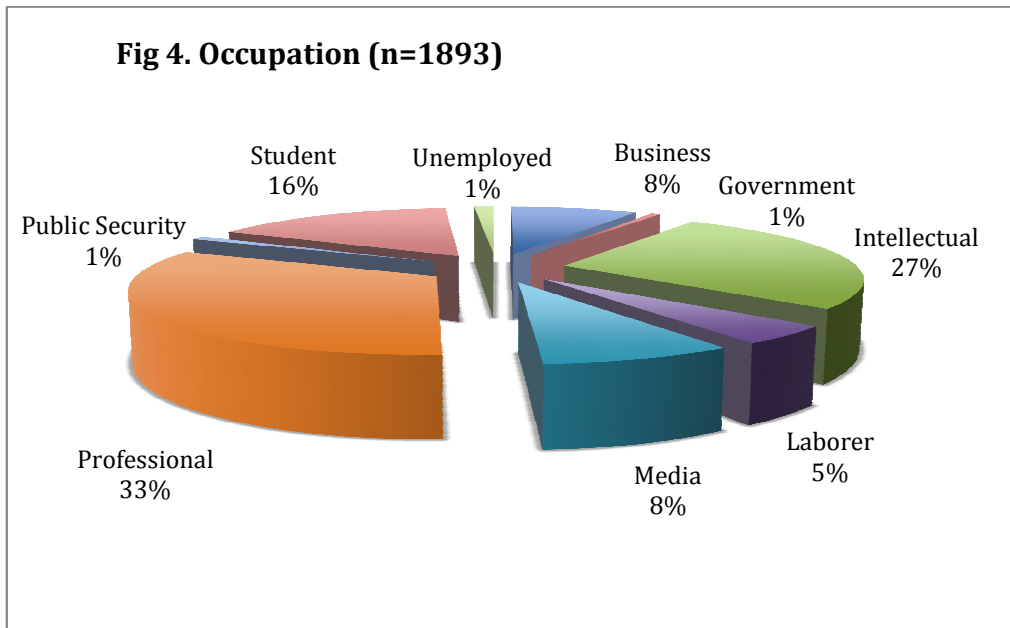
* The Northwest region counted on two representatives and the North Central Coast on one representative in the list, both of which have been rounded to 0% in the figure above



* Africa, South Asia and Central Asia each counted on one representative in the list, which has been rounded to 0% in the figure above

The signatories also indicated a wide range of professions and occupations (see Figure 4). Interestingly, the most commonly cited one was student (253), a group that had not yet been able to make a significant contribution to these debates by other means. Other popular ones were scientists (244), engineers (250), managers (202), teachers (94), researchers (92) and business persons (81), reporters (69) and writers (64). Again, the list

of signatories appeared to be a well-educated group. However, other interesting groups appeared on the list, such as the 52 signatories who described themselves as grade school students, including the twenty together from Quang Trung High School in Ha Dong – Hanoi (#1630-1641 and #1921-1928). Another sixty indicated that they were labourers (*công nhân*), nineteen farmers (*nông dân*), and twenty-one as domestic workers (*nội trợ*). There were also eleven who identified themselves as working for government, two for the police and fifteen from the military. Together they made an unprecedented statement of widespread opposition to a major policy of the party-state.



However, even as the opposition to bauxite mining was reaching all corners of Vietnamese society and becoming increasingly radical and defiant, the public debate was beginning to quiet down. Part of the reason may have been the stalemate reached in the National Assembly. After this, *Bauxite Vietnam* also began to turn its attention to other controversial and emerging issues, such as the lack of response from the Vietnamese leaders to China’s on-going harassment and impoundment of Vietnamese fishing boats in the Eastern Sea. However, another reason was that even as top-level state officials were pandering to their critics in the National Assembly debates, other ones had already begun to roll out a more repressive strategy.

State Crackdown

Indirect repression: a crackdown on bloggers and intellectuals

Even as the government was engaging the public debate on bauxite mining in the halls of the National Assembly, other forces within the party-state were already at work to suppress these discussions more forcibly, even if only indirectly at first. Examining the party-state’s repressive actions in Vietnam is always difficult because it is near impossible to know who is behind these actions, what were their specific motivations, and how they may or may not link to other events going on at the same time. However, if

we examine a series of them together over a period of six to eight months starting around the same time as the National Assembly's bi-annual meeting, then a pattern of directed repression on activists and intellectuals connected to the bauxite mining controversy appears plausible at the least.

The first signs came with a series of high profile arrests on Vietnamese bloggers from late May to early July. Blogger Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức, who operates the website Change We Need, was the first to be arrested on May 24th of 2009. Even though he was arrested on a series of charges related to propagandizing against the state, he had also posted on bauxite mining, notably that highly condemning account of Vietnamese Communist Party leaders making backroom deals with the Chinese Communist Party (as discussed in Chapter 3). Indeed, the posting on this Change We Need's blog site was entitled "Central Highlands Bauxite: the Communist Party Dynasty is digging its own grave" (Change We Need, 2009, May 16).

Following Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức was Lê Thăng Long was arrested on June 4th, who was a member of the Tran Dong Chan blog site also established by Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức; Lê Công Định on June 13th, who operated Change We Need together with Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức; and Nguyễn Tiến Trung, who blogged on Tran Dong Chan and Change We Need, and Trần Anh Kim, member of the Vietnam Democratic Party, both arrested on July 7th (*VietnamNet/VNA*, 2009, August 20). Again, all of these individuals were arrested on broader charges of propagandizing against the state, but all of them had also posted on bauxite mining at some point.

These arrests were also widely publicized in the state media, with the "guiding" hand of the party-state no doubt. In particular, the arrest of nationally and internationally renown human rights lawyer Lê Công Định, who had formed part of the legal defense team for leaders of Bloc 8406, drew a lot attention. Lê Công Định was not only a blogger, but also an activist and an intellectual. Born in 1968, he had been a Fulbright Scholar, studied at Sorbonne in Paris and earned his Master's of Law degree at Tulane University in the United States. He was a vocal advocate for democracy and political reform in Vietnam through his blogs and other activities. He also signed the Petition of 135 Signatures (#241) and on June 26th, after he was already arrested, *Le Monde* published an article of his warning against bauxite mining in the Central Highlands. Even though the charges brought against him did not mention bauxite mining, an article in the Vietnamese Communist Party's daily *Nhân Dân* was sure to note that he had "exploited the Central Highlands bauxite and Paracels-Spratlys issues to incite anti-party and anti-state ideology." (*vnngaynay*, 2009, June 22).

Even if only indirectly related to the bauxite mining controversy, these arrests had a chilling effect on public discussion on any topic, not least of all on bauxite mining. At the same, state authorities appeared to be busy working behind the scenes of the domestic media too, which virtually stopped publishing information and especially discussion on bauxite mining for the next several months. For example, *VietnamNet* posted only a few articles on bauxite mining and nearly all of them were sourced directly to government media (e.g., *Thông tin Xã hội Việt Nam*, *Cổng Thông tin Đòi thoại Chính phủ*) rather than by its own reporters.

On July 24th, the government took another measure that seemed to target more directly the Vietnamese intellectuals. This came with the Prime Minister's Decision 97 ("Quyết định 97/QĐ-TTg," 2009). Decision 97 limited the scope and autonomy of

“scientific and technology organizations” established under the 2000 Law on Science and Technology, which is the law under which the NGO CODE had originally registered (see Chapter 3), in three important ways. First, it delimited permissible areas of research to a pre-determined list of some 300 fields (Article 1). Second, it required that if these organizations “had any ideas that were critical of the directions, orientations or policies of the Party or State, they must send these ideas to the relevant Party or State authority. They are not allowed to make these ideas public under the name of or in association with that organization” (Article 2.2). This effectively granted state authorities a veto power over any research they deemed as against the interests of the party-state. Third, the Decision now required these organizations to be licensed under the Ministry of Science and Technology and those that were already licensed had to re-register (Article 3). This lack of a requirement to register under a government organization under the original law distinguished it from the legal framework for NGOs and other organizations in Vietnam. It was what allowed CODE to call itself “independent.”

However, this Decision did not seem to be targeting organizations like CODE, but rather another kind of fish altogether. That organization was the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). IDS, also registered under the 2000 Law on Science and Technology, was widely touted as the “first ever *independent* policy think tank in socialist Vietnam” (Vuving, 2010, p. 376 emphasis added).¹¹⁸ Moreover, it brought together some of the most renown and accomplished policy analysts, economists, scientists and academics still residing in Vietnam. As described by Vuving (2010):

Members of the think tank included such personalities as the economists Lê Đăng Doanh, Trần Đức Nguyên, and Trần Việt Phương, who had served generations of party and government chiefs as major advisers; former Ambassador Nguyễn Trung, who was an adviser with a ministerial rank to former Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt, former Vice President of the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry Phạm Chi Lan; leading scholars such as the mathematician Hoàng Tuy and the historian Phan Huy Lê; and prominent thinkers such as Nguyễn Quang A, Trương Lai and Nguyễn Ngọc (p. 376).

This group of illustrious members was one of the most concrete manifestations of the intellectuals in Vietnam. As can be seen from the list, many of them had also been centrally involved in the bauxite mining controversy, notably Nguyễn Ngọc and Nguyễn Trung, but also Hoàng Tuy, Trương Lai, Nguyễn Quang A, Lê Đăng Doanh, and, not mentioned above, Phan Đình Diệu and Phạm Duy Hiền.

The activities of IDS were relatively limited. They mainly involved a monthly seminar on topics of “development.” However, what likely distressed state authorities most was that they had come together as an alternative voice on state policy. Notably, many of them had played central roles in the bauxite mining controversy, notably Nguyễn Ngọc and Nguyễn Trung, but also Phạm Duy Hiền, who had participated in the early discussions organized by CODE and VUSTA; Nguyễn Quang A (President of IDS), Phan Đình Diệu and Hoàng Tuy (Chair of IDS), who signed the Petition of 135 Signatures; and

¹¹⁸ It was founded based on a bet between friends that an independent research organization was legally possible in Vietnam (Interview 009).

Lê Đăng Doanh and possibly others who had made public statements that were critical of bauxite mining. Indeed, it would not be too far of a stretch to imagine that certain state authorities had suspected IDS of being behind bauxite mining controversy in the first place.

On September 14th of 2009, Decision 97 seemed to have had its intended effect (IDS, 2009). IDS issued a public statement announcing its dissolution, the day before the Decision went into effect. As explained in the announcement, Decision 97 made it impossible for IDS to function as it had been originally designed. The notion that the Decision targeted IDS was further reinforced by the fact it appeared to be largely forgotten after IDS dissolved. More than three years later, organizations affected by the Decision reported to me that they had noticed little change in their work because of this Decision. In particular, every government Decision needs to be followed by a Circular, which outlines the more specific institutional and implementation arrangements for the Decision. However, informants also reported to me that no Circular had yet been issued that would inform them to whom and how to re-register or comply with other provisions as stipulated in this Decision.

IDS' announcement of its dissolution also served as more awareness raising on the state of Vietnamese politics. However, Decision 97, like the arrests earlier in the month, appeared to have the effect of chilling the debate on public discussion. Meanwhile, the website *Bauxite Vietnam* continued to push on other politically sensitive issues, but had gradually moved away from its more specific focus on bauxite mining.

*Direct repression: cyber attacks and police interrogations*¹¹⁹

Once the public debate on bauxite mining mostly died away roughly six months later, state authorities appear to have coordinated a more direct attack on the organizers behind the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. Part of it was anonymous and surreptitious carried out on the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, while another part was directly carried out by the police on the leaders of that website yet ambiguous in its intent. Again, it is difficult to divine the exact methods behind the madness. However, the clandestine ways and ambiguity also testify to the complexity of carrying out repressive measures, especially on such publicly esteemed persons as those that were speaking out against bauxite mining. The party-state cannot simply stamp its brute authority upon its critics, but rather must suppress them in ways that appear fair and legitimate or else cleverly disguise them when they are not.

By December 2009, *Bauxite Vietnam* was still, surprisingly, at large. It had not yet been firewalled like so many other websites and blogs in Vietnam that post material critical on the party-state. However, starting from December 12th, the website suffered a series of “vicious [cyber-]attacks” (BBC, 2009e, December 20). They were primarily Denial of Service (DNS) of attacks. DNS attacks consist of coordinating a large number of other computers, often remotely operated through viruses and botnets, to make so

¹¹⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, quotes by Nguyễn Huệ Chi and other information pertaining to him in this chapter are derived from an unpublished interview conducted with Nguyễn Huệ Chi on October 2010 in Berkeley, California, by Peter Zinoman and Nguyễn Nguyệt Cầm, who have kindly granted permission for its usage here.

many simultaneous demands on a targeted website that the website itself can no provide service to anyone. In this sense, it becomes completely paralysed.

This was not the first time. When I first met with Nguyễn Huệ Chi in May 2009, he was already complaining about hackers continuously trying to enter and sabotage *Bauxite Vietnam*. However, this time the attacks were more sophisticated and coordinated. Nguyễn Huệ Chi had to call up to Hanoi a young university student from southern Vietnam just to help him fix the problem. From December 12th to the 24th, this student stayed with Nguyễn Huệ Chi until they managed to re-establish the website.

After this, however, having not yet realized the full scale and seriousness of this bout of cyber attacks, Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his team were elated. They congratulated themselves on having defended themselves against yet another anonymous hacker. Even one of their supporters from Vung Tau sent Nguyễn Huệ Chi some money and a bottle of 21 year-old Chivas Whiskey to organize a little dinner celebration. However, little did they know that as they were celebrating success, that same university student was being picked up by the police as he disembarked from his plane in Ho Chi Minh City. The student was eventually released without apparent punishment, but Nguyễn Huệ Chi was never able to resume contact with him again.

While Nguyễn Huệ Chi later suggested that these new attacks were motivated by a relief effort for flood victims in Central Vietnam that he had carried out on behalf of *Bauxite Vietnam* a few weeks earlier¹²⁰, they were also part of what appeared to be a larger and more coordinated effort. Similar DNS attacks had also disabled *đổi mới* writer Phạm Thị Hoài's *Talawas* on December 21st. The attacks also left the exact same message on *Talawas* as had been on *Bauxite Vietnam*, which was, "For technical reasons, *Talawas* has suspended its activities indefinitely" (BBC, 2009f, December 21).

Furthermore, over the next few months several other Vietnamese language websites and blogs, hosted both inside and outside of Vietnam, were also anonymously hacked and paralyzed. They included *Đổi Thổi*, *Cao Trào Nhân Bản*, *Tập Hợp Vì Dân Chủ*, *X-café*, *Dân Luận*, *blog Osin* and *Đàn Chim Việt* (Gia Minh, 2010b, February 2; RFA, 2010, February 5). Reporters described a general pattern to these attacks as "attacking the websites, stealing and forfeiting documents, infiltrating email accounts, usurping names and propagating false information, and defaming and provoking division among the founders of these websites." (Thanh Quang, 2010, February 3). As became increasingly clear, *Bauxite Vietnam* was also being attacked in each of these ways.

One day after Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his student had re-established the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, it was attacked and disabled again. This time the attack was even more serious and invasive. This time they also destroyed content and planted counterfeit documents. Nguyễn Huệ Chi was also suddenly unable to access his email from his home and so he went to a nearby Internet Café. Nguyễn Huệ Chi now believes that this

¹²⁰ The *Bauxite Vietnam* group had raised funds through its website and Nguyễn Huệ Chi, Nguyen The Hung and others organized a trip to deliver it directly to households hit by catastrophic floods in the Central Region in late 2009. One of their principles in doing so was not to pass any money through the hands of local officials. Based on certain encounters they experienced during this mission, Nguyễn Huệ Chi believes that it "incited" (chọc tức) the ire of state authorities against them and possibly prompted DNS attacks on *Bauxite Vietnam*.

is how the authorities retrieved his email password and were subsequently able to infiltrate his email account. The next day a couple of counterfeited emails were sent around in the names of Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn, in which the two colleagues attacked the motivations and moral character of one another.

One email sent from Nguyễn Huệ Chi's account complained that Phạm Toàn had become unreliable and left the group. It also acknowledged that Nguyễn Huệ Chi himself had received payments from Vietnamese abroad to operate *Bauxite Vietnam*, namely from physicists Phạm Xuân Yêm and Đỗ Đăng Giu and retired scientist Phùng Liên Đoàn (BBC, 2009i, December 30). It suggested that *Bauxite Vietnam* was being sponsored by "reactionary forces" that sought to overthrow the Vietnamese state.

Another email containing two attachments was circulated under the name of Phạm Toàn. The first one was a two-page letter in which Phạm Toàn requested to withdraw from *Bauxite Vietnam* because of health problems. It read, "I am like Pavlov. I only work well with dogs, not with people!" (Trần Văn, 2010a, January 1). The second one included emails between Nguyễn Huệ Chi and his technical assistants that gave an impression of Nguyễn Huệ Chi as "two-faced" (Trần Văn, 2010a, January 1). They also suggested that Nguyễn Huệ Chi was operating the *Bauxite Vietnam* website for personal profit by receiving money from abroad.

Phung Lien Doan, who lives in the United State and who had helped to set up the *Bauxite Vietnam* website and contributed money to the flood relief effort, also had his email account infiltrated. A counterfeit email was also circulated in his name with more arguments to corroborate alleged divisions between Phạm Toàn and Nguyễn Huệ Chi in slandering ways (Đức Tâm, 2010, December 30; Gia Minh, 2010a, January 1).

However, it was soon made evident the email attributed to Phạm Toàn had actually been generated from his own email account. It had been sent from a similar email address, except that the "i" in Phạm Toàn's username "phamtoankhkiemton" had been replaced by an inconspicuous "j."¹²¹ Soon, Phạm Toàn sent out an email through his circles explaining the duplicitous scheme. This also shed scepticism on the other emails sent out by Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phung Lien Doan.

In retrospect, these emails may appear as very flimsy attempts to discredit *Bauxite Vietnam*. However, they were not without effect at the time. I had the opportunity shortly afterward the scandal to ask some trusted Vietnamese friends and colleagues, who

¹²¹ Phạm Toàn first found out about the counterfeit email from Nguyễn Quang Lập, while both of them were attending a friend's wedding in Hanoi (BBC, 2009h, December 29). Phạm Toàn rushed home immediately to investigate. There he discovered that the email had not originated from his account at all. Phạm Toàn then sent out an email to explain this situation and deny the information circulated by this email, except for the part that he had indeed at one point requested to resign from *Bauxite Vietnam* for reasons of personal health and commitment to other projects. Nguyễn Quang Lập later related a corroborating account to RFA, as follows: "After hearing about the two emails, writer Phạm Toàn was completely shocked. He left the wedding immediately to run back home. One hour later, he called me many times, saying those guys [i.e., hackers] counterfeited my email. They just switched the letter 'I' with a 'j' in the email address. At 10.30 p.m., I then received an email from Phạm Toàn explaining this to everyone" (Trần Văn, 2010a, January 1).

worked with NGOs in Hanoi on mining issues, what they thought about Nguyễn Huệ Chi and *Bauxite Vietnam*. At this time, they tended to hesitate and waiver. While they could not present any definitive claims against him, they appeared very reluctant to endorse his activities. Specifically, they impressed on me that they did not know who was behind him. Another informant, who is a long-time friend to both Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Phạm Toàn, also admitted to me at the time that she did not know what to believe. She described herself as feeling sick after reading those emails.

These cyber attacks also intense debate in the Vietnamese language blogs and international media. For example, Nguyễn Ngọc commented to RFA, as follows:

This dirty plot has been contrived by feeble persons. Deep down inside they know that they are feeble even though they are very aggressive on the outside. Of course, they are not powerful people, who are confident of themselves. People who are strong know how to dialogue. They are decent and transparent. They don't use violence and underhanded ways like this. (Nhật Hiên, 2009, December 29)

Bauxite Vietnam was then re-established on January 11th as a website and blog site with four different addresses, in an effort to protect itself from further attack. Again, all of these sites were attacked and disabled the next day. However, the attacks on *Bauxite Vietnam* were not limited to cyber-space either.

The next day, the police turned up with a search warrant at the home of Nguyễn Huệ Chi. They confiscated his computer hard drive, some books, and a pile of DVDs.¹²² They also took Nguyễn Huệ Chi away for questioning. Nguyễn Huệ Chi was released later that night. However, they returned every day for the next four days to take Nguyễn Huệ Chi in for questioning and then intermittently for a period of twenty-two days until February 4th, just before Tết (Lunar New Year). Phạm Toàn was also taken in for questioning on the morning of January 14th, though he was released by noon without further interrogation.

However, the aims and nature of these interrogations were confusing and ambiguous. In an interview with the BBC, Phạm Toàn described his interrogators in almost friendly terms. As he reported, "Their attitudes were not harsh. I always felt comfortable. We laughed as we spoke. I thought to myself that I just needed to make them understand who we were. So I wasn't tense. I think I was very respectful today. We often say that they [i.e., authorities] are very respectable. Today, I think I was very respectable" (BBC, 2010a, January 14).

¹²² Specifically, the police confiscated along with the hard drive a book by "dissident" General Tran Do and a pile of pornographic CDs, which Nguyễn Huệ Chi claimed had been left there by his son-in-law. However, the selection of these items was not trivial. They illustrate well the state's tactics. Their purpose was to prove connections with potential "reactionary forces" and attack the moral character of the accused. As vividly exemplified in the arrest of lawyer Cù Huy Hà Vũ half a year later, who was nabbed while sharing a hotel room with a female companion, alleged illicit sex is one of the state's choice angles for generating sensational and defamation towards the accused.

Similarly, Nguyễn Huệ Chi described his discussions with the police as “just normal” (*bình thường thôi*). He described his interrogators as young, intelligent and “earnest” (*tử tế*). He also related many instances of laughing, joking and playful banter. When he was first taken in for questioning, he noted that the police had left behind a couple of plain-clothed female officers to stay with his wife because they were concerned about her health. In particular, she had high blood pressure. On the way to the station, Nguyễn Huệ Chi was even able to convince the officers to make a stop for him at a computer shop to pick up the modem that was supposed to be delivered to his house that afternoon, since he would not be there for it.

However, these appearances of respect and even cordiality should not obscure the harsh realities underlying this situation—as, indeed, such appearances may very well be designed to do. For example, that police officers stay behind with Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s wife out of concern for her health was a sign that the situation was anything but “just normal.” It was a courtesy only within the context of the harsher situation being generated by the authorities themselves. Being in Hanoi at the time, I also recall how many persons close to Nguyễn Huệ Chi were very concerned about the whole situation. They had organized for somebody to stay with his wife on each day that he was being questioned. The interrogation process was also very long, exhausting and disruptive process. Sometimes Nguyễn Huệ Chi was brought to the station from early in the morning and returned home only late at night—even though Nguyễn Huệ Chi himself described the actual time for questioning each day as “only about four hours.” As Nguyễn Huệ Chi had expressed to the BBC after his initial bout of questioning, it was “exhausting” (BBC, 2010b, January 22).

The stakes also appeared to heighten when Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s was brought in to see the Vice-Director of the Department of Security on January 28th. After initially praising Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s scholarly work and certain revolutionary members of his family, as if to remind Nguyễn Huệ Chi of his allegiances, the Vice-Director then asked Nguyễn Huệ Chi to write a confession (*bộc lộ chủ quan*). Surprised, Nguyễn Huệ Chi asked why. The Vice-Director then compared him to the case of Lê Công Định and Trần Huỳnh Huy Thức, who, one week earlier, had just been sentenced to five and sixteen years of prison. Lê Công Định, who had received the comparatively lighter sentence, had “agreed” to write a confession, while Trần Huỳnh Huy Thức had not. For the first time, Nguyễn Huệ Chi said he became really “upset in his gut.”

The next day, the Vice-Director called him in again and asked Nguyễn Huệ Chi to rewrite eight pages of his statement. He was clearly trying to intimidate Nguyễn Huệ Chi. However, rather than being afraid, Nguyễn Huệ Chi described himself as feeling insulted and suddenly angry. Because of this, he then excused himself to go to the toilet to avoid acting inappropriately or “losing face.” However, from the toilet, Nguyễn Huệ Chi then proceeded to call to his friend, lawyer Cù Huy Hà Vũ. At that time, Cù Huy Hà Vũ happened to be sitting in the office of the Communist Party’s Secretary General, Nong Duc Manh. Nguyễn Huệ Chi said to him, “You have to come here immediately. Now, I am being pressured for real (*bị truy bức thật rồi*). It’s not like before anymore, now it’s real pressure. You need to come here immediately. If my blood pressure rises, it will become dangerous.”

Cù Huy Hà Vũ immediately rushed over together with his brother. According to Nguyễn Huệ Chi, the two brothers slipped through the gates of the station and began

yelling from below, “You sons of bitches! If Professor Hue Chi collapses there because of his high blood pressure, I will send the lot of you to jail!” Again in his own words, Nguyễn Huệ Chi gently encouraged the police to go down there to speak to him to avoid a more complicated situation. A couple officers did just that and managed to dissipate the tension. Nguyễn Huệ Chi was then released without further ado.

Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s account of these events suggests some bravado. Never does he admit to feeling afraid or uncertain. Rather, his emotions are ones of anger and indignity. The whole situation is also resolved by Cù Huy Hà Vũ, whisking himself away from comparatively trivial business with the General Secretary of the Communist Party to shout some obscenities at Nguyễn Huệ Chi’s persecutors. However, the turn of events also suggest that Nguyễn Huệ Chi was made to feel less than comfortable by the situation, perhaps most notably in his apparently furtive attempt to sneak away to the toilet to call for help from Cù Huy Hà Vũ but also in his initial attempts to cooperate with the Vice-Director on his confession letter. Indeed, this situation was also anything but “just normal.”

Five days after this encounter, the police called Nguyễn Huệ Chi again. This time, however, their purpose was to reassure him that everything was now settled. According to Nguyễn Huệ Chi, the police had concluded that the *Bauxite Vietnam* “website was entirely patriotic.” They also returned the confiscated items to Nguyễn Huệ Chi and issued a statement of exoneration (*thanh minh*). However, it should also be noted that this statement of exoneration was for charges that were never made clear to Nguyễn Huệ Chi. The police also added, in a now familiar statement to Nguyễn Huệ Chi (see the Trần Dân Petition in Chapter 3), that there had only been an “an administrative error.” That error was related to the posting of one article on the website that had spoken libelously of former state leaders Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Anh.

So the police concluded with Nguyễn Huệ Chi saying, “Your website is patriotic. It is clearly passionate about the nation, and it represents the voice of the intellectuals wanting to contribute to finding the best solution to the urgent issues of the nation.” However, they did not forego the opportunity to add, “we just request of you this one thing. You are all intellectuals, but intellectuals in different fields. Therefore, you should only talk about micro issues only. For macro issues, or specific or technical things, you should let the government experts speak. They will raise their voice. You do not need to intervene because if you intervene on a topic that you are not an expert on, you will speak incorrectly.” In other words, they issued their own verbal version of Decision 97 to Nguyễn Huệ Chi and the activities on the *Bauxite Vietnam* website.

Finally, on February 4th, the blog and website addresses of *Bauxite Vietnam* were re-established again. This time they remained, except that they now operated under firewall inside Vietnam.¹²³ The police also stayed away, though they had made it known to Nguyễn Huệ Chi that he was now under observation. Hence, while Nguyễn Huệ Chi described the situation as “case closed,” Phạm Toàn’s description was probably more

¹²³ *Bauxite Vietnam* had actually managed to re-establish the now combined web and blog site on February 1st, but again it was attacked and dismantled. Of course, that these attacks on *Bauxite Vietnam* finally ceased on the same day that the police communicated their conclusions to Nguyễn Huệ Chi, we can only speculate on.

accurate. As he commented to Radio Free Asia, “we never say they [i.e., authorities] are finished, we just say ‘temporarily suspended!’” (Mặc Lâm, 2010, January 14).

After the National Assembly’s meeting of May and June, the public debate on bauxite mining finally began to subside after at least eight months of an increasing controversy. Part of this maybe explained by the stalemate reached in the National Assembly. After this, certain concessions had been granted to the critics of bauxite mining and now all they could do was wait and see whether the government would come through on its promises. However, an examination of the six months following this meeting also suggests that repressive measures by the party-state also played an important role in closing down these debates.

The repressive measures were at first indirect and apparently arbitrary. Later they were more stealthy and ambiguous. They included high profile arrests and, eventually, sentencing of bloggers, legislation to curtail intellectual activities, anonymous attacks on activist websites and infiltration of email accounts, and police interrogation and intimidation of the leaders of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. Whatever their rationale or target, they appeared to chill the public debate on bauxite mining and, once bauxite was much less in the public eye, the authorities went more directly after the *Bauxite Vietnam* website and its leaders. In the end, no harsher punishment was directed at the leader of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website except for the firewalling of the website. However, it is difficult to say whether that was because state authorities condoned its activities or they did not wish risk public backlash from enforcing harsher measures on such high profile persons with more adequate justification.

Conclusion

Is it fair to call the Vietnamese state’s response to the bauxite mining controversy repression? Nobody was imprisoned or arrested because of it, not directly at least. Furthermore, the tremendous spread of these debates seems to belie a notion that they were repressed at all. However, if we are to consider an act of repression as the use of state authority to silence or restrict a public discussion, then, yes, the bauxite mining debates were actively repressed. However, the events examined in this chapter show that state repression is carried out without impunity. Rather, it consists of a multi-pronged strategy that requires a delicate balance between maintaining public legitimacy and the careful, if clandestine, application of state force. In sum, every act of repression by the party-state must be matched with an act of persuasion and vice-versa. In this chapter, I have argued that the debates carried out in the National Assembly, especially as they were manipulated by the nation’s top leaders, and the repressive measures that followed over the next eight months manifested both sides of this equation.

The Politburo’s concessions to its critics on bauxite mining that emerged with its official Communication at the end of April and the explosive discussions that emerged in the National Assembly in May and June suggest a degree of openness and flexibility of the accommodating state. However, close analysis showed how these discussions and the level of the National Assembly’s involvement in the bauxite mining debates were also subject to strict state controls. This included allowing Assembly delegates to discuss but not vote on the projects, limiting time for discussion (e.g., in response to delegate requests to add a separate day to discuss bauxite mining), providing inadequate or vague

information for delegates, and, as the discussion became more intense, deploying the state's top brass to defuse and dismiss the discussion.

Then I examined the state's more repressive measures to try to control the debate. This was a difficult task to do because it was often unclear how a particular action (e.g., arrest of a blogger) was related to the bauxite mining debates or whether such actions were actually even carried out by state authorities (e.g., anonymous cyber attacks). Such an analysis would require more privileged access to the thoughts and discussions of high-level state officials than I could ever hope to have access. However, in examining all of these events and actions together, I have argued the state authorities carried out repressive measures on the bauxite mining controversy.

The series of high profile arrests of bloggers and Decision 97 targeted bloggers and intellectuals, who were at the centre of the discourses being generated about bauxite mining. Six months later, a series of somewhat mysterious events occurred that targeted the *Bauxite Vietnam* website, namely successive cyber attacks that paralysed the website and infiltration of data and email accounts. They also included 22 days of police interrogation of Nguyễn Huệ Chi. What was particular about these incidents was their apparent anonymity and the way almost amicable ways the interrogations seemed to proceed. However, behind these surface appearances was the reality that state authorities were using intimidation and harassment as a way to curtail activities on the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. Finally, Nguyễn Huệ Chi was “exonerated” for charges against him that were never made clear. The police told him that they had found nothing wrong with the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. However, even this did not prevent it from being firewalled inside Vietnam once it was finally re-established on February 4th, 2010.

With this, we come to the end of what has been described as the “first wave” of the bauxite mining debates. A “second wave” occurred in the fall of 2010, in response to a tragic “red mud” spill at a bauxite-alumina processing plant in Ajka, Hungary, that killed a dozen people and decimated two tributaries of the Danube River. However, this first wave captures the main networks, processes and discourses that helped shift the political landscape in Vietnam today. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I examine what I call a post-bauxite politics that was launched by the bauxite mining controversy.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: the Emergence of a New Oppositional Politics?

The “Second Wave” and Other Expressions of Opposition

On October 4th of 2010, the walled corner of a cesspool containing red mud collapsed at a bauxite-alumina processing plant in Ajka, Hungary. As a result, 1.1 million tons of “red mud” spilled over an estimated area of 40 km² into several nearby towns and contaminated two tributaries of the Danube River (Bilefsky & Dempsey, 2010, October 5; Thanh Vân, 2010, October 7). The flood killed ten persons and injured another 162, of which 62 were hospitalized and eight of them in critical condition (Hodgson, 2010, December 8; Thanh Vân, 2010, October 7). Some had been hospitalized for critical burns from the red mud that had burned through their clothes as they waded unsuspectingly through their mud-flooded streets and homes. International conservation organizations declared the two local rivers as dead and hundreds of tonnes of plaster were dumped as neutralizer into the Marcal river to prevent contamination of the mythical Danube (Tran, 2010, October 5).

The news did not take long to reach Vietnam. It was actively reported in the domestic press, by which I mean almost every day in newspapers like *Tuổi Trẻ* and *Thanh Niên* for the next two weeks. Many of the key spokespersons during the initial bauxite mining controversy raised their concerns again in the domestic press and online, such as scientist Nguyễn Thanh Sơn and Nguyễn Đình Hoà and National Assembly delegate Dương Trung Quốc. They were also newly joined by other prominent intellectuals, such as former members of the Institute of Development Studies Chu Hào and Phạm Chi Lan. Together, they drafted another petition against bauxite mining in the Central Highlands and posted it online (“Kiến nghị thăm họa Hungary,” 2010, October 9).

This time the first eleven signatures were from members of the former Institute of Development Studies—that organization of illustrious academics and policy analysts that was legislated out of existence in the wake of the bauxite mining controversy—followed by the three original authors of the Petition of the 135 Signatures and many of the other intellectuals that had signed that earlier petition. The 2,000 signatures to the new petition also included many other prominent intellectuals and persons newly joining in on the discussion, including former Vice-President Nguyễn Thị Bình. While the former Vice-President had had only a private correspondence with state officials the first time around, she now joined ranks with the intellectuals in speaking out publicly against bauxite mining.

Some described this renewed burst of criticism and concern as the “second wave” of the bauxite mining controversy. This second wave brought out many elements of the network that came together during the “first wave” and mobilized many of the same processes, notably the online petitions of the intellectuals. In this regard, the second wave had not generated new groups or processes to the opposition, only expanded

them.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, it was testimony to the enduring networks, processes and discourses that had been established by the initial bauxite mining controversy. The second wave was not the only testimony to the endurance of the bauxite mining controversy. Many other surprising events for Vietnamese politics also followed.

Exactly one year after the National Assembly's explosive discussion on bauxite mining, another one erupted in its bi-annual meeting over government plans for yet another massive project to build a highspeed railway from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. As with bauxite mining, the debate was also preceded with much discussion in the domestic press and online and scientists and other experts also advocated Assembly delegates directly. The difference this time around was that the National Assembly was in a position to vote on the project and, much to the delegates' own surprise, they successfully voted it down. In a survey conducted by *VietnamNet* on the eve of the voting showed that nearly 60% of delegates were in favour of the project (Lê Nhung, 2010, June 16). However, even the delegates that had voted against the project were shocked the next day when they discovered that a majority of them had voted against it. Indeed, the difference between intense discussions on expanding the boundary of Hanoi capital that had heated up the National Assembly in 2008 and these ones on the highspeed railway was that the latter was followed through in the voting. As founder of IDS Nguyễn Quang A commented at the time, "this decision was unprecedented in the history of the National Assembly" (TVN, 2010, October 6). In between these two events had occurred the National Assembly's meeting on bauxite mining in 2009.

One year later again in the summer of 2011, the thing that never or very rarely happens in Vietnam began to happen, mass demonstrations in the streets of major Vietnamese cities. They were protesting Chinese belligerence in the Eastern Sea and the Vietnamese government's apparent complacency towards these acts of aggression on Vietnamese fishers and military vessels. Like the protests in front of the Chinese Embassy in December 2007, Vietnamese youth and students appeared to drive and coordinate these protests. However, the difference this time was that they were joined by many prominent intellectuals, former Vice-Minister of Science and Technology Chu Hảo, who had signed the bauxite petition of 2010, literary scholar Nguyễn Huệ Chi, who had authored the Petition of the 135 Signatures in 2009, and Phạm Duy Hiền, who had signed the Scientists' Petition of late 2008. Their presence raised the public profile of these protests and brought with it extensive commentary online by other intellectuals and many others. These series of protests, which were eventually cracked down upon by state authorities, coincided at least three other widely publicized online petitions or open letter on the Vietnamese leadership's response to Chinese belligerence and its crackdown on protesters ("Kiến nghị quyền biểu tình," 2011, August 18, "Kiến nghị về bảo vệ đất nước," 2011, October 7, "Tuyên cáo về việc Trung Quốc," 2011, June 25). Ninety-five persons signed the first one and twenty signed the second. Most of them were persons who had been prominent in either the first or second waves of the bauxite mining controversy.

¹²⁴ Partly for this reason, I did not include the second wave in my chronicle of the bauxite mining controversy was because the basic elements and patterns of the opposition had already been established with the first wave. The other more pragmatic reason was because my period of fieldwork in Vietnam had mostly terminated by then.

Over the next twelve months two other incidents of state-society conflict of special significance occurred. They both concerned government expropriation of agricultural land. In December of 2011, a spectacular incident involved a farmer in Hai Phong, who hid in a tree with a rifle and shot at police officers as they arrived to remove he and his family from agricultural land. Then in April 2012, several thousands of local residents and farmers demonstrated against government expropriation of their land for a private “development project” in a province bordering Hanoi. As Hayton (2010) has written, land expropriation is one of the most politically contentious issues in Vietnam today and so these acts of protest and resistance were not exactly the first of their kind. However, once again, these same networks of Vietnamese intellectuals posted online petitions in protest of the party-state’s response to each of these incidents (“Kiến nghị Tiên Lãng,” 2012, February 14, “Tuyên bố Văn Giang,” 2012, May 1). Hundreds of local farmers also signed these petitions. In doing so, these petitions helped connect popular unrest with political discourses of opposition.

These networks of Vietnamese intellectuals wrote other petitions too, but two more deserve special mention here. In December of 2012, they posted online a petition on the formerly tabooed subject of human rights (“Thực thi quyền con người,” 2012, December 25). In this petition, they specifically asked for the abolition of Article 88 of the National Constitution, which is the one that state authorities have most frequently used to crackdown on oppositional voices for “crimes of propaganda against the State.” Then in January of 2013, they circulated recommendations for on-going revisions of the National Constitution at the time (“Kiến nghị về sửa đổi Hiến Pháp 1992,” 2013, January 19). Among them, the petition included a recommendation to remove Article 4 from the Constitution. Article 4 is the one that establishes the Vietnamese Communist Party as the sole “leading force of the State and society” (CIT). This last petition has an unprecedented 15,000 online signatures. Truly, a more oppositional voice has emerged in Vietnamese politics and society.

In this concluding chapter, I suggest that the endurance of the networks, processes and discourses established in the bauxite mining controversy makes an argument for post-bauxite politics in contemporary Vietnam. That politics is what I have been arguing as a new type of oppositional politics. To where exactly they will lead is still a matter of speculation and depends on many other contingent factors. Here I want to summarize and re-examine how the bauxite mining controversy created template for this new oppositional politics.

Recap of the Bauxite Mining Controversy

In this dissertation, I have emphasized the many and diverse groups and processes that came together in common opposition to government plans for mining bauxite in the Central Highlands and how they suggested that they signalled the emergence of a strong “political culture of opposition” towards the party-state. Here I will review each of them separately.

The anti-bauxite coalition: a socially heterogeneous and geographically expansive network

Following Thayer (2009), I have referred to the many and diverse groups emerged in opposition to bauxite mining as the anti-bauxite coalition. However, this was a

particular type of network. Although it relied mostly on pre-existing interpersonal networks in the earlier stages, the network became increasingly “virtual” as it expanded. The Internet became the main venue for bring the different elements of the network together. The importance of Internet testifies partly to the restrictive conditions in Vietnam for organizing and assembly on politically sensitive issues. The discreet meetings convened by the scientists and others in the period leading up to and following from the Dak Nong workshop reflected these risks and concerns. However, it also true that as any network it expands it must rely less and less on the actual physical connections. As the network expands both in number and geography, it inevitably becomes more like an “imagined community.”

I have defined this network by a self-identifying action of speaking out against bauxite mining. This included signing one’s name on an electronic petition, because that required stated one’s full name, organization or occupation, and address. However, it did not include anonymous activities, such as reader comments to online newspapers, or an opposition to bauxite mining that was not publicly expressed. By this definition, the network was also loose and flexible. Anyone could become a part of it. The looseness and flexibility of the network enabled the network to expand rapidly, while also spreading out risk for and complicating the task of state retribution on any particular part of that network. Nevertheless, in spite of these loose and virtual connections, the coalition could still be recognized by their common opposition to bauxite mining.

At its peak, the network totalled around 4,000 to 4,500 persons, most of which joined by signing the online Petition of the 135 Signatures, which totalled about 2,700. The 1,000 persons who attended the Catholic vigil against bauxite mining at the Thai Ha Parish near Hanoi also made a significant contribution to these numbers. This number is significant, but it was not necessarily its most important feature. Rather, what distinguished the anti-bauxite coalition from other domestic confrontations with the party-state was the extent of its socio-political heterogeneity and geographic expansiveness.

I identified ten key groups in the anti-bauxite coalition. In categories I devised or borrowed for the purposes of my analysis, they were scientists and technocrats, domestic reporters, NGOs, artist-intellectuals, retired high-level officials, activist bloggers, government officials, religious leaders, political activists and overseas Vietnamese. Each of these groups have been historically divided and politically isolated from one another. As a result, each of them brought to the coalition their own approaches for trying to engage, influence or, in certain cases, struggle against state authorities. They also carried with them diverse histories of conflict and collaboration with the party-state.

Most notably, the coalition included those groups that have tended to be more loyalist and reformist in their approach to the party-state, such as the military leader of the anti-colonial revolution and wars of resistance the great General Võ Nguyên Giáp, and others that have been more radical and oppositional, including the overseas Vietnamese organization, such as Việt Tân, which has explicitly advocated for removing the communist regime and, at one point in its history, had organized and trained soldiers to do so. The coalition also included groups that have built their careers within state organizations, such as scientists and many artist-intellectuals, with other ones that have existed on the fringe of state authority and public acceptance, such as religious leaders and political activists. Hence, the anti-bauxite coalition was significant not simply

because it was heterogeneous, but because it was complex and it traversed key historical lines of division within Vietnamese society.

The geography of the coalition was important too. It included Vietnamese persons across the country and around the world. Furthermore, it crossed key lines of historical division and political fragmentation enduring in the legacy of the Vietnam War. One line was between northerners and southerners, whereas previously southern interests were often dismissed as residual opposition from the Vietnam War and northerners were considered as the party-state and, hence, part of the problem. Another key line of geographic division was between Vietnamese inside and outside the country, that magical line that defines the sovereign territory of the modern Vietnamese nation that was made all that more important because of the massive waves of refugees and emigrants that followed in the wake of the Vietnam War. While Vietnamese people have since ventured abroad to a wide range of locations for a wide range of reasons, this line of division still recalls the violence and division that went into creating the contemporary Vietnamese party-state. This is partly because of the anti-communist sentiment that continues strongly among certain concentrations of former Vietnamese refugees, but it also raises deep questions about what constitutes a Vietnamese nationalist.

However, despite their socio-political heterogeneity, geographic expansiveness and histories of division and fragmentations, these groups came together in a common opposition to a major policy of the party-state. I have to be cautious in using this term because not all nodes in that network were opposed to bauxite mining. More accurately, they were critical of the government's current plans for bauxite and alumina production, as outlined in the Prime Minister's Decision 167 of November 2007. They simply disagreed with how the government had proposed to do it. Nevertheless, this sense of opposition was important. It is one that the online Petition of the 135 Signatures capitalized on to make broader comments on the Vietnamese political system and role of the Communist Party. While not all members may share this opinion about the Party, all of them collectively experienced the constraint of this political system through their advocacy in the bauxite mining controversy.

Diverse processes and events: from embedded advocacy to an oppositional politics

Like the groups and network, diverse processes and events also characterized the bauxite mining controversy. They included writing articles in the domestic press, both printed and electronic; organizing discreet meetings with local government and other state organizations, as well as hosting larger and more public policy workshops; writing petitions and open letters to state authorities; posting and circulating information, commentaries and interviews online; appealing to and raising issues through the National Assembly; and, in a few exceptional cases, organizing a mass demonstration, a T-shirt campaign in major Vietnamese cities, and personally suing the Prime Minister.

These processes and events reflect a gamut of different ways that different groups interact with state authorities in Vietnam and the type of relations they maintain with them. However, their diversity and especially their capacity to engage with and build off of one another is what enabled a wide range of groups to come together on this particular policy issue. In other words, as much as the groups and actors of the network mobilized processes to speak out against bauxite mining, these processes and events themselves also constituted the network.

In my chronicle of these processes and events, I mark an important shift from what I have referred to as a more instrumental and “embedded advocacy” (Ho and Edmonds 2008) towards a more performative and oppositional politics. Embedded advocacy was the approach initiated by the Vietnamese NGO CODE and the small network of Vietnamese scientists it had coordinated to approach local government for a “policy dialogue” on bauxite mining. This consisted of maintaining a low profile, focusing on local levels, and endorsing a collaborative approach. In particular, they emphasized a “scientific” approach to the discussion that reflected diverse perspectives on mostly environmental and social impacts of bauxite mining. On one hand, this emphasis on science reflected both their belief that scientific evidence and a rational approach could be effective in influencing policy decision-making. In this sense, their efforts were instrumental. On the other hand, CODE and the scientists were also aware that policy advocacy is a delicate issue in Vietnam that can engender personal and professional risk. For this, scientific approach and emphasis on “environmental” issue provided them with a cover against potential accusations of being against the state or nation, which could have been used as both a way to dismiss their concerns and potentially engender personal and professional risks of state retribution.

This approach was very successful in creating a public debate on a national policy where one did not previously exist, especially when combined with a media strategy in the domestic press. The regional policy workshop that was organized in the provincial capital of Dak Nong in late 2008 included some twenty domestic reporters, whose coverage of that workshop transformed these initially discreet local-level discussions into a highly charged national debate.

However, this approach also began to show its limits as the public debate on bauxite mining developed into a national and international controversy. The Prime Minister and other state authorities almost immediately set in motion processes to control and clamp down on the public debate. Their measures were both responsive and repressive. They included an injunction on the domestic press from further reporting on the topic of bauxite mining in January of 2009 and, later, arrests of bloggers and other more directly repressive measures in the last half of 2009. However, state response also included different types of dialogues with its critics, including a closed-door seminar organized by the central branch of the Vietnamese Communist Party and chaired by two Politburo members in February of 2009, a “Scientific Workshop” co-organized by the government’s Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations and the Ministry of Industry and Trade in April 2009, and an explosive debate on bauxite mining in the bi-annual meeting of the National Assembly in May and June of 2009.

However, an examination of these two apparently divergent responses from the party-state showed how they worked together to for a more singular purpose, which was to maintain the party-state’s total authority over the fate of bauxite mining. That purpose consisted of permitting a certain degree of input and criticism on state leadership, while also being able to stifle or crackdown on that input when deemed threaten the authoritarian rule of the party-state. In other words, state authorities also used the political calculus of embedded advocacy to allow certain types of criticism while behind-the-scenes resorting to its more repressive measures to crackdown on criticism that exceeded this calculus. By definition, embedded advocacy is constrained to these limits. However, the public debate on bauxite mining was not.

The public debate became both more widespread and oppositional after the then 98 year-old iconic military leader of the anti-colonial revolution and Vietnam's subsequent "wars of independence," General Võ Nguyên Giáp wrote a letter written to the Prime Minister in protest of bauxite mining in January of 2009. General Giáp's intervention on these debates was so significant because of his stature among Vietnamese nationalists and his contribution to modern Vietnamese history. His letter of protest affirmed that the criticisms raised against bauxite mining were not opposed to the Vietnamese nation but rather sought to protect it. It emphasized that government plans for bauxite mining threatened national security. Furthermore, his explicit mention of Chinese workers on these projects—something that a few persons had alluded to but dared not state explicitly until now—galvanized nationalist sentiment based on historical narratives of resistance to foreign and especially Chinese aggression.

After General Giáp's letter, a wide range of groups and persons now weighed in on the public debate. However, the primary venue for these discussions became the Internet. The Internet had been important since the regional workshop in Dak Nong province, especially through the online versions of many domestic newspapers and magazines, but now it became even more important in enabling a public debate that escaped the government's more stringent controls over the domestic media. This enabled a wider range of groups to speak out about bauxite mining and connect the problems that it symbolized with their own histories of conflict and grievance with the party-state.

The issue that most galvanized the online debate was the threat of Chinese military aggression that Vietnamese state authorities appeared to treat either ignorantly or dismissively. To be sure, many of the issues raised about China's role in bauxite mining appeared speculative and exaggerated. One of the downsides about the openness of websites and blog sites is that they could lead to rumour and unfounded speculation. However, the nationalist sentiments they evoked or re-evoked were no less real because of this and what was perhaps the most important outcome of the discussion on the Chinese role in bauxite mining was that it reflected very badly on state leaders.

The petition against bauxite mining circulated by literary scholar Nguyễn Huệ Chi, writer Phạm Toàn and hydrologist Nguyễn Thế Hùng helped cement together these diverse discourses on bauxite mining into a more pointed attack on the party-state. While in its analyses it capitalized on fears over China's role in bauxite mining, in its recommendations it demanded that the National Assembly, the only popularly elected governing body in Vietnam at the central level (even if only in theory), vote on bauxite mining and a more inclusive public debate. In this regard, one of the most significant details of this petition was an omission. This petition that concerned the "fate of the nation" was addressed to each of the nation's top leaders except one, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Not only did this omission contradict the National Constitution's insistence that the Party is the "leading force of the State and society," but it questioned the Party's role in the governing of the nation altogether. Such a statement not only opposed government plans for bauxite mining, but it opposed the regime that gave life to them.

Indeed, the bauxite mining controversy generated a good inventory of the diverse ways that different groups seek to influence state authorities and organizations in Vietnam. What is remarkable about the bauxite case is how they all came together in common struggle against bauxite mining. Most notably, it brought together the more

traditionally loyalist and reformist approaches of embedded advocacy with the more radical and dissident ones into a common opposition that was characterized as much by its emphasis on nationalist sentiment (i.e., patriotic, not reactionary) as on the importance of criticism and dialogue that requires some degree of opposition.

The emergence of strong political cultures of opposition

I have used political cultures of opposition as a central idea for examining the bauxite mining controversy. I have framed my examination in this way for two main reasons. First, political cultures of opposition offers a more syncretic approach for examining the many diverse groups and processes that came together through the controversy. Second, it draws attention to the significance of this controversy to broader processes of socio-political transformation in contemporary Vietnam.

The first point I have demonstrated above. The point here is to emphasize that rather than endorsing a more structural/network and cultural approach to movements and revolutions, it is more important to understand how different elements of both models come together in more particular formations. Similarly, the bauxite mining controversy belies approached to Vietnamese politics and society that emphasize collaborative versus conflictive approaches to the party-state, domestic versus overseas forces for change, networks versus organizations, among other dichotomies. Clearly, the socio-political potency of the opposition that emerged against bauxite mining was based on its capacity to bring all of these diverse and complex groups and processes together.

Perhaps it may be argued that the opposition was not a coalition at all or only a very contingent and ephemeral one. However, I have argued that what defines the coalition is their recognizable opposition to bauxite mining and how they expressions of opposition reflected and built on one another. Referring to this coalition as a political culture of opposition helps us to understand that its form is identifiable not only by the actual actors and organizations that took part, but also by the processes and discourses that constituted the coalition. In this regard, it emerged as something more like a culture than an organization.

The second point is somewhat more speculative but still important. In John Foran's work, a political culture of opposition is a pivotal point in bringing about a revolutionary transformation. By Foran's scheme, conditions of dependency development and perceptions of an exclusionary leadership—two conditions that were also highlighted by the bauxite mining controversy—are too of the most important conditions for generating conditions of widespread grievance in developing nations. However, for these grievances to be transformed into more direct and collective political action, they require the emergence of strong political cultures of opposition. In this regard, political cultures of opposition also mark the point of human agency in the revolutionary process. I have remarked from the outset that Vietnam may not be undergoing a revolution, but I still believe that the bauxite mining controversy is testimony to important socio-political transformations that are currently going on in the party-state.

A recent trend in the literature has been to downplay division and opposition between state and society in Vietnamese politics. This literature has tended to emphasize informal networks and spanning boundaries across the conventional domains of state and society. However, the bauxite mining controversy has shown that oppositional elements,

even if not absolute, are also important. My use of the word opposition needs to be made with care precisely because it is one that the party-state has used to fragment and isolate political opponents. However, my purpose has been to show how elements of the anti-bauxite coalition needed to emphasize division between the Vietnamese people and the party-state for the purpose of being able to criticize a major policy of the party-state and the political system that gave it life. The type of opposition that emerged with the bauxite mining controversy can be characterized in three main ways.

For these reasons, I believe that the bauxite mining controversy signalled the emergence of a new oppositional politics in Vietnam. It was not new in the sense of never having existed before, but rather in how it combined more marginal oppositional perspectives with more mainstream loyalist ones. It asserted that an active and politically engaged Vietnamese society exists as distinct and autonomous from the party-state. Some have referred to this as an emerging or growing civil society in Vietnam. However, I think it is more accurate and precise to refer to it as the emergence of a strong political culture of opposition.

Further Questions and Problems

The bauxite mining controversy raised many key issues of relevance to contemporary Vietnamese politics and society that I was unable to cover more adequately in the dissertation. As possible avenues for future inquiry, I raise some of them here.

Environment as structural grievance

I have avoided referring to the opposition that emerged around bauxite mining as an environmental movement. One reason is that environmental concerns related to bauxite mining were not articulated together with other either national or international environmentalist discourses. At best, the environment and environmental science provided a protective shield to the criticisms raised against bauxite mining. However, this type of environmentalism also became an effective way for state authorities to contain and silence what had become a highly controversial public debate. However, this is not to suggest that nature and natural resources were not important to the formation of this opposition. I believe that two avenues of inquiry would be worth exploring further.

The first would be to examine the type of social and political mobilization that emerges around environmental problems as structural grievance, for which an environmental movement is only one of perhaps many possible socio-political responses. By structural grievance, I am referring to Marxian traditions that view economic processes as generating the underlying structure for social and political transformations. In this regard, the economy provides a base to livelihoods, quality of life and everyday experience. The environment also works in a similar way and it can also provide a structure to the livelihoods and economies, such as for those persons most directly affected by bauxite mining. In keeping with my attention to political cultures of opposition, the key issue would be to examine how grievances emerging from environmental problems are articulated with other cultural, historical or other narratives in a process of socio-political struggle. This would generate a more profound approach to examining nature's role in creating socio-political formations rather than labelling them *a priori* as environmental movements.

The second avenue of inquiry would build from this first one by examining these changing environmental conditions not simply as background context, but rather by considering them in the light of recent work on nature's agency. In particular, I would emphasize the role that particular geological, hydrological, ecological and other such properties and processes play in producing particular types of discourses and creating new socio-political formations. The conventional approach has been to examine "environmental discourses" as, essentially, social constructions of environmental problems. They emphasize the role of social actors (or humans) in producing situated discourses about nature and the environment. However, I would be interested to take this approach further by examining how elements of nature, as manifest through their particular properties and characteristics, themselves shape discourse in particular ways. In other words, analyses of discourses should not be seen as entirely located within the realm of human agency, but rather they should also attend to nature's agency.

Towards a post-socialist nationalism

In this dissertation, I have inadequately addressed the topic of nationalism that was so central to the public debate on bauxite mining. I have suggested that anti-Chinese narratives in the public debate on bauxite mining were primarily a stick with which to beat the party-state. However, I part of the problem opponents of bauxite mining were dealing with was finding a way to criticize a major policy of the party-state while not being labelled or dismissed as against the nation. This is why the intervention of General Giáp was so important. It emphasized that the opponents of bauxite mining were patriotic. It is also why the Chinese argument was such an effective way to discredit state authorities.

This problem arises precisely because, as Slater (2009) has argued, the Vietnamese Communist Party has a hegemonic dominion over the symbols and ideology of Vietnamese nationalism. This dominion is expressed in the notion of the nationalist-socialist state. Scholarship has debated the degree to which the anti-colonial revolution and subsequent Indochinese Wars was a nationalist or socialist movement (Vu, 2007). However, the power of the communist movement in Vietnam emerged from its capacity to weld together nationalism with socialism and, in doing so, locking together the communist party with the Vietnamese people as an indissoluble unity.

The result has been a near impossible situation for anyone seeking to criticize a major state policy. Precisely, by using the word "oppositional," state authorities justify dismissing, marginalizing and even taking punitive actions on critics deemed to be against the interests of the party-state or its top leaders. This tactic was cemented in the politics of division that characterized the anti-colonial revolution and Indochinese wars. Either one was with the revolution or against a free and independent Vietnamese nation. Anything that was anti-socialist was also defined as anti-Vietnamese, as was South Vietnam.

I believe that one of the fundamental struggles underlying the bauxite mining controversy was one to create a post-socialist nationalism. A post-socialist nationalism is one that is liberated from its socialist tie. It creates the possibility for other kinds of policies and political systems that are not necessarily socialist. It would enable one to be Vietnamese without necessarily also being socialist. A close attention to the role of nationalism in the bauxite mining controversy could test this hypothesis.

Technology, discourse and the intellectuals

Much has been made about the role of new information technology in creating new possibilities for civil society and democratization around the world. In the bauxite mining controversy, the Internet played a crucial role in making possible the public debate, especially after the Prime Minister had banned it in the domestic press. However, before reverting back to a technological determinism, I believe that at least as important as the new technology were the users and voices behind it.

In this regard, I have paid inadequate attention to the discourses generated through the bauxite mining debates and the different groups generating them. What I have discussed above about the environment and nationalism highlights the role of discourse in bringing different groups and processes together. They came together by weaving together different discursive strands into a more universalizing narrative of opposition to bauxite mining. This universal narrative served as the basis for the anti-bauxite coalition.

The Vietnamese intellectuals played a central role in weaving this narrative together, especially through the activities of the *Bauxite Vietnam* website. In other words, the intellectuals were important in this controversy not so much as an enlightened elite, as they themselves might have suggested, but more so because they occupied a more privileged location in discursive production. Indeed, the articulation of themselves as “intellectuals” was a way of highlighting identifying these producers of discourse. This category potentially included anyone who contributed intellectually or discursively to the public debate on bauxite mining. Further research should examine more carefully the diverse discursive strands that emerged with the bauxite mining controversy and how they specifically brought different groups and processes together with each strand.

Local voices and ethnic minorities

Arguably, the most problematic absence in the public debate on bauxite mining was the voice of the local communities and indigenous peoples most immediately and directly affected by bauxite mining. This was surely not by accident. As mentioned in Chapter 3, attempts had been made to include them in these discussions, but were thwarted by state officials.

This absence of local and ethnic minority voices is reflective of their socio-political marginalization within Vietnamese society. Their lack of resources, social and economic marginalization and disenfranchisement from political processes likely complicated the possibility of their engaging more significantly in these debates. Their voices were not essential my own research, which focused on the emergence of a widespread oppositional movement in Vietnam. However, further research into the development potentials and risks of bauxite mining for the Central Highlands would need to make these voices more central.

Democratic mobilization and political reform

Another question that hangs over this dissertation, but I have not addressed adequately enough is one of political reform and democratization for Vietnam. What significance did the bauxite mining controversy have for democracy in Vietnam? Was it

an early expression of a democratic movement? These are complicated questions that I can only speculate on for the moment.

In a sense, the opposition that emerged around bauxite mining was democratic. It made a call for broadening policy decision-making within the party-state. Specifically, it called for a more effective National Assembly, as the elected representatives of the people, to decide on bauxite mining and the government's attention to a wider public discussion on the topic. In this sense, it challenged the authoritarianism of the party-state and sought a wider participation in policy decision-making. In this regard, the opposition to bauxite mining could be described as a type of democratic mobilization.

However, whether these early expressions might lead to political reform or democratization is an almost entirely different question. As I have just suggested, important population groups were completely absent from the public debate on bauxite mining. Those persons and organizations who drove these debates were primarily from an urban elite and ethnically Vietnamese. Hence, while the bauxite mining controversy urged for more democratic discussion, their vision for a more democratic political system was not yet apparent. At this point, the main challenge has been to generate a political voice that can be critical of the party-state. The degree to which it may lead to a more democratic state and society is a topic for further research.

The bauxite mining controversy showed many and diverse groups and processes advocating against a major policy of the party-state. Their activities have not been exactly new in the sense that they followed many pre-established patterns for engaging state authorities. Indeed, the bauxite controversy generated a pretty good inventory of all the different ways state authorities have been approached in the recent history of Vietnam. However, the controversy was a significant event in the way it brought all of these many and diverse groups and processes together into a common opposition to the party-state. While the opposition was not effective in actually stopping bauxite mining in the Central Highlands, it has generated new networks, processes and discourses for social and political activism that, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, continue to endure and develop in Vietnam to this day.

Whether these events will lead to more definitive changes in Vietnam's political system remains to be seen. What seems to be clear is that society is changing from a quiescent to a more active one. Environmental issues, as they are connected with and, as suggested above, basic to so many other different elements of life, are also beginning to stir more social and political activity. The Internet has also provided a new forum for many Vietnamese to participate in political discussions, but also one that the party-state is mobilizing to gain a firmer grip on. Whether these emerging tensions will be resolved through collaboration or conflict depends on many factors, not least of all how the Vietnamese Communist Party chooses to respond to them.

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